Migration Stories

A Case Study on the Life Course, Social Networks and Mobility Intentions of Refugees in Hofors

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Abstract


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This thesis explores the mobility intentions of refugees in Hofors. The aim is to apply the theoretical framework of the life course perspective and social network theory; evaluating their suitability in approaching the topic of refugees’ mobility intentions in the Swedish countryside. The research questions ask how the life courses, social networks, and the specific locality influences their mobility intentions. The empirical research is based on biographical interviews and participatory mapping with refugee migrants residing in Hofors and an expert interview with a municipal employee. The findings illuminate: the role and dominance of different life domains at different timings (e.g. importance of the work domain in the initial stages of integration), the function of social networks as a resource of information, and the social context offered by Hofors (facilitating certain resources) – indicating the central importance of this conjunction, between the needs of trajectories within certain life domains and the ability of the locality to satisfy these needs, in influencing the mobility intentions. The research is situated in the field of international migration to the Swedish countryside, focusing on how rural municipalities can retain more refugees, by addressing the issue from the perspective of refugee migrants.

Key words: refugee migration, internal migration, countryside, rural, life story interview, life course perspective, social network theory, mobility.
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1. Introduction

International migration to Sweden has been present for a long time and during the 20th century it has been primarily constituted of labor migration. However, since the 1970s, international migration to Sweden has seen a shift towards more refugee migration followed by family immigration (Statistics Sweden 2016a & Åslund 2005). Many refugee migrants have ended up in the Swedish countryside, however, the majority leave within five years to settle in bigger cities (Statistics Sweden 2016a). This recent trend of international migration to Sweden can be seen in conjunction with the more lingering trend of urbanization; municipalities in the countryside are wrought with an aging population a general decline in population. Interestingly, it has been shown that international migration has a positive effect on the demographic composition of the Swedish countryside (Hedberg 2010, Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014 & Malmberg et al. 2016) among other things. The influx of people contributes to the possibility of a more resilient countryside, a positive development in the face of the problems that rural depopulation has caused (Stenbacka 2013).

Refugee migration has become more noticeable since the new millennium because of various conflicts around the world and the increased number of displaced people they generate. UNHCR has used terms such as “the age of refugees” and “a world of displacement” to describe the situation. Recently Sweden (alongside Germany) has been at the forefront of other European countries receiving refugees, and is often a primary intended destination (UNHCR 2015). Refugee migrants have been shown to settle in large cities and/or move to large cities more frequently than other international migrants (Statistics Sweden 2016a, Lindgren 2003, Åslund 2004, Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014). Additionally, they are frequently of working age, and so could potentially contribute to a rejuvenation and refill of the Swedish countryside. With the large influx of refugee migrants to Sweden in recent times, it is relevant to investigate why some come to end up in rural localities, why some choose to move away, and why some choose to stay – their mobility. To inform the academic discussion on these topics, and subsequently inform policy makers in rural municipalities, it is necessary to investigate these questions closely; to hear out refugee migrants firsthand, to explore the issues of their mobility in the countryside, could yield additional results that can enable the Swedish countryside to retain a larger share of the international migrants – creating a more resilient Swedish countryside overall.

1.2. Motivation, aims, and research questions

The two trends discussed above - urbanization & international migration – are integral in shaping the spatial demographic composition of western European countries. The countryside of contemporary western countries faces many problems and is often framed as spaces of decline (Hedberg 2010). The effects of these problems are mainly demographic and rooted in the general trend of urbanization; an aging population, negative fertility rates,
and negative net mobility are central characteristic problems commonly observed in the Swedish countryside (Statistics Sweden 2009, Stenbacka 2012 & 2013).

There are initiatives to retain or to create a resilient Swedish countryside, by slowing down the negative effects of urbanization by identifying and investing in mitigating factors (e.g. Eimermann 2013). One such potential mitigating factor is international migration and its contribution to a more positive age structure in these contexts. Among these international migrants are a multitude of groups categorized by their reason for migration. Some are simply seeking a new life style (often intra-European/Nordic migrants) while some are refugees forced into migration, perhaps displaced by armed conflicts or likewise (often from the global south).

These two trends and their effects carries a lot of societal relevance; a waning countryside is a general problem of western countries and international migration (especially refugee migration) has become more impactful as of late. This thesis aims to on the one hand enrich public and academic debate when it comes to these questions and on the other hand contribute pragmatically in a way that could inform municipal policy decisions to help (re)create a resilient countryside and create better conditions for social integration.

Academically the thesis aims to explore a specific, but sizeable, group of international migrants to the Swedish countryside – namely refugees – and their relation to the Swedish countryside. While there has been substantial qualitative research into international migration to the countryside, it has been more oriented towards remote/peripheral rural areas and has in those cases missed the knowledge to be gathered from the refugees who are more often found in small-scale localities within a larger continuous rural area. An objective is to fill in the gaps left by previous research by investigating intermediate rural areas such as small-scale localities, rather than the very peripheral rural areas.

The thesis idea is inspired by results from previous quantitative studies into the demographic effects of international migration to the Swedish countryside. This thesis aims to more closely investigate refugee migrants place in, and role in the “demographic refill” (Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014), of the Swedish countryside. The central aim is to apply the two theories of the life course perspective and social network theory; can we apply these two theories to better understand (im)mobility\(^2\) of refugee migrants in the Swedish countryside? Using a qualitative approach in a small-scale locality the thesis addresses the following research questions:

\(^2\)“(im)mobility” denotes either immobility or mobility, relating to geographical/residential relocation.
How can the life course perspective be used to understand (im)mobility intentions?
- In what way does the life course of a refugee migrant influence (im)mobility intentions?
- What role does different life domains play in influencing (im)mobility intentions?

How do social networks influence (im)mobility intentions?
How does the locality impact on the (im)mobility intentions?

There is demand for younger and working age population in rural municipalities – criteria that are more likely to be satisfied by this type of international migrants – and their reasons for (im)mobility can give considerable firsthand insight into what these municipalities should focus on to retain more of these migrants. Therefore, the thesis does carry academic and societal relevance, relating to the two central themes and trends of (counter-)urbanization and international migration. And while it aims to enrich an already existing academic topic it will also be within its own niche by focusing on a specific migrant group in an intermediate rural locality; investigating their role in the contemporary dilemmas of the Swedish countryside – against the backdrop of their migration stories.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

After this introductory chapter, chapter 2 presents the background for the thesis, wherein themes and concepts relevant to the topics at hand are presented. Furthermore, the chosen study area is presented, discussed, and motivated – giving an outline to where the fieldwork was carried out to situate the results. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework that has been employed in this thesis. It outlines the two central approaches, the life course perspective and social network theory, as well as discuss the definition of countryside.

Presentation of the research methodology and design is found in chapter 4. Outlining the research methods, their choice is motivated and explained in relation to the theoretical framework. In conjunction with practical considerations the limitations of the methodology are discussed and their impact on what kind of results can be expected are explored. Of central importance is also the ethical considerations of the thesis and its fieldwork, considering the problems arising from the chosen methodology and research process.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical results of the study. It contains different themes that arose out of the thematic analysis of the material. Brief biographies of the participants are also provided. Chapter 6 discuss the findings in relation to the research questions, theoretical framework and previous research. To conclude, chapter 7 summarizes the key findings of this thesis, discussing suggestions and contributions to the academic field and considers potential implementations.

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3 Read “study area”. Further notion and definition thereof is found in sections 2.5. & 3.3.
2. Background

This chapter aims to give a contextual background relevant to the thesis, while at the same time acting as a literature review. This is to provide the reader with the necessary information to enable an understanding of the objective of this thesis. It outlines the general topic of international migration to the Swedish countryside, the trend of urbanization and its effects on the countryside, and character of the study area. In addition, core concepts and the way they are applied in this thesis are defined.

2.1. ‘Internal migration’ or ‘secondary migration’?

Important for this thesis is to use clear and concise language which is partly achieved by defining central concepts. For this reason, the terms/concepts of secondary migration and internal migration are highlighted. There are several different usages of these terms in and outside the academic world and all of them cannot be accounted for. Instead, their usage in this thesis is outlined and related to literature. Internal migration is a straightforward concept and is usually meant to denote the mobility of people within a country’s borders; this is therefore a distinction from international migration (Samers 2010: 9). Secondary migration has seen a much more confused usage and it is frequent to see different applications of the term. One way to see it is as a term that denotes an event of international migration after a previous one. An example of this usage can be seen with the Migration Policy Institute who describes the USA as a secondary migration destination in the way that international migrants move to e.g. the UK to retain residency/citizenship to then conduct a second international migration to the USA. Others use secondary migration as something that denotes a second migration after an international migration event, regardless if it is internal or international (e.g. Åslund 2005). Therefore, in this thesis the term secondary migration is discarded and internal migration will be used exclusively. This term will signify any subsequent migration or residential/geographic mobility within Sweden after the major international migratory event the participants have gone through. Mobility is used to describe events of internal migration, such as (short) residential relocation or when moving across the country. The term migration, if stated without a prefix (e.g. international), will consequently be used interchangeably with mobility throughout the thesis.

2.2. The concept of integration

In a study about refugee migrants in the countryside, it is expected that the term integration will be present in different ways. Integration is a concept that is used in a variety of ways, ranging from everyday usage which can encompass completely different things, to academic usages which tend to be more defined. The concept of integration that will be used in this thesis is based on Samers’ (2010) outline. Samers claims that integration has three principal meanings: the first is concerned with assimilation, that the arrived migrant should assimilate into the host society to be considered integrated. This is done when the migrant conforms to dominant practices and values that permeates the host society, with a disregard for the migrant’s own culture. The second meaning is considered closer to the values of multiculturalism, the migrant does not have to abandon their culture, but is expected to “join
the liberal political culture” that is the basis of formal life in western societies. The third meaning is about a merger of the host culture and the migrant culture, the different cultural practices of migrant origins and host country are adopted (Samers 2010: 277f.). Samers goes on to argue that European countries has recently seen a shift from the multiculturalism-meaning of integration, ending up between it and assimilation – termed as “civic integration” (Samers 2010: 278).

Throughout this thesis, integration will be used to reflect the second meaning, the focus is on migrants’ integration as in how they join the “liberal political culture” and formal life in the locality. “Social integration” is a way to name this more explicitly, where: “social integration concerns creating equal opportunities and equity, and a society wherein all members can live harmoniously” (Castree et al. 2016). The usage of integration in this thesis is further reflected by the following quote:

Integration is defined [...] as a process through which immigrants become a functioning part of important social spheres by taking part in different types of social relations in the community in which they have settled. Integration is a measure of the quality of these relations, in that it shows to what extent immigrants can take part in the community on an equal footing with the majority population.

[Cvetkovic 2009: 112]

If another connotation of integration is intended, this will be conveyed by the usage of a prefix. Furthermore, since the study aims to be open to the narratives of participants, additional usages of integration might be relevant, though they cannot be foreseen.

2.3. Urbanization and the declining countryside

Urbanization has since long had widespread effect on the countrysides of the global north. With its starting point at the agricultural revolution, it has since accelerated since the industrial revolution (Niedomysl & Amcoff 2011, Castree et al. 2016). Urbanization has also affected Sweden, the process of population concentration has coincided with the depopulation of rural areas and decreasing job opportunities (Hjort & Malmberg 2006: 55). As a result, the Swedish countryside has had an aging and declining population. Descriptions of the rural and the countryside has therefore been framed in negative ways, as a space of decline and stagnation (Hedberg 2010), and projections have predicted a continued decline in the demographic composition and population amount in peripheral rural areas (Niedomysl & Amcoff 2011: 257-258).

While the persistent trend of the 20th century has been that of urbanization (Borgegård et al. 1995: 31), some literature points to a more recent competing trend. Since the 1970s

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4 A Dictionary of Human Geography – “Integration (social)”. Accessed as an e-book, for that reason I cannot give a page.
urbanization has been challenged by the trend of counterurbanization. This trend has been observed in most western societies, including Sweden (Borgegård et al. 1995: 31ff. & Niedomysl & Amcoff 2011: 263-265). Counterurbanization has been attributed to varied factors, such as suburbanization, elderly and families moving away from cities in favor of rural areas and so forth. However, an aspect that is sometimes overlooked – and is indeed highly relevant in these times – is the aspect of international migration as part of this counterurbanization.

2.4. International migration to the Swedish countryside

International migration to countrysides is not the most researched topic, instead most research is focused on cities (Stenbacka 2012: 58) since most of the international migration goes to larger urban areas. However, Sweden seems to have a particularly rich material that consider this theme, combining worries for a declining countryside with what an increased international migration might bring. Much of this research adopt a macro perspective, utilizing longitudinal microdata to map out the phenomena on a national level (e.g. Hedberg 2010, Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014, Lindgren 2003, Lundmark et al. 2014, Åslund 2005, Malmberg et al. 2016 are some examples). There is however a significant portion of the research that is constituted by more qualitative approaches, conducting interviews with key respondents such as policy makers, municipal officials, or members of specific migrant groups (e.g. Hedberg 2016, Stenbacka 2012 & 2013, Webster 2016). Thus, while focused research into international migrants to the countryside is fairly new (Nienaber & Roos 2016: 286), there is still a considerable amount of research that investigate this area.

In Sweden, international migration to the countryside has been varied; previous to and during the 1960s and 1970s international migration to Sweden was mostly made up of labor migrants congregating to industrial areas (urban and non-urban, e.g. “bruksort”/”company town”). During the 1980s and 1990s this shifted to being dominated by refugee migration, a trend that has continued to this day (Borgegård et al. 1998, Åslund 2005, Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014). And while much of these migrants congregate in the big cities of Sweden (Åslund 2005, Ekberg & Andersson 1995), it has also coincided with a growing trend (Hedberg 2010: 9) of more international migrants moving to the Swedish countryside, for example:

During the most recent years, we have been witnessing a trend involving both dispersion and diversity. International migration now affects most rural regions in the country but to different degrees and not only the Nordic countries are represented. Some municipalities now host more than 50 nationalities.

[Stenbacka 2012: 55-56]

In fact, the demographic importance that international migration carries for the Swedish countryside recently should not be underestimated, since it is: “the only component that is contributing to population increase in rural areas.” (Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014: 128). However, the literature points to how foreign-born individuals who have recently arrived are expected to have a much higher rate of mobility, which seems decidedly more common for international migrants that have initially settled in rural areas (Hedberg 2010: 20). This also
coincides with the fact that the people who are young are also more likely to have a higher mobility rate, and many leave for the urban life (Hedberg 2010: 19, 21).

An important point that is made in much of the literature about international migration to the countryside is the positive demographic effects it might bring, since international migrants are frequently of working age and so can contribute to their new locale. In this way they contribute to a more positive age structure (increases amount of working age people) and it can mitigate or reverse the drop of total population which enables more positive socioeconomic effects (Malmberg et al. 2016, Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014). Rural areas are frequently suffering from an internal negative migration rate and aging population. Since international migrants are often younger (working age) they can contribute to a more positive age structure (see e.g. Hedberg 2010). This can be characterized as a “refill”, especially groups of migrants that are between the early 20s and early 40s are to an extent filling the age structure gaps that are more prominent in rural and small-scale localities (Malmberg et al. 2016:31ff.). This potential could be seen in relation to the decline of rural areas, as Stenbacka (2012: 56) puts it:

*From the view of Swedish “peripheral” municipalities, the migration issue is a crucial one since many regions and smaller localities suffer from population decline and related problems with the supply of public and private service.*

International migration can therefore effectively be a potential resource, something that can contribute to a more resilient Swedish countryside in the age of urbanization. However, these statements are usually made when talking about *all* international migration to Sweden, this includes lifestyle migrants, labor migrants, and refugee migrants among others. What if they are distinguished from one another? Definitions of these different kinds of migrants can vary a lot, often for good reasons, and so it can be difficult to try to outline and differentiate between some groups occasionally. What is of importance is to assert the distinct character of refugee migration which depends on their reason for migrating. This draws a clear line between refugee migration and other types of migration, e.g. lifestyle migration or labor migration, and differences between the groups are clear. For example, refugee migrants are likely to have a high mobility rate, typically oriented from small localities and rural areas in the countryside towards big cities (Statistics Sweden 2016a, Åslund 2005: 144, 152 & Lindgren 2003: 409). When using the terms casually it alludes to specific images of what kind of migrants these people are, but it is their differing reasons for migration that draws a clear distinction between them. Therefore, while all are part of the international migration to Sweden, the difference between them is important. As Eimermann et al. (2012) has shown, one type of lifestyle migrant to the Swedish countryside are Dutch migrants that are looking for a change and new amenities in rural Sweden. In Eimermann’s discussion (2013: 41) for how lifestyle migration should be defined he pinpoints the central aspect of lifestyle migration (in paraphrasing O’Reilly & Benson 2009): “Lifestyle migration, they argue, is distinct from other forms of migration in its principal motivation: lifestyle and a gradual achievement of a better way of life.” A lifestyle migrant is someone that identifies what they want to change and acts on it by their own choice. It should be clear from this that it is
different from the principal motivations and reasons of refugee migrants. Refugees are forced to migrate for reasons that are out of their hands, and they have very limited ability to choose where to go (initially). A core difference between a lifestyle migrant and a refugee migrant ending up in a rural locality in the Swedish countryside is that only one of them has made an initial informed decision that led them there. The findings of the literature that refugee migrants are more frequently seen in the big cities, and frequently have a higher mobility, moving towards urban centers is not really a surprise then.

Since the recent global trend of increasing conflict and displacement of people there is a need to investigate the refugee migrants and their role in the Swedish countryside more closely. Since this group has been of considerable size the latest decades the need is twofold: it is a group that tends to urbanize a lot while it also carries the positive demographic aspects in great demand in the Swedish countryside. This considerable portion of international migrants could be a potential resource to create a resilient Swedish countryside (Stenbacka 2013). Even if the extensive demographic changes that a large group could bring to the countryside is disregarded, small numbers of immigrants can have a big impact on rural localities (Lundmark et al. 2014). There is therefore a need to investigate the relationship between the Swedish countryside and particularly refugee migrants; with a focus on the refugee migrants own perspective one can hope to find out what could lessen the urbanization rate to enable the countryside to retain a larger share of international migrants.

A distinction that might be valuable is that of how the migrants come to be settled – by their own resources or by authorities. In the 1980s a policy was adapted that sought to disperse refugee migrants throughout Sweden, to combat a concentration to the big cities. As alluded to above, when the refugees received residency it led to a large-scale internal migration towards the big cities. The strategy was abandoned 1994 (Statistics Sweden 2016a: 20f.), and since then refugee migrants can choose municipalities on the condition that they can find a place of residence themselves (EBO = “Eget boende”), otherwise they are placed in accommodations (ABO = “Anläggningsboende”). A way to term these two groups are, as per Hedberg (2010: 3), as either self-settled (EBO) or authority-settled (ABO).

2.5. The case: Hofors

(This section presents the chosen study area to provide the reader with a context of the locality that the research was carried out within. For a description on how and why it was chosen see section 4.2.).

The chosen study area is a locality named Hofors which shares the name with the municipality in which it is located. Hofors is the central locality of the municipality which have one more significant locality called Torsåker. Hofors lies due north of Stockholm, approximately 50 kilometers west of Gävle and is accessible with public transportation (bus, train) and the major highway that connects Gävle with Falun which runs through Hofors. Hofors municipality was merged with other municipalities in the municipal reformation of

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and assumed an area identical to that of the historical predecessor of Torsäker Socken (410 km\(^2\)). It has 23 inhabitants per square kilometer (Statistics Sweden 2016b). Since the 17\(^{th}\) century Hofors has been the site of an ironworks which has been central to Hofors’ development throughout the years. Hofors is a locality which could be described as a bruksort/brukssamhälle (English: company town) since the ironworks has been so dominant in the development of the locality. The current size of the industrial complex rivals that of Hofors itself.

Hofors municipality has seen a decline in total population which is visible in data from Statistics Sweden since 1975 (cannot be compared with earlier counts because of the changes to the administrative divisions).

Since 2005 Hofors municipality has had a negative *natural* population growth ranging between -30 to -71 per year while the net migration is varied between negative values of up to -111 and positive values up to +55. In 2015, 80 people arrived in Hofors from a foreign country and the share of foreign born individuals in the municipality amounts to 13% compared to the Swedish average of 17%. The two dominant sources of occupation in the municipality is manufacturing and extraction (employing almost 40% of the population above 16 years old) and health & social care (employing approximately 15%) (Statistics Sweden 2016b).

The Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) keep data on internal migration of newly arrived migrants which is, to a limited extent, available to the public. This is because

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7 Hofors municipality website:
http://www.hofors.se/kommun--politic/historia.html
municipalities have a right to compensation for the reception of foreign citizens that has been granted a residence permit (refugees and similar). This compensation is disbursed during a two-year period, and so data is kept on the mobility of these individuals, so that the right municipality will receive the money. Unfortunately, this is only available (for the public) since 2013, but it is information that gives a snapshot view of the internal migration of newly arrived migrants (within two years of arrival).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>From Hofors</th>
<th>To Hofors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: the Swedish Migration Agency.9
Fig 2. "Vidareresa", Internal migration of newly arrived migrants, from and to Hofors.

Of course, this data, limited to three years and only looking at one municipality does not say a lot; but it does show that the last couple of years there has at least not been a situation where all newly arrived leaves during the first two years. Receiving refugees is not something new in Hofors which is a municipality that has had a history of welcoming refugees. With a quick survey of local media one can find news articles chronicling different instances when receiving refugees was deemed newsworthy. One example is from 2002 when Hofors were going to receive 200 refugees (Öhlander, Gefle Dagblad10) and in 2015 Hofors municipality was one among 49 municipalities (there are 290 municipalities in Sweden) that received extra money as reimbursement for heightened education costs because of the accommodation of refugees (Harrysson, Gefle Dagblad11). In the 1990s Hofors was an area that had a relatively high share of refugee accommodation in relation to the population, with between 160 and 200 refugee migrants per 10 000 inhabitants (Statistics Sweden 2016a: 23), in 1992 there were 1 059 individuals classified as refugees in Hofors (Statistics Sweden 2016a: 132). In 2016, there were 1 375 foreign born individuals residing in Hofors municipality (Statistics Sweden12).

Hofors therefore seems to be a municipality and locality that has an extensive experience with refugee migration. Since it is a locality deemed as part of the countryside – a rural locality – (see section 3.3.) and it has the relevant experience and municipial infrastructure that works with questions of integration it is an appropriate place to conduct the case study (further expanded upon in section 4.2.).

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12 Statistics Sweden, Statistical Database: "Utrikes födda efter region och år".
3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theory that has been employed when designing and carrying out the study as well as when carrying out the analysis of the empirical material. Two central theories are used to formulate the theoretical framework for this thesis, and they are: a) the life course perspective, and b) social network theory. Additionally, a definition of what constitutes as a rural small-scale locality in the countryside, which is the focus of this case study, is given by invoking formal and theoretical ideas and definitions.

3.1. The life course perspective

The life course perspective is a theory that is inherently interdisciplinary (Bailey 2009). It aims to combine, or find a middle ground between, the macro and micro level. The micro level is generally seen as comprised of the individual behavior or agency, while the macro level involves the structural or institutional, contextual influences on the micro level of behavior (Dykstra & van Wissen 1999: 5).

The basic units of the life course are life events, events that change the attributes of the individual, some examples are getting a job, moving, starting an education. These events make up the structure of an individual’s life, and they can be traced to map out the structure of the individual’s life course (Willekens 1999: 31f.). These events are grouped into different domains of life such as work, education, family, housing, residential mobility. The events contribute to transitions within the individual’s life course; transitions can be made up of several events or just one, but constitutes an impactful change in the trajectory of that individual’s life. In addition, a certain event could constitute what is termed as a “turning point”; a specifically important event that shuffles the cards, causing a “change in the direction in which the individual had been heading” (Clausen 1998: 203). Turning points are not to be confused with transitions; while a turning point is necessarily a transition, a transition is not necessarily a turning point (Verd & López Andreu 2011: 36). The life course perspective assumes the general view that events works consecutively, certain events are more likely to follow other specific events, a sort of soft path dependency. And so, in general, the events and transitions in an individual’s life follows trajectories within the different domains of life. These are the theoretical concepts that are the basis in studies following the life course perspective, what they specifically are defined as or which of them are deemed relevant depends on the study being conducted.

Although the naming of certain concepts and terms have varied in the literature, Elder & George (2016: 63) asserts:

*There is now general consensus that the life course perspective includes five principles: the principle of life-span development, the principle of agency, the principle of time and place, the principle of timing, and the principle of linked lives.*
Despite there being some variation in defining core principles or what different authors deem as more or less relevant, these five principles are very useful to sum up what the life course perspective aims to consider.

The principle of life-span development is a recognition that development of an individual’s life does not end when that person becomes an adult. Throughout an individual’s life several events and transitions occur well after adulthood has formally begun, within different domains and are probably affected by earlier events. This is precisely why the development over the life-span of the individual is required to be considered. It enables the researcher to examine the relationship between the micro and macro level, how the individual’s life structure develops within the structural context. This way the complete story is considered, recognizing the lifelong processes involved in developing a person’s life and how it has shaped them. Coupled with this is the principle of agency which asserts that although there are structural constraints acting upon the individual, the individual does have agency and so the ability to alter his/her (or other’s) life course(s). This means that even though a lot of people follow general trajectories, the individual can have an impact on them and how their life develops, through their own decisions and actions throughout their life (Elder et al. 2003: 11).

The third principle, the principle of time and place, constitutes this structural context that the individual’s agency is placed within. The constraints and opportunities that are present depends on the historical context of the time and place that the individual’s life is developed within. A common example of this are wars and wartime areas wherein a specific age cohort might have been heavily conscripted to participate in the military. This consequently influence many individuals within this age cohort in that they might lose many years of their occupational life, or that the timing of starting a family lags behind the norm. The events of a war for example, accordingly have far reaching demographic effects on a population long after the war is over, it alters the potential life courses. The point is that historical events and the institutional arrangements they form have an impact on people’s life structure that are usually out of their hands (Elder et al 2003: 12). It is therefore not a big logical leap to the fourth principle – the principle of timing. The timing of an event and/or a transition in an individual’s life has big implications for how this event and/or transition affects the individual and their life course. For example, a person in their 40s immersed in their professional career being forced to migrate or flee suddenly to another country, carries with it a whole different set of implications as compared to a child or a retired person experiencing the same event or transition. Depending on where a person is in their life at the time of an event, the event will have very different effects and the person will have very varied opportunities and constraints imposed on them. Since refugee migrants arriving in a receiving country are very varied and have experienced very different life courses, the timing when they arrive is of central concern, the different timing is going to lead to completely different experiences.

Lastly and importantly, the principle of linked lives (also known as “interwoven lives”, Hagestad 1981) acknowledges that even though it might be easy to envisage the individual in an empty vacuum but surrounded by structures/institutions they are also affected by the individuals they have ties to. People and their decisions are connected to others and their own
actions impact upon these individuals they are connected to. Commonly seen in familial ties, parents might not pursue career opportunities or chose a specific residential location because they consider the wellbeing of their children over their own interests. Or on the flipside, a career opportunity might see a parent move across the country and bringing the family with them, causing transitions to occur for the children and affecting their future life development, without any action of the children’s own volition. The principle of linked lives helps us remember that individual agency does not have to be egocentric and that the decisions of an individual influence people connected to them.

Summarized by Elder et al. (2003: 13), the intention of the life course approach to be all-encompassing, to compromise and borrow between different academic fields, to mingle the micro with the macro, is evident:

*These five principles steer research away from age-specific studies and towards the recognition of individual choice and decision-making. They promote awareness of larger social contexts and history and of the timing of events and role change. They also enhance the understanding that human lives cannot be adequately represented when removed from relationships with significant others. Allowing these principles to guide inquiry promotes the holistic understanding of lives over time and across changing social contexts.*

Because of these principles and what they entail the life course perspective aims to consider the whole story of a person’s life development – a life story. The cumulative impact of life events is central in that they affect what is to come afterwards. Another topic of interest is then the pace of transitions, they can be “early” or “delayed” because of events and transitions that have occurred before (Dykstra & van Wissen 1999: 10f.) or because a trajectory has been put on hold by the macro level. Most closely tied to the principle of timing, the pace of transitions and their importance has been illustrated by comparisons of how wars or economic recessions have clearly impacted the life course of age cohorts differently. Certain events and contextual conditions can therefore be conceptualized as “pausing” a person’s life course development. This is relevant for this thesis where people have been forced to migrate and the whole process of a migration is sort of a pause of development in many of the domains of life. For example, living in a refugee camp, refugees are left to events and structures to decide their future while they themselves cannot really control much of their own life course development. They cannot educate themselves or advance in a certain career to the extent that they would be able to do outside of a refugee camp in “normal” living conditions. Of course, living in a refugee camp is also “valid” in that it is reality that contributes to an individual’s life course, but the point is that it is a hindrance to advancing and going through many transitions in many domains of life.

While these five principles are a good way to outline the approach of the life course perspective, studies utilizing this approach usually are more focused and so do not address all these principles explicitly (Elder & George 2016: 63). Depending on the sort of study it
can be limited to just one life domain for example. Central to studies of residential mobility is the importance to distinguish between moves triggered by the different domains (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 159).

Central to the choice of this theoretical approach is an acknowledgement that refugee migrants are a distinct sort of migrant since they have been forced into their migration. This is in stark contrast to other types of migrants, for example lifestyle migrants, who are free to make a choice. And while the choice of a lifestyle migrant can be dependent on external constraints (Eimermann 2013: 41ff.), it is worlds apart from a refugee’s situation who must migrate because of the untenable situation in their home country. A refugee arriving in a small-scale locality at the end of their international migration process has not made an informed decision to get to that specific locality at the onset of their migration. That refugee migrants are more prone to move away from the countryside to big cities compared to other international migrants (Åslund 2005, Ekberg & Andersson 1995 & Lindgren 2003: 409) is therefore not odd. Consequently, the refugee migrants’ role and perception of the Swedish countryside is interesting to consider. Thus, the spatial context (urban or rural, small town or city, etc.) is the structural or institutional reality wherein the individual’s life course is situated; to investigate how the individual’s life course interacts with this spatial aspect is of interest. Hence why the life course perspective is useful when investigating non-lifestyle migrants in the Swedish countryside. Where are they in their trajectories right now, which domain is dominant or passive, and how does the spatial context accommodate or fail to accommodate this trajectory and its needs? It is a fitting theory to employ when trying to find out how the specific small-scale locality interacts with the individual development of these refugee migrants’ lives, mapping out underlying processes to mobility intentions (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 164, 169).

An important reason to apply this theoretical approach to this topic is that it is useful in a methodology that deals with personal histories of migration. Migrating from your country of origin, because of reasons outside of your control (war, strife, etc.), resettling in a foreign country, integrating into society, learning a new language, and so forth are all significant changes in a person’s life, it changes all the contexts of their normal life. To trace their migration history is therefore necessarily connected to mapping their life course. Utilizing a qualitative approach is thus not problematic since individual case studies (with single migrant individuals or families as participants) are frequent in studies of migration history and it is especially useful in identifying and outlining “general dynamics” that they encounter and process (Carling 2012: 155f.).

Even though most of the literature that form the basis of this review of the life course approach is often connected to mostly quantitative longitudinal studies, the approach is also a good fit for qualitative studies (e.g. Erel 2007). To get firsthand accounts from refugees is valuable, and there is potential to discover processes and interactions that is inaccessible with quantitative methods. This is because qualitative methods are more apt at gaining insight in to the life of the participants, in how they frame and deal with contextual aspects that are frequently termed as push and pull factors (Halfacree & Boyle 1993: 335). Mapping out the life course of the participants, piecing it together from their own versions gives a rich material to discover connections and explanations (Erel 2007), potentially informing subsequent
quantitative hypothesis-testing studies. This thesis will utilize the life story concepts on a deeply personal level, exploring individuals’ own accounts of their lives. This allows a more detailed description and explanation of their life courses and how it affects their behavior. The focus is on the individuals’ own narrative account and thoughts on the matter at hand, since the thesis addresses what influences their (im)mobility within their spatial context.

The focus on the life course perspective has been integral in shaping this thesis and how it was carried out. With a focus on personal narrative accounts of their life story centered around the topic of migration and what attributes they have carried within different domains at different times – the participants tell their migration story (further expanded on in section 4.4.1).

3.2. Social network theory

As discussed in the previous section, a central principle of the life course perspective is that of linked lives – how people connected to each other affect each other’s different life trajectories in different ways. It seems reasonable then to include a theoretical approach that can focus on this question more closely, and even more so since the importance of ties to other people are pointed to as integral to internal migration decisions (Åslund 2005: 161 & Moret 2016).

The kind of social network that is the subject of this thesis is termed as egocentric networks. This kind of network focuses on the one central node (the participant) and the network surrounding it (Marin & Wellman 2011: 20). As with the life course approach, much of the literature on social networks focus on quantitative applications of the theory. However, it has been pointed out that network theory has some qualitative roots and that the beginning of the theoretical approach utilized “qualitative data, less structured approaches to data collection, and interpretive methods in describing and analyzing social networks” (Hollstein 2011: 404). The qualitative approach has the strength of generating new theoretical concepts; aspects that needed discovery through qualitative methods, some famous examples of these were developed in the 1950s and 1960s that became popular in the general theoretical approach of social network theory (Hollstein 2011: 404).

There are a multitude of methodological approaches when employing a qualitative approach to social network theory, but one of the most common approaches are qualitative interviews (conversational, narrative, open-ended, semi-structured or unstructured interviews). Furthermore, the usage of the theoretical approach and consequent methods entail certain ontological standpoints boiled down to what Hollstein terms the “interpretive paradigm” – asserting the social constructivism of social reality. It enables the qualitative approach to take on the role of “understanding of meaning” (Hollstein 2011: 405). It is thus a suitable theoretical and methodological point of departure to take when studying firsthand accounts and descriptions of own experiences and motivations like this thesis aims to do (further description of the specific methods connected to this is given in section 4.4.1).

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13 The famous example of this is the Manchester School of Anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s.
The reason for going into social network theory comes from the reading of previous research into the topic of international migrants’ internal mobility in Sweden, with a special focus on refugees in Sweden. Åslund (2005) demonstrates how most of these migrants end up in large cities, and offers the explanation that in general these migrants tend to seek out areas where there is a larger share of co-ethnics (shared region of origin, shared mother tongue, shared culture) and relatives, indicating the importance of networks in migration. It is therefore useful to try deep-diving into these migrants’ networks and how their networks affect their internal mobility.

In migration studies, network theory is often used to explain the perpetuation of mobility (Massey et al. 1993). It is even claimed that migrant networks contribute to migration becoming self-perpetuating since it enables the necessary economic, social, and institutional structures for continued migration as well as creating a demand (Bakewell et al. 2012: 418). The networks, usually termed “migrant networks”, contributes to this process by declining risks and costs over time for subsequent migrants wishing to go to the same destination. These networks are mostly associated with transnational links, the links between migrants in the host country and non-migrants in the country of origin: the first migrant, or pioneer migrant, leaves their home for another destination in which they have no connections. For these migrants, the costs and risks are high since they have no network to draw upon as a resource in their migration process and entry to the new host society, but upon successful entry they decline risks and costs for those who wish to follow (Massey et al. 1993: 449). The migrant networks act as a form of resource that future migrants can draw upon when migrating, reaching destinations present in the network has been made easier. Migrant networks theory holds the view that migration is a:

*individual or household decision process, but argues that acts of migration at one point in time systematically alter the context within which future migration decisions are made, greatly increasing the likelihood that later decisionmakers will choose to migrate.*

[Massey et al. 1993: 449]

While this theory is mostly focused on the transnational links between migrants in the destination and non-migrants in the region of origin (Samers 2010: 114), this thesis is interested in the formation and development of social networks in the destination country. Since the participants in this thesis are refugee migrants, what is of interest is how their networks in the new host country is formed and how it influences their (im)mobility intentions. And with many refugee migrants moving to big cities (as previously discussed), the participants might have geographically extensive networks within the host country, reaching far outside of their current small-scale locality of residence (e.g. “translocal networks”, as per Stenbacka 2012). How do these networks influence their decision-making processes? Do networks trigger internal mobility? Are their networks a resource for residential relocation? By interviewing refugee migrants who has so far remained in the small-scale locality it might illuminate important aspects of the network and its function. Investigating the period between arriving in the new country and potentially moving to a big
city – a pattern so often observed with refugees (e.g. Åslund 2005) – it can shed light on reasons for their (im)mobility.

The way social network theory is employed in this thesis is to explore the networks of the members of the migrant group that are being studied – their egocentric networks. Exploration of networks is a typical approach when trying to identify, outline, and explore networks that previous knowledge about is limited – frequently used for migrant networks (Hollstein 2011: 406). Furthermore, in conjunction with the exploration of the networks, generating an understanding to how networks matter for the respondents’ agency and decision-making is another theme that a qualitative approach permits. What is of focus is the migrants’ own meaning-making, their subjective perspectives. It is evident, therefore, that this is a theoretical approach that allows exploration of the issues of relevance for this thesis. It is compatible to centering the focus of the study around the respondents’ own views and narratives and how they perceive their networks and ensuing effects thereof. It will help answering the research questions; to generate an understanding in how the social networks of these migrants have formed in the small-scale locality and its context, and how it has impacted and how it possibly will impact future mobility.

A common tenant of qualitative social network analysis is to focus on the relations and not the attributes of the nodes. It is the interplay between the nodes that are interesting, not what kind of attributes one node happens to contain (Marin & Wellman 2011: 13). This thesis, however, will consider a few specific attributes that some nodes may carry, and that is their spatial dimension or geographical place. This is because on the one hand what the respondents deem relevant and how they describe their social network and how it impacts their mobility is interesting. But on the other hand, what is also of interest is the spatial aspect of their networks. It will highlight the issue of linked lives and how certain nodes within their networks impact on their decision-making when it comes to residential relocation.

3.3. The definition of countryside

A central issue and potential problem of every study connected to the urban-rural dichotomy, or aiming to discuss issues of the countryside explicitly, is how the concepts are defined. What exactly is meant by “rural”, what is meant by “countryside”? The problem often lands in a sort of grey area between official definitions – that are inherently generalized and problematic when employed on a smaller, place-specific scale – and definitions adopted on theoretical and practical reasons. Nationwide official definitions – like Statistics Sweden’s – does on the one hand have a problem with being too general, grouping vastly different places into the same categories. On the other hand, it is problematic from an international perspective – what is meant by rural in continental Europe is far detached from what is meant by rural in Scandinavia because of comparatively low population densities (Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014: 132). In the end, the aim of this thesis is to investigate international migrants’ roles and perspectives in the Swedish countryside, with a case study situated in one place. And so, the definition will necessarily be based on practical reasons coupled with theory and other research about Swedish rurality or countryside.
Statistics Sweden have some operational definitions of what could be construed as rural or urban, locality and non-locality. However, these definitions do not straightforwardly define urban or rural, they rather form a formal basis to group data into. The relevant terms are “tätort” and “småort”, but I will focus on “tätort”. Statistics Sweden’s English term for “tätort” is “locality”, and they define it as: “a group of buildings normally not more than 200 metres apart from each other, and must fulfil a minimum criterion of having at least 200 inhabitants.” In effect, a locality can then be anything from a place with 200 inhabitants to a city like Stockholm. The term locality as it is used by Statistics Sweden is therefore too wide and is required to be divided to more suitably define a locality that would be deemed as part of the countryside. In addition, common international definitions and measurements of urban and rural, like the OECD typology, does not correspond to Scandinavian circumstances: “apart from Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, the rest of Sweden is classified as rural” (Hedberg & Haandrikman 2014: 132). Thus, the formal definition of Statistics Sweden is not a good alternative when trying to define rurality or countryside; and since international definitions does not capture the Scandinavian context at all we must instead turn to theory and previous research located within Scandinavia.

A useful concept to proceed from is the term “Small-scale locality” as defined by Hedberg (2010: 5). A small-scale locality is a locality with a population between 3 000 and 10 000. While the category of “small-scale localities” is separated from the exclusive category of “rural areas”, it is also separated from “large-scale localities”. I think small-scale localities is a perfect concept to develop my conception of what constitutes as countryside. Not necessarily rural, an area can still be denoted and viewed as part of the countryside in that it distinguishes itself from larger cities or localities (urban-rural continuum). I therefore employ the term “countryside”, to willfully obscure the dichotomy of urban-rural, that there is an intermediate level and that part of it is closer to the rural than it is to the large city centers of Sweden. The term countryside could be translated to Swedish in several ways (e.g. “landet”, “landsbygden”, and so forth). Some support for characterizing the category of small-scale locality as part of the countryside rather than the urban spaces of Sweden is found with the Swedish Board of Agriculture. Their terms for urban is “storstadsområden” and “stadsområden”, defined as municipalities that has at least 30 000 inhabitants, in which the central locality should have no less than 25 000 inhabitants. Furthermore, a locality cannot be said to be rural per se, however, a locality can be located in a predominantly rural area to which it houses important amenities etc. – a rural locality. The concept of a small-scale locality is therefore used in this thesis to identify a suitable location to place the case study in. A locality that is part of a rural landscape, part of the countryside. (“Small-scale locality” and “rural locality” will be used interchangeably throughout the rest of this thesis to describe the chosen locality, and is viewed as part of the countryside.)

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4. Research Methods

This chapter outlines and presents the research design and resultant methods that have been employed. The research process is accounted for to give an insight into how the research was carried out. Limitations of the employed methodology are discussed and ethical issues are given proper consideration, illustrating how they have shaped the research and subsequent presentation.

4.1. Research design, assumptions and approaches

This thesis is designed as a case study to allow intensive study of the topic at hand, exploring and evaluating theoretical points of departure. As Bryman (2012: 67) puts it, case studies are often limited to a certain location. This formula is followed and the case study is placed in one locality that should fulfill the role of a rural locality (see section 3.3.). A case study design excels when conducting intensive research rather than extensive research (Bryman 2012: 71), the aim is to deep-dive into the topic, evaluate theories explanatory power for the research questions and potentially generate new theoretical insights (Bryman 2012: 387). Intensive research typically engages with methods that are employed in this thesis, for example qualitative interviews, participatory mapping. These are suitable to find out the structure and interactions that shape the respondents’ opportunities and constraints (Castree et al. 201616). Conducting a case study was therefore suitable for the methods at hand and to carry out intensive research into this research topic.

The adopted research strategy is not one that neatly fits into one of the two paradigms of the often assumed qualitative-quantitative binary. While the research in this thesis has adopted a theoretical framework that has shaped and formed how the research was carried out and who participated – a deductive approach – it was also open to the findings generating new theory. The research strategy of this thesis could be described as a kind of middle ground, a “qualitative investigation” (Bryman 2012: 27) where theory is used as a background to frame the research but it does not necessarily limit the research. This is rather a question of the employed method, and in this thesis, interviews with the members of the group that is the subject of the study are used. Valuing their first-hand account is central and the way they describe things in their own words are of high value.

There is no reason that a qualitative study cannot be used to test theory (Bryman 2012: 387), and it is fruitful to evaluate theory specified in advance in a case study to closely examine that case and hopefully discover how the aspects highlighted by the theory works as causal effects related to the research questions.

The epistemological position that has been assumed for this thesis is critical realism. Critical realism is a philosophical standpoint which asserts the independent reality of the external world while also recognizing that humans and their actions make up the social world. The

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study of this social world is only attainable through the social sciences (Castree et al. 2016\textsuperscript{17}). Bryman discusses two things that critical realism implies: (1) conceptualization used by researchers is only a way of knowing the reality, rather than directly reflecting the reality, as postulated by positivists; and (2) so called “generative mechanisms” (or hypothetical entities) are acceptable in research, even if they aren’t directly observable – it is rather the observable effects of these that are required. (Bryman 2012: 29).

4.2. The study area

As was previously discussed in section 3.3., the adopted definition of what constituted countryside or a rural locality was crucial to locating a suitable place for the case study. The choice is motivated by theoretical and practical reasons and since the theoretical reasons have already been discussed this section will focus on the practical reasons for the choice, as well as how it came to be found.

When trying to locate a suitable place for the case study, data from Statistics Sweden was utilized to narrow down the number of municipalities that would be suitable. Utilizing the theoretical upper limit of a small-scale locality with a maximum of 10 000 inhabitants the number was narrowed down to 71 potential candidates of the total of 290 Swedish municipalities. Data on the amount of “foreign born” was used next, and since a municipality with a substantial share of recent refugee migrants was the goal, municipalities with at least 10\% of the total population being foreign born was picked out\textsuperscript{18}. The result was 46 potential candidates. Only basing this on the amount of foreign born entailed a risk since some municipalities on the border to Finland or Norway might have a lot of foreign born from these countries – not the type of migrants that is of interest to this thesis. Consequently, having limited potential municipalities to 46, publicly available data from the Swedish Migration Agency was examined to identify the municipalities that have had a substantial amount of foreign born that had come as refugees. This resulted in fewer potential municipalities but there were still practical reasons to take into consideration.

The first practical reason that was considered when picking the study area was that I had to be able to get there by public transportation, and preferably to be able to make one-day trips between the study area and my home outside of Stockholm, while still being a considerable distance from Stockholm. A working definition was that it should not be practical for ordinary people to do daily commutes to Stockholm, it should not be a locality which prime function is to house people working in Stockholm, known in Swedish as “sovsamhälle”. The aim was simply to choose a locality that was outside of Stockholm’s “catchment area”, people who live in the chosen locality should have to move to have easy access to Stockholm, it should be outside of the participants “daily activity spaces” (Hägerstrand 1970). This limited the available alternatives to a handful and travel times by train and bus to the different localities were compared. Finally, to choose between the few alternatives the local news media and the municipalities official websites were swiftly searched (to get some form of

\textsuperscript{17} A Dictionary of Human Geography – “Critical realism”. Accessed as an e-book, for that reason I cannot give a page.


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grasp of the topic of international migration in the municipalities). The last step was to control that the municipality had a designated integration department which would confirm that they actively work with issues of international migration.

The locality and municipality that I ended up choosing was Hofors. Hofors is a municipality centered around the locality with the same name. It lies between Gävle (population: 99,576) and Falun (population: 57,532), 50 kilometers from Gävle, it takes approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes by bus from Gävle to Hofors. The closest larger locality is Sandviken (population: 38,693). Travel times between Stockholm Central and Hofors Centrum by fastest public transportation possible usually ends up being somewhere between 3 hours and 15 minutes or 4 hours (depending on type of train, assuming suitable connections etc.).

For a more exhaustive and thorough presentation of the study area of Hofors, see section 2.5.

4.3. The participants

Since the aim is to illuminate how the life courses and social networks of refugee migrants, living in the countryside, impact on their mobility or lack of mobility the relevant participants were refugee migrants who resided in the chosen study area. A central reason for choosing refugee migrants as the participants is that these migrants are far more likely to move to large cities, leaving the countryside, while they at the same time often carry the types of attributes in great demand in rural municipalities (e.g. positive demographic effects, transnationality, see section 2.4.). These participants are chosen because they can give a firsthand account of their own perceptions and opinions on what impacts their decision-making when it comes to mobility. They are the ones who could provide the insights necessary for this study; they have the firsthand account of what it is like to end up in a rural locality after a forced migration event. They could therefore give informative stories as to how the rural locality is perceived, what are the positives and negatives, and what affects their decision to stay or go.

In addition to the main participants an expert interview was performed with someone familiar with the topic of refugee migration in the locality from an official and professional level – a municipal official with the integration department. This interview would serve the purpose of getting introduced to a kind of gatekeeper at the municipality and give valuable contextual information from the municipality’s perspective.

The sampling used in this thesis is purposive: snowballing and opportunistic (Bryman 2012: 419). At the outset of the fieldwork the assumption was that it would be difficult to find the participants as outlined above, cold-calling was avoided since it is a careful balancing act and a big risk you start off on the wrong foot. The plan was instead to be referred to participants by people they know and trust, so that there is opportunity to introduce myself and the study I am carrying out and explain why what they have to say is of particular interest for the study (further expanded on in section 4.6.).

Because of delays and time restrictions one participant was interviewed even though he was a family migrant who had moved to Sweden to his wife, a refugee who had been settled in Hofors. In the end, the snowball started rolling too late into the field work; one of the last

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19 Statistics Sweden, Statistical Database, Population Statistics: “Number of inhabitants”.

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people interviewed was central in an ethnic community of the locality and could have put me in contact with several people to interview. However, due to the time restriction there was no further room for more interviews. This has hampered my sample size and although the method of biographical narrative interviews is suitable for a small sample, it will of course impact on the results. (The limitations this brings are discussed in section 4.5.)

To summarize, the approach of purposive sampling is the suitable method for this kind of study. The sample does not need to be representative of a larger general population, it is a non-issue in a qualitative case study that does not seek external validity (Bryman 2012: 390). And the most suitable way to carry this out was through snowball sampling, which is what would allow me to find the participants that I did. With the exclusion of the expert interview which was selected upon theoretical, topical, and practical reasons.

In the end, I conducted seven interviews in total, six interviews with migrants and one interview with a municipal official with the integration department:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Migrant type</th>
<th>Region of origin</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Type of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2017-03-24</td>
<td>1 h 1 min</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>Expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2017-04-04</td>
<td>1 h 9 min</td>
<td>Quota refugee</td>
<td>Northeastern Africa</td>
<td>Hofors</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2017-04-04</td>
<td>1 h 10 min</td>
<td>Asylum seeker</td>
<td>Northeastern Africa</td>
<td>Hofors</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2017-04-21</td>
<td>45 min</td>
<td>Family migrant</td>
<td>Western Asia</td>
<td>Hofors</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2017-04-21</td>
<td>1 h 8 min</td>
<td>Asylum seeker</td>
<td>Northeastern Africa</td>
<td>Hofors</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2017-04-21</td>
<td>1 h 10 min</td>
<td>Quota refugee</td>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td>Hofors</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2017-05-05</td>
<td>1 h 40 min</td>
<td>Asylum seeker</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Hofors</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4. Data collection

4.4.1. Presentation and motivation for the chosen methods

Qualitative methods are well-suited for answering how-questions (Webster 2016: 27). The methods are a good way to get deep into a subject and explore how aspects of the life course perspective and social network theory impact on the participants (im)mobility – from the perspective of the participants. In a study interested in how certain things processes are connected and impact internal migration it is important to utilize methods that allow the respondents’ own perspectives and ways of narrating to be at the forefront.
Literature on the topic of *refugee migration* to the Swedish countryside or rural areas, has recently been dominated by two themes. They are either impersonal quantitative approaches investigating the migrants’ attributes and demography (large-scale demographic studies) or qualitative studies mostly focusing on interviewing municipal officials or similar. There seemed to be a sort of lack of focus on the migrants own voices to be heard on these issues; this was a reason to utilize qualitative methods and that the main participants would be members of the migrant groups themselves (this is not to say that similar approaches are non-existent, but they seemed a minor contrast in the contemporary literature). It also influenced the chosen theoretical perspective of the life course approach and subsequent utilization of life story interviews (also called biographical interviews) with a first-hand narrative focus. The rationale is to let the voices of these migrants be heard, to map out their perspectives and attitudes to the topic of international migration in a rural-urban context.

The methods that have been used are therefore centered around the participants and designed to let their voices be heard; these are *narrative interviews (life story, biographical), expert interview, and participatory mapping* of egocentric social networks.

A life story interview is a type of interview that lets the interviewee tell the story of their life course in detail, either completely free or geared towards a subject (Atkinson 1998 & Bryman 2012: 488f.) These life story interviews were semi-structured in the way that an *interview guide* was produced (see *Appendix 9.1.*) that helped when carrying out the interview to remember what topics to cover, to steer the conversation towards the things most relevant. This was of course a balancing act since a main point of conducting this sort of life story interview is to let the interviewee tell their story. Cutting the interviewee off was therefore avoided even if they had started talking about something that seemed irrelevant to the topic. The focus is after all on what the interviewee deems important when telling their life story, their reasoning, their wishes, their decisions (Bryman 2012: 471). A methodological distinction that exists and could be invoked here is the one between the “lived life” and the “told life” – the former focuses on objective facts and/or attributes whereas the latter focuses on the interviewees perception of these objective facts (Wengraf 2001) – this thesis is geared towards the latter. Bryman describes the strength of the life story interview in the following way:

> Its [the life story interview's] unambiguous emphasis on the point of view of the life in question and a clear commitment to the processual aspects of social life, showing how events unfold and interrelate in people's lives.

*Bryman 2012: 489*

An aim of the interview was to be open, straying away from what was on the interview guide was not a problem if something said by an interviewee seemed relevant and interesting. So, even though the narrative interviews had an element of structure, there was room for unstructured elements to influence it. As Bryman (2012: 471) points out, the researcher has a lot of flexibility when conducting semi-structured interviews and allowing the interviewee to say their piece is paramount. While the interview guide is an effective tool to limit the topic to what is especially relevant to the research questions it is important to avoid posing
leading questions (Bryman 2012: 474). The interview guide was just that, a guide to know what topic to touch on next. In the actual interviews, I did not say what was written on the guide word for word, but rather adapted it to the moment and context of the conversation, and tried to avoid talking about specific concepts. The interview guide was created with the theoretical framework in mind: trying to include questions that would touch on the different life domains, going over general life course events and trajectories, and designating a space for investigating the social networks of the participants.

As already discussed, the narrative interviews carried out with the participants were life story interviews, a biographical method (Bryman 2012: 488). The deliberation about this method and how to carry it out in a suitable way was based on the writings by Atkinson (1998). The strength of this method, and one of the main reasons to use it, is that it excels in gathering/generating information/data inherently subjective to the respondent – it helps the researcher to understand and explain how the individual understand their social worlds. What is extracted, then, is the subjective reality of the interviewee (Atkinson 1998: 3, 13, 60). As the research design, research questions (and reasons for choosing them) alludes to, this is precisely what is wanted. To understand what influences decisions to stay in a rural locality or not it needs to be examined from the actors own point of view, how they describe it, what they think is relevant; this is essential to this thesis.

One life story can tell us the ways in which culture has shaped and influenced that one life. This gives us an idea of what is possible not only for this one individual but for others as well. 

[Atkinson 1998: 70]

The kind of life story interview that was conducted are centered around the respondents’ migration, their life before, during, and after, in consecutive order. Since the migration events that these people have experienced is such an uprooting experience it was integral to even begin to properly understand the respondents’ reasoning. Perhaps, even though the interview covers much of the person’s life, it might be more fruitful to term the interview as a “migration story” – a life story centered around their migration. To align it to the theoretical framework of the life course approach and social networks, broadly relevant concepts were included as topics, while letting the interview flow mostly freely from what the interviewees said. For the life course approach, the most common domains of life when migration is the topic of interest (family, occupation, housing, moving, and so forth) was covered.

To include the interviewees’ social network, there was a designated section of the interview to explicitly deal with this. However, it was also assumed that the interviewee would bring it up throughout their migration story as well. This designated section was time explicitly set aside for an “exercise” of participatory mapping. In accordance with the research method and strategy so far (the subjective reality of the respondents) I was interested in how they themselves viewed their social networks and how they would plot it out. For example, what would they include, how would they rank their contacts in the network, why were they included, what kind of relationships are they, and where do people live. This would also get the interviewees into the mindset, to think and discuss their social networks in preparation for the last theme of the interview guide which dealt with their plans for the future.
A social network is conceptualized as a set of nodes and linkages between these nodes (Marin & Wellman 2011: 11f.). The first step is to identify what should constitute as a node for the study, in this case this happens to be individual persons and the linkages are the kind of relation they have to other individuals or institutions/organizations. The second step involves identifying what should constitute as relevant ties between the nodes (Marin & Wellman 2011: 12). In this case, the adopted approach explicitly relied on the participants’ views and so this definition was up to them, even though participants were given instructions during the interview. A rule of thumb, however, is that this involves ties of kinship, friendship, formal ties, normative judgement ties (as a will to distance oneself from or relate to a person), etc. (Marin & Wellman 2011: 12). The aim is to explore how the respondents account for their interactions with people they deem relevant to include. In this case, the social network approach is used in conjunction with the life course approach, and it should be seen as complementary to the life course approach. The social network theory will therefore not be as exhaustive in how it permeates the thesis.

The decision to include participatory mapping as an element of the research method to investigate the social network-aspect of the interviewees’ life come from qualitative social network analysis – particularly Emmel (2008) and Emmel & Clark (2009). It is a method that works well when exploring egocentric social networks, it gives the “insider” view, the meaning of the ties and an awareness of the context of the ties. Rather than getting a static snapshot of a network and attributes of the different nodes you get a personalized view of a network, with an emphasis on the meaning and importance of the ties. The focus is therefore on the perception of the interviewees, how they view their social networks and how it affects them; in conjunction with a qualitative interview it is a method of considerable strength to investigate these sorts of networks (Emmel & Clark 2009: 16-17). During the interview the reasoning behind it is introduced to the interviewee, a blank piece of paper and a multi-color pencil is available for the interviewee to draw upon. In this stage, it is important to stress to the interviewee that there is really no wrong way of doing it – it is their social network they are drawing after all (Emmel 2008). In the end, the important result is not the map that has been produced, it is the conversational exchange that follows when the map is being produced that is of real value – the first-hand explanation of a respondent’s network (Emmel & Clark 2009). The objective of this exercise is therefore to generate an overview of the social network of the participants, but the main point was to fuel a discussion about the nodes and links in their networks. This allows a deeper understanding of how the participants are influenced by their social networks, what role they play in their mobility decision-making.

When considering how to find respondents with a migrant background, and how to quickly get a grasp of the locality, an idea was to interview a municipal official whose work it is to deal with issues of integration and connected issues. This meant that a different interview method had to be applied than the one employed for the migrant participants, a form of expert interviewing. Expert interviews are a very efficient method to quickly get highly relevant and condensed information, where the expert is a sort of “crystallization point” (Bogner et al. 2009: 2). In this case, the expert interviewed served the important purpose of providing context that the main interviewees are situated within, what institutional factors are integral to their
perception of the place they live in (Verd & López Andreu 2011: 52). Nevertheless, as with all interviews, the researcher needs to be mindful of their positionality and that of the interviewee. In this case the positionality is reversed compared to the usual interviews – the expert is often in a position of power and very well-versed in the topic (Kvale & Brinkman 2014: 51). It is therefore imperative for the researcher to also be knowledgeable about the subject to not risk getting dismissive answers because of perceived time-wasting (Richards 1996: 201). So, when planning this interview, I was mindful that it was on the one hand an expert interview in the way that the interviewee is highly knowledgeable about the locale and the general topic. On the other hand, it is a kind of elite interview when considering the positionality and power dynamics at play.

Lastly, the transcribed interviews were read through multiple times in an attempt to identify distinct themes related and unrelated to the theoretical framework. The transcripts were coded/indexed, highlighting certain fragments of the text. This process and analysis is based in thematic analysis (Bryman 2012: 578ff.). In chapter 5, the findings are presented as distinct themes. When presenting the findings, verbatim quotations of the participants are included alongside the text. These are included to illustrate certain themes, to enable the voice of the participants to be heard, which deepens the understanding of the findings (Corden & Sainsbury 2006: 12-16). Since the interviews were done in Swedish this required translation of the transcriptions to be done. The goal is to stay as close as possible to the participants’ choice of words, often including unclear words in their Swedish form, while also correcting some grammar to enhance readability.

4.4.2. Research process – a description of how the research was carried out

After a location was chosen for the case study the process of finding participants started. The first step was to try to get into contact with people working at the integration department of the municipality. To see if someone familiar with questions of refugee accommodation and integration would be willing to participate in an interview. The expert interview was partly to get their insights into the issue in the place-specific context, but more importantly it was to get a foot in the door at the locality. The integration department official acted as a key gatekeeper and he/she would be integral to getting into contact with migrants who could participate in interviews. The plan was therefore to get an initial interview with someone like this and then try to snowball from there. This would turn out to be a successful strategy since it was how all other participants except for one was recruited. The snowballing was therefore partly a failure, since a snowballing effect was only achieved with two out of seven people. However, things could have looked differently if contact with participants had been established earlier in the research process.

In any case, contact was established with people at the integration department of the municipality, an outline of the research, what kinds of questions were of interest, and why they would be able to help, was sent. The subsequent expert interview was very valuable; in addition to putting me into contact with potential respondents, introducing me to a couple of people, the insights from the interview were very thought provoking and the professional experience of the interviewee within the subject was obvious. It therefore followed that the
expert interview influenced the interviews conducted with the migrant participants, some key concepts identified in the expert interview were explored in them.

Following the expert interview, two interviews were immediately scheduled with suitable participants, sending them each an email with necessary information so that they would know what they agreed to. Following these two interviews the progress stagnated and there was difficulty finding more interviewees or getting answers. This was partly because of the Easter holidays, something that had not been considered. The result was that no interviews were conducted until two and a half weeks later when three interviews were conducted in one day. At this stage compromises seemed reasonable, consequently a family migrant related to an asylum seeker was interviewed. At this point the field work was delayed and even though one participant (interviewed 21st of April) might have been someone who could put me into contact with more potential participants, time constraints got in the way. At this point one final interview was scheduled, once again with help from the official at the municipality.

At the outset of the research, it was planned to include respondents that had lived in the specific locality but moved away to a city (e.g. Stockholm, Gävle). Unfortunately, with the very limited success of snowballing respondents this was not possible (impact of which is discussed in section 4.5.) Several more avenues to get into contact with more respondents were explored, none successful.

All the interviews were carried out in Swedish, and there were not any major issues of understanding what was said. When things seemed unclear the participants were asked to clarify as to avoid confusion and errors in transcription of the interviews. All the interviews were carried out in calm and silent settings, and all except for one was in the participant’s workplace (the exception was the last interview carried out in an office of Folkets Hus/The People’s House). It was important that the interview was situated in an environment where the interviewee would be able to feel calm and not worry about being overheard, since the subject of the interview could touch on sensitive topics such as past traumas or negative opinions about the locality. The issue of past traumas being brought up in the interviews with migrants had been foreseen, however, I was not really prepared for the emotional intensity generated when they were recounted. This was an ethical issue that had been thought about and discussed with course mates and supervisor; the approach was to not probe on issues that seemed to be of past traumatic experiences, to simply let the interviewee decide themselves if they wanted to go into this or not. Notably, it did seem like everyone wanted to cover these aspects, even if it was difficult in the moment. Some of the interviewees expressed that they enjoyed the opportunity to tell their story, to have someone’s undivided attention of telling their highly personal stories which included traumas such as deaths of family members for example. This sentiment was something that Atkinson (1998) wrote about, and it was a pleasant surprise that it was apparent from these interviews – personally, it was a highly worthwhile experience.

In advance of every interview an email was sent, containing a short description of the research, what was of interest, and why they were relevant participants. It did occur that I met some of the participants before sending them the email and they expressed that they would be willing to participate. However, it was important that they received the email,
allowing them to read in peace and quiet, consider, and avoid having to say “no” in front of me (expanded upon in section 4.6).

4.5. Limitations

Although representative sampling has not been an aim in this thesis, there is a limitation that arose during the process of this research regarding sampling bias. The initial plan was to include participants who had moved away from the locality to a large city (e.g. Stockholm, Gävle), the rationale behind this was that they would be more likely to illuminate the negative aspects that they found of living in the rural locality, and highlight why they chose to live in a large city instead. However, and unfortunately, no such participants were located. Instead, all the participants in this study are what I would view as “success stories” in this rural locality; they are all employed, they have all gotten a good grasp on the Swedish language, most of them are satisfied with their current situation, and so on. This has probably resulted in missing out on important aspects to the rural locality that are decidedly negative, and the people who decide to leave it. Unfortunately, there is not much that can be done about this except for acknowledging it and being mindful of how it impacts the findings. However, the aim of the study is to listen to often unheard voices, to let these participants’ experiences and views be heard, and hopefully provide insight into the processes that are in effect influencing decisions to stay or go. Conversely, a strength of this is that this study will be looking more closely into these “success stories”, that could identify what works well and inform of best practices to retain refugee migrants in the locality.

Furthermore, the sample size is limited and impacts on the richness of the material. The goal was to reach ten interviews; however, things went slowly and the snowball did not roll as easily as had been imagined. When the seventh interview had been conducted and transcribed, and the material reviewed it was concluded that there was enough material to provide significant results that illuminates the aspects that were sought after. This is largely because of the kinds of interview conducted, the life story interview is very intensive and deep-diving, and so the material generated is full of detail and can be approached from different perspectives. Furthermore, these kinds of interviews are difficult for the interviewees, they are very personal and the decision to participate should not be taken lightly (if properly presented beforehand, of course). Additionally, there is no real set limit to what is the minimum number of interviews in qualitative research, it all depends on the material generated (Bryman 2012: 425-426). The study also lacks a longitudinal approach that is frequently used when conducting studies with life story methodology and life course approach. This approach could give lots of further insights and more detailed findings since you follow the development in real time. This was not possible because I was limited to one semester.

The concepts of validity and reliability carries limited value to qualitative studies since they seem to be geared towards quantitative methods (Bryman 2012: 389). There are some ways to adapt the concepts so that they are better suited for qualitative research, as LeCompte & Goetz (1982) are paraphrased by Bryman (2012: 390): the terms are kept but the concepts are adapted to the qualitative research context. Firstly, external reliability – the replicability of the study, and to which degree it will generate similar results – is a difficult criterion to
meet for qualitative research. Measures that can be taken to improve this is to clearly outline the methods used, the research process, relevant participants, and of course in which context the study is situated. Internal reliability alludes to the fact that it is important to be clear about terms and concepts and what they mean for the study in question, should the study be repeated to test the replicability, it is important that the same concepts and “measures” are used in the same way. Internal validity, are we investigating that which we want to investigate with the employed methods and concepts? In the case of qualitative studies, taking LeCompte & Goetz’s understanding of the term, internal validity concerns whether the theoretical ideas are well-matched to the observations. In this thesis (and most qualitative research), the aim is to see through the eyes of the participants, and intensive methods are a good way to make sure you see eye to eye. The divisions of certain events, acts, and transitions as part of different life domains is a straightforward process, since they are intuitive, for example, the work domain contains events regarding occupation. Lastly, when it comes to external validity, qualitative methods and especially case study-designs with small sample sizes considerably limits it (Bryman 2012: 390). Indeed, one could say it is not a goal of studies of these kinds to carry any external validity. A case study tied to a certain location is fixed in a specific, non-replicable, context. It would be fruitless to assume that the context does not affect the research process and outcomes. Furthermore, the results of this study are meant to evaluate certain theories in the specific context, to explore the explanatory power of the theories in this context, and to examine the case in detail (Bryman 2012: 68).

Therefore, as a small qualitative study, the aim is not to represent all the international migrants in rural localities in Sweden. The aim is rather to identify important factors and processes that exists for people belonging to this group in this setting, which could inform future inquiries.

An individual life story may help us understand general developmental or social processes. [...] One life story can tell us the ways in which culture has shaped and influenced that one life. This gives us an idea of what is possible not only for this one individual but for others as well.

[Atkinson 1998: 70]

Lastly, the positionality of myself – the researcher – needs to be considered and acknowledged. Adopting a reflexive outlook, I considered the issue of what role I would play when meeting participants and how the way they view me might impact what they are willing to share (Caretta 2015: 47f.). Coming from Stockholm, conducting a study as part of a program in Stockholm University, there is a risk individuals belonging to the researched migrant group connect me with some form of establishment. Furthermore, since most of the people I got into contact with was through the help of the municipality, it was important to be clear that I was not part of the municipality myself, that I conducted an independent study as part of my education; being open about negative aspects of where they live would probably be viewed as risky if they believed I was connected to the municipality.
4.6. Ethics

When conducting research, ethics are always important to consider and allowing it to shape how you carry out the research enables you to take steps so that your research will not impact negatively on the participants. Especially, when conducting qualitative research, being in direct contact with the individuals that the research revolves around it becomes extremely important. There are a multitude of ethical issues to consider, but the basis is to do no harm; you achieve that by giving it a lot of consideration early in the research. The methods that a researcher will use determines what ethical issues might arise, and one should prepare aptly.

This is a qualitative study where international migrants settled in rural Sweden are interviewed. Since the interviews revolve around the respondents’ life story, future mobility intentions and the basis for those intentions they might include intimately personal information. It is therefore important to ensure that the research has an ethical soundness so as not to abuse the respondents’ participation (whether intentional or unintentional).

The ethical dilemma of facing two rights (Nachmias & Nachmias 1996: 80) – rights of the researcher and the researched – is an interesting way to frame the issue. In my view, based in my own morals and ethical considerations, the respondent’s wishes trump the researcher’s. Especially since I am still a student and this is only for a Master’s thesis. Respondents should therefore be able to terminate their involvement and draw boundaries in the interviews at any given time. It comes naturally then that the researcher needs to enable the participants to give their informed consent and ensure that they understand their right to self-determination.

Nachmias & Nachmias (1996: 81ff.) presents four integral elements: 1) Competence, 2) Voluntarism, 3) Full information, and 4) Comprehension. In my project, Competence and Comprehension are entwined because of the potential language barriers. The potential participants and I must be able to communicate properly to ensure that they are able to comprehend what partaking will entail, which in turn ensures that they are competent in reaching a decision to participate or not. Ensuring that the participation is voluntary is also essential, and my focus is on the participatory aspect of the research, trying to embody what Nachmias & Nachmias terms “a joint adventure” – I wish to explore the respondents’ stories in collaboration with them, with a decidedly participatory methodology.

Furthermore, when approaching respondents and requesting their participation they are given a period to deliberate before reaching their decision. This is an extremely important guideline to assume when carrying out this kind of research. It ensures that the participants are not taken by surprise and risking them to participate unwillingly. This helps achieving informed consent from the participants, since it gives time and room to introduce the research to the participants, they can digest the information and deliberate before making their decision to participate or not. The participants have then been given the opportunity to be reasonably informed by being given a thorough explanation as to why the research is being carried out and why their participation is desired. For good measure this is reiterated right before starting the interview. Moreover, to ensure that you and the interviewee are at the same page it is a good measure to reiterate basic principles and wishes. In my case I made sure to have a couple of minutes before the interview to try to establish a relaxed setting and then inform them that I am there at their terms, they may pause or terminate the interview at any time, they may
refuse to answer any questions or go into a specific topic – no questions asked. I also asked for permission to record the interview and at the same time explain exactly why I wished to record it, what I was going to use it for and what I was going to do with it after the research was done.

Privacy and anonymity are other core aspects that one should take precautions to ensure as far as possible. Nachmias & Nachmias (1996: 86-88) provides three dimensions that needs to be considered to ensure that the participants’ privacy is respected: 1) the sensitivity of the information, 2) the setting being observed, and 3) the dissemination of information. The more sensitive information that is being shared by the participant, the more their privacy becomes an issue. The setting of the interview also affects the privacy, for example interviewing a person in their home is highly personal and needs to be respected as such. Meeting in the participants’ workplace, on the other hand, permits a more neutral place while it at the same time offers a place in which the participant is more familiar with than the researcher. Lastly, dissemination of information will occur in this thesis and so I will have to attempt to make sure that this information is difficult to connect to any participant by a reader.

Anonymity follows naturally in that it relates to privacy, precautions need to be taken to separate “the identity of individuals from the information they give” (Nachmias & Nachmias 1996: 88). I can only do my best to achieve anonymity of the respondents, for example the individual that put me into contact with a certain respondent will know that I have interviewed them and so may be able to identify specific information that they have shared. This is a difficult problem to get around, especially when operating in small-scale society. Some methods to achieve anonymity is by not writing down names of the respondents, using codes instead, and deleting identifiers in the material that will be presented (e.g. formal title, specific information about age, region of origin, etc.), and being very careful with the material generated from the study (tapes, transcriptions, templates with records on it, etc.).

Measures such as those discussed above are integral, and maybe especially so when utilizing highly personal qualitative methods with vulnerable individuals (as I perceive these types of migrants in a new society to be). Considering these issues and attentively taking steps to ensure the welfare of the participants is absolutely necessary. To conclude, assuming an attitude of honesty towards the participants goes a long way in resolving many ethical issues.
5. Results

This chapter presents the main findings of the field work. It is based on the thematic coding and analysis of transcribed interviews. The chapter will largely be devoid of theoretical connections since this is left to chapter 6 where these things are discussed in depth, this chapter focuses on briefly presenting core themes that have arisen.

A limitation of the thematic analysis is that all the themes presented here are intertwined and difficult to separate from one another. This presentation of the findings and the subsequent analysis and discussion will to some degree be reductionist and lose some of the detail in the findings (Bryman 2012: 577). However, this is necessary to produce any form of summary of the research findings and – later on – connecting them to theory.

Several potential ethical issues have been recognized and are attempted to adhere to, this will be reflected in how the results are presented. Most notably, the participants are identified only by code (participants are represented as P1, or P2, and so on), that identifiers (things that could help in identifying the participants) are avoided as far as possible, and that categories/attributes of the participants are given in a crude form (e.g. presenting age-interval rather than the specific age). I have chosen to include genders since they could be of contextual importance. Given names has been avoided since even fake names can carry with them connotations that influence the reading of the findings. The reasoning behind these decisions can be found in section 4.6.

5.1. Brief biographies

In this section, short introductions of the participants are given that aims to illuminate central attributes that they carry and how they ended up where they currently are. These introductions are necessary to give so that the reader will be able to associate the stories, findings, and analysis to actual people, even if they are anonymized. Additionally, it provides a brief overview of what type of people have participated in the study.

The first interviewee, P1, is a man in his fifties who came to Sweden in 2010 as a quota refugee from northeastern Africa. His migration history started when he was 18 years old, when he had to flee from unrest in his home country. He then spent 23 years in a neighboring country, first working as a mechanic to then having a corner shop/cafe. After being persecuted and jailed in the new country P1 received help from UNHCR and was resettled to Sweden, being settled at once in Hofors. P1 is employed and lives as a tenant in a rental apartment with his wife. P1 has lived in large cities his whole life prior arriving in Sweden.

P2, a man in his forties who arrived in Sweden 2007 as an asylum seeker comes from northeastern Africa where he had lived several years under threat from conflicts in the area. He worked as an interpreter during this time. Having lost family members and living in proximity to a conflict with no end in sight he decided it was time to leave his home. Hiring smugglers, he received help to leave, but had no idea where he would end up. Eventually arriving in Sweden, he received a temporary residence permit, and after some time and troubles he received a permanent residence permit. He arrived in Hofors 2010 after a long
asylum-process where he had resided in a northern small town. P2 is now employed and lives in a rental apartment with his wife and children. P2 has lived in the capital city of his home country and then moved around near cities due to the conflicts.

P3 is a man in his thirties who arrived in Sweden 2009 as a family migrant since he wanted to marry and move in with his wife who had previously sought asylum in Sweden. Originating from west Asia, in a country that had seen some conflicts recently, he had been satisfied there and only came to Sweden so that he could live with his wife who had been settled in Hofors. Having gone through SFI he found work at the end of the course, helped by being reportedly fast in learning the language. Currently he resides in a house in Hofors with his wife and children.

P4 is a man in his fifties originating from northeastern Africa where he led a relatively affluent life, living in the capital city and working as an engineer and supervisor. He fled his country of origin in 2002 where he had lived in similar conditions to P2 for many years because of the impact of the conflicts. Arriving in a neighboring country, he spent two years trying to find an avenue to continue his journey to a secure country. Eventually he ended up in Sweden where he sought asylum, received a residence permit and moved around to four different cities. P4 experienced the same disruption in the asylum process as P2, but eventually got a permanent residence permit after settling in Hofors 2005 in a refugee accommodation. He is currently employed and resides in a rental apartment with his wife and children.

P5 is a woman in her forties that arrived in Sweden following a UNHCR resettlement program – a quota refugee. She had lived in a refugee camp in southeast Asia for 15 years prior to finally getting to move. Ethnic conflicts in her country of origin led to the loss of family members and they were forced to flee under threats to their life to a neighboring country. Building her life in the refugee camp, she worked as a nurse/doctor’s assistant and was politically active. She also started to build her family there. Being the age of 15 when she was forced to flee her home, and spending 15 years in a refugee camp, she arrived in Sweden 2005, and was settled in Hofors at once. She is currently employed and resides in a house. Her original home was close to a large city, and while the camp was in border areas far from major cities, it was densely populated.

P6 is a man in his twenties that arrived in Sweden 2011, underaged and unaccompanied he sought asylum in Sweden. Born and raised in south Asia, he had worked since childhood while also going to primary school. The region in which he and his family lived had seen increasing ethnic violence that affected his family directly. Experiencing traumatic events where he lost family members, he was the oldest man in the family and he set out towards a European country in the hopes of being able to get his remaining family to safety. Spending approximately 8 months migrating (via human trafficking routes) he ended up in Stockholm, Sweden. He was then resettled to a refugee accommodation in Hofors. Today he has graduated secondary school and is currently employed. He resides in a rental apartment with his family (mother and siblings). Growing up, he had always lived in a large city.
5.2. “The shortcut” – work and integration into Swedish society

Being new to a country after migrating from another country, the decision to stay or go from the locality of residence is impacted by how well one integrates into the society (in the specific locality but also on a national level). It was clear throughout the interviews that satisfaction with the locality was dependent on the success of social integration and highly impactful for mobility intentions.

A common theme expressed throughout the interviews was the feeling of being in a hurry to getting settled in and integrating into society – an eagerness to start their new life. The most common form of how this was expressed, and the first step of integrating into Swedish society, was to get a job. The participants expressed that one of the most taxing times of their whole migration process was the time between arriving in Sweden and getting your first form of occupation (whether it was being employed or an internship). This rushed feeling seems to stem from the fact that they have had a “paused” life course because of their migration history – where some people have led a life avoiding bloody conflicts; some have lived in refugee camps; some have lived in adjacent countries trying to find smuggle routes. These are periods in these individuals’ life that has been sidetracked or halted, losing years of progress where they could have worked towards their goals in life, hindering following along ordinary trajectories within different life domains (e.g. education, occupation).

Conducting life story interviews, that were fairly free (but still somewhat semi-structured to follow a chronological order) allows the researcher to extract the process and how they affected the lives of the participants. While P1, P3, and P5 managed to live lives resembling some form of normality (but still having their life courses dramatically altered), the others experienced more severe impacts on their lives. P1 had to flee his home country and live in an adjacent one where he worked and led a decent life. However, conflicts between his country of origin and his country of residence caused him to be persecuted and jailed for over two years. Upon his release, he tried to establish contact with UNHCR in hopes of being resettled as a quota refugee, but experienced difficulties in contacting them and had to wait further to get help. P3 on the other hand, who arrived in Sweden as a family migrant, did not live under direct duress, but still experienced the destabilization of his home country. Following his wife who had sought asylum in Sweden, he had to wait for a one-year process where communications between the Swedish Migration Agency and the embassy was lacking. P5 experienced ethnic conflicts within her home country and was eventually forced to flee the country when her father had been killed. She spent 15 years in a refugee camp in border areas, and while this was a large camp and so had some societal functions (she received education, was engaged in different forms of work, started a family) it still altered her life course severely, inhibiting progression along standard trajectories.

P2, P4, and P6 experienced more uprooting things altering their lives. For example, P2 and P4 had to live with the same conflict spanning decades which forced them to move around in a nomad-like way. P6 experienced ethnic conflicts aimed at the minority group he is a member of, affecting his family directly and dismantling the normal state of their society he
was forced to quit school, to take up two jobs which he was eventually forced to quit for reasons of security.

Having experienced these severely encroaching contextual events that affected them in multiple ways and caused them to pause or countertransition (reversing in their trajectory), they arrived in Sweden where they must once again wait. This time the wait was for reasons of the asylum process or getting a spot in SFI (“Swedish For Immigrants”). One man expressed the desperation and feeling of impatience:

*I had lots of plans about different things, but not many worked out the way I had hoped. When awaiting the residence permit in the living arrangement at the Swedish Migration Agency not a lot happens. I think they lose a lot of people during this time. You could stay in this living arrangement for 2-3 years and barely do anything...*

Some participants had to wait several months to perceive that they did any sort of progress (except for trying to study Swedish on their own), while two participants had to wait years. It should come as no surprise then that when they finally received a residence permit or got a spot at SFI, and could start trying to rebuild their life, they will try to do so the fastest way possible – taking shortcuts along the way. This entailed giving up original hopes and dreams, for example, ambitions of what one wish to do; to not pursue the route of validating previous work experience/education obtained in the home country so that it will be valid in Sweden. Because these things take time, and time is in short supply when months and/or years has already been wasted during their life course so far, the participants tended to prioritize making fast progress rather than achieving quality progress.

Some participants recount how they had hoped to continue their career in the field they already had competence in from previous work and education, believing this was their central asset when trying to find work in Sweden. One man expressed how he had to alter his initial plans:

*My first thought was to continue as an engineer, but when I arrived in Sweden and saw the situation I realized it didn’t fit. Because when I arrived here, I was [age redacted, in his thirties] ... to begin school from the basics – since my papers aren’t valid here in Sweden – it was really difficult to think like this. So, I thought I had to change my plan. I had to have something that I could point to when searching for a job, that’s why I chose the education I did. My thinking is, it was the shortest way.*

Recounts of these kinds of compromises recurred with other participants who had wished to continue in their previous fields where they had work experience. P5 expressed how she tried to pursue a career in medicine or getting any kind of diploma for a tertiary education, but was ultimately put off the idea since it would take a long time to achieve the necessary education in Sweden, and she could not reconcile this with taking care of her children, and managing her finances:
When I arrived in Sweden I had the ambition of studying, I had that goal. [...] But as I said, I sat and calculated – in 10 years I am done with university. [...] So, then I thought, time, economic situation, and not having to receive subsidy from the municipality, I absolutely didn’t want to do that, I wanted to provide for myself from day one! Then the road was too long, and my family situation did not fit.

The thing that was highest up on the participants list was finding a job, getting some form of occupation to break the phase of sitting at home alone and not doing anything worthwhile. This sentiment of being rushed and stressed to find work first and foremost was apparent with most of the participants, those that were in their middle ages (thirties to fifties), while the participant who arrived as a minor did not convey the same sentiment – except for feelings of restlessness while waiting for the asylum process.

There was clearly a focus on compromises that had to be done by the participants, abandoning the initial hopes and focusing on getting stable work a quicker way. These tended to be trying times of hopelessness and dissatisfaction with their current situation. Many expressed that they were exploring options to move away from the locality to areas where they would have better luck in finding work at the time, disregarding other aspects that the locality did or did not offer. The work domain was clearly dominant at the beginning of the social integration of the middle-aged participants.

What unites these participants is that they were all able to find an occupation, stable work, eventually. The way they describe this event, what their thoughts were before and after, and how it impacted their satisfaction and well-being in the rural locality indicates this event as a turning point in their life course. The way that they clearly talked about it being their primary concern, and how it affected them and their family’s well-being, and integration it would also seem that the domain of work dominated their mobility-decision – their internal migration – at this initial stage. It seemed that the success of their social integration, which in turn influence their decisions about mobility seemed hinged on finding work. P1 expressed how it impacted his decision:

*If you have permanent employment then you can... then it's good to live in Hofors. The problem is when you don’t have a job, it's a small town, few jobs... And many [...] want to move to big cities to have more options. And I was the same way as well: if I had not gotten employment then I would have moved.*

Reiterating later in the interview when asked why he did not move to his sister in Lund:

*If I got a job, I would remain here, if not then I would move to big cities, maybe to Lund or Stockholm.*

P2, when reflecting on structural changes in how integration is handled in the municipality (before, refugees went directly to the municipality, since 2010 they go directly to the Swedish Public Employment Service, attempting to quickly establish newly arrived in the labor
market expressed how it used to be better because it was a shorter route to go directly through the municipality, alluding to how this longer route might put people off and so they move:

> It’s not easy to find a job here in Hofors. [...] This route [through the Swedish Public Employment Service], I think something happens in the middle of it. People disappear [“försvinner”] at this moment, they don’t enter society and not the labor market, I don’t know why. I think it was better when the route was short.

A further aspect that points to gaining entry to the labor market as a turning point in the life course and social integration success to the rural locality was how it aided the migrants in their social endeavors. P3 lamented how the Swedish culture seemed different from what he was used to in his culture, people were much more distant and cold toward strangers, which had the effect of it being exceedingly difficult to gain friends that are members of the native population. This has a negative effect on the social integration of newly arrived immigrants in that they have a hard time finding people of the native population with whom to socialize and to speak Swedish with. Being made a part of the society into which they are trying to integrate with they need some form of contact with the native society, preferably informal/causal. Being in the stage of unemployment, and being stuck in the phase of sitting at home, it is easy to see how this contributed to dissatisfaction with the locality in general. P3 recounts how getting work was a way to mitigate the difficulties of socializing with native born individuals, it’s a way to get an in:

> When it comes to people here [native born] they are much more careful [“försiktig”] compared to others that arrive here. It's not easy when you come and try to talk to people, it's a bit difficult. But it is an advantage when you know someone because it is then easier to continue with him. I think that my work colleagues here, it's super easy to socialize with them.

This aspect of getting work further enhances that it constitutes a turning point in their life course. Finding that initial occupation seemed to have a dramatic effect on the decision making of the participants when they were newly arrived, leading them to be much more prone to stay. With much of the literature (and indeed political debates) focusing on the life domain of work and its importance to social integration, a common critique is that it often receives too much emphasis, neglecting other important life domains which should be explored (Verd & López Andreu 2011: 37). And while this may be true, these interviews have pointed to the central importance the work domain seem to have on the well-being and satisfaction of these newly arrived migrants at the early stage of their integration. Most report how they experienced the period between arriving in Sweden and getting their first

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occupation as a painstaking road of desperation and feelings of powerlessness. Most wanted to leave and go to big cities to find work. However, after getting employed these perceptions and opinions seemed to have completely shifted, and suddenly other domains and aspects of the locality come to the forefront. As described by some participants, having no job as a newly arrived migrant entail that one will have very limited social interactions with native born individuals, few activities to attend to, and much time spent at home unhappy. Getting that first job changed this, completely shuffling the cards of life, constituting a turning point in the life course and integration of the individual.

A way to view this is that getting that first employment acts as a sort of base requirement that “unlocks” other aspects that impacts their plans and decision making-processes when it comes to internal migration – their mobility. As a result, the domain of work – while it certainly seems to remain important further on as well – is exceedingly important in the early stages of integration (illustrated with the participants trying to take the shortest route/the shortcut). This points to the importance of timing in the life course, and how different domains carry differing importance depending on the timing. Later on, other domains (such as family, and linked lives) seems to carry more importance over the advancement in career. The aspects and impacts of timing are important and permeates the findings in general.

5.3. Other domains

With the importance of the work domain previously established, this section is dedicated to presentation of results concerning other life domains more generally before presenting more specific findings.

All the participants arrived in Hofors before 2011 and all had an easy time finding a place to live. Some participants arrived with their families while some arrived alone but were later followed by their families. The municipal housing agency was the normal route of the participants to find their residence, which was often a rental apartment. Allegedly, it had been very easy finding available apartments in Hofors during this time, one participant recounted how his wife had gotten the keys to three apartments that she could choose between when it was time for her and her husband to move in together. Indeed, this might of course impact the findings of the previous section – if getting your own place to live is easy and taken care of pretty much instantly then it is natural that other domains will receive more attention in the narration of the participants’ stories.

While some participants were not completely pleased with their initial housing (citing issues of the initial apartment not being appropriate for the number of family members living together), the housing market that prevailed made it possible to move and find a more suitable place. Therefore, after the initial settling-in period the participants had moved (some several times) within Hofors to more fitting accommodations, following the path of a common life course trajectory of housing dependent upon family proportions. This aspect is described by P2, whose family did not all arrive at the same time:
Yes yes, I have already moved within Hofors several times, yes. When I first arrived in Hofors I lived in one room. And when my family arrived I moved to another apartment. We were four, two children, the wife and me. So, when my children arrived we moved to a larger apartment. So, we have moved over three times.

P4 had moved four times within Hofors, P3 and P5 had bought a house to suit their family better, and P6 had moved to an apartment when his remaining family arrived. This was a considerable strength of the rural locality of Hofors, finding appropriate housing was a seamless process with many alternatives. Even though after arriving in Sweden, the initial stage described in the previous section, the home was often described in negative terms, a place of confinement and loneliness it was clear that later on when the work situation had worked out that people were in general pleased with their living arrangements, especially after moving to appropriately sized housing. Most participants went on to compare Hofors to larger cities considering the housing and work situation, giving a perception of a mirrored state between the two: while it was easy to find a place to live in Hofors, finding work was difficult; and while it was easier to find work in larger cities, finding a place to live was all the more difficult.

However, a perception of the participants was that the situation was changing when it came to finding housing in Hofors. According to some, several buildings had been torn down a couple of years ago, and the recent influx of migrants meant that getting housing now, moving within Hofors had become increasingly difficult. P3 voiced this in connection to how he and his wife had found their first apartment and how they ended up buying a house later on:

It wasn’t difficult [finding a place to live], because there weren’t so many in Hofors at the time, not like there is now. Hofors reminds me of Stockholm with apartments now. It’s really difficult finding apartments rights now.

This perception was repeated by P6 who was in the process of trying to find an apartment at the moment. If this is indeed true (which is of course difficult to know from only this material) Hofors has lost a seemingly important resource when it comes to retaining newly arrived migrants since it was the positive side of the early problematic phase when trying to find work, starting the integration into society. If newly arrived migrants cannot progress to better living arrangements when more family arrives or they just need to upgrade it might be a factor influencing decisions to move away from the rural locality.

All the participants had lived in a city except for one who had lived in close proximity to one. Only one indicated any adverse feeling in regard to coming to live in a rural locality in Sweden when used to bigger cities. The others did not express anything similar and most seemed to value the peace and quiet (expended on in later section). However, one participant did describe a lack of things to do for entertainment, and lack of amenities such as restaurants or similar. This participant frequently visited the closest cities during the weekends with his family to have something to do. All in all, more negative effects of growing up and living in
large cities and ending up in a rural locality in Sweden had been expected, but it seemed to be a minor issue. One possible explanation, however, is that the rural locality is “close enough” to the nearest city of Gävle, so that the lack of certain amenities in Hofors was alleviated by going to this neighboring city. When asked if he could sometimes miss certain things of not living in a large city P1 answered:

No... Gävle is 55 kilometers, if I want to drive or if I have the possibility of some other transport then maybe, then the option is there. It’s especially if you want to buy something rare that you cannot get in Hofors, I can go there.

As accounted for in the previous section, studies and education was something that the participants had to sacrifice in hopes of finding work quickly via the shortcut. However, when work was secured many participants started studying on the side, parallel to their work, finding solutions such as working fulltime and studying part-time. Some participants alluded to a need to “rebuild” themselves from the bottom, which meant going through SFI, going through basic education for immigrants and adult education, getting grades, graduating from secondary schools (gymnasium, Komvux), and maybe further. Many participants would then fall into the trajectory where they pursued a higher education even though it was not needed for their current work. Most reported how it was easy to focus on studying in Hofors, because of there being few distractions. Pursuing some studies alongside work was commonplace among the participants, some did it for future plans and some did it just because they wanted to achieve a higher education for its intrinsic value.

A specific finding here was the importance of distance studies, the option of studying from home while off work. Distance studies makes it possible to retain their job while they study on the side, there was no need to travel to school, which meant that the studies have a minimized impact on their ordinary day when it comes to stress and household finances. P5 describes:

You can do distance studies. But, like I thought with my situation, it is the only alternative, it’s distance studies that fits. I cannot decrease my working hours; our finances will not go together... So, I must work 100%, so that’s... I don't have time to go to school.

This was a shared sentiment by the participants, some described how they had been offered solutions that combined work and studies. For example, P3 got his current work because he had the appropriate skills, but he lacked formal education so he was offered to do the work and at the same time get a formal education within the field. P6 was awaiting his application if he could continue his work and combine it with studying to become a teacher. These examples and distance studies showed the importance of flexibility which was needed for these migrants to be able to work and still pursue their ambitions of education, which impacts their trajectory in multiple ways (one of them being that they get more skills, and that the skills are documented and so can be referred to when applying for jobs).
The residential relocation domain, the future mobility intentions of the participant, was that all were planning on remaining in Hofors for the foreseeable future. What would change this was that if the children would move away when they were grown up, it would lead to P3 leaving Hofors for example. P5 was planning on remaining in Hofors regardless of her children moving, a move would however become an eventuality when she retires, since she longed for a warmer climate. P6 wanted to stay in Hofors, but would move if he could pursue his dream education at a university, in which case he would have to move. All other participants wanted to remain in Hofors, as long as they were not forced to move due to unforeseen circumstances, they would stay until the end of their days. Everyone except for P3 would want to move to areas similar to Hofors, a countryside.

5.4. The family domain & linked lives

The family domain is separated from the rest – similarly to the work domain – findings explicitly related to it is presented in this section. The previous section touched on how the family domain seemed to impact decision-making about residential relocations for the participants, especially when it comes to moving within Hofors. Apparent in the interviews with all participants (except for one who does not have any children or nearby siblings) are their perceptions about how it is to live in Hofors, and how they think it affects their children or siblings. It became clear that decisions about moving within the locality, or thoughts about moving away from the locality to larger cities were largely influenced by how they thought it would impact on their families, to whose lives their decisions are linked. A frequent response to questions of how they liked living in Hofors was to mention how it was a good fit for their children, P4 puts it succinctly:

\[...\] Sometimes it's not good to only think of oneself, you must think of other people close to you. If I continued to live in Stockholm, maybe I can get a job earlier, and such things. But what I thought of was when my family, my children, arrives. They must build their future.

He connected this to what he saw as problems of raising foreign born children in Stockholm, risks of living in ethnically segregated areas which will cause the children to have trouble with integrating into general society and trouble learning the language and so on. The only participant that said that he did not particularly like it in Hofors (he was clear that he would live in a large city if he was alone) expressed clearly how he remained in Hofors because he prioritized his children’s welfare, he thought that Hofors was a good place to grow up:

Like I've said, it's a good place for families [Hofors], but if I moved to Sweden alone, I would never live in Hofors actually. [...] In fact, I don't want to remain here, but for the sake of the family I have to. Because I think it's good for them.

Indeed, the decision to migrate or flee from their home country to Sweden often had the rationale that it would be a way to secure the future for close family. P5 expressed how the
most important thing was to get the children to a place that was secure, P6 gave up his dreams and ambitions when quitting school and taking up two jobs as a 12-year-old, so that his younger siblings would have the opportunity to get an education. It was also the reason he finally tried to migrate to Europe, so that his family could follow by secure routes to a secure country. P4 also expressed how he thought that his children had fared very well in Hofors, and that it was an excellent place to grow up where they could focus on school – which they had been successful in doing so far.

Interestingly, P5 described how the linked lives works the other way around as well; her children had complained that they wanted to move to a large city, or at least a larger town. But since P5 enjoys where they are and her place there, and that it is a good place for her children her decision was to stay. Thus, P5’s decision affects the lives closely linked to her in that they will remain in the locality.

There were several reasons cited when motivating why Hofors was a good locality for children and/or young siblings, they are presented below among other aspects affecting further reasons for being satisfied or dissatisfied with the locality as well.

5.5. Specific aspects of the rural locality

Through the process of meeting and conducting interviews with the participants several interesting themes arose that are specific to the rural locality of Hofors that influenced the participants’ satisfaction with living there. Furthermore, one concept arose from the expert interview that was then included in the interview with migrants which came to be an interesting finding of the field work in general. Some of these aspects can be related to the theoretical framework that was defined at the outset of the thesis work, while some of these aspects are independent of this but relates to the research question and are therefore included. These independent aspects are relevant to the topic in general and the research question of what the primary indicative factors for wanting to stay or go are.

What seems clear from the interviews is that Hofors has been a good place to “start fresh” for these migrants, to quickly rebuild themselves – learning Swedish, getting a driver’s license, easy access to basic education and settling down. This relates to section 5.2, in that for these participants who found a job in Hofors it was a good locality since it accommodated the rushed feeling many experienced upon first arriving. It provided the necessary things to take the shortcut, to quickly rebuild oneself. P4 who had worked as an engineer and had an industrial education described how validating his skills and experiences, and trying to get a Swedish education in proportion would take far too long time:

*To be an engineer you must finish university. And that’s really difficult. Maybe if I had started then [when he had received a residence permit], maybe I would manage finishing up university when it’s time to retire!*

P4 described how he had to choose the shortcut, a fast route that would mean he had to reinvent himself:
I had to rebuild myself, to get a job here in Sweden. And in Stockholm, there are jobs but it’s really difficult, more difficult than here, to find a smooth way to get an education because the requirements are stricter.

Therefore, when the participants achieved the turning point of finding work they got on the right track and could progress along a more regular trajectory since the necessary resources were present in Hofors. Integration was helped along this way in that the opportunities were present in the form of education (distance and non-distance), easy to get a driver’s license, good place to focus on yourself.

Another central aspect of Hofors alluded to by the participants, when discussing what the good things of living in Hofors are, is that it is a calm place where you have peace and quiet as well as a relatively stress-free environment. Correspondingly, related to the linked lives-concept, this was a resource often seen as particularly good for the children, a secure place compared to the urban crime of larger cities and other disturbances. P5 mentioned how the calm and stress-free environment was important when considering if the locality was a good fit for her children, and P4 compared Hofors to Stockholm and lamented over urban youth crime in the capital city.

Not limited to concern for their children, the aspects of peace and quiet, calmness, and a stress-free environment seemed to resonate with the participants themselves as well. Especially those that placed a lot of emphasis on their past traumatic experiences in their home countries (which were often results of armed conflicts) enjoyed living in a place where they could feel secure. A small-scale locality like Hofors felt more secure than the stressful big cities of Stockholm or even Gävle. P6 who had been through an ethnically charged conflict aimed at the minority group of which he belongs to (losing his father and older brother) and a traumatic eight months of migration via smuggling routes through nine different countries pressed this point when talking about being satisfied in Hofors:

*The first years in Sweden were very tough. All my thoughts were on the traumatic experiences I had gone through, they came back and I couldn’t sleep during the nights. I went to a therapist and told them. But then I decided that I would not think of this anymore, I am here now and I will try to do the best I can of my life. [...] I am secure in Hofors, I feel secure and I am very happy with life at the moment.*

P6 also expressed an appreciation of the milieu of and around Hofors:

*I really like the nature, because this nature... it’s a calm area and it got me to restart in Sweden. When I was sad and these thoughts came back I went to the forest and walked for hours.*

All participants except for P3 mentioned how they themselves appreciate the calmness, the peace and quiet, of the locality. And it was emphasized by those who had had focused more on past traumatic events in their interview. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that
they have experienced more traumatic events from an objective viewpoint, and it might also reflect differences in how open one wants to be about these issues. However, it does suggest that those that did place a lot of emphasis on it felt it important to understand their story and so they did talk about it extensively. This aspect, seeing the long-term process and continuity fits nicely into the first principle of the life course approach as delineated by Elder et al. (2003), that of life-span development and the importance of looking for this continuity. These were aspects that were made accessible by the life story method of interviewing. Had I not explored the past migration history of the interviewee, this detail would have been lost.

A further aspect specific to the locality is something that I have termed “non-anonymity” which embodies the feeling of being seen. This aspect/concept was brought up in the expert interview, the municipal official perceived that during the years working with integration in Hofors it had been palpable that personal bonds got established easily. This was attributed to the small size of the locality, that it was easy to recognize people and remember them, in contrast to the platitudinous of large cities being “cold” and impersonal. In any case, it was integrated into the life story interviews, asking how the participants perceived how they were welcomed, how they fit in, their social life, feelings of being seen etc. Interestingly, it seemed to be a sentiment that the participants shared, P2 describes:

> If you live in Hofors three-four years you know almost half of the people living here in Hofors. If I meet maybe 10 people, maybe three-four know my name, even if they are Swedish. [...] It’s easy, very easy to meet someone here in ICA or Sparköp, and just say hello and walk together to your home since you might be neighbors.

Comparing how he perceives it to be in large cities like Stockholm:

> But in the big cities, it’s not easy to find someone to connect with, because everyone is busy – even you! If I find you at the train station in Stockholm, you run around, you have headphones in, right?

Finishing on a significant point for integration:

> Integration needs... it must come from people. It’s personal stuff, it must come from people first.

As mentioned before in section 5.2, this was something that seemed hinged on getting work as an “in” to the social life. To start making acquaintances with others than just your migratory group of people, such as native-born people as well as members of other ethnic groups. But regardless, just in the meeting with officials from the municipality or government agencies it seems to be on a more personal level in Hofors, where things become recognizable. This has the effect of creating some form of tangible transparency of the formal Swedish society, it becomes easier to understand how the municipality works, what the Swedish Public Employment Service is for; since there are fewer people to interact with, you’ll get to interact with them more. Contrasted to larger urban areas, places where the interviewees believed official dealings with the bureaucracy to be impersonal and getting to
know members of the native population to be more difficult (residential segregation being the primary concern). P4, who has lived in several cities in Sweden before coming to Hofors describes:

*If you live in a big city like Gävle or Stockholm, you get lost. But if you live in a small town like here for a while, then you become familiar – everyone knows you and you know everyone. And that is a very big difference, because if you live in a big city you will get lost, no one knows you, you know no one.*

He went on to allude to the transparency, that it was easier to gain an insight in the small-scale locality:

*If you don’t want to get to know someone, or just want any job, then it's good to live in Stockholm. If you want to know how the society works then [...] You can see it more clearly, the society, Sweden [...] to live in a small town, it means that you’re standing on top of Sweden and observing, because you see how everything works – government agencies are close, maybe you have a friend, you've befriended people, companies, society has become more familiar.*

P5 suggested how this aspect of non-anonymity in the locality creates opportunities in the occupational setting for people that lack formal qualifications (or proof of certain professional skills) since:

*I've built up a confidence with my work colleagues, my superior and the municipality – everyone knows me! Even if I don’t have a university education I can get a job like this, but it would not be easy to apply for the same position in another place, because they require a higher educational degree.*

Moving away would mean starting over from square one in some way, regardless if the move is to a large city or another small-scale locality. But it would seem to be easier to build a repertoire with people in a small-scale locality because of this aspect of non-anonymity. P6 also mentions similar aspects, and the positive effects of getting to know key people in the small-scale locality:

*After having lived here for six years I think it’s only positive to live in these small societies, here are the opportunities. Like, if I had stayed in Stockholm I would not have grown as much, I couldn’t develop as much. Here you had the opportunities, you’ve had the people that... in smaller groups you can more easily get into contact with other people and that’s what made me stay. Many have moved away but I chose to stay just because of these opportunities.*
Having explored the findings that are focused on the specific aspects of the locality that are positive there are also aspects that have been brought up in the interviews that points to more negative or problematic effects. These affect the level of satisfaction, the success of integration, and more. In sum, these are the double-sided issues with learning Swedish in the locality compared to in a large city, and issues following the lack of amenities and/or activities.

Language was an aspect that was considered when planning this study, language is often upheld as integral for successful integration – for good reasons. It would therefore be interesting to hear the participants out on how they experienced learning Swedish in this locality. The results have been very double-sided, where the participants reasoning points to some positive aspects and some negative aspects. A view often alluded to by the participants when discussing problems of integration and language in the context of big cities is that residential segregation causes immigrants to be clustered and so the predominant language used is their native language. A potential of small-scale localities is that this clustering is unlikely to occur, and interactions between native born individuals and immigrants should in theory be more frequent – perhaps causing better opportunities to learn Swedish.

To summarize, there is no consensus among the participants when it comes to if it is positive or negative to learn the Swedish language in Hofors. Half of the participants think it is advantageous learning it in Hofors, while the other half thinks it is better learning it in a big city. However, their reasoning is what is of real value, which identifies some of the aspects that makes it either negative or positive to learn Swedish in Hofors. Firstly, one could connect it to the issue and difficulty in finding work in Hofors, since it seemed to carry a relationship to getting a chance to socialize with Swedish speakers. Finding work gave the opportunity to use Swedish more frequently. Consequently, learning Swedish benefited from social interactions with the native population while it stagnated if they did not get to use it during their normal day.

Another focus was the difficulties surrounding SFI (Swedish For Immigrants), a common complaint was that it took a long time to start SFI. The reason was that SFI had been overwhelmed by the amount of people in need of SFI. And they would complain that this process was faster in big cities. Some would then have difficulty during this period since they had difficulties with learning the language on their own. The waiting times varied, P2 had to wait three months, P3 five months, P1 seven months, P5 eight months. Conversely, the non-anonymity and the fact that when they had spent time here they got to know many people (at least on a superficial level) they got more opportunities to practice their Swedish with those whose native language it is. And there was in general a perception that there would be difficulties in big cities that there was a risk to only interact and talk to people of similar ethnic origin and so not use Swedish, P1 express this:

You know people, you learn the language. If you live in big cities, if I lived in Stockholm I won’t meet swedes, only talk my mother tongue. [...] But maybe I will meet someone today or tomorrow [in Hofors], and we’ll go have a coffee [“fika”] and we speak only Swedish.
The topic of amenities and activities (basic services, shops, restaurants, amusements, etc.) also received a varied response. While some were adamant in that there was a severe lack of it in Hofors – like P3, who went to the nearest cities almost every weekend, complained that there was only one “real” restaurant, only one library, and that there really was not much to do out in Hofors. Other participants would instead highlight that there was one restaurant as something of a positive surprise, that there were many locales for doing sports, and you had the People’s House (“Folkets hus”). In any case, an important point was to be made; the aspect of lacking initial socializing avenues would impact negatively on integration. P2 emphasized that the lack of activities to do together meant that it was more difficult for people to integrate. P2 was the participant that highlighted that successful integration needed to come through people themselves, and so activities where people could socialize (this could be sports, or amusements) would constitute some form of space for integration. This was in his view rare in Hofors.

5.6. Social networks

Lastly, the social networks of the participants were explored in the interviews; an emphasis was placed on the qualitative aspects of their networks, trying to gauge the meaning of bonds/links that they brought up and how it impacts their decision-making for internal migration. In addition, an aim was to generate an understanding of the spatial distribution of the network, for example, where important nodes were located, if the networks gravitated towards any area. It must be said that this was the least fruitful part of the interviews since most participants seemed a bit more guarded about sharing information of other people with me. Consequently, a result was that most participants did not share a lot of information pertaining to the meaning of different relationships.

Half of the participants ended up in Hofors because of central decisions that they had no say in, two quota refugees and one unaccompanied minor. The other half all ended up in Hofors because of networking, however sparse their network was at the time. The processes involved for P2, P3, and P4 were that the only person they knew in Sweden at the time (or at least had closer personal bonds to) lived in Hofors. So, when trying to move away from refugee accommodations to more permanent housing (after receiving their residence permit or waiting for it) they chose to settle where the person they knew best lived. In P3’s case this was straightforward and a bit irrelevant since he came as a family migrant, moving to his wife who had settled in Hofors. But for P2 and P4 it was clear that they had several alternatives, had lived in different places in Sweden for considerable periods of time, and decided to come to Hofors. P2 had spent most of his time in a northern large town, where he lived in a refugee accommodation, waiting to receive his residence permit. When he finally got it, he followed in the tracks of his friend whom he had shared a room with in the refugee accommodation. This friend had moved to Hofors and was able to provide P2 with housing for a while. There seemed to be no other aspects involved in his relocation to Hofors other than he knew his friend who lived there.

P4 had experienced a complicated route before he ended up in Hofors. He had gotten a residence permit prior but it got revoked amidst policy decisions revolving around people from his country of origin. The municipality he had stayed in (a northern city) threw him out
of the apartment that had been arranged and so he was forced to go somewhere. He had his friend in Hofors, who recommended the locality, and so he moved to the refugee accommodation in Hofors municipality. These participants could be said to have ended up in Hofors because of their existing network, which was very limited at the time.

Of a central concern is whether the social networks of the participants are something that triggers internal migration or if it is only informing their decision-making when/if they are forced to move. In other words, is their network an informing resource or a causal resource? Several participants expressed how their social network would act as an important factor in informing them where to move if the circumstances were such that they had to move from Hofors. This point is illustrated by P3 when discussing possible residential relocations outside of Hofors:

\[
[...] \text{when it comes to friends, I have a lot who don’t live in Hofors.} \\
\text{And I travel to them to socialize with them. [...] it would be a positive aspect when it comes to moving.}
\]

However, he goes on to point out how being in close proximity to friends is not the highest priority when it comes to moving, and it wouldn’t be something causing mobility:

\[
\text{With friends... maybe you don’t meet up every day, even if you live close to them, maybe they have studies or work. So, it's not a big thing for me essentially, I can wait. [...] In fact, I will not move because of friends.}
\]

This sentiment resounded with all participants, their network did not stir any causal effect when it came to moving within Sweden, away from Hofors, while it could very well inform them in their decision on where to move. When discussing his network, P2 was asked if his network would be relevant at all, P2 points to his map and exclaims:

\[
\text{Yes absolutely, because if I could not continue to live in Hofors anymore I might go live with some of them.}
\]

P1, who seemed to tone down his ties to people outside of Hofors mostly pointed to his sister who lived in Lund as someone he would move to if he for some reason had to move from Hofors.

Another interesting aspect is that some of the participants report that the locality plays host to specific ethnic communities that they are a part of. P4 is a central part of the organization of one of the communities, P5 plays the same role in another organization, P1 cites how the people of similar ethnic origin in Hofors (around 60 people) are important for his day to day life and his satisfaction of living in Hofors. The existence of local communities that shares ethnic origins (such as shared languages, customs, culture) was potentially another factor that was an important pull-factor of the locality of Hofors.
This is a good place to remind ourselves of the participants; all of them have integrated fairly successfully into the local society, they all have jobs, they all have stable housing, everyone except one says that they are satisfied in Hofors. The fact that they are “successful” probably has some form of effect on their network, differing from the networks that are generated for people who have no luck entering the local labor market, someone who does not reach that turning point. In any case, the networks of these participants are very centered around Hofors, and the impact seems to be a sort of pull-factor, a reason to stay. It is therefore difficult to say if the participants’ networks fail to be a cause of mobility or if the pull-factor of the nodes outside of Hofors is simply outweighed by the nodes within Hofors. So, while it may be clear that the networks act as something that informs decisions, it is difficult to say anything about a causal effect.
6. Discussion

This chapter will discuss the previously presented research findings and relate it to the theoretical approaches and other relevant literature to situate the findings and conclude what they contribute. Before beginning, however, it should be noted that the results are highly contextual and cannot be completely understood without the context; they are tied to the place of the case study. While there cannot be any empirically grounded argument for wider generalizations, the results are explorative of this topic and has highlighted specific processes that can be highly relevant for other refugee migrants living in the Swedish countryside.

The central aim of this thesis has been to apply the two theories of the life course perspective and social network theory; can they contribute to a better understanding of (im)mobility of refugee migrants in the Swedish countryside? This topic is important to investigate since refugee migration can be a potential resource for the Swedish countryside, especially in times of worsening demographic conditions (e.g. Stenbacka 2013). Reversing this logic, applying an instrumental perspective on the municipalities, from the refugee migrants’ perspective has been an ambition of this thesis. What can the rural locality offer the migrants to enable them to stay?

In the following sections, the core findings are briefly presented before they are discussed in relation to the research questions.

6.1. The influence of the life course

In section 5.2, the perceived dominance of the work domain in the early stages of arrival and social integration was explored. This dominance was seen in relation to other more passive life domains, such as the housing or education domains. If getting a job was unsuccessful, internal migration was a likely outcome. Other ambitions and plans of the participants in the non-work domains were suspended, instead they dedicated most of their resources to finding the first job. The process of a refugee migrant getting their first job was conceptualized as a sort of “shortcut” that was taken, since the “long route” of following ambitions in the other domains was not pursued. This was connected to the concept in the life course perspective of turning points (Clausen 1998: 203 & Verd & López Andreu 2011: 36) – getting the first job was a turning point that reoriented trajectories and shifted the dominance of life domains. The accomplishment of getting the first job was further seen as a turning point in that it had the effect that the participants gained entry into the social life of the locality, and enabled a more successful process of social integration. The reason for taking the shortcut was explained by the lifespan development of the participants, with a focus on the migratory process and event of the migrant as something that “paused” their life course. This had resulted in countertransitions (Hagestad & Neugarten 1985) in the work and housing domains particularly, while the family domain seemed to have progressed without much disruption. With the regular pacing in the trajectories inhibited, the participants arrived in Sweden with a feeling of being rushed and so turned to shortcuts to rapidly catch up on lost progress. In sections 5.3. & 5.4., the continued importance of timing of the life domains was further explored. The initial dominance of the work domain was surpassed by the family domain especially, but also the housing and education domain, after the previously discussed turning
The welfare of the participants’ family became the primary objective, their wellbeing trumped career advancement. Connected is the increased importance of the housing domain, being able to upgrade housing was important to properly tend to one’s family. These findings, of the importance for the participants to consider the people linked to them, was connected to the principle of linked lives (Elder & George 2016: 63 & Hagestad 1981). Furthermore, the future mobility intentions of the participants were presented. None were planning on moving away in the foreseeable future. However, certain events could trigger a move, for example not getting the first job quickly enough, getting accepted at a dream education, retiring and migrating to a warm climate, or moving after their children had moved away.

The concept of domains as dominant or passive stems from van Wissen & Dykstra (1999: 270) who highlights that the primary motivations in people’s lives are varied, focusing on certain life domains. It follows that different priorities results in differing life paths. This was a way the life course perspective could be used to understand (im)mobility intentions of refugee migrants (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 164). The behavior and intentions of the participants were therefore seen through this lens, to try to identify what influenced their satisfaction in the locality and subsequent (im)mobility intentions. This meant that the domains could be traced throughout their life story, identifying which one took precedence over the others. These findings generate information that illuminates what is of importance in the rural locality at different times in the participant’s life story. For example, how the work domain was prioritized in the earlier stages, which meant that the education domain was passive and its trajectory modified to suit the dominant domain. This result contributes to the research and public debate of social integration of refugees, in which it is claimed that there is an overemphasis on the importance of work (Verd & López Andreu 2011: 37). While it is true that other areas/domains should be given their due attention, the results of these participants life stories support the idea of work as central to the success of social integration for refugee migrants. If this trajectory of the work domain is not satisfied by the locality, subsequent mobility from the locality seemed the probable outcome. And according to the research of refugee migrants in the Swedish countryside, most move to big cities (Statistics Sweden 2016a, Åslund 2005: 144, 152 & Lindgren 2003: 409). Being able to get a job could therefore be conceptualized as a form of resource that a locality has more or less of. Failure to satisfy the needs of individuals’ life courses could be a lack of certain resources then.

The first job of the participants also had the effect of helping them gain an entry to the social life of the locality. Being part of a workplace, they found it easier to socialize with native born individuals, and make friends. This was an integral part of their social integration in the locality, having a positive impact on their satisfaction with the locality, which increased their reasons for remaining in there, as supported by other research (e.g. Cvetkovic 2009).

One finding that relates to the early dominance of the work domain is the concept of a “paused” life course. As already discussed to some length, when the word “paused” is used, it is not to say that their life course is frozen in time, what happens during this time is still a valid development that makes up part of the participant’s life course. “Paused” is instead understood as the contextual and structural aspects that inhibit progression along trajectories that comply with the individuals dreams and ambitions, their agency and behavior. This relates to what van Wissen & Dykstra (1999: 269) terms as “non-normal transitions”,

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resulting in life courses that does not fit the standard patterns and are disrupted in some ways. Van Wissen & Dykstra mostly points to events such as divorce, childlessness, or step-parenting and are clearly oriented toward quite usual predicaments in today’s global north. This view, however, has good potential for the non-normal life courses experienced by refugee migrants in today’s “age of refugees” (UNCHR, 2015). The experience of non-normal transitions was apparent with the participants of this study, in the way that their life course was paused. And as such, being that as it may that the participants have experienced periods that may be termed as paused; it resulted in a predominant feeling of being in a hurry when they arrived in the new destination country. Compared to their former situation, before their displacement that led them to flee, some participants held qualified jobs. Arriving in Sweden and finding out one’s work experience is deemed invalid and having to start over from square one constitutes a form of countertransition (Hagestad & Neugarten 1985) within the domains of work and education. This was apparent in the first steps of integration into Swedish society in Hofors in that the dominant domain that was expressed was clearly the work domain, everything else could wait. This predominant feeling of being in a hurry to get the first job, and prioritizing it over all the other domains seemed predicated on the fact of having experienced a sustained period of a paused life course. Finding that first job, some form of stable occupation, constituted a turning point (Clausen 1998: 203) in that it caused a complete shift which brought the other life domains to the forefront as well as the locality-specific aspects/resources.

Perhaps it follows quite naturally to draw connections to the principle of timing and pacing of transitions in the life course as outlined by Dykstra & van Wissen (1999: 10f.) and Elder et al. (2003: 12). The turning point of getting that first job was of obvious importance, the need of taking shortcuts and compromising on other aspects within different domains alluded to this. Because of this period of a paused life course, certain transitions were put on hold and occurred at later times. Especially when arriving in a new country and work experience and education is deemed invalid, it sets the individual back some time. The timing of this turning point could indicate how it can lead to very different results; as per the participants, if it took too long they would have moved: the participants in this study had been successful in taking the shortcut and securing a job, if they had not they would have moved to bigger urban areas in search of work, contributing to the already dominant urbanizing pattern of refugee migrants (Statistics Sweden 2016a, Åslund 2005: 144, 152 & Lindgren 2003: 409). The aspect of timing and its impact was clear in relation to this turning point and transition in the individuals’ life course, and had the timing been different they would seemingly have left Hofors.

The timing was also central in how different domains exchanged place as the dominant one at different stages of the life course. As already stated, the domain of work completely dominated the first steps of integrating into the local society. When reaching the turning point the trajectory begun following a more regular path. Being employed allowed the focus to shift to other domains, such as those concerning housing arrangements, family matters, and educational development. The very pronounced shift from the dominance of the work domain to that of family illustrated how trajectories within different domains seems to affect the timing of transitions within other domains. In this case for example, the turning point of
finding the first job meant that focus shifted to the welfare of the individual’s family, triggering certain transitions to occur such as upgrading housing arrangements to better suit the children.

Consequently, the principle of linked lives was constantly present in how the participants described their reasoning behind making different decisions, pertaining to residential relocation and/or the potential for moving away from Hofors. At the forefront was a concern for the wellbeing of their children or younger siblings. The agency of the participants was clearly shown to be hinged upon how their closely connected individuals would fare as a result of this agency, a commonly observed behavior (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 165). Not surprisingly the domain of family was closely connected to these aspects for the participants, indicating that individuals that are considered “heads of the household” will prioritize aspects of linked lives if possible. This is conducive with Mulder & Hooimeijer’s (1999) theory of residential relocation (van Wissen & Dykstra 1999: 270). The domain of family overtook the domain of work for the participants, with people not pursuing career options in bigger cities because of the perception that their children would be better off in Hofors.

The life course of the participants clearly impacts how they perceive the locality that they are currently residing in. The principles of the life course perspective (Elder et al. 2016) most relevant to these results are those of 1) life-span development, 2) timing, and 3) linked lives. The timing of transitions that allowed them to progress along trajectories in dominant domains at different times was an influence on their satisfaction with the locality, and subsequently what their (im)mobility intentions were. Different domains were dominant during different stages of integration into the locality, and the possibility of progressing along the intended trajectories was dependent on the locality itself – the macro context of opportunities and constraints (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 164). There is therefore a need to give room to the participants perception of what the locality of Hofors has to offer, to what extent it can satisfy the needs of the participants’ ambitions.

6.2. The social context – the resources of Hofors

The locality that constitutes the place the participants are currently residing in – Hofors – is conceptualized as the social context in the terms of the life course perspective. It plays host to the opportunities and constraints, the characteristics inherent to the place (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 162). Stenbacka (2013) discuss refugee migrants as a potential resource for rural localities, but a result of this thesis is that it is fruitful to investigate what resources the rural locality can offer the migrants. The results explored what the social context of Hofors offered, termed as the resources of the locality.

Section 5.5. focused on the resources present in the rural locality, Hofors, and how they influenced the satisfaction of the participants. Three positive aspects were explored: 1) the possibility of taking the shortcut, the necessary infrastructure was present, for example adult education; 2) peace and quiet, a calm and relatively stress-free environment that was valued, particularly by the participants who had emphasized their past traumas; and 3) the resource termed “non-anonymity”, the small size of the locality allowed easy familiarization between individuals and enable transparency of the bureaucracy that participants had to understand in
their new host country. The first and third aspect enabled a more successful social integration of the participants, while the second aspect greatly increased the satisfaction of living there. Conversely, the locality lacked some available amenities, and no advantages of the locality to learning Swedish could be identified. These aspects connect to the principle of time and place, the social context of the participants serves an important purpose in illuminating how the setting could influence (im)mobility intentions (Dykstra & van Wissen 1999: 5, Elder & George 2016: 63, & Elder et al 2003: 12).

The first resource facilitated the “shortcut” that was taken by all participants who had been adults when arriving. This was the way to the first job, which one got to by discarding the initial ambitions. Hofors was reportedly a good place for a fresh start in this way, it had necessary infrastructure to facilitate the fresh start, the participants could quickly take adult education geared towards a certain job (either distance studies or not), employers were flexible with studying on the side, and it was easy to get a driver’s license were some examples. Furthermore, the aspect of peace and quiet was a resource that was valued by the participants, either for themselves or when considering those who are close to them, such as their children. The method of life story interviews allowed tracing things backwards and observe the lifelong processes at work, the life-span principle (Elder et al. 2003: 11). This presented itself in their migration stories through the expositions of past traumatic events that most participants had experienced. Those who put an emphasis on these were the participants who seemed to value the peace and quiet, the calmness, and feeling of security in Hofors most. This could indicate that migrants with these kinds of experiences could be prone to valuing such aspects present in Hofors more than other people do.

The third resource is that of non-anonymity, which is a concept that was included as a result of the expert interview. The concept explores how many convey the feeling that they are being seen, that the society with few people has the advantage of providing a familiar environment. This results in a higher satisfaction since social interactions are easier, the small scale of societal institutions and personable environment creates a transparency in which it becomes easier to understand the inner workings of general Swedish society such as the purposes of government agencies, municipalities, and so on. This has been highlighted as an issue of social integration for refugee migrants in western societies, the difficulty of grasping the bureaucracy (Nienaber & Roos 2016: 289). These are resources of rural municipalities that have been identified previously (Cvetkovic 2009). However, in this case this aspect seems hinged on the frequently mentioned “shortcut”, getting the first job seems integral for developing extensive social bonds and relationships with people outside the family and ethnic community. This permeation of non-anonymity has been alluded to as an avenue of creating opportunities that these participants would not have in another context (such as a living in a big city). The non-anonymity and the element that it seems like “everyone knows everyone” means that things like formal educational or professional requirements are in some ways sidestepped. Since people interact on personal levels and the progress of these participants are noted and remembered by central members of society they have opportunities to get jobs or responsibilities “above their formal qualifications”, so to speak.

These are some specific resources that constitutes the social context of the rural small-scale locality of Hofors, things it can offer migrants. In a time where more importance is placed
on what has been termed a “sociology of flows” (Montanari & Staniscia 2016: 10), an emphasis on the direction and speed of migratory flows, it is important for rural localities such as Hofors to distinguish themselves; to work on their strengths and see to their weaknesses. In the end, there is much that a rural locality like Hofors can offer refugee migrants that big cities cannot.

There are also constraints inherent to the locality, which some participants alluded to. These were mostly focused on a lack of amenities. This is something contingent on the life style of the participant, since it is concerned with what the individual’s daily activity space is (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 162, referencing Hägerstrand 1970). The amenities wanted by one of the participants were outside of reasonable travel times, his daily activity space, and so had a negative impact.

The social context was overall sufficient for the needs and preferences of the participants, and so it influenced the (im)mobility intentions for them. The locality either satisfied the personal wishes or was sufficient for the needs and wellbeing of the individuals with which the participants’ lives were interwoven (Hagestad 1981). The resources of the locality must be considered in a life course approach, to explore the opportunities and constraints that constitutes the social context of the participants’ behavior. The specific small-scale locality interacts with the individual development of these refugee migrants’ lives, constituting underlying processes influencing mobility behavior (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 164, 169).

6.3. Functions of social networks

Lastly, section 5.6, examined the role of the participants’ social networks in influencing (im)mobility intentions. The findings could not support that the social networks trigger internal migration, they would however be an informing resource to the participants if/when they had to move. The social networks do not trigger internal mobility, it informs the destination of mobility. These results are dependent on the sample of participants, since the participants have lived in the locality for a considerable time and have developed Hofors-centric networks. The existence of ethnic communities within the locality was explored, and shown to be important to some of the participants for their satisfaction in the locality. Also connected to the concept of linked lives, many of the participants had utilize their social network as a resource, declining costs and risks of migrating to Hofors (Massey et al. 1993), either for themselves or for family members.

When exploring the social networks of the participants, the focus was on their networks within Sweden, the host country. Three participants were authority-settled as quota refugees directly in Hofors, and so if they had any social network in Sweden at the time, they were irrelevant. Only two of the participants had self-settled in Hofors, but they had done so by utilizing their social network as a resource. Very sparse at the time, their network consisted of a few people (mostly other refugees), both had a friend that informed them of Hofors. These friends helped them settle in at Hofors, acting as a resource that decreased the associated costs and risks (Massey et al. 1993). When the participants discussed their (im)mobility intentions, none alluded to their social networks as something that would trigger a move. However, the participants did reflect on that their social network would be highly
informative as to where they would move if they had to. The networks functioned as a resource, informing them of certain places, and potentially drawing them to a certain place to get closer to friends or relatives. Furthermore, the participants had lived in Hofors a considerable time and so had expanded their social networks in the locality. These were mostly colleagues and friends, but also individuals of similar ethnic origin, and of course family members. Coupled with the resource of non-anonymity, the participants had achieved some form of social position in the locality. The social networks of the participants therefore acted as a resource in the way of social capital (Samers 2010), giving them access to occupation among other things.

While the participants themselves had not migrated because of their social network acting as a trigger, and it was not perceived to be something that would cause internal migration, three of them had been reunited with their family members. This could be said to have been a trigger for their family members’ international migration, and them ending up in Hofors, indicates some support for the migrant networks theory of it creating a self-perpetuating process (Massey et al. 1993). Consequently, some of the participants could be the “pioneer migrants” that Massey et al. (1993) discuss. In this way, the three participants have contributed with information, access to housing, school, and so on, decreasing the risks and costs (Samers 2010: 86).

It has been said in research on refugee migrants in Sweden, that a reason for their high rate of urbanization following a tenure in the countryside is that the large urban centers offer an ethnically similar community (e.g. Åslund 2005). A result of this study is that there are considerable ethnic communities in Hofors itself that these participants include in their social networks, and cites it as an important reason for satisfaction in the locality. The participants of this study have developed a Hofors-centric social network, which could influence the (im)mobility intentions as it could constitute a pull-factor for the locality, a further reason to remain. This relates to the idea of a “critical threshold” of migrant networks theory (Massey et al. 1993: 449): if a critical threshold is achieved for an ethnic community in a rural locality, it can potentially contribute to a higher rate of retention of refugee migrants, and perhaps willful in-migration. A limitation of the study is of course that no refugee migrants that have moved away from Hofors have been heard. They could have completely different networks, lacking the richness that these participants have achieved in Hofors, and experiencing completely different influences from their networks.

An additional result of the social network of the participants is the value getting a job has for the social aspects of living in Hofors. It enables closer contact with people in Hofors (often people who are native born), which helped the participants form more casual relationships, such as friendship, with colleagues. Such aspects added to the satisfaction of Hofors, to have a social life, and results in an increase of the pull-factor of Hofors for the participants. This also related to social networks of the participants as some sort of social support, or social capital (Lin 1999).

In sum, the social networks of the participants were in general well-developed and centered around Hofors. These networks acted as a pull-factor to remain in Hofors, a place where they had settled down. Moving away would mean uprooting many of the personal bonds achieved.
The social networks did work as an information resource: when the participants had been on the move and had something to say about where they would end up, and if the participants had to move, all of them cited their network as something that would guide their residential relocation. The way these participants perceive how their social networks impact on their internal migration seems to support the findings of Åslund (2005) that points out that international migrants with refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds are more likely to end up in large cities; since the majority of refugee migrants live in the big cities, it is not surprising that more will go there, informed by their social network.

To conclude, the way that the social networks of the participants impact on their (im)mobility intentions is mostly through being a resource of information. Not something that would trigger a residential relocation, but something that would inform one.
7. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis has been to closely investigate the countryside from the perspective of refugee migrants, their role as a counterurban force and place in the “demographic refill” of the Swedish countryside. The central aim was to apply two theoretical approaches – the life course perspective and social (migrant) network theory – to better understand the (im)mobility intentions of refugees in the Swedish countryside. This was done by conducting a case study in a small-scale locality in the countryside – Hofors. Moreover, the thesis has also intended to evaluate the applied theories in this context, to conclude if they are appropriate tools when exploring the topic of refugee migrants in the Swedish countryside.

By utilizing interviews with refugee migrants their voices constitute the core of this research, and it was important to let these voices be heard since it is an examination of why some refugee migrants come to stay in a municipality in the Swedish countryside. This has been a significant approach since refugee migrants have been identified as a potential resource, a part of the counterurbanization, that could mitigate the negative factors of rural depopulation and aging (Stenbacka 2013, Hedberg 2010). However, they are at the same time one of the most probable groups of international migrants to congregate in the large cities of Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2016a, Åslund 2005). There has therefore been a need to put a magnifying glass to one locality where refugee migration has been considerable, to attempt to uncover underlying processes at work, influencing the internal migration of refugee migrants – to consider their own reasoning.

The life course perspective established the basis of the approach to this research problem, and is therefore central to the study. The life courses of refugees residing in a small-scale locality has been explored through life story interviews with a focus on their migration story. This has uncovered significant findings that relates predominantly to the differing importance of life domains (van Wissen & Dykstra 1999: 270), what the timing of different transitions entails, and how the displacement and migration process itself has impacted on (im)mobility intentions of the refugees. All the participants have lived in Hofors for a considerable amount of time, and they plan to remain there for the foreseeable future. The focus has therefore been on refugee migrants who have been “successful” in finding their place in the small-scale locality in the countryside. These success-stories describe how they came to remain in the locality, and why they have no intention of leaving. One way that this has been approached is through an exploration of the different life domains of the participants. A major finding is how the different domains are prioritized differently throughout the life course, and how they impact on the (im)mobility intentions of the refugees. In the early stages of arrival and integration in the locality, the work domain has been of central importance. The reasons for this has been that the refugee migrants have been focused on quickly “rebuilding themselves”, by getting a job as fast as possible. This has meant that other domains, such as the education and housing domain, has been passive. The ambitions and dreams inherent to these passive domains have been neglected in favor of the work domain; the participants have utilized a route that has been conceptualized as a “shortcut”, to some degree neglecting the aforementioned ambitions and dreams.
One of the central reasons for this has been accessible through the migration story of the refugees, who has described a process wherein they experience a “paused” life course. Progression along regular trajectories have been halted because of external contextual conditions, such as war, conflicts, and the migration process in and of itself. This has been reinforced when arriving in Sweden, where they have had to await the institutional machinery of refugee accommodation. The participants have therefore experienced countertransitions in the work domain and education domain.

Another important finding is that the dominance of the participants different life domains has shifted depending on the timing. While the work domain was exceedingly important in the earlier stages of arrival and integration, it was overtaken by others after the participants had gotten their first job, which constituted a turning point in their life courses. Subsequently, the family, housing, and education domain received increased priority, which has been connected to the principle of linked lives (Elder et al. 2016) as an influence on decision-making.

This should be seen in relation to the social context of the participants, which is constituted by the location of the case study – Hofors (Mulder & Hooimeijer 1999: 162). The ability of this locality to satisfy the needs and goals of the participants, the prevailing opportunities and constraints – the resources; needs to be seen in conjunction with the agency of the participants to achieve their goals. This conjunction has been decisive in influencing the (im)mobility intentions of the participants who have all remained in the locality for a considerable time. Some of these social contextual resources that have been integral are: an extensive infrastructure that helps early integration, a milieu of peace & quiet, and an atmosphere of familiarity which has been perceived by the participants.

Lastly, the social network of the refugee migrants that have participated in this study has been shown to act as a resource. While the participants do not perceive their internal migration as something that could be triggered by their social networks, the international migration of some participant’s family members can be considered triggered by the social networks. However, the social networks of the participants mainly function as a resource for information, which could guide internal migration mobility if the situation would have these participants move away. Additionally, the social networks have been expanded during the participants time in the small-scale locality, to include members of the native-born population, and ethnic communities. These social networks, therefore, partly function as social capital (giving access to jobs, information, contacts, and so forth), while also acting as a pull-factor for the locality – a reason to remain (Samers 2010, Halfacree & Boyle 1993: 335).

The employed methodology and theoretical framework has been mostly successful in approaching this research problem. The approach has allowed the voices of the refugees to be in focus, something that is needed when evaluating what a small-scale locality in the Swedish countryside can offer refugee migrants so that they will remain rather than move to big cities. The results can allude to what is the central aspects affecting refugee migrants’ satisfaction of a small-scale locality, what needs to be available to retain a larger share of this important international migrant group. While a limitation of the chosen methodology is a lack of external validity, the life stories indicate “what is possible not only for this one
individual but for others as well” (Atkinson 1998: 70). The findings of this thesis could therefore point to relationships and aspects that could be revealing of the underlying processes influencing the (im)mobility intentions of refugee migrants residing in the Swedish countryside.

The most significant findings, in their contribution to the existing research, is that of the conceptual approach of different life domains as dominant during different timings, and that the participants’ intentions (needs, wishes) must be situated within the locality, evaluating the perceived resources of the locality. This conjunction is central in influencing the (im)mobility intentions of the migrants and should be evaluated in a given small-scale locality to estimate the ability to retain migrants. Specifically, the findings support the centrality of getting a job for successful social integration and entry into the society, while it also highlights that one should not neglect other life domains. While the work domain is central in the early stages, it seems to shift to other domains at later stages. If the locality cannot satisfy the needs that are resultant of these other domains, their ability to retain the migrants is diminished.

This thesis has shown how a qualitative study can approach the structural/institutional social context through the eyes of the participants, adhering to Mulder & Hooimeijer’s (1999) theory of residential relocation – addressing both the micro and the macro. An intent in this research was to employ an instrumental view unto refugee migrants and countryside localities. Inspired by Stenbacka’s (2013) view of refugee migrants’ potential as a resource for rural municipalities, this is reversed in this thesis and interests itself with what potential resources the rural locality can offer the refugee migrants instead. The focus is therefore on the interplay between the migrants needs and wishes (decided by dominant domain and resultant of their trajectories within their life domains) and how the locality can satisfy these needs (the resources of the locality). The resources of the locality are represented by how the participants perceive them, what Hofors has been able to offer them. This interplay has been highly influential for these participants (im)mobility intentions. The results of this thesis could inform future studies (qualitative or quantitative), for example to develop measures of a locality’s ability to satisfy needs within certain domains and investigating its relation to migrants’ mobility. Overall the thesis has contributed to the academic topic of international migration to the Swedish countryside, internal migration of refugee migrants within Sweden, and has pointed to how the employed theoretical framework is suitable when investigating refugee migrants (im)mobility intentions.
8. References


Hedberg, C. 2010. 'Every soul is needed!': Processes of Immigration and Demographic Consequences for Swedish Rural Areas. *Stockholm Research Reports in Demography* 2010:16.


9. Appendix

9.1. Interview guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kod:</th>
<th>Ålder:</th>
<th>Kön:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ursprungsland:</td>
<td>Ålder vid flykt:</td>
<td>Mellanländer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hur lång var migrationsprocessen:</td>
<td>Tid spenderad i Sverige:</td>
<td>Familj/släkt i Sverige:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kvotflykting eller asylsökande:</td>
<td>Religiös:</td>
<td>Nuvarande boendesituation:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participatory mapping*, vad bör tas upp: För att respondenten ska själv kunna beskriva sitt sociala nätverk (familj, vänner, bekanta, arbetskollegor, släkt, etc.), förklara meningen bakom kopplingarna till olika individer och hur de påverkar respondentens intentioner och framtidsplaner. Blankt papper och penna med flera färger.

Sammanfattande anteckningar om intervjun (hur intervjun gick; var; omgivningen; reflexioner etc.):

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Tema 1 – Livet före flykten:

1. Hur såg ditt liv ut innan du var tvungen att migrera/fly?
   a. Hur och var bodde du? Stad eller lands-/glesbygd?
   b. Familj och vänner?
   c. Studerade du eller jobbade du? Som/till vad?
   d. Fritidsaktiviteter?
   e. Vilka framtidsplaner hade du innan du tvingades på flykt? (gällande familj, utbildning, jobb, flyttnings)?

Tema 2 – Flykten/migrationsprocessen:

1. Beskriv processen från er flykt till att ni kom till Sverige.
   a. Gjort uppehåll i länder därreomellan? Hur länge, varför, och var?
2. Varför hamnade du i Sverige?
   a. Hade du släkt eller bekanta i Sverige vid det tillfället?
   b. Hade du något val med var du hamnade (EBO, ABO, beroende på tidpunkten)?
3. Vad för förväntningar och kunskap hade du om Sverige innan?
   a. Förhoppningar och kunskap/info om specifika platsen du ankom till / Hofors?
   b. Tankar/planer om jobb?
   c. Tankar/planer om utbildning?

Tema 3 – Situationen i Sverige:

1. Varför är du bosatt i just Hofors?
   a. Har du flyttat något sen du först kom till Sverige?
2. Vad tycker du om att bo i Hofors? Är något specifikt positivt eller negativt?
   a. Skulle du säga att du är nöjd med att bo i Hofors?
   b. Fritidsaktiviteter?
3. Upplevelse av integration.
   a. Känner du dig välkommen i Hofors, i Sverige generellt?
   b. Spekulation kring skillnader och likheter mot att integreras i en stad.
   c. Skillnad i att lära sig språket?
   d. Andra aspekter såsom en mindre anonymitet i småorter?

*** Utrymme för Participatory mapping ***

Tema 4 – Planer inför framtiden:

1. Vad är dina framtidsplaner och ambitioner?
   a. Vill du bo kvar? Varför då?
   b. Vill du flytta? Varför och vart då?
   c. Familj (förhållanden, skaffa barn, osv.)
   d. Utbildning och jobb, hur påverkar de dina framtidsplaner?
   e. Flytta för att byta boende-form? Till vad?