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Perception of Immigrants Regarding Their Integration into the Swedish Labor Market

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is studying and analyzing immigrant’s perception of their integration into the labor market in Sweden. It is a qualitative study and the data consist from six in-depth interviews with immigrants who live in Östersund, Sweden and arrived to Sweden at least one year ago. The theoretical starting point of the thematic analysis of the collected data is following concepts: social integration and social segregation, discrimination (statistical, preference, ethnical, racial, religious), cultural distance, self-confidence and self-perception, human capital and social capital.

The results have shown that the majority of the immigrants perceive themselves as segregated from the Swedish labor market due to the unemployment, discrimination towards them, cultural differences between them and Swedes, the unadjustment to the Swedish society, and the exclusion from the Swedish social network. However, the employment was not considered by all interviewed immigrants as a prerequisite for the integration into the job market in Sweden. Such country-specific skills as Swedish education and Swedish work experience were identified by the interviewed immigrants as important factors for their acceptance by the Swedish employers.
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1. Introduction

“Because the truth is, today’s immigrants, as they have for generation after generation, work the longest hours at the hardest jobs for the lowest pay, jobs that are just about impossible to fill.”

Luis Gutierrez

The report describes the invisible barriers that prevent foreign born Swedish citizens from integration into the labor market. Many scholars have researched factors or “barriers” that are important for the consideration of foreigners as potential workers by the Swedish employers. For example, C. Ryding Zink claimed that “where you come from decides where you are heading” in meaning that country of origin plays significant role in employment of immigrants in the Swedish labor market and in their positions there, notably those who were born in Western and Northern European countries have fewer problems with job placements in Sweden comparing with those who were born outside the Western world and Scandinavia (especially who were born in Eastern Europe and in non-European countries) (Ryding Zink 2001:27). Another researcher, A. Behtoui, confirmed the assertion of C. Ryding Zink by concluding that individuals born outside the north-western Europe and North America (ONW group) are more likely to suffer from discrimination” even with the similar level of productivity and “nevertheless enjoy an inferior status (in such terms as levels of employment or wages) than those individuals who born in the preceding countries (NW group) and Swedish native-born workers (Behtoui 2006:20). Therefore, it is assumed that immigrants are “the target of widespread prejudice” and are considered as “not us” by NW group and Swedes (Behtoui, Neergaard 2010:765).

Many scholars who studied job opportunities of immigrants in Sweden (e.g. such scholars as Duvander; Behtoui; Delander, Hammarstedt, Månsson, Nyberg; Støren, Wiers-Jenssen, Ryding Zink) concentrated on the “human capital” of immigrants, for instance, their educational level, work experience and country – specific skills, and on the “social capital” of immigrants, namely, their social networks and social ties for explaining the difference in employer’s perception of them as potential employees. Moreover, the duration of residence in Sweden was also examined by researchers as an important factor for consideration of immigrants by Swedish employers, the longer the foreign born citizen is staying in Sweden, the higher is the possibility that he/she will be employed. C. Ryding Zink considered cultural difference as one of the most important factors that segregate immigrants from the Swedish society and impedes integration of the former into the labor market (Ryding Zink 2001).
According to Peroz & Rosca (2007), state plays a crucial role for integration of immigrants into the job market in Sweden. Changes brought by the Swedish Government in 2007 year affected a lot of youth immigrants to be unemployed, because they lost previous support and had to count on themselves. Besides, “at the same time the state and society had high expectations from them” (Peroz & Rosca 2007:39). Previous studies in this area identified that the Governmental Employment Organization (Arbetsförmedlingen) offers very little help in finding jobs for immigrants what makes it difficult to succeed for them (Støren & Wiers-Jenssen 2010). However, the new rules for the labor immigration introduced in the end of year 2009 by the Swedish Government are supposed to be “more flexible and effective system that makes it easier to for people to come to Sweden to work and for companies to recruit labor from outside Europe” (Regeringskansliet/Government Offices of Sweden www.regeringen.se).

Currently, Sweden is among ten European countries which have the highest number of immigrants and therefore the topic of immigrants’ employment in Sweden is hot nowadays. According to Statistics Sweden, 98,801 persons immigrated to Sweden during 2010, 46,163 immigrants are women and 52,638 are men. The first largest group of the immigrants in Sweden consists of returning Swedes most coming back from Norway, the US, the UK and Denmark, the second largest group is Somali citizens, followed by Iraqi citizens (Statistiska centralbyrån, www.scb.se). Overall, 1.33 million people or 14.3% of the inhabitants in Sweden were foreign-born in 2010 year (Statistiska centralbyrån, www.scb.se). For comparison, in 2006 about 13% of Swedish citizens were born outside Sweden and only 4% in 1960, which means that the number of immigrants significantly increased in Sweden during the last 46 years (Statistiska centralbyrån, www.scb.se).

The purpose of coming to Sweden has changed in the past three decades. If 1950s and 1960s were characterized by labor immigration mostly from Europe, the mid-1970s has witnessed a gradual raise in refugees and asylum seekers (Andersson, Osman 2008). Moreover, in early 1970s family reunification from countries in the Middle East and Latin America was widespread (Westin 2006). Therefore, this shift has provoked the highest unemployment rate, since refugees did not have jobs in Sweden and were not well-educated (mostly have working-class background) in comparison with those who came in 1950s and 1960s (Westin 2006). Nowadays, there are more motives for the immigration to Sweden, for example, during 2010 the most common reasons for immigrating to Sweden were the following (statistics by Migrationsveket):

- Labor migrants (21 %)
- Family reunification (20 %)
- Immigrating under the EU/EES rules of free movement (18 %)
• Students (14%)
• Refugees (12 %)

Taking in account the unemployment rate, Sweden occupied the 16th place (7.9 %) among the European Union countries in January, 2011 (Eurostat www.eurostat.com). The unemployment rate in Sweden has fallen comparing to 2010 – 8.8% (Statistiska centralbyrå, www.scb.se). In spite of this fact, Sweden still has high unemployment rate among immigrants (except labor immigrants) (Rogstadius 2007). According to the National Swedish Labor Market Administration in 2010, the highest unemployment rate among immigrants (13.6 %) was found in the north-western parts of Sweden, while the southern part of Sweden “enjoys a much more flourishing labor market” (Rogstadius 2007:4).

Looking at the unfavorable results of the immigrants’ unemployment rate in Sweden, it becomes clear that this topic is urgent nowadays, that is why it captures the attention of many scholars. Most of the studies conducted by different researchers are quantitative (Duvander; Fleischmann & Dronkers; Delander, Hammarstedt, Måns son & Nyberg; Støren & Wiers-Jenssen) in order to compare statistics regarding employment/unemployment rate between immigrants from different countries/continents and native Swedish citizens, to research individual level effects (level of education, work experience, gender, age, etc.) on unemployment among immigrants, etc.

The reason behind conducting a qualitative research is identifying personal opinions of immigrants regarding their position in the Swedish labor market, gaining information “from the first person”.

The purpose of this research is to study immigrant’s perception of their integration into the labor market in Sweden. According to the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

- How do immigrants perceive their position in the labor market in Sweden?
- Which factors do immigrants perceive as those that affect their integration/segregation into the Swedish labor market?

Qualitative research method and specifically in-depth interviews with six immigrants in Sweden were executed for collecting necessary data for analysis. The study is theoretically guided, so the interview questions are based on the theoretical background developed by the previous findings of other researchers studied this topic. The research has some limitations that are discussed in the conclusion part.
2. Methodology

The following research design was chosen as the most suitable for the mentioned purpose and research questions: A qualitative study that is appropriate for identification of perception and opinion of respondents regarding the research topic. The research was conducted using qualitative method, namely in-depth interviewing. The method of interviewing is very useful technique because “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the life experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman 2006:9). The interview guide that was used in this research has subcategories in order to not mix different aspects that are analyzed after conducting the interview. The interview questions were asked in English (for non-Russian speaking respondents) and in Russian (for Russian-speaking respondents). The advantage of the in-depth interview is that questions can be changed or adapted to meet respondent's intelligence, understanding or belief (Seidman 2006). In the current research, each interviewee has unique life story that should be discussed in different way. Thus, in-depth interview is the most appropriate method to avoid missing of useful information. In-depth interviewing involves a small number of respondents in order to “explore their own perspectives, perception of a particular idea, program, or situation” (Boyce & Neale 2006:3).

Despite the advantages of the in-depth interview method, there are some problems that must be taken in account before conducting an interview. Such problem as ego threat can appear during the interview. Ego threat in interviewing is defined as “withholding information by the respondent because of a perceived threat to his/her self-esteem” (Boyce & Neale 2006:5). Ego threat can be a barrier for receiving truthful and valid information from the respondents, which means that “depending on circumstances surrounding the interview respondents do not want to answer questions candidly” (Ryding Zink 2001:24). For example, questions about unemployment can be considered as a threat for interviewee’s self-confidence and self-esteem. Hence, interviewees are likely not to answer these questions honestly. Therefore, each question was examined using preliminary test with other 3 persons who have independent view in order to formulate questions in a right way, to make them less sensitive for interviewees. Moreover, the interviewer effect can take place, which means bias or prejudice of interviewer that is shown during the interview process and affects the outcome of interview (Seidman 2006). So, the interviewer must be objective as much as possible and do not influence the answers of respondents.
The research has being conducted during 10 weeks in a small Swedish town called Östersund. 

*The sample* was constructed from people born outside Sweden or held Swedish citizenship, namely first-generation immigrants, who currently live in Östersund and have stayed in Sweden for at least one year. Six respondents were recruited for participation at the Lärcentrum, where they are studying Swedish language. *Snowball technique* was used for the recruiting process, for example, the person is well-known for the researcher as right for his/her sample refers the former to his/her contacts and etc. All respondents were interviewed using recorder; the expected duration of each interview was 1 – 1.5 hour.

Collected data was analyzed after conducting and transcribing all six interviews. The *thematic analysis* was used for interpreting the interviews. Firstly, all the data was broken into parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and then coded, afterwards “the limited number of themes was identified which integrated substantial sets of these codes” (Hurberman, Miles 1994:120). According to the thematic analysis technique, it is important to carry out the data collection and transcribe it (in the case of interviewing) by the same person for being extremely familiar with it (Hurberman, Miles 1994). The thematic analysis was the most appropriate for this study because it could identify themes, namely factors that affect the perception of the immigrants concerning their integration into the Swedish labor market.

Some *ethical principles* were considered in this study. All participants in this research were asked about their consent to be interviewed, recorded and to use received information in scientific purposes. The names of respondents were replaced by mentioning their gender and the country of origin, e.g. “the man from Georgia”, “the woman from Ukraine”, etc. in order to not divulge personal information. Also respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, method that is used, the duration of interview and about confidentiality and anonymity before executing the research. After interviewing and typing information, all respondents had the opportunity to read the transcripts and to make some corrections of mistakes due to any kind of misunderstanding or other reasons. This procedure was used for increasing respondents’ involvement in this study and for possible errors elimination that could appear because of different understanding of words by the interviewer or the interviewee.
3. Theoretical Framework

After reviewing the literature regarding immigrants’ position in the Swedish labor market, some information was extracted that is needed for the comprehension of this study. First of all, some key concepts were operationalized, which were used in the research in order to make them distinguishable and understandable. These concepts were used as a basis for the empirical part of this study and for data analysis.

The concept *immigrant* is considered as “all people who have come to the country as asylum seekers or refugees and their later arrived relatives” (Ryding Zink 2001:11). According to Åsa Hammar, the term *immigrant* is defined “as a person living in Sweden who either is born abroad or hold a foreign citizenship” (Statistiska centralbyrån, [www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)). The last definition is more comprehensive since it considers all people who came to Sweden and decided to stay here for various reasons as immigrants. Thus, it was adapted in this study. This concept might be broken into subcategories such as first and second generation immigrants. According to F. Fleischmann, *first generation immigrants* are “people born in country other than Sweden”, *second generation immigrants* are “native-born people (who born in Sweden), but have at least one parent who born outside Sweden” (Fleischmann & Dronkers 2010:339).

Other two concepts were used in this study are *social integration* and *social segregation*. Social integration incorporates multiple dimensions of well-being that means people have “the opportunity and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural activities which are considered the societal norm” (Fremstad, Gragg & Waller 2007:2). Social segregation is defined as “a lack of participation in society and stress on the multi-dimensional and changing nature of the problem” (Peroz & Rosca 2007:16). There are some indicators of social integration and social segregation, such as income levels, the access to job, education, health, housing, etc. (Fangen 2010). For example, an indicator of the social segregation may be a situation when a person does not have access to the labor market (education, health, housing) or his/her income level is low in comparison with majority’s level, etc.

One of the obstacles for the integration of immigrants into the Swedish labor market might be the theory of stigmatization developed by E. Goffman in his work “*Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*” (Goffman 1963). According to Goffman “normals” or majority

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1. Stigmatization - a process of selection of the person among other individuals on the basis of his/her unacceptable deviation from the norms or standards of society and application of social sanctions to this person (Goffman 1963).
categorize or stigmatize minority – “abnormals”. Goffman argues that “normals” believe that a person with a stigma is not quite human being, and also “we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances” (Goffman 1963:5).

Another scientist, A. Sayad, confirms Goffman telling that “immigrants’ appearance, the way they talk the language of the new country, the way they dress, their gestures, postures, ways of carrying the body and behaving with the body, the marks worn on their bodies (hair, moustaches), even the names they have”, it all become stigmatized feature (Sayad 1999:260). Stigmatization causes unequal treatment of members of disadvantaged minority groups (who immigrants are) on the basis of their “ethnic status” in the labor market and “leads to unequal treatment of them in the social relationships that are formed among individuals in everyday social interactions” (Behtoui 2006:31).

There is another term that explains unequal treatment of immigrants by the Swedish native citizens. According to C. Ryding Zink Swedes are ethnocentric which means that they strongly identify themselves with their own ethnic group and show the negative attitude towards other ethnic groups. Swedish culture that is very homogeneous, “is characterized by its division of “us”, Swedes, and “them”, the immigrants in the sense of “the unknown” (Ryding Zink 2001:41). So, immigrants as a minority group could be “abnormals” for Swedes, who are a majority group, and the former experience discrimination from the side of the latter ones. The term discrimination means “identifying individuals and groups with certain characteristics and treating them less well than people or groups with conventionally valued characteristics” (Peroz & Rosca 2007:16). This treatment is negative and its purpose is to exclude the person from what he/she desires, for example work, education, social activities, etc.

Some types of discrimination related to the involvement of immigrants into the labor market might be separated: it is so-called statistical discrimination, preference discrimination, ethnical, racial and religious discrimination. Statistical discrimination means that employers have negative subjective evaluations of ethnic minorities’ productivity, when “the perceived group characteristics are assumed to apply to the individual” (for example “all Turks are...”, “all Russians are...”) (Behtoui 2006:7). Statistical discrimination is based on stereotypical thinking that all people from one country are the same. In the case of statistical discrimination, Swedish employers may believe that immigrants are less productive than the majority, Swedes. This can occur when the employer does not want to spend time and money to obtain information to what extent an immigrant has the same characteristics as ascribed to the ethnic group, the employer feels uncertain or unaware about how the qualifications should be considered and evaluated (Ryding Zink 2001). Therefore, Swedish employers prefer to employ native Swedish citizens, it
will be less costly and more quickly, because they are already familiar with merits gained in Sweden.

Another type of discrimination, so-called preference discrimination, implies that “an employer prefers native to immigrant workers, even when he/she is aware that the immigrant worker is at least as productive as the native worker is” (Ryding Zink 2001:46). It means that employer is certain and aware about foreign qualifications, how good or bad they are, but his/her choice regarding hiring is based not on economic incentives, but on his/her own preferences. It might result from “the employer seeking Swedish values as the norm to which all candidates must subscribe” (Ryding Zink 2001:47).

Since immigrants are representatives of different ethnicity, race and religion ethnical, racial and religious discrimination might take place in the Swedish labor market. Religious discrimination means treating of person unfavorably because of his/her religious believes, ethnical discrimination is based on unequal treatment of person because he/she belongs to certain national or ethnic group, and racial discrimination is based on unfair treatment of person based on his/her race (Behtoui 2006:3). Race/ethnicity is a “categorization by reference to different types of skin color and other physical attributes or different ‘cultures’, which has often been determined by the social interests of those involved in categorization” (Behtoui 2006:2).

Besides, discrimination concepts that explain difference in treatment of majority and minority groups based on race and ethnicity, cultural theories explain difference in treatment based on cultural differences and cultural distance. The difference in country of origin creates difference in cultural attributes people adopted. According to A. Behtoui, some cultures attach more importance to such values as hard work, discipline, investment and desire for education and occupational training, people who inherit these cultures and therefore these values are more likely to be employed than “‘inferior groups’ who lack the cultural virtue and work ethic” (Behtoui 2006:9). Also A. Behtoui argues that “the greater the cultural distance between the origin and destination labor market, the worse the predicted performance” (Behtoui 2006:10). So, a big difference between Swedish and origin country’s culture is an obstacle for immigrants in their attempts to find a job in Sweden. However, immigrants who have Swedish partner or Swedish friends “are able to bridge cultural distance in the labor market as they do in their home” and therefore they have more chances to be accepted by the Swedish employers (Duvander 2001:216).

Following the factors that might affect chances of immigrants to be employed in Sweden, the “human capital theory” should be also mentioned. Mainstream neoclassical economic theories suggest that economic success of the individual which includes level of wage and employment
ratio can be explained with the term “human capital”. According to the economic theories, workers earn money according to their productivity, but their productivity depends on the quality and quantity of the human capital of these workers that includes individual’s innate ability and is acquired through the formal education and/or job training (Behtoui 2006). Bourdieu argues that this innate ability is a product of family background and social inheritance rather than genetic one (Bourdieu 1996). Human capital immigrants possess and that is valuable and important for Swedish employers includes work experience, education level, duration of staying in Sweden, language proficiency, country-specific skills plus contextual factors such as the time of immigrants’ arrival and the patterns of their settlement (Peroz & Rosca 2007:30). According to A. Behtoui, “differences in attainment of human capital reflect genetically based differences in intelligence” (Behtoui 2006:9). Human capital can be divided into two types: observed one such as formally documented education level or work experience, and unobserved such as “the importance of the type of economy and political system operating in the home country of immigrants, its dominant religion, history etc.” (Scott 1999:22).

Country-specific skills as a component of the human capital include country’s language fluency, competence, cultural interaction skills, knowledge particular to a specific context, also educational system that is approved in this country, because it is difficult to transfer credentials from one country to another, schooling pursued in the country where immigrant came has positive effect on his/her position in the labor market, etc. (Duvander 2001). C. Ryding Zink considers good knowledge of Swedish language as a prerequisite for entering the Swedish labor market, because employees are expected to participate in the “normal coffee break chat” in order to “be team members and to have a good reputation among colleagues” (Ryding Zink 2001:126).

Another important concept for consideration of immigrants’ opportunities in the Swedish labor market is “social capital” that consists from “resources embedded in one’s social networks, and it is accessible through one’s direct and indirect ties” (Behtoui 2006:19). Bourdieu associates social capital with a power and defines it as the “totality of resources…activated through a more or less extended, more or less mobilizable network of relations” (Bourdieu 2005:194). People in a specific social network recruit new employees from the group they know, it means that social capital gained by one group of people will be a loss for others who is from another group and do not have this capital or have a lack of it, so-called “social capital deficit” (Duvander 2001). Two researchers, A. Behtoui and A. Neergaard, argue that immigrants born outside the north-western Europe and North America (ONW) are “associated with a substantial social capital deficit” (Behtoui, Neergaard 2010:773). Resources that are embedded in the
personal ties of ONW immigrants may prevent them to work in supervising positions or white-collar jobs in general, but it keeps them unemployed or in blue-collar jobs that are not highly-paid (Behtoui, Neergaard 2010:774). According to A. Behtoui, “immigrants and their children tend to be overrepresented in the lower echelons of the labor market, with lower wages, poorer working conditions and less employment security” (Behtoui 2006:5).

So, social capital is an important possession that excludes individuals or groups without the “right” contacts from access to necessary resources and “to reproduce the existing hierarchical structure of society as well as the distinct power position of different social groups” (Behtoui 2006:26). A. Behtoui and A. Neergaard claimed that social capital is positively correlated with male gender, higher education, more work experience and higher parents’ job status and negatively with being immigrant who born abroad (Behtoui, Neergaard 2010). Previous researches show immigrants in Sweden are less likely than Swedes to be able to find jobs through informal methods (or personal group ties), but in case the former use it they obtain lower wages than Swedes (Behtoui, Neergaard 2010). “Finding jobs through contacts may be one’s best option, yet the jobs found still be of poor quality by general standards if this is all the group can provide” (Granovetter 1995:151). In general, an access to the social capital plays an important role in “hiring, promotion and remuneration” in the labor market (Behtoui, Neergaard 2010:774).

Apart from the capitals immigrants possess, there are psychological factors such as their self-confidence or self-perception that partly affect the way immigrants look for a job. (Ryding Zink 2001). Self-perception is the individual’s evaluation of his/her own abilities or skills, “assessment that an individual makes about oneself” (Ryding Zink 2001:64). Self-confidence is related to self-perception and means positive self-perception of the individual, his/her trust in one’s own skills and abilities. Both self-perception and self-confidence depend on the opinion of people surrounding the individual. Many immigrants feel that “their qualifications and work experience are not recognized and their claims for more qualified jobs are systematically turned down by referring to unrealistically high demands” (Ryding Zink 2001:64). So if people express doubts in the person’s abilities, skills and competences, he/she is likely to consider himself/herself as unlucky person and his/her chances to find a job become smaller (Ryding Zink 2001). On the other hand, pleasant experience of previous application process, examples of successful friends - immigrants who have found a job contribute to a positive self-perception and increasing of self-confidence of the person what might enhance person’s chances to get a job (Ryding Zink 2001). Trying to avoid the low self-perception and self-confidence due to the unemployment, many immigrants start their own business, notably restaurants, hotels, and small
trade. The self-employment, own business is also the way to employ relatives and friends who are in the lack of money.

To sum up, the main concepts separated by different scientists specialized in studying immigrants’ status in Sweden and their opportunities in the Swedish labor market are the following: possession of two capitals – human and social one; discrimination based on personal preference (preference discrimination), stereotypes and prejudice (statistical discrimination), intolerance to the certain religion, ethnicity, race from the major group side; cultural difference and cultural distance; the level of self-confidence and personal self-perception.
4. Results and Analysis

Six immigrants have been interviewed during one month in the Östersund’s Lärcentrum: 26 years old woman from Ukraine, 45 years old man from Kurdistan, 39 years old man and 38 years old women from Kazakhstan, 40 years old man from Somali and 29 years old man from Georgia. Four of the interviewed immigrants are employed: the man from Kurdistan is self-employed, the woman from Kazakhstan works as assistant for nurse, the man from Georgia works as football player and the man from Somali works as school Mathematics teacher. Two of the immigrants, the man from Kazakhstan and the woman from Ukraine are unemployed, however they are studying Swedish language or temporarily working as interns or trainees in order to get a full-time job in the future. Three of the immigrants have already gotten higher level of education, three others just finished a secondary school or vocational school before coming to Sweden.

4.1. Social Capital

Social capital was indicated by all interviewees as one of the most important factors encouraging them to enter the Swedish labor market. Swedish social network as the prerequisite for the access to the social capital that immigrants need for their full involvement into the Swedish labor market was indicated as closed for the minority group. In other words, the interviewed immigrants mentioned that they do not have admission for joining Swedish social network, however they want to and it may help them to be accepted by the Swedish employers.

“You must have personal contacts, Swedish network to get a job. With this network it is easier to find a job. If somebody knows who you are, if somebody knows how good you are, it is always easier to get a job.” (the man from Somali)

Moreover, it is important to be a member of the Swedish social network that has a good reputation in other networks to be promoted as a good worker for the employers.

“...Yes, right, network and it can be said that “your friend is your reputation.”” (the man from Kurdistan)

“You should have the ties that will be advantageous, beneficial for you in not economic terms, but in terms that you will have the “right” company, where you could be known for everyone. In this case you could find a good job much easier.” (the man from Georgia)
Also the man from Kurdistan and the woman from Ukraine noted that the trusted social network is the family or relatives, namely the closest people to the person, who undoubtedly will help him/her in finding a job:

“We, foreigners, don’t have any family here who can help us or any relatives whom we can trust. That is very important to have contacts, to build contact net…”

“If you were born not in Sweden and if there is no such foundation as relatives or friends, it is very hard to find a job, it is almost impossible.” (the woman from Ukraine)

Besides, the “right” social network is very important for getting a job in towns, such as Östersund is, where the overall population is small:

“The acquaintances play significant role. This is Östersund, it is so small, it's like a little playground, in each restaurant, in each organization they know each other, and they all are relatives of each other…” (the woman from Kazakhstan)

The results of the current study confirmed the findings of two researchers, A. Behtoui and A. Neergaard, who said that immigrants born outside the North America and north-western countries (ONW) experience “social capital deficit”. In this study, all of the interviewed immigrants came from the countries which are not included in the NW group (North America and north-western countries). They indicated the lack or absence of the access to the Swedish social network which in turn impedes their access to the social capital and it prevents them from the working in supervisory positions. Moreover, the immigrants who were chosen for the research use direct ties and formal methods for finding a work unlike Swedes what impede the former from the hiring on the high-paid jobs.

4.2. Human Capital

All of the respondents mentioned that the human capital obtained in the native country such as the high level of education, work experience are not considered by Swedish employers as a valuable resource for being hired. Even immigrants with high performance, with the degree from the prestigious universities outside Sweden cannot easily find a job here, however they could do it without barriers in their home countries. The main reason is that Swedes are afraid of foreign qualifications, they are not familiar with and prefer to hire those ones who have Swedish qualifications what can be an indication of the preference discrimination. Moreover, the standards of work for architects, doctors, for example, are different in Sweden and outside, so it may be the barrier of integration into the labor market for immigrants:
"I spoke with the woman at the Arbetsförmedlingen, I told her that worked as architect in Ukraine, I drew projects, but she said that the standards of drawing are different in Sweden, so I should start trainings, qualification courses and practice again."

In other words, country-specific skills (such as Swedish education, Swedish work experience, Swedish language proficiency) as a component of the human capital are very important for considering immigrants as potential employees in the Swedish labor market. According to the woman from Kazakhstan, immigrants should start from “zero” in Sweden, which means that all their merits, high education, work experience they got outside Sweden are not acceptable. Hence, immigrants should study and get work experience again in Sweden, which only will be counted by the Swedish employers:

“You must study again here, almost from zero, your language, your practice ... It all starts from the beginning, the way is very long.” (the woman from Kazakhstan)

“Look, my education I got in Russia and Ukraine does not play any role. You came here and you start studying like from the first class of the school.” (the woman from Ukraine)

Such country-specific skill as the proficiency in Swedish language was indicated by the immigrants as one of the most significant factors for integration into the Swedish labor market. The interviewed immigrants perceive the good command of the official language of Sweden as an essential knowledge needed for living in this country, despite of the fact that the majority of Swedes speak other European languages, such as English or German:

“Language is very important. If you don't know language you cannot do anything at all.” (the man from Somali)

“You know, you live in this country and without knowing the language you cannot get anywhere. This is like a tree, like the grass, like an animal, something like that.” (the woman from Kazakhstan)

However, a few immigrants mentioned there are exceptions from the current opinion that the knowledge of Swedish language is a prerequisite for entering the labor market in Sweden. There is a possibility to be hired without being fluent in Swedish language. Although the immigrants confirmed that without a good command of Swedish language, the proposed work will be not high-paid. So, the fluency in Swedish language is one of the prerequisites for the immigrants for entering the Swedish job market with proposals of well-paid jobs:
“Only one thing you can do without Swedish language in Sweden, it is like if you are a very big company outside Sweden, you come to Sweden to open a branch maybe…” (the man from Kurdistan)

“There are some cases, when you know English language very well and the employers can hire you, but it is like exceptions.” (the woman from Ukraine)

The results of the study did not indicate the dependence of the “quality” of the human capital, the employment ratio and the wage difference. The immigrant from Kurdistan does not have a higher education, but he is self-employed and he earns good money by the standards of Sweden, at the same time some of the interviewed immigrants have higher education, but they are unemployed or have not well-paid job.

4.3. Cultural Distance

The interviewees mentioned cultural distance or cultural difference between Swedes and arrived immigrants that prevent the latter from entering the Swedish labor market. Immigrants should adapt to the society they live in to be accepted by the latter:

“We, the Russian-speaking people, are very impulsive, we openly express our opinions, what we think, our emotions. Here, in Sweden, you need to keep your feelings to yourself and to integrate into the new society, it is important for working.” (the man from Kazakhstan)

“We, Russians, are very friendly and hospitable. We give more than we take. It is our mistake, we should not be like that in Sweden.” (the woman from Ukraine)

It is visible that Russian-speaking people treat their culture as different and in a more positive way in comparison with the Swedish one, what is the demonstration of so-called “cultural centrism” or consideration of the own culture as a dominant. The woman from Ukraine does not consider the Swedish culture as different, however she agrees that the cultural inheritance plays significant role for the integration of the immigrants into the Swedish labor market:

“No, I think, we do not have difference in the culture. Maybe, the Muslims have. That is difficult for them to work, they have another culture, they hug each other at the meeting, it looks strange for the Swedes.”

The man from Kurdistan does not have any problems with cultural adaptation and does not feel cultural distance, arguing that everything depends on the person and each person can easily adjust oneself to the new culture and new people:
“I can easily adapt to society, it is also important, because without adaptation you cannot live here at all, even not speaking about the work...everywhere you will be faced with another culture, another people, don’t be afraid to speak with them and try to find right approach.”

Confirming the previous findings, the interviewed immigrants mentioned the existence of Swedish partners or friends or the access to the Swedish social network as an important condition for the Swedish culture adoption.

4.4. Discrimination in the Swedish Labor Market

In general, the interviewed immigrants perceive discrimination as unequal treatment of the minority group, immigrants, by the Swedish society. During the interviews immigrants repeatedly separated Swedes and their own immigrant group as “them” and “us”, what could be a clear evidence that immigrants do not consider themselves as a part of the Swedish society, partly because of the possible immigrants’ ethnocentrism (identification only with their own ethnic group), partly because of the discrimination towards the former ones. Most of the interviewees mentioned that discrimination towards immigrants exists in the Swedish labor market, but in a hidden form, when it is invisible and unclear for everyone. The Swedish employers try to not show discrimination, their negative treatment of the minority group – immigrants, because of the strict sanctions from the government:\footnote{On 1 January 2009 Sweden's anti-discrimination act entered into force. A new agency – the Office of the Ombudsman against Discrimination – monitors compliance with the new act. The act apply to most areas of society, such as working life, education, goods, services and housing, social services, the social insurance system, health care, national military and civilian service and regarding public appointments (The Swedish Government’s Human Rights Website // \url{http://www.humanrights.gov.se})}

“Discrimination exists, it does, but they will not directly pour the dirt on your face, but still...” (the man from Georgia)

“Discrimination...They don’t show it to you, but you feel it...” (the man from Kazakhstan)

“I always face discrimination, always, wherever I am. I did not experience visible discrimination, they (Swedes) do not say you everything face-to-face.” (the woman from Kazakhstan)

Only one of the interviewees mentioned that she experienced visible discrimination towards immigrants from the non-EU countries in Sweden:

“I know only one case of visible discrimination in Sweden. When immigrants from the non-EU countries want to pass the driving test in Sweden, they get 6 wrong answers on the final test,
but when immigrants from the EU countries pass it, their all answers are evaluated as right. And it is always like that, without exceptions.” (the woman from Ukraine)

The woman from Kazakhstan mentioned the existence of statistical discrimination, the negative subjective evaluation of the minority groups by the Swedish employers:

“They (Swedes) are afraid of Russians, because we are well-known as mafia and drug dealers. In general, Russians are associated with alcoholics, drug addicts and all the rest. That is why they (Swedes) treat all of us like that and do not want to consider us as the potential employees.”

From the interviewed immigrants point of view, the preference discrimination also takes place in the Swedish labor market, when the Swedish employers prefer to hire Swedes, because Swedish norms, qualifications and education is well-known for them unlike foreign ones:

“You should be afraid that even if you are working on the low level job, tomorrow the young 18 years old Swede may come and the Swedish employer will kick you out.” (the woman from Ukraine)

Surprisingly, one of the immigrants, the woman from Kazakhstan, subjectively mentioned that Swedish employers prefer hiring English-speaking people, no matter from which country they are:

“Here, in priority are English-speaking people, no matter who they are, which qualities they possess, which qualifications they have, Swedes love these people. I have experienced it here, because I do not speak English.”

Moreover, immigrants noted the existence of racial and religious discrimination in Sweden in general, which is one of the obstacles for employment:

“…Here is easier to find a job, for women from Europe it is easy, but for women from Asia, Arabic countries or Africa it is really – really difficult. And here, in Sweden, is a high racism…” (the man from Kurdistan)

Although the immigrants indicated discrimination towards them as one of the factors that preventing them from the integration into the Swedish labor market and working on the same conditions and levels as the native citizens; one of the interviewees mentioned that the knowledge of own rights in the foreign country helps to avoid discrimination:

“When I worked as a teacher at the Swedish school, I earned less money than Swedes. One day I went to the manager and asked him to pay me more money. He disagreed and then I
started to record him and asked him to repeat what he said, he was afraid and I got money I wanted to have.” (the man from Kurdistan)

4.5. Self – confidence and Self-perception

An importance and presence of two theoretical concepts, self-confidence and self-perception, was visible during the analysis of the immigrants’ speech regarding their status in the Swedish labor market. Next tendency was identified: the immigrants who were employed had a high level of self-confidence and self-perception and perceived themselves as those who have such qualities of the character that help them to be integrated into the Swedish labor market:

“After the practice I accidentally got a job at the same place…just because I gained trust of the people with whom I worked, because I am social, open-minded and communicative.” (the employed man from Somali)

“My character, I know how to speak with people, how to achieve my goals. The most important is the strong character and optimism…and you will be involved.” (the self-employed man from Kurdistan)

On the contrary, immigrants, who have low level of self-confidence, were unemployed and were pessimistic regarding their opportunities and chances to be integrated into the Swedish labor market:

“It is very difficult. The idea is that there is practically no chances to realize the dreams you wanted before coming to Sweden as immigrant, to achieve something…” (the unemployed man from Kazakhstan)

Furthermore, confirming the findings of the previous researchers, one can argue that the positive experience in finding a job by the friends of immigrants raises the self-esteem and self-confidence of the latter:

“I have good examples of my friends-immigrants who found a job here…They are the same as I am, maybe it is a good luck, but I think I can find a job, also. If they found, I can find in a future too.” (the woman from Ukraine)
4.6. Integration into the Swedish Labor Market

Immigrants associated integration into the Swedish labor market with acceptance of them by the Swedish society and permanent employment. Majority of the interviewees mentioned that they are segregated from the Swedish society and the labor market here, because they face discrimination and “cold attitude” from the side of Swedish employers and Swedes around them and also because of the high requirements from the Swedish employers towards immigrants. This opinion especially is widespread among unemployed immigrants, which means that segregation is directly related to the presence of discrimination, high demands and unemployment:

“I am still unemployed after 5 years of searching for jobs...What does it mean? It is discrimination, they (Swedes) are afraid of my foreign qualifications; moreover I cannot find the job related to my specialization as a cook. No, I do not feel myself integrated into the labor market, never.” (the man from Kazakhstan)

“They (Swedish employers) want too much from us.” (the woman from Ukraine)

But, not all employed immigrants agreed that they are integrated into the Swedish labor market. For example, the man from Georgia who works as a football player mentioned that he neither integrated nor segregated:

“I am not belonging to the Swedish labor market...Yes, I am a football player, it is my work, I earn money, but I do not consider football as a part of the Swedish labor market, this is a game, for major players it is just a hobby, like for me...”

Immigrants who agreed that they are integrated mentioned that such factors as permanent employment (but not the part-time job), Swedish network encourage them to be a part of the labor market and of the society in general. The duration of living in Sweden was indicated as the neutral factor for the successful integration into the Swedish labor market. Generally speaking, it can be said that the integration or adaptation to the society are associated with the integration into the different “branches” of the society, such as the labor market, education, health care, etc. So, firstly, cultural adaptation and acquisition of the social network in the country people immigrate contribute to their integration into the new society and therefore integration into the labor market.
Below is the scheme of the immigrants’ perception of the key factors for their integration into the Swedish labor market. Interviewed immigrants perceive adaptation to the Swedish culture and/or involvement into the Swedish social network or existence of Swedish social ties as the prerequisite(s) for their acceptance by the Swedish society. The integration into the Swedish society and/or the presence of the full-time job in Sweden was mentioned by the immigrants as the main factors that may encourage them to be integrated into the Swedish market. At the same time the interviewed immigrants emphasized that the acceptance by the Swedish society mostly influence the integration into the Swedish labor market, while the permanent employment is not always a prerequisite for being a part of the Swedish labor market. Moreover, there is exchangeable connection between employment and the integration of the immigrants into the Swedish society. The interviewed immigrants considered a full-time job as “a part of the social life that helps you to be integrated into the society” (the man from Somali). In contrast, some of the immigrants emphasized that it is impossible to find a full-time job without integration into the society.
5. Concluding Discussion

In regard to the results of the study, interviewed immigrants perceive themselves as segregated from the Swedish labor market if they are unemployed, unadapted to the Swedish society and not included into the Swedish social network. However, employment is not always associated with integration into the Swedish market, especially when the job is considered by immigrants as just a hobby. Moreover, the results of the study demonstrate that immigrants are still not involved and not adapted to the Swedish society, taking into account the separation into “them” (Swedes) and “us” (immigrants) in the speeches of the interviewees. Although, objective integration of the immigrants into the Swedish job market is still questionable, some of the immigrants subjectively consider themselves as integrated. At the same time, the majority of the interviewed immigrants still perceive themselves as segregated from the Swedish labor market.

Immigrants who were chosen for this research are not satisfied with their position in the job market, considering their status as low because of different types of discrimination towards them in Sweden. Immigrants mentioned preference, statistical (based of prejudice and generally accepted stereotypes), religious, ethnical and racial discriminations towards them by the Swedish employers, but all of these types exist in a hidden form in order to avoid sanctions from the government. And also, the results reveal that self-employed immigrants feel integrated into the Swedish labor market and are more satisfied with their salary, labor conditions, and their position in the job market than employed ones. It can be explained by the absence of superior officers who may discriminate the foreign-born employees by the lower salaries, higher requirements compared to the salaries and requirements to the native-born employees.

Besides discrimination, immigrants in this study consider cultural distance or cultural difference and the lack of the country-specific skills and of the social capital (precisely the Swedish social network) as the main factors preventing their integration into the Swedish labor market. The proficiency in Swedish language was indicated by the immigrants as the key country-specific skill needed for their acceptance by the Swedish employers. Country-specific education, namely Swedish education, was mentioned as an important prerequisite for the integration of the immigrants into the Swedish labor market, because employers trust familiar academic background and afraid of the foreign education due to the lack of knowledge about the latter one. For the specific types of jobs (e.g. doctors, architects, etc.) the Swedish work experience is also considered as an important factor for integration into the Swedish job market.
and is preferred by the Swedish employers due to the possible different standards of such work in Sweden and in the immigrant’s country of origin.

Although separate important factors for the integration of immigrants into the Swedish labor market that were not discussed with the interviewees (because of subjective interpretation of these factors by the immigrants), they were identified during the conversation with them. These factors are self-perception and self-confidence. The dependence of immigrants’ perception to be a part of the Swedish labor market on one hand, and immigrants’ self-confidence and self-perception on the other hand can be described by the following: The higher are the levels of self-perception and self-confidence by the immigrants, the higher are their chances to be accepted by the Swedish employers and to be integrated into the job market. On the contrary, if the immigrants do not believe in themselves, the possibility to be integrated into the Swedish labor market is lower for them. Furthermore, the immigrants mentioned that the positive experience of employment of the friends or acquaintances with immigrant background is a motivating factor for raising self-confidence and self-esteem among the former ones. In a nutshell, self-confidence, activity, sociability are the valuable characteristics for the Swedish employers.

The conducted theoretically guided study is based on previous research regarding the opportunities of immigrants to be employed in Sweden. The study was conducted in order to check the tendency with regard to this topic and to find out new outcomes. Mainly, the results of the current study confirmed the previous findings, such as the importance of the social capital, human capital, country-specific skills as a part of the human capital, self-confidence and self-perception for the immigrants in their attempts to be employed in Sweden. In addition, according to the interviewed immigrants, the discrimination factor as the main barrier for their acceptance by the Swedish employers is still exist in Sweden as it was identified by the previous researchers.

Compared to the previous researches which examined the opportunities of the immigrants in the Swedish labor market, the factors that encouraged them to be employed or, on the contrary, preventing factors, the current study examined a specific topic that is insufficiently invistigated, namely the perception of immigrants of their integration into the Swedish labor market, which is not just the employment question, but also the personal feeling of the immigrants regarding their acceptance by the Swedish employers, whether they are the part of the Swedish labor market or not.

The conducted study has some limitations. First of all, the sample is quite small, because of the dedicated time limit. However, the in-depth interviewing technique that was adopted proposed a small number of respondents. Besides, only the immigrants from the non-EU countries living in a small town were interviewed. It is presupposed that immigrants from the
EU-countries have more chances to be integrated into the labor market, partly because of the positive perception of them by the Swedish employers. The foreign-born citizens of big Swedish cities also may have more opportunities to join the labor market due to bigger amount of vacancies and job offers in comparison with small towns.

Although the obtained results of the current research contribute to the future research in the same area, which will be conducted in a wider sample with aim of replicating and comparing the outcomes of the given sample with the wider one, the continuation of studying this topic is crucial in order to understand the process of adaptation of immigrants to the Swedish society, how they perceive it, which factors encourage them to be adapted and which preventing them from that.
6. References


7. Appendix

Interview Guide

Hello! My name is Anastasiya, I am a current Master Student at Mid Sweden University. As a final step towards getting my Master's degree in Human Resources, I am doing a Master Thesis with title of “Immigrant’s Perception of Their Integration into the Labor Market in Sweden”. I will ask you questions related to this topic, it will take up to 1 hour of your time. If some questions will be sensitive for you, you can leave them and answer the next questions. All information you provide me with is anonymous and will be used only in scientific purposes. Please, be frank and truthful in your answers.

- Background, personal information
  1) Tell me, please, about your educational and work background (the highest educational level, specialization, how many years of work experience the person has, etc.).
  2) When did you move to Sweden and what was the reason(s)?
  3) Do you have friends – immigrants in Sweden? Do you have close relationships with immigrants from your country of origin?
  4) Do you have Swedish friends, partner/husband (wife)?
  5) What is your native language(s)? Which language(s) can you speak fluently?
  6) Are you currently employed in Sweden? Where and how much time do you work in Sweden in general? How did you find this job(s)? Did you use a help of somebody for finding a job?
  7) If the person is unemployed:
     How do you think: what is the reason(s) of your unemployment?
  8) Are your friends – immigrants currently employed (most of them)? Which positions do they occupy?

- Perception of immigrant’s integration/segregation into the labor market in Sweden
  9) What is integration and segregation in your opinion? What does it mean for you “to be integrated” and “to be segregated”?
  10) How do you think: are you a part of the labor market in Sweden)? Why “yes” or “no”?
  11) If “yes”:
     How do you perceive this integration?
     Which factors encourage you to be integrated into the Swedish labor market?
  12) If “no”:
     How do you perceive your segregation?
     Which factors impede you to be integrated?
Which factors can encourage you to be integrated?

13) Did you perceive some changes towards your integration or segregation into the Swedish labor market from your arrival in Sweden till now?

14) Are your friends – immigrants integrated into the Swedish labor market? Why “yes” or “no”?

- **General perception of discrimination**

15) What is discrimination in your opinion?

16) Have you ever been discriminated? What was the base(s) of discrimination (gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, functional disability, etc.)? Have you been discriminated in the public or in the workspace or both? Please, describe some cases.

- **Perception of immigrant’s discrimination in the labor market in Sweden**

17) Have you been discriminated in the labor market in Sweden? What was the base(s) of discrimination (gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, functional disability, etc.)? Please, describe this situation(s).

18) Have your friends – immigrants been discriminated in the labor market in Sweden? What was the base(s) of discrimination (gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, functional disability, etc.)? Please, describe this situation(s).