Integration or Segregation? Immigrant Populations Facing the Labour Market in Sweden

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This article discusses the labour market situation for different categories of immigrant populations and young people of immigrant origin in Sweden, pointing to the failure of integration policies. The article argues that, as in other labour-importing countries, it is Sweden's economic needs and structural labour market conditions that are decisive for their integration, or alternatively segregation, or discrimination in the labour market and in working life. It challenges the argument which points to cultural factors intrinsic to ethnic minorities themselves as a major obstacle to their successful integration in the labour market. Instead, it shows the operation of discriminatory mechanisms which affect persons of non-Swedish origin, particularly in a tight labour market situation.

Keywords: discrimination, immigrants, labour market, refugees, youth of immigrant descent

Introduction

This article discusses the situation of different categories or groups of immigrant populations in Sweden with regard to their labour market situation, effects of labour market policy measures and opportunities for further training and career development. Keeping in mind the heterogeneity both with regard to ethnic origin and motives for immigration, the discussion centres on worker immigrants, on political and humanitarian refugees and on the youth of immigrant descent. As far as is possible in a short article, attention is paid to differences *within* and *between* immigrant populations

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as to socioeconomic background, rural or urban origin, gender, motives for immigration, educational levels and other factors of relevance for their chances of entering and gaining a foothold on the labour market.

Factors related to their background may to a varying degree have an impact on their chances of labour market integration. Yet, I challenge the argument which points to cultural factors intrinsic to ethnic minorities themselves as a major obstacle to successful integration in the labour market.[1] Instead, I argue that more than any background factors, it is, as in other European labour-importing countries (Kahn, 1989: 13–14; Sassen, 1999: 149), Sweden's economic needs and structural labour market conditions that are decisive in whether immigrants are integrated, or segregated, or discriminated against in the labour market and in worklife. Typically, at the end of the 1980s when the economy flourished and labour was in short supply, social imagery depicted ethnic minorities as 'a resource'. As observed by Schierup (1991: 36–8), the positive discourse turned into its opposite as soon as the labour market started deteriorating, speaking about immigrants in terms of 'problems' and 'a burden'.

A Short Background to Postwar Labour Immigration

The initiative behind postwar immigration of labour came in 1946 from the Social-Democratic government which, in agreement with the employers' association (SAF) and the more hesitant Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), opted for immigration as the quickest way to solve Sweden's urgent labour shortfall.[2] Foreign workers were wanted for jobs in the expanding industrial sector and, later, in the 1960s, in the rapidly growing public service sector. Economic growth factors thus initiated the recruitment of foreign workers, which in turn was the signal that prepared the ground for spontaneous inflows of immigrants in the 1960s.

From the start and until the early 1980s, high labour force participation rates indicate that there were jobs for all immigrants, both women and men (SOU, 1967: 34; SOU, 1974: 100; Knocke, 1993).[3] Statistical evidence, when collected, and research show that many of them were skilled workers or had good educational credentials (Knocke, 1986; Schierup and Paulson, 1994). It was, in fact, initially the policy of the trade unions to only accept the recruitment of

skilled workers (Beckholmen, 1978: 204–6; Knocke, 1982). Regardless of this, a majority ended up in low-skilled jobs on the ethnically and gender-segregated labour market – in jobs that needed to be done and where no Swedish workers were available. Worker immigrants had no choice but to accept what was on offer; and they may not have seen it as a problem to accept these assignments as first jobs. But what with time turned into a severe problem is that they got trapped in these low-skilled jobs and ethnically segregated 'work-ghettos' (see, for example, Knocke, 1986, 1993, 1994; Schierup and Paulson, 1994). Swedish employers behaved in this respect no differently from any of the other labour-recruiting countries (Feuchtwang, 1982).

In February 1972, earlier than France and West Germany, for example, and before the first oil crisis, the LO put a stop to the immigration of non-Nordic workers, who had mainly come from Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, with reference to a strained labour market.[4] Preference was instead given to the domestic workforce, not least married women, to take up work in the quickly growing public welfare sector.[5] Non-Nordic immigration of workers came to a halt almost immediately. Inflows of immigrants have since then consisted of family reunions and, in the 1970s, Eastern European and Latin American refugees. From the early 1980s, immigrants have mainly consisted of political and humanitarian refugees from the Middle East, Asia and the African continent, and in the early 1990s, refugees from the former Yugoslavia. The *primary* motive for refugee immigrants has not been to take up a job, but to get shelter from oppression and political unrest in their home countries. But they too want to work and need a job to earn a living. Not least, they want to make use of their education, skills and qualifications.

One more relevant categorization in the present labour market context is between immigrants who are employed or who until recently have been holding a job, now being unemployed, and persons who have never managed to enter the labour market. A great majority of the former category have gained extensive work-life experience in jobs in Swedish private companies and public sector organizations. The majority of the employed and the formerly employed belong to the generations that came as worker immigrants. Speaking in terms of numbers and labour force participation rates, they were well integrated in the labour market although, as pointed out earlier, often in low-skilled jobs at the bottom of

worklife hierarchies. In contrast to the 'old' worker immigrants, there are the more recent non-European immigrants, namely, those who have been entitled to a residence and work permit on political or humanitarian grounds. Many of them have met with serious obstacles in gaining any access to the labour market at all.

Last but not least, there are the young people of immigrant origin, an age group that needs special and urgent attention with regard to their chances of entering and getting a foothold on the labour market. I refer to the generation who have either been born in Sweden or came with their parents in their early childhood and have been raised and educated in Sweden. At the end of 1994, the number of children and adolescents with at least one parent born abroad amounted to 675,000.[6] Of these, 578,000 were Swedish citizens. I return to discuss the most crucial aspects of their educational and labour market situation in a later section.

Changes in the Labour Market

Before addressing issues related to segregation or integration, it seems necessary to point to some important events that occurred in Sweden over the 1990s. At least three factors, which coincided in this decade, had a strongly negative effect on the labour market opportunities for immigrant populations:

1. Sweden had to face an acute economic and unemployment crisis;
2. increasing demands on skills and qualification levels were made in the wake of structural and technological change and the move to a more knowledge-based economy;
3. an exceptionally high number of refugees, principally from the former Yugoslavia, but also from Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Somalia, arrived in the early part of the 1990s.

We witnessed the effects of these coinciding factors in a loss of 500,000 job opportunities between 1989 and 1994 (Gonäs and Spånt, 1997), in low or decreasing labour force participation rates and in rapidly increasing unemployment both for settled immigrant populations but in particular for the more recently arrived refugee groups. Nationality groups which previously had enjoyed high

participation rates and high concentrations in low-skilled industrial jobs, for example immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, suffered severe employment losses.[7] The female unemployment rate for this national group was, during the 1988 economic boom, a negligible 0.8 percent, but had in 1992, before the major influx of refugees, risen to over 12 percent. Equivalent figures for Yugoslav men were 2.3 percent unemployment in 1988 and 15.6 percent in 1992.

The unemployment crisis, although felt by all, has disproportionately touched non-Nordic immigrants and refugees. The unemployment rate for non-Nordic immigrants was 4.9 percent in 1990, compared to 1.4 percent for the entire labour force aged 16–64. For the non-Nordic labour force it had by 1995 risen to 29.8 percent compared to 6.9 percent for the rest of the population. More or less over the same period temporary employment increased from 18 percent in 1990 to 31 percent in 1994 for the non-Nordic population. As many as 62 percent of Iranian citizens had temporary jobs, for example. The same was true for more than 40 percent of persons from Arabic-speaking countries, from Asia and from the African continent.

Activity rates, that is persons actually holding a job, dropped for non-Nordic men from 69.6 percent in 1988 to 40.8 percent in 1994.[8] Corresponding figures for non-Nordic women were 57.7 percent and 31.0 percent respectively (AKU, 1988, 1994).[9] Others may be registered as being part of the labour force, but high proportions of them are actually unemployed persons in search of a job, amounting, for certain nationalities, to between 40 and 50 percent. Alarming figures of dropping activity rates, from 63 percent to 39 percent, are reported between 1990 and 1995 from a Stockholm suburb with high concentrations of immigrant populations. For refugees from Somalia the drop was dramatic, falling from 43 percent holding a job to 5 percent, for Iraqis from 51 to 13 percent and former Yugoslavs from 63 to 13 percent (Andersson, 1998: 54).

Nationwide, around 47 percent of the more recent arrivals, that is refugees, were not registered in the labour force at all. In part this is explained by the fact that 30–35 percent of them were enrolled in Swedish-language courses and other training or study activities (Liljegren and Råbergh, 1995). Involvement in studies is, however, only a partial explanation for growing inactivity rates. Figures indicate that even 36 percent of naturalized former non-Nordic citizens were inactive, meaning outside the labour market, as compared to 22 percent of indigenous Swedish citizens.

Against this background, it is hardly an exaggeration to call the development of the labour market situation for Sweden's immigrant populations disastrous, especially for persons from outside Europe. Instead of integration and equal opportunities in line with the governmental policy goals for immigrants adopted in 1975, there are alarming signs of an ongoing social exclusion and marginalization of large parts of immigrant and refugee groups in the labour market and, as a consequence, in society at large. High proportions of unemployed and inactive immigrants and refugees are concentrated in and are confined to living in suburbs surrounding Sweden's bigger cities. Discouragement due to unsuccessful job hunting, discrimination according to racialized hierarchies on the housing and labour market, and frustration about not having been able to qualify for job-related benefits all put their mark on these social spaces and their inhabitants. Research shows strong covariation of dwelling in these geographical areas and dependence on social cash benefits for survival (Andersson, 1998: 85).

Worker Immigrants

There is no single factor, not even the unemployment crisis of the 1990s, that explains every aspect of this situation. I argue that the problems which surfaced in the 1990s had been building up over a great number of years. Let me take you back to the situation of the formerly well-established worker immigrants, both women and men. Thanks to a much more favourable labour market situation and the demand for their labour, both skilled workers and people originating from rural areas had high labour market participation and high activity rates, actually higher than for the indigenous Swedish population of working age (16–64 years). This was still true in the early 1980s, for both sexes. It was true for Nordic immigrants, who are still doing comparatively well, but also for most immigrant groups from Southern European countries.[10] But, and this needs to be stressed, in their unskilled industrial jobs and in low-level public sector service jobs, worker immigrants were rarely given opportunities for promotion, or career development through learning-on-the-job or further training.

A 1975 study into standards of living (SCB, 1977) had already found great differences between learning opportunities for immigrant workers compared to Swedish employees. Two-thirds of

Swedish men confirmed that they had opportunities for learning-on-the-job and around 30 percent had participated in further training arranged at the workplace. Figures for naturalized immigrants were at that time almost identical. Swedish women and foreign men had about the same opportunities: around 44 percent enjoyed opportunities for learning-on-the-job, 22 percent were offered further training at the workplace. Foreign women were the most disadvantaged group. Barely 28 percent had the chance of learning-on-the-job, no more than 18 percent had enjoyed further training at the workplace. Data from 1987 roughly confirm the picture, although there is no breakdown of figures by gender. Further training, arranged by employers, was offered to 26 percent of Swedish employees, while only 16–17 percent of employees with an immigrant background, including those naturalized, had been involved in further training. Persons of Asian or African extraction were particularly disadvantaged. Less than 10 percent of these groups had been involved in further training or course activities (SCB, 1991).

Empirical workplace studies confirm the picture. In an interview study in the mid-1980s involving 111 women from Finland, Yugoslavia, Greece and Chile at four industrial plants and in two large hospitals, not one of the 66 women in industrial work had been offered further training by their employers, although 70 percent had been living and working in Sweden for more than ten years (Knocke, 1986). Two women out of 45 at the hospitals had, *thanks to their union*, been given the possibility of further training. It was not that the women were not interested. Almost 50 percent of the women interviewed would have opted for further training or education in order to get better jobs, *if* they had been given the opportunity. The reluctance of companies to offer their immigrant employees further training and development on the job is confirmed in other workplace studies. For instance, a study at the Volvo car plant in Gothenburg showed that young Swedish men were the most favoured and Finnish men too were relatively often given opportunities for training, upskilling and advancement; while both men and women from the former Yugoslavia were rarely given the opportunity for skills upgrading or training (Schierup and Paulson, 1994). Different sets of prejudices for male immigrants, positive images of Finnish men as hard workers and negative images depicting Yugoslavs as sickness prone, enhanced opportunities for Finns and hindered opportunities for Yugoslavs with respect to in-house training. As to the women workers on the Volvo shopfloor, gender

and immigrant status merged without regard to any specific ethnic factor, resulting in their fairly permanent entrapment into the most monotonous and lowly qualified jobs (Knocke, 1994).

All available evidence thus suggests that the generation of established immigrant workers was offered few opportunities by either private or public employers to prepare for the newly emerging demands in the organizations' job structures or for structural changes in the labour market. Instead, large numbers have been made redundant in cutbacks, layoffs and when new technology or new types of work organization have been introduced. Many others, in particular women, are suffering from long-term illness or have been forced into early retirement due to injuries caused by many years performing monotonous and repetitive work tasks (RFV, 1990).

More Recent Arrivers – Refugees

Unemployment for refugees, particularly for those who started arriving in the early 1980s and onwards, has been higher, often considerably higher, than for the Swedish population irrespective of the labour market situation. Difficulties in gaining access to and a foothold on the labour market persist despite many of them having good educational backgrounds and academic credentials: 27 percent have a higher education as compared to 23 percent for the Swedish population. There is, it is true, a bifurcation in educational levels in that also a higher proportion of the refugees than the Swedish population have only lower secondary level schooling: 38 percent as compared with 30 percent.

High educational levels do improve chances on the labour market, but are by no means a guarantee of finding a job or finding work corresponding to educational levels. A five-year follow-up study by the National Audit Board (RRV, 1992) of around 150 academics, who had immigrated in 1985 and 1986, showed that after five years only 10 percent had managed to get employment commensurate with their qualifications. The five years had been used to learn Swedish and to pursue supplementary studies to bring their qualifications in line with Swedish requirements. These data can hardly be said to be encouraging with regard to the benefits of further learning. A similar study of a sample of refugees who arrived in 1991 confirms that labour market measures, namely training and complementary

studies, are rarely helpful. Only 6 percent of the refugees had a regular job after three years of preparation (Liljegren and Råbergh, 1995). As research has shown, programmes for basic adult education[11] for persons with low or no formal schooling have never helped much to improve their employability unless there is a labour shortage. Only then have such programmes at best opened up opportunities in low-valued job sectors, even for those last in the line (see studies by E. Franzén: Franzén, 1993, 1997; Söderlindh-Franzén, 1990).

The traditional Swedish way to take care of the unemployed and to improve their job chances are active labour market measures: labour market training and different employment programmes, for example. Non-Nordic immigrants have been a target group for different types of labour market training. As many as 20 percent, or 20,000 people, were involved in such programmes in 1994. Results are rather depressing, in that overviews show that six months after completing training, 10 percent fewer foreign than Swedish participants had managed to get a job. At the end of the 1980s 70 percent of the Swedish participants versus 60 percent of the foreign participants had got a job. With the unemployment crisis of the 1990s, only 30 percent of the Swedish and 20 percent of the foreign job-seekers had managed to get employment six months after their labour market training had ended.

Evidence suggests that unskilled jobs, which were previously on offer for immigrants, have become scarce. A report from the Swedish Labour Market Board (Liljegren and Råbergh, 1995) confirms that in 1980 around 40 percent of vacancies or job openings required education, training or previous work experience. In 1992 the proportion of vacancies asking for education or previous experience had risen to 80 percent. 'Perfect' domination of Swedish is a requirement strongly emphasized by employers regardless of a job's qualification level (AMS, 1996).[12] But what exactly does it mean to speak 'perfect' Swedish? Is 'perfect' language proficiency, oral and/or written, determined by specific job requirements or is it a convenient way of sorting out applicants with a non-Swedish background?

Youth of Immigrant Origin

Employers quite willingly refer to bad knowledge of Swedish as an obstacle even for young persons of immigrant extraction (Råbergh

and Liljegren, 1993), without, however, substantiating the claim. There is, on the one hand, evidence that speaking Swedish with an accent is often enough not to be considered for employment. On the other hand, a study on labour market chances for young people of immigrant origin shows that fluency in the Swedish language can be superseded by the job applicant's 'peculiar' or 'strange', that is non-Swedish, name.[13]

Reference is also made by employers to undefined cultural and social limitations due to ethnic origin and a supposed lack of support at home (Råbergh and Liljegren, 1993). Social and economic injustice as well as unequal ethnic and class relations are disregarded in favour of culturalist arguments. If cultural explanations are supposed to have a bearing on labour market relations, they would need to be detailed and analysed. Whose culture exactly are we speaking about of the more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups present in Sweden? What aspects of ethnic origin or culture are supposedly constituting obstacles for the productive worklife participation of young women and men of other than Swedish extraction? A major obstacle for equal chances on the labour market is at all events those employers who give preference to Swedish job applicants, that is the ones with Swedish names, whether on grounds of prejudice and discrimination or out of fear of the foreign (Råbergh and Liljegren, 1993). It seems that any ethnic marker will do – name, hair colour, skin colour, an accent – especially in a tight labour market situation, to favour 'one's own' and stigmatize 'the others'.

Although the entire Swedish population has had to carry the burden of job loss and unemployment in the last decade, the burden has disproportionately fallen on Sweden's immigrant populations with alarming statistics reported for the youth of immigrant origin. Low labour force participation rates, high unemployment figures and low activity rates indicate that young women and men of immigrant origin, particularly those from outside Europe, have been facing great difficulties in gaining access to and a foothold on the labour market (Ekberg, 1997). Research is unanimous in stating that negative experiences in the first years of labour market contacts have a great impact on later success or failure in the labour market (Schröder and Vilhelmsson, 1998; Soidre, 1999). Some studies point to the risk that young people develop a so-called 'unemployment culture', where the role of paid work is

played down or even valued negatively, while others have not found any proof of this (Arnell Gustafsson, 1999).

Recent research results confirm that even when language proficiency, education, place of residence and family background are controlled for, there remains an unexplained residual of a 30 percent higher risk for being unemployed if one of the parents is born abroad (Schröder and Vilhelmsson, 1998). In view of this, the risk of discouragement cannot be entirely dismissed.

These kinds of survey analyses are important indications of the injustice suffered by the young of immigrant origin, in Sweden as elsewhere (see, for example, Ouali and Rea, 1999 for Belgium). Yet, with some notable exceptions (Wrench and Solomos, 1993; Wrench, 1995; Wrench et al., 1999), little research interest has been directed to the job-seeking process to show the discriminatory mechanisms encountered by young job applicants from different ethnic backgrounds. The story told by British researchers reveals both direct and indirect racist attitudes on the part of the employers: the operation of negative stereotypes, of filtering processes in job advertisements and even of labour exchange officials acting as gate-keepers. Similar discriminatory mechanisms operate on the Swedish labour market.

What has to be kept in mind is that the labour market has undergone profound transformations. The kind of menial jobs held by the parent generation have become fewer and have at any rate little attraction for the younger generations, unless there is the opportunity for career development (Knocke, 1994; Schierup and Paulson, 1994). In this respect, young people of immigrant origin are no different from their indigenous Swedish counterparts. They have been raised and educated in Sweden and have acquired similar work ethics and career aspirations, without, however, having equal opportunities for employment or decent jobs.

With access to decent jobs being closed or scarce, some may find it more attractive to live on social benefits than to accept any low-paid job or to participate in poorly remunerated labour market measures.[14] But, contrary to populist and prejudiced beliefs, this attitude is by no means a general phenomenon. Interviews conducted with labour exchange officials confirm instead that these young persons are very ambitious job-seekers. When failing to get a job, most of them accept lowly paid labour market measures before turning to the passivity of unemployment and dependence on social cash benefits. With the odd exception, for the more than

30 young persons interviewed (Knocke and Hertzberg, forthcoming), recourse to social cash benefits stood out as something loathsome and to be avoided.

A relatively high proportion of the *unemployed* young have, according to the Labour Market Board and interviews with labour exchange officials, low educational backgrounds. Many have only received compulsory schooling, while others are dropouts from upper secondary school. Interviews in the youth study confirm that difficulties on the job market are greatest for the young who have not managed to accomplish at least three years of upper secondary education. This educational level has become the minimum for practically any kind of job. To what extent low educational attainments are signs of discouragement and poor job prospects or a result of having to live in geographically segregated areas needs further research. Being confined to living in these areas is in itself a drawback as it offers little possibility to be part of and in contact with Swedish society, to establish networks for job openings or even to learn proper Swedish.

Low educational levels may well be a problem for a proportion of unemployed youths. But on the other hand, a government commission report (SOU, 1996: 122–5) found that young persons aged 20–24 with at least one parent born abroad had (except women and men of Turkish and women of Danish origin) obtained on average higher educational levels than corresponding age groups in the rest of the population. Young women's educational achievements were in most groups higher than for young men. Obviously more detailed research is called for to avoid generalizations spilling over from young people facing problems in educational attainments to the youth of immigrant origin at large.

Discriminatory Mechanisms

Indications of ethnic discrimination at work and in the process of labour recruitment are manifold, while empirical proof of discrimination meets with difficulties (see, for example, Höglund, 1998). Manuals for anti-discrimination training and discrimination- or practice-testing, methods that have been developed and used in the UK since the end of the 1960s, have been developed by highly qualified scholars (Wrench and Taylor, 1993; Bovenkerk, 1992). Discrimination-testing has also been successfully applied in ILO-

initiated studies in several countries (for Germany, see Goldberg et al., 1996; for the Netherlands, see Bovenkerk et al., 1995), but is not accepted in Sweden on ethical grounds. This has raised international debate and astonishment (see, for example, an article by Michael Banton, 1997), considering that the method does not reveal the identity of firms or persons who have been found guilty of discrimination. Banton's conclusion is 'that the ethical objections to practice-testing constitute an insuperable obstacle to the use of this research method is, in effect, to endorse the prevailing incidence of racial discrimination' (Banton, 1997: 419).

Old and New Obstacles

A scrutiny of 157 complaints of discrimination in working life, reported to the Ombudsman against Discrimination (DO) over a two-year period, shows that not a single complaint had led to legal action (Alcalá, 1996). Examples of cases brought to the DO were as follows: Snezana, born and raised in Sweden, was not deemed suitable as a reception nurse because 'she does not look Swedish'; Nelli's 'accent', when speaking Swedish in a day nursery, was judged not suitable; Arshad, who had excellent educational credentials as well as work experience, was deemed to have the 'wrong personality'. The 1994 law against ethnic discrimination in working life has been referred to as 'toothless' and as offering few possibilities for sanctions. The burden of proof rested with the plaintiff, who had to substantiate that it was the employer's *intention* to discriminate on ethnic or racial grounds.[15]

Against this background, high unemployment figures are not only explained by the unemployment crisis. Apart from the labour market situation and discriminatory mechanisms, there have always been other barriers as well. Among them is the issue of the recognition of foreign academic credentials and of previous occupational experience. For a number of years, equivalency programmes have existed for recognizing foreign academic credentials and professional diplomas. Schemes have been established for supplementary education or training. Nonetheless, even persons who have acquired a Swedish academic degree on top of their foreign one or whose entire studies have been in Swedish universities, have often been rejected as job applicants or passed over in job interviews. Neoliberal arguments that claim that a deregulation of the

labour market with more freedom for employers to hire and fire would improve their labour market chances are hardly conclusive, since practically no contract for tenure is signed without some form of temporary employment, for example a probationary period of up to six months.

A more recent argument put forward by employers against the hiring of job-seekers with an immigrant or refugee background is the supposed lack of something termed 'social competence' (Broomé et al., 1996), sometimes referred to more specifically as 'Swedish social competence'.[16] There may well exist something that can be conceptualized as social competence. But as long as there exists no definition of the concept or what kind of social competence is needed for a particular job or in a given context, it must be seen as a newly created myth serving as one more discriminatory argument. As pointed out by labour exchange officials, it has become 'a fashionable concept'. It is not replacing but adding to older stereotypes and generalizations. While during earlier periods it was 'their culture' which was seen as a handicap, particularly in the case of women, reference is now made to 'cultural distance'. One marker translated into 'cultural distance' is the Muslim headscarf, or *hijab*. The headscarf is read as a sign of cultural distance and foreignness regardless of whether the woman has been born and educated in Sweden, or whether she is of Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian or Maghrebi extraction or for that matter a Swedish convert. Young women who have chosen to wear the headscarf are, due to their visibility, compelled to choose a career or look for jobs where they are invisible.[17] 'Muslim' has in a number of ways become the most recent incarnation of 'otherness' alongside earlier negative social constructions related to a non-Swedish name, colour of the hair or the skin.

Discussion – Is There a Future for Integration?

Sweden has for many years prided itself and even stood out internationally for its progressive policies, programmes and declarations in matters of integration. Looking at the results, we find that only in periods of economic boom and high demand for labour has integration, measured in labour market participation rates, been successful.

As economic research has shown (Ekberg, 1990), there was a successive weakening of the link between immigration and the

business cycle, from the early 1970s onwards, until it finally disappeared. Sweden's economic needs ceased to be geared towards low-skilled jobs in the industrial or service sector, where earlier immigrants used to find employment, often with the intention of returning home after a few years of work.

The reality today is very different. What needs to be stressed is that immigrants, refugees and their children are no longer just immigrants, but settled inhabitants, whether they have come as immigrant workers or as refugees. They are an integral, although far from economically, socially or politically integrated, part of the Swedish population. In view of this, it has to be recognized that low labour force participation, high unemployment rates, dependence on social welfare benefits and social exclusion can no longer be defined as an 'immigrant problem' nor be explained by cultural factors. The consequences of marginalization are suffered by immigrant populations and their children. The problems, however, are urgent social and political problems to be addressed and solved by Swedish society in cooperation with representatives from immigrant populations.

As the crisis of the 1990s has shown, traditional labour market measures are no longer enough to channel people into jobs, nor are they much help for persons of non-Swedish origin. As a matter of fact, and according to one of the founding fathers of labour market policy, the labour market policy measures were never meant to fight long-term or mass unemployment (Rudolf Meidner, pers. comm.). A general economic recovery is likely to alleviate the unemployment burden for all, even Sweden's immigrant populations. This, however, is not enough to create equal opportunities. New and forceful initiatives are needed to tackle the many expressions of segregation and ethnic and racial discrimination that occur both with regard to labour market access and opportunities inside organizational structures. Recommendations from the National Labour Market Board a few years back encouraged labour exchange officials to work more actively with employers for a change of attitudes. More or less at the same time, journalists found evidence of public labour exchange officials taking part in institutional discrimination by excluding non-Swedish job applicants at the wish of employers. A reorientation of labour market measures announced by the Labour Market Board now stresses the need for longer, market-oriented training periods, instead of an array of short-term measures and projects. High priority should be

given to using the resources represented by academics and highly qualified professionals in jobs that correspond to their qualification levels.

As to the young generation, poor prospects and unfairness in the labour market risk negatively influencing their motivation with regard to education and make them lose faith in the advantages of further training. In the case of such discouraged young people, the primary task is to motivate them to learn at all. It is not unlikely that many of them have first to learn how and why they should *invest in studies*, to be convinced of the positive aspects of learning. The major challenge, however, is for society to prove that they, their knowledge and skills are needed; to assure and show them that their chances of getting a job, a decent job, will improve with learning and further training.

In more than one sense, immigrants, refugees and their children are all involved in a process of learning. The parent generation is asked to learn the norms and the functioning of the system and institutions of their new country of residence, something their children are supposed to learn in school. They need to learn the language, which is one of the necessary but, as has been shown, not sufficient prerequisites of integration in the labour market and in society. All are involved in a learning process of how to cope and manage in an alien environment. Studies, my own as well as others, show that immigrants, both women and men of all ages, want to be involved in learning and in improving their Swedish. It is for mainstream society to open up possibilities and for employers, both private and public, to make use of what they have brought along and what they have acquired, instead of sorting them out, when the labour market gets strained. Otherwise, all declarations proclaiming equality and integration will stand out as nothing more than another set of the emperor's new clothes.

Notes

1. 'Cultural distance' has more recently entered the debate to explain the difficulties minorities encounter on the labour market (Broomé et al., 1996). Explaining social inequalities with reference to cultural background factors has met with criticism and is termed 'culturalization' (see, for example, Ålund and Schierup, 1991; Ålund, 1997).

2. The LO, like Swedish women's organizations, would have preferred women and other domestic reserves to enter the labour market (Nelhans, 1973; Kyle, 1979).

3. SOU is short for Statens Offentliga Utredningar, that is government commission reports.

4. The halt to worker immigration in France came in October 1973 and in Germany in November 1973. The first oil crisis and fears of an ensuing economic crisis were put forward as arguments (Kahn, 1989: 16).

5. Separate taxation of incomes for couples was introduced in 1972 as an incentive for women to engage in paid employment.

6. Age group 0–17: 311,000 individuals; age group 18 years or older: 339,000 individuals (SCB and SIV, 1995).

7. Labour force participation rates for former Yugoslavian women were 77.5 percent in 1988 and 69.9 percent in 1992. Figures for men were 76.9 percent in 1988 and 67.8 percent in 1992 (AKU, 1988, 1992).

8. 'Activity rate' as used in Swedish labour force statistics means 'persons holding a job', whereas more conventionally the term 'economically active' is broader than this.

9. AKU is short for the Annual Labour Force Survey compiled by Statistics Sweden.

10. In 1988, as many as 76.9 percent of foreign men and 69.9 percent of foreign women were in the labour force. Unemployment for men was 4.0 percent and for women 3.7 percent. In 1992, labour force participation for men had dropped to 71.1 percent, and unemployment had risen to 14.5 percent. The figures for women were 63.7 percent in the labour force and 11.0 percent in unemployment.

11. Basic adult education (*Grundvux*) is offered to all immigrants and refugees with fewer than six years of formal education.

12. In a study, titled 'Labour Market Chances for the Youth of Immigrant Descent', employers' representatives frequently stress the need for 'perfect' Swedish – even for menial jobs such as cleaning (Knocke and Hertzberg, forthcoming).

13. Approximately 2000 persons per year change their foreign name to a Swedish one to improve their chances on the labour market. This figure has recently been verified by journalists from the Swedish television channel TV2.

14. Jobs devised to gain work experience have been paid just below SEK2000 a month.

15. A new and stronger law was passed in parliament on 1 May 1999; it covers both direct and indirect discrimination, the entire recruitment process and also eases the burden of proof.

16. For a critical discussion see de los Reyes (1997) and Behtoui (1998).

17. A quite different issue is the wearing of the *hijab* if it is imposed on young women.

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