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A place called home: the meaning(s) of popular education for newly arrived refugees

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we direct our focus on some of the recent activities undertaken by popular education institutions in Sweden in relation to the refugee challenge in 2015. The aim is to analyse how these popular education activities are shaped as specific communities of practice, through the ways they are described by those who organised these, and what meaning newly arrived refugees create regarding their participation in these practices. Drawing on a socio-cultural understanding of participation and learning, we analyse interviews with newly arrived refugees, principals, managers, teachers and study circle leaders. Our analysis illustrates how popular education emerge as specific communities of practice different compared to the regular education system; how these practices are shaped as practices of stability and learning; and how newly arrived refugees construe these practices as important in their current engagement across a range of communities in the role as newcomers.

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Introduction

Popular education has gained a central role in the last few years of migration policy in Sweden. In the wake of the refugee situation in 2015, when Sweden had the highest rate of immigration per capita among the member states in the European Union, the Swedish government had a quite challenging task of finding ways to provide meaningful activities for refugees. In this situation, the government, amongst other things, turned to the popular education institutions, inviting them to organise a range of activities for newly arrived refugees seeking asylum (see, e.g. Fejes and Dahlstedt 2017; Fejes and Dahlstedt 2020; Fejes et al. 2018b; Fejes et al. 2018c). In this article, we will focus on some of these activities arranged by popular education institutions such as study associations and folk high schools.

At the same time as the government invited popular education institutions to work with newly arrived refugees, arguing for popular education's uniqueness of providing democratic and meaningful activities, there were changes in Swedish migration policy, with a

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shift towards a more repressive approach to migration and the integration of migrants. In the wake of the so called refugee crisis, heated debates concerning the alleged challenges caused by migration followed. Here, discourses on the ‘failure of integration policy’ and migration as a threat to welfare and social cohesion became more and more normalised (Scarpa and Schierup 2018). In an international perspective, Swedish migration and integration policy had for a long time been quite well-known and widely celebrated for its inclusive ambitions, not least in research (cf. Borevi 2014). However, with the developments of recent years, such notions of ‘Swedish exceptionalism’ (Schierup and Ålund 2011) have been seriously challenged.

Since 2015, a series of restrictions in asylum policy have been introduced, on the one hand with a focus on reducing the number of asylum seekers entering the country, and on the other hand with a focus on deportation (cf. Herz and Lalander 2019; Wernesjö 2020). By introducing such restrictive policies, the number of asylum seekers has declined quite radically, from 162,877 in 2015 to 28,939 in 2016 and further down to 21,958 in 2019 (Migration Board 2020). Furthermore, there has been a stronger focus in policy discourse on restrictions and demands put on asylum seekers in Sweden, for instance in terms of a more restrictive legal praxis regarding the right to support from the social services (Kjellbom and Lundberg 2018), the introduction of a duty for asylum seekers to take part in language learning activities and proposals on the implementation of language tests for acquiring Swedish citizenship (Rydell and Milani 2020; see, e.g. Morrice 2017 for a issues regarding tests for migrants in the UK).

However, this is not the only line of development in Sweden. As is the case in a number of other countries, the work of popular and adult education targeting migrants has been an important support for migrants’ in their paths towards potential social inclusion. This has in different ways been elaborated in research in relation to e.g. Canada (Guo 2006; 2017; Shan 2013), the UK (Grayson 2014; Morrice 2017), Austria (Kukovetz and Sprung 2014; Sprung 2013) and Australia (Webb 2015; Webb and Roy 2019; Flowers and Swan 2017). However, and surprisingly, most of these studies focus on highly skilled migrants, and very few on refugees and their engagement in adult or popular education. However, there are some studies that focus on more civil society based, or popular education like, activities for migrants (Grayson 2014; Guo 2006) as well as on popular education activities for refugees specifically (Fejes 2019; Fejes and Dahlstedt 2017; Fejes and Dahlstedt 2020; Mesic et al. 2019).

In one way, having an article on popular education and migration (specifically newly arrived refugees) focusing on Sweden might not be that surprising taking into account three issues. (1) The fact that the level of participation in educational activities among the adult population is higher in Sweden than in other countries (see, e.g. Rubenson and Desjardins 2009). (2) The institutionalisation of adult education, and especially popular education, in Sweden goes back as far as the mid-1800s (see, e.g. Laginder, Nordvall, and Crowther 2013), where popular education include millions of participants each year in some kind of studies. (3) As already mentioned, Sweden had the highest share of refugees per capita in the European union in 2015. In sum, Sweden provides an interesting case in pursuing analysis of the work by popular education institutions targeting migrants.

In this article, by focusing on some of the recent activities undertaken by popular education institutions in relation to the refugee situation in Sweden in 2015, we contribute to the under-researched area of the work of popular education with migrants. Our specific

aim is to analyse how these popular education activities are shaped as specific communities of practice, through the ways they are described by those who organised these, and what meaning newly arrived refugees create regarding their participation in these practices.

Popular education in Sweden

Popular education has a long tradition in Sweden, going back to the mid-1800s with the establishment of the first folk high schools in 1868, in combination with the emergence of public libraries and public lectures. In 1912, the first study association was created (Gustavsson 2013), and with social movements such as the workers' movement, the temperance movement and the free church movement, folk high schools came to develop into schools for the members of these movements – many of whom were working class. Originally, these schools were for the sons of rich farmers, but in the 1930s, the majority of the participants came from the working class, and thus these schools came to serve as the only possibility for the further education of the working class at that time (Larsson 2013).

Folk high schools and study associations are part of what in Swedish is called *folkbildning*. There is no equivalent word in English, but it could be translated as 'popular education'. However, in Sweden, popular education is quite different compared to some other parts of the world (e.g. Latin America). If popular education is often construed as 'against' the State (see Kane 2013), in Sweden popular education has more or less always merged in close connection to the State. Or rather, the relationship between the state and civil society organisations has always been close – as part of the development of the corporatist Swedish welfare model (Fejes et al. 2018a; Trägårdh 2007). The state has provided popular education with financial support for the last century, and this is still the case today. Today, the state provides folk high schools and study associations with approximately 4 billion Swedish kronor, with the broad aim that this should support the further development of democracy and culture, and lessen the education gap among the population. However, besides the general state support for popular education, the state and other public actors commission popular education institutions with specific tasks, which generates extra income for these institutions. Swedish from day 1 and Language introduction are two such commissioned tasks emerging in the wake of the recent refugee situation (Fejes and Dahlstedt 2017; Fejes et al. 2018b, 2018c).

What characterises Swedish popular education, in comparison to the formal adult education system, is first and foremost that it is free and voluntary. This means that study associations and folk high schools are free to design any programmes and courses they wish, and participants are free to register for these. The regular adult education system, in comparison, is governed by State regulation in terms of, e.g. what courses are delivered, the curriculum as well as course plans. Secondly, popular education could foremost be categorised as non-formal education as no grades are awarded, as compared to the formal adult education system. It is only for those courses at folk high schools that provide eligibility to apply to higher education that documentation resembling grades is issued. Thirdly, popular education is based on ideas of *bildung* – the free search for knowledge – and thus, study circle engagement or engagement in courses at folk high schools should be based on participants' own will and motivation. In comparison, the idea of

bildung is quite margin within the formal adult education system as the focus is there very much on producing an employable workforce (see, e.g. Fejes et al. 2018a).

There have been ongoing discussions on what characterises the pedagogy of popular education. For folk high schools, the pedagogy has been argued to be based on the collective as a basis for the individual's development, both relational and self-driven (Paldanius 2014; Fejes et al. 2018a). Study circles were originally seen as being based on the participants' own activities and experiences. These experiences were the starting point for discussions in combination with literature. The study circle leader did not have the role of teacher, but was rather included as a member of the group. These notions of experience, the books and the leader, were the basis for the idea of collective learning among the participants, i.e. free and voluntary self-bildung (Gustavsson 2013).

Research approach

In order to analyse the way popular education activities are shaped as specific communities of practice (CoP), we draw on a socio-cultural understanding of participation and learning (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). A community of practice, could in its simplest form be described as group of people who share a common interest to learn. A central concept here is participation. People participate in different communities. Some participants are more well rehearsed in terms of knowing the goals, the tasks, and in valuing of different tasks that are part of a specific CoP. Others are newcomers, and more peripheral in their participation. However, over time, these newcomers appropriate the competence necessary to use the joint repertoire of the CoP, including values, traditions, symbols and language. Thus, through such learning, the participant moves for the periphery towards the centre of the practice.

With an interest to understand how the CoP of popular education activities targeting newly arrived migrants in Sweden is shaped, we focus on the meaning making of those who participate in such CoP, i.e. circle leaders and principals, as well as the newly arrived refugees. More specifically, we ask the following questions: What characterises the practice, in relation to other practices? What makes the practice possible? And how is the practice experienced by the newly arrived refugees participating in it?

In order to answer these questions, we focus on two popular education institutions: study associations and folk high schools, and their organisation of activities directed at newly arrived refugees. Swedish from day 1 is organised by study associations and directed at adult asylum seekers, with the aim of providing an introduction to the Swedish language and society. From the autumn 2015 until the end of 2017, more than half of all newly arrived adult asylum seekers had participated in such study circles (Fejes et al. 2018c). Language introduction is a programme at upper secondary school for young newly arrived adult migrants (age 16–19). The programme aims to prepare participants in terms of language as well as other subject areas in order for them to be able to enter a regular national programme at upper secondary school. For most participants, this means that they will have to conduct such studies within the frames of adult education institutions. This was one of the arguments that laid the ground for some municipalities, by decision of the government, to try and outsource some of the study places for such language introduction programmes to folk high schools. A popular education institutions that normally only allows participants above the age of 18. The idea was further that these schools

would be better suit for such target group as the folk high schools work with another kind of pedagogy (Fejes et al. 2018b; Swedish National Agency for Education 2016).

Empirically, regarding Swedish from day 1, the largest study association, the Workers' Educational Association (ABF), was selected for further study. ABF was the study association with most participants registered in Swedish from day 1, and there was already well developed collaboration between the study association and the researchers, i.e. access was easy. Three different ABF locations in Sweden where Swedish from day 1 was carried out were chosen for further study: one large city, one medium-sized city and one rural area. For the Language introduction programme, two folk high schools with a temporary right to deliver language introduction were selected for study, located in two medium-sized cities. Thus, a total of five sites are included in the sample.

At each site, we participated as observers of teaching as well as of activities outside the classroom. Informal conversations were conducted with teachers, study circle leaders and participants. At each site, a sample of participants, teachers, managers and principals was chosen for semi-structured interviews. With teachers, interviews were conducted as group interviews, and the focus was directed towards their ideas about teaching and their participants. Principals and managers were interviewed individually, with a focus on their views on their educational programme or study circles, as well as their views on participants and teachers. Interviews with participants were conducted individually, with a focus on their ideas about their current studies and how these related to their past experiences of work and education, as well as to their dreams about the future.

Our research ethos in the project draws on a reflexive approach towards categorisations, for instance based on ethno-cultural and migrant background, which may easily lead to stereotypical representations (cf. Gunaratnam 2003). As many of our informants were in a precarious situation, and in which the power relations between information and researchers becomes very acute, we made sure to fully explain, often with the help of the local organisers (amongst whom there were people speaking the language of participants), what the research was about, the voluntary participation as well as how the information would be handled. Written consent was gathered from all informants. We also offered the opportunity to use interpreter. However, this offer was only taken up in two interviews. The project has also been ethically vetted and approved by the regional ethical committee (Dnr 2017/280-31).

We managed to gain a varied sample of interviewees, in terms of gender, age, nationality, educational and vocational background, as well as in terms of time spent in Sweden. In total, we interviewed 76 newly arrived refugees, where just over half of them were still waiting for the decision on their asylum application, while the rest had recently gained a residence permit. We also interviewed a total of seven teachers and two principals working at the language introduction program, as well as eight study circle leaders, and nine managers within Swedish from day 1. All interviews were transcribed verbatim but have been edited for readability (Table 1).

Table 1. Interviews.

	Principals/managers	Teachers/circle leaders	Participants
ABF	9	8	46
Folk high schools	2	7	30

Drawing on a socio-cultural understanding participation and learning our analysis has firstly been directed at understanding the popular education practices in which the newly arrived refugees take part and secondly, on refugees' meaning making regarding their participation.

Results

In the following, we will firstly focus on the way popular education emerge as specific communities of practice, and secondly on how such practices emerge as practices of stability, participation and learning. In the last section, we focus on the meaning making of the newcomers, i.e. the newly arrived refugees, and specifically the way they create meaning regarding their participation in the popular education activities studied.

Popular education as specific communities of practice

In our material, popular education emerge as specific communities of practice, as in certain respects different compared to the practices emerging within the formal education school system. Such differences are evident both in narratives by actors outside of popular education, as well as key actors engaged within popular education. The kind of specificity ascribed to popular education became evident in the wake of the refugee situation in Sweden in 2015, when the government awarded popular education large sums of money to introduce newly arrived migrants to Swedish language and society. As the minister for adult learning at that time, Aida Hadzialic, argued:

We know that study associations are good at meeting people of different backgrounds. Thus, the government has awarded this task to study associations. Important factors are that study associations are experienced working with asylum seekers and newly arrived migrants, they reach every municipality, they can be flexible and quickly start new activities. (Swedish adult education association, 2016, 11)

Here, study associations are construed as specific practices good at 'meeting people of different backgrounds' and experienced in working with 'asylum seekers and newly arrived migrants'. Of specific focus for the minister was the fact that study associations, through its organisational form and relative independence from the state, have possibilities to quickly set up new activities. Such organisational flexibility was also emphasised by one of the managers at ABF:

Through the regulations, we can start and stop anytime. We do not need any fancy rooms. ABF is big. We have activities in nearly all municipalities [there are a total of 290 municipalities in Sweden], and also in several locations in some municipalities. Thus, we become flexible.

Flexibility is thus a key characteristic in how popular education is shaped as specific communities of practice. Such characteristic is closely linked to the way popular education is described as free from government regulation in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. As further elaborated by one of the folk high school principals:

I don't want to discard the compulsory and upper secondary school system. But it's another approach. I believe that the way we invite, we have no predefined course plans. Participants can influence the course plans, and I believe this is important.

Here, folk high schools, through its independence from state regulation, emerge as different communities of practice as compared to the communities of practice found in the formal education system. Folk high schools are not only construed as free, but also as democratic in its approach, where participants are regularly invited to influence the course plans. The kind of more democratic forms of organising education does also, according to the same principal, provide the grounds for participants to feel safe.

So, if you wish to become part of a social community, and learn study techniques, subject knowledge, then folk high schools might be better for you as compared to municipal adult education [the formal adult education system] which is much more individualised. But, it depends on where you are in the process. But I get the impression that many of our participants feel that they are in a safe environment where they get new friends. This does not mean, however, that we should be some cosy place without focus on knowledge. But a good safe environment is important in order to develop knowledge.

Folk high schools here emerge as communities of practice where learning takes place through the collective. Such collective, according to this principal, provides a space where participants can feel safe.

In sum, popular education emerges as specific communities of practice which are free from government regulations in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, as flexible, well suited to work with newly arrived refugees, shaping its activities in democratic ways where participants can influence course plans, feel safe and learning new things. In the next section, we will further develop such analysis by focusing on how the inner life of the specific communities of practice are shaped.

Popular education as communities promoting stability and learning

In this section, we turn our focus towards the ways in which the specific communities of practice of the folk high schools and ABF emerge as social practices that promote stability, participation and learning for the participants. As illustrated in the former section, popular education is construed as safe places for learning in which the individual is part of a greater collective. Such way of reasoning is further elaborated by those working more closely with the activities under scrutiny. As one of the teachers in the language introduction program at one of the folk high schools describe it, the school as practice is very important to the newly arrived refugees:

I believe it's important to them to have a stable and safe place to go to. For those who have a hard time and who do not know: 'Will I be allowed to stay? Where will I live? When do I have to move? What will happen to my living arrangements?' In all of this, the school becomes a stable place. The school is here, it's open five days a week. Even though a student might come here really tired due to lack of sleep, they still come here. Some might sleep during lessons, but still, I think it's important that they come here. That they feel it's meaningful to be here and that they are acknowledged as people, that we see them. I believe this to be important. Especially for students who have migrated by themselves without their families, so that they have someone they can turn to [the teachers].

Here, the teacher specifically refers to the stress that arise for participants who are waiting for a decision on their resident permit application (seeking asylum), not least for those who arrive in Sweden without their families. For all newly arrived refugees coming to Sweden, engagement in a range of new communities of practice are necessary. These

could be the new practice of living in a new family or living in a house for newly arrived youth. Further, the practice of engaging in the asylum process and so on. Thus, being a newcomer in so many practices at the same time might invoke feelings of both stress and uncertainty. Thus, the school, as argued by this teacher, becomes perhaps the only stable and safe community in which the participants currently are engaged.

Turning to ABF, their activities are also described as focused on providing safe spaces for learning. Not least are these practices described as going well beyond the formal task and financial support awarded by the state as well as by the municipalities (cf. Fejes et al. 2018c). The formal task on providing introduction to Swedish language and society was only one part of what was actually taking place in these practices. At ABF, the asylum seekers were provided a range of services aimed at supporting them in their engagement in various other communities of practice, such as the asylum process, the practice of taking part of the social security system (doctors, dentists) and so on. As expressed by one of the leaders:

They [the participants] ask for different kinds of support, all the time. A letter to the migration authorities, the social office, or daycare. One asylum seeker wanted to do body-building, so I wrote a note that gave him a discount. I have to take care of their wishes all the time, I do everything. At the beginning, I started working at nine until five each day. I take care of a lot of people, and they are happy. There are always people coming here, and I help them a lot. They might need something, I might book an appointment with a doctor, or talk to their handled are the migration board, the bank, doctors, clinics, the layer. I give a lot to participants, and thus they are very happy. They come here, not only to learn the Swedish language, but also because we help them a lot.

Similar way to describe the support provided to the participants is made by another leader in Swedish from day 1:

It's always an open door policy, making it possible to help everyone who asks for help with calling the authorities, interpret letters. It was a lot to do for me. Sometimes you stayed until nine in the evening, and you tried to read their letters and maybe write an application to the migration board.

Here, the leader explains how he uses an open door policy, where participants can contact him more or less anytime in order to get support with a range of tasks in their everyday lives here and now. Both leaders point to a pattern that emerged throughout all sites where Swedish from day 1 activities were examined. By providing support not related directly to learning the Swedish language, nor to a more formal introduction to Swedish society, popular education through Swedish from day 1 makes itself relevant to the situation here and now of the newly arrived refugees – in their introduction to and engagement in a range of other practices in which they are newcomers.

However, the dual task as shaped within these practices, the formal task as well as the more supportive task of introducing newly arrived refugees to a range of other practices, do indeed create challenges to the study circle leaders at ABF. Not least when engaging in the teaching practices. As explained by one study circle leader describing the challenge of participants wishing to talk about their problems and challenges (not related to learning the language), even when in the classroom.

Yes, as a person or people, you have feelings, but I usually say: 'If you have a problem? It's not easy to forget, but we will take care of that outside of this room'. Or we could sit in a room

and talk. It's important to separate things, here we either speak Swedish, or we talk about everything. When we are finished we can talk about other things, that's the way it is. You have to be strong, otherwise it won't work.

The study circle leader here describes the challenge of drawing boundaries between what should be dealt with in the classroom and what should be left outside, as well as providing an answer to how he deals with these kinds of situations. In one way, he is teaching the newcomers, the newly arrived refugees, about the differences between the practice of teaching and the wider community of practice of ABFs work.

In sum, popular education is by leaders and as well as study circle leaders and teachers shaped as stable and important communities of practice for newly arrived refugees. Here, the newly arrived are not only introduced to the practices of popular education in itself. But they are also supported in a situation of being newcomers in a range of other communities of practice in which they are currently engaged.

Newly arrived refugees feeling at home

Turning to the newly arrived refugee participants, we can see how they negotiate meaning regarding their participation as newcomers in the specific settings of popular education as a community of practice. Such negotiation do indeed take place in connection to their negotiation across numerous practices in which they currently are newcomers.

In general, the newly arrived refugees we have interviewed describe their participation in the popular education practices studied as both meaningful and important. No matter what kind of popular education practice, participants find these as safe and supportive, both in terms of learning and in terms of social support. One aspect is how the practices are described as places of stability, which makes it possible for the newly arrived refugees to get away from their stressful everyday lives – from their engagement in a range of other communities of practice which are not as stable. As expressed by a participant in Swedish from day 1.

The refugee accommodation where i live. There are a lot of guys there, gathering and getting drunk. They scream and don't want to do anything. But when I come here, we have a class where we got to work with Internet. There is free coffee. And I sit there in the afternoon. For five hours, from 12 to 17, when they close. And for five hours, I write, nothing else. I try to come here in the morning and do this all afternoon.

For this participant, ABFs activities of Swedish from day 1 become a stable place. A place where he can get away from a stressful situation at the refugee accommodation where he as well as his peers are all waiting on a decision if they are allowed to stay in Sweden or not. At the same time, the participant describes a sense of meaningfulness to partake in the activities provided. Similar notion of getting away from a stressful situation at home, and ending up in a stable and supportive place, is expressed by one of the participants enrolled in the language introduction program:

My life now is to stay at home and go to school. If I don't go to school things get worse, because when at I'm home I start thinking about all the bad things.

For this participant, who is still waiting for a decision on his asylum application, language introduction becomes a place that helps him to think about other things than the bad ones

– such as his experiences of leaving his country of origin and his family, and the uncertainty of receiving a resident permit. Participation in language introduction becomes meaningful and a way to deal with the challenges of being a refugee, an asylum seeker applicant, and a newcomer to his current place of accommodation, in Sweden etc.

Popular education as communities of stability is also expressed by yet another participant in Swedish from day 1, who is also waiting on a decision on his asylum application.

I can only recommend that those sitting at home, that they have to come to ABF. Here you can find friends, you can learn Swedish, and you get in touch with people. ABF is not a school for me. ABF is a home. I feel at home when I'm here.

Here, by participating in the Swedish from day 1 activities at ABF, the participant develops a sense of feeling at home. Swedish from day 1 here emerges as a place where you can meet other people, both those with similar experiences as well as people who are supportive in helping learn the Swedish language and who listen to you. Thus, at this site, there is possibility to feel at home, and to participate as equals, even though you might have difficulties communicating in Swedish. In other words, through participating in the community of practice of Swedish from day 1 organised by ABF, the participant becomes a member of the specific community. In the words of another participant in ABF: 'This is a great environment where everybody becomes like a family'.

Similar ways to become a member of a community is visible in the quotation below, by one of the participants at the language introduction program. Here, the participant describes the way one of her teachers start out the Monday morning sessions.

Every Monday morning, the same thing happens. Johanna asks us: 'How has the weekend been? What have you been doing?' She hugs us and like. It is not so important. Like, we don't learn very much. But it is important that she is ... it feels good. It makes us feel good when we tell what we have been doing during the weekend. She also tells what she has been doing.

The weekly routine of inviting each participant to tell the others in the classroom what they have been doing during the weekend is described as not particularly important in terms of learning, but as very important in terms of creating a sense of being seen by somebody as well as being seen as part of the wider group. The question posed by the teacher does in other words invite the newly arrived refugees as participants, i.e. invites them to learn to be part of the community of practice of the language introduction program at the folk high school.

Discussion

In this article we have analysed popular education activities are shaped as specific communities of practice, through the ways they are described by those who organised these, and what meaning newly arrived refugees create regarding their participation in these practices. Firstly, we illustrated how popular education emerge as specific communities of practice, as different compared to those found in the regular education system. Here, specific attention is directed towards the flexibility of popular education, as well as their specific pedagogy which is construed as particularly useful in relation to newly arrived refugees. Secondly, these practices emerge as practices of stability and learning, in the way they are described by teachers and study circle leaders. Not least, participation in

such activities is described as important by newly arrived refugees themselves. In a situation where they engage in a range of, for them, new practices, in the role as newcomers, popular education emerge as a space which is construed as stable, valuable and meaningful. Through participation, they gain insight into, not only the practice of popular education, but also other practices in which they are currently engaged, and in which they potentially will become engaged. Or rather, they develop the capability to participate across a range of practices. Thus, by acquiring the knowledge and competencies needed to understand and carry out the common goals of the specific communities of practice in popular education, as well as knowledge useful across other practices, the newly arrived refugees start their movement towards the centre of the practice (cf. Wenger 1998).

In one way, such results relate to the wider literature on adult education and migration, in which issues of participation and learning, from wide a range of theoretical standpoints, has been in focus (e.g. Webb and Roy 2019; Guo 2017; Morrice 2017). For example, the importance of stability, which clearly stands out in the analysis presented in this article, concurs with results presented in previous studies. Focusing on high skilled migrants, Webb and Roy (2019) illustrate, e.g. how the informants in their study use the notion of home when describing the popular education activities they take part in, a notion strongly connected to stability, inclusion and status. Among the newly arrived refugees interviewed in our study, popular education is also partly shaped as a home, as a place not only of stability, but also for participation and learning.

By engaging with a socio-cultural understanding of participation and learning, we have in this article been able to illustrate how popular education seems to play an important role in the lives of newly arrived refugees in Sweden. This in itself, we believe, is an important contribution to current literature on the education of adult migrants, as such research often focus specifically on high skilled migrants, or labour market immigration (see, e.g. Webb 2015; Webb and Roy 2019; Sprung 2013). Further, much of such research do also focus on more formal settings for adult education, while popular education is seldom in focus, even though there are some examples of such focus (Guo 2006; Grayson 2014; Fejes 2019; Fejes and Dahlstedt 2017).

However, our focus in this article does have its limitations. Firstly, as we here have primarily been interested in the meaning making of those participating in the CoP, the question of popular education as compared to the regular education system has not empirically been elaborated further. What we have been able to do here is to highlight such differences with a point of departure in the descriptions of leaders, teachers, study circle leaders and newly arrived refugees engaged in the popular education settings in focus. Such question would indeed ask for further inquiry. What are the differences in meaning making of those who participate in popular education activities as compared to those who engage in more formal education activities? A second limitation is that the theoretical perspective used here, does not specifically engage with issues of power and inequality. When it comes to newly arrived refugees, or indeed migrants more broadly, taking into account different mechanism of inclusion and exclusion are important (for a further elaboration, see Herz and Lalander 2019; Wernesjö 2020). However, such focus is outside of the scope of this specific article. For those interested, we have elaborated on issues of power, inclusion and exclusion in relation to the popular education settings in focus elsewhere (cf. Fejes and Dahlstedt 2017; Fejes and Dahlstedt 2020).

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