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Abstract

When discussing barriers to integration, we often focus on language skills, cultural capital, supportive environments and other more obvious, distinct and material aspects that have an impact on educational achievement. In the present study, we have instead chosen to look at how young immigrants construct their life plans, and how this relates to their perceptions of ethnicity, neighbourhood and identity. The sample used here consists of a total of 10 individuals. The interviews were used to explore certain designated dimensions and processes. All interviews were conducted in the school environment, in classrooms and other locations within the school. The students attended two different vocationally oriented study programmes: one focused on health promotion, the other on pre-school children. A narrative–sociological approach is used in the analysis. The young people's perceptions and narratives are analysed in relation to concepts such as: *territorial stigmatization*, *identity*, *inclusion/exclusion* and *life plans*. The key finding is that these young people try to adapt to certain normative expectations connected to the notion of *Swedishness*. Being 'in sync' with this normative conception leads to self-confidence, whereas being 'out-of-sync' leads to low self-esteem.

Keywords

cultural boundaries, exclusion, identity, strategies, multicultural, schooling, territorial stigmatization

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, an increasing number of people in Europe have been pushed into marginalization and poverty. Today we are witnessing an increasing social and cultural polarization in many European countries. In the beginning of the 1990s, the unemployment rate increased considerably in Sweden. During the period 1991 to 1993, the open unemployment rate grew from 2.9 to 8.2 percent (Hjerm, 2002). Although this situation had an effect on the total labour market, immigrants were more vulnerable to these societal changes. In the beginning of the 1990s, 65 percent of immigrants originating from non-Nordic countries were in the labour force, whereas the corresponding figure three years later was 43 percent (Hjerm, 2002). Recent studies show that this pattern still prevails and that immigrants have a weak position in the Swedish labour market (Bekhtoui, 2006; Malmberg-Heimonen and Julkunen, 2006; Sundlöf, 2008). Similar patterns of social exclusion can be seen if we look at education and academic achievements (Bunar, 2008a, 2008b; Dahlstedt et al., 2007; Lundqvist; 2007).

In the Swedish cities of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, we find the largest proportion of young people with immigrant backgrounds in districts characterized by high degrees of unemployment, social welfare dependency and poverty (Andersson, 1998; Sernhede, 2005). These suburban areas are often *stigmatized* and portrayed in the media as dangerous and hostile environments. Consequently, the young people living in these districts have to deal with widespread negative conceptions of their local communities. There are, of course, different ways of dealing with exclusion and marginalization. On the one hand, we can see how people defend their neighbourhood and, on the other, there are those who dissociate themselves and desire to move into more affluent neighbourhoods.

Earlier research has shown that place and the local living environment have a significant impact on young people's self-perception and identities (Sernhede, 2005; Shildrick, 2006; Willis, 1977). One way of coping with stigmatization is to develop a strong affinity with the local district, a kind of *local patriotism*. However, there are also other, more ambivalent ways of relating to social exclusion. For example, stigmatized individuals can sometimes *disidentify* with the stigmatized position, and dissociate themselves from others who experience the same stigma. This strategy seems to be an indirect way of repudiating subordination (Johansson, 2008a, 2009b; Johansson and Hammarén, 2010).

Earlier research on young people's educational and career moves has focused on different barriers and possibilities (Blair, 2001; Perry, 2008; Plank and Sykes, 2003). There are, of course, strong connections between parents' economic and cultural capital and young people's academic careers (Ball et al., 1997; Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000[1977]). However, there are also other influential factors such as contextual support (relational and community resources), psychological assets, positive ethnic identity, successful earlier learning experiences, teacher support and a high degree of individuation (Garcia-Reed, et al., 2005; Jackson et al.,

2006; Lopez, 2001; Perry, 2008). A lack of supportive factors can be a potential barrier to an educational and academic career.

In the present article, we are interested in how young people with immigrant backgrounds perceive and handle these structural conditions. How do young people with immigrant backgrounds in 'multicultural' suburbs handle segregation and exclusion? How does the general image of immigrants' situation in Sweden and in the labour market affect young people's school career moves? Is it possible to trace influences of the stigmatized living conditions in young people's life plans and educational aspirations? Do immigrant students modify their plans or restrict themselves in any way? In the next two sections, we will discuss some key methodological and theoretical considerations. This is followed by four sections in which key parts of the empirical material will be presented and analysed. We will conclude by discussing what we can learn from this particular approach to schooling, segregation and young people's strategies.

Methodological considerations

The empirical study was conducted in a large Swedish city. A great number of schools can be found in the city, 40 in total, of which 25 are independent high schools and the remaining are municipal. We have focused on one particular municipal high school situated in the city centre, 'the Future School' (Johansson et al., 2009).

This study is part of a larger research project on young people's different trajectories between neighbourhoods and schools.¹ The sample used here consists of a total of 10 individuals. The interviews were used to explore certain designated dimensions and processes. The core material of the present study is based on interviews with five boys and five girls. All interviews were conducted in the school environment, in classrooms and other locations within the school. The students attended two different vocationally oriented study programmes: one focused on health promotion, the other on pre-school children.

A narrative–sociological approach is used in the analysis. Our attention is directed towards the relation between young people's stories and a societal, cultural and physical context (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Clandinin, 2007; Kvale, 1997; Lightfoot, 2004; Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2008). The linguistic and narrative forms will not be analysed in detail. Instead, the focus will be on the sociological relation between different statements and an overall varying reflexive story of life plans and strategies. The intention is to give the reader a comprehensible image of how these young people think about career moves in relation to ethnicity.

The interviews focus on the young people's experiences of school life, friends, educational achievement, urban experiences, relationship to their neighbourhood and other aspects of everyday school life. In the following sections, we will look more closely at: (1) the young students' perceptions of academic achievements and prospects for the future; (2) networks and friends; (3) relationship to their neighbourhood and to other significant urban places; (4) views on nationality,

'Swedishness' and belonging. Even though we will try to cover all four themes in the case studies, the structure will also be adapted in order to suit the different stories.

Instead of working with all 10 interviews included in this particular sample, we have decided to focus on four portraits. We have chosen two young men and two young women, illustrating four different approaches to social and ethnic backgrounds. These cases include stories of self-confidence and trust, as well as stories illustrating how career expectancies can be affected in a negative way. The case studies have thus been chosen on the basis of gender and strategies used to handle exclusion/inclusion. They illustrate the main dynamics, processes and narratives found in this empirical material. We are, of course, aware of the limitations of this approach. However, rather than generalizing the results, our intention is to extract some interesting dynamics and narratives, which can help us to understand the social psychological world of these young people. Precautions have been taken to protect the informants' anonymity and to ensure confidentiality. Key details have been altered, and we have also provided the informants with new names.

Theoretical positions and concepts

We are interested in the students' strategies for handling and relating to the stigmatization of their home environments and the immigrant position. How does this affect their life plans and ways of dealing with educational challenges and prospects? When discussing barriers to integration, we often focus on language skills, cultural capital, supportive environments and other more obvious, distinct and material aspects that have an impact on educational achievement. Here, we have instead chosen to look at how young immigrants construct their life plans and how this relates to their perceptions of ethnicity, neighbourhood and identity. The young people's perceptions and narratives will be analysed in relation to concepts such as: *territorial stigmatization*, *inclusion/exclusion*, *life plans* and *'in and out of sync'* (Back, 1996; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996; Hammarén, 2008; Jonsson, 2007; Stauness, 2004).

We will use the concept of *territorial stigmatization* to refer to specific and often negative categorizations of certain local neighbourhoods (Sernhede, 2005). The largest proportions of Swedish youth with immigrant origins can be found in districts characterized by low incomes, high degrees of unemployment and a weak community spirit. These sites and spaces are often portrayed in a negative manner in the media. The symbolic connection between poverty, immigrants and certain spaces thus creates a foundation for territorial stigmatization. This does not mean that the young people living in these suburbs always have a negative image of their neighbourhood, but, in one way or another, they will have to deal with the symbolic images of *Otherness*. The concepts of *inclusion* and *exclusion* are central to this discussion. We will use these concepts to refer to what is subjectively regarded as 'inside' or 'outside' in society. Being 'outside' is often regarded as problematic and unwanted, whereas being 'inside' has positive connotations. There is, of course,

a dynamic interplay between what is regarded as inside or outside, and these spatial dimensions are also strongly connected to economic and social processes (Fangen, 2009, 2010; Koller and Davidson, 2008). Here, we are mainly interested in how young people categorize themselves in ethnic positions, and how this affects their life plans.² We are well aware of the fact that there is an extensive amount of literature dealing with career planning and career development (see, for example, Blake and Sackett, 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer, 2006). We have tried to relate this to some of the relevant issues raised in this literature, but the focus of our article is limited to the relation between life plans and the construction of Otherness. The concept of life plan will be used to analyse how young people structure and talk about their plans for education, work and the future. There is an extensive conceptual discussion on how to use this concept, and how it is related to modernity and ontological insecurity (see, for example, Anderson et al., 2002; Brannen and Nielsen, 2007; Devadason, 2008). Here we will mainly focus on young people's reflexive attitudes towards their life plans, and the factors influencing life plans in a negative or positive way (Giddens, 1991). What *turning points* can be discovered and how can this affect the life plan?

The present article focuses on how ethnicity and the construction of ethnic identities influence young people's careers and life plans. In what ways does the feeling of Otherness become problematic? Danish social psychologist Dorthe Stauness (2003, 2004) uses the concept 'in sync' when analysing young people's feelings of Otherness. This concept can easily be used in our analysis of Swedishness. Being in sync means adjusting to and adopting the existing and dominant norms of being, for example, a good student or a good citizen. Consequently, what this means is that immigrant youth may feel that they need to adapt to Swedish norms in order to fit into society. Being 'out of sync' can thus be interpreted as a feeling of Otherness, of being 'outside'.

In the following sections, we will apply these conceptions and analyse how young people relate to and struggle with issues of place, identity and life plans.

The importance of becoming Swedish

Farez was born in Iran. He is 20 years old. He arrived in Sweden eight years ago. In Iran he lived with both his parents but they divorced when he was five years old. His mother went to Sweden, but for several years he stayed with his father in Iran. When Farez was 12 years old his mother brought him to Sweden. In the beginning it was very difficult for him to adjust to the new country, environment and his new family (his mother was remarried). He started a preparatory class, studying Swedish and some other subjects. Farez was quite surprised that all the kids and adults he met in Sweden came from other countries. His family lived in a suburb, and his school was also situated in this urban environment. Farez was surprised and disappointed that all his new friends were immigrants, and they were also black. When he talks about this, he says: 'Everyone was black! I have nothing

against blacks, but I had a totally different picture of Sweden, I thought everyone was blond you know.'

Farez had considerable problems adjusting to his new home, which also affected his schoolwork and results. Instead of starting high school, he had to attend supplementary courses in certain key subjects. For one year he studied at the Cathedral School, which is considered a high-status school. He actually wanted to continue his education at this school, but the student counsellor told him to apply to another school. His grades were not sufficiently high to grant him a place at the Cathedral School. So Farez applied to the Future School, and started to study in the social science programme. He was quite satisfied with the school and the programme. During the first year his mother divorced her new husband, which led to a family crisis. Farez was drawn into a complicated family situation, which affected his studies. He started skipping school. His teachers reacted, and there was a school conference. Farez was advised to try another programme, and he was more or less 'sent' to the child-minder education programme. According to Farez, this was not his own choice; he was rather told that this would be the best approach to his school situation.

During the interview, Farez tells us about his family situation. His father studied in Italy to become an architect, but now he is living in Iran, working in a food store. His mother worked for several years in Sweden at a home for elderly people but now she is on sick leave. He has not seen his father for five years. Farez described himself as a very lonely and quiet person. He has ambitions, and dreams – for example wanting to become a pilot – but at the same time he is working hard just to pass his exams. As an alternative plan, he would like to become a social worker. When talking about his friends, Farez sighs deeply and tells us:

I don't have that many friends. Most of my friends are working at pizzerias, they are pizza bakers. They don't tell you to study hard. I want a friend to boost my dreams and plans, and not someone who draws me down. If I wanted to become a pizza baker, I would have quit school a long time ago.

Farez clearly wants to finish his studies and to pass his exams. The next step will be to take some complementary courses so he can apply to do university studies. He still nourishes a dream of becoming a pilot, but realistically this may not be a good option. His primary focus now is on getting his own apartment and leaving his mother's home. When talking about apartments, suburbs and other urban places, Farez states that he wants to move away from the suburb. He says:

There are too many immigrants there, there are of course also good immigrants, but there are too many of them, which is bad... If all immigrants are gathered in one place, it becomes impossible to live there. They make up their own rules.

Farez rather wants to move to what he describes as a neighbourhood with fewer immigrants and more Swedish people. He has already started to modify

his future plans. He clearly distances himself from his 'pizza friends', and his local neighbourhood. During the interview, we can see that his plan is to become better adjusted to society, to fit in (to become more 'in sync'), continue his education at the university and to move to a more 'Swedish' urban environment.

One way of interpreting his narrative and his discursive positioning is to put his tale in the framework of 'the importance of becoming Swedish'. He distances himself from people and places related to immigrants. His first memory of Sweden also tells us something about his aspirations, and about his complicated relation to other immigrants. Farez develops his life plan in relation to space and ethnic identities. Here it is possible to interpret his transformation of life plans within a framework that involves a distancing from stigmatized urban spaces and ethnic identities, and a gradual adaptation to a more 'Swedish' lifestyle. In many ways, Farez is still feeling 'out of sync', but he is struggling hard to adapt and to find a place 'inside' Swedish society. There is a clear connection between what could be seen as a turning point in Farez's story, and his ambition to become 'more Swedish'. The child-minder programme was not his first choice, and he describes how he was more or less sent to this programme. But gradually his motivation has increased. Consequently, Farez is restructuring his plans, and dreams, and adjusting his life plan to achieve a good education and to fit into society. The story about the turning point and the move towards a more 'Swedish' lifestyle seems to be intermingled.

Feelings of Otherness

Helen arrived in Sweden five years ago, and she is now 22 years old. The family had to leave Kurdistan as refugees, and consequently they left everything behind. Helen comes from a wealthy family. Her father owned a factory in Kurdistan, a family business, but now he is unemployed. Although the family has been through some dramatic changes, her brothers and sisters seem to have adjusted quite well, and they all have academic plans. During the interview, we talk a lot about language skills and the importance of learning Swedish. Helen has lived for five years in a suburb, where most neighbours come from different countries around the world. She says: 'I live in a suburb, and therefore learning Swedish has become a problem. People do not speak Swedish, but other languages for example Arabic, Somali or Persian'.

When Helen finished her preparatory studies, she started planning for her high school education. Helen has an old dream, to become a pharmacist. So she talked with the counsellor and with teachers about this, but they told her that perhaps she had to modify her plans:

Helen: I had planned to apply to the natural science programme, but then I talked with my teacher and she said that maybe this would be too complicated for you, pointing out that Swedish is not my first language, and if you want to study at the natural science programme it's important to master Swedish.

Interviewer: Strange?

Helen: She told me that it would be too difficult. I would have to study hard.

Interviewer: . . . and this affected you?

Helen: Yes, I had decided to study natural science, to become a pharmacist, which is my dream.

Interviewer: Is that still your dream? I think you speak really good Swedish.

Helen: Yes, but this neighbourhood has had a bad effect on me, and I don't have so many Swedish friends either.

As we can see, Helen has modified her plans considerably. She puts considerable weight on language skills. She points out that several factors have made it difficult for her to gain access to the Swedish language codes, not least living in a neighbourhood where most people speak other languages. Another important influence is her father. He told her that she should listen to her teachers, and not to gamble too much with her future, whereas her mother still supports her plan of becoming a pharmacist. Helen decided to listen to the teacher and to her father, modify her plan, and start studying at the child-minder programme.

Helen has recently married, and her husband is still learning Swedish. Her future plans are also affected by this, and she tends to reason in terms of economy and security. She has not abandoned her dream of becoming a pharmacist, but she has decided to take the secure road to education and employment, and to become a pre-school teacher. Thus, her family can feel secure, the married couple can get a steady income and it will be possible to plan for the future with children and so on.

When talking about her future plans and her family, Helen is clearly affected by her parents' negative experiences. Though they have tried, neither of her parents has got a job in Sweden. When we ask why, Helen says: 'I believe it all lies in the family name. They always check the family name, and if they find an immigrant name, it is bad. They believe that immigrants are lazy and that they won't do a proper job.' Helen also describes her own feeling of Otherness:

I am not Swedish and I am also carrying a veil; an immigrant with a veil. I am a different person. It is also impossible for me to spend time with my school mates, especially when they drink and party. Immigrant women cannot do the same things as Swedish people, it is simply not allowed.

Helen has lived in Sweden for only five years. During this short time, she has obviously adjusted quite well, but she also expresses strong feelings of Otherness. She has also modified her plans and become somewhat more pragmatic. Several factors have influenced Helen's life plan. One important contribution comes from her teacher, who told her not to apply for the natural science programme, and to instead lower her ambitions somewhat. Her father listened to the teacher, and consequently she felt pressure to adjust her plans. Most of Helen's female friends

have also adjusted their plans. Some of her friends started studying at the university to become lawyers and economists, but they failed. Now they are working at supermarkets and restaurants.

Helen's case study provides a good example of how class, gender and ethnicity interact. Helen comes from an affluent family. As refugees in Sweden, the family has had to adjust to a totally new situation. Helen's choices are clearly affected by her overall life situation, the feeling of having less worth in Swedish society, and by the misfortune of her friends. Gradually she has adapted to these new circumstances. Her family's social decline is noticeable in her decision to become a pre-school teacher. She has adjusted to a lower social status, and to a common and traditional female occupation. As a Muslim woman, Helen feels that she has to struggle with prejudices and negative conceptions of Muslims. She is trying to become more 'in sync' with Swedish society, but at the same time she also fights to uphold her own identity. One way to interpret this is that she has to pay a price for this situation, lowering her career expectations and adjusting to a position as a subordinated female immigrant.

There is a clear turning point in Helen's life plan. The counsellor's advice to Helen to adjust to lower career expectations had a decisive impact on this young woman's life. Through this advice, language skills became an issue, and this probably affected Helen's self-confidence in a negative way. The meeting with the counsellor was the starting point of several processes – among these we have the father's advice, the marriage and the economic situation – which together influenced and changed Helen's life plan in a drastic way. Paradoxically, representatives of Swedish society contributed to pushing Helen into a more traditional female position, rather than encouraging high career expectations and individual development.

Structures of inequality and life plans

Hilda is 17 years old. She is studying at the child-minder programme. She was born in Bosnia, but because of the war she came to Sweden 16 years ago. Hilda's father was imprisoned in Bosnia, and has never really recovered from his experiences during the war. The family first arrived in a small Swedish city, but eventually moved to a larger one. Hilda's mother is an assistant nurse. The family has moved to a more affluent area in a suburb. Hilda is quite proud of this, and she points out that they are living in a Swedish area, where there are only a few other immigrants:

Hilda: I live in the more exclusive part of the suburb, where it's clean and nice to be.

Interviewer: Isn't it clean in the other parts of the suburb?...

Hilda: When you cross over to the other neighbourhoods there's lots of rubbish there. My mother is on the board of the housing co-operative, and we clean up every week.

Hilda is making a clear distinction between different types of immigrants, and she obviously is eager to point out that she is more 'Swedish' than many other

immigrants. She also tells the interviewer that she speaks perfect Swedish, especially compared to many of her immigrant friends.

Hilda is quite self-confident. She had some different options when deciding what school to choose. At first she thought about becoming a hairdresser, but on second thought she saw many problems with that kind of career choice, among others difficulties getting a job and the effort it takes to run one's own firm. So she decided to start at the Future School in its child-minder programme. There are many reasons for this. She is interested in people and in sports. She also sees the programme as a possibility to continue on to university. She is thinking about becoming a lawyer, a teacher or a police officer. Hilda has many plans.

Hilda has a clear picture of her former and new friends. She talks a great deal about how her earlier friends have changed and how they have gradually lost contact:

Interviewer: You talk about how your earlier friends have changed, how?

Hilda: They are different people now, they've changed a lot!

Interviewer: In what way?

Hilda: They were much better before, now they have become more criminal, and abusive.

Interviewer: Not good at all.

Hilda: My best friend is at the Cathedral School, it's an English school. She's going to become a doctor.

Interviewer: Has she changed?

Hilda: Yes she has improved.

Hilda has a clear line of demarcation between different friends. Although she locates some of the problems, criminality for example, to the suburb, she also defends her home environment. At the same time, Hilda distinguishes between good and bad neighbourhoods, and good and bad friends. This should be interpreted within a framework of place, ethnic identities and the construction of Otherness. Hilda's distinctions create a symbolic universe in which certain immigrants are seen as more 'Swedish', and as exhibiting more proper behaviour. The line of demarcation is also connected to thoughts about cleanliness. There are 'clean' and 'unclean' immigrants (cf. Bauman, 1990).

Hilda is very satisfied with her study programme, and she has improved her grades considerably during a short period of time. She is motivated and feels at home at the school. She is very optimistic about the future. Hilda has a good relationship with her family, her brothers and sisters, and she also has an extended network of relatives all around the world. The family keeps in contact with relatives in the US, Germany, Italy and Bosnia. They all meet frequently in Bosnia.

After school, Hilda plans to go to her aunt in Germany to study. Hilda speaks more or less fluent English, German and Croatian.

The support Hilda gets from her family and her friends helps her concentrate on her schoolwork and improve her results. The reference points she uses – becoming Swedish, living in a Swedish neighbourhood, having successful friends and disassociating herself from her ‘bad’ friends – can be seen as part of a more or less developed career plan. She is on her way to raising her cultural capital, and the social and cultural distinction she is making is part of that plan. By distancing herself from certain places, people and identities, Hilda is struggling to become more ‘in sync’. She is well aware of the territorial stigmatization of the suburb, but she has found a strategy to *disidentify* herself with a subordinated immigrant position. There are no obvious turning points or breaks in Hilda’s life plan. She is actively using the category of ‘being Swedish’ when talking about her everyday life, space and her life plan. Hilda’s life plan is structured in relation to certain social networks and social affiliations and it is also ‘written’ as a successful story. This ‘story’ and life plan is clearly constructed in relation to conceptions and notions of ‘Swedish society’. This is also a narrative about class, and *disidentification* with the working class and the unemployed.

The suburb as an ambivalent space

Antonio is 18 years old. His family moved from the former Yugoslavia to Sweden when he was one year old. The first years in Sweden they lived in a small rural city, but later on they decided to move to a larger city. His parents had no problems getting jobs, and the family settled down in a multicultural suburb. His father works as a bus driver, and his mother is a civil servant at the social insurance office. They are both satisfied with their careers.

In elementary school Antonio had some problems concentrating on his schoolwork, which affected his grades. After finishing elementary school he had to take supplementary courses. He did well, and applied for the recreation leader programme. His dream is to become a policeman. Antonio is satisfied with his choice of school and programme. He is motivated and goal oriented.

When talking about his home and neighbourhood, Antonio is clearly ambivalent. On the one hand, he loves his neighbourhood. On the other, he describes the environment and some of the people there in negative terms. When talking about his friends, he makes a clear distinction between his old and new friends. Some of his old immigrant friends from the suburb are criminal, and he dissociates himself from these people. His new friends mostly come from the more affluent inner city areas:

Interviewer: So, how do you pick your friends?

Antonio: I chose the ones with good backgrounds, who behave normally.

Interviewer: When you say ‘behave normally’, I can’t help wondering what the other ones are doing, are they criminals or something?

Antonio: Not all of them, but some of my old friends are criminals. As soon as I find out that they're into such activities, I just stop seeing them, they're not my friends any more. Some of them are in jail, and many of the people I have known have been killed.

When asked about where he wants to live in the future, Antonio says he would like to stay in his neighbourhood. But at the same time, he points out that it is a dangerous place, and probably he will have to move somewhere else. He is not interested in living in the city centre, but he would like to move to one of the more affluent suburbs. Antonio has a very clear life plan. He wants to finish his studies, and to improve his grades. Thereafter he is going to work for a couple of years, and when the time comes he will apply to the police academy. He is self-confident and goal oriented.

When talking about identity, Antonio emphasizes that he is proud of coming from Montenegro, and he is also proud of being a Muslim. He sees his future in Sweden, and he also feels very Swedish. At the same time, people point out to him that he is a foreigner. He says: 'If I tell them that I'm Swedish, they say: no you're not Swedish. Look at your cultural background, so I cannot say I'm Swedish.' When asked what his children will be, he says: 'I hope they will be Swedish.'

Antonio's family has adjusted well to life in Sweden. His parents are content with their jobs and lives. Antonio is clearly affected by his experiences of living in a multicultural, segregated suburb. He emphasizes the negative and dangerous aspects of this environment, but he also identifies with the people and the urban context. His choice of becoming a policeman is viewed with suspicion by his friends, and when asked if he can stay in his neighbourhood after graduating as a policeman, he says: probably not. He would be regarded as a traitor. His friends are saying: 'look at him, he is living in Angered, but he wants to become a cop, it's a joke'.

Antonio makes a very clear distinction between good and bad immigrants, and he also has a clear ambition of becoming more 'Swedish'. Antonio positions himself very clearly in relation to Swedishness. One interpretation is that he wants to 'become Swedish'. His career choice will make it impossible for him to stay in his neighbourhood, but nevertheless he wants to proceed with his plans. In order to continue with his plans, Antonio has to dissociate himself from some of his old friends, and to develop new and perhaps also more 'white' buddy systems. Antonio has decided to stay 'inside' Swedish society. He even wants to become a part of the police force, upholding norms and rules. His relation to the suburb is ambivalent, but he does not express any local patriotism. On the contrary, he distances himself from this space, and his occupational choice means that he will have to move to another part of the city. Antonio is feeling ambivalent in relation to his neighbourhood and friends. His life plan is, however, clearly structured in relation to an ambition to become more 'Swedish'. There are no clear turning points in Antonio's life plan, but his plans to become a policeman will probably lead to a definitive break with his neighbourhood and some of his friends. He is aware of this, but is still planning to become a policeman.

Discussion and conclusion

The four case studies show both variability and some more general patterns. The four young persons represent and highlight different ways of relating to, for example, family backgrounds, neighbourhood, friends and academic plans. Whereas Farez and Helen can be characterized as having low or fairly low self-esteem and motivation, Hilda and Antonio are very self-confident and assured about themselves and their future plans. There are probably many explanations for these differences. One obvious explanation can be found in the number of years spent in Sweden and consequently language skills and adaptation to a new country. However, there are probably other explanatory factors involved as well.

The main issue and objective of the present article is not to explain what affects school career and success or failure, but instead to look more deeply into some of the relational factors involved in young people's creation of an identity and self-image. What is the relation between aspirations and successive adaptation to what could be called 'Swedishness'? We will start by discussing three important relations and aspects of everyday life: networks and friends, neighbourhood and urban places, and nationality, Swedishness and belonging.

It seems as though choice of friends has a clear relationship to academic aspirations. These four young people distinguish between new and old friends. This distinction is sometimes connected to an image of 'good' versus 'bad' immigrants. Some of the immigrants are seen as criminals, but there are, according to our informants, also good and decent immigrants. One interpretation of this is that young people living in suburbs internalize the stigma and bad reputation of this urban space and place. Their choice of friends and clear demarcations between 'good' and 'bad' immigrants can be read as a sign of how they dissociate themselves from the stigma and try to create a positive image of themselves and their neighbourhood. This is obviously a very ambivalent practice, which must be understood in relation to the territorial stigmatization of the suburb.

These four young persons have a common view of the suburb as a stigmatized and segregated urban space. While feeling at home and often safe in their neighbourhoods, they also emphasize that there are very many immigrants in the suburb, and this is not only seen as an asset. There are many negative connotations of segregated suburbs: criminality, conflicts and lack of access to Swedish society. Yet this does not necessarily mean that one wants to move from the suburb to the more affluent parts of the city. Hilda points out that her family is living in a 'Swedish' area in the suburb, and Antonio wants his children to become Swedish. He would consider moving to one of the more affluent parts of the city, however.

The key issue and project constantly brought into the discussion is the wish to become 'Swedish'. This does not necessarily mean that these young persons are ashamed of their origin or national backgrounds, but they all express an ambition to become 'Swedish'. This ambition is manifested in different ways, for example in their choice of friends, the wish to move to more affluent and 'Swedish' areas in the city or in the general upgrading of things labelled 'Swedish'. The ambition to

become 'Swedish' is obviously connected to academic aspirations and to a life plan that includes family, a job and a good life in Sweden. The four cases represent different strategies and alternative paths.

Farez wants to become a pilot. He has high ambitions, but he has already started to modify his life plan and expectations for the future. He feels a lack of support from his family, but also from the school system. He still has certain dreams, but he is prepared to modify his plans and adjust to what is possible. Helen comes from an upper-middle-class family, but through migration her family has lost its position and economic capital. She always dreamt about becoming a pharmacist, but she has successively adjusted her dreams to everyday life and the need to provide for her new family. It seems as though both these young people lack support from teachers and family. According to their teachers, they do not have sufficient language skills to manage certain educational programmes. But the question is what would have happened if they were given more support and time. They both have considerable cultural capital in their families, but it seems difficult to transform this capital into a suitable career in Sweden. Significantly, both these families have had problems entering the labour market.

Hilda was practically born in Sweden, she lives in a suburb, but in a 'Swedish' area, and she is eager to point out that she is very 'Swedish'. Although Hilda's parents do not have a middle-class background or high economic and cultural capital, she has high ambitions in life. She has different plans, great self-esteem and ambitions. In contrast to Farez and Helen, Hilda does not limit herself, she wants to achieve a high-level position in society and she also thinks she will succeed. Antonio clearly distances himself from the suburb and some of his less law-abiding 'friends'. He has decided to become a cop, which in many ways implies moving from the suburb and making new friends. Antonio has a working-class background, and his ambitions are in line with his parents' social position. Hilda's and Antonio's families are well-integrated into the Swedish labour market.

It would seem that one important factor in these young persons' life stories and future expectations is the relationship to what we have called 'Swedishness'. Franz Fanon and other postcolonial theorists have described how the construction of the *Other* is internalized and turned into an inner social psychological oppression of the self (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996). Reading these life stories and narratives of academic career expectations, it is also obvious that the territorial stigmatization of the segregated suburbs and the weak position of many immigrants in Swedish society are internalized and made into a potential barrier to academic success. The key to success seems to be to transform oneself so as to become 'Swedish'. The coping strategy of developing a strong local patriotism and identification with the suburb is not present in the empirical material of this study (cf. Sernhede, 2005). Instead we find a more negative or ambivalent image of the suburb in combination with different escape plans.

Looking at our material, the young people try in different ways to adjust to what they believe is the appropriate behaviour of a 'good Swedish student'. The feelings of Otherness and of failure are connected to a conception of normative Swedish

behaviour. In this way, being in sync with Swedish society is also connected to brighter and more hopeful expectations for the future, whereas, for example, Farez and Helen incorporate the feeling of being out-of-sync. In this way, the somewhat loose and fluid conception of being 'Swedish enough' seems to transform into an almost material barrier. Being in sync can create a creative and self-assured hope for the future and for a career, whereas being out-of-sync can lead to low self-esteem and successive adjustments to lower expectations in life. I am fully aware that these observations and this proposed connection need to be more thoroughly researched and explored.

The results indicate the importance of investigating how symbolic barriers are created, and how they influence and sometimes function as obstacles to academic and occupational careers. The life plans of these young people are clearly influenced by the feeling and mental conception of being inside or outside Swedish society. There is also a strong connection between decisive turning points in these young people's life plans, and conceptions of being the Other. These young people's life plans are intimately connected to structures of inequality in Swedish society. This study thus raises questions concerning how ethnic and national categories and constructions form, intermingle and interfere with young people's life plans and dreams. The differentiation of life plans described here has to be understood in relation to social networks, social support, living conditions, conceptions of different neighbourhoods, and ethnic and national stereotypes. Stories of inclusion/exclusion are intimately linked to the development of career expectations, life plans and turning points. We also learn that exclusion is not a static or stable condition or experience, but rather a changing and sensitive part of young people's narratives of belonging and alienation. The degree and subjective experience of inclusion/exclusion varies over the life span. Strong feelings of exclusion, and being out-of-sync can have damaging effects on social bonds, career plans and living conditions.

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Notes

1. The total investigation will be based on 100 interviews in different types of schools, locations and cities.
2. We are well aware of the fact that there is an extensive amount of literature dealing with career planning and career development (see, for example, Blake and Sackett, 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer, 2006). We have tried to relate this to some of the relevant issues raised in this literature, but the focus of our article is limited to the relation between life plans and the construction of Otherness.

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