



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET  
INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIALT ARBETE

# CULTUURLIJN

A Project that paves the way for social inclusion and empowerment of  
asylum seekers?

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## Abstract

International migration has increased considerably over the past decades, mainly due to a rise in the number of asylum seekers who have applied for international protection. Prior to arrival in Europe, the migrants have often passed a long journey, followed by a trying asylum process determining their legal status in the host country. The state of waiting and 'not knowing' for months or even years obviously affects the asylum seekers in complex ways. These factors do not only impinge on their human- and economic rights, but they also affect their mental health and ability to maintain a social life.

The aim of this study was to investigate whether Cultuurlijn, a sociocultural project in Brussels could play a preventive role against the social exclusion of asylum seekers and enable them to feel more empowered. The research thus attempted to observe the contributions that NGO's can make in ensuring asylum seekers to enjoy some rights and freedoms that they are normally not entitled to. By employing a mixed methods approach, two perspectives of Cultuurlijn emerged: Participants' and Initiators' experiences.

The findings that derived from this study provided us with new and important insights into the impacts a cultural project can have on participant asylum seekers' lives. We can identify several key factors that emerged as particularly significant. Notably, creating social networks, participating in the social and cultural life of the host society and learning the culture and language were stressed as particularly important.

There were also significant elements in the initiators' and stakeholders' experiences of working with the project. The informants particularly stressed the value of social interactions and avoiding isolation. The project was also believed to contribute to an integration process taking place which can prepare the participants for a possible life in Belgium.

The study conclusively showed that in absence of political belonging, the asylum seekers were in need of another form of belonging which was enabled through the activities of Cultuurlijn. The experiences of participating in the project thus served as a coping strategy and an escape from their difficult circumstances which became a way of survival.

**Key words:** Asylum seekers, Social inclusion, Empowerment, Social networks, Participation

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Somita Sabeti,  
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# CHAPTER 1

## 1.1 Introduction

International migration has increased considerably over the past 25 years due to economic, social, ecological or political factors, most often from the migrant's country of origin (UN, 2011, Eurostat, 2006). It is estimated that a total of 20 million people migrated to Europe between the years 1960-2004 (Eurostat, 2006). The main reason for this growth is explained by the rise in the number of asylum seekers who have applied for international protection over the past decades.

Asylum seekers can be defined as people who leave their country of origin, either by force or by choice, in order to apply for international protection in another country ([www.unesco.org/shs/migration/glossary](http://www.unesco.org/shs/migration/glossary)). However, the applicants are not eligible for refugee status until they can ascertain that, in line with the 1951 Geneva Convention, they have “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (United Nations, 1951, p. 16). Thus, refugee is a term relating to a person who after a legal procedure has formally been granted protection from the authorities.

Prior to arrival in Europe, the migrants have often passed a long journey which as mentioned above, is followed by a trying asylum process determining their legal status in the host country. Hence, what follows is a state of waiting and 'not knowing' for months or even years which obviously affects the asylum seekers in complex ways. These factors do not only impinge on asylum seekers' human- and economic rights, but also affect their mental health and their ability to maintain a social life (Hynes, 2011). In order to cope with the challenges ahead, asylum seekers thus need different forms of support, of which some are provided by the authorities of the receiving country. However, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) have increasingly become an important sector of civil society which generally is said to take the burden off the states (Mayo, 2005). Over the past decades, NGO's have thus made valued contributions to the rights and interests of considerable asylum seekers and refugees by responding to their social needs. In this research, I focus on gaining an understanding of the role that NGO's can play in the reception of asylum seekers.

## 1.2 Background

In fall semester of 2012, I was given the great opportunity to do my internship at the socio-artistic organization Globe Aroma in 'the Capital of Europe', Brussels. As a non-profit making association, Globe Aroma aims to provide a platform for asylum seekers and newcomers to come together and develop artistic projects as well as participate in cultural activities in the city of Brussels. Established in 2001, it is, above all, a meeting point where people committed to their growth and success in the field of art and music gather to give rise to art exhibitions, musical productions, film-making and live performances. During my time as an intern, I have gained invaluable experiences and knowledge from the different projects I was involved in, of which one of these projects Cultuurlijn is the source of inspiration for this thesis. Yet, it was

not only the project itself that inspired me but rather the participants – the people that the project addressed to and the impacts that it had on their lives.

### *1.2.1 The Cultuurlijn Project*

Cultuurlijn, also known as 'The Line of Culture', is one of the projects of Globe Aroma that aims to enable asylum seekers residing in Petit Château, the largest reception center in Belgium, to discover the cultural and artistic offerings of Brussels. The project which was established in 2009, involves the event Cultuurlijn Salon which is arranged once a month and invites the residents of Petit Château to choose three different activities for the upcoming month. Prior to the event, the staff of Globe Aroma regularly visits the reception center to promote Cultuurlijn Salon and distribute flyers.

As for the event, the staff of Globe Aroma and the volunteers (also called 'cultural ambassadors') are usually present. During the evening, around 8-10 cultural activities, such as theatre performances, cinema, concerts, dance performances or Globe Aromas own events are presented of which three can be selected by the participants and the cultural ambassadors. Later on, the participants are reminded by SMS one day prior to the activities and are informed to meet up with the cultural ambassadors outside Petit Château one hour before the specific activity is held. Thereafter, the asylum seekers are accompanied by some cultural ambassadors who are present throughout the activities.

Another significant aspect is that over the years, participants have also been able to become ambassadors owing to their strong commitment and enthusiasm for the project. Cultuurlijn is funded by the General Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports at the Flemish Community Commission.

### *1.2.2 Asylum seekers in Belgium*

In 2012, a total of 21,463 asylum applications were submitted in Belgium (cgra.be). According to CGRS<sup>1</sup>, Belgium had a decrease in the number of asylum applications for the first time in four years. The principal country of origin of the asylum seekers were Afghanistan (12.3%), Guinea (8.4%), Russia (6.8%) and DR Congo (6.2%). Out of these applicants, many were registered as multiple applications which mean that they reapplied for an asylum application after having already received a final asylum decision in Belgium. Furthermore, out of almost 20,000 asylum decisions that were made in 2012, 78% got a negative decision, 15% refugee status and 7% subsidiary protection status. As a whole, that indicates that there were 22% positive decisions.

Upon arrival in Belgium, the asylum seeker makes an asylum claim to the Immigration Department (cgra.be). The asylum application is then forwarded to CGRS for a proper investigation. Thereafter, the asylum seeker is generally requested for an interview within three months after the asylum claim is registered. During a thorough hearing, the asylum seeker is demanded to explain the reasons for fleeing his/her country of origin (ibid). The purpose of the hearing is to investigate whether the asylum seeker has a well-founded fear of being persecuted in his country for a Convention reason (see page 1). If that is not the case, the asylum officer should further judge whether the applicant deals with an actual risk of

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<sup>1</sup>

suffering serious harm if the person would return to his/her country of origin (subsidiary protection status). In general, it takes 80 days on average to make a decision (cgra.be). However, in one third of the cases, the asylum procedure takes between three to six months.

In the case of a negative decision, the applicant can make an appeal which either leads to a reopening of the case or a refusal of the appeal (ibid.). On the occasion that an asylum claim is not granted, the person will be ordered to leave the Belgian territory. If this is not done, (s)he can be deported from the country by force.

### 1.3 Problem area

Migration is a phenomenon that has existed for centuries (Eurostat, 2006; Hynes, 2011). However, in present time human mobility has become more global in character and has increased considerably in scale. As follows, the migration process has come to develop more and more fixed national borders which has intensified the sovereignty of nations (Benhabib, 2005). The development towards increasingly closed borders and restrictive immigration policies appears to paradoxically undermine the otherwise legitimate endorsement of democracy (Düvell, 2006). An example of this is 'Fortress Europe', a concept of the progress and patterns of European policies characterized by reduced granting of refugee status and prevented illegal immigration through border patrols (Hynes, 2011). Consequently, the most affected are refugees who have fled their countries to avoid persecution, torture or death; people who on a general basis are portrayed and perceived as either 'victims' or 'threats'. However, in line with Turton, this study proposes a view on refugees and asylum seekers as *“ordinary people who have been through extraordinary circumstances in their country of origin and continue to experience extraordinary circumstances in their country of asylum”* (Turton, 2003, p. 6).

In relation to the circumstances that asylum seekers face in post-modern Europe, I have strived to reflect on what it is that genuinely has puzzled me and appeared as a paradox in my mind. Is it really possible for an asylum seeker without citizenship rights to feel socially included in the society? Could someone despite the lack of these civil rights be able to feel empowered? And, in what way could a cultural project such as Cultuurlijn affect those individuals feelings of inclusion and empowerment?

This study intends to address these two issues and their opposite effects; social exclusion and disempowerment. Firstly, the asylum procedure and its all different steps are processes that socially exclude asylum seekers (Hynes, 2011). Initially, upon arrival to the receiving country, not knowing the asylum system and where the process will lead causes a feeling of losing control and helplessness. Secondly, the exclusionary processes that asylum seekers experience can be understood through the concept of liminality (ibid.). Namely, the deprivation of entitlements and services, difficulties of maintaining and developing a social life and being outside mainstream society itself continues to place asylum seekers in a liminal position of 'socio-cultural non-identity, non-existence' (Hynes, 2011, p. 30).

Furthermore, liminality in addition to the lack of language ability, discriminatory treatment and stigmatization are factors that can create a sense of low self-confidence and self-esteem (Hynes, 2011). These disempowering effects can be due to non-participation and limited social networks (Hynes, 2011; Adams, 2008).



## 1.4 Aims and objectives

Bearing these aspects in mind, this research intends to observe the contributions that NGO's can make in ensuring asylum seekers to enjoy some rights and freedoms that they are normally not entitled to. My main interest is to understand whether asylum seekers, in spite of all the extraordinary circumstances that they face, could both create a sense of belonging in the society and become more empowered in their lives. The overall aim of this study is to investigate whether a sociocultural project in Brussels such as Cultuurlijn could play a preventive role against social exclusion of asylum seekers and enable them to feel more empowered.

### *1.4.1 Research questions*

The study intends to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does the project Cultuurlijn promote social inclusion in the Belgian society and a sense of empowerment among the asylum seekers?
2. How can the asylum seekers' subjective perceptions of participating in Cultuurlijn be seen from a social inclusion and empowerment perspective?
3. What approaches and methods do the initiators and stakeholders of this project consider to promote the empowerment and social inclusion of the participants?

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.1 Previous Research

There is a broad field of research addressing the social exclusion of asylum seekers and refugees in the contemporary world. In my search for the existing knowledge in relation to my research questions, I have noticed that the greater part of the research on international migration has since the last decades increasingly come to deal with the mechanisms and processes of migration, particularly the consequences this has on the mental and physical health of asylum seekers in the host countries. Thus, a great deal of previous studies approach the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on the well-being of asylum seekers<sup>2</sup>, e.g. the published research 'Mental health of refugees and asylum seekers' by Bhugra, Craig and Bhui (2010).

However, it has been a challenge to find research that concerns cultural participation as promoting the inclusion and empowerment of asylum seekers in the society. A number of researchers have acknowledged the importance of social and cultural participation of migrants, even though they do not provide an overview of the current scope of existing participatory initiatives for these groups in contemporary Europe. Nevertheless, the importance of these studies still makes it reasonable to initially discuss some of them in relation to my research questions.

I have chosen to present the research under two headings: Asylum and Migration research (2.2) followed by Cultural and Participatory action (2.2.1). The existing knowledge has not only provided me with a more comprehensive understanding of the study area, but it has also helped me to identify gaps in the literature to build on as well as to develop new insights concerning the social inclusion and empowerment of asylum seekers (Bryman, 2011). The selected research will now be outlined.

### 2.2 Asylum and Migration research

The research on migration is relatively new in comparison with the phenomenon itself, which has influenced the entire history of mankind (Rystad, 1992). Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has come to touch upon a multitude of issues, such as economic factors, mental health, refugee experiences and participatory initiatives. The early migration research has had a particular orientation towards the economic field in terms of push/pull factors. Harry Jerome's study *Migration and Business cycles* (1926) presents the push-pull model as an explanation of the causes of migration. The push factors represent the negative factors that cause people to move away from their country of origin whereas the pull factors signify the positive factors that attract migrants to the host country (Jerome, 1926; European communities, 2000). Jerome (1926) concludes that the economic prosperity that characterized the United States at that time, made the pull factors much stronger than the push factors.

Furthermore, mental health issues have gained greater attention since the last two decades (Ingleby, 2005). International research has particularly recognized high levels of distress and psychological disorder among asylum seekers (Heeren et. al., 2012). An example of this is the

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<sup>2</sup> Other previous studies: *Trauma, Exile and mental health in young refugees*, E. Montgomery, 2011.

study 'Mental health of asylum seekers: A cross-sectional study of psychiatric disorders' which examines the mental health status through different psychiatric diagnostic instruments (Heeren et. al., 2012). The findings indicate high levels of psychiatric morbidity, with major depression and PTSD as the most common diagnosis. Traumatic experiences prior to arrival in the receiving country are further recognized as one of the causes of these disorders (ibid.). Their study suggests that the mental well-being of asylum seekers requires specific interventions in order to prevent psychological disorders.

Additionally, the migration research has attempted to address the dimension of refugee experiences in order to explore and gain an understanding of the issues they may be facing during the waiting period in the host society. One study that particularly addresses the experiences of waiting is Jan-Paul Brekke's study 'While we are waiting – uncertainty and empowerment among asylum seekers in Sweden' (Brekke, 2004). The research gives an overview of the phenomenon of waiting consisting of three key elements: time, return and integration. The findings show that the act of returning to one's country of origin was no option for the asylum seekers. Additionally, the double policy of promoting integration and return was perceived as problematic, both for the applicants and also the authorities. This issue is marked by confusion considering that the authorities do not want rejected asylum seekers to be integrated to such an extent that they would want to stay. The same goes for keeping the asylum seekers disintegrated and isolated from the rest of the society and thereafter either return to their country or stay in Sweden. Lastly, one finding shows that the asylum seekers had very low sense of coherence during the waiting period, particularly regarding the lack of a sense of meaningfulness. In the following section, I intend to present previous research which aims to enhance the sense of coherence among asylum seekers through cultural and participatory action. Thereby, I intend to present earlier research that is more related to my research questions.

### *2.1.1 Cultural and Participatory action*

Participatory research is a relatively new field of study which has captured the interest of several researchers. The main focus has been on gaining an understanding of the positive outcomes that participatory and cultural initiatives have had on people's lives. As follows, these forms of initiatives in relation to asylum seekers and refugees shall now be outlined.

In a study by Cath Maffia's (2008), a project is examined which targets the possibilities of preventing mental health problems of asylum seekers and refugees. Maffia (2008) explains that the Well-being project that was operated in UK during a three years period, aimed to empower people, provide them with new social networks as well as regaining the support and confidence caused by the experience of forced exile, separation and uprooting. With a total of 805 participants, the project consisted of several different activities of dance-, music- and cooking classes and outdoor activities such as football, gardening and swimming. According to her conclusion, the project has contributed to a reduced social isolation, improved mental health, better understanding of the UK's society and a key to create contacts with the host community (Maffia, 2008). However, there is a lack of methodological approach to the results mentioned above which I believe reduced the reliability and validity of the study.

Jonathan Lang and Peter Bramham (2006) study the contribution of fourteen cultural health projects on social inclusion. According to Lang & Bramham (2006), the projects all

pursued different aims and targets but were still concerned with social inclusion of the participants even if that was not presented as one of their aims. The main aims of the projects consisted of improved education and health, increased employment and reduced crime rates. In regards to their findings, they indicate that cultural projects have been increasingly acknowledged as promoting social inclusion. However, even though the researchers recognize that the projects actively made a difference in the participants lives, their attempts of finding evidence of the link between cultural projects and social inclusion lacked consistency and was thereby highly unfulfilling (Lang & Bramham, 2006). One of the main reasons for this conclusion is the issue of not having accurate indicators for social inclusion converted in cultural terms. Lang & Bramham (2006) thus asks whether it de facto is possible to measure social inclusion in terms of cultural activities. Thus, they argue that providing socially excluded groups various benefits does not necessarily indicate a promotion of social inclusion. Furthermore, they claim that although there would exist some specific indicators for social inclusion, e.g. better health, higher self-esteem or entering an employment, they are sceptical if such benefits gained through cultural projects could represent a promotion of social inclusion. How many of these indicators have to be gained to even be able to state that someone has achieved social inclusion? Overall, Lang & Bramham (2006) state that the contribution of the cultural health projects had a notably modest success and do not necessarily promote long-term social inclusion.

'The role of culture in preventing and reducing poverty and social exclusion' is a report conducted by the European Commission (2005) which gives an overview of the main findings from the study on cultural projects and social policies in eight Member states of the European Union. In analysing these different programs, the study identifies specific cultural practices which can promote social inclusion among people in disadvantaged situations. The factors that enhance a greater social inclusion includes among other things: building skills and self-confidence, overcoming cultural diversity and discrimination, creating employment opportunities and increasing access to information and services. All of these components can for instance be gained through arts and theatre workshops, language classes and celebration of different cultures through city events. The EU report (2005) points out three social groups which they believe are at risk of cultural exclusion. Firstly, people who have a lack of economic resources, secondly; refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants and thirdly; disabled people. The barriers which limit these groups' opportunities to access to and participate in cultural activities are mostly due to the fact of being outside some particular social networks and thus having a lack of knowledge and information about cultural programs. Other barriers to cultural participation can be caused by the cost of services or lack of time and energy. Furthermore, the EU report (2005) states that the link between culture and social inclusion has not been recognized in the different Member States. One of the reasons for this discrepancy is the lack of quantifiable evidence as well as the need of indicators to be able to measure the effects of participation in cultural activities on social inclusion. Finally, the report presents recommendations in order to clear away the barriers to participate in cultural activities and thus advance cultural policies to enable equal accessibility. The important aspect to have in mind is for the ministries responsible of culture to put greater efforts on obtaining a quantifiable as well as qualitative dimension of the term culture and the possible impacts on social inclusion.

Belfiore (2002) examines the shift of the British cultural policies towards government funded art organizations in order to promote a greater social inclusion. This new approach to culture as something that could alter social change is, according to Belfiore (2002), greatly emphasized and officially acknowledged by the government which has prioritized a funding agenda on art organizations. Belfiore's study (2002) aims to focus critically on the research projects on which the decision of the government on arts funding partly are based. The researcher points out several methodological flaws in Matarasso's work (1997) on the social impacts of art programs. First of all, Belfiore (2002) claims that the focus is rather on outputs (the artistic product) than on outcomes (long-term impacts on the participants) which Belfiore claims decreases the validity of the study. Belfiore (2002) thus argues that the study does not examine what it claims to evaluate which is how art projects can create social benefits for the participants. In order to have reliable evidence on the social impacts of art, Belfiore (2002) therefore emphasizes two crucial aspects: the importance of conducting a qualitative approach, i.e. people centered evaluation targeting the outcomes and developing a long-term evaluation of the social impact of the art projects. This should be done in order to be able to state whether the impacts are short- or long-term. However, in conclusion Belfiore (2002) states that the idea of culture as a contributor of social benefits and thus as something promoting social inclusion is widely established and will most likely continue to play an influential role in the cultural policies and funding agendas of UK. Not least due to the efforts of cultural project initiatives implemented by the European Commission during the last decades (Belfiore, 2002).

In this chapter, the previous research has aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study area and identify gaps in the literature to build my research on. In relation to cultural and participatory research, the main challenges faced by researchers, as we have seen above, relates to methodological difficulties of ensuring the validity of the studies. These issues have mainly been due to lack of adequate objective indicators of different concepts (e.g. social inclusion) and thus a lack of correlation between the dependent and the independent variable (e.g. between cultural activities and social inclusion).

# CHAPTER 3

## 3.1 Theoretical framework

The third chapter aims to present a theoretical framework of reference in order to underpin the results and the analysis of the study (Bryman, 2011). Two different theories based on the research questions will be presented and discussed: Social inclusion and Empowerment. As the study aims to examine whether Cultuurlijn project enables asylum seekers to feel more socially included as well as empowered, this section intends to examine these concepts in relation to refugees and asylum seekers.

Nevertheless, due to the multifaceted nature of these concepts, particularly regarding the theory of social inclusion, it is generally required to apply a comprehensive and multidimensional approach. Thus, when faced with diverse interpretations of the concept of social inclusion, I have considered three different approaches which could be adequate for analysing the results of my study. Equally, an insight into the theory of empowerment will be given though not divided into categories considering the fairly established notion of the concept.

## 3.2 Social Ex/Inclusion

### 3.2.1. General definition

Social inclusion is a relatively broad and vague term which has no universally acknowledged definition (Hynes, 2011). It is usually considered to be related to the process of enabling people to participate in the political, social and economic life based on the equality of rights and opportunities which fosters a sense of belonging in the community (United Nations New York, 2010). The word belonging can thus be strongly associated with the concept of social inclusion. However, it goes without saying that in order to fully understand the meaning of social inclusion, we need to grasp the concept of social exclusion since it is often believed to be an opposite effect of the latter.

The expression 'social exclusion' is known to be originated in France during the 1970's and involved people who were excluded the rights of formal social protection from the state, the so called underclass (Byrne, 2005). Single parents, young adults, disabled people and unemployed without insurance were at this age of time labelled as '*Les Exclus*' (the excluded). Subsequently, the usage of this expression expanded and in the middle of the 1990's, it had more or less replaced the word "underclass" (Byrne, 2005). In contrast to the word "underclass", the concept of being socially excluded gave rise to an altered perception of poverty, namely that to be poor is no longer viewed upon as a matter of individual defect or impairment, neither as only a lack of material resources. Byrne (2005) implies that 'social exclusion' is a multi-dimensional process in the sense that it concerns "changes in the whole of society that has consequences for some of the people in that society" (Byrne, 2005, p.2). Today we can affirm that people who are socially excluded from the society do not necessarily have themselves to blame, but instead it is rather society as a whole that plays a major role in their exclusionary process. Hence, Byrne (2005) argues that it is important to make a distinction between the notion of 'social exclusion' and the more basic idea of



'poverty'. In conclusion, social exclusion is referred to individuals being shut off, completely or partially, from the economic, political, social and cultural systems in society which is *de facto* a part of people's civil rights of citizenship (ibid.).

From a theoretical point of view, exclusion has so far been examined in terms of internal exclusion within post-industrial societies (Byrne, 2000). Yet, it needs to be understood that exclusion also can be examined from a global context. In that respect, the question of social exclusion is related to people who are kept out of a specific nation or continent; asylum seekers and refugees. 'Fortress Europe' can be seen as an illustration of this process which either refers to immigration in the European Union and the EU policies agreeing to reduce the granting of refugee status, or to the prevention of illegal immigration through border patrols and detention centers. Hynes (2011) claims that these measures of deterrence adopted by individual states over the past few decades have made asylum seekers suffer of various types of disadvantages in different systems of society, such as health, education, employment and housing. Consequently, Levitas (2000) argues that these people are a socially excluded group not only outside mainstream society, but also believed to be outside society itself (p. 358).

Social exclusion has so far been introduced in order to enhance the understanding of social inclusion. Taking into account the explanation provided above, social inclusion can be defined as efforts to tackle and to reverse the exclusionary processes that individuals or groups in society are facing. Thus, the key question is; how can this process of tackling exclusion be understood in regards to the political circumstances that asylum seekers live in? Bauman (2000) explains that asylum seekers' experiences of persecution in the country of origin followed by a non-acceptance in the receiving country creates a sense of liminality; a condition of non-existence and a sense of abnormality and alienation. Hynes (2011) points out that this is due to the lack of political inclusion which causes asylum seekers to develop a new form of inclusion in other domains. In that respect, Hynes (2011) means that social inclusion is strongly associated with a 'sense of belonging' which is enabled through the creation of social networks. In order to tackle the exclusionary processes of the asylum system, interacting with others and participating in various networks thus becomes a coping strategy (ibid.). The new form of belonging, Hynes (2011) argues, becomes a way for asylum seekers to cope with the dehumanizing system and can thereby be seen as a matter of survival. In this study, the concept of social inclusion is primarily interpreted as a 'sense of belonging' in the absence of political belonging. However, one cannot deny that the concept is complex and that there are other ways of perceiving social inclusion. That is why I have decided to also approach the term social inclusion from two other perspectives in order to deepen the analysis in chapter 5. Firstly, the concept of social inclusion can be traced back to the system theoretic ideas of Niklas Luhmann as well as the political philosophy of Hanna Arendt in the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the following section, I intend to apply a System theoretic- and Philosophical approach on social inclusion.

### 3.2.2 *System theoretic approach*

System theory is first and foremost a theory of communication which can be used to describe some of the factors concerning social inclusion (Jönhill, 2012). The distinction between inclusion and exclusion is from this theoretical point of view, believed to characterize each individual's sense of belonging or 'non-belonging' in the society as a communicative system.

One of the key principles of this approach is that as human beings, we are all included in the society as long as we can *communicate* (ibid.). However, inclusion principally occurs when individuals participate in societies many different subsystems, i.e. social contexts such as a family, the education system, as an employee at work, one's circle of friends, Facebook, Art Associations etc. (Jönhill, 2012). Hence, social inclusion occurs when people interact and become a part of the different subsystems of society (ibid.). By the same token, we can be excluded from numerous subsystems which we are not members of, e.g. as an unemployed with no access to the organization of work. Jönhill (2012) explains that subsystems or organizations normally have requirements for membership on the grounds of certain characteristics that individuals have. Thus, in an overall meaning, social inclusion concerns the relationship between man and society in terms of the communication and actions between the two (ibid.).

Niklas Luhmann (as cited in Jönhill, 2012; Braeckman, 2006) who has played the leading role in developing the system theoretic concept of inclusion and exclusion, claims that the transition towards a functionally differentiated society has changed the form of inclusion in such a way that we nowadays are *partially* included in the society. That is to say that in contrast to the pre-modern era, individuals are no longer assigned their place in society by exclusively belonging to one multifunctional subsystem, e.g. slavery or aristocracy (full inclusion) (Braeckman, 2006). The functionally differentiated society indicates a society where people can participate in different subsystems at the same time (partial inclusion). Hence, one can nowadays participate in society as a consumer, researcher, voter, music lover and father in the subsystems of economics, education, politics, music and family (Braeckman, 2006). Individuals do not fully belong to one of these subsystems, but are partially included in several subsystems which form one's identity (ibid.). However, Luhmann (as cited in Braeckman, 2006) claims that the problem of present time is no longer about being excluded from society since it is very unlikely not to be included in any subsystems at all, it is, he states, rather a question of the *limitations* of inclusion. To be excluded from one subsystem can cause being excluded from other function systems which Luhmann (as cited in Braeckman, 2006) means limits people from being included in certain function systems. This process is believed to create a domino effect (ibid.). If you are not a member of the political system in terms of citizenship, as a refugee your social inclusion can be limited in terms of losing entrance to some subsystems in the society, for instance, not having access to an ID-card or an employment (Jönhill, 2012; Braeckman, 2006).

Yet, Luhmann (as cited in Jönhill, 2012) concludes that we are all socially included in the society as long as we are alive. The distinction between being outside and inside the society comes therefore down to either communication capabilities or the lack of these capabilities. As communicative social beings, we have countless daily interactions with our surrounding world – we give and receive. Therefore, this is viewed as a fundamental condition for inclusion which means that no one is excluded from society as an overall social system. Even the *outsider* is an *insider* (Jönhill, 2012). However, when it comes to our relationship to the different subsystems and organizations of society there are other important outcomes. In this case, we can either be excluded or included in these systems depending on whether we have a membership or not. In regards to the social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees, this implies that these people are free to participate, not in all the encounters between people, but in countless meetings, groups and communities (Jönhill, 2012). Yet, as an asylum seeker or



stateless person, one is not a member of the political organization which excludes that person from several subsystems. I intend to partly apply a system theoretic approach in the analysis of the study. The focus will be on discussing the Luhmann perspective in relation to the empirical data. I believe that this perspective will enable me to analyse which interactions, subsystems and organizations that the participants of Cultuurlijn are included in or excluded from.

### 3.2.3 Philosophical approach

*“The rights to have rights, or the rights of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself.”*

-- Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951], p. 177

In the study *The Rights to have Rights in Contemporary Europe* (2005), the democratic theorist Seyla Benhabib makes us familiar with the thoughts of Hanna Arendt - one of the most influential thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In her work, Benhabib (2005) seeks to understand Arendt's discourse on 'statelessness' in relation to contemporary Europe.

According to Arendt (as cited in Benhabib, 2005), 'statelessness' is equal to the loss of nationality status, no connection between a human being and a state and thus indicates the deprivation of all human rights. In that respect, Arendt (2005) argues that individuals become excluded in such a way as to not having the recognition as members of the human race. Thus, Arendt (2005) claims that the moral conception of every humans' right to belong to some community in the world should come first, i.e. to be acknowledged *the rights to have rights*. Individuals who are not accepted by any state as its members are condemned to live in a state of limbo – living in non-existence and turned into unwanted ghosts (Benhabib, 2005; Hynes, 2011). Therefore, Arendt (2005) argues that we, humanity itself is duty-bound to guarantee these rights to our fellow human beings through ensuring the fundamental right of belonging to some human community. Yet, Arendt adds that “it is not clear that this is possible” (Benhabib, 2005, p. 7). Benhabib (2005) directly links this human duty to the Kantian notion of “moral”. A sense of moral, Benhabib (2005) states, that involves us all humans as such regardless of cultural, religious or ethnic background, and beyond national boundaries.

However, when Arendt expressed her ambivalence as indicated above<sup>3</sup> she was in fact reflecting upon the contradiction between universal human rights and each states claim for national sovereignty (Cotter, 2005). These aspects are at the heart of the study 'Hanna Arendt and the Rights to have Rights' by Bridget Cotter (2005). Cotter (2005) who in her study refers to the arguments of Arendt, explains that refugees are the human manifestation of this conflictual relationship seeing that the national sovereignty means to freely have the right to deny citizenship of any human being, i.e. their universal human rights. At this point, Arendt (as cited in Cotter, 2005) makes an interesting statement, namely that the Rights of Men as we know them in various acknowledged universal laws of modern time, does in fact, only concern the citizen-members of the national state. Strictly speaking, the right to employment, home, education or just the ability to contribute to the world in any way are rights which requires having a citizenship of a nation. Arendt (2005) believes that if such a thing as the Rights of Men would exist today, it would be through proper law enforcement and regardless

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<sup>3</sup> Arendt: “It is not clear that this is possible” (Benhabib, 2005, p. 7)

of peoples' backgrounds. Hence, it is in fact citizenship which is the main guarantor of human rights whereas the loss of it indicates the loss of the rights of man and thus to remain in a life of statelessness (Cotter, 2005).

The UN Declaration of Human Rights (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr>) entitles everyone the freedom to emigrate, i.e. to leave any country, however, not to immigrate (Article 13). Thereafter the right to apply for asylum is proclaimed (Article 14) followed by “the right to a nationality” (Article 15). However, Benhabib (2005) asks what difference this declaration actually makes. Benhabib (2005) argues that the Declaration of Human Rights never enforces states to guarantee immigrants citizenship and is thus not a constituted law but rather a guideline for nations. Arendt (as cited in Cotter, 2005) does not consider this as enough protection for the universal rights of man and therefore suggests a new supranational law and international court. Cotter (2005) states however that “Arendt does not solve the many problems she raises” (Cotter, 2005, p. 12). Instead, Arendt (2005) concludes with one question which has a great relevance for our time: “Is there such a thing as a right to belong? And if so, should we have a choice of where we belong and to what?” (Cotter, 2005, p. 13). Arendt's perspective plays an important role in the discussion on social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees and will thus be a part of the analysis of this study.

### 3.3 Empowerment

Empowerment as a concept relates to people's experiences of power and powerlessness in society (Adams, 2008). Even though it at the late 1980's was a term with radical associations and political values of equality and freedom, it is nowadays perceived as a multifaceted notion with social, psychological, political and economic aspects. According to Adams (2008), the process of empowering others generally refers to:

the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives (Adams, 2008, p.17).

Two factors are believed to contribute to the feeling of empowerment: Personal agency and opportunity. Whereas personal agency refers to the social, financial and human factors, the notion of opportunity concerns the societal structures such as social norms and legislation. Adams (2008) claims that these two factors play a major role in the empowerment process through enabling or disabling people to achieve their interests and goals. To give an example; an asylum seeker might be disadvantaged due to legal factors (no citizenship) and in terms of personal agency either feel in a state of powerlessness or feel empowered and in control of one's life. As follows, empowerment generally addresses marginalized people who struggle against inequalities and oppressions (Adams, 2008). In this respect, the process of discriminatory treatment can be seen as a structural barrier which prevents people from realizing their potential. This form of unequal treatment can be related to a person having another cultural or ethnic background than the majority population who becomes a victim of social stigma and stereotypes.

Self-empowerment is an important term which refers to individual's capacity to form their lives, both at the present time and in the future. In this sense, Adams (2008) emphasizes people's experiences, feelings, skills and knowledge as tools in developing a more positive sense of self. However, she argues, simply by being offered to participate will not make people become empowered. To be empowered, a person's feelings, dreams and goals need to be in accord with what they do. Adams (2008) claims that the idea of self-empowerment can be linked with capacity building which means that people acquire self-confidence by gaining new skills and knowledge which allows a full personal development and an active participation in the community or society. It is thus the individual itself who can create a mind-set that helps them in realizing their own ability and to build positive relationships with other people. Yet, Adams (2008) explains, some problems and issues that people are faced with cannot be solved through self-improvement. Some of these problems can be caused by factors that are out of our control which creates feelings of helplessness and paralyzing fear (Adams, 2008).

The concept of freedom is further a central concern in the paradigm of empowerment (SinghaRoy, 2001). According to SinghaRoy (2001), it represents a process of orientation towards equality and independence by enabling unprivileged people to access to the different domains of the mainstream society. Additionally, in line with SinghaRoy (2001), empowerment is about raising the quality of life of marginalized people through self-reliance. This can be achieved through participatory approaches at the grassroots level which aim to meet human rights and needs that cannot always be provided by the authorities.

Lastly, the importance of being aware of empowerment as a western concept which advocates the occidental notion of individualism and freedom of choice is underlined (Adams, 2008). This implies that individual's wishes and goals are given priority over the values of the family and community.

The empowerment perspective will be discussed in relation to the empirical findings in chapter 5. Great importance will be attached to whether the Cultuurlijn project has fostered a feeling of empowerment among the participants and how their experiences can be viewed from an empowerment perspective.

# CHAPTER 4

## 4.1 Methodology

The fourth chapter aims to present the methodological framework applied in conducting the study. First and foremost, my purpose has been to apply a type of research strategy which adequately answers the research questions of this study. Thus, in line with Bryman (2011), I believe that the research questions should be the principal determinant of choice of research methods. The research questions which are central to this study not only raises the issues of realist assumptions such as what and where (quantitative), but also interpretivist assumptions such as why and how (qualitative) (Brannen, 2005). Having considered these factors, a mixed methods approach has been chosen in order to study the subject from diverse perspectives. In this chapter, I intend to explain the process I have undertaken to reach the results of the study and to discuss the methodological strengths and limitations. The research design will firstly be presented followed by the different data collection strategies. Thereafter, the mixed methods analysis, quality criteria and lastly ethical considerations.

## 4.2. Research design

The focus of this study is seeking to understand whether a sociocultural project in Brussels such as Cultuurlijn could promote the social inclusion of asylum seekers and enable them to feel more empowered. In order to approach this field of study, this thesis employs a mixed methods approach to the research subject, collection and analysis of data. As stated by Bryman (2011), this implies that the research integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single study in order to compensate for their respective limitations and accentuate their strengths. I have thus been working with different types of data of both quantitative and qualitative nature in order to pursue different targets by triangulating data/results (Brannen, 2005).

In this research, triangulation as research design has been focused on uniting data of the two research methods in order to generate a complementary understanding which together provides an overall picture of the study subject. However, Brannen (2005) clarifies that the possibility may also exist that the quantitative and qualitative findings conflict. Yet, I suggest that examining any resulting types of contradictions might in fact raise important questions and signify meanings of the complex social context that marginalized groups find themselves in. As Brannen (2005) states “different forms of triangulation are investigative strategies that offer evidence to inform judgements, not techniques that guarantee truth or completeness” (p. 13). Below I intend to outline the different methods that I have been using to explore variations in asylum seekers experiences of Cultuurlijn and whether these experiences have enabled them to feel more empowered as well as socially included in the Belgian society.

## 4.3 Quantitative data collection strategy

Quantitative research method is associated with a positivist epistemology, relies on the use of numbers and the actions and behaviours of the informants in a specific study (Bryman, 2011).

In this research, data collection was conducted through a survey questionnaire to quantify the subjective experiences of asylum seekers in relation to Cultuurlijn project; levels of satisfaction with the project, level of social inclusion in the Belgian society and empowerment.

#### *4.3.1. Sampling*

The first step taken was to identify the population for the study from which the sample was to be selected. Accordingly, the participants of Cultuurlijn were identified as the sampling frame. Globe Aroma provided me with the list of all the people that have participated in the project which represented a total sum of 227 participants. The next challenge was to select a sample which would be representative of the population as a whole, i.e. a sample that accurately reflects all the 227 participants of the project. According to Bryman (2011), a probability sample approach is more likely to lead to a representative sample which could more likely enable the researcher to generalize the findings to the population. Considering these facts, I applied a stratified random sampling which represents a method in which the population is divided into smaller subgroups called strata. Subsequently, three language groups (*English, French and Farsi*) were chosen as the main strata for the reason that I found this as both practical and feasible when observing the population characteristics. Thereafter, the size of each stratum was made proportionate to the population size of the strata. Thereby, each stratum had the same sampling friction, i.e. Farsi stratum: 22, French stratum: 18 and English stratum: 10 (Bryman, 2011). This gave me a total of 50 survey questionnaires to distribute which the quantitative dimension of my study is built on.

#### *4.3.2. About the Survey Questionnaire*

In executing the survey questionnaire, following steps were distinguished on the basis of three criteria: (1) the aim and research questions of the study, (2) theories which the research is built on and (3) the target group which the study is directed to. How to ask and formulate the survey questions has been a process of exploring the areas of interest for my research more deeply by defining the important theories. In accordance to Bryman (2011), I have thus tried to address the research questions in order to get accurate results. Hence, the theories 'social inclusion' and 'empowerment' have been explained to the respondents according to this study's interpretation of the concepts (see Appendix 1). I have also paid attention on the specific target group and tried to put myself in the situation of the individuals carrying out the survey (Bryman, 2011).

The survey questionnaire is based on mostly closed but also open questions, initially involving the respondents' personal information such as time of residence in Brussels as well as about friends and relatives. Apart from that, the questions mainly focus on levels of measurement in relation to satisfaction of the project, the most important reasons for participating, if the project has helped the participants to feel more socially included and empowered and lastly if the cultural ambassadors who have accompanied them have been helpful for the participants to feel more socially included. Thereafter, the survey proceeds with a number of personal questions such as age, nationality and education. Bryman (2011) has been a guideline in designing the questions and in what to avoid when preparing them. In

that sense, the instructions and questions have been formulated as clear as possible for the respondents in order to avoid unambiguous terms and leading questions. Seeing that my mother tongue is farsi and I master the french language, I was able to translate the surveys from English into French and Farsi. No translator was used in order to write the surveys, however, I was able to receive some support in order to have an optimal equivalence between the languages.

Before administrating the survey, I conducted a pilot study in order to pre-test the questions. Three volunteers were selected, all of them somehow familiar with Globe Aroma and its projects though not members of the sampling frame. This enabled me to estimate the time frame of carrying out the survey and possible misinterpretations with the questions. Thanks to the piloting, I was able to get advice about adding some other activity alternatives (e.g. concerts). Some of these remarks were taken into consideration.

A group administrated survey was conducted in two Cultuurlijn evenings which were held by the initiators of Globe Aroma and me being present, with the first occasion in March and the second one in April. Nevertheless, the amount of respondents were not enough which made me turn to the reception center for asylum seekers in Brussels (Petit Château) to distribute the remaining questionnaires to participants of Cultuurlijn. Finally, after a period of two months, 50 survey questionnaires were completed based on the three strata: English, French and Farsi.

#### 4.4 Qualitative data collection strategy

Qualitative research method is based on interpretivist epistemology which emphasizes the understanding of human behaviour by grasping the subjective meaning of social actions (Bryman, 2011). The main focus of the researcher is thus on how people make sense of their actions which makes the challenge lie on gaining access to respondents' social world and see things from their point of view (ibid.). A total of five interviews were conducted for this study: two focus groups with the participants of Cultuurlijn and three semi-structured interviews with the initiators and stakeholders of the project.

##### 4.4.1. *Sampling*

In this phase of the research, a generic purposive sampling was employed in selecting respondents for the interviews. This implies that the research questions and research aims were the main criteria for selecting the respondents for the study. Considering the mixed methods approach to this research, the survey administration also became a base for the selection of qualitative sampling (Bryman, 2011). Primarily, when examining the research questions, I identified two groups that would be of relevance for the study: first of all, the asylum seekers participating in Cultuurlijn and secondly, the initiators/stakeholders of the project.

The first group of interest was strategically selected in connection with Cultuurlijn Salon in March and April when the surveys were distributed. The selected respondents were composed of French-speaking and Farsi-speaking people who thereafter were divided into two focus groups. Two focus group interviews were conducted divided into two strata groups: FG1 –



Farsi-speaking group and FG2 – French-speaking group. It goes without saying that in order to communicate effectively, the respondents should share the same language.

The second group of interest was selected at the same time period. This group was relatively fixed from the initial phase of the study. The idea was at first to conduct a focus group composed of the selected initiators of Cultuurlijn. However, due to lack of time and conflicting working schedules, I decided to proceed with three semi-structured interviews instead. One of the interviews was held with the Director of Globe Aroma and the second one with a Professor of Anthropology who is a board member of the Globe Aroma administration (the initiators). The third interview was conducted with two assistant directors of the Flemish Community Commission at the General Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports (the stakeholders). The stakeholders are the policymakers that grant state subventions to support Cultuurlijn.

#### *4.4.2. About the Interview Guide*

As I was preparing the interview guide, I strived to formulate interview questions that could answer the research questions (Bryman, 2011). The pattern of the interview guide was however substantially affected by the survey which was conducted before the interviews; a common feature with mixed methods research (Brannen, 2005).

As anticipated, I had to employ different interview guides directed to the two target groups: 'participants' and 'organizers of the project'. Mainly, because of the two different research questions which distinguished them but also because the interview methods differed. The interview guide for the focus groups included specific themes to create a discussion in the group (see Appendix 2). Bryman (2011) explains that the aim of questioning in a focus group is to use topics and broad questions to stimulate discussion. Thus, the three themes chosen were: experiences with the Cultuurlijn project, social inclusion and empowerment.

The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was more structured than the focus groups (see Appendix 3). When preparing the questions for the interview guide the third research question of the study was relevant: *What approaches and methods do the initiators and stakeholders of this project consider to promote the social inclusion and empowerment of the participants?* Thus, the questions concerned the aim and working methods of Cultuurlijn followed by their reflections and opinions of social inclusion and empowerment.

#### *4.4.3. Interviewing*

FG1, the Farsi-speaking group was held in a local that Globe Aroma had booked for me. The group consisted of 5 respondents, by which all were participants of Cultuurlijn. Initially, I had counted on the presence of 8 respondents but unfortunately some of them were unable to participate. According to Bryman (2011), this is one of the challenges of conducting focus group interviews. FG2, the French-speaking group was held in the same local as the first group. This group consisted of 4 respondents in the beginning but later on, one of them had to leave which left us with only 3 respondents. I found conducting the focus groups stressful and difficult not only due to the process of getting all the respondents in one place at one time but also because of some unexpected events that occurred. Moreover, throughout the interview, I attempted to regularly take notes and pay attention to the group interactions, especially on

expressions of agreement and disagreement. Equally, I tried to not be too intrusive but still encourage the more reserved speakers to contribute to the discussions. Both of the focus group interviews lasted for around one hour and twenty minutes.

The semi-structured interviews were all held at different locations, lasting between 30 minutes to almost one hour. Two of the interviews were conducted in English and one of them in French. All of the interviews conducted in this research were based on good scientific practice, all of them recorded and later on transcribed for purposes of analysis. However, important to mention is that the interviews on French and Farsi were directly transcribed and translated in English. As I speak both french and farsi fluently, all the interviewees were conducted without interpreter and no translator was used to transcribe the interviews.

#### 4.5. Mixed methods analysis

Brannen (2005) identifies *ordering*, *dominance* and *logic of enquiry* as principal aspects to bear in mind when carrying out the research strategy for mixed methods analysis. Firstly, regarding the ordering and dominance of the methods, the research design of my study is indicated as: quan > QUAL. This implies that the findings will firstly be presented with the quantitative data followed by the more dominant method; qualitative data. In regards to the logic of enquiry, this study will be aimed at both inductive and deductive logics even though the study primarily is based on deductive reasoning. This implies that my study is built on the theories social inclusion and empowerment and thereby the research process moves from a general to a more specific level (Bryman, 2011).

In the data analysis, a triangulation strategy will be applied in order to examine if the results deriving from the two methods indicate correspondence. The survey is intended to provide contextual and descriptive data in order to get a firm picture of the study area. Thereafter, the focus groups aim to provide an understanding of the respondents' experiences and point of views, even though these would turn out to be contradictory. In this way, I intend to establish a comprehensive understanding of the study area. Nevertheless, it should be noticed that the mixed methods research is differently connected to the research questions and do not include the entire study. The first and the second theme which will be presented in chapter 6 are based on mixed methods research. However, the third theme which is based on the third research question consists only of qualitative data.

In the quantitative data analysis, both univariate and bivariate analysis have been carried out by SPSS. According to Bryman (2011), univariate is associated with frequency counts of single variables while bivariate mainly refers to cross tabulations of two variables. Additionally, in order to enhance the validity of the results by eliminating chance, a chi-square test has been carried out which will be reported in chapter 5 (statistical significance is reached at less than 0,05). Also standard deviation (sd) will be presented which indicates how much variation or dispersion from the mean value that exists (e.g. +/- 1,25).

Regarding the qualitative data, the empirical findings have been analysed differently between the focus groups and the semi-structured interviews. In analyzing the focus groups, a thematic analysis has been carried out based on the two main theories of this study: social inclusion and empowerment. The semi-structured interviews have partly been analysed thematically as explained above and partly by developing a coding scheme. Thus, grounded theory has been employed through selective coding followed by saturation of different



categories (Bryman, 2011).

Finally, I shall briefly explain the coding scheme in the presentation of results and analysis. The respondents coded as 'R' refer to the participants of Cultuurlijn whereas the informants 'I' refer to the initiators and stakeholders of the project. Additionally, focus group is coded as FG followed by either 1 (Farsi-speaking focus group) or 2 (French-speaking focus group).

#### 4.6 Reliability, Validity and Generalizability/Replicability

When conducting a mixed methods approach, the most important criteria for evaluation of research is reliability, validity and replicability which shall be presented in this section (Brannen, 2005; Bryman, 2011). It has been difficult to find adequate guidelines on how to assess quality criteria when triangulating two different research methods. The quality assessment of quantitative methodology is broadly associated with measurement conditions whereas the qualitative approach focuses on words and the construction of meaning in order to develop contextual understanding (Bryman, 2011). Accordingly, quality concepts such as validity and reliability cannot, according to Brannen (2005) be applied when employing a qualitative study as it does not deal with measurement. The following section aims to address this issue and most importantly to enhance the research quality of the study as well as identify the limitations when collecting the data.

From a quantitative aspect, reliability is a question of consistency of measurement and thus requires a measure that is stable over time (Bryman, 2011). This implies that if a researcher administers a survey and later on readministers it, the result should be fairly persistent without indicating any major variation. In qualitative research on the other hand, dependability is the preferable term which rather implies that the researcher should describe the research process and possible changes that might have affected it (Bryman, 2011).

The reliability of this study has been taken into consideration, for instance by avoiding that the measure indicators lack coherence and instead relate to one another. Furthermore, the process of avoiding subjective judgements when classifying the data has also been an important factor to assess research quality (Bryman, 2011). However, the reliability of a study is difficult to attain, especially due to natural inconsistencies of the respondents' judgements over time. There are a few aspects worth mentioning in this respect. Firstly, the activities of Cultuurlijn are generally aimed at being attractive and inviting to all participants. However, due to political or cultural reasons, some activities might be experienced as inconvenient by some respondents. Hence, the results might show a lack of consistency if a researcher administers a survey before or after a participant has experienced an activity (e.g. as 'disturbing'). The factors that might affect this process are for instance unexpected events and cultural or linguistic differences. Thus, the subjectivity factors affect the stability of the research. Secondly, the reliability of the study might depend on the respondents' personal circumstances. One concern is related to the fact that the target group in focus of this study are in a precarious situation, waiting for an initial decision or even a final decision on their asylum application. It is difficult to consider that the results will not be affected if an asylum seeker has received a negative decision the day before (s)he conducts the survey. Or, could any possible fear for authorities have an impact on the quantitative data? I believe that such conflicts might question not solely the reliability of the study but also the validity, although it

is very difficult to measure the extent of it. Regarding the dependability of the study, it has been assured through providing a description of the research process.

When conducting social research, the measure has to be reliable in order to be valid which lead us to the concept of validity (Bryman, 2011). Validity basically refers to whether a measurement of a concept measures what it claims to calculate. Internal validity is related to causality whereas external validity concerns whether or not the study can be generalized to a broader population than was sampled. Bryman (2011) emphasizes that in order to claim that a study is externally valid, the researcher should employ a sample that is as representative as possible. In a qualitative point of view, the equivalent to internal validity is credibility which is a question of how believable the findings are, for instance by employing triangulation (Bryman, 2011). Transferability on the other hand parallels external validity which indicates that the main target should be to seek a deep understanding of that specific social context, or as Bryman (2011) suggests produce thick description.

The validity of this study has been taken into account by applying different measures, both from a quantitative as well as a qualitative point of view. First of all, a pilot study has been conducted to pre-test the questions on a small group and on one expert (supervisor). Moreover, the integrity of the conclusions has been attained by the triangulation of two research methods which has generated a variety of sources of evidence, including survey administration and interviews with the target groups. In qualitative ways of speaking, the transferability of the study has been attained through generating a theoretical saturation of concepts in order to explain the phenomenon at issue for this study. Lastly, replication as quality criteria is intended to enable other researchers to replicate a study. In order for this to be possible, the researcher has to thoroughly explain the methodological procedure undertaken (Bryman, 2011).

However, there are some limitations which have yet to be fully addressed. Regarding the internal validity of the study, there might be some factors that can appear as problematic. One reflection concerns the term social inclusion. The overall challenge has been whether to measure this term through objective indicators (e.g. economic situation) or subjective indicators. Thus, the question which has emerged is one of causality: In what way should a researcher measure if a cultural project (x) can promote social inclusion among the participants (y)? And, in a survey, can the respondents' judgments of feeling socially included be viewed as valid and legitimate enough? As the study deals with social research and human understanding, I believe that the respondents are the ones to judge their own perception of feeling socially included in the society. Thus, I measure the concepts from a subjective perspective. Furthermore, one issue concerns the fact that the surveys were distributed in three different languages and even though I have tried to translate the surveys as literally as possible, there might exist some differences in nuances in languages. Regarding the external validity of the study, due to limitations in terms of time and resources, the study has been employing a stratified random sampling. Thus, the findings of this study can only be generalized to the sample frame and not the population from which the sample was taken. However, this does not mean that this study is invalid or not legitimate.

## 4.7 Ethical considerations

Asylum seekers and refugees are one of the most vulnerable groups of people in the world (<http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org>). The asylum process is common to put an emotional strain on any refugee seeking protection, not to mention the traumatic experiences that the individual already might have endured. The moral and ethical aspects of this issue have thus been taken into account throughout the whole research process. Bryman (2011) identifies a set of key ethical principles which are crucial to take into consideration when applying different working methods. In order to exhibit good ethical credentials, Bryman (2011) emphasizes to be aware of the issues that might rise in contact with the research participants. These involve to avoid potential harm to the respondents, to obtain informed consent, limit invasion of their privacy and lastly to not be deceptive in any way.

First off, informed consent has been obtained through the distribution of the surveys. The participants were all provided with an information sheet which was also verbally explained to them before conducting the survey. By this means, the respondents were informed of the overall aim of the study, that the survey was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from completing it at any time. Confidentiality was also assured to the participants, meaning that the personal details of the respondents will not be used in other purposes than for the results and analysis of this study, except if the respondents have given their approval (Bryman, 2011). Moreover, the anonymity of the participants has been respected throughout the research process.

In regards to the interviews, the respondents were informed by the same ethical principles as the previous research method. The purpose of the study was explained in the beginning of the interviews, as well as ensuring their confidentiality and that all the data is for academic purposes only. The interview was preceded after I got their approval to participate. However, when the same ethical process was carried out for the three semi-structured interviews, I found that some of the respondents perceived it as unnecessary. This I believe was due to the fact that as representatives for Cultuurlijn, they wished to not be anonymous.

Nonetheless, I was faced with some ethical dilemmas in relation to both the survey administration and the focus group interviews. These matters concern what Bryman (2011) identifies as harm to participants. When distributing one of the surveys, the respondent had some difficulties to answer the research questions due to limited literacy which I believe could have had an impact on the person's self-esteem or even put him in a stressful situation. Furthermore, during the focus group interviews some sensitive and private information was revealed which has seriously been taken into consideration through keeping the data as confidential as possible. On the whole, this study has been carried out in a respectful way as possible in order to preserve the integrity of the research.

# CHAPTER 5

## 5.1 Presentation of results and analysis

In this chapter, the findings of the study will be thematically presented and then analysed in an effort to reach the aim of the study. Firstly, I will provide the reader with a brief overview of the demographic characteristics of both the survey sample and the interview subjects at issue of this research. In order to make it more comprehensible for the reader, the chapter will thereafter be divided into three central themes which are linked to the study's research questions: The role of Cultuurlijn in promoting the social inclusion of asylum seekers, Cultural action to strengthen the empowerment of asylum seekers, and lastly, Initiators' approaches to promote participants' social inclusion and empowerment. The purpose of this chapter is also to analyse the findings in relation to the theories from the third chapter. By dividing the results into different themes it will be more comprehensible for the reader to understand the associations that are made between the data collection and the relevant concepts and theories.

### *5.1.1. Introduction to the Survey respondents*

The survey sample consists of 50 participants of the Cultuurlijn project which has a population reaching a total of 227 participants. It is observed that all subjects included in the study were males ranging from 18-32 years old with mean age of 26. As previously mentioned, all of the participants were divided into three different strata groups depending on which language the individuals chose to fill out the survey. Consequently, the Farsi-speaking group represents 44 % (22 respondents); the French-speaking group 36% (18 respondents) and the English-speaking group 20 % (10 respondents).

The average level of education of the respondents is secondary school level, however the measure indicates a spread of +/- 1,25 which indicates that the data values are far from the mean (Bryman, 2011). Observing the data more closely, significant differences in the education level between the three different strata groups were noticed which might explain the large measure dispersion. It appears that around 60 % of the Farsi-speaking group reaches primary school level which for the English and French-speaking group is 10% and 17% respectively. Also, the English and French group stretch to 50% and 44% respectively on university level while in the Farsi group ca 9% have a university education. This can be explained by the fact that the education level in Afghanistan is still limited.

Furthermore, the participants rated their health status with mean health as good, though a large spread exists. Likewise, the average on happiness status showed that the most part of the participants experience themselves as happy. However, it is worth to notice that 50 % of the English group ranged from very unhappy to neither happy nor unhappy and the rest of the 50% as happy. Also, 50% of the Farsi-speaking group rated very happy while 14 % described themselves as very unhappy. The French group neither experience themselves as very unhappy nor unhappy but rather fairly distributed their rates on happy and very happy. Regarding the period of time that the respondents have been living in Brussels, the average time is 4-8 months. Nevertheless, there are variations between the three strata groups that will be noted. A large part of the English and Farsi-speaking group, i.e. approx. 42 % have been

living in Brussels for less than 4 months whereas the same amount of time for the French-speaking group is 17%. The participants who have lived in Brussels for more than 1 year reaches 30% for the English group and 50% for the French group. This implies that the French group has lived in Brussels for the longest period. The reasons for these differences can be explained by a variety of factors which cannot be explained other than on speculation. Furthermore, the country of origin of the respondents were more or less equally distributed between Nigeria, Somalia, Nepal, Jordan, Tibet, Western Sahara and Congo, though with most of the participants from Guinea (14%) and Afghanistan (46%).

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Age</b>	47	100	25.91	6,56
<b>Gender</b>			1,00	,00
Male	50	100		
<b>Language</b>			2.24	0.77
English	10	20		
French	18	36		
Farsi	22	44		
<b>Education</b>			2.58	1.25
Primary school	17	34		
Secondary school	2	4		
High school	16	32		
University	15	30		
<b>Time in Belgium</b>			2,27	1.17
Less than 4 months	16	32		
4-8 months	16	32		
8-12 months	5	10		
More than 1 year	12	24		
<b>Health status</b>			3.84	1.42
Poor	4	8		
Fair	2	4		
Good	14	28		
Very good	12	24		
Excellent	17	34		
<b>Life satisfaction</b>			3.78	1.23
Very unhappy	5	10		
Unhappy	1	2		
Neither happy nor unhappy	11	22		
Happy	16	32		
Very happy	17	34		

5.1.2. Introduction to the Interview subjects

The qualitative data is, as previously mentioned in chapter 4, based on a total of five interviews, of which two are focus groups and three are semi-structured interviews. The two focus groups which consist of a Farsi-speaking and a French-speaking group were strategically selected from the respondents of the quantitative survey. The key findings deriving from these interviews held with nine respondents will primarily be presented in the first theme (5.2) concerning the participants' experiences of social inclusion in the Belgian society and the second theme (5.3) dealing with their experiences of empowerment. All of the respondents in the focus groups are asylum seekers who are or have been residents of one of Brussels reception centers, of which some are waiting for first or final decision on their asylum application and some are living as undocumented immigrants in Brussels.

The three semi-structured interviews are conducted with the initiators/stakeholders of Cultuurlijn. One of them was conducted with a board member of the organization and the second one with the director of Globe Aroma. The third interview was conducted with two assistant directors of the Flemish Community Commission which are the policymakers that grant state subventions to support the project. The key findings deriving from these interviews will be presented in the third theme (5.4) and the results intend to answer what approaches and methods the initiators of this project consider to promote the social inclusion and empowerment of the participants.

Table 2: The interview subjects	
Focus Group 1: Farsi group Focus Group 2: French group	Theme 1 (5.2): The role of Cultuurlijn in promoting the social inclusion of asylum seekers Theme 2 (5.3): Cultural action to strengthen the empowerment of asylum seekers
Semi-structured interview 1: The Director of Globe Aroma Semi-structured interview 2: Member of the Globe Aroma Administration Semi-structured interview 3: Policy Makers of the Flemish government	Theme 3: Initiators approaches to promote social inclusion and empowerment

As mentioned above, all of the respondents of this study were men. Surely, this can be viewed as problematic from a gender perspective. Unfortunately, this issue cannot further be analyzed and dealt with due to the limited scope of this study. However, it would certainly be interesting and important to examine this matter in future research. One of the reasons why there are only men participating in the study has to do with the Cultuurlijn project itself. Globe Aroma has promoted the project to both men and women but without success. Nevertheless, this lead Globe Aroma to start Cultuurlijn for women in 2012. Another reason could be the fact that there are in general more men than women who apply for international protection in Belgium.

## 5.2. The role of Cultuurlijn in promoting the social inclusion of asylum seekers

In this theme, the main results in relation to social inclusion will be presented and analysed. In order to reach the research purpose, quantitative as well as qualitative findings will be outlined.

After examining the results in SPSS, the findings indicate that 76 % (38 respondents) feel that Cultuurlijn has either been 'helpful' or 'very helpful' to make them feel more socially included in the Belgian society (Table 1). This is against 24 % (12 respondents) who answered that the project has been unhelpful or not likely to have helped them in this matter.

	Number	%
Very unhelpful	3	6
Unhelpful	4	8
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	5	10
Helpful	16	32
Very helpful	22	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Furthermore, the respondents were asked the question: Have the cultural ambassadors helped you to feel more socially included in the Belgian society? The findings in Table 2 indicate that 42 % (21 respondents) found the team of people accompanying them to the activities as a help to feel a sense of belonging. Besides, 30% (15 respondents) answered that they considered the ambassadors as very helpful. This is opposed to 28 % (14 respondents) who did not consider the ambassadors as helpful in this matter.

	Number	%
Very unhelpful	3	6
Unhelpful	6	12
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	5	10
Helpful	21	42
Very helpful	15	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

When examining the relationship between the two variables: satisfaction with the project and feeling of social inclusion in the society, the analysis shows that the results are statistically significant ( $<0,007$ ). The findings indicate that a large number of respondents who were satisfied with the project also found it helping them in their inclusion process (Table 3). A total of 56,3% (9 respondents) who found the project as helpful to feel included in Belgium,



were also satisfied with Cultuurlijn. Moreover, ca 73% (16 respondents) who answered that the project was very helpful, were also very satisfied. However, the findings also indicate that there were people who found the project as unhelpful and unsatisfying. For instance, 50% of the people who found the project unhelpful answered that they were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with it. Furthermore, also unexpected findings were observed in Table 3 below. A number of respondents found Cultuurlijn as helpful in their inclusion process but were 'very unsatisfied/unsatisfied with it'. The reasons for these answers are difficult to explain.

	Very unhelpful (%)	Unhelpful (%)	Neither helpful nor unhelpful (%)	Helpful (%)	Very helpful (%)	Total (%)
Very unsatisfied	33,3	-	-	6,3	-	4
Unsatisfied	-	-	20	6,3	-	4
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	33,3	50	20	6,3	4,5	12
Satisfied	33,3	25	60	56,3	22,7	38
Very satisfied	-	25	-	25	72,7	42
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	-

The aim of the focus group discussions is to provide us with deeper insight and understanding of the result emerging from the quantitative results. The focus of the discussion was concentrated around respondents' experiences of participating in Cultuurlijn and how these experiences have an impact on their feeling of social inclusion in the society.

After analysing the statements of the respondents on the topic of social inclusion, I found several similarities but also contradictions and tensions between their perspectives. When being asked about the Cultuurlijn project, most of the respondents answered that the positive aspects were related to the social relationships that were established and the possibility to discover the host city. As one respondent stated:

*“In general it makes us get familiarized with the society and become acquainted with people that we don't know...eh..well in some of the activities there are Belgian people that participate or also asylum seekers like us...”* (FG1 – R1)

On the topic of social inclusion, the respondents discussed what the concept meant to them. The majority of the participants emphasized the importance of understanding the culture, laws and customs of the host society, without forgetting their own culture and identity. Other respondents added that to actively participate in the social life and not to stay isolated was a way to become socially included in the society. As one respondent pointed out:

*“To be socially included in the society is to understand others, live with others, to adapt to their way of living, try to understand their culture, try to integrate, but it's always difficult”* (FG2 - R4)



Besides, one of the respondents expressed the difficulties that asylum seekers encounter when arriving to a country of which the customs and social rules are different from their own. R1 stated:

*“...it's not easy to really get to know them, here they kiss each other when they say hi, or shake hands, for someone who's not from here it can be perceived as a bit strange [...] what I mean is that it's important to learn and understand the customs of this country, how to say hi and so on...”* (FG1 - R1)

Yet another respondent expressed the idea of social inclusion in a fairly contradictory way. On a broader interpretation, one could suggest that the respondent meant that the form of inclusion that he describes is not possible for “them”, i.e. asylum seekers since “we” do not have the same rights as the citizens of the host country, R2 put it as follows:

*“The inclusion is to live with the Belgians and live like a Belgian. That means understanding the rules, laws, attitudes [...] but, we should have the same rights as Belgians to be able to live like a Belgian.”* (FG2 - R2)

Concerning the effects that Cultuurlijn had on the sense of social inclusion in the Belgian society the opinions are divided. Most of the respondents agreed that it helped them on a mental and social level; however, they are not as certain whether these feelings are temporary or enduring. As two of the respondents, each from different focus groups described:

*“...so how can cultural projects as Cultuurlijn help us? Well, concerts are good, you know it makes you forget your problems, you go there, listen to music a couple of hours, dance a bit and then that's it. Maybe you will get acquainted with people a couple of times but that doesn't mean it will last”* (FG1 - R1)

*“In fact, it is mostly the joy and well-being that Cultuurlijn brings. But do not think that it can have an influence on the regularization procedure. It's two different things”* (FG2 - R4)

Interpreting the two statements, one might conclude that the project acts as a distraction for the asylum seekers, brings them some happy moments, however, it only lasts temporarily. The risk of being deported still exists and thus the problems and worries might resurface again. However, on the contrary, one of the respondents from FG2 pointed out that:

*“You meet with others and obviously some relationships are developed, and they grew stronger and can become lifelong. And all starts with Cultuurlijn. The meeting attests that it is not only 'hanging-outs' and activities. It's something deeper”* (FG2 - R3)

Moreover, when specifically being asked if Cultuurlijn leads to a sense of social inclusion, most of the respondents answered in a hesitant and ambiguous way. Some respondents meant that it depends on the persons attitude, the first impression that is made to others and that this further determines the degree of inclusion the participants experience. As one of the respondents expressed it:

*“...and with Cultuurlijn I got to know others, got new friends, who are like brothers to me, we always hang out nowadays, and thanks to Cultuurlijn I have discovered places that I didn't even thought I would set foot in or enter in my lifetime” (FG2 - R3)*

From the last part of the sentence, one might suggest that the respondent has experienced a form of exclusion from places that he initially believed he did not have access to.

One other discussion concerned the value of being able to speak the language of the host society. However, FG1 (Farsi-speaking) was the only group that mentioned the issue of lack in language skills. The group was discussing the reasons why people from African countries such as Guinea and Morocco seemed to be more integrated in the Belgian society than people from Middle East countries.

*“But somehow I feel that people from African countries are more integrated or...Belgian people really like their culture” (FG1 - R1)*

*“Maybe it's because they share the same language...yes probably... but I really think it would be good if Cultuurlijn could have more activities that also reflect our cultures” (FG1 - R2)*

Lastly, the respondents were asked if they personally felt socially included in the Belgian society. The question evoked considerable discussion and disagreement, mainly regarding the issue of citizenship. Some respondents meant that there is a difference between being included culturally and administratively. As one of the respondents clearly explained:

*“I still don't feel well included in the Belgian society because I don't have any papers or citizenship. That counts too! To be included, it also means to have the peace of mind of a Belgian. And I don't have that peace of mind because I can be called to be deported any day, tomorrow or the day after” (FG2 - R3)*

The same respondent further explains that he feels totally included on a cultural level, but not on an administrative level:

*“Administratively speaking, I'm stuck, as I have not a legal residence permit, it would be an illusion to think that I am included in the Belgian society.” (FG2 - R3)*

Furthermore, a discussion took place between two respondents about the principles of social inclusion. Whereas one respondent was claiming that a person cannot be included in the society without citizenship, the other respondent believed that it indeed is possible since one is after all living in the society at the time being. To illustrate a part of their discussion:

*“You say that I'm saying this because I have to leave Belgium, no! I'm saying more than that, can you really say that something is yours if you've not been accepted? For example you have a car in front of you, but when it's not your property, can you really claim that it is yours? I'm telling you that as long as I don't have my citizenship, I can't be socially included in this society!” (FG1 - R3)*

*“In my opinion, you are wrong... because for the time being you are living in this society, because you have people who have been living here for ten years without papers as an illegal [...] he can't go back to his country of origin, so he has to try to do his best to be a part of this society, even if it is really difficult” (FG1 - R1)*

After a time of argumentation, a third respondent contributed with his perspective on social inclusion. The respondent argued that the aspects of learning and to seek belonging are advantages for a person which occurs naturally when living in a country. However, these experiences do not necessarily mean that one is socially included in society. R2 intervened in the discussion by saying:

*“Ok, let me tell you guys something else. When you live in another country, you learn the countries culture and try to somehow be part of it. This question is different from what you are arguing about, to really become included in that society, but to learn the countries culture is an advantage for you. If I learn about the Belgian culture and its history it can come handy for me even if I don't have a citizenship, but this doesn't mean that I see myself as included in the Belgian society” (FG1 – R2)*

Lastly, some respondents discussed that social inclusion is important for everyone and not only asylum seekers. In the following sequence, one respondent explained that even the cultural ambassadors that voluntarily participate in Cultuurlijn are in need of feeling included. The respondent claimed that:

*“Cultuurlijn makes sense for everybody, not only for asylum seekers...there are Belgians who also need social inclusion. This exchange is also a rare opportunity for us to finally bring something to the Belgians. Some “ambassadors” do not only come to Cultuurlijn to do good, it's also because they need it. In some ways, it brings them a smile, plenty of energy, something missing in the western countries” (FG2 - R4)*

Conclusively, as it is illustrated above, social inclusion is perceived as a controversial topic. The majority of the respondents agreed that the project enabled them to gain a better social life as well as decreasing the psychological burdens caused by the asylum process. However, as for social inclusion, the respondents' opinions are rather polarized and the phenomenon is explained on the basis of each participant's personal experience and point of view on this aspect.

### *5.2.1 Analysis of results*

To what extent did Cultuurlijn promote a sense of social inclusion among the participants? How can the asylum seekers' subjective perceptions of participating in Cultuurlijn be seen from a social inclusion perspective? And, what were the main reasons for not seeing oneself as included in the Belgian society?

As presented in the findings above, the majority of the respondents believed that Cultuurlijn as well as the accompanying cultural ambassadors have helped them to feel more socially included in the Belgian society. Yet, further indications show that some respondents were not as convinced that the project or accompaniment helped them in this matter. The picture becomes slightly more complicated when directing attention to the variety of perspectives that came forth during the focus groups. In relation to social inclusion, the respondents particularly stressed the importance of creating social networks, actively participating in the social life and avoiding isolation. According to Hynes (2011), the lack of political belonging, namely to not have residence permits, makes it important to create social networks in order to develop *another* form of belonging. This form of belonging which is based on social interactions can be viewed upon as a coping strategy (Hynes, 2011). It can

thus be acknowledged that the political circumstances that the respondents of the study live in entail some negative experiences which can more or less be coped with by making new friends and get familiarized with the environment. Other aspects, such as understanding the culture, customs and ways of living in Belgium were also found to be important in order to feel more socially included. In addition to that, one of the focus groups mentioned language skills as an essential tool. In that respect, to be able to enter different subsystems of society, individuals need to have communication capabilities (Jönhill, 2012). Communication does not only include an exchange of words, but also gestures, behaviour and how we dress. Overall, it is about understanding the context that individuals find themselves in and be capable to interact and exchange information. Consequently, by understanding the Belgian culture and customs and by having language skills, respondents were provided the means to feel socially included. Significantly important, the Farsi-speaking group perceived themselves as less integrated in the society than other ethnic groups in Brussels who share the language of the host society. Thus, their lack of communication capabilities prevents them from having a sense of belonging in some specific contexts.

Furthermore, Hynes (2011) argues that the social networks that surround a person enable him/her to survive, acquire information, gain awareness of rights and to simply "feel human within a system that is dehumanizing to asylum seekers" (Hynes, 2011, p.155). The *dehumanizing* aspect was particularly stressed when some respondents questioned to what extent a person can be socially included without the same political rights as the citizens of the country.

Furthermore, the respondents agreed that Cultuurlijn had positive impacts on their lives, although they hesitated whether these social and mental benefits were temporary or enduring. The respondents' perceptions of the positive effects of Cultuurlijn as short-lived and temporary was related to the burden of the asylum procedure constantly present in their minds. Many respondents thus perceived the participation in Cultuurlijn as a way to escape this distress. According to Hynes (2011), the emotional state that the asylum seekers face can be understood through the concept of *liminality*. This expression refers to the process of leaving one's own country of origin and still not being accepted in the host country which puts the individual in a liminal position creating a feeling of 'neither here nor there'. It could thus be acknowledged that the respondents' experiences indicate that they are living in a 'state of limbo' imposed by the authorities' exclusionary policies. Hynes (2011) claims that this policy-imposed liminality could be resisted by developing social networks - a form of belonging which becomes a matter of survival. For some respondents, Cultuurlijn lead to gaining more social networks out of which some relationships were even believed to last for a lifetime.

Additionally, a person's attitude and ability to establish positive relationships with others was believed to be an important factor to feel socially included. Some respondents expressed that the process of gaining a sense of social inclusion is conditional and depends on a person's approach to others. According to Jönhill (2012), a person can be divided into a biological-, psychological- and social being which shapes us as individuals. Through the different roles that we have in life, we also create a social identity which refers to how we build, interpret and understand ourselves and others. These factors influence how we approach and interact with our surrounding world. Regarding the value respondents attached to social relationships, one might assume that the participants realized that the only way to create a sense of belonging was to take initiatives and search for it.

Concerning their own sense of inclusion in the Belgian society, the respondents had dualistic and opposing views on the social inclusion phenomenon. These different perspectives existed between the focus groups but also within the groups. The majority of the respondents answered that they did not feel socially included. The discussion on the reasons behind this answer is expressed differently depending on which focus group we observe, even though the meaning is similar. In the French focus group, the discussion was focused on cultural and administrative inclusion. The respondents perceived themselves as included on a cultural level but due to their legal status, to believe that they are socially included in Belgium would only be an illusion. In the Farsi focus group, the discussion was rather referred to the lack of citizenship and the effects that it has on the social inclusion process of asylum seekers. Two main standpoints were observed, in which one respondent claimed that it is not possible to be included without citizenship while the other respondent argued that inclusion is achievable since one is, to some extent, communicating and engaging in society. Lastly, a third perspective was presented, concerning the advantages that come forth when learning the culture and language as well as developing social networks *despite* of not having a citizenship. Two different perspectives will now be applied which represent the social inclusion theory: a Luhmann perspective and an Arendt perspective.

From a Luhmann perspective, the society can only be observed as a communicative system, in which we are all included as long as we can communicate (Braeckman, 2006). Social inclusion thus becomes a question of belonging or non-belonging to the different subsystems of society, such as one's circle of friends, family, organizations, cyberspace and so forth. As follows, we should not limit the concept of inclusion/exclusion to a dichotomic "either/ or" - perspective. Thus, people are basically included and excluded at the same time when it comes to the different social contexts of society. On the other hand, seen from an Arendt perspective, individuals who are stateless and have no nationality status become totally excluded, not only from the society, but also as members of the human race (Benhabib, 2005). Arendt argues that every human being should have *the rights to have rights* as well as belong to some community or state in the world and that we as humans have the duty to guarantee these civil and political rights. When someone is not accepted by any state at all, the individual is condemned to live in a *state of limbo*. Taking into account the results of this research, the Luhmann discourse can be identified in the different ways the respondents perceived social inclusion. The respondents expressed that they felt included in the different social subsystems of the society, such as on a cultural and social level. However, most of the respondents ultimately expressed that they did not feel socially included in the Belgian society seeing that they were excluded on a political level and for some also culturally. A particularly telling example of this was when two respondents disagreed on the meaning of social inclusion as something unachievable without citizenship (R3) versus something that is inevitable regardless of one's legal status (R1). Seen from a Luhmann perspective, exclusion from one subsystem can create a domino effect which excludes a person from other subsystems. This is the case for the respondents of this study as they are not members of the political system, which in turn results in reductions of entitlements, rights and services (ID-card, employment etc.), not to mention the constant risk of total exclusion from the nation through authority expulsion. Thus, viewing the respondents' statements from a Luhmann perspective enables us to understand the reasons why some respondents agreed that: "*it would be an illusion to think that I'm socially included in the Belgian society*". Luhmann (as cited in

Braeckman, 2006) argues, however, that in spite of these obstructions, we are not excluded from society as such, as long as we have communication capabilities. This aspect can be related to R1's statement when expressing that one can certainly become socially included in the society by creating social networks and being engaged in learning the country's culture and language. Contrarily, seen from an Arendt perspective, as stateless without basic civil and political rights and without belonging to any human community, it could be argued that some of the respondents are excluded from what should be a right for all human beings. This aspect can be related to R3's statement when expressing that one is excluded from the society without citizenship rights. R3 further metaphorically explains the exclusionary aspects of not having citizenship: *"If you want to go somewhere, when you are not the owner of "it", do you say that... for example you have a car in front of you, but when it's not your property, can you really claim that it is yours?"*.

Finally, it is valuable to consider the conclusion of Hynes' (2011) analysis. In accordance with the author, I believe that the policies of the authorities are based on the idea that integration should only occur after an asylum seeker has been granted a positive decision. However, Hynes claims that belonging rather becomes an outcome of the issues and stress that the asylum seekers experience when waiting for their status determination. The individuals thus cope with liminality by avoiding contact with the authorities and direct towards forming other forms of belonging. Social inclusion, Hynes (2011) concludes, occurs in those contexts where asylum seekers feel a sense of welcome.

### 5.3. Cultural participation to strengthen the empowerment of asylum seekers

The findings related to the concept of empowerment, which emerged from both the survey responses and the focus group interviews, will now be outlined and afterwards analysed.

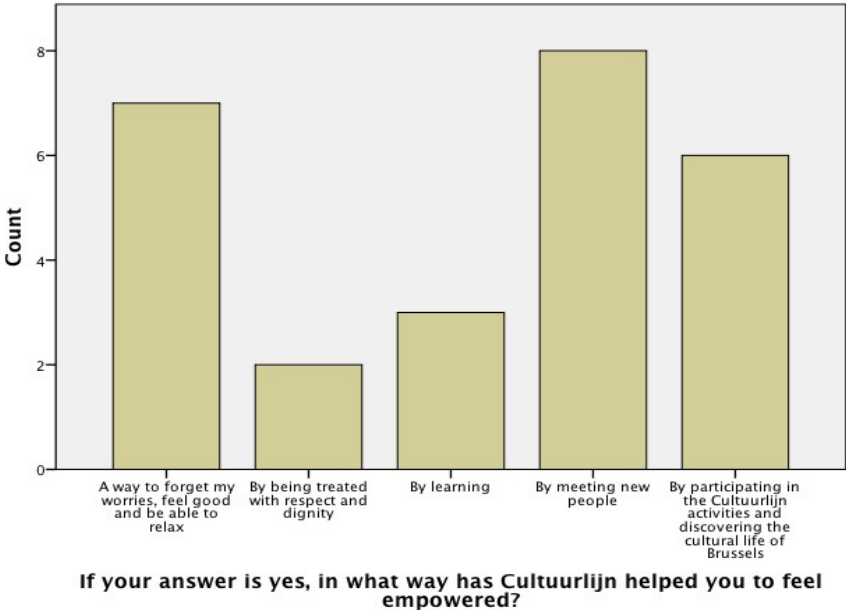
The survey results on the topic of empowerment gives us an indication of whether the Cultuurlijn project has made the participants feel more empowered or not (Table 1). The results indicate that a total of 66% (33 respondents) believe that Cultuurlijn has made them feel more empowered whereas 28% (14 respondents) answer that the project has not affected them in that manner. It should be noted that there was a non-response of 3 respondents and thus this question collected 47 answers.

	Number	%
Yes	33	66
No	14	28
Non-response	3	6
<b>Total</b>	50	100

Thereafter, the following supplementary question was asked: If your answer is yes, in what way has Cultuurlijn helped you to feel empowered? Of the 33 respondents who answered 'Yes' on the previous question, 26 replied how Cultuurlijn had made them empowered. The answers are categorized and presented in Figure 1. The results attest that ca 31% of the



respondents believed that they got empowered by meeting new people, ca 27% by forgetting their worries and being able to relax and 23% by participating in the Cultuurlijn activities and discovering the city. Furthermore, 11,5% answered that they got empowered by learning and 7,5% by being treated with respect and dignity.



The relationship between empowerment and the importance of cultural ambassadors has been analysed and shows us that there is a statistically significant relationship  $p < 0,01$ . The results indicate that 90,9% (20 respondents) that found the cultural ambassadors very important also answered that they feel empowered. Contrarily, of the people that answered that Cultuurlijn did not make them feel empowered, there were only 9,1%, that is, 2 respondents that found the ambassadors as very important. However, when examining the people who answered 'Important', the difference between the 'empowered' and 'non-empowered' is only 10%. Accordingly, 54,5%, i.e. 12 respondents that found the team of people accompanying them as 'important' also felt empowered while 45,5% (10 respondents) had the same answer but did not feel empowered. In Table 2, Empowerment is measured through 'yes' and 'no' and importance of cultural ambassadors by 'unimportant' and so on.

	Unimportant (%)	Important (%)	Very important (%)	Total (%)
Yes (%)	33,3	54,5	90,9	70,2
No (%)	66,7	45,5	9,1	29,8
<b>Total (%)</b>	100	100	100	100

Additionally, interesting findings were observed when analysing the data of Empowerment in relation to Social inclusion which are worth mentioning. The level of statistical significance

was set to  $p < 0,003$  which makes the data more valid by eliminating chance. As Table 3 indicates, totally 29 respondents who found themselves empowered by Cultuurlijn also believed the project to be very helpful/helpful to feel socially included. On the contrary, 6 respondents who did not feel empowered by Cultuurlijn answered very helpful/helpful when being asked about their level of social inclusion.

	Very Unhelpful (%)	Unhelpful (%)	Neither helpful nor unhelpful (%)	Helpful (%)	Very helpful (%)	Total (%)
Yes (%)	0	75	20	87,6	80	70,2
No (%)	100	25	80	13,3	20	29,8
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100

The focus groups shall now be presented to enhance the understanding of the results which have so far been outlined. One of the themes in the focus groups was related to the concept of empowerment and whether Cultuurlijn could contribute to feeling empowered. Besides, the respondents discussed what obstacles that prevent them from feeling empowered in the society.

On the topic of empowerment, the respondents shared their experiences and assigned different values and meanings to this central issue. Yet, there were many similarities and aspects that they had in common about the ways Cultuurlijn helped them to be empowered and the barriers they have experienced which makes that process more difficult. The majority of the respondents expressed the value of meeting others, particularly to be acquainted with people from different cultures and backgrounds. To be able to meet social workers, exchange ideas and learn is further mentioned as something important. As one respondent stated:

*“I have met a lot of different people, among them social workers... and of course we learn a lot from them, for example we went to the cinemas last week and afterwards, we discussed and shared our different opinions which was a very good experience” (FG1 – R1)*

However, the reasons for participating in the first place is not only to become acquainted with others but also a way to reduce the mental distress that the participants encounter. Two respondents, each from different focus groups put it as follows:

*“The purpose of my participation was rather to escape, to not stay locked in and isolated all the time. At first it was just a distraction” (FG2 – R2)*

*“A person that is waiting for a decision obviously has a lot of stress and pressure and this project Cultuurlijn sometimes makes those feelings of stress decrease [...] the project makes us forget our problems and sometimes frustrations...” (FG1 - R1)*

It seems that the mental aspect is a crucial consideration when it comes to the purpose for participating in Cultuurlijn. The general consensus in the focus groups is that Cultuurlijn enables them to break away from all the emotional strain and administrative challenges that is



associated with the asylum process. In that respect, some mentioned a feeling of freedom when participating in Cultuurlijn. One respondent claimed that:

*“Cultuurlijn involves moments of relief for people, let you forget some of your problems and be free of the worries and stress that you have when you're at the reception center. Everything is about freedom with Cultuurlijn. And there's no obligations, you choose your own activities and that makes you feel more independent”* (FG2 – R4)

Yet another respondent expressed the dimension of freedom in Cultuurlijn:

*“Globe Aroma does not introduce the concept of hierarchy, control and demands. Just the idea of voluntary participation creates a space of freedom. Everyone has and takes his own responsibilities, and the group is free to be themselves”* (FG2 - R3)

Furthermore, when discussing about Cultuurlijn, some respondents remark on the benefits that come from participating in the project that otherwise might have been lost. One of the participants explained that:

*“Cultuurlijn it's pretty simple, it gives you pleasure. And beyond the pleasure it gives you an idea of what this society is like. With Cultuurlijn you quickly discover new places and get new knowledge, though it would have probably taken a much longer time. Cultural life, good meetings with others, these are not things that are easy otherwise”* (FG2 – R4)

Besides, some respondents explained that in spite of their difficult circumstances, the necessity to recognize oneself as an independent individual capable of achieving one's goals and future dreams still exists. One respondent stated:

*“Even if it's difficult for refugees, it depends what visions we have for our future, what plans, what goals, I know that even if it will be really difficult I have to stay here, because I don't have a choice”* (FG1 - R1)

Both of the focus groups discussed the value of being outgoing and approachable towards people. Two respondents, each from different focus groups put it as follows:

*“I have noticed one thing, if you wait for 'that' day to come, it will never come to you. But, we foreigners we always seek to meet others, we provoke, and they say 'oh that's the people of Petit Château, they don't have papers, they are womanizers', no, it's not that, we really are in need of friendship”* (FG2 - R4)

*“Today, I'm more open as a person than before, so I have found a self-confidence by thinking: If someone can do something, than you can also do it. It depends on how we think and how we approach things in life. If we stay in our room all day and don't seek to develop with the society, obviously that becomes a disadvantage for us. But no one will come to you and say all this, it's up to us”* (FG1 – R2)

Equally important, the respondents were discussing the barriers that they face in their everyday lives. One respondent explained a situation that occurred:

*“At a party a couple of weeks ago I was drinking with my teachers and then two girls came up to me and asked me where I come from. I said that I'm Afghan but that I've lived in Iran for all my life, then she told me: 'are you a Taliban?' You see, why is it like this? They give you a label based on where you come from”* (FG1 - R1)

Another respondent explained some barriers that hinders him to feel empowered:

*“...this law is terrible, the terrible thing is that, they should have a law that if it takes more than two to three months, they should give us a decision, but you know the thing that the social workers help you and then we have to learn their language and we do our best, and then suddenly after six months or a year they say we have to leave, this law is really horrible” (FG1 - R3)*

Lastly, one respondent described one of the ways the difficulties of being an asylum seeker can be overcome. R2 stated:

*“It is degrading to realize that because of our irregular situation, we cannot have any position in the society! Having no activity, no program, you feel lost. And Cultuurlijn provides some of these possibilities, it is a different way of learning” (FG2 - R2)*

To sum up, the majority of the respondents believed that Cultuurlijn has helped them to feel empowered. Several contributors have been identified by the focus groups, such as to interact with others, divert their attention to other things in life than the status of their asylum application and the learning possibilities and notion of freedom that is related to participating in Cultuurlijn. Some respondents further expressed the importance of being active and maintain the hope of a brighter future. However, some obstacles were also mentioned which makes them vulnerable and feel left out.

### *5.3.1. Analysis of the results*

To what extent did the project Cultuurlijn promote a sense of empowerment? How can the asylum seekers' subjective perceptions of participating in Cultuurlijn be seen from an empowerment perspective?

The majority of the respondents believed that Cultuurlijn made them feel more empowered while nearly one-third of them did not feel empowered. The respondents further judged that this was mainly enabled through meeting new people, being able to relax, participating in Cultuurlijn activities, obtaining new knowledge and by being treated with respect. During the focus group interviews, these aspects also turned out to be the most essential issues discussed, though not directly related to empowerment. However, seeing that these results are based on the subjective judgments of the respondents, does it ascertain that they in fact have been empowered?

Empowerment is defined as *“the theory concerned with how people may gain collective control over their lives, so as to achieve their interests as a group, and a method by which social workers seek to enhance the power of people who lack it”* (Adams, 2008, p. 17). Thus, the question is which factors that contributed to empowerment as well as acted as barriers in this process. As follows, I intend to examine the empowering and disempowering factors that appeared in the findings on a micro-level (interpersonal/social interactions) and on a macro-level (legislation/policies).

The findings show that the majority of the respondents believed that the meetings enabled through Cultuurlijn were a contributing factor to learn, exchange ideas and obtain new knowledge. Some respondents further add that these learning processes and achievements

would have taken a much longer time without Cultuurlijn. According to Adams (2008), a way to overcome the barriers of empowerment is by networking, meaning to build trusting relationships, share information and experiences as well as developing common strategies. Also an active participation is recognized as an important part of empowerment. However, Adams (2008) argues that people cannot become empowered only by being invited to participate; they also have to feel empowered. That requires that a person's internal experiences, feelings and thoughts are in harmony with what they do (ibid.). As the findings indicate, the outcomes of participating were to gain new knowledge and skills and thereby some expressed to have become more self-confident.

Another recurring issue was the elements of freedom that Cultuurlijn granted to the participant asylum seekers. In this respect, some respondents stressed that in contrast to the authorities, Cultuurlijn acts from a set of values and practices which are not based on hierarchy and control. This aspect, they believed, created a sense of freedom and relief which enabled them to be themselves: *"you choose your own activities and feel more independent"*.

Seen from an Empowerment perspective, authority refers to legitimate distribution of power and is thus hierarchical by nature (SinghaRoy, 2001). SinghaRoy (2001) thus claims that this hierarchisation has placed people in different social positions in society, of which some are living at the margins of the society. Contrarily, the voluntary actions initiated by NGO's play a crucial role in the empowerment of marginalised people (ibid.). By being given a possibility of decision-making, a sense of freedom is gained. Thus, the respondents felt a contrast between the power structure of the authorities and the NGO. In participating in Cultuurlijn, the respondents could 'break free from their shackles' and experience an environment where they were able to decide according to their own preferences. Cultuurlijn clearly provide an empowering framework which has a positive and deep impact on the participants' lives.

Furthermore, some respondents discussed that it is important to struggle through the difficulties one is facing and despite the hardship, believe that they can achieve their future goals and dreams. Even though the respondents appeared to see this as a difficult task, they expressed that the only way to reach their goals is to view themselves as capable individuals. The disadvantages of *"staying in our room all day"* and *"waiting for 'that' day to come"* were explained as something which prevents a person from reaching one's goals. On the other hand, a few respondents were not as optimistic. The hardships of asylum-seeking were expressed as too great which made them question the point of even having hopes and dreams. According to Adams (2008), the present and future lives of individuals are shaped by their previous experiences, skills, knowledge and feelings which can act as tools to become (dis-)empowered. On a micro-level, these aspects might affect us in a way which makes us feel confident, have a positive sense of self and wanting to struggle to reach our goals even if we on a macro-level are restricted by legal policies to achieve some of these goals. However, Adams acknowledges that *"individuals are not the sole cause of their problems, so the problems cannot be solved merely by a change in the self"* (Adams, 2008, p.102). Similarly, Fox (2001) points out that the human rights of refugees are not sufficiently valued which obviously affects their quality of life. Bearing these aspects in mind, I ask myself whether it is possible for a person to feel empowered if one has not reached one's goals and particularly, being prevented by authorities' exclusionary processes to be able to reach these goals? Even though the respondents believe in their own ability to get where they want in life, everything

can be taken away from them as soon as they are placed in detention and deported from the country. In line with SinghaRoy (2001), I thus wonder if the process of empowerment of marginalised groups will even be effective without a culture of protest, resistance and opposition against the current power structure. The consequences that are due to the asylum seekers legal position in society (macro-level) can thus cause a feeling of powerlessness and paralyzing fear *or* a sense of never wanting to give up and still be an active individual (micro-level).

Similarly, some respondents pointed out one issue that was perceived as an preventive factor in feeling secure about themselves. The experience of discrimination and stigmatization was expressed by some respondents as disturbing and prevented them from feeling welcome in the host country. According to Adams (2008), discriminatory treatment is related to empowerment and can be viewed as a challenging structural barrier in society which prevents people from achieving their potential. Seeing that it is a structural issue, NGO's cannot be awaited to challenge discriminatory structures in an individual's life, but it could make people feel empowered (Adams, 2008). This aspect can be related to one respondent who expressed a feeling of disgrace due to the unprivileged situation as asylum seeker but claimed that Cultuurlijn had provided him with some possibilities which would not have occurred otherwise. According to Fox (2001), the marginalised are usually without employment, without the possibility to have a social life and maybe stigmatized because of their unprivileged situation. Some may thus accept their position in society by endurance while others may become frustrated.

Lastly, it can be recognized that there was a strong connection between empowerment and cultural ambassadors (Table 2) which basically indicated that the respondents who felt empowered also found the ambassadors as important. This can be linked with the importance of networking and social interactions in order to feel empowered (Adams, 2008). Likewise, that goes also for empowerment and social inclusion (Table 3) which implied that more than half of the respondents who felt empowered also believed Cultuurlijn had helped them to feel socially included in the society. According to SinghaRoy (2001), empowerment occurs in the process when the disadvantaged people enter and feel included in the mainstream society.

#### 5.4. Initiators' approaches to promote social inclusion and empowerment

In this section, the qualitative data which has emerged from the three semi-structured interviews with the organizers of Cultuurlijn will be presented. The aim shall be to answer the third research question: *What approaches and methods do the initiators/stakeholders of this project consider to promote the empowerment and social inclusion of the participants?*

Considering the different roles and responsibilities that the informants have for the project, it is important to note that the Director (I1) and the Member (I2) of the Globe Aroma Administration Council shall be named as 'initiators' and the Assistant Directors of the Flemish Community Commission (I3, I4) as 'stakeholders'.

The first question was to seek to understand how Cultuurlijn was established and what the aim of the project is. I1 explained that the idea of Cultuurlijn was based on the awareness that the cultural institutions were unknown for many of the asylum seekers. In the following sentence, I1 explained that the asylum seekers, who came regularly to the workshops of Globe

Aroma, did not know the cultural institutions that were located on their daily passage between the reception center Petit Château and their organization. I1 further mentioned that:

*“On their way to Globe Aroma they pass: four art galleries, theatres, some concert halls... and we realized that even if the asylum seekers would be interested of these cultural places, they can't see those buildings the same way as we do, that you actually can have access to see an art exhibition. I really found that a pity. The idea was to focus on the city center, to create this 'Line of Culture', like a tram way with its each stops. So that's the idea behind 'Cultuurlijn'” (I1)*

According to I2, Cultuurlijn was established to create a possibility for the asylum seekers at Petit Château to participate in different cultural events and thereby spend some leisure time. I2 stated:

*“The first step for the refugees is just to get outside Petit Château, to learn how the city works, to meet people, to see that there are possibilities for them [...] but it's difficult because there are big fancy buildings, you don't know how to behave in these buildings, you don't know how much it costs, how the performances work, what the cultural code is behind it” (I2)*

Concerning the aim of Cultuurlijn, the initiators explained that the main purpose is to enable newcomers to discover the artistic and cultural offer of Brussels as well as developing social networks in the city. Besides, I1 stressed the importance of learning the social values of the country, such as freedom of speech.

*“Another purpose is also for the participants to get to know the social values of this country, for example to know the meaning of freedom of speech and to show that this freedom is often expressed in artistic works” (I1)*

When being asked how a cultural project such as Cultuurlijn can help the participants, all the informants particularly emphasized the social benefits that emerge from meeting others. Both the initiators and the stakeholders related to the importance of the social interactions that take place through Cultuurlijn. I1 and I4 stated:

*“The heart of the project is based on the meeting. It simply starts between the residents of Petit Château, after the activities they get to know each other better, and usually people have a tendency to be in their own communities, the Afghans, the Congolese, the Guineans, but the simple act of going out together, to share an experience, to talk, it somehow switches off the segregation in these communities” (I1)*

*“A real interaction, it's not just a monolog, even dialog and people meet eachother and through this encounter they get to know what it's like to live in Belgium and get to know the culture, institutions but also the way of life” (I4)*

Besides, I1 pointed out that Cultuurlijn is the first friendly meeting the newcomers have with Belgians. I1 stated that:

*“Most of the Belgians that they have encountered are officials or lawyers with whom they have only talked concerning their asylum application. With this project, we try to act on a different basis, that is, to make them feel, at least during the time of an activity, included in the society... and to taste an encounter that is not totally conditioned by their status. It is not so often that they get to meet other Belgians and to feel a part of the society” (I1)*



The opinions of the informants on the concept of social inclusion differed in several aspects. The concept was perceived as complex and wide and the informants assigned different meanings to the issue. However, one aspect that they all had in common was the importance of the social networks that link people to each other as well as participating in society on an equal basis. I1 and I4 stated:

*“I believe that the social network is essential, to avoid isolation and solitude. For me the social network, the contact with others is what makes us stay alive, for asylum seekers it becomes a way to cope with the reality and their challenges” (I1)*

*“I think it's also about giving people the chance to participate in so called society on very different levels [...] being able to participate in almost everything that the society provides I think” (I4)*

On the other hand, one of the informants highlighted that:

*“Instead of talking about inclusion into a community, first of all we should talk about communit-i-e-s and not look at it like something you either belong to or don't belong to, but rather some kind of continuum [...] for instance, if you have Moroccan origins, you might have a family network, you might have a network from a mosque, but you might also have a network in school, or in your neighbourhood, or on Facebook, most of the people still have some kind of network which they can fall back on” (I2)*

Additionally, being asked whether Cultuurlijn can lead to social inclusion, one informant indicated that cultural participation is not only a way to feel socially included, but also a matter of making the integration process easier. I1 claimed that:

*“Culture is an area where you don't need papers to participate. Considering that during the first six months any applicant cannot work at all, going out and explore is not only a way of feeling socially included, but also a way of preparing the work for regularization and reintegration. To be included also means to be involved in the society, aside from all the administrative procedures” (I1)*

On the contrary, I2 seemed to be more hesitant in relation to the social inclusion statement. The informant stated that the project can help them for sure but that there is no guaranty. In the most cases, it depends on the person who participates. I2 further stated that:

*“They travel because of war situations, some of them, they are political refugees, some have been tortured, it's not easy to come over these things... just by visiting a cultural center, but it will only be one of the few small small steps one has to take, so it does not solve the problem, of course not... but it can help something, a small step I think” (I2)*

On the topic of empowerment, the initiators expressed some mixed views, though some similarities were observed. One of the informants perceived the word as problematic due to its colonial connotation. I1 stated:

*“Yes, yes! But I'm thinking whether empowerment is the right term to put on it, because, it still has this kind of colonial connotation, like you have the power and you give it to 'them'. [...] Cultuurlijn is about confronting people with what they can be, can do, providing them with a framework, which allows them to do something constructive, to work on themselves, and that will enhance their well-being of course.*

*For some people just the very small fact that they dare to join in an activity might give them so much self-confidence, and that can open doors for them” (I2)*

According to I1, the asylum seekers that participate in Cultuurlijn are already strong. However, they might lose their courage and hope when they face all the challenges related to the asylum procedure and thereby lose confidence. I1 put it as follows:

*“But, it's also common that they lose courage and hope. After their arrival a feeling of relief comes, they think that they finally have succeeded, they get to know the country and want to be a part of it and stay here. But then they realize that the path will be long and difficult, all the administrative procedures, the interviews, mentally, all this is very heavy. By this way, a considerable loss of confidence sets in. So with Cultuurlijn the word confidence is very important, we give them confidence for who they are, we attempt to give back some confidence to everyone by opening the doors of events that seems to only be for "others", to show them respect and that we believe in them, I think that really makes the participants feel empowered” (I1)*

In the interview with the policy makers, the two informants explain the reason behind the decision to grant financial support to the Cultuurlijn project. I3 started by explaining:

*“We work with organizations that have ideas and concepts, and we develop these concepts and then try to seek support for these concepts, so what we have is some laws that mainly give us a reference. And if there's a match between our policy and their concept we can give them financial support” (I3)*

Regarding the aim of giving financial support to Cultuurlijn, I4 stated:

*“The Urban fund is focused on people living in poverty or precarious situations but also newcomers, so that's why Cultuurlijn fits the picture [...] one of our operational objectives is about cultural participation, meaning that we support socio-cultural institutions in order to reach a more diverse public and newer public and that's why Cultuurlijn fits in... because what they do, they reach a different public of newcomers residing at Petit Château, that's something that normally the big theatres for instance, it's much more difficult for them to reach that kind of public” (I4)*

Lastly, I3 expressed the impact she believes that Cultuurlijn makes on the participants:

*“I think it's important because Petit Château where the people live, life is very hard there, it's very basic and not much to do, and you live with very different people on very small surfaces, so I think it's important to give them some kind of program, by which means they can relax a bit, have some experience which could also be beautiful and give them some relief” (I3)*

Conclusively, I attempted to provide an overview of the Cultuurlijn approaches used and the different purposes they intend to serve. In the following section, the concepts of social inclusion and empowerment from the initiators' point of view will be analysed and discussed.

#### *5.4.1 Analysis of results*

What approaches and methods did the initiators and stakeholders of this project consider promoting the empowerment and social inclusion of the participants? Firstly, the informants explained the starting point of the project and what main aims it is pursuing. The initiation was explained to be based on spreading awareness to asylum seekers that there are



possibilities to access cultural institutions in the city and thereby provide the means for them to participate in these cultural events and gatherings. As the initiators stressed, these platforms were basically unknown and perceived by the asylum seekers as something for “the others”. Considering asylum seekers' legal status, they occupy a precarious position in the society which is of temporary nature (Hynes, 2011). That is, access to welfare and other services are on a short-term basis which excludes these people from the rights available only to the regular citizens of the nation (ibid.). I argue that these factors may most probably affect the asylum seekers approach to other services and institutes in the city. Could the reason for keeping a distance from these institutions be understood as fear of rejection? Or, maybe the fact of not being recognized as citizens makes the asylum seekers feel underprivileged in relation to the 'the others'? Furthermore, the initiators pointed out the aim of Cultuurlijn by describing three key elements: to discover the cultural offer of the city, to develop social networks and to learn the social values and ways of living in Belgium.

Regarding in what way Cultuurlijn can help the participants, the initiators and stakeholders particularly stressed the benefits that arise from social interactions with others. It can thus be acknowledged that the project has helped the participants to avoid isolation and thereby refrain from remaining in the reception center at all times. Additionally, the living conditions faced by the residents of Petit Château are mentioned as difficult and basic. To be able to have some kind of program for the asylum seekers was thus agreed upon as a necessity. In line with Pathy (2001), by using participatory approaches, people's quality of life can be improved and their human needs can thereby be met. Similarly, Adams (2008) points out that participation enables people to regain some power or ability to decide over their own lives which confronts the exclusionary processes that they otherwise experience. The participatory approach of Cultuurlijn can thus be identified as providing the means to come away from the reception center and be involved in something that gives the benefit of meeting others and thereby enriches the participant's social networks. One other aspect of what Cultuurlijn contributes to is, according to the informants, a weakened segregation between the different communities at the reception center as well as between asylum seekers and Belgians. One informant claimed that on a general basis, the only meetings asylum seekers have had with Belgians before participating in Cultuurlijn are marked by hierarchy and control in relation to the asylum procedure. This is also stated by Hynes (2008), who claims that the social trust is created through different forms of belonging whereas the institutional trust is not. This is due to the simple reason that the resistance of liminality involves asylum seekers to avoid contact with officials.

Concerning the concept of social inclusion, all of the informants stressed the tremendous impact social networks and broad types of participation can have on a person's life. For one informant, this was a way in which the asylum seekers could be able to cope with their distress. These viewpoints have a good correspondence with the literature, in which Hynes (2008) recognizes that the social networks function as coping strategies for asylum seekers in order to resist the liminality that they face. Although the asylum system pushes the asylum seekers to a liminal state, they can still recreate their own form of belonging. Thus, the inclusion occurs where the asylum seekers feel a sense of welcome, respect and comfort. It seems that this other form of belonging could for some be created by participating in Cultuurlijn. Furthermore, one informant claimed that the concepts social exclusion/inclusion should not be seen as antipodes. According to I2, it is not a question of either to belong or not

to belong and it should be taken into account that the society is based on different communities. This standpoint can be referred to Luhmann (as cited in Braeckman, 2006) who argues that people are simultaneously included and excluded in relation to the different social subsystems of society. In this respect, we should not talk about full inclusion/exclusion but rather understand our social position through partial inclusion/exclusion. This can further be related to Hynes (2008) who explains that even though asylum seekers as Luhmann (2006) stated, are included in the various subsystems such as one's friend circle, school or some religious community, one is simultaneously in a liminal position. I1 continues by saying that there are no guarantees that Cultuurlijn can make the participants socially included, but that it at least is a small step. Contrarily, one informant suggests that Cultuurlijn not only promotes a sense of social inclusion but it is also a way of promoting integration in Belgium. In this respect, Hynes (2008) claims that there exists a legitimated policy that integration should happen only after an asylum seeker has been granted a positive decision. However, what is particularly striking is that the resistance of liminality and thus the approach towards creating belonging elsewhere generally leads to an integration process taking place. The integration becomes an outcome of the liminality and its consequences, opposite to what the asylum system and executive power propose. Hynes (2008) finally suggests that the support provided to asylum seekers due to their needs is indeed justifiable.

On the topic of empowerment, the initiators had diverse point of views. The expression was perceived as having a colonial connotation as if the power is given from A to B. This aspect is mentioned by Mohanty (2001) who concludes that the notion of empowerment as something externally imposed by someone else is problematic and that it rather should be a process that occurs naturally from within. Similarly, the informant continues to explain that Cultuurlijn is about providing the participants with a framework in which they can be empowered through what is inside the people which "*can open doors for them*". Furthermore, one other respondent means that the participants are already very strong considering their life circumstances. Additionally, I1 explained the arrival to the host country as a relief that quickly, in connection with the asylum procedure, turns to a loss of hope and self-confidence. Thus, the word confidence is an essential part of Cultuurlijn. Seeing this statement from a Hynes perspective (2008), the arrival to the host country is the stage of which "the suffering begins" (Hynes, 2008, p. 95). At this point in time, the asylum seekers lose control over their lives and destinies, not knowing what to expect and who could be trusted, upon which liminality occurs (ibid.). The "recovery" is only stabilized and the social trust restored at the point of which the asylum seekers recreate a form of belonging in the host society by the means of social networks (Hynes, 2008). Additionally, Hynes (2008) stresses that this form of belonging becomes a way to regain dignity which empowers the asylum seekers. As stated, the entire waiting period is very difficult for the participants. Cultuurlijn could in this sense be viewed as a way for the participants to regain self-confidence and a social life. And in line with Adams (2008), by building confidence the participants can overcome the barriers to be empowered.

# CHAPTER 6

## 6.1. Discussion and conclusion

Many conclusions can be drawn from this study in relation to the participants' perspectives and experiences of Cultuurlijn. The findings of this study was shown to correlate to some degree, however, the mixed methods data generally had a conflictual relation to each other. In this chapter, the main conclusions of the thesis will firstly be summarized followed by a discussion on the study's methodological challenges. Lastly, research contributions and implications as well as future research directions will be outlined.

## 6.2 Conclusions of research

In this section, the most significant conclusions will be presented through illustrations of different figures. The conclusions are presented in the same themes as in the previous chapter.

### 6.2.1. Social inclusion: Belonging, survival and participation

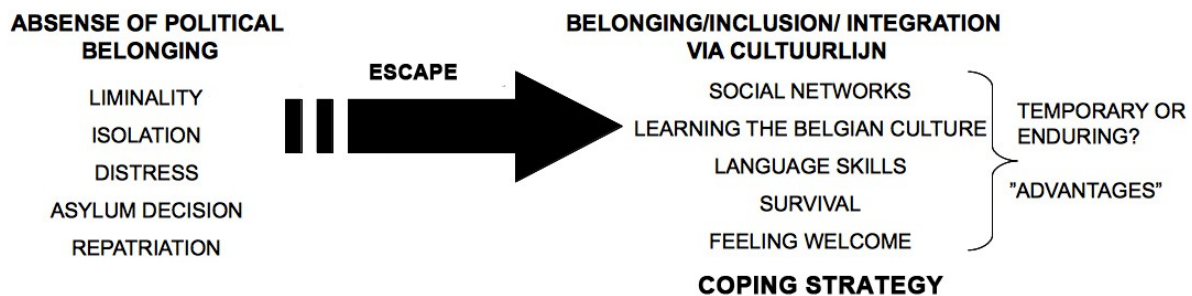


Figure 1. Between liminality and belonging

Participation in Cultuurlijn can be viewed as means of creating a sense of belonging in the absence of political belonging. As Figure 1 illustrates, the majority of the asylum seekers are in a state of liminality as they are waiting for their asylum determination. In this state, they experience distress and anxiety over their asylum case and the frightening thought of being repatriated to one's country of origin. The individual is in a liminal state of 'neither here nor there; in non-existence'. In order to cope with these problems and difficulties, most of the asylum seekers decided to participate in Cultuurlijn which according to many of them served as a distraction and survival strategy. As the arrow in Figure 1 illustrates, the asylum seekers thus tried to *escape* from their difficult circumstances in hope of finding another form of belonging. The project enabled the participants to meet new people, both Belgians and other asylum seekers and thereby recreate social networks in the city. Through these encounters, some learned the culture and got to practice the language as well as discovering the city in which they live in. Through the participatory approach of Cultuurlijn, the participants can be assumed to have created a new form of belonging in the host country. However, the ambivalence in perceiving this form of belonging as temporary or enduring was

clearly apparent. Even though the participants expressed the project as meaningful, pleasant and entertaining, the problems and worrying thoughts still remained when they came back to the reception center. In spite of this, some meant that the importance of the social relationships that were developed through Cultuurlijn made them see the project as more profound and beyond 'just' the purpose of entertainment. Thus, Cultuurlijn and indeed all other types of situations and forums that provided a form of belonging can be acknowledged as coping strategies for asylum seekers. Nevertheless, even though the quantitative data indicated that the majority of the participants felt socially included in society, there were only a few respondents who answered the same in the focus groups. There are two different factors that can perhaps help to explain this condition. Firstly, the respondents who argued that they did not feel socially included made reference to the aspect of non-recognition as citizens of the country. The restricted rights to services and entitlements as well as the awareness of a possible exclusion from the nation as a whole through repatriation was the explanation to this answer. To see themselves as socially included in Belgium was perceived as an illusion, even though some of them felt culturally and socially included in the society. On the other hand, the respondents who claimed themselves as socially included in society referred to the social aspect of interacting, communicating and engaging in the society one is living in at the time being. In this respect, associations were made with people who have been living in the country for decades without papers and who, according to this respondent have no other choice than to be a part of the society. Lastly, all the good experiences that came of participating in Cultuurlijn, such as learning the culture and language was perceived as an advantage, even if the participants would have to return to their country of origin. Hence, the strategy to cope with all the burdens that the asylum system entailed, lead to an orientation towards recreating social networks, learning opportunities and possibly the beginning of an integration process to prepare a life in Belgium. However, in the case of a negative decision, the respondents might leave with a baggage of new experiences and knowledge about a culture and country that was denied to them.

6.2.2. Empowerment: Possibility or illusion?

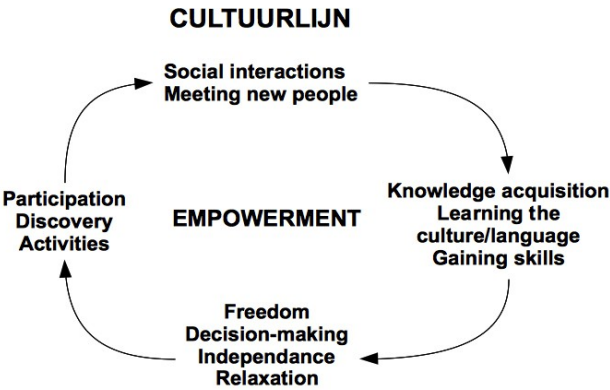


Figure 3. Cultuurlijn as an empowering platform

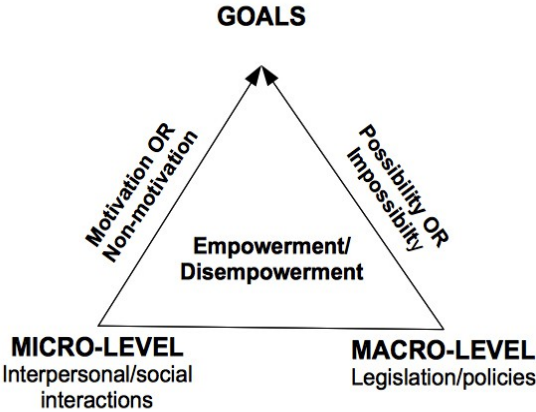


Figure 4. Possibility or illusion?

The majority of the respondents of this study perceived themselves as more empowered thanks to Cultuurlijn. By participating in the project, the asylum seekers got the opportunity to interact with others, and through these social relations they acquired new knowledge and learned more about the countries culture and language (see Figure 3). The cultural ambassadors who accompanied the participants to the activities were proved to be an important part in order to feel empowered. In the moments of dialogue and exchange of ideas, some respondents meant that they were able to achieve self-confidence. These outcomes have been possible through Cultuurlijn's participatory approach which enabled the asylum seekers to discover, learn and connect with others. Additionally, the sense of freedom was associated with the moments of participation in the project. By this means, the participants got the right of decision-making, to feel independent and relaxed. However, do all these aspects mean that the participants have been empowered? Can a person be empowered simply by *feeling* empowered? As Adams (2008) has stated, empowerment is about a person's capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes. In the analysis, empowerment was categorized on a micro- and macro-level. As illustrated in Figure 4, on a micro-level an asylum seeker might be motivated to reach his/her goal, *or* feel hopeless and powerless. On a macro-level however, one might operate in a context in which that goal is possible to reach *or* impossible or at least unlikely to be reached. Some respondents expressed the importance to struggle through the difficulties and believe that they can reach their goals while others were less optimistic and had lost their hopes and beliefs in a brighter future. Yet, as I perceived the respondents, all of them were initially hoping for a positive decision and to be able to be citizens of the host country, a hope and dream that is totally conditioned by the determination of the asylum machinery (on a macro-level). Thus, I question whether, in spite of all the positive outcomes that are achieved through Cultuurlijn, the empowerment of the asylum seekers is a possibility or an illusion? All things considered, some problems cannot be solved only by someone's motivation and aspiration to solve it since in some cases, the problems are not caused by the person himself. Nevertheless, the aspects explained above do not need to contradict or devalue the sense of empowerment that 66% of the respondents answered that they felt. In the end of the day, the participants believed that Cultuurlijn had increased their self-confidence, contributed to more knowledge, enabled them to meet new people and provided them with a platform where they could be themselves.

### *6.2.3. The initiators' objectives and perspectives of Cultuurlijn*

#### **CULTUURLIJN OBJECTIVES:**

1. Discover the cultural offer of the city
2. Develop social networks
3. Learn the social values and ways of living in Belgium

*Figure 5. Cultuurlijn objectives*



The project Cultuurlijn is initiated by Globe Aroma, a socio-cultural organization in Brussels. As Figure 5 illustrates, the main aims of the project is for the participants to discover the cultural and artistic offerings of Brussels, enable them to develop social networks in the city and lastly learn the ways of living in Belgium in terms of social values and customs. When examining how the informants believed that the project has helped the participants, social interactions and the avoidance of isolation was particularly valued. Thus, to be able to have some sort of program was expressed as a prerequisite to cope with their circumstances. Regarding the concept of social inclusion, the informants stressed the importance of creating a social network in the city and participate in what the society provides the asylum seekers. As Figure 6 demonstrates, Cultuurlijn was believed to promote the social inclusion of the participants to some extent. According to the informants, this process was enabled through the development of social networks and through participatory activities, hence avoiding isolation. One respondent argued that what Cultuurlijn provided to the participants served as a coping strategy. In addition to that, the projects contribute to an integration process taking place which prepares the participants for a possible life in Belgium. However, another perspective provided was that the degree of feeling included depended on the participant and that for some it can only be a small step.

In relation to empowerment, the informants meant that the word confidence was an essential part of Cultuurlijn (see Figure 7). To provide the participants with a stable and safe framework was further mentioned as a way to believe in oneself. The asylum seekers were perceived as already very strong and the focus lied on empowerment as a process that starts from within and nothing that 'they' give to 'them'. Instead, the process of being empowered was explained as an outcome of the countless meetings the participants have with others and the opportunities to participate in society's different subsystems. One informant referred to the process of regaining the self-confidence and social trust that was lost upon arrival in the host country. That is why Cultuurlijn attempts to help the participants to regain the lost confidence by believing in them, by showing them respect and dignity and by opening doors to cultural activities and events that seemed to only be for 'others'.

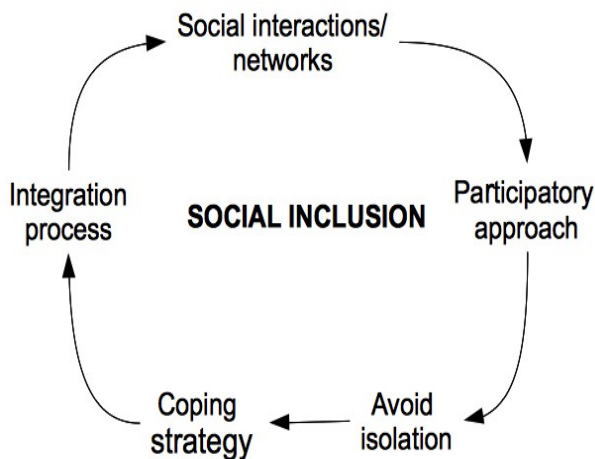


Figure 6. Social inclusion through Cultuurlijn

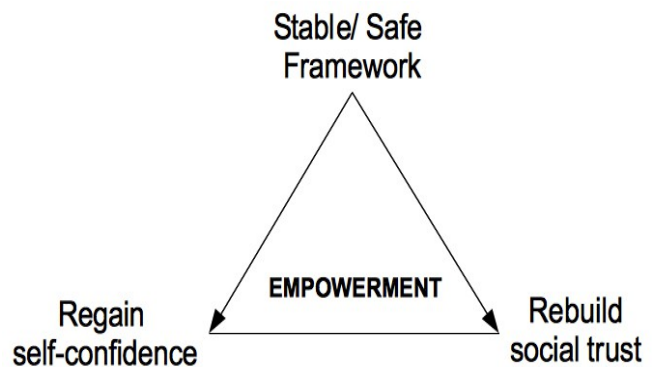


Figure 7. Empowerment through Cultuurlijn

### 6.3 Discussion

I shall now turn to the matter of the methodological challenges that have arisen during the course of study and on how these have influenced the development of approaches and understandings of the study subject. Throughout the research process, I have been confronted with different dilemmas, both in terms of theories, methodology and inconsistency between results. The main reasons behind this could be linked to the use of a mixed methods approach but also to the logics of enquiry in terms of deductive and inductive reasoning.

There are several issues that can be addressed. First of all, at the beginning my idea was to mainly have a deductive approach which explains why I built my study on the two theories empowerment and social inclusion. Later on, when studying the concepts more thoroughly it made me realize that these theories, particularly 'social inclusion' is greatly vague and an expression that can refer to a multiple of different aspects. Consequently, the scientific research principle of getting a clear starting point, as Bryman (2011) underlines, became a difficult task. However, I strived in the best possible way to explain the concept of social inclusion and, based on the literature, develop my own definition of the theory. Yet, I knew that I, scientifically speaking, was heading towards "paradoxical grounds" considering the fairly indefinite basis of the study.

Secondly, in regards to the survey that aimed to test the theories, the respondents were initially informed about social inclusion and empowerment according to the definitions that was made in this study. The real issues, however, began after I had conducted the interviews and realized that I was left with new data that could not necessarily be connected to my theories. Thus, I became aware that I had to take the inductive elements of the qualitative data into consideration. Still, this process of shifting between two "logics of enquiry" was proved to be more complex than I initially thought it would be. In order to make sense of the qualitative findings, the data was after all mostly related to the theoretical framework. What this implies in relation to the respondents' perceptions of participating in Cultuurlijn is that the qualitative data was connected to the theories, even though some of those elements were basically inductive. In other words, the observations could be made into a more general set of propositions about the respondents' experiences, i.e. from the specific to the general (Bryman, 2011). For example, the aspects of freedom, learning the culture and language, interacting with people and discovering the city are basically inductive (general), even though I decided to connect them with the theories and thereby transform them into deductive reasoning (specific).

Thirdly, both the quantitative and qualitative findings provided us with important insights, though for the most part the data from these two methods were inconsistent. The quantitative data demonstrated a descriptive and firm picture of the respondents' perceptions whereas the qualitative findings rather provided us with a detailed insight into the diverse views of the respondents which included elements of paradox and conflict. To take the first theme (5.2) as an example; while the survey results indicated that the majority of the participants felt socially included in the Belgian society, the focus group interviews contained elements of ambiguity in regards to definitions of the term social inclusion. The interesting discussions that emerged from these specific disputes, however, reflected the multi-dimensional nature of the social inclusion phenomenon. The respondents experienced themselves as included and excluded in society at the same time depending on which subsystem or domain in society that was in



question. Thus, as the theory was vague and controversial, this was highly reflected in the focus group interviews. Nevertheless, it should be admitted that the respondents also discussed their experiences of Cultuurlijn which as explained above was connected to the theoretical framework. In the end, many conclusions could be made about the impacts Cultuurlijn had on the participant asylum seekers' sense of social inclusion and empowerment. Now, in hindsight, I ask myself whether the study could have been done differently. What would happen if more distinct theories were applied to the study? How would that affect the outcomes of this research? Or, if I would only use one research method, would the conclusions be more accurate and consistent? In spite of all this, I do not regret to have chosen social inclusion and empowerment since these concepts at the very beginning puzzled me, especially when linked to the context that asylum seekers find themselves in. I believe that the contradictions that we were faced with in this study in fact have raised important questions and provided us meanings of the complex social context that asylum seekers live in.

### *6.3.1 Implications and suggestions for future research*

The waiting period for an asylum decision is definitely a difficult and trying experience. Thus, the social networks, learning possibilities, participation in cultural life and elements of freedom that was to some extent provided to the participants of Cultuurlijn, can be seen as a way to meet the social needs of these people. In this thesis, the main factors that affect the lives of asylum seekers while waiting for a decision have been brought to our attention. The process from initially being in a state of non-recognition and ultimately passing to a zone of either recognition or rejection is frightening, arduous and according to some researchers even dehumanizing (Hynes, 2011; Benhabib, 2005). There are two ways that the authorities can deal with this situation. Either by providing the means for these people to start an integration process in the host society or by maintaining them in non-participation and passivity. The reasons for either one of these decisions are based on the temporary position of asylum seekers and the fact that they have to leave the territory after a negative decision. Thus, considering that nothing is still permanent in this state, the authority might judge that the integration process becomes important only after a positive decision has been granted. This aspect of the asylum period is undoubtedly a dilemma for governments today. In this respect, the Swedish Government's asylum framework (SOU 2003:75) can be addressed. The report broadly highlights the asylum waiting period as a time that should involve meaningful activities that could prepare the person for either a return to one's country, or integration to the Swedish society. However, the authors further question if it even is possible to provide activities to the asylum seekers which at one hand can serve as integration in the society and at the other hand as a preparation for returning to the home country (ibid.). What if that only would lead to attract asylum seekers to stay in the host country even though one has not been granted residence permits? This aspect is recognized as a difficult balance to strike, but one that I believe needs to be directed towards a human rights perspective. In line with the Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2013), I suggest that every individual should have the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts and its benefits. In this respect, I would like to point to the findings that derived from this study which have provided us with new and important insights into the impacts a cultural project can have on participant asylum seekers' lives. Notably, the process

of leaving one's country of origin to the host country is difficult, especially if one has left because of refugee reasons. Upon arrival in the receiving country, a state of liminality sets in which is commonly marked by despair and anxiety but for others also hope and anticipation. In this condition, the study indicated that the individuals are in need of another form of belonging which for these people partly was created through Cultuurlijn. Meeting other, discovering the cultural life of Brussels, learning the culture, customs and the language was to some extent provided to the participant asylum seekers. This was also expressed through the initiators' and stakeholders' experiences of working with the project and viewing the positive impacts it made on the participants. The study thus showed that the asylum seekers were in need of Cultuurlijn as a coping strategy, an escape from the harsh reality which became a form of survival.

I am hopeful that the findings of this study will have implications for future support and practical developments in order to improve the well-being of asylum seekers and refugees. Furthermore, this research has contributed to alternative ways that NGO's can improve their participatory approach to asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. There is a further need of research in terms of refugee experiences and ways in which governments and NGO's can work to raise these people's quality of life. As the issues raised in this study derived from a Belgian context, it would be interesting to examine how a cultural project such as Cultuurlijn would look like in a Swedish context? How does the situation look for asylum seekers in Sweden? How could a platform for asylum seekers be developed and function? And, what would the limitations consist of in this process? Another suggestion could be to look at NGO's in Sweden that are already engaged in supporting recently arrived migrants. What experiences do they have of working with asylum seekers? Lastly, I believe that there should be a more multidimensional research approach to the concepts: social inclusion, empowerment and culture. With an increased evidence based practice in relation to these concepts, social workers could be more engaged in the cultural sector and understand the benefits of culture for people in precarious situations.

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# Appendix 1: The Survey

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## Cultuurlijn Project ENG

Welcome ! Thank you so much for taking your time to fill out this survey. The survey questions aim to collect information about your appreciation of Cultuurlijn. The purpose is to find out if the project has helped you to feel more socially included in the Belgian society.

This research is anonymous. You will not be asked to provide your name.  
Your choice to participate in this research is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and your decision to withdraw will have no penalty to you.

If you agree to these conditions, please proceed with the survey.

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Researcher: Somita Sabeti / [somita.sabeti@gmail.com](mailto:somita.sabeti@gmail.com)

This study has been approved by the supervisor at the department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg. Contact: Linda Lane

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## Cultuurlijn Project FR

Bienvenue! Je vous remercie de consacrer de votre temps à remplir ce questionnaire. Le but de ces questions est de réunir des informations afin de mesurer votre degré de satisfaction quant au projet Cultuurlijn. L'enjeu est de déterminer en quoi ce projet peut vous avoir aidé à vous sentir mieux inclus dans la société belge.

Ce questionnaire est anonyme. Vos coordonnées ne vous seront pas demandées.  
Le choix de participer à ce questionnaire doit être volontaire. Vous êtes libres de changer d'avis au fil de vos réponses, et vous ne serez pas pénalisés si vous décidez d'abandonner le questionnaire.

Si vous êtes d'accord avec ces conditions, vous pouvez commencer à répondre aux questions.

---

Recherche par : Somita Sabeti / [somita.sabeti@gmail.com](mailto:somita.sabeti@gmail.com)

Cette étude a été approuvée par un superviseur du département du travail social de l'Université de Göteborg (contact : Linda Lane).

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## پروژه Cultuurlijn

سلام به حضور محترم دوستان! خیلی ممنون از وقتی که در اختیار من گذاشتید و همکاریتان در این نظر سنجی در رابطه با پروژه کولتورلین. دلیل نظر سنجی در این پروژه از این قبیل است که:

1. دریافت اطلاعات در مورد رضای بودن شما در پروژه کولتورلین

2. آیا شما از طریق این پروژه کولتورلین خودتان را جزئی از جامعه بلژیک میدانید یا نه

در این نظر سنجی احتیاج به نام دادن نیست، یعنی اسم شما ناشناس است.  
شرکت کردن در این نظر سنجی کاملاً داوطلبانه است. شما هر موقع بخواهید آزاد هستید که این نظر سنجی را به اتمام نرسانید، بدون این که هیچ مجازاتی برای شما داشته باشد.

---

پژوهشگر: سومینا سابتی

این پژوهش توسط سرپرست در وزارت کار اجتماعی در دانشگاه گوتنبرگ تایید شده است. رابطه مثل: لیندا لین.



**Page 1**

**Personal information and social surroundings:**

**1. How long have you been living in Brussels?**

- Less than four months
- 4-8 months
- 8-12 months
- More than one year

**2 a) If you have any friends in Brussels, are they:**

- Of belgian origin
- Foreigners
- Both of belgian origin and foreigners

**b) How often do you meet your friends?**

**c) Do you have any relatives in Brussels?**

- yes
- no

**d) If your answer is yes, how often do you meet your relatives?**

**3. Cultuurlijn is one of Globe Aromas projects that you have participated in. How satisfied are you with Cultuurlijn?**

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied

**4. Would you recommend Cultuurlijn to a friend?**

- Definitely
- Probably
- Unlikely
- Not at all

5. Will you continue participating in Cultuurlijn?

- Definitely
- Probably
- Unlikely
- Not at all

6a) What is most important to you in participating in Cultuurlijn? (Please choose three options maximum)

- Meet new people
- Practicing language
- Going to concerts
- Going to performances such as theatre and dance
- Hanging out with your friends
- Get to know the cultural life of Brussels

b) Which one of your three choices is the most important one?

7. Some people believe that participating in cultural activities makes them feel more included in the society. Has Cultuurlijn helped you to feel more socially included in the Belgian society?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

8 a) Empowerment means becoming able to take responsibilities in our hands, and get more self-confidence. Do you have the feeling that somehow Cultuurlijn activities has made you more empowered?

- Yes
- No

b) If your answer is yes, in what way has Cultuurlijn helped you to feel empowered?

9 a) In the cultural activities of the project Cultuurlijn you are accompanied by cultural ambassadors. Have you found it important that the cultural ambassadors have accompanied you?

- Very important
- Important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Unimportant

b) Have the cultural ambassadors been helpful for you to feel more socially included in the Belgian society?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

10. When you think about your life, how happy are you?

- Very happy
- Happy
- Neither happy nor unhappy
- Unhappy
- Very unhappy

11. How would you rate your health right now?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

## Page 2

12. Which year were you born?

13. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

14. What is the highest level of education that you have completed? (please tick the highest level of education that you have completed)

- Primary school
- Secondary school
- High school
- University

15. What is your country of origin?

16. Before terminating the survey : would you like to add something about Cultuurlijn?

You have finished the survey now. Thank you very much for your participation.

You can now close the window.

## **Appendix 2: Interview guide for the participants**

**Research questions:** What are the participants' experiences of participating in Cultuurlijn? Do these experiences have an impact on their feeling of empowerment and social inclusion in the society? If not, what are the main reasons for that?

### **Presentation**

1. Name, time in Brussels, country of origin

### **Cultuurlijn experience**

1. What is your experience of Cultuurlijn?
2. How does it come that you decided to participate in Cultuurlijn?
3. If you were the ones to decide, how would you change Cultuurlijn?
4. How can cultural activities or projects help a person? What does it lead to?

### **Social inclusion**

1. What does social inclusion mean to you?
2. How can a person be socially included in society?
3. Do you think that a project like Cultuurlijn can help people to feel more included in society?
4. What about you, do you feel socially included in the Belgian society?

### **Empowerment**

1. What does empowerment mean to you?
2. How can a person be empowered?
3. Do you believe that Cultuurlijn have helped you to be more empowered?
4. How about the cultural ambassadors? What are your experiences?

## **Appendix 3: Interview guide for the Initiators**

**Research question:** What approaches and methods do the initiators and stakeholders of this project consider promoting the empowerment and social inclusion of the participants?

1. What is Cultuurlijn?
2. How did you get the idea to create the project?
3. What is the aim of Cultuurlijn?
4. How can cultural activities help a person? What does it lead to?
5. How could an entertainment contribute to improve a social situation?

### **Social inclusion**

1. Social inclusion, what does this word mean to you?
2. How can a person be socially included in the society?
2. Do you believe that a project like Cultuurlijn can help people to feel more socially included in the society?

### **Empowerment**

1. Empowerment, what does this word mean to you?
2. How can a person be empowered?
3. Do the activities of Cultuurlijn help people to be more empowered?