

Organising Integration Support for Recent Immigrants in Sweden as a Spectacle: Practices and Consequences

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Abstract

This paper explores organising outside organisations in the context of the labour market integration of recent immigrants in Sweden. More specifically, it examines integration support events organised as a means of facilitating the efficient employment integration of recent immigrants. It draws on Guy Debord's ideas of the spectacle in modern society and practice-based approaches to organising to explore how these events function as part of an integration spectacle as they produce and reproduce images of change and renewal where immigrants become employed and employers hire them, obscuring an otherwise sombre reality of inequalities. I use this lens to critically engage with field material collected as part of an ethnographically inspired field study of two annually held integration support events in Sweden, the *Your Day!* event and the *Finally a Job!* recruitment day, aimed at facilitating recent immigrants' employment integration.

1. Introduction

Shortly before lunch, I stepped outside the elegant banquet hall where a number of inspirational speakers had been invited to talk to an audience of around 200 people attending the annual *Your Day!* job fair organized for recent immigrants in Swedcity, a large city in Sweden. I bumped into representatives of a local non-profit organization, who told me that they had thoroughly enjoyed the talks given during the morning. They felt that it was a pity, however, that the recent immigrant jobseekers had been unable to attend these inspiring talks. This had been made difficult as the speed interviews and other job matching activities had been organized at the same time. As a result, the role-model immigrants, together with the icons of the business world and the acclaimed speaker invited to present a humoristic take on "Swedish norms and social codes," gave their take on what facilitates successful integration to an audience of what the *Your Day!* brochure described as "old Swedcity residents" (the natives), who shared an interest in integration, inclusiveness, and diversity, while next door (literally), close to 500 immigrant jobseekers engaged in speed interviews with employers or tried to meet company representatives manning the stalls in the exhibition section of the fair. At lunchtime, an elaborate meal was served in the atrium of the venue to participants who had reserved a seat prior to the event. The lunch too was advertised as an opportunity for participants at the event to meet. However, as the representatives from the non-profit organization shared with me, the price tag for a seat at one of the tables was "hefty." This might explain why the atrium seemed

to be populated during lunch predominantly by established persons – the “old Swedcity residents.” (Field notes from observations)

The above excerpt from my field notes gives a glimpse of what I observed at one of the many integration support events I attended during my three-year research period in Swedcity, a large urban area in Sweden. Initially, I sought to understand how employment integration of recent immigrants is organised in practice, involving many public, private, and non-profit organisations, groups, and individuals. I soon realised that while an overabundance of initiatives were underway to support recent immigrants into employment and facilitate their integration into society in the aftermath of the 2015 “refugee crisis” (see also Diedrich and Hellgren, 2018, 2021), the results in terms of improving recent immigrants’ labour market outcomes remained disappointing; recent immigrants continued to experience higher levels of unemployment compared to their Swedish counterparts and, when they did find a job, were often underemployed (see e.g., Delmi, 2018; Statistics Sweden, 2019; Wikström and Sténs, 2019).

The aim of this article is to situate the integration support events organised for recent immigrants within these developments. It asks how integration support events are organised in practice and how such organising contributes to producing and reproducing inequalities.

In advancing the discussions on the challenges of organising integration support for recent immigrants in practice, I draw on the work of the French critical theorist Guy Debord (1992/1967) on the spectacle in modern societies and a practice-based approach to organising. I use this lens to critically engage with field material collected as part of an ethnographically inspired field study of two annually held integration support events, the *Your Day!* event and the *Finally a Job!* recruitment day, aimed at facilitating recent immigrants’ employment integration. Both received a fair amount of public attention locally and were labelled successes. The events were presented as a means of improving recent immigrants’ employment integration, not by any one organisation – the Public Employment Service (PES) or a particular company – but by bringing together employers, immigrants, and integration support tools in novel ways. The article shows, however, that in practice, the events highlighted the achievements of exemplary individuals – model immigrants and employers – success stories, and best practices. They also constituted instances where integration was (re)presented as a one-way process, where recent immigrants had to look, feel, talk, and think like the natives in order to be worthy of integration. It therefore becomes important to ask how integration support events address, reinforce, adjust, or replace such understandings.

Considering the aims of the article, a focus on integration support practices in the Swedish context is relevant on several accounts. During the “refugee crisis” of 2015, Sweden took in more refugees per capita than any other European country, and immigrant integration has been high on the political agenda for decades (see e.g., Dahlström, 2004). Also, responsibility for integration was not formally located in one place but distributed among the municipalities and the state (see e.g., Emilson, 2015; Qvist, 2017; OECD, 2018), and lately also, to an increasing degree, public and private employers and civil/community organisations (Ek Österberg et al., 2022). Coordination and collaboration around integration between these organisations has remained challenging (see e.g., Diedrich and Hellgren, 2018; 2021; OECD, 2018). And the scores of integration support professionals across the public, private, and community sectors who worked, and often collaborated, with each other to improve recent immigrants’

employment integration did not necessarily agree on how to achieve this goal and what not to do (see e.g., Brorström and Diedrich, 2022).

Such controversies provide good opportunities for exploring practices, as actors are forced to justify what they are doing, and crucial aspects that would otherwise remain taken for granted and hidden come to the fore (Bueger, 2014).

Before moving on, I would like to stress that I use the term “integration” in this paper not because it is analytically useful but because it is the term used consistently by my interlocutors in their everyday speak. During my fieldwork in 2017-2019, I followed a concept in time and space: “integration”. I observed the work of public officials, educators, managers, employees, entrepreneurs, social workers, and activists in the city who claimed to support recent immigrants in their employment integration. I will here refer to these individuals generally as “integration support professionals.” I also interviewed these professionals and recent immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, and I observed interactions between them, such as when caseworkers met recent immigrants at the Swedish Public Employment Service (PES). While the setting for this research is a larger city, thus inhibiting the identification of individuals and organisations, I have nevertheless changed any identifying information to preserve anonymity.

I proceed first by exploring Debord’s concept of the spectacle in modern society, before introducing the Swedish migration and integration context in general, and Swedcity in particular. Next, I present the study’s methods, before moving on to the findings. Here I focus on how, as a result of the “refugee crisis”, new integration support practices have emerged and are justified, and adjusted or replaced over time. I consider specifically how, in this way, integration support practices such as “matching” and “speed interviewing” have become spectacted through the organising of job fairs and recruitment days for recent immigrants. I conclude, finally, that the organising of the events as part of an integration spectacle (see also Laakonen, 2021; Kataria and De Martini Unglotti, 2022) produces and reproduces dreamlike (happy) images of individual capabilities and “agency” of immigrants (and employers too), thus obfuscating a harsh reality – one where complex organising processes involving multifarious organisations, groups, and individuals result in recent immigrants remaining marginalised in the labour market and society. This obfuscation prevents recent immigrants, employers, and integration support professionals from engaging in shared sensemaking and a questioning of taken for granted relationships and practices to promote meaningful change and renewal.

This study thus offers an explanation of how integration support events contribute to producing and reproducing the inequalities they purportedly intend to counteract. Furthermore, it engages with the general debate on recent immigrants’ employment integration at a time when a plethora of employment support initiatives have emerged since the 2015 “refugee crisis” but have yet to produce any significant positive results in terms of increasing employment levels among recent immigrants. My hope is that this will offer an example for further reflections on the existing integration support practices and how these may be organised more meaningfully in the future.

2. An overview of migration and integration politics in Sweden

Sweden is an interesting setting for such a study of integration support events. The country admitted more refugees per capita than any other European country during the 2015-2016 “refugee crisis”, is often seen as the prototypical liberal welfare state that – at least until recently – has invested considerable resources in supporting the integration of refugees into the labour market and in society, and is home to a large immigrant population (approximately 18% of the total population), with a high number of people in need of protection and support (Swedish Migration Board, 2018).

Sweden has amended its migration and integration policies regularly over the past decades (see Dahlström, 2004; Diedrich, 2017; Qvist, 2017). Following World War II, the country encouraged labour migrants from other Nordic countries and southern Europe to work in Sweden to address severe labour shortages in industry, and the number of labour immigrants, mainly from Finland, increased drastically (Dahlström, 2004). As these labour migrants instantly had employment and were expected to return to their home countries in the not-too-distant future, little effort was made to support their integration into the labour market and society.

In 1972, labour migration was halted after increased pressure from the powerful Swedish trade unions, which saw it as a threat to their members’ interests. Since that time, the main immigrant categories have been asylum seekers, refugees, and members of their families. While they came mainly from Chile during the 1970s (see Lundh and Ohlsson, 1999), and from the Balkans in the 1990s, at the time of study in 2018, the majority of asylum seekers came from Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Iraq.

Over the years, Swedish migration and integration policies have increasingly acknowledged the reality of the country’s growing ethnic diversity, and the opportunities and challenges of immigrant integration (Eastmond, 2011).

A critical integration policy reform came into effect on December 1, 2010 (“Law on the settlement of certain recent immigrants” 2010:197). The aim of the new law was to put in place procedures to integrate immigrants as soon as possible after arrival, by supporting them into employment, utilising their skills and competence in a better way, and improving the coordination between the various state agencies’ responsibilities (see Law 2010:197, §1). To this end, responsibility for recent immigrants’ integration was shifted from the municipalities to the PES, and support activities were bundled into the national “Settlement Program” (*Etableringsprogrammet*) for refugees and other recent immigrants. As part of the two-year program, participants had to attend integration support activities corresponding to 40 hours per week. Their financial benefits were conditioned upon their attendance at the assigned activities. These included mandatory Swedish language courses (Swedish for immigrants, SFI) and civic orientation courses arranged by the municipalities, and other activities such as job application courses, fast tracks, internships, the recognition of prior learning, and mentorship programs organised by educational services providers and public and private employers. Most support measures were not undertaken by the PES but were developed and offered as part of local collaborative initiatives involving public, private, and community organisations (see e.g., Diedrich and Hellgren, 2018).

Notwithstanding the efforts made to support employment integration of recent immigrants, they continue to face great challenges when attempting to find a job (Delmi, 2018; Statistics Sweden, 2019). They continue to remain unemployed in greater numbers and for longer

periods of time compared to their native (Swedish) counterparts, and they are often underemployed (Risberg and Romani, 2021).

3. The spectacle and spectacted organising

Organisation scholars have lately become interested in how representations are created as part of organising and how representations of social and organisational relations, and what it means when organisations create specific and often dramatic representations of reality, by drawing on the French critical theorist and philosopher Guy Debord's (1992/1967) concept of the spectacle in modern society. In his *Society of the Spectacle* (1992/1967) Debord furthered Marx's critique of capitalism, and specifically of commodity fetishism with all its focus on appearances. He argued that in modern society much of "authentic" social life – that which is directly lived – has been replaced with its representation, and a particular imagery of customership and individual agency has gained ground, making systemic change increasingly difficult to imagine (Laakonen, 2021). The spectacle, Debord argued, reduces reality to an endless supply of abstract and commodifiable fragments, while encouraging people to focus on appearances. For Debord, this constitutes an unacceptable "degradation" of people's lives. Yet much of contemporary organising seems to be about producing dramatised representations of reality – spectacles. Companies and public organisations such as universities put more and more effort and resources into creating a brand and marketing products and services; and the creation of visions and strategies for the future as well as acting in a sustainable manner are also the order of the day.

The spectacle, wrote Debord (1992/1967), "is not a collection of images, rather it is a social relation among people, mediated by images." And, following Debord, the spectacle can be seen as serving as a means of abstracting a complex reality and, more specifically, of redirecting "citizens' attention from structural inequalities to spectacular events designed to subdue social criticism" (Kersten and Abbott, 2012: 324). In other words, by organising spectacles, the possibilities for promoting change and renewal in the future are diminished, because spectacles do not provide the adequate means for questioning taken for granted relationships and practices (see also Bakhtin, 1968).

Debord argues that by replacing authentic social life with its representation, reality is objectified as images exchanged among people to create, extend, and reify social relations. This also means that something that *appears* to go against, and brings into question, 'the way we normally do things' may, following Debord, further entrench stabilised power relations and hierarchies. Romani et al. (2019), although not drawing on Debord's work, show how this plays out in practice in their study of human resources professionals who remain blind to the harm that highly publicised diversity initiatives in companies are doing to employees from marginalised groups. They referred to this as "benevolent discrimination", which may very well be seen as a part of a larger, global diversity spectacle (Kersten and Abbott, 2012). The spectacle may thus serve as a meaningful concept to explore the complex, shifting relationships between the real and its representations as part of organising.

To be clear, as a scholar inspired by post-structuralist thought, I feel at times rather uneasy with Debord's ideas of the spectacle grounded in notions that there is some kind of "real" reality *behind* the reality produced by the spectacle and that it is possible to go "backstage" and see this real reality. However, in agreement with Flyverbom and Reinecke (2017), I see

value in using Debord’s original formulation to study interesting issues of contemporary organising and delve into how organising produces representations and is influenced by such representations. Here another concept is interesting: mimesis. Representation has often been equated with mimesis – a form of imitation (Walton, 1990) or copy, of *doing the same as* or *becoming the same as*. In biology, for instance, the term is used to describe the external resemblance of an animal to a thing, such as a leaf, or to another animal that is distasteful to predators. In literary theory, Paul Ricoeur (1981) positioned mimesis as different from copy as it is open to the idea that what is imitated, such as words, artefacts, actions or practices, changes during the process as it becomes reinterpreted and transformed. Mimesis thus not only means the copying of a practice, but it also includes something else. The anthropologist Michael Taussig (1993) spoke of mimesis as consisting of both the *copy of* and the *contact with* what is imitated. Czarniawska (2002) used Taussig’s take on mimesis to describe how as part of organising processes meaning of the past and the relationships between organisational actions and the actions of others is created. If the aim is to imitate a practice, the way to successfully enhance mimesis is to promote and facilitate both *copy of* and *contact with* that practice. Taussig (1993) pointed out that mimesis is largely repressed in modern society as increasing focus is placed on simulating contact instead of providing access to the context where a practice that one seeks to understand better has been well developed.

A critical theoretical focus on the spectacle thus seems a meaningful way to address what many consider to be contemporary society’s biggest challenges – global migration and the integration of recent immigrants into labour markets and societies – as it provides a vocabulary that is sensitised to considering the role of integration support events in producing power relations not necessarily to the benefit of the recent immigrants whose situation the events seek to improve.

In the context of migration and integration, Debord’s notion of the spectacle has recently been used to explore how countries in the Global North legitimise their interests and increasingly severe control measures through a “Border Spectacle,” including depictions of immigrants as “floods” or “waves” threatening Europe and increasing visibility of border enforcement practices (De Genova, 2013; Andersson, 2014), and how a neoliberal “Integration Spectacle” projects the appearance of societal change in a Finnish suburb densely populated by migrants at the same time as it works to gloss over a well-entrenched racialised social order (Laakonen, 2021). And in organisation studies, Kersten and Abbott (2012) have explored how Western images of the Other are part of a “global spectacle” that diverts our understanding of differences, obscures social and political controversies, and influences or inhibits efforts to promote inclusiveness and pluralism in society.

What these and other studies of the spectacle in organisational contexts (see e.g. Boje, 2001; Boje et al., 2004, Islam et al., 2008) have in common is that they direct attention to the discrepancies and processes of obfuscation that go hand in hand with spectacted organising. Here, I will build on this work by shedding light on spectacted practices of integration support.

4. A praxiography of integration support

This paper presents the results of a study which zoomed in on one type of activity undertaken under the label of integration support: events aimed at supporting the integration of recent

immigrants into the labour market through information sharing (“spreading the word”) and bringing together employers and other established persons, and immigrant job seekers.

This paper is based on ethnographically inspired fieldwork that was conducted from January 2017 to February 2020. This included semi-structured and informal interviews, observations, and document studies. In total, I undertook interviews with recent immigrants, public officials, educators, social workers, managers, and activists, with each lasting between one and two-and-a-half hours. Many informal interviews and conversations were also undertaken with company representatives, PES caseworkers, representatives from non-profit organisations, and recent immigrants I encountered spontaneously in the field. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist; the informal interviews were partially transcribed.

Finally, documents were collected and studied. These included documents that provided information about the activities of upcoming events, such as brochures and other promotional material, emails, PowerPoint presentations, and texts on websites. These documents did not tell me about how integration support actually unfolded in practice, but nevertheless gave me important clues *about* integration support practices and the knowledge that informs them. I interpreted these documents by taking a reflexive stance toward the idealised picture painted in the information provided of how the upcoming events were intended to unfold and toward whom, and what was included in the documents and who and what was excluded.

The study can be described as a praxiography, a term borrowed from Annemarie Mol (2002), as it included the study and description of practices observed in the field. In line with practice scholars (e.g., Schatzki, 2002; Bueger, 2014), I understand practices as the smallest unit of analysis which contain implicit knowledge, speech acts, actions, and usage of objects. Through the observations, I gained insights into bodily movements, how people act and interact, how they engage with objects and how they talk about what they do as part of their daily practices. The interviews helped me gain additional insights into how people accounted for the practices they were part of. Gaining insights into the implicit knowledge which informs practices was the most challenging part, as this was not directly observable, but only indirectly interpretable.

To identify and explore integration support practices, I focused primarily on initiatives labelled as supporting recent immigrants’ employment, and not on organisations. Two annual events received my increased attention as they seemed to resemble microcosms of the overall integration support efforts I had witnessed over the years in different settings throughout the city: the *Your Day!* job fair and the *Finally a Job!* recruitment day. It is important though to keep in mind that these events are embedded in the broader context of employment integration support organised for recent immigrants in Swedcity and Sweden as a whole.

4.1. The *Your Day!* job fair

The *Your Day!* job fair was an annual, one-day event arranged by a non-profit organisation in collaboration with the local municipality and the Swedish Public Employment Service. It was marketed as “Sweden’s new arena for inclusion through employment” (*Your Day!* marketing material, 2019). *Your Day!* comprised three parts: a seminar and workshop series held during the morning, the exhibition, where companies and other organisations that supported companies in their work with diversity could present their business, and a job matching event where up to 25 employers met, and could potentially be matched with, recent

immigrant job seekers. The seminar series aimed to inform employers who visited the event about the advantages of diversity, for example when entering new markets or increasing sales, and to inspire them to begin working with diversity in their organisations. To achieve this, the organisers invited business people and entrepreneurs well-known to the Swedish public, as well as “inspirational speakers” (*Inspiratörer*, in Swedish) to share their experiences of diversity. At the exhibition, several companies and other public, private, and non-profit organisations had set up their stands to market their products and services related to diversity. Authors presented their books on the subject, educational services providers presented the courses they offered which were related to facilitating diversity in the workplace, and non-profit organisations presented events they arranged that were intended to bring immigrants and Swedes together, such as singing in a choir. Several companies that worked with matching immigrant jobseekers with employers had also set up their stands. Finally, the job matching activity was set up in two halls: in one hall, 25 companies had set up their stands and presented their businesses to potential jobseekers, and in the other rows of tables, each with two chairs, had been arranged for the speed interviews. I attended the event for three consecutive years, from 2017 to 2019. I joined the audience for the presentations in the mornings, taking extensive field notes to capture what was said, how it was said, and at whom it was directed. I also moved around the exhibition hall talking to employer representatives manning the stands and walking around, asking about their experiences and perceptions of the event. My access to the event had been secured during an interview I had undertaken a few months earlier with the organiser of the job fair. When engaging with people at the event, I always identified myself as a researcher and explained my presence.

4.2. The *Finally a Job!* recruitment day

The *Finally a Job!* recruitment day was organised by a large private company in collaboration with the PES. The event aimed to recruit highly-skilled recent immigrants registered with the PES to a six-month long internship program at the company. The company’s HR specialists invited managers (heads of local branch offices) interested in mentoring an intern. In preparation for the event, PES caseworkers selected 30-35 potential candidates from their pool of immigrant jobseekers with academic backgrounds, based on selection criteria provided by the HR managers. The branch managers invited to the event were given the opportunity to rank the candidates they wished to interview. Before the recruitment event, the HR manager in charge of the program matched branch managers with candidates to be interviewed based on the rankings. On the day of the event, each manager met three to five candidates for a 15-minute interview and then ranked the candidates. The recruitment event was held on the elegant top floor of the company’s regional headquarters and was attended by the company’s HR managers and other senior managers, the branch managers who had volunteered to act as mentors for the immigrants, the 30-35 immigrant candidates, a handful of PES caseworkers, recent immigrants who already worked as interns for the company, as well as other integration support professionals who had been invited to observe the event to “learn.”

I attended the event for three consecutive years, from 2017-2019, observing opening speeches by senior managers, several speed interviews, and the informal interactions between applicants, PES caseworkers, managers, and others, and also engaged in informal interviews with two PES caseworkers, managers, and applicants. I always identified myself as a researcher when engaging with people at the event and informed them about my research

project and the reasons I was attending. While observing the speed interviews, I sat in a corner of the small rooms where the interviews took place. The manager undertaking the interview informed the applicant who I was and why I was in the room and asked for their consent for me to observe the interview. In all cases this consent was given. Furthermore, I interviewed four managers at the company and two immigrants who had been recruited as interns.

4.3. The analysis

The analysis of the material proceeded in the following way: First, I undertook a thematic analysis to identify emerging themes in the material. The focus of this first round of coding was to gain an understanding of the field of integration support, the types of support offered and the perceptions of needs (immigrants and employers need to meet), challenges (existing behaviours) and opportunities (immigrants are a resource on the labour market), in order to identify commonalities and differences. I then engaged in an iterative process of coding and theorising. I engaged with the material – the field notes and the transcripts from the interviews, going through them multiple times. At the same time, I engaged with the literature. Here I noticed that the focus often lies with structural barriers recent immigrants have to face in the host societies as well as individual aspects and behaviours of recent immigrants. My interlocutors, however, referred to challenges associated with practices of integration support, such as deficient matching of jobs and recent immigrants, and absence of connections, such as a lack of meetings between employers and recent immigrants.

I then shifted my focus to understand how the solutions being proposed to deal with these challenges were enacted as part of the integration support events and functioned as what I here refer to as *spectacled organising*. Such organising attracts attention and excitement through its representation of integration support as an exciting organisational field, filled with images and promises of creative, new practices and solutions to the challenge of immigrants' employment integration, concocted through an intermingling of immigrants, employers, and integration support tools. But it also in part performs the real into being and, in doing so, reinforces conflicting understandings about what it means to be integrated, and who should integrate in the first place, and into what.

Peering through Debord's (1992/1967) critical lens, one could say that the way integration support events are organised produces a distraction from a complex and sombre reality, one in which recent immigrants continue to be unemployed and unintegrated. This because such organising fails to bring together immigrants, employers, and tools in a meaningful way that allows shared questioning of current practices and shared sensemaking around potential future change and renewal, thereby not necessarily producing favourable outcomes for the one or the other.

5. Findings: enacting integration support spectacles

In this section, I elaborate on how these integration support events were organised in practice. I present selections of the field material that illustrate how organising produces spectacular representations of employment support for recent immigrants. I begin by situating them in the context of employment support organised for recent immigrants in the aftermath of the "refugee crisis".

5.1. How the ‘refugee crisis’ was dealt with: the controversy of employment integration support

In the aftermath of the 2015 “refugee crisis”, the larger than usual influx of refugees to Sweden, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, led to the establishment of many initiatives and other activities aimed at supporting their speedy integration into society. Initially, many of these were organised by individuals and civil society organisations, but state authorities, municipal organisations, and private companies soon followed. One research report identified close to two hundred integration initiatives aimed at employment support in one Swedish city (see Diedrich and Hellgren, 2018 for an overview) and the map of employment integration support presented a complex picture where many initiatives addressed similar issues and encountered similar challenges without meaningful connections being made between them (see also OECD, 2018). There was thus no single actor that connected all the initiatives and, as a result, recent immigrants’ employment integration remained challenging, as one integration support professional explained:

My analysis was the same: all these tools already exist. But there isn’t always a good collaboration between the actors, and many say, ok we’ll reinvent the wheel again and do something on our own. We have companies in Swedcity that say that they want to recruit in a more socially responsible way. And we have a large group of people who are foreign born who say, we want a job. Still, it doesn’t seem to work in Swedcity (connecting these). We have these jobs, but still these people (immigrants) are not being employed. [Interview with integration support professional, activist]

The professional here points to a controversy that came to the fore in the aftermath of the “refugee crisis”: many immigrants with skills and experience had arrived in Sweden and stood at the disposal of the labour market, employers experienced skills shortages and wanted to recruit, and societal actors collaborated to bring them together; yet immigrants remained unemployed. The proposal put forth by integration support professionals to address this situation of doubt, which challenged conventional accounts of how the labour market works, was to improve ways of connecting immigrants willing to work and employers willing to hire. This was generally referred to as “matching.”

Matching activities were undertaken at many sites of integration support, not least at the PES. One PES caseworker described matching as a central part of her work with recent immigrants on the settlement program. Asked when she felt she succeeded in her matching, she replied:

You succeed when you get people out (into work). For example, when you put people into a selection process where the matching is actually correct. That we’ve received an order from an employer and I have maybe four people who I feel are suitable for this position. That you include them in the selection and you get the response that they are absolutely relevant. Ok, they might later on not be selected for the job, but they have a profile that corresponds to the order, for example. Then the matching effort you have undertaken has been of good quality. When you include the right people, so that from an employer perspective you present relevant job seekers with the right competence. So that you don’t just throw anyone into the selection, so that you can show that you have done your

matching, and then the people don't even have the right education or experience. [PES Caseworker INT AF 10]

The caseworker here alluded to the idea that "successful" matching of recent immigrants requires much hard work in selecting the "right" candidates who correspond to the requirements of a position. If the "wrong" people – e.g., an immigrant who does not speak Swedish and an employer who requires specific language skills – meet for a job interview, the interview is likely not to yield a positive result for the employer or the immigrant. Another PES caseworker explained that matching recent immigrants with jobs was often difficult to achieve:

It's difficult to match them (recent immigrants) when they don't speak Swedish, especially when the employers demand that one should at least be able to communicate in English. So, this is a target group that is very difficult to match [PES Caseworker INT AF 13]

Here, the employers and their demands, and the immigrants and their skills (or lack thereof), are portrayed as complexifying the matching process. Matching did not seem to work properly, and integration support professionals pointed to the need for changes to practice to bring employers/jobs, recent immigrants, and the tools for employment integration together in better ways. But how?

5.2. "Let's create a buzz"

From 2016 onwards, efforts were made by individuals and public, private, and non-profit organisations in Swedcity, often in collaboration with one another, to address the above-mentioned controversy through the arranging of events to draw attention to the plight of recent immigrants wanting to enter the labour market, share information about best practices in employment integration, and provide an arena for bringing together immigrants and employers and for matching immigrants with jobs. One integration support professional recalled the results from a survey she had sent to representatives from local public organisations and private companies asking what they would want to gain from such an event:

Simpler communication channels; knowing what help you can receive. Because if you're a small company, that isn't at all involved in this societal challenge of integration, you don't know all the tools available in the toolbox or about all the initiatives that exist. So, simpler communication channels, and spreading good examples. You need to get inspiration to see what can be achieved. So that's what formed the basis for the Your Day! event. [Integration support professional, activist]

The integration support professional interpreted the survey as showing that in order to be successful, the future events needed to provide inspiration, and help to spread information and good examples, and to do so through simple forms of communication. But equally important were questions of how to package the events to interest people, groups, and organisations:

If we want to change people's behavior, we need to package the event in the way we would normally package events. It's no different to Egmont (a large Swedish publisher) saying, 'we want more people to read our newspaper'. We want to create a type of behavior. [...]. The longer-term vision is that Your Day! will be the same as Westpride (a large international music festival) that highlights the LGBT issue. I want Your Day! to highlight the diversity question in the same way. Of course everyone should be allowed to enter the labor market. [Integration support professional, activist]

When integration support events were envisaged as a novel form of integration support, employers and public officials were primarily considered as needing to be convinced to change their behaviours. The recent immigrants targeted as needing to be integrated were not initially considered.

5.3. How integration support events played out: adjusting practices and connecting new ones?

The *Your Day!* event and the *Finally a Job!* recruitment day were held for the first time in 2016. The integration support professionals involved in organising the events argued that the success of the events depended on who ended up attending, as performers or spectators, and on their performances. The aim was to communicate to recent immigrants attending that they could find employment in Sweden, and to employers that they should not be afraid to hire recent immigrants. At the *Your Day!* event this was facilitated through "inspirational speakers," best practices, presentation of role models, and success stories and tools. During the seminars at the 2019 *Your Day!* event, which took place in a large, glamorous, windowless banquet hall with crystal chandeliers, where an elevated stage and chairs for 200 people had been arranged, I observed the following scene:

A representative of a mid-sized company took to the stage to talk about how he had employed a recent immigrant from Syria after he had participated at "Meeting Point Integration" (annual event on the topic of integration of recent immigrants) last year and how well everything had turned out for him. The Syrian man in question stood next to him on stage. After a while he was given a chance to tell everyone how much he enjoyed working for the company and how much he had learned since he was employed; and he did this in Swedish, which was commented upon by the moderator and acknowledged with applause by the audience. Another Syrian man had been invited to talk about his terrible experiences in a Syrian jail, his escape to Sweden, and how he had been given a chance to build up a whole new life in the country. He spoke in near-fluent Swedish, once again an impressive achievement, given the fact that this man too had only recently arrived in the country [Field notes from observation of the *Your Day!* event 2018]

The performers on stage played the role of the "inspirers" who captivate the spectators with their stories and their physical presence by serving as role models of integration support – the employer as a model employer, who had "dared" to employ the refugees, and the refugees as model immigrants, because they had learned Swedish so quickly.

Apart from the presentations of best practices and model employers and immigrants, a regular practice I observed at the events was the performing of speed interviews. Speed interviews were short interviews taking no more than 15 minutes. They had originally been

developed in educational settings to provide an efficient tool for enabling large numbers of students of journalism, media and communication studies, and other fields to practice interviewing techniques as part of a normal length lecture. In the context of integration support events, this efficiency associated with speed interviews was equally valued, as becomes apparent from the story a branch representative from the Swedish construction industry shared about his positive experiences of speed interviews while on stage at the 2017 *Your Day!* event:

I've run speed interview events at our premises here in Swedcity. We invited recent immigrants from the Arab world who had received their permanent residency permits and who had documented experience from the building and construction sector. And we didn't invite the larger employers to this event because they already work with these types of projects. Instead, we invited small and medium-sized companies, in order to give these companies the chance to maybe recruit (immigrants) in the future, and to give immigrants the opportunity to meet the companies and to participate in an interview, even if it is a shorter one [compared to a normal interview]. [Field notes from observation of the *Your Day!* event 2017]

The fact that the speed interviews were short allowed the interviewers and interviewees to participate in several interviews at the same event. Integration support professionals described speed interviews as efficient and meaningful tools as they made it possible to undertake large numbers of interviews in a fairly short time and they mimicked "real" job interviews. They believed recent immigrants benefited greatly from participating in these interviews. As one integration support professional, who organised the *Finally a Job!* recruitment day, explained:

I'm sure I have told you about these people who come to these recruitment days and have sent out 300 job applications and have never had the chance to come to an interview. And they have double degrees from Lund and Damascus and all sorts of stuff. And then they come to us, and they take part in four interviews with managers. And everyone wants this person.... So, once more, sending in an application is very anonymous, and, furthermore, if you do not get the chance to take part in an interview, you are never given the opportunity to get one step closer. I believe in this process, letting people meet physically, and starting from there – instead of starting with an application on a piece of paper. [Integration support professional, manager]

Speed interviews also became a central activity at the *Your Day!* event. The organiser shared with me how, in 2017, 400 immigrants had registered online as job seekers prior to the event. Employers too could register for the event. Once they had done so, they could choose whom they wanted to interview for an open job position from among the immigrants registered. The event's organiser stressed in an interview how important it was that employers did not simply interview potential candidates, but that they interviewed them for a real position. She hoped that "[...] the 400 leave here today and have a job, or at least feel they have gotten closer to a job, or know how to get a job in the future" (field notes from observations of *Your Day!* event 2017).

Interestingly, the field material indicates that the focus when organising these interviews was not only on recruiting recent immigrants. The organiser of the *Finally a Job!* recruitment day shared this with me:

The idea from the beginning was to take the concept of the short interviews for matching...for a matchmaking day. You can do that in different ways, but for us it was important to ensure that our managers came to this event. They weren't forced to take an intern away from the event with them. The big question for all the other companies I have been in contact with has been: "How do we get our managers to participate?" [...]. And usually I told them: "Don't make it mandatory to attend, because then they won't come with the right attitude." [...]. The managers can also come to our event as observers if they like. For the next event I have 7-8 people who will be there as observers. They won't have interviews, but they will be in the rooms where the interviews take place, and they will mingle with the candidates between the interviews to see if this could be something for them next time round. [Integration support professional, manager]

Organising speed interviews at the event and allowing other managers to observe them was here understood as a means of creating more interest among these potential recruiters to participate in future events. The integration support professional did not frame the interviews in terms of their efficiency in recruiting recent immigrants, but in terms of how they functioned to involve others in the event.

To sum up, speed interviews with recent immigrants were seen as a meaningful tool of integration support – a kind of best practice. Because of their short duration, they came with the promise that large numbers of interviews could be undertaken in a short time, making them ideal for integration support events that sought to attract attention as sites of large-scale matching of recent immigrants with employment.

6. Discussion: spectacted integration support practices

In this article, I have analysed the meaning of integration support events organised to counteract the deficient employment integration of recent immigrants and their unintended consequences. By exploring integration support practices emerging in the aftermath of the 2015 "refugee crisis" and the controversy of how to support recent immigrants into employment more effectively in the absence of palpable results, as well as the emergence of integration support events as meaningful solutions, I gained several valuable insights.

Importantly, it became obvious to me that integration support events function as a form of *spectacted organising*. Now, I am aware that some scholars drawing on Debord's original formulations in an organisational context have warned that the term spectacle can be misleading, as it may encourage us to think of spectacular representations in a moment of show instead of representation that has "become autonomous, separated from its underlying reality, and productive of a false consciousness that masks brute reality through dreamlike imagery" (Flyverbom and Reinecke, 2017). While the integration support events at times took on the character of a show, my focus here has nevertheless been on two important practices of integration support – matching and speed interviewing – that were important parts of the integration spectacle and seem to have travelled from location to location, and continue to do so, a form of isopraxis (Erlingsdottir and Lindberg, 2005).

The practice of arranging large numbers of speed interviews involving employers and recent immigrants at the events within short intervals can, from a Debordian point of view, be seen as part and parcel of attempts to create a dramatised representation of reality. In “normal” reality, at “normal” interviews in Sweden, recruiters meet one or more applicants, usually for more than 15 minutes, and for the most part, none of these, or very few, are immigrants. These interviews are framed primarily as an opportunity for employment, but less so for recent immigrants, as the statistics continuously show. As part of the spectacle, the question of how many recent immigrants found employment through the events remained ambiguous. The integration support professionals did not necessarily see this as a problem, however, as the opportunity to participate in the interviews, even if it was only as an observer, was understood as a positive result in itself – both for the recent immigrants and for employers. The spectacle of integration support performs into being a reality where immigrants are interviewed in large numbers by (established/native) employers, and this is seen as a reason to be optimistic and enthusiastic. This is a far cry from the much more sombre and less glamorous reality that recent immigrants, and refugees in particular, often face when trying to enter the labour market (see e.g., Bursell, 2012; Schenner and Neergaard, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Risberg and Romani, 2021).

Secondly, as part of the integration support spectacle reported here, recent immigrants’ integration was packaged in the form of abstract, sanitised, *spectacled* practices (copy), but contact with the complex everyday reality of recent immigrants’ labour market and societal integration was avoided. Both copy and contact are needed however for practices to spread meaningfully in time and space as previous studies of mimesis and imitation have shown (e.g. Taussig, 1993, Diedrich, 2004) – and this was after all one of the main aims of the events observed here: to spread practices and change behaviours. The role of the events presented here in the integration support spectacle was to create novel connections between people and tools to facilitate enthusiasm to get involved in integration support. However, the connections which emerged as part of the organising of the events in practice entrenched separations; they did not provide the adequate means for shared sensemaking among employers, recent immigrants, integration support professionals, and others to question taken for granted relationships and practices (see also Bakhtin, 1968). Instead, the *spectacled* organising of integration support however implied the reduction of the audience – recent immigrants, employers and others – to bench-bound listeners (Bruner, 1961). They were expected to learn and to change based on abstract decontextualised information, and they were not made part of the formulation of the learning activity through dialogue. The dramatic representation of the job interview as a *spectacled* practice of integration support resulted in the means (for recruiting immigrants) becoming the ends in themselves.

The way the events were organised resulted in the production of images of “integration,” “inclusion,” and “diversity” that (re)presented an ideal (dreamlike) reality without room for hindrances such as discrimination or socio-economic precarity. Instead, recent immigrants’ unemployment tended to be framed at the events in terms of individual shortcomings – the lack of integration, cultural differences on the part of the recent immigrants, and lack of information and knowledge on the part of the employers. This resulted in practices that, while intended to counteract recent immigrants’ marginalisation in the labour market, further entrenched it. My analysis of the integration support events has, moreover, illustrated the potential of the integration support events to become performative of reality, with unintended and potentially paradoxical consequences. It illustrates how such events may entrench the idea

of integration as a one-way street, where immigrants have to adapt to what already exists and look, think, and act in ways that resemble those of the natives. This is reminiscent of the “benevolent discrimination” explored by Romani et al. (2019), in that the events a) were enacted as well-intentioned efforts to address the unemployment problem among recent immigrants, b) produced social relationships and images that portrayed the Other in need of help, and c) produced images that signalled the expectation that such support would be given to those that were willing to adapt into the existing order.

This is a far cry from a reality where questions of who integrates into what are far more complex than meets the eye and where increasing calls are heard from critical scholars and other commentators to view integration as a two-way process, as part of which not only the immigrants, but also the natives need to change their ways and understandings, and they need to do it together (Castles, 2002; Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2009; Nederveen Pieterse, 2015), or to replace the concept of integration all together (Schinkel, 2017; 2018).

Keywords:

organising, spectacle, recent immigrants, integration

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