

Seeing the wood and the trees. Assessing Swedish Nature-Based Integration utilising the theory of socio-cultural viability

BENEDICT E. SINGLETON



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Migration is a prominent topic in many European societies, spawning numerous initiatives aiming to help 'integrate' newcomers. One subsection of these initiatives in Nordic countries is 'Nature-Based Integration' (NBI). Varied in scope, NBI involve activities where newcomers engage in activities in local natural environments. This article analyses NBI in Örebro County, central Sweden. It utilises the Mary Douglas derived theory of socio-cultural viability (cultural theory) in order to examine the group dynamics and related narratives found within observed activities. Utilising cultural theory's fourfold typology of social solidarities, the NBI observed were characterised as a combination of egalitarianism and hierarchy, with the other two, individualism and fatalism, considerably less prominent. This has consequences for the relevance of NBI to newcomers' lives – the initiatives' 'success' as far as participants are concerned will relate to whether NBI compliment or conflict with institutional narratives in the other, much larger, parts of their lives. The collected data suggest that narratives of individualism are arguably not as prominent in NBI as in the lives of newcomers and Swedes using nature. This article thus represents a first step in understanding NBI's impact in the complex situations newcomers find themselves.

Keywords: integration, Sweden, Mary Douglas, cultural theory, migration

Benedict Singleton, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden and Swedish Biodiversity Centre, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden. E-mail: benedict.singleton@gu.se, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1038-2412>

Introduction

Migration is one of the political topics of the moment in many Western countries; often framed as problematic for welfare states and national identities (Schierup *et al.* 2006). This is certainly the case in Sweden, where large numbers have sought asylum. In 2015, there were 163,000 applicants, the highest ever (Salmonsson & Hedlund 2018, 526). In Sweden, as elsewhere, populist parties have arisen and been influential in shaping migration policy with migrants subject to physical and cultural violence (Hirvonen 2013; Arora-Jonsson 2017). In common with other countries, Swedish public discussion has focused on the perceived otherness of newcomers and the need for 'integration' of newcomers with the host population. There has been a concomitant surge in programmes aimed at

assisting this integration. This article focuses upon one group of projects: several Nature-Based Integration (NBI) schemes in Örebro County, central Sweden. NBI are a diverse group of projects that have emerged in various Nordic countries (Pitkänen *et al.* 2017; Gentin *et al.* 2018). They vary in focus, some encouraging migrant employment (Johnson *et al.* 2017), whereas others encourage various forms of 'nature-based outdoor recreation' (*friluftsliv*) (Gentin *et al.* 2018). Broadly, NBI is defined as a "process in which an immigrant gets familiarized with the local environment, through activities that take place in a natural environment..." (ibid., 17). At present, there is a paucity of precise data on the prevalence of NBI but it appears increasingly popular. The projects examined in this paper have been the subject of various news articles and enquiries to the Swedish Centre for Nature Interpretation reported that a majority of Sweden's 33 *naturum* (visitor centres in nature) are involved in some form of NBI (personal communication). The data for this article comprise ethnographic observations built upon guided walks in nature and 'nature interpretation' (*naturvägledning*) as well as interviews with nature guides and examination of successful funding applications.

While increasingly of interest to policy makers and academics (e.g. Pitkänen *et al.* 2017; Gentin *et al.* 2018), there is, at present, little research on the extent that NBI work as *integration* within host societies. As such, this research aims to fill the gap. In this paper, I present a qualitative case study of several NBI projects in Örebro County, central Sweden. Located between Gothenburg and Stockholm, Örebro is a medium-sized city with 153,367 inhabitants in 2018, approximately half of Örebro County's population of 302,252. Within the county, official statistics list 50,033 inhabitants as foreign-born (Statistics Sweden 2019). The Örebro municipality (*kommun*) emphasises development of the local area's outdoor recreation potential. This has been recognised nationally, with Örebro awarded the annual title of Sweden's 'outdoor municipality' four times in the last eight years (Svenneback 2017). The city itself has twenty areas classified as nature reserves, with two more classified as cultural reserves. It is within these reserves and others around the nearby towns of Nora and Laxå that observations took place.

I collected data through interviews, observations and documentary analysis, from which I assess the extent that NBI contribute to the integration of different societal groups. This assessment utilises the Mary Douglas originated *theory of socio-cultural viability* (cultural theory, for short). Cultural theory is a theory of constrained relativism in dynamic contexts and is a way to examine different understandings of what integration means within NBI activities. I thus apply cultural theory's typology of social solidarities to the empirical material, highlighting how activities embody particular narratives. Through this analysis, I raise concerns that the NBI need to be adapted to fit the broader pressures inherent to the contexts of newcomers' daily lives. This is then a first step in beginning to assess the relevance of NBI within the social contexts migrants to Sweden find themselves.

Theory: integration and the theory of socio-cultural viability

Integration is a much-utilised and much-discussed subject within the field of migration studies. "The term commonly refers to both the socio-economic incorporation of immigrants in the host society, and to their socio-cultural adaptation to that society... Successful integration is usually considered dependent on characteristics of the immigrant and of the receiving society." (Saharso 2019, 1). Such a definition can clearly encompass a range of different things and has tendency to adopt certain normative positions. In other words, whilst there is recognition that integration experiences change both hosts and immigrants, there is arguably a tendency to measure immigrant adaptation of various essentialised attributes of the host society. This has been criticised as based on a false image of countries as homogenous entities with social life neatly limited by national borders. This links to the racist othering of migrants (Schinkel 2018); and is inherently coercive (Favell 2019). As such, 'integration' is often something only migrants do (Grip 2010; Klarenbeek 2019). Whilst some scholars call for the abandonment of the term integration itself (Schinkel 2018), others argue that as integration thinking informs the lived lives of migrants (who find themselves the subject of integration initiatives) the concept retains analytical value. Such researchers argue for a focus on integration as a field of governance – part of the 'factual architecture' – within which immigrants lives are experienced (Hadj Abdou 2019). There is thus a need to examine integration in relational

fashion, investigating people and institutions in specific immigration contexts (Klarenbeek 2019). To do this, in this article cultural theory is applied.

The theory of socio-cultural viability (cultural theory) originated in the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas. Originally, cultural theory was a heuristic aid Douglas developed after she noticed certain patterns in the ways that disparate peoples organised themselves and their world-view (Douglas 1970 [2003]). Cultural theorists employ two axes: the extent of incorporation into bounded units and the extent that an individual is bound by the scope of external prescriptions. From this, a typology of four different, ideal-type *social solidarities* emerges: *egalitarianism*, *hierarchy*, *individualism* and *fatalism* (Thompson *et al.* 1990, 5). Each social solidarity generates a discourse with a particular, distinctive narrative on ‘nature’, ‘humanity’, time, styles of learning, material and political distribution within society (Table 1), with an associated “behavioural strategy” (Thompson *et al.* 1999, 1). Each social solidarity likewise demonstrates a different pattern of social relations and political relations. Those in egalitarian or hierarchical relations form a group pattern for collective undertaking, with those in egalitarian groups retaining more autonomy than hierarchs. Thus, egalitarian groups are characterised by equal relations and collective decision-making whereas those with demarcated authority predominantly make hierarchical groups’ decisions. The relations of individualism are fluid, personal networks characterised by individual choice. Fatalistic relations are those of atomised individuals with tenuous and unreliable links to others (Thompson 2008, 72–78; Swedlow 2012, 157–159).

Within cultural theory, each of these social solidarities exist at every level of social organisation from ‘dividual’ (since individuals exist within dynamic social and material contexts) to the international level (Thompson 1998, 200; 2008, 70). Indeed, solidarities (and concomitant discourses on the world) may coexist within institutions, often in pairwise fashion (6 and Mars 2008, xviii–xviiv; Verweij *et al.* 2011a). It thus becomes possible to analyse any given institution – understood broadly within cultural theory as “any non-randomness in behaviour (or ... in the beliefs and values that are used to justify that behaviour)” (Thompson 2008, 51) – using cultural theory’s typology at different times and social scales.¹

Table 1. The social solidarities (adapted from Thompson *et al.* 1990; Thompson 1998, 2003).

	Egalitarianism	Hierarchy	Individualism	Fatalism
Type of social order	High (group) incorporation, low external prescription: unranked groups	High incorporation, high external prescription: ranked groups	Low incorporation, low external prescription: ego-focused networks	Low incorporation, high external prescription: margins of organised patterns
Nature	Intricately connected and fragile	Controllable	Benign and will ‘bounce back’	Capricious
Humanity	Essentially caring and sharing	Malleable: deeply flawed but redeemable	Self-seeking and atomistic	Fickle and untrustworthy
Distribution	Equality of result is key	Distribution should be by need (based on rank or station)	It is fair that those who put most in get most out	Fairness is impossible

I should state several things at this point. Firstly, the particular knowledge of the world each social solidarity is partial and irreducible to that of the other social solidarities – no social solidarity is ‘wrong’. Cultural theory is thus not a means to push people towards ‘correct’ understanding of a situation. Secondly, cultural theory is not a theory of personality types. All people move between different social solidarities as they go about their lives. Indeed, many will move multiple times during a single day. As such, thirdly, cultural theory is above all a dynamic theory. Individuals are attracted towards one of the solidarities at any given time as a way of making “transactional sense” of their situations (Thompson 2008, 147). As situations change (due to the action of people or otherwise), particular world-views become increasingly difficult to sustain. This is the ‘viability’ mentioned in the theory’s full title. This is rooted in the imperfect picture of the world each solidarity generates – the uncomfortable knowledge of the other solidarities has a tendency to make itself heard (Verweij *et al.* 2011b). As such, social solidarities are not deterministic, rather as discourses they constrain and enable particular behaviours (Tansey & Rayner 2009). Furthermore, each solidarity will always exist

in some form (Tansey & O'Riordan 1999). People constantly organise and disorganise themselves in groups with concomitant outlooks on the world, their preferences emerge through their involvements with others (Thompson *et al.* 1990, 56–59).

Cultural theory is a strong candidate for examining integration projects. From the beginning, focus has been on processes of classification and boundary-maintenance (Douglas 1966 [2002]) and how this structures the information institutions can process, fuelling or defusing trajectories towards violence (6 & Richards 2017). This focus has led to papers focusing on the dynamics of egalitarian political systems among closed, dissident minorities (Richards 1999; Douglas & Mars 2003), the emergence of tyranny (Mars 2008), migrant integration (Olli 2012), as well as efforts to theorise and effect conciliation and peace-making (Richards 2009). Within cultural theory, difference and difference-making are integral to human life and what matters is how difference is accommodated (Richards 2009, 7). Cultural theorists are thus interested in the dynamics of institutions dominated by the outlooks of particular social solidarities and actions that mediate interactions between them (Richards 2010). An advantage of the typology is that it allows a degree of prediction within research. The way that these predictions are made is through assessing the extent that any given action or sets of actions is performed in the appropriate style and scale.

In cultural theory, *style* relates to the dominant social solidarity of a given institution and the extent that an action matches that solidarity's dominant narrative of the world. For example, an individualistic free market solution to an issue is unlikely to be popular or successful in a context where the egalitarian solidarity is dominant. However, as noted earlier, situations are not static and indeed institutional contexts change with people and even whole groups moving between social solidarities and changing their social organisation concomitantly (Mars 2008). Furthermore, with each social solidarity only able to appreciate part of reality, institutions that incorporate only a 'pure' set of views are integrally unstable – the amount of anomalous phenomena challenging the dominant framing of a situation will mount up. Different institutions have different strategies for dealing with anomalies; however, one response involves alliances between different groups. Thus, the individualists' free-market requires hierarchies for its maintenance. In such circumstances, tensions between contradictory worldviews may be managed ritually (Richards 2010; 6 & Richards 2017) but also by predominating at different social *scales* – egalitarianism could be dominant at the community level, while hierarchy is the stronger at national and international scales, for example. As such, in assessing NBI in Örebro County this article looks at what social scales the narratives of different social solidarities emerge. It thus becomes possible to make cautious assessment of the extent that the NBI activities observed are 'appropriate' to the integration-contexts within which they are practiced in terms of style and scale.

Methods and material

The NBI that comprise the focus of this study began in 2015, around the work of two local environmental non-governmental organisations: the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Örebro County (*Naturskyddsforening Örebro län*) and Hopajola. The initial phase of the project involved training newcomers as nature guides, with two (originating from Syria and Kosovo respectively), subsequently employed by the municipality. Since then, these guides state they have guided 2,300 people in various languages. This has included a series of "Nature experiences in several languages" (*Naturupplevelser på Flera Språk*, NFS) aimed generally at all members of local society. Similar to NFS is "Chat between the pines" (*Språka Mellan Tallarna*, SMT). SMT excursions were conceived as language-cafes in nature. The previous guides helped out with SMT, but many activities were organised by a person specifically hired for the project, who had come to Örebro from Afghanistan. SMT continue at the time of writing around Örebro County, at times organised by the participants of a third NBI project; "Education for nature interpretation in several languages in Örebro Region" (*Utbildning Naturvägledning på Andra Språk i Örebro län*, ENI). ENI comprised four three-day courses various in the towns of Örebro, Nora, Karlskoga and Kopparberg in total. Attendance at NBI activities was extremely variable. One SMT session was attended only by myself and the guide, whereas several days of the ENI course involved 21 people, guides included. Newcomers generally outnumbered Swedes with the exception of one SMT excursion (a snowshoe expedition). The largest

group of newcomers came from Syria. In general, the proportion of men to women varied considerably. The data collection period was between December 2017 and February 2019.

While the different projects had different objectives, they shared a basic activity template – guided walks in nature reserves. In general, ‘participants’ would be led by ‘guides’ through a nature reserve, stopping periodically to carry out pre-planned activities. The activities varied considerably but recurrent features of the activities were collective or cooperative action, entertainment, learning and the utilisation of a variety of different senses to build a picture of the local nature. Typically, guided walks were organised around one or two of the “universal access laws” (*allmansrätt*, Naturvårdsverket n.d.), which accord considerable rights to roam and collect resources in the countryside.

One of the challenges of performing a cultural theory analysis is avoiding tautology. The best way to do this is to work in a detailed fashion, trying to get information on the empirical object from a variety of perspectives with several methods, notably participant observation and interviews, supplemented by documentary analysis (Verweij *et al.* 2011a).

Participant observation

As Nature Based Integration activities comprise episodic, repeated, multiphasic experiences with an inherently embodied component, it seemed relevant to seek to attend as many NBI sessions as possible (Stewart 1998; Bolger *et al.* 2003). As such, data were collected *in situ*, with the intention of experiencing NBI as any other participant (Kusenbach 2003). Table 2 lists all NBI activities attended. I recorded observations utilising a notebook, camera and portable voice recorder. I collated this material in the form of a field diary, which was then used as the basis for coding alongside other data materials. As a regular participant in NBI activities, I was able to build social relationships, mostly with guides, which led me attending related events outside of NBI activities such as work seminars and meetings. These helped me to understand better the context within which NBI projects were planned and executed, providing opportunities for discussion of the strategic aims of the various activities as well as an awareness of where information was gathered for planning NBI activities.

Table 2. Observations collected.

Activity type	Number of activities attended	Notes
Språka Mellan Tallarna (SMT, Chat between the pines)	7	Conceived as a ‘language-cafe’ in nature. Highly variable attendance (2–17 including a guide and a researcher). Most activities took place around Örebro city. Organised by Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Örebro County.
Naturupplevelser på Flera Språk (NFS, Nature experiences in several languages)	3	Provided guiding experiences aimed at groups of diverse language background. Included an open day at Örebro Nature School. Guided walks attended by 4 people each including guides and a researcher. Took place around Örebro city.
Utbildning Naturvägledning på Andra Språk i Örebro län (ENI, Education for nature interpretation in Örebro County)	7	Comprised several three-day courses in several towns around Örebro County. Researcher completed the course twice plus one extra session. 109 participants over the seven attended sessions including guides and a researcher. Organised by Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Örebro County.
Other	1	Activity organised by a Swedish teacher to a group of medical workers learning Swedish in order to work within the medical system. 7 attendees including guides, a teacher and a researcher. Took place in Örebro city.

Interviews

Nine semi-structured interviews were organised (Table 3), with respondents purposively selected for their relationship to NBI in Örebro County. These comprised two groups. 1) Those who worked as NBI guides (Interviews 1–5). These were selected for their role as organisers of NBI activities, with several involved in project planning and successful funding applications. 2) A mixed group. These included Swedish-language teachers who have availed themselves of the pedagogical opportunities of NBI (Interviews 6–7), the Project Leader of an environmental NGO (Hopojola) involved in the planning and application processes for these NBI projects (Interview 8); and finally a municipality-employed ecologist who maintains online information on local nature and culture reserves (Interview 9). This information was a resource advertised and utilised by NBI guides. Interviews took place in the language of the respondent's choosing (eight Swedish, one English) and were transcribed.

Table 3. List of interviews.

Interview No.	Newcomer or Swede	Role
1	Newcomer	Nature guide
2	Newcomer	Nature guide
3	Newcomer	Nature guide
4	Swede	Nature guide
5	Swede	Nature guide/Project Leader at Swedish Society for Nature Conservation
6	Swede	Swedish-language teacher
7	Swede	Swedish-language teacher
8	Swede	Project leader at Hopajola
9	Swede	Local authority ecologist

Further information and coding

I also draw upon the successful project application documents for ENI. This allowed for comparison between the official (regarding funding) and the stated aims of the activities produced by respondents while performing different activities. I used NVivo to manage these combined data, allowing juxtaposition, analysis and consistent coding (Paulus *et al.* 2014). Utilising cultural theory's typology, I coded data in abductive fashion, paying attention to the different contexts within which different social solidarities were articulated.

Ethical concerns

As a field researcher, I was enmeshed in a web of social relationships, affecting and affected by the data collection context. It was thus essential that I was reflexive about my own impact on both results and respondents (Agar 2008; Ortbals & Rinker 2009). Regarding NBI activities, as a newcomer to Sweden, I did not feel my presence was disruptive as I tried to act as any other participant. At the beginning of each session/course I would identify myself and explain what I was doing. I also assured participants of their anonymity within the research. However, as a white, Swedish-speaking, male, European I was periodically misidentified by other participants as a Swede. In order to ameliorate this I thus sought to distance myself from guides and other authority figures by announcing myself to respondents and also by physically distancing myself from guides during activities, taking up a place in the group of participants. A concern to avoid appearing overly prying was also a factor in decisions around interviewing group participants. Immigration and immigration status are sensitive topics and as such I have rendered respondents anonymous in the text, with data collected regarded as

confidential. This is to minimise any risk of harm to respondents (European Sociological Association n.d.). Finally, in an effort to ensure that the results of this research did not simply become another output, I endeavoured to share and discuss results with respondents both in public and in private, with the aim of constructive action around NBI (cf. Ybarra 2014).

Utilising predetermined demarcations between social groups risks concealing the heterogeneity (background, mobility, culture, legal status) among both 'hosts' and 'newcomers' (Schinkel 2018). However, throughout the research process respondents of all stripes would tend to essentialise on some level. For the purposes of this paper 'Newcomers' is used to refer to peoples called *invandrare* ("immigrants"), *nysvenskar* ("new-Swedes"), *personer med utländsk bakgrund* (people with foreign backgrounds) and *nyanlända* ("new-arrivals") by respondents or in documents. Similarly, I refer to newcomers' counterparts, variously called *svenskar* ("Swedes"), *svensktalande* ("Swedish-speakers") and *ursvenskar* ("original-Swedes"), as 'Swedes' in this paper. The categories as used here do not make any sort of claim about residency status or rights to live in Sweden.

The social solidarities of NBI

This section is in four parts, each of which discusses one of cultural theory's social solidarities. The two social solidarities most prominent are egalitarianism and hierarchy, although individualism and fatalism are also present. Discussion then turns to the extent that the dominant orderings of NBI are appropriate to many immigrants' lives.

Egalitarianism – bringing newcomers into the group

Within these collated data, the discourse of the egalitarian solidarity appeared repeatedly. To members of the egalitarian solidarity, equality of outcome is key and there is considerable concern about iniquities within society and concomitant action to change institutions that distribute unequally (Thompson 2008, 24). The funding application for the ENI project illustrated this. The stated outcomes of the project assert that it is expected that "new citizens appreciate and use nature as a source of knowledge, recreation and relaxation". Likewise, the SMT funding application specifically seeks to address lack of knowledge among participants about safely accessing nature during wintertime. Similarly, different interview respondents regularly voiced concerns that newcomers to Sweden were unable to access the same rights to nature, with newcomers described as scared, unaware of the possibilities and ignorant of their rights to roam (Singleton 2020a).

This concern also partially explained the emphases upon Sweden's universal access laws. These laws are popular among many Swedes (Sandell 2006) and accorded with symbolic importance (cf. Beery 2013), embodying societal egalitarianism (Dahl 1998, 300–301). NBI activities thus chime with other actions to allow all inhabitants of Sweden to access nature (Fig. 1). During guided walks in several reserves, we passed facilities designed to allow disabled access to nature, provision of information for the blind as well as information for people of all ages to familiarise themselves with different natural environments. Likewise, through providing equipment for exploring the natural environment, many of the NBI activities aimed to reduce inequities of access. Thus at one SMT session, participants were allowed to borrow and experiment with nature photography using a good camera. At other sessions, loaned binoculars or clothing allowed people to see things and experience conditions that would previously have been less accessible.

As the egalitarian solidarity is characterised by high group incorporation the maintenance of group boundaries is often important with egalitarian groups often defining themselves against the mainstream (Douglas & Mars 2003, 772). As such, egalitarian groups are simultaneously opposed to mainstream society whilst sometimes wishing to 'convert' members of wider society to their cause (Thompson *et al.* 1990, 65). This emphasis on creating and maintaining group boundaries is visible at several levels in the data. Linking to the above-mentioned desire to remove obstacles to newcomers' access to nature vis-à-vis Swedes was also a desire to create situations where newcomers and Swedes could mingle. Reflecting egalitarianisms caring and sharing view of humanity, several respondents asserting that walking together will naturally lead to bonding:

Because I myself feel happiest out in nature it is best to meet me in nature [laughs], or so I think... And [in nature] I have knowledge that I want to share. It is not better or worse than meeting in a church or at a library but it is still important... And it is also an important part of our [Swedish] cultural history. (Interview 5)

While out in nature we are both on neutral ground. I can say “now I must go home” and I can go home. I don’t need to say to someone “you must leave my house now” ... For me [nature] is a good place to meet. And one can find different things to talk about that can unite people and find similarities and differences. (Interview 8)

As this last statement suggests, simply spending time with people and doing shared activities was hoped to lead to a shared body of experiences (cf. Singleton 2020b), making conversation and enjoyment easier. NBI activities endeavoured to create a shared space for the creation of social bonds. In effect a group space. Similarly, the egalitarian nature of the social space allowed for people to learn from one another as equals. Thus, one respondent expressed a strong desire to share her love for and knowledge of nature:

It doesn’t matter where one comes from or what one’s background is or what god one believes in or what sexual orientation or anything at all, everyone can enjoy nature and do it together with others, and that’s what I want to highlight. You can hang out with me in nature as well. I think it’s cool and will share. And I want to hear about your nature and thoughts. (Interview 5)



Fig. 1. Multilingual welcome sign for a nature reserve in Örebro.

This desire to create an egalitarian group space and consequent identity clearly emerged within NBI activities themselves (Singleton 2020b). Guide training also hammered home to participants that they need to involve people and build cohesion. Many activities had an active group-building component, encouraging cooperation and active learning, with usually everyone (or each subgroup at least) accorded an equal chance to speak. An example of this is a game where participants answered questions on either Swedish nature laws or vocabulary. Divided into groups, participants roll a die to identify which question to answer. Participants scatter the questions (36 of them) around the immediate (usually forested) area on bits of card. Groups should then work together to find the questions and to answer the questions, ensuring that everyone understands. Thus whilst it was possible to be competitive in this game with groups trying to be the first, the central thrust was on ensuring the group as a whole were able to learn. No rewards were ever given for finishing first in any case.

There was a strong emphasis on equality and concern for maintenance of the group as a whole (although certain hierarchies did emerge as the next section shows). Indeed, dealing with people who chose to leave the group could be problematic. As one respondent put it:

A single group member should not influence the whole, so the excursion should proceed as planned. If a person doesn't want to be with us, we shall try to encourage them and then show them the way back ... [or] take them to a place they can wait for us so we are free to ensure the others enjoy themselves. (Interview 1)

Likewise, the reasons respondents gave for people not attending activities resonated with egalitarian discourses. Attendance was quite variable, particularly for SMT. Respondents depicted newcomers as stuck in the fatalistic category – as passive, afraid and unable to access the opportunities of Swedes. Thus, a big challenge for NBI was to overcome this passivity. The assumed key to this was gaining access to extant newcomer groups as well as to inform them of the opportunities that were available. Indeed, the guides of newcomer background were envisaged as providing a way towards those felt to be excluded: "I believe the key is to find key-people in the municipalities that have the confidence of [newcomer groups]... So actually I don't believe it's because people don't want to come it's that they haven't received the information in the right form." (Interview 8).

With desire to bring people into the egalitarian group also came concomitant articulations of the egalitarian discourse on reality. Several respondents argued that something has gone wrong regarding people's relationship to nature and they have become cut off. "To egalitarians, who reject authority, it is the system ... that is held to blame" (Thompson *et al.* 1990, 59). These respondents argued that there was a need to educate and sensitise people to the environmental impacts of their activities and inculcate an awareness of society's connectedness with and dependence upon nature. Furthermore, this was not unique to newcomers, it also affected Swedes.

It is not just people who come to Sweden. It's also similar with our children, and it relates to adults today – they must become nearer [to nature] ... We are dependent upon [nature] and we are a part of it and we need to feel like we are a part of it in order to protect it. (Interview 4)

[W]e have begun to lose contact, the nature contact. People don't go out. Children eat fish fingers and believe that it is fish.... So it is a problem in Sweden too, that Swedes have distanced themselves from nature. (Interview 8)

As such, NBI organisers aspired to form a wider movement within Swedish society and indeed globally, since environmental issues are global in scope and effect. This was integral to their work on migration issues: "It is quite obvious to us that much of this whole refugee stream [is very much linked] to the pursuit of profits and to extract natural resources in an unsustainable way" (Interview 8). Elsewhere, cultural theorists have discussed the similarities between environmentalists and certain religious movements (Douglas & Wildavsky 1983). Within the collected data, this similarity also appears pertinent. NBI can be understood (at least in part) as an attempt to convert participants of all stripes to a particular worldview of nature as a delicate-balance. As one respondent stated that nature was simply and obviously "life" (Interview 5).

In sum, the discourse of the egalitarian solidarity is particularly prominent within these NBI. Built on the idea of society on a path to environmental destruction, the mantra 'do not disturb, do not destroy' (*stör inte, förstör inte*) is spread as the appropriate way for people to enjoy nature. Furthermore,

nature is important for people to enjoy and many activities may be simultaneously interpreted as an attempt to address inequities in environmental justice and as an attempt to build an egalitarian group both on individual walks and within society more broadly (Singleton 2020a).

Hierarchy – ensuring everyone gets the right info

Hierarchy is also clearly present alongside egalitarianism within NBI. Within the hierarchical solidarity's perspective, the world is very much knowable and people are malleable. It thus becomes possible to manage the world in an efficient, rational manner. Resources should be distributed by rank, station or (measurable and clearly defined) need, often through recourse to expert, dispassionate authority (Thompson 2008, 24). The approach of hierarchs to integration has a certain amount of overlap with egalitarianism. Both wish to incorporate people into groups, however hierarchy differs with a preference for clearly demarcated roles and specialism. Within this discourse, integration is about bringing people into the extant institutional order. Thus, integration is about both accessing nature and acquiring requisite knowledge to function within the hierarchy. In terms of social security, it thus becomes an exercise in identifying the 'deserving poor' and helping them (Thompson *et al.* 1990, 94-95).

The hierarchical outlook emerged in several situations during data collection. Firstly, it manifested on group activities in the separate roles of guides and participants (Singleton 2020b). Whilst there was a clear desire to reduce hierarchies through group exercises, guides still needed to organise people. As such, a hierarchy physically manifested with guides taking a visible position surrounded by participants. Similarly, when participants did not act as instructed, hierarchical authority would often emerge reflecting concerns that people need to be ordered. On several occasions, guides would take participants to task for example over lateness. For example, on one occasion a (newcomer) guide lambasted a young female participant: "In Sweden time is so important. ... One must start on time... That is a key rule – respect it!" (field notes). At other times, participants were criticised for failing to bring lunch to the forest (thus necessitating a trip away), which can be interpreted as breaking up the group but also as a resistance to guides' control of the day's timetable.

This reflects an argument that to integrate newcomers need to do three things: firstly to become aware of and obedient of the law. Within the activities observed this usually meant respecting the universal access rules. Secondly, it also entailed the absorption of the information required to utilise nature safely. This could be orienting oneself but also knowing that some mushrooms, for instance, can be lethal if eaten. Finally, it also entailed learning and respecting norms of Swedish society and nature use. As one respondent pointed out: "...in Sweden ... we have many laws. But we also have many rules. Including unwritten rules" (Interview 7). The same respondent then went on to give the example of the need to clean up after oneself using the example of family barbecues. It has been suggested that newcomers tend to practice different activities to Swedes, with the former preferring large social gatherings in comparison to 'Swedish' "values such as silence, solitude, hardiness and amateur scientific interest in flora and fauna" (Lisberg Jensen & Ouis 2008, 179). Thus while there is space for variety of practice, dominant norms and rules are expected to be obeyed ensuring facilities are available to others. This world of norms, rules and laws implicitly entailed Swedes and guides claiming authority to correct those seen breaking the rules. For example, one Swedish respondent described her difficult decision to confront several newcomer youths who were littering, in the end deciding that she must make a stand.

Decisions about what NBI participants needed to know reflected this teacher-student relationship. When asked about the incorporation of newcomers' views into planning it was stated that guides' experiences of previous activities and, in particular, the viewpoints of newcomers who had become guides were key. Thus, they identified the twin foci of biological knowledge and the universal access laws as likely to be most interesting/relevant to newcomer groups. Similarly, for newcomers looking to carry out specific roles in Swedish society, different bodies of knowledge could distinguished. As such, one Swedish-language teacher of medical workers argued for the importance of her students gaining an understanding of the lifestyles Swedes have. After all, to understand how an injury occurred and suggest a treatment requires knowledge of what activities people may do.

As such, hierarchy also often manifested on NBI guided walks. Integration entailed taking on the attributes ascribed to ordinary people within Swedish society and respecting the governing order, ultimately embodied by the Swedish state and its laws. Within this hierarchical ordering of integration, newcomers take a junior role in a teacher-student relationship, with concomitant levels of authority. Guides (and sometimes Swedes) decide what newcomers need to know and learn. This order was measured and kept track of in the form of reports that guides would produce, recording how many people they had guided, where they went and what occurred. NBI are thus positioned to appeal to those tasked with rationally deciding how resources are utilised (in other words, local authorities and funding bodies). NBI can thus also be interpreted as an attempt to order society following a hierarchical logic – an attempt to integrate newcomers and Swedes on a cost-effective and expert-led basis.

Individualism – earning one's place

In contrast to group-oriented members of the egalitarian and hierarchical social solidarities, members of individualistic solidarity actively seek to build ego-focused networks. Individualists, rather than joining bounded organisations, strive to make personal connections and to manipulate their networks. Individualistic actions are conceived as taking place within a competitive market, with the victors naturally accruing success (Thompson 2008, 23). With hierarchy and egalitarianism prominent within NBI group work, individualism only manifested episodically as people sought to build networks. For example, on one occasion on an SMT excursion a participant, an experienced Lebanese doctor, upon hearing I was associated with a university, immediately asked for my email address with the hope that I could somehow help him to find work within his field.

The discourse of individualism appeared most commonly around possibilities for paid employment. This was most obvious on the courses in nature interpretation. On several occasions, guides suggested that participation on the course (and the certificate awarded on successful completion) would be of value regarding future employment opportunities. For example, at the end of the first day of the course in Nora, over coffee and biscuits, the Swedish leader of the project clearly stated the value of the course and certificates – there is a growing need for more nature guides who can speak multiple languages, in part because interest in NBI is growing around Sweden. Furthermore, these particular certificates will have value because speaker herself is experienced and prominent in the field. The certificates thus have “a little power behind them” (field notes). This is very suggestive of an individualistic logic: the certificates have value in the Swedish job market. Furthermore, much of this value depends on the speaker's personal influence. The speaker is a ‘big man’ at the centre of a wider network, within which they are influential.

Course participants themselves also seemed to endorse an individualistic narrative of integration. Several were persistent in demanding what they saw as having earned; outside of sessions, several guides complained about participants pestering them for certificates, including those who had not fulfilled the completion criteria. The course participants were behaving in an individualistic manner – seeking to get their deserved outcome in their eyes, and with it a tool for use in the job market. Likewise, when participants took a competitive approach to NBI exercises, concerns for nature's sensitivity sometimes went out the window as people rushed to be first to finish (Singleton 2020b).

Finally, periodically the guides themselves would articulate the individualistic discourse. One guide would sometimes talk about the unwillingness of certain newcomers to make the necessary lifestyle changes to allow them to integrate into Swedish society: “It depends on how much [an immigrant] makes an effort. They are victims of their own backgrounds. Sometimes from my perspective one can say there are those who do not want to integrate themselves... Sometimes it helps those people to force them” (Interview 2). At other times, on guided walks, the stories guides would tell would also endorse this picture. This was most obvious at Oset och Rynningeviken reserve, which has an unusual history as land claimed from Lake Hjälmaren, then as a rubbish tip, then as reserve. I heard this story on at least four occasions used as a parable highlighting that Sweden was not built in a day. Sweden's welfare system and rich society are the product of Swedish struggle. The message for newcomers is: they need to work hard themselves. These different responses in many ways resemble classic individualistic reasoning. Members of the individualistic social solidarity

typically “attribute personal failure to bad luck or personal incompetence or some combination thereof.” (Thompson *et al.* 1990, 60). In this framing, the two newcomer guides are an example to others; they have successfully learnt Swedish and found work.

Fatalism – there is no such thing as integration

The fatalistic solidarity is of a different nature to the other three, tending to be most obvious by their absence in policy debates, for example. Individuals may find themselves in the fatalistic solidarity through being frozen out of the other three. Within the perspective of fatalism, fairness is an impossibility and this will never change (Thompson 2008, 24–25). As such, fatalism only made sporadic appearances in the NBI activities observed. Indeed, the voluntary nature of many activities meant that fatalists, characterised by apathy, keeping one’s head down and risk avoidance (Thompson *et al.* 1990, 63), were unlikely to even show up. However, whilst many people attended the nature interpretation courses voluntarily, on several occasions in Nora, several people appeared on the second and third days of the nature interpretation course on the back of a local employment scheme. Whilst some of these participants participated fully, others seemed to have only a desultory interest, often doing as little as possible within the constraints of various exercises and it seemed that they had been pushed to attend. The presence of these people (who appeared without warning) was a source of frustration to guides as it disrupted the hierarchical planning of activities.

Finally, the existence of the fatalistic solidarity was integral and implicit to the planning of all the NBI activities. During research, there were also periodic comments about some newcomers having a ‘bad culture’ that needed to change to integrate into Swedish society. For example, one ENI participant, from Uganda, complained “especially in Africa, we don’t totally give a shit about the nature. It’s because how we grow up ...” (field notes). On another occasion, I spoke with a newcomer representative of a women’s group in Karlskoga, which has adopted guided walks as one of their regular activities after completing the ENI course. This woman felt it was terrible that newcomer women could become isolated from society “because of culture” (field notes). Some groups of newcomers were conceived as existing in a fatalistic state and planned activities aimed to move them into other solidarities: “Powerless and exploited, fatalists, in egalitarian eyes, are prime candidates for missionary work. Since fatalists are the meek who, one day, will inherit the earth, the egalitarians’ task is to “empower” them so that the glorious day is not postponed indefinitely.” (Thompson *et al.* 1990, 95). Thus, the dominant egalitarian framing of newcomers as isolated and unable to access nature and make contact with Swedes depends on the (perceived) existence of the fatalistic solidarity.

The appropriateness of NBI

This section discusses the presence of the different social solidarities, with particular regard for the social scales within which they emerge. It concludes with discussion of the ‘appropriateness’ of NBI interventions within Swedish immigration contexts. Within the collated data, the perspective of the egalitarian solidarity is prominent. Respondents regularly articulated a discourse based on bringing people into subgroups and wider society as equals. However, within the organisation of NBI, hierarchy also repeatedly appeared, notably in the organisation and conduct of NBI activities. Likewise, there was evidence of the remaining social solidarities despite the hegemony of egalitarianism and hierarchy. As an egalitarian-hierarchy institution, I interpret the NBI activities observed as attempts to enact Swedish nature (or parts of it) as a ‘common-pool resource’ or a ‘commons’. Within cultural theory, definitive of the commons is cooperation of those involved for the greater good (Singleton 2017, 1009). The repeated motto of the universal access rules to neither disturb others nor damage nature is emblematic of this perspective. NBI invite newcomers to share both nature and the Swedish commons.

As an alliance between egalitarianism and hierarchy, NBI are responding to a problem within egalitarian institutions – true consensus decision-making becomes increasingly challenging as the size of a group increases. There are two common solutions to this issue: to splinter or to acquire some sort of hierarchical decision-making mechanism (Douglas & Mars 2003). Within the NBI observed, hierarchy and egalitarianism are often separate. Hierarchy largely manifests in preparation, including decisions

over activity choice and content. In this NBI also link to the hierarchical governance structures of the Swedish state – both as an ‘efficient’ solution to the ‘problem’ of integration but also in outlining what a newcomer needs to know. In the practice of NBI activities however, egalitarianism is the order of the day. There is a preference for consensus and guides expressed frustration at having to badger people to participate in things. After all, one of the key aims of the activities is to have fun and it is seldom fun to berate or be berated. This recourse to hierarchical coercion when consensus-approaches failed at times led to uncomfortable moments during observed activities. Likewise the awkwardness of ‘Swedes’ being tasked with ‘teaching’ and ‘disciplining’ newcomers was generated because it infringed the norms of the commons as an institution of equals. However, the need for egalitarian approaches to maintain the commons remains: while there are numerous Swedish laws about what one can and cannot do in nature, enforcement in a big, sparsely-populated country presents great challenges. As such, the commons system can only continue if people adhere to the norms of use. This point was made on an ENI course. I asked the guide what happens if the laws of a nature reserve are ignored. The subtext to her response was that in practice, often very little, as she reiterated that guiding in nature “is built on really respecting [the rules]” (field notes).

Diagnosing NBI activities as an egalitarian-hierarchy makes it possible to consider the extent that such practices fit into participants’ lives. The appropriateness of any particular social institution (such as NBI) depends on the extent that it matches the contexts within which it occurs. This means it should fit predominant social solidarities at the various social scales (Thompson 1998; Singleton 2017). The NBI observed here manifest on two different social scales at the level of local governance and at the level of the guided activities themselves. Different social solidarities dominate at these scales and thus different narratives about what success constitutes success will be in place.

In Sweden, at the level of local governance, municipality (*kommun*) or county (*region*) bodies predominate, organisations often with a largely hierarchal outlook. NBI activities at this scale appear as a rational, measured response to the societal issue of integration. It involves experts (guides) providing newcomers with the tools to access nature and society. The observed NBI appear a rational response to integration issues from the hierarchical perspective. The success of the observed NBI projects and subsequent ones (which have also garnered local funding) reflects this. The organisers of NBI in Örebro County are able to present their activities in such a way that satisfies members of the hierarchical social solidarity. The documented activities with the numbers of people involved serve to measure the success of the work. As such, this form of NBI will likely continue to appeal to hierarchical actors at a higher social scale as long as the activities are measurably a success.

At the scale of the individual, however, the egalitarian solidarity is dominant. In this case, success is likely to be considered in terms of the extent that newcomers are incorporated into each activity and ‘converted’ into both wider society and a wider egalitarian, environmental movement (Singleton 2020a). Within the NBI activities themselves, this was largely successful. While there were periodic examples of resistance and conflict to NBI (Singleton 2020a, 2020b), for the most part activities passed without a hitch. Beyond the observed activities however, it is harder to gauge how successful NBI were on their own terms. For example, difficulties in attracting people to SMT sessions may not just demonstrate a failure to access local social groups, as respondents suggested, but also indicate that the types of activities themselves (and the underlying egalitarian logic) were part of the problem. This is the subject of the next paragraphs.

Respondents provided several examples of NBI success, like a Karlskoga women’s group utilising guiding technique (field notes). In another case, a Columbian newcomer and her Sweden-Finnish husband joining a branch of the Swedish Society of Nature Conservation was seen as demonstrating NBI’s potential (Interview 4). Similarly, the only regular attendees of SMT guided walks, apart from myself and the guide, were the guides’ siblings. This suggests that the egalitarian nature of NBI activities is most appealing when participants are drawn from extant social organisations (families, groups), and it is possible that these already matched the narratives of egalitarian and hierarchical social solidarities.

This point is incomplete; it was beyond the scope of this research to explore the impacts of NBI activities. It does suggest that future NBI activities may profitably garner support by targeting extant social groupings within Swedish society. However, such groups need to be open to incorporation within NBI – in groups where the maintenance of boundaries and the retention of members in the

face of outside threats (as in the case of heavily enclaved organisations) then NBI activities may simply be another thing to be resisted (Douglas & Mars 2003; Richards 2009). It also suggests that newcomers who find themselves in the individualistic or fatalistic social solidarities may be less receptive to NBI as a path to integration. NBI advocates will hope that the enjoyable NBI success will convert fatalists to their group, but accessing them remains challenging. Members of the individualistic solidarity present a different challenge, the NBI observed here present only limited and sporadic opportunities for networking and the building of social capital. As such, if many newcomers are in individualistic contexts and/or are acting/being pushed to act in an individualistic way in other parts of their lives, this will affect their responsiveness to NBI activities. It is tempting to see participants' demands for ENI course certificates and framings of the course as advantageous for employment as reflective of this. There is thus a need to thoroughly situate NBI activities in the daily lives of participants and their families (Olli 2012). The NBI observed in this study are episodic and will be a small part of participants' lives. Hypothetically, if newcomers and Swedes are pushed to behave in an individualistic manner within the greater institutional contexts of their lives, then one would expect NBI similar to the ones described here to have limited impact. If newcomers are often in individualistic contexts, NBI-based employment schemes may prove more successful.

There is also a need to further interrogate NBI's place in the lives of Swedes. Swedes constitute the group with which integration is to take place and as such are an integral part of NBI activities. However, Swedes were rare on many SMT and NFS activities, perhaps reflecting that they did not match many Swedes' preferences for outdoor recreation. One respondent stated that the Swedes that come along on guided walks (not just NBI) tend to already have an interest in outdoor recreation and may well have already 'converted' to NBI's implicit green social movement (Interview 4). Thus, the basic level of NBI information needed to bring newcomers in may be relatively uninteresting to Swedes. The one SMT session where large numbers of Swedes participated was the snowshoe expedition, with several participants saying they were eager to try out something new. As such, future NBI that seek to bring Swedes and newcomers together perhaps need to think harder on what activities might appeal to both groups.

There is thus a need for greater investigation of different practices in nature. Indeed, this is where insights from cultural theory may have further value. Research suggests that many Swedes endorse the model of nature as a commons and the egalitarian symbolic values these entail. However, if many Swedes express preferences for solitude in nature in 'wilderness' (Lisberg Jensen & Ouis 2008, 179), this may reflect more individualistic approaches to nature in private lives – nature is a boundless landscape to be 'conquered' by bold 'explorers'. As such, while the right to access Swedish nature is a common good, its exploration is a product of the investments one makes (time, money for equipment, etc.). If this is the case, then this may explain difficulties in integrating Swedes into NBI – egalitarian group exploration is counter to individualistic preferences. Likewise, if newcomers choose to access nature in different ways to Swedes there may be potential for conflict as has been the case over usage of other shared physical spaces (Mack 2017). As such, there is a need to analyse NBI's place in Swedish immigration contexts alongside cultural theory investigations of different forms of nature use. This would generate knowledge useful in the planning and conduct of NBI but also contribute to cultural theory investigations of the commons. This is of importance because, as cultural theory research elsewhere has shown, the dominance of particular narratives can have counter-intuitive and sometimes pernicious effects. For example, anti-discrimination legislation has been implicated in the *de facto* increased segregation of Dutch society (Bovens & Trappenburg 2006).

Conclusion

This paper has examined nature-based integration activities in Örebro County utilising the theory of socio-cultural viability. Within cultural theory's typology the observed activities can be understood as products of an alliance between egalitarianism and hierarchy. Egalitarianism predominates at the level of the activities themselves with the activities' purpose interpreted as an effort to bring newcomers into shared group spaces with Swedes as equals and provide them equal access to the commons of Swedish nature. Hierarchy manifests in the role guides play in planning and coordinating

guided activities and in the way that the observed activities are framed to appeal to hierarchical actors higher up the social scale. Tensions between the different social solidarities appear at moments where guides are compelled to try to discipline participants.

This interpretation is a first step to thoroughly interrogating NBI and other integration initiatives' place in Swedish society. Put simply, if the egalitarian-hierarchy framings of NBI do not match the socio-material contexts that newcomers and Swedes go through in their daily lives then this will affect their impact. This article suggests that the variable levels of attendance by both newcomers and Swedes may reflect that the framing logics of NBI are not always appropriate to participants. It argues that there is a need for further research to explore this. Notably individualism around broader integration activities of newcomers (for example, in job hunting) and in the nature use of Swedes should be investigated further. Doing so will increase the possibilities for different forms of NBI as well as helping ensure that the good intentions of the different activities have the desired effect.

Notes

¹ As with any theory, cultural theory has its critics, notably around the potential for misunderstanding it as static and deterministic of human behaviour. In many cases, people raise criticisms to misapplications of the theory. In the interest of brevity readers are guided towards 6 and Mars (2008, xxiii) who compile and address a list of criticisms.

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