Venligboerne

Integration on Facebook



“It would be nice to know that some of the efforts have a long-term effect.”

- J., Volunteer with Venligboerne

“You prepare us to live again”

–F., Refugee posted in Venligboerne

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# Abstract

Integration is a challenge for both majority and minority populations. It is difficult in Denmark due to factors such as language, perceptions of minorities, personal difficulties faced by asylum-seekers, cultural differences in majority and minority groups, and internal forces in the majority society.

A Facebook group like Venligboerne can empower both Danes and asylum-seekers through networking opportunities and transfer of social capital. It addresses some issues faced by individuals, and can bridge language barriers.

Actor Network theory is used in this study to assess praxis in the network, and Venligboernes initial phase.

Methodological approaches include participant observation, online and offline; interviews; and literature searches.

Facebook as a tool for informal integration processes has advantages, including an informal, flat structure, easy accessibility, and built-in language translation (of certain languages). It relies on Facebook’s existing “gift” or encouragement system of “likes”, “newsfeed” and posting notification.

There is a disadvantage in that anonymity of asylum-seekers is difficult to secure. Other problem issues, not unique to Facebook are also discussed.

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# Introduction

This section provides a view of the problem, the research question, the field and history of the problem.

The problem

Integration is a difficult process in Denmark for many reasons.

Harald Schultz, cand.pæd. in pædagogisk filosofi, defines integration as, “…becoming an active part of the foundation of Danish democracy.” (Information, 2015) Language, employment, and education are part of integration, but not the whole picture. This is because being Danish is about more than just these things. And being Danish is very difficult to learn. It is a process of learning. Some understanding of the scope of the difficulty of integration can be found through a Google search of “fejlslagen integration” which brings up 17, 000 hits 6.6.15. (“integrationsproblemer” brings up only 11,600. 6.6.15)

This paper is not about problems with integration. Rather it is about the advantages that are afforded through a special type of informal integration on Facebook.

This study will, however, sketch out some of the reasons that integration in Denmark is difficult. It also points out that integration was also difficult in ancient Rome, and in 15th century Venice. There is nothing new about the problem, and it is not limited to this country.

There is a small group of people in Northern Jutland who have found a unique way of tackling some of the problems posed by integration by using Facebook to create a group called “Venligboerne”. This group is public, but requires membership to participate. Volunteers offer activities like trips or visits, some plan large events, some post thoughts for discussion. Asylum-seekers are encouraged to visit, attend events, or post their own thoughts. The chat service of Facebook, Messenger, can be used to contact individuals privately for conversations or requests.

Facebook is commonly known as a “social media” (SNS). For many, it is THE social media (1.44 billion monthly active users) (Newsroom.fb.com, 2004) . Its networking possibilities allow immigrants to connect with each other and Danes across barriers that will be described in the following section.

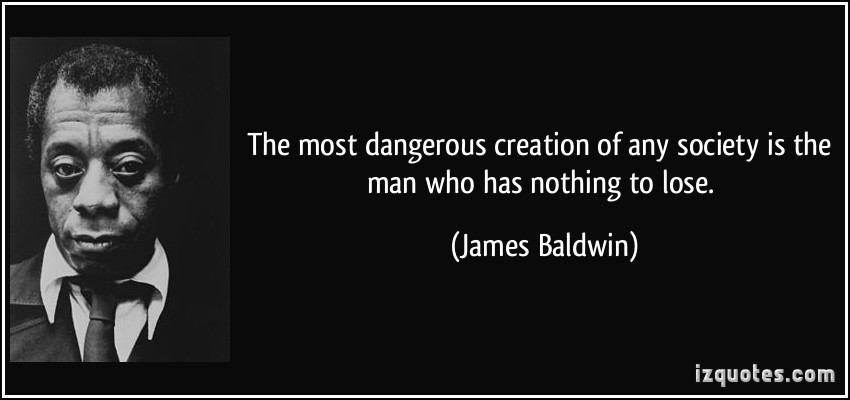
My research question:

How can Facebook contribute to an informal, grassroots integration process like Venligboerne? Which strengths and weaknesses does the technology provide?

The Facebook group Venligboerne is a new, direct way of doing small-scale aid work, through personal contact on Facebook. It provides the possibility of empowering both givers and receivers of aid.

In the course of the paper, the history of integration, some key terms from integration and socialization are discussed. Venligboernes organizational history is laid forth, their methods are illustrated through ethnographic data, and finally, Facebook’s contribution to the process is considered. The broad-based success of this small, grass-roots organization in promoting integration of asylum-seekers into local Danish society seems to stem from a variety of factors.

The writing style of this paper is inspired by Dinah Boyd, principal researcher at Microsoft, and graduate of Brown and Berkeley Universities. In an interview, she stated, “If you have the privilege to be able to examine complex issues and have the skills to do meaning-making and the freedom to think for a living, you have a responsibility to help others understand what you know.” (Wang, 2014) The goal of this paper is to a give a clear view of a digital, grass-roots integration project on Facebook called Venligboerne and to explain how it improves integration in Denmark. Venligboerne provides an inexpensive, volunteer-based, supplement to official integration of growing numbers of refugees into Danish society.



(Baldwin, 1962)

## The Field (the big picture)

The community-based approach of this study does not mean that there is the belief that a small, local Facebook group can change the forces driving migration into Europe, and other 1st world countries. There are huge forces of war, poverty, and insecurity pushing people to move. An overview of migration is provided in this section

(UNHCR, 2015) There is fear that this year will be the most dangerous for those making the crossing from North Africa to Italy because the Italian rescue operation has been cut back (fortunately, the EU supported continued military patrolling of the Mediterranean) and there is continued pressure from Syria, Iraq, Libya, while the terror groups ISIS and Boko Haram are still inflicting damage in the region. (The Guardian, 2015)

Australia has implemented a drastic strategy, reportedly to cut down on the deadly crossing from Indonesian to Australian territory, and to prevent criminals from entering as asylum-seekers. The Australian government pays for two refugee camps on remote islands in Papua New Guinea. Australian politicians have received domestic and foreign criticism for this policy. (International Business Times UK, 2014)

This community-based approach does not mean that there is not an understanding that there forces far greater than those contained in a Facebook group, driving migration into Europe, and other 1st world countries. There are networks of human traffickers that ensure passage from dangerous and disadvantaged parts of the world to areas of relative safety. The passage is often perilous.

There is fear that this year will be the most dangerous for those making the crossing from North Africa to Italy because the Italian rescue operation has been cut back (since the first writing, the Italian Navy and the EU have agreed on stepping up rescue efforts, and funding has been provided- Amanpour CNN 20.05.15) But there is continued pressure from conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya, while the terror groups ISIS and Boko Haram are inflicting damage in many area of Africa and the middle East. (Elbagir, 2015) This means that the pressure to flee also continues.

Australia has implemented an alternative strategy, reportedly to cut down on the deadly crossing of the sea from Indonesia to Australian territory, and to prevent paperless migrants who might be criminals from gaining access to Australia. It is one of the most extreme examples of immigration control in the world. The Australian government pays for two refugee camps on remote islands in Papua New Guinea, and ships all refugee entering Australian territory to these camps... These camps have been criticized as being inhumane holding areas, and integration into New Guinean society has proved extremely difficult for refugees, due to a lack of economic and educational infrastructure in New Guinea. The isolated camps have experienced riots, the killing of a refugee by New Guineans, and frequent hunger strikes.

There is continued pressure on migration into Europe, and as statistics from 2013-2014 from the UNHCR show. The media reports that the current number of refugees exceeds that during WW2. Refugee quotas for Denmark are 500 UNHCR refugees per year, and (Nyidanmark.dk, 2015)

### Into the field

Stepping into this field was an overwhelming and humbling experience. I was not prepared for scope of social and sociological, political, personal, and theoretical problems in the field of integration. This complex study area encompasses, according to the United Nations organization for refugees, UNHCR, about 46 million (including all displaced peoples) worldwide. (UNHCR, 2015) Migration is a problem with a scope that is overwhelming, and an immediacy that seems to encourage response rather than planned programming. Internal responses to radicalization often bring whole populations of foreigners into question, divide residents, and may marginalize and radicalize further. (The photo and quote from James Baldwin illustrate this problem) Generalizations in this field are often interpreted as racism. This is a field in which problem solving on a micro level seems difficult- both because of the huge, international scope of the problem, and because asylum seekers are protected and governed by specific rules and organizations (DFH and licensed operators run centers for asylum-seekers) these rules and organizations differ from those normally used by Danes. (Nyidanmark.dk, 2015) (Justitsministeriet.dk, 2015) (Tinor-Centi, 2015)

The field addressed by this study has been narrowed considerably by looking at the problem of informal integration through the lens of Facebook’s contribution to the process. Although integration is an issue that is described in written sources back to ancient Rome, Facebook’s contribution is very recent. Actually, Facebook’s contribution to integration is extremely difficult to find through literature searches, making this somewhat of a pioneering study.

There are four coordinating agencies for asylum centers in Denmark: Vesthimmerlands Kommune, Jammerbugt Kommune, Lollands Kommune and the Danish Red Cross.

The program to be examined, in this study, Venligboerne, is just this; a micro-level integration solution: simple, inexpensive, grass-roots, which shows promise in integrating a number of asylum seekers in Denmark. It does not solve all integration problems. It does work to provide networks for both asylum seekers and Danes. I have the utmost respect for those who started and run this program.

“Venligboerne” has harnessed the power of networking to help immigrants overcome some of the barriers of integrating using the SNS, Facebook. The technology provides strengths, and has some inherent weaknesses.

The field addressed by this study has been narrowed considerably by looking at the problem of informal integration through the lens of Facebook’s contribution to the process. Although integration is an issue that is described in written sources back to ancient Rome, Facebook’s contribution is very recent. Actually, Facebook’s contribution to integration is extremely difficult to find through literature searches, making this somewhat of a pioneering study.

My suggestions are meant to help with eventual optimization, not to cast doubt on the work of any of those who participate in this program, Danes and refugees alike.

### My entrance into the field

My entrance into the field came while I was working on my last internship at a regional museum. The staff spoke about starting an integration project, I wanted to help with this project. This would have allowed me to use my knowledge from my last internship and continue at the museum. My interest in integration is because I am both Danish and a second-generation Dane. And not. My father fled from Poland after the failed Hungarian uprising, and my mother was a Danish social worker employed by the United Nations. I grew up in a household, in America, which was always neither/nor. Not American, not Danish not Polish. I still identify myself as American, if people ask. Often, they assume I am Danish. My museum project, however, never got started, because I was offered a good job teaching Danish to asylum seekers at the local Højskole. And being part of a family trying to make ends meet on SU, I took the job. I thought about working on the global Google game “Ingress”, which also functions as a networking tool. Somehow, though, it was just a game. At the Højskole, I met many asylum seekers. Just like in any group, their uniformity dissolved into individual personalities. A colleague at the Højskole, Helle Møller Riis, the media teacher, told me about the Facebook group, Venligboerne, and I made an appointment to visit Hyttebyen, where volunteer coordinating took place at that time. I was there the day Niels Viberg from Radio SkagaFM came for an interview. During the animated interview, many other people came to offer assistance, to talk, to make suggestions, to bring books. I was overwhelmed, and very curious. Around the same time, I saw Merete Bonde Pilgaard, who started the group, speaking on Aftenshowet (DR TV, 2015)), and I sensed that Venligboerne might be a unique opportunity (this was confirmed by the list of media reports on a quick Google search of ‘Venligboerne’)

## What is it like to be an asylum-seeker in Denmark?

This section will present some barriers to integration in Denmark. Venligboerne on Facebook can help overcome some of these barriers.

In a recent novel, Albanian refugee, Gazmend Kapllani writes,

“The immigrant is a creature surrounded by borders. Conventional borders, those that separate countries are for him, nothing more than the large, visible border. But there are thousands of other invisible borders that wait for him every moment, every day, almost with every movement, and every ambition. Language: there you have your first invisible border. What immigrant has not felt the first moving feeling- almost like first love- that one experiences, when one speaks his first sentences in a foreign language that until yesterday resembled the banging of a hammer, or the sound of a sewing machine? You attempt to steal intonation and specific expressions which you believe will conceal the fact that you are different than the locals.” (Kapllani, 2010)

### Language

Triloki Nath Sharma, in his book Danskerne, also points out that language is crucial, not just in Danish culture, but also in integrating into Danish culture. He is an expert in oriental languages, a researcher and a teacher. In his chapter on integration, he states, “Language is the most central part of being Danish, it is actually the basis for integration, also on other levels, i.e. Professional integration, social integration and so on. With a few exceptions ... it is not easy to "do right" in Danish society without a good mastery of Danish ... It's an unequivocal belief that everyone should be able to speak the Danish language to be part of the democratic system and to function as equal citizens ... based on the belief that all people in Denmark are equal.” He goes on to state that Danes ensure that foreigners receive language training. Sharma continues that the requirements for a high level of language mastery are greater in Denmark than in other countries, for example in the US, where one may function socially, and on the employment market, with more limited language capabilities. Sharma goes on to quote Leif Davidson, who wrote in “Den Troskyldige Russer” that “Danes do not allow anyone into their tribal society who does not know all of the nuances of the Danish language.” This, Sharma states, one of the main problems with integration in Denmark. The culture is relatively insular, Danes have a norm called “ikke at blande sig” (not to interfere). Danes themselves do not seek out and contact people they do not already have some connection to. Foreigners, therefore, have a hard time practicing the Danish language and learning Danish culture because they do not have contact with the Danes. (Sharma, 2008)

### Boundaries and social capital

To understand this notion of borders and boundaries enclosing the immigrant, Paolo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a good starting point. Freire worked teaching language to, and empowering minority groups in Brazil. Immigrants have spent money and personal and educational resources- many have used connections to get papers, permissions and passages (all of these tangible and intangible resources are known as social capital- see Bourdieu appendix) to flee. When they arrive, they find that the social capital in their new country has a “different currency”. They need to re-learn almost everything, not just language, but the underlying ways of thinking that support the language. Freire’s approach to learning language harmonize with the way the group Venligboerne accepts, respects and socializes asylum-seekers. His educational approach relied on dialogic or conversational forms, something we see in Facebook communication. This dialogue requires mutual respect, and not acting upon another, or “banking” information. Seeing a movie, or going to a lecture are classic examples of “banking”. The learning needed to have its roots in a respect for the learner’s previous life and experience, and grow out of this. Freire was also focused on learning in the real world. He was praxis-oriented. These values describe well the socialization occurring through Venligboerne. There is a strong current of political resistance in Freire’s work, something we will also see as part of the Venligboerne movement, primarily when the site was starting.

It is perhaps ironic to mention the Danish Queen and Pierre Bourdieu in the same sentence. The queen, however very succinctly explains the concept of social capital in her New Year’s speech of 2007 (as quoted by Triloki Nath Sharma), “Ingen bør forvente, at den, der kommer til et nyt sted, et fremmede land, straks skal kaste alt sit arvede gods overbord, som om det var overflødigt. Det ville føre til, at man blev rodløs for alvor..” (Sharma, 2008) Immigrants need to feel they have something to offer to the society they are entering.

### Locus of control

A democratic discussion of rights and responsibilities seems to be missing between Danes and asylum-seekers. This is sketched out by two social scientists.

British social anthropologist and sociologist, Richard Jenkins, writes in his book, Being Danish, based on field observations in Skive in 1996, that,”…the refugees who came to Denmark from the mid-80’s onward were the human manifestations of international treaty obligations to which, until then, few Danes had paid much attention…As a result, when they appeared in the border, many Danes did not see them as invited, or their request for admission as legitimate.” (Jenkins, 2012)

Triloki Nath Sharma also explains why many new citizens are not aware of what has been sacrificed to achieve the current Danish welfare state, and what a great feat this was before the North Sea Oil development projects provided the Danish state with many of the resources it now possesses. Sharma writes that Danes are quite modest, and they have not taught others to reflect about what this achievement actually means. (Sharma, 2008) Many immigrants to Denmark, according to Sharma, may not have an understanding for the actual costs involved in running a welfare state. This issue is not directly addressed by Venligboerne, but Volunteers often encourage young asylum-seekers to continue their educations.

### The unity of “them”

Richard Jenkins also addresses a point I chose to call The Unity of Them, which I see as the definition of immigrants as “other’ ‘suspect’ “foreign”. This grouping makes integration more difficult because immigrants seem even more difficult to approach. “…Skive’s “Islamic community” may appear, from an outsider’s perspective, to be a unitary community- and that, indeed, is how local Danes see them, as a definite them- but the view from within of this complex network of people of different identities, with different histories must be rather different… their fragmentation and lack of a shared group identity- may discourage them from taking the interpersonal risks demanded by Danish integration policies.” (Jenkins, 2012) It is not irrelevant which society one is integrating into.

Statistics from aftenshowet- 7 out of 10 Danes, according to Dansk Flygtninghjælp, would not knock on the door of a refugee center. (DR TV, 2015) This means that if Danes are not empowered, either culturally or psychologically to reach out to asylum-seekers, then Danes may not be able to overcome the barriers separating them from asylum-seekers, and an integration that would benefit all.

Shifting the locus of control to the individual (Dane or immigrant) increases feeling of empowerment. Venligboerne lets Danes feel like they can make a difference on an individual level. And it makes asylum-seekers able to reach into Danish society and share what they have to offer.

Gerd Baumann, in his book based on field studies in Southall, U.K., called “Contesting Culture” writes that the idea of culture is manufactured. Both Danish culture and immigrant culture exist from the outside, “Ethnographers’ use of the word culture have established one point of consensus: culture is not a real thing, but an abstract and purely analytical notion. It does not cause behavior, but summarizes an abstraction from it, and is thus neither normative nor predictive… Culture exists only insofar as it is performed, and even then its ontological status is of a pointedly analytical abstraction.” (Baumann, 1996) This focus on performance, or praxis, in terms of culture, means that being able to influence this praxis on individual level (being empowered) is vital to both Danes and Asylum-seekers.

### Perception of Islam

A perception of Islam as culture that threatens Denmark may lead Danes to shun asylum-seekers. However Baumann’s previous explanation of culture and a study from the Center for studies in Islamism and radicalization seem to show that there is neither a clear threat, nor a clear culture to fear.

This seems to support findings of the Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalization (CIR) at Aarhus University, which writes in its 2010 report on radicalization, that “Thus, reviewing the literature on radicalization and Islam, it has been said that the pattern is that there is no pattern – there is no single model that explains how and why some young European Muslims become radicals.” They write about French researcher, Olivier Roy who has written extensively about integration issues:

…Roy is arguing that because the academic concern with Muslim minorities in the West today is driven largely by perceptions of Muslims as potentially dangerous, research has been steered by categories and assumptions, which are foreign to the practices and everyday lives of most Muslims. In terms of philosophy of science this is called ‘etic’ categories and descriptions, meaning research using a vocabulary produced by scientists and not the objects of research themselves. In contrast, sociological and ethnographic virtues of ‘understanding’ and ‘emic’ (the study and description of cultural practices from the point of view of the insider, not using an external, scientific vocabulary and categorization) are forgotten. (Kühle and Lindekilde, 2010)

Radicalization is both a perceived threat, and a contributing factor in objectifying asylum-seekers as potentially dangerous “others”.

### Internal Forces within the society

In his book, “Den Multiculturelle Skole- integration og sortering” Thomas Gitz- Johansen makes yet another distinction in the complex concept of integration. He states integration of foreigners is more difficult if society has more “disintegrational” forces. He contrasts integrational with disintegrational forces. Gitz-Johansen cites the sociologist Mortensen, when he writes that examples of socially integrative forces include: “ …use of legitimate political power, democratic institutions, cultural joint practice, tradition, ritual, and consensus.” and examples of disintegrative forces include:”… the functional inconsistencies of institutions, conflicts of interest, exclusion of people, class struggles, illness, lack of norms, discrimination, separation and psycho-social pathology.” (Glitz-Johansen, 2006) This particular view is interesting in that rather than understanding why foreigners have a difficult time integrating into Danish society, one also examines the forces in our post-modernist world that contribute to an alienation of not just foreigners, but of many ordinary citizens. Many citizens find it hard to see how their individual contribution, or even their person, fits into the big picture of society. Aside from having some disintegrational forces, Danish society has a high level of technical and bureaucratic complexity.

### Some may have a harder time

Eriksson, a psychologist, did a pioneering study of the Sioux and Yurok Indians during the 1930’s, which was an interdisciplinary psychoanalytical and anthropological field study based on participant observation. He postulated through this study that the Yurok Indians of Southern California, whose cultural identity emphasizes traits such as acquiring and retaining possessions, self-restraint, and understanding the larger picture in terms of economic resources had an easier time of integrating into Northern American culture than the Sioux Indians of the plains. This group, when faced with the difficulties of adapting became passive and withdrawn. There are differences in how different people integrate into different cultures. Integration is not one single, easily-defined concept. It depends on the individual immigrant and his or her culture, and the culture he or she is integrating into, and as Jenkins points out, all of the other immigrants who have already come. And even these factors, including culture, as Baumann points out, are not wholly predictive. (Baumann, 1996)

## Integration in ancient Rome

It is interesting to take a historical perspective on integration to give a broader understanding of the issue. Many of the debates we engage in about how to incorporate new members into our society, are the same as those engaged in 100, 1,000 and even 2,000 years ago. The editor, in fact, frames the debates in the book itself, by stating that it is important to view integration, not form a general, but a local, point of view.

“…debates on integration and identity are often very general: they focus on general processes of integration and identity formation, looking for rules and models that can be applied over a wide area and through various periods in time. However, they do not always take sufficiently into account the myriad local variations that occurred throughout the Roman Republic and the motivations of the individuals experiencing and participating in these processes. Although general models can certainly be helpful to explain such processes, local situations should form the starting point of any enquiry into integration and identity formation.”

(Roselaar, 2012)

Interestingly, the same author mentions that a person’s allegiance to the Roman state often depended on the circumstances. Identity was thus a relatively fluid entity, as was the Roman state’s allegiance to colonial states dependent on economic and political circumstances. These factors make it evident that a local (or micro) perspective is justified, if not necessary in understanding questions of integration in a historical (as well as a modern) context.

However, an understanding of the judicial, political and economic aspects of the issue are also crucial to gaining a picture of how the question of integration is unfolding in Denmark at the present moment. Therefore, a larger network approach gives background information to provide a meaningful context to the issues surrounding integration. However, the primary focus will be on the very local analysis of “Venligboerne”, which works to integrate asylum seekers and refugees from various nations into society in Hjørring in Northern Jutland.

It is also useful to note that the Roman Empire was not alone in working with questions of integration, but that there have been groups of humans moving from one place to another for many thousands of years. (Roselaar, 2012)

A similar point about identity could also be illustrated by a look into art, which sometimes gives a less complicated view of underlying abstract concepts than reality readily affords. This example is not meant to provide a symbolist approach, but merely to illustrate the complexity of identity.

Shakespeare’s Othello provides a beautiful, if tragic description of the role of an outsider and an insider at the same time. Othello’s identity is double. In the play, Othello is the black Moorish general employed by, and loyal to the Venetian state. He has won the love of the desirable young Venetian noblewoman, Desdemona. He faces jealousy and treachery from many parties, in spite of, and because of the fact that he is successful and powerful, both in winning Desdemona, and in commanding the fleet of Venice. He is duped by Iago, a man he has passed over for a position as Lieutenant. Because Othello trusts Iago, he ends by losing love, power and his own life. Shakespeare makes it clear that Othello is an outsider, yet his character is the character with whom one identifies most. In spite of his position, and his loyalty, he is not accepted by Venetian society, and among many other things, one realizes that integration poses challenges on many levels.

## Facebook

Facebook is a multimillion dollar enterprise. People all over the world, 1.3 billion of them, use it regularly. Facebook’s slogan “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life” and its impressive user numbers are an expression of how important the social is to humans everywhere. Imagine if Facebook could help immigrants connect and share with the locals of the previous quote. At the moment, Facebook provides a platform for many people’s social experiences worldwide, in rich and poor countries, in hundreds of languages. Facebook has also received a round measure of criticism, from many sectors from academia to the business world. Its encouragement of disclosure, and function in a capitalist society have led to more than one lively debate, this one from an anthropological perspective. (Fish, 2010) Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, has compared Facebook to a gift economy, and while he does not name Mauss, the relation is clear in his description of the giving of social “gifts” online, like the thumbs up, “Like” , and the acceptance of “friend” requests. He further states that any information posted on-line is actually a “gift” being given to the public.

### News Feed

News Feed is a function based on soft-ware algorithms that analyzes the information produced by Facebooks users that chooses profile changes and actions that are most interesting to their friends, and presents these to them in reverse chronological order. Each person’s start page would therefore be unique, and depend on who one’s friends were. (Kirkpatrick, 2010)

Most recently, the criticism has focused around the politically, and possibly socially, polarizing effect the algorithms that support the newsfeed function seem to have on Facebook users. This effect is called the “Echo-chamber effect” and has been reported on in the media for a few years, but has just recently been received scientific attention from Facebook researchers in a major study. The study has included those Americans who reported their political affiliation on Facebook, and studied whether their newsfeeds, which are algorithmically rinsed of posts that differ in content from those which the person has liked or shared, then are more polarized than before. The three scientific analysts at Facebook (one of whom is an associate professor at the University of Michigan) who worked on the project, came to the conclusion that the algorithms are no more responsible than people themselves in the polarization.

This is a particularly interesting conclusion when one examines two aspects of a small Facebook site in Denmark that was started to assist refugees at a newly-started asylum center in Northern Jutland. The two aspects are.

1. An **internal** polarization of views –the group was not able to embrace the range of views about integration held by all members.
2. The second aspect is that the site reflects the possibilities that Facebook has for bringing people together from disparate backgrounds- a seemingly unique quality of the platform. These meta reflections will be discussed in association with the analytical framework

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to the media which will be discussed in relation to the use of networking with asylum-seekers. These will be presented in the discussion section.

Marginalization is a central process in anthropological studies-how do people become like the man in the photo- someone with nothing to lose? Status is conveyed in many ways- through work, family, and access to resources, connections, and expressed through language. If one does not understand the language spoken in the culture in which one lives, as expressed in one of the central cultural anthropological theories (the Sapir-Whorf theory) one’s world view is different from the group, and one will be isolated from their view. This lack of interaction can contribute to ghettoization, and marginalization.

Asylum-seekers, to be able to integrate, need contact with the majority culture.

I went looking for historical precedents, and found reports from a recent conference about integration in ancient Rome. This is not a new problem. It is interested that is has been documented as a matter of concern for thousands of years.

The Facebook, now known as Facebook, was developed by Harvard psychology student, Mark Zuckerberg as the primary developer. It was developed in 2003, and launched in early 2004. Zuckerberg had earlier launched a site called “Face Mash” which was extremely popular with students, and extremely unpopular with school officials. He was almost expelled for his efforts. With “the Facebook”, as it was first called, many other universities, to create an extremely attractive and lucrative site. He managed to appeal to the social interests and needs of his Harvard University by providing a site that showed picture and profiles, and which provided (Phillips, 2007)

Facebook-fuelled political movements are not new. A well-documented example is the Columbian anti-FARC movement, Un Million de Voces Contra Las FARC which went viral in 2008. It was a movement that arose in the wake of the finding of a little boy whom the group FARC had claimed was kidnapped. (Kirkpatrick, 2010) An especially interesting aspect of the Venligboerne movement, is the encouragement to direct action, not donation or likes or signatures, through different modes of participation. It is also encourages very separate groups to interact- something the “echo chamber effect” would indicate would be very difficult to achieve.

To be able to analyze the process, some terms are important to understand Key Concepts (which are all part of larger debates):

## Privacy issues

When viewing Venligboerne from a broad perspective, the group fills a surprisingly small space. Compared to Amnesty International (7,000,000 members (Amnesty.org, 2015)). Human Rights Watch, with 400 staffers and contributions of 87$ million in 2013 (human rights watch annual report 2013, 2013) or other international organizations, Venligboernes ca. 3,000 members have very little political or economic leverage as a group. They do make a big difference in the lives of individual refugees. The power of the Facebook social networking site has made it possible for ordinary Danes to reach across the boundaries of an asylum center, and make personal connections with refugees. Connections that contribute to the start the process of integration. This radicalization does seem to have any one root cause, but social marginalization stemming from non-integration seems to be one of the difficulties facing those who are radicalized. The example of radicalization is an extreme example of what members of Venligboerne may assist society in avoiding. Venligboerne makes a difference not only to individual refugees, but also to Danish society as a whole.

Facebook is a medium that has facilitated communication for years, and among other movements, is partly responsible for communication during the the Arab Spring uprisings in several countries, including Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and spread to other countries including Syria. This shows the power of networks, but there are also negative sides to this power.

Regarding privacy issues, the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, offers recommendations for insuring users on-line.

In the case of Venligboerne, there are privacy issues (keeping information given to the group away from advertisers) and there are security issues (asylum-seekers have protected status)

The first category of privacy issues, according to Privacy Rights Clearinghouse

Is simple privacy. They recommend a “privacy assessment” to clear up whether or not there may be any sensitive issues that may be addressed.

What questions should we ask when we perform a privacy assessment?

* What personal information, if any, is posted on the web site? This can include the roster of the entire membership, board members, committee members, top donors, award winners, event planners, and so on.
* What kind of personal information is posted -- name, address, phone number, e-mail address, committee participation?
* Is the organization's newsletter posted on the web site, and if so, does it include individuals' names and other personal information?
* Are names, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses included in announcements for upcoming events?
* Does the web site post information about those who signed in to attend a recent event or the minutes from meetings?
* Do you list the names of members in captions of photos that your web site posts of your most recent event?
* Do you obtain consent from individuals before posting photos on the web site, whether or not their name is included in the photo caption?
* Do you post the names of those who have donated to your organization? (Privacyrights.org, 2015)

In looking at Venligboerne, once membership is obtained, the messenger chat function is accessible to contact members privately. This function may be set for privacy on individual devices, but not all asylum-seekers may be aware of this, or the advisability of limiting access. No problems have been reported thus far, however a growing group of users makes the likelihood of problems greater. Problems could range from unpleasant communication to spam-this is a concern for all members.

A potential problem exists because of the nature of the users. These people are seeking asylum because there are conditions in their homelands that pose potentially life-threatening threats to their safety. Some have families, or extended families that have remained behind in their countries.

This poses one type of risk: Marit, the director of the asylum center, Hyttebyen, tells a story at the meeting on 17 March about a man from Gaza. He appeared on TV Nord in a story that included information about his homeland. To his horror, he later learned that one of his family members had been executed by a terrorist group because of information he provided in the story. Marit says that the people who come seeking asylum need to be ensured the safety and protection they seek.

Another type of risk arises from the fact that not all will receive asylum. Some will be returned to their home country. When they return, there is the possibility that their digital communications may be traced from devices they return with, or from observations made abroad of communications here. Then they, or others in the Venligboerne network may be perceived as a threat.

Politically inspired posts may be a problem before asylum is granted.

Rather than looking at digital security and cryptography to solve the problems, it would be wise to inform users- asylum-seekers and Danes about privacy settings and the risks to individuals that might be posed through photos, posting, and participation in chats on-line. Or, like Eazyintegration.dk has done, minimize personal postings, so communication among members is more private.

Australian researchers Leitch and Warren from Melbourne present these concerns about Facebook security, including identity theft and verification, and copyright protection, and on-line purchasing (which may also be an issue for Venligboerne as more large events are created with food-purchase, or other options (Event: Musik Uden Grænser, May 20). This table from Proceedings of the 7th Australian Information Security Management Conference gives a good overview of potential problems, coupled with the danger expressed earlier by Marit, one may gain a fuller view of the concerns of operating in a Facebook network. (Leitch and Warren, 2009)

## Key Terms

This section explains key terms used in the immigration debate in Denmark.

### Culture

**Culture** no single model of culture can satisfy the analytical requirements of the points of this paper. One of the key questions of anthropology is what shapes peoples’ ideas of the world? The Sapir-Worf hypothesis points at language, others propose different explanations. These models are a source of debate and contention, and represent the product of years of work within the field. Within this thesis, there will be several areas, as in any large techno-anthropological controversy- as defined by LaTour that will be identified and explained to the extent that is possible. My personal perception and mental framework for understanding culture was revised several times during this study, to accommodate a deepening perception of the nuanced reality I experienced. selected hopefully, the line of argumentation will be clear enough that one will be able to follow and understand the positioning of the argument within the outline of the larger debate Barth- culture is not predictive, … in depth. This means that culture isn’t a closed system where all cultural elements fit together in a neatly packaged system (like Geertz’s thick description of Balinese cockfighting), and where the differences between actors with various positions, intentions and interpretations disappear into a whole. (Høiris, 2010)

The notion of “culture” poses this type of difficulty in this paper. In trying to come to grips with the term “culture” one wanders into the field that has fascinated ethnographers, anthropologists and sociologists from the Culture beginning of these sciences. There is no one definition, nor is there one conceptual framework to work from. One must piece together the framework for both the immigrants, and for the dominant discourse, the Danes, who are also not one homogeneous group. Another way of viewing is that of Brazilian literacy activist, Paolo Freire- culture is based in language- teaching is dynamic driver of change. This relates to the power Facebook brings to integration networking. Additionally, each actor within each network will be an expression of an individual culture. For example,”the culture of Dansk Flygtninghjælp” or “the culture of the UNHCR”. Simply mapping the area of how to define “culture” and how to approach the question of culture as such would be a fruitful and fascinating study. This, however, is just one of the huge areas of study to be unpacked in making the journey to understanding the question of integration. Anthropologist A. Hastrup argues for a relative definition of culture, one that encompasses an unfolding story of the processes and structures of who “we” the tellers of the story are.

### Asylum seeker

The terms asylum-seeker and refugee are often confused: an asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.

National asylum systems are there to decide which asylum-seekers actually qualify for international protection. Those judged through proper procedures not to be refugees, nor to be in need of any other form of international protection, can be sent back to their home countries.

The efficiency of the asylum system is key. If the asylum system is both fast and fair, then people who know they are not refugees have little incentive to make a claim in the first place, thereby benefitting both the host country and the refugees for whom the system is intended.

During mass movements of refugees (usually as a result of conflicts or generalized violence as opposed to individual persecution), there is not - and never will be - a capacity to conduct individual asylum interviews for everyone who has crossed the border. Nor is it usually necessary, since in such circumstances it is generally evident why they have fled. As a result, such groups are often declared "prima facie" refugees. (Refugees, 2015)

### Immigration

Integration -according to the Oxford English dictionary, integration is defined as “…the mixing of persons previously segregated” (Pearsall and Trumble, 1996) in the report “Kommunernes Integrationsindsats og Integrationssucces” (Heinesen, winter and, Husted 2004) There is a parallel drawn by the group between integration and the employment of immigrants. This is the measure of the municipalities’ success. Also in the new integration policy, integration and participation in employment are closely related

### Marginalization

Marginalization is a process that contributes to being removed to the edge of a group / class / community. It reflects an exclusion from and movement away from society's 'center' and out towards the edge or margin of the community. This usually indicates that one has little or no influence on the essential aspects and conditions of one's own life. (Leksikon.org, 2015)

Marginalization is not a fixed concept, but something contextual and in terms of process. Marginalization in one context does not necessarily mean exclusion from another. A woman can, for example, be marginalized in the labor market, but not in the domestic sphere.

Richard Jenkins has written about marginalization and how a group defines itself in relation to the “others” that are on the edges of society.

It is difficult to define the term with precision, but marginalization is inseparable from categorization and identity. Surrounding community categorizations seem to say more about the surrounding community itself, than about the specific marginalized groups. Therefore, it is interesting to look at marginalized groups, as they demonstrate the rest of society's values and ways of life, as "normal" is always constructed in opposition to the abnormal. "At the boundary, we discover what we are in what we are not," writes Jenkins in his book about social identity. (Jenkins, 2015)

### Identity

Identity is, according to Richard Jenkins, a social process. It is the creation of an image of self that is separate than others. One may identify more or less with others in one’s group or with humans universally, depending on psychology and culture. The process of “selfing” or identity happens in the context of “othering” or identifying one’s own and the group’s boundaries. Therefore one’s identity develops in conjunction with awareness of the groups norms and margins. (Jenkins 2008)

All of these terms exist within the fields of anthropology and sociology. None of the terms, with the exception of asylum-seeker is a definite, bounded term. These processes are, in a sense, what the investigation of anthropology is about. That is the main reason the focus of this particular is about: how the technology of Facebook contributes to informal processes of integration through the site Venligboerne. The theoretical framework used for analysis is Callon, Law and LaTour’s Actor Network Theory, which will provide meaning from a networking perspective to a somewhat unbounded field. Venligboerne will be the lens, and ANT will provide the focus.

Techno-anthropology, the hybrid study of technology and social science together make it possible to understand the contribution of Venligboerne by analyzing the networking potentials.

# Method

Methods for this study can be divided into three main areas. Ethnographic methods were used for gathering data relating to Venligboerne. Literature searches through AUB and local library databases laid the foundations for sections on Facebook and background of the immigration issue. The history of Venligboerne was done by following strands of information given in Danish in lectures and interviews, and doing thorough on-line searches of these in local newspaper and local government databases.

I have been privileged in this study to have both a physical field and a virtual field that I could study using participant observation. Ethnographic information is included from both of these fields. Interview information takes precedence in this study because the data was not filtered through Facebook, the computer and the group. These included a meeting with Asylum-center Agency Jammerbugt Kommune. Participant observation of informal café meetings with Venligboerne, volunteers, asylum-seekers, a session of bowling with one volunteer and asylum seekers, interviews with 2 volunteers, online homework assistance session with young immigrant (this was a virtual participant observation), an informal interview with 4 asylum seekers, a formal interview with an asylum seeker.

The area of cultural anthropology is divided into several subgroups, among them, according to Ember and Ember, ethnology, which studies,” how various cultures develop and change… this field work provides the data for a detailed description (an ethnography) of many aspects of the customary behavior and thought of these people (and)…answers to such questions: (as) How are economic and political behavior related?... (she) may also suggest explanations for some of the customs he or she has observed” (Ember and Ember, 1977) this description of ethnology is particularly interesting in light of the present techno-anthropological investigation because the problem of integration lies across several disciplines.

More formal interviews with asylum seekers had been hoped for, but I found that the language barrier was difficult for me as a researcher to broach. Even though I explained questions, showed what I had written to my informant, and explained the purpose of questions and the investigation, I was still uncertain of the level of understanding. I was ethically challenged by these barriers, and tried to select an informant I had worked with for some time, so I could ensure a better level of understanding. I have provided full anonymity to all asylum-seekers because of the possibility that they might be compromised by their status. Hyttebyen is at present being moved from the middle of Hjørring to Harken; a small town just south of Hjørring.

I have supplemented the data from interviews and participant observation with online observations. As Christine Hine writes in her paper titled “Virtual Ethnography”, one must realize that the machine is a filter, and that data is sent through both the filter of the use group, and the programs that this culture utilizes. I have been able to verify the identity of all subjects of this ethnography, with the exception of the receiver of my homework assistance. I am, however, very aware of the fact that Facebook has many users who utilize false or misleading identities. . (Hine 2015)

A recording device was used at the first observation session, but it proved a barrier in itself, in that there were many people coming and going at the café in Hyttebyen, and the constant attention and explanation it required proved disruptive to my observations. Consecutive observations were done with a notepad and pen, which also required explanations, but was much less disruptive. Notes were transcribed to the computer immediately after the observations, resulting in reflections, which continued after transcription and into the writing phase. My methods for data collection could have been improved by informing participants of data collection sessions beforehand, and following through with a technically assisted recording of observations. This might have improved validity, although quality may have been compromised, because my attention would have been more on the device, and the recording, rather than on reflection.

Christine Hine, who has done pioneering studies on internet cultures, argues for a multiplistic approach in terms of methodology. The object, or field of study is often divided by social systems or computer networks, she writes,” science is about practices carried out between varyingly identified groups and institutions and individuals; because it increasingly takes place not just in physically bounded laboratories but also in computer-mediated locations; because different media combine into complex communication ecologies; because material and virtual cultures are imbricated and inextricable; and because we need to be agile, itinerant and attentive if we are to trace these connections” (Hine 2007) She argues for building a better understanding of reality through a flexible methodology.

Literature searches have been iterative, starting with broad topics, and later funneling into narrow ones. A broad understanding of network use and integration issue was sought first. Online voting and democracy is very popular area in terms of Facebook, integration issues have gained very little attention (unless mathematical integration is your thing). The studies about Facebook use and effectivity for university students which were found in early searches gave the impression that Facebook could be a useful tool in opening existing cultures, in spite of the research on the echo-chamber effect, which was brought to my attention later in the process. Subsequent searches have occurred through the AUB database, on Google scholar, and lastly on Google to supplement, check and verify findings.

My work as a teacher for asylum-seekers has affected this study in several ways. Firstly, one of my informants was in my class. Secondly, my view of asylum-seekers became far more nuanced as my months of teaching continued. My didactic techniques changed, as did my feeling that I had many answers to provide. Instead, I became more of a partner in exploring culture and language.

## Techno-anthropology

When assessing the techno-anthropological aspects of this evaluation of the Facebook page Venligboerne, it is important to understand aspects of techno-anthropology. Firstly, it is interdisciplinary. This means, this report will be neither a technical document, listing all of the code that underlies the Facebook page, and dialogue possibilities, nor is it a sociological or political science paper that will argue for or against a certain stance on immigration or refugee policies. Rather, the discipline of techno-anthropology is a hybrid, as Jamison and Botin (Jamison, Hyldgaard Christensen and Botin) point out. It thus will bring forth some of the themes that link the possibilities of Facebook with the small group Venligboerne, which has a social, and possibly political, impact on the refugee debate in Denmark. The philosopher, Don Ihde discusses the principal of co-constitution, in which users partake in development of systems, and technologies shape our life worlds. Often designers do not consider users’ needs. The creators of Venligboerne are the same people who use it on a regular basis, and asylum-seekers themselves have posted tips for using the site. (Floridi, n.d.)

Ihde also argues for the fact that technology is not “neutral”, but that it takes on its significance in context. This points to the fact that Venligboerne, although working on the Facebook platform, may have a different significance than the SNS in itself. (Ihde, 1990) This study of Venligboerne blends history, organizational theory, ethnographic fieldwork (both site-specific, and multi-site) and text studies of Facebook in a hybrid examination of the contributions of Venligboerne.

Techno-anthropology seeks to democratize and harness technology to people’s real needs. As philosopher of technology, Andrew Feenberg writes,” The public sphere appears to be opening slowly to encompass technical issues that were formerly viewed as the exclusive preserve of experts. Can this trend continue to the point where citizenship will involve the exercise of human control over the technical framework of our lives? We must hope so…” (Feenberg, 2015) Venligboerne is just such an example of ordinary people using the powerful technology of Facebook, and taking the matter of integration into their own hands to help solve real problems.

## History of Venligboerne how and why does it work?

This section examines how Venligboerne started, the organizational roots, and how to access and participate in the group.

#### How Venligboerne works:

Venligboerne is a public group on Facebook that can be accessed by typing “Venligboerne” into the search field at the top of a Facebook page.

To participate in Venligboerne, to or post, one must ask to join the group (click join), which is then granted by one of the administrators. At this point, the admins recommend that one post,”Thanks for membership, how can I get involved”. A reply usually follows with some suggestions. One may see if anyone is asking for homework assistance, or if there are any interesting events or trips. One may also respond to one of the posts, and eventually send a message via “messenger”. Simply following the posts is another option. “Liking” photos or comments is an opportunity to participate more actively. To organize an activity is not difficult. A trip to a local park or thrift store, or a cup of coffee on a picnic table at the asylum center is simple and inexpensive, and requires just a few lines of text, and a press of the “post” button. The leader of the asylum center in Hjørring, Marit Risdahl Nielsen is also a member, though inactive because of her professional responsibilities.

The group is unique in that it encourages asylum-seekers to contact locals, and encourages locals to invite asylum seekers to various activities, as simple as swimming, or as involved as a trip to the Moesgård Museum, or to a music festival arranged by Venligboerne for hundreds people. Facebook networking, assisted by media exposure, powered the start of Venligboerne.

### History

This section provides a look at the history of Venligboerne with roots and network in a health project. It also looks an author who contributed his creativity to the early phase of Venligboerne

#### A healthy start

The group was started by a nurse, Merete Bonde Pilgaard, who works as a health consultant for Hjørring Kommune. She seems a very private person, and politely declined a request for an interview. She had been part of a large health project aimed at helping marginalized citizens in the lower-income area, Vest-byen, in Hjørring. In the context of that project, a Facebook group was started to”…help people with difficulties to communicate in a positive tone.” (Pilgaard and Risdahl Nielsen, 2015) It was found that a direct, positive approach worked best. This type of positive communication was found to reduce conflict, and improve individuals’ moods in Vestbyen. Therefore, Pilgaard, said,”…it was natural to start another Facebook group when an asylum-center opened in the middle of town.” (Pilgaard and Risdahl Nielsen, 2015)

Venligboerne sprang from an idea that was part of a large health project sponsored by the ministry of health aimed at improving the quality of life. This project, Sundt Samspil ran Nov. 2010- Nov. 2014

Lili Damsgaard is health representative on the municipal board. She wrote the introduction to Sundt Samspil. She ends the introduction by quoting the principal of Lundergård Skole (a local public school ed.) “The best support for people with fewer resources is given by increasing diversity. Diversity is a requirement for good integration and for incorporating people with fewer resources.”

An interest in incorporating people of different backgrounds was a goal from the start. There were, however, discussions about user participation from the start, as well.

The project seems characterized by a top-down approach to users, in that it states that representatives from the apartment complexes will be “referring to” the leadership group… “A place will be left open (presumably on the board) for representative from a housing project”. There is little evidence of the “participation ladder” mentioned on p. 9. The methods dot no explain how the participation will be achieved.

The initial interviews seemed focused primarily on health status assessment.

A citizen of Hjørring Kommune writes, “Where is the user participation?” (Kristensen, 2011)

The reason for this interest in Sundt Samspil is the fact that, as of this writing, Venligboerne Flygtningehjælp has not yet been established as a formal organization, it has no vedtægter, no elected board. There are no formalized goals or paragraphs in relation to the public (except its Facebook description).

If one looks at the government roster of organizations, there is a “Støtteforening for Venligboerne”, which is organized to support the activities of Venligboerne. It was founded 11.2.15 (Omdanmark.dk, 2015). There is no public roster of members. Interestingly, Venligboerne was, according to members, already receiving paragraph 18 funds (money that is applied for to support membership activities) at the beginning of March. None of the volunteers that I spoke with had been offered recompense for expenses- (such as 400 kr. For a bowling alley) and all were paying out of pocket for meals and transportation they provided. Which perhaps may seem fair, considering the low incomes of refugees, but might prove a barrier to low-income Danes, who might want to participate.

Sundt Samspil had one quality that made the groundwork for Venligboerne very solid- that was an excellent network. Marit Risdahl Nielsen, director of the new asylum center, Mette Jacobsen later head of Frivilligcenteret, and Lilli Damsgaard from the municipal board were partners in Sundt Samspil, and became important allies for Venligboerne. The director of the new asylum center made it possible for Venligboerne to be in contact with her residents.

Frivilligcenteret was also responsible for providing a venue for the first meeting that informed the public about how Venigboerne relates to the asylum center, Hyttebyen, although the connection to Frivilligcenteret was not highlighted to the same extent. Merete from Venligboerne and Marit from the asylum center made presentations in the large hall at Frivilligcenteret on Østergade in Hjørring on Mar. 17, 2015.

At this presentation in Frivilligcenteret, there were no asylum seekers. There was another meeting that evening sponsored by the municipality about refugees moving to Lendum. Many attended that meeting instead. At the presentation, there were several people who were interested in helping Venligboerne, and who wanted information on how to get started. There were some who were quite involved in helping already, Janice Hunter, whom I interviewed later. Jens Guldsmed-Thomsen was there and provided information about the Facebook group. Kirsten and Merete, who had appeared on television promoting Venligboerne both spoke that evening. Merete presented an introduction to Venligboernes history and origins, including mentioning the Facebook group created for Vestbyen, which became the model for Venligboerne.

Merete Bonde Pilgaard, started Venligboerne and contributed with activities like arranging an afternoon where asylum-seekers could use double bicycles to bike elderly nursing home residents around Hjørring- providing the elderly with a voluntary break from their routines, and providing asylum-seekers with both exercise, training in bicycling, and an opportunity to explore the local area.



Figure - Rickshaw bicycles

This was likely the inspiration for later visits to nursing homes, and for the group’s handing out of roses to nursing home residents on mother’s day. Her message is seductively simple, that through simple kindness one may change the world.

She is a proponent of the effects of oxytocin, a neurotransmitter that, in conjunction with dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins, provides the body with positive cues that improve well-being. The effects of a positive state of mind have been documented in neurotransmitter levels. Merete’s message is that helping others is good for the others, and provides positive physical and emotional effects for the helper.

She seems to be a representative of health, structure, and a strong network.

#### The Author

Another person was who helped when Venligboerne was starting up, was Mads Nygaard, one of the employees of the asylum-center. He started a café in an old storage room. He then became a full time volunteer with Venligboerne and started arranging events with people he knew in the local area. These events and the schedule for volunteering at the café were posted on the group’s page. Mads also had a network of media contacts who started promoting the group locally and nationally (among them, the media teacher who first told me about Venligboerne). Events, recipes, and individual’s thoughts, and a potpourri of other things were laid out on the group’s group page. Nygaard and Pilgaard were frequent contributors to the group on Facebook. As was Louise Dalsgaard, who works with integration on Sjælland. (a Facebook post in extra documentation)

Nygaard was a central character in Venligboerne. He was the person who would answer calls at café Sunshine. He could then refer to the correct person, or often, take care of the matter or request himself.

The central role of one person in a specified place (cafe Sunshine) during most working hours was like attaching an office function with secretarial support to the organization that is not a formal organization.

He took responsibility for making a storage-area in one of the buildings into a cafe with a donated coffee machine, a large conference table with mis-matched chairs, racks of donated clothes for sale for 2kr. a piece, and some bookshelves filled with books, optimistically called, ”a library”. There were a few sofas for lounging on when there were too many people and the number of chairs was not sufficient, or if one was quite tired. The cafe is about 7x7 meters with a kitchen-like-area with sink and stove top near the entrance doorway. It is half of a bungalow that is nearly identical to most of the others that make up Hyttebyen.

The placement of Nygaard in one of the central nodes of the early network, in the winter of 2014 was interesting from the point of view that he considers himself an outsider. He has a great deal of charisma, and it was inspiring to watch him interact with people, asylum seekers and Danes alike. He had strong opinions about the asylum system, and integration, and wanted change. He had the engagement of a good teacher. These opinions were not acceptable within the Venligboerne network, which included some professional representatives who had to support the system. This conflict is dealt with in the section about ANT.

He seems a representative of creativity, spontaneity and passion.

According to Rikke Frank Jørgensen’s book, Framing the Net,”Online communities have frequently been characterized as open and exchange-oriented rather than control-permission oriented… Social network sites essentially allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system and to articulate and make visible their connection with other people within this system… research increasingly speaks of the roles of networked publics, how people socialize in the various online domains, tensions between public and private… ” (Jørgensen, 2013)

There has been tension since the beginning of Venligboerne between a participative model, that is more anarchistic, and a more controlled organizational model, which is more stable and bureaucratic. This tension has provided a dynamic balance.

### Connections, Timing, Media Coverage

There is an element of chance in the success of Venligboerne, which was also promoted heavily in the media. This was partly due to various networking connections available to some volunteers. I was able to observe one of these connections the first day that I visited Venligboerne at Sunshine café, where Mads Nygaard was, among many other things, being interviewed by an old school friend Niels, who now works for a radio station.

Volunteers use various individuals in their own networks to arrange activities, projects and programs.

Networking was also evident within various groups who became involved as volunteers. My interview with Janice Hunter made clear connections to several other volunteers who had become involved after this locally influential lady had promoted Venligboerne. The value of word-of-mouth seems to be great for grass-roots organizations, and Suzanne Fanning, President of WOMMA (Word of Mouth Marketing Association), has written the power of WOMM and contemporary efforts to create experiences worthy of being passed from person-to-person: WOMM is a respected source of disseminating information through networks.

(Whitler, 2014)

These are some of the observed reasons for the success of Venligboerne among Danish citizens, but what are the drivers for success among refugees themselves. This movement is obviously more than merely an advertising campaign. It springs of a genuine desire to help others. It promotes integration in a measurable way- Janice Hunter tells that another volunteer is gathering statistics at present to show differences between centers where there is a Venligboerne program, and those where there is no program. How are these efforts perceived by the refugees?

### Brovst modellen.

This model (Poulsen, 2014) is provided by Jammerbugt Kommune to describe how the center works for asylum-seekers.

The model of how daily life is structured (described in the above cited link) for refugees with “the individual in the center” (by the operator) refers to doing “activities with volunteers.” The asylum-center relies on volunteers for engaging adults at the centers, as an alternative to “foreninger” organized activities provided. The structure of the contact system at the asylum centers rests on elected representatives among asylum-seekers making decisions when professionals at the centers have gone home. Venligboerne stepped forward as a group of volunteers at the time that Jammerbugt asylafdeling was expanding its operations in Hjørring in 2014, making them a good match for Venligboernes group. Contacts for this cooperation were made through Sundt Samspil.

Savings on activities which are provided by volunteers rather than paid for by the center, may also have been a factor influencing the asylum center’s interest in Venligboerne.

# Theoretical Framework

Actor Network Theory. Definition

This is a theory of networks, and how these influence outcomes, it was developed by Michel Callon, and further elaborated by LaTour and Law. The theory grants agency, or power within the system to non-human agents (such as Facebook) as well as to humans. This quality make it particularly well-suited to the type of analysis in this study. Not only is it possible to examine the history of the organization of Venligboerne, but it allows for some explanation of how the actions of the human actors involved, are influenced by the technological platform they are acting within.

ANT is often used in analyzing computer systems and networking, but was developed for understanding the interplay and outcome between individuals and devices in complex technological and social systems. There are several “versions” of ANT, used for different purposes

## ANT

This section examines Actor-Network Theory, and discusses Venligboernes History in terms of ANT.

ANT is an analytical lens through which we may view the effects of Venligboerne. Bruno LaTour, who along with Michel Callon and John Law, developed ANT, insists that ANT is not a predictive social/psychological theory, but a theory that examines **why** there is truth or stability in a system at all.

In choosing to analyze the tensions surrounding Venligboerne, the theory ANT is selected because of its usefulness in viewing technology on par with sociological aspects of controversies. ANT has been used to analyze information systems, to understand complex biosystems, and to contextualize complex interactive changes such as the development of vaccines (La Tour) It had its inception in the study of the complex technological, social and political foundations for the failure of the introduction of commercial scallop production in France by Michel Callon and his scientific colleagues. The explanation of this process led to the development of ANT. The ability to work with data that includes human sociological information as well as computer-related specifications allows us to trace how Venligboerne became a possibility, and how its success relates to both the technology that supports it, and to the social environment of which it is a part. ANT has also been successfully used to analyze web-based ethnographies of politics because of its unique ability to function on both a macro and micro level, and to accept the technology as actant.

Actors may be human non-human. Actants work together- La Tour’s vaccine example

Power in LaTour’s view- diffusion/ translation (diffusion is successful command from central source representing the will of the organization p. 861 (problematic on internet as it is flat-structure) (Fox, 2000)

Hopefully, this illustration of ANT analysis will appear clear. Bruno LaTour writes of a system that he examined. The system included the following actants: a hotel clerk, guests, the owner, and the keys that were lent out to the guests. The owner wanted to make sure that guests returned room keys, since many keys needed to be replaced.

First, the owner told the clerk to remind all guests to return the keys before walking out of the building. This was only partially effective. The clerk could not remind all guests, sometimes they walked out with the key anyway.

The second strategy was to hang up a large sign with a request to return the room key. This was also only partially successful.

The last strategy was to put a large weight on the key ring (mediating technology), so guests had a hard time having the key in their pocket, and would not forget to return the cumbersome item. The last strategy worked, and is in use in many hotels.

(This example is a well-known illustration of LaTour’s work from The SAGE Handbook of Power (Clegg and Haugaard, 2009))

This example is similar to the translation that occurs in Venligboerne. Rather than guests who are reluctant to return keys, we see people who would like to support asylum-seekers. These people are drawn together through the mediating technology of Facebook. On an individual level, they had very little influence on the broad subject of immigration (bringing keys back) However, through technological mediation, actants may be enrolled (unified in action) to bring back keys (or) to help asylum-seekers. This has occurred with much efficacy.

There are some aspects of the theory that fit this analysis quite well. One is, actually an aspect that has received criticism from researchers, according to Muller. That is the aspect of power. Because we are able to look at the controversy without dissecting the power relations between the Asylum Centers and the refugees, and the users and the Facebook platform, we are able to view many other very interesting elements of the functioning of the Facebook group Venligboerne.

One of the key topics in ANT, as in STS (science and technology studies) is the perspective that the actors actually perform with through and because of the technology. This is crucial in observing Venligboerne because it is the very nature of Facebook networking that has been Venligboernes strength and one of their weaknesses.

Bruno LaTour wrote Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory, in 2005. In it, LaTour states emphatically, that ANT does not start with theory, or a theory about how the social functions. He maps out five areas around which ANT studies may take their inspiration. One of these areas is groups living with other groups. This is definitely the locus of interest for Facebook’s Venligboerne. (Latour, 2005)

LaTour encourages the researcher to look not at the group, or entity, but at the “traces” caused by the ensemble. He says if there is a viable process, it will cause a controversy. This is exactly what we have seen in Venligboerne. This controversy is mapped in subsequent analysis, but it is fascinating to see that this controversy mirrors the divisions of society on a large scale. One faction of Venligboerne who wish to protect and secure asylum-seekers (and existing society) are opposed another group who wish to ensure equality and freedom for all people.

ANT again determines that one refrain from political posturing on behalf of one or another group, but one simply map and present. This created a surprising effect.

One of the problems with using this theory is that immigration is a boundless issue, linking into many global issues, so it is difficult to define a clear system. According to Venturini, who works with cartography of controversies (a form of ANT) on should avoid boundless controversies. (Venturini, 2009) It is not possible to draw a thread from this tapestry without pulling at the whole carpet. No line can be drawn clearly around it. The use of the group “Venligboerne” as the “hotel” in our previous example, is an attempt at such a boundary. Beyond the issue of boundaries, is the problem of defining actants. It may be clear that the guests may be the volunteers, but it is more difficult to define the asylum-seekers they are also actants and they also affect the immigration experience, while being the people who are immigrants and affect the main culture. More actants may or may not be included, for example, the UNHCR, the Danish Red Cross, the operators of asylum centers, municipalities, various political parties, volunteer groups, and more.

Another actant is quite clear: Facebook, which provides a platform for this integration. Asylum-seekers all have mobile-phones upon which the platform may run, the devices may also be actants, or mediators. All know Facebook. In this way, the opportunity for integration has been opened. The asylum- seeker is yet another player, as is the majority culture- made of hundreds of actors. The process of integration through Facebook requires one more player, a Facebook group or site. The one that I have analyzed is, according to my research, the first created for this purpose. It is called “Venligboerne”. It was started in Nov. 2014, and at present there are already many regional site spin-offs, and a new, more easily navigable site started in Skive called “eazyintegration.dk”. (Eazyintegration.dk, 2015)

### The moments of ANT

In this section, the history of Venligboerne is analyzed using an early form of ANT.

ANT allows that actants perform with, through and because of technology. They are entities that do things. This is crucial in observing Venligboerne because it is the very nature of Facebook networking that has been one of Venligboernes main strengths.

ANT started with the analysis of a small group of scallop fishermen who were in disagreement about new scallop fishing methods. Venligboerne had problems in the initiation phase

In ANT, technology is seen as in itself neutral- in theory, though the actants who make up the network nodes, all have their own individual experiences, memories and interests. The network is analyzed as a way of understanding the flow of influence that results in a change in the system. Emergence is an important concept, as according to ANT, as networks grow out of other networks (as was the case of Venligboerne growing out of Sundt Samspil). Most often, there is no single transfer that is responsible for change- therefore it is worthwhile to look at the network as a system. It has roots in the work of researchers who were trying to explain why a group of fishermen ignored the expert advice of a team of scientists who had brought commercial scallops from Japan to France to start commercial industrial production. The effort failed, but a seminal explanation for the process emerged from Michel Callon. This eventually grew into ANT theory.

The process of translation- bringing diverse interests together to create a joint effort that moves in one direction- is divided, according to Callon, into several parts that may be repeated to refine or change the process.

The first step is **problematization**. In this phase, actors define their interests, and will map out who they are and what they want from the network. Problems are defined, and what is crucial is **who** defines them.

In terms of Venligboerne, the problematization phase could be seen as the time when Merete Bonde Pilgaard defines her goal as helping Hjørring’s asylum-seekers with kindness. She also emphasizes that oxytocin is released when one does something kind for someone else. She starts a small, local network based on a Facebook site. She uses skills and social capital from a previous network and project to create the foundation for a new network, including assistance from Frivillignetværket and contacts with the operator of the new asylum center, Jammerbugt Kommune and the enthusiasm of local activist Jens Guldsmed-Thomsen. The problem is helping people who need help. Aid on a volunteer basis.

**Interessment** in this phase actors are convinced that one particular point of view is the correct way to develop the group, product or organization. In this phase the competing views are slowly narrowed down, and actors are encouraged or convinced to perform in a certain way in the network. Facebook’s culture has a shaping role in this moment of Venligboernes development. Actors are convinced that the posting of pictures of smiling asylum-seekers, and acquiring “likes” for their behavior is positive within this culture.

The next phase in ANTs translation process comes shortly after the start-up, and is called **enrolment**, new members are recruited, including active, engaged volunteers like Janice, Doris and Mads who initially accept the message of the focal actor, Merete: friendliness can help asylum-seekers, (their social capital can help others through the network- these are my words, an etic description) During this phase of Venligboerne, all of the volunteers are focused on a similar goal, and a great deal of media attention is focused on their work, brought, in part by contacts in the network.

In following phase, according to Callon, fewer of the initial actors have the needed information to make decisions in the network. The first meeting that I attended at Frivilligcenteret, was indicative of who chose to be ”in” and who chose to be ”out” of the network which subsequently disintegrated, and reconvened.

It would be fair to say that the first meeting I attended was an **Obligatory Point of Passage.** This is because actors were mobilized around the support of the policies of the asylum center. It was considered imperative that Venligboerne support the policies of the asylum-center, and the Danish state, to be allowed to continue to operate out of the location that was provided rent-free, by the center. It was too much of a conflict of interest to keep cafe Sunshine, and to criticize the length of ”behandlingstid” (length of time for the asylum case to be processed), repatriation of children born in Denmark to asylum-seekers, or other conditions that were problematic for asylum-seekers. This was probably seen as actively working against the already difficult task of running the center. Marit told us of the problems of running the center. She mentioned that asylum-seekers are primarily interested in getting their own cases through. That most come from cultures where waiting is not a virtue, and where distrust and pushiness are rewarded. (See Appendix 8) We were convinced that the “right” course of action was to drop the political attitude, and focus on change through “friendliness”.

I also noted (from the meeting) another fact that could create tension- that health care is completely different in asylum-centers than in civil society. Asylum-seekers are treated according to the N.U.S. principle (nødvendig uopsættelig smertelindring) which, from what I could understand, meant that much of what could wait to be treated, was left to be treated until after asylum was granted, since asylum seekers have no CPR, they must contact an elected representative from the center to call the hospital or doctor if they are ill outside of clinic opening hours.

The last stage in the process of translation, a process which may repeat itself many times over in the life of a group or organization is **mobilization of allies.** This is where all actors pull together, or some are left behind, and the rest move forward. This also happened to Venligboerne. A separate faction was created that was more critical of the asylum-process, several actors left Venligboerne and either joined the Copenhagen branch, or discontinued participation in the group. Many of these actors grouped around the central volunteers in Sunshine café, who so clearly tells the story, I will let the words from his e-mail stand alone: from Facebook wed. 18 Marts:

A big-brother mentorship role might give more certainty to new Volunteers, but it would affect the flat-structure, and egalitarian relationships that have been the trade-mark of Venligboerne. This equality of partners would be a loss. A more formal mentoring program might provide long-term stability, but might also cost the spontaneity that volunteers Doris and Janice value.

Volunteers and asylum-seekers might be advised that the stories all of us tell are influenced as much by a desire to understand the truth, as an actual knowledge of it. The creation of truth is a group effort. This is a great strength for Venligboerne, who affect the truths asylum seekers tell about Danes in a very positive way. This statement can be supported by the line from Venligboerne, “You prepare us to live again”. A look on the Facebook page Venligboerne, provides hundreds of thank yous from asylum-seekers to Danes, as well.

# Facebook

An excellent paper on the possibility of accruing social capital in the real world through virtual Facebook correspondence, seems to have found a correlation between these factors. This seems to indicate that refugees with little or no network here in Denmark can be helped by participation in a Facebook group designed to increase their network with positive activities and individuals. Several other studies support this view of students’ perceived benefits from Facebook participation in transition from home to the university environment (somewhat comparable to an immigrant experience, where new social connections must be made) and during their time at university. (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007)

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Facebook’s News Feed function makes viral distribution of events like Musik Uden Grænser and Personal Posts on Venligboerne evident to users of Facebook very quickly. This spreads news. If people in the network do not react repeatedly to new information (by liking or following links) these cease to pop up on News Feed. This is the reinforcement of preconceived proclivities called “the echo-chamber effect” that to a certain extent should be overcome by the fact that the network of Venligboerne contains a very diverse cross-section of society which includes asylum-seekers and their friends.

The fact that Facebook became a platform in addition to an SNS in 2007, means that some open-source software is produced for Facebook, and they don’t have to develop everything themselves. Microsoft unlocked the key to the advantages of being a platform on which other’s applications may run. This means that the platform (facebook) may choose the programs that function best- like Messenger (which earlier, was a rather poor, and wooden chat) (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Github (GitHub, 2015) is a site where open-source programmers may contribute through GITHUB to Facebook’s infrastructure. This distribution of contributions led to Facebook’s international dispersal- in 2008, programmers from many countries made Facebook available in a host of languages. This directly affects many of Venligboernes users.

According to an article by S. Vaughan–Nichols, “Facebook uses [F5 Big-IP](http://www.f5.com/products/big-ip/), which is a family of Linux-based appliances that also perform network management.

The story is the same when it comes to Web servers. [Apache](http://www.apache.org/) is the Web server of choice and LinkedIn uses Sun ONE Web Servers in addition to Apache. Most of the social networks also use Sun's [MySQL](http://www.mysql.com/) database management system to organize their users' messages and status updates…The data itself -- your notes, photos, etc.-- are kept on a variety of different vendors' storage servers. This storage is measured, not in gigabytes, but in terabytes and petabytes. It runs (as of 2010) 30,000 servers. (Vaughan-Nichols, 2015)

The mobile telephone application of Facebook and messenger in 2011 for Android and OiS meant that one could access the platform without a PC, something that is vital for asylum-seekers.

In David Kirkpatrick’s book about Facebook, he writes that Zuckerberg refers to the gift economy when he speaks about Facebooks’ contribution to society. A gift could be a “like” or the comment “lol” in a social context. It could be what we do for others when we express ourselves about politics, we express our personal views and open ourselves to criticism, allow our vulnerability, because we are identified with our real names. This, according to Zuckerberg, is a gift of ideas to society. (Kirkpatrick, 2010) In this sense, Venligboerne is quite dependent on Facebook both for “likes” and distribution of information.

An interesting possibility within the current structure might be to use a so called, “Love Machine” model for rewarding givers in a system, both to provide incentive and to prevent burn-out. (Sendlove.us, 2015) This technology was developed for use in Game company “First life” to promote giving behavior among those who might be overlooked by peers. Often support staff were rewarded with love messages when the provided attention that developers and other employees. Incentives for selfless behavior are often a good idea in environments where monetary rewards do not measure up to the time or work put in.

Facebook itself promotes individuals. People are rewarded with “likes” for posting photos of events, such as “taking Amir to the beach” (fictive example). This reinforces the behavior, and shows all others in the network that this event was fun. They are notified on their newsfeed that the post was made. Others in the network are often inspired to emulate the behavior. The individualization of the newsfeed function means that only the types of posts that one has “liked” or commented on are shown.

This type of reward technique was also used, albeit in a standardized form, by Dansk Røde Kors to reward collectors who went on routes to collect money for the last national campaign.

### Cost free Group site/ nonprofit

Facebook started offering assistance to non-profit organizations just last year, after criticism that Google had provided support for some time. This support has resulted in some California non-profits being offered a “donate” button on their Facebook sites (some criticism of the button has already been aired because the information on who donates and how much belongs to Facebook). However, there is also a page on Facebook’s “backside” where non-profits may post suggestions for improvements (for example a “translate” button for the integration site, Venligboerne) - possibly also to give GIT-HUB collaborators a chance to provide meaningful software input.

Social Networking sites provide platforms for more traditional media activity, as well as “re-posting” of prepared pieces of journalism. This can lead to very dynamic sites, where news feeds are posted at the same time as commentary is coming in from multiple users. There is often, just as in traditional journalism, little way to verify the factual basis of stories, unless one is sure of the reputation of the journalist, the person posting, or the blogger. Sources are often difficult to trace. For example, this story on Facebook’s Eritrean News

This leads to questions of identity when dealing with an impersonal media. The identity of individuals on Facebook can also easily be altered or fabricated. Sherry Turkle, psychologist, and author of Life on the Screen, writes about the creation of internet identity. She sees, “… the internet as a meaningful social laboratory in which to experiment with constructions and reconstructions of one’s identity.” (Turkle, 1995) The role of the administrator is supposed to ensure that all participants of a group are known, however when a group reaches a large size, this role may be distributed among participants, subject to admin approval. (Facebook.com, 2015)

## Facebook and networking

Facebook has contributed many characteristics to their platform that have made a site for integration like Venligboerne a possibility.

Facebook’s structure has also shaped the way communication occurs on such sites. We can thus, in a later section, analyze how Facebook’s structure influences human interaction on Venligboerne by using the social theory of technology called Actor Network Theory. First we must examine some of the qualities Facebook technology that are evident in interactions on Venligboerne…

1. Dialogue (moderated) on sites
2. Individual dialogue (chat) over private channel: Messenger
3. Event posting including ticket sale
4. Individual post
5. Educational invitation (homework assistance)

Web 2.0 technology is ubiquitous, easy-to use, and Facebook exists in many languages. Facebook was introduced in 2006 in Denmark, and in 2013, had a reported 3,4 million Danish profiles (Astrid Haug, 2013) Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, Google’s Google Plus, Brazilian Orkut, and Russian VKontakte, all provide platforms for information and communication. A general definition of these sites is provided by Computer Hope, an organization that participates on many different sites to help users understand the media, Alternatively referred to as a virtual community or profile site, a social network is a website on the [Internet](http://www.computerhope.com/jargon/i/internet.htm) that brings people together in a central location to talk, share ideas and interests, or make new friends. This type of collaboration and sharing of data is often referred to as social media. Unlike traditional media that is often created by no more than 10 people, social media sites contain content that has been created by hundreds or even millions of different people.  (Computerhope.com, 2015)

Most people have smart phones so they may participate when they wish. This is a benefit- notifications come through Facebook’s newsfeed service, where one is notified when there are new postings. Messages are posted on the site, so members may reply when they have time, or someone to translate.

Facebook itself has posed few problems because the technology is almost ubiquitous, and, at present, so highly developed that it requires little specialized knowledge to set up, administer and maintain a Facebook site. This being said, there is the problem of language. Arabic speakers may choose to access their Facebook through an Arabic language interface, but there is no such possibility for speakers of Tigrinya from Eritrea. There is also no Google translate to Tigrinya, which has a beautifully sculptural look to the letters, and reportedly about 200 letters in its alphabet, with individual letters for many consonant-vowel combinations like Bu, Ba, etc. A speaker of Tigrinya would have to be fairly good at English to be able to communicate understandably. An Arabic speaker would be able enter on an Arabic interface, and run all communication that was not understood through Google translate- which admittedly, is far from perfect. The problem of language creates situations mentioned by volunteer Janice and asylum-seeker S. which are very similar to the translation process in ANT, where interests are not necessarily translated

Allows for different types of communication- notification of events (with software supported ticket sales) Personal postings of events, thoughts,

Posting, with a request for homework or other assistance, new examples are constantly showing up- for example posted on 24.4.15, were two posts about improving language- conversations to improve Danish, and helping as a contact person with homework assistance

### Soft Power

This section examines the concept of “Soft Power” in connection to Venligboerne. It is important because the power relationships between minority and majority cultures are central to understanding integration.

“We experiment a lot”, says Janice. “We can’t wait too long, otherwise the individual refugees will be gone, and so it’s good that it isn’t a bureaucratic system.” (Hunter, 2015)

In the examination of Venligboerne, I was posed a question by my Advisor, “What is it about them that you really like?” I realized afterwards that this question brought me back to art school in California. It was a singular place. A program where the focus was to identify what worked. What were the elements that made an artwork succeed?

In terms of Venligboerne, one of the elements responsible for success is the concept of “Soft Power”.

Soft Power is a concept developed by Joseph Nye of Harvard University. Soft Power is contrasted to Hard Power, where results are achieved through coercion, force, or economic incentives. Soft Power relies on persuasion (often on a national level). It is illustrated as a way of convincing people of one’s agenda. "Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive.”[1

The flat structure of Venligboerne, internally, is much closer to a soft than a hard-power model.

The Venligboerne web-site conveys the idea of promoting integration through working directly with refugees. Participants may provide what they wish to give, from half an hour helping with homework to inviting someone home to dinner, to going bowling or walking on the beach. Venligboernes work reflects the essence of soft-power; using a simple message of respect and equality, they provide a positive supplement to the integration effort in Denmark. Asylum-seekers, too may be influenced by the soft-power model, as we see in a later section. They want to learn Danish so they may participate in activities and online. (Nye, 2011) (Nye, 2004)

## Empowerment/ Health

This section provides a brief review of Anonovsky’s theory of Salutogenisis, which is often used as an anchor theory in health-related work also focusing on the concept of “empowerment” which has become important in the social sciences.

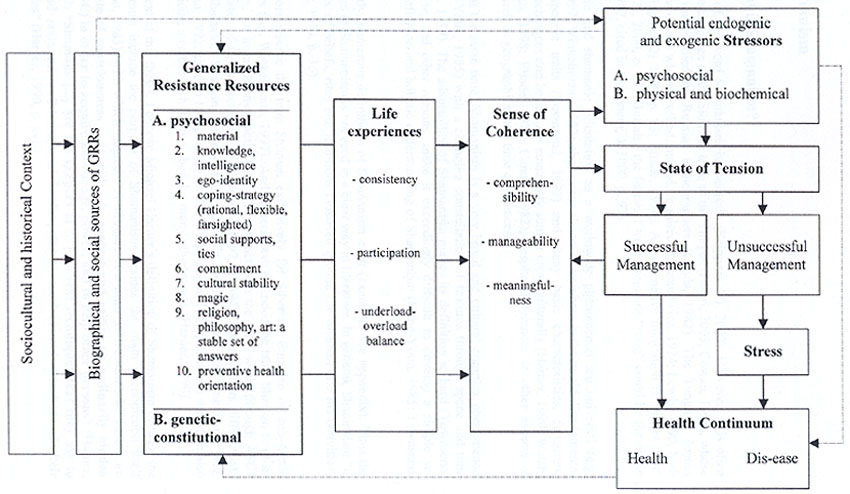
Aaron Anotonovsky, an American-Israeli sociologist developed the idea of Salutogenisis to explain why some people remain healthy in spite of in spite of external pressure. This theory connects health to a “sense of coherence”. People who remain healthy can maintain comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. He is particularly popular in planning health care initiatives. His theory of salutogenesis, or why people remain healthy in spite of external pressure emphasizes strengthening a sense of coherence. His work led to pychoneuroimmunological studies that examine the connection between state of mind and health. The importance of neurotransmitters like oxytocin has been studied in this context. An excellent explanation for why user participation is so important. When a sense of participation and manageability are increased, tension is minimized, and users may direct their energy to the problem at hand.

Figure - http://www.salutogenesis-shamanism.com/

The empowerment that occurs because people are able to cope with their surroundings, improves health.

Merete, who was a nurse at Sundt Samspil, created a small Facebook page for the residents of Vestbyen which was geared toward improving communication among residents. It was based on positive communication, and emphasized the positive effects of oxytocin- the hormone released when one is happy. There was an anchoring for people using the site in Mødestedet, the meeting place, which was supported by DFH (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, among other local organizations) (Damsgaard, 2011)

It would provide the groundwork for a similar constellation in Venligboerne.

When Venligboerne started helping asylum-seekers, café Sunshine became the central hub of many activities.

A vital aspect of Venligboerne that seemed lacking in Sundt Samspil (according to the criticism) is the element of participation. The may be due to the nature of Facebook, which is easy, well-known and at-hand, and encourages participation.

## Empowerment/ Anthropology

Using ethnography, Anders Hastrup, shows how refugee camp residents recreate Darfur's history from the exile , they involuntarily fell into. As limited as the camps may be, the thesis is that they are a creative space where perceptions of the Darfur conflict , its causes, key players and possible future solutions are constantly discussed . Thesis does not attempt to tell ' the true story ' about the background of the war in Darfur , but combines an anthropological and historical approach and suggests that a so-called ' deep listening ' is a very suitable method to explore the refugees' story production . By analyzing the different ways in which refugees try to recapture their history and a place in Sudanese history , the thesis is a contribution to the understanding of some of the mechanisms that underlie the wars in Sudan . (Hastrup, n.d.)

The important aspect of this thesis is that there is not just one story, but many. The camps are a place where stories, solutions and problems are generated through communication. In Danish camps, this is a question of many different nationalities, many different stories. Just as in some families, one might have many stories about one uncle or grandparent, thus, in camps truths are brought forth, discussed, embroidered upon and worked with.

One may, as a volunteer, perceive one truth, one aspect of a refugee’s story, while a professional from a camp might understand, and use the same story in a completely different context with a different aim. What is important, as Anders Hastrup points out, is that these stories provide a key to the truths of the places from which refugees come. They are the threads from which the whole tapestry is woven. And there is not just one static story.

This makes it quite a challenge to assess and understand the needs and the communications of the refugees in and around Venligboernes group. There are many asylum-seekers, and many from differing backgrounds. Some with academic experience, some with skills, and others who have been soldiers or housewives. Some have traumas in their baggage. There is no procedure for volunteers to assess interests and needs at present. Right now, there is a list of events on, and those who can understand Danish or English, have something of an advantage in terms of translating for the others, and signing up. (Hunter, 2015).

The inclusion of Hastrup’s view of empowerment, or personal meaning making, is also to highlight that Venligboerne has many stories. I have stitched one together in my attempt to be an objective researcher. I come with my own story, as do all of the asylum-seekers and volunteers. The synergy that I see coming through this group, may be different than the gifts or obligations or prevarications that others may identify. I will lean on the judgment of someone far more experienced than myself: Anders Ladekarl of the Danish Red Cross is quoted as stating, “

“If there’s one initiative that really stands out, then it’s Merete’s “Venligboerne” and the fantastic reach it has attained.”

Er der ét initiativ, der virkelig stikker ud, så er det Meretes "Venligboerne" og det fantastiske omfang, det har fået, siger Anders Ladekarl. (Kjeldsen and Nørgaard, 2015)

Anders Hastrup’s hypothesis that refugee camp residents create Darfur’s history from exile also gives an extra angle to the understanding of the stories of the refugees in this study-as well as to those of volunteers, and of my own. Hastrup’s point that there is no one “true story” about the conflicts that rage in Sudan, just as there is no one true story about the conflicts in the homelands of the refugees I have met and read about on Venligboerne. Rather, truth emerges through the stories that are told, online and in person. According to Hastrup, in camp, truths are brought forth, discussed, embroidered upon and worked with. They are places for the creation and molding of truth. Truths about the camp itself are also subject to this non-static, interpretive nature.

One truth might be defining of a person to a worker at the center, and another truth may be defining in another context with a volunteer. Just like a person gives a different impression personally and professionally.

This can be a challenge for an aid worker, or volunteer when trying to communicate through Venligboerne. It may be difficult to see the whole tapestry behind the individual asylum-seeker. What are the reasons for the type of request or communication I am receiving? What is the social context that this person fits into now, how has that changed?

The requirements for volunteers are sometimes considerable, (even more so for staff at the asylum centers) and security is an issue, both for individuals online, and when meeting in private space. According to Frivillignet, a Danish organization for volunteers helping refugees, about a third of Danish refugees are traumatized, which might hinder participation in programs like Venligboerne. (Frivillignet.dk, 2015)

Frivillignet also has a closed intranet, onto which volunteers may log, and find calendars, activities and inspiration for how to start boys and girls clubs and homework assistance.

### UCT CCT

Two types of aid are described in an article in The Economist aptly titled “Pennies from Heaven”. This article describes the difference between conditional and unconditional aid plans, like Give Directly, where money is is donated directly to the poor without bureaucratic intervention. (The Economist, 2013)

Receivers of aid have to meet certain conditions through the CCT (conditional cash transfers). They must, for example, ensure that children remain in school for a certain number of years. CCTs have supported incomes in Latin American countries for many years. They are fairly inexpensive aid programs.

The UCT makes no requirements of the receiver. Give Directly is a charity that was started in 2012 by a team from MIT to alleviate extreme poverty. It gives direct cash transfers, and has few staffers or other expenses (GiveDirectly, 2015)

Interestingly, the possibility of UCTs is supported by mobile technology- much like Venligboerne. Payment of cash is possible through the mobile payment service M-Pesa. Large amounts of data are crunched to locate poor recipients, who are contacted by representatives and given phones. Facebook cofounder, Chris Hughes is on the board of Give Directly. Technology-supported aid is similar to the Venligboerne model. However, UCTs transfer more tangible cash, whereas Venligboerne transfers social capital.

## Social workers and possible growth

In their book about Danish social work in a globalized environment, Helle Antczak and Helle Johansen write, (translation mine) “One might, for example, wonder why more social workers have not gotten involved in the introduction of “Starthjælpen” or in connection with Asylum seekers’ living conditions at asylum centers.” (Antczak and Johansen, 2007)

Venligboerne could be a way to push for conditions that are better for asylum seekers, this seems to be the case with other Venligboerne groups. It does not seem to be the intention of the original group.

Antczak and Johansen also point out that in the area of social politics, the EU provides funds for special programs and planning that covers areas of “…1)equality, 2)vulnerable groups (ensuring fair treatment of the handicapped, immigrants) and 3) support for social and economic integration of handicapped… The central principals that determine the allocation of funds are: partnership (public sector, private club activity, employment sector and companies), innovation (support for new activities, supplements for national policy) trans-national cooperation, …. And finally, a co-financing of 50% locally.” (Antczak and Johansen, 2007)

This seems it might be a logical progression of the group, since the activism showed by many members to agitate for change in the actual living conditions of asylum seekers seems to be secondary.

Several conversations online illustrate this point.

Ensuring a co-funding quotient of 50% will also ensure the continuance of large arrangements like Music without Borders, which might be of benefit to all refugees, not just those with English skills.



Figure http://mug2015.blogspot.dk/2015/04/glde.html

One of the problems with Danish social work occurring as a tax financed public good, is, according to Antczak and Johansen, that social work becomes part of the political arena, “where different political and socio-economic interest groups fight for their share of the national budget… this is why planning of social programs and social work is strongly influenced by national and local politics as well as current political and economic priorities.” (Antczak and Johansen, 2007) Venligboerne has avoided this problem by being a completely volunteer-run program.

It is suggested that to make a difference in financing an initiative for refugees, it might be wisest for a small group to seek EU funding, rather than attempting to navigate the stormy sea of Danish local or national politics, in spite of the fact that they started as a project under the ministry of health.

Facebook groups, can thus a way of empowering individuals to influence the national strategy in a way that may bypass the ordinary barriers to funding that determine social policy.

# Findings and Discussion

The next section presents and discusses empirical findings from ethnographical data.

## A train ticket though Venligboerne and ANT

ANT can provide a theoretical approach to examining purchasing a train ticket for an asylum-seeker.

Purchasing a train ticket can be a difficult task for an asylum-seeker in my town. They do not have much money, and there is no shop that sells tickets. There is a machine that is programmed to Danish and English. Asylum seekers are excluded from discount purchasing unless they have a CPR number, or can order Orange tickets online. (participant observation 2, 2015)

An actant needs a ticket to visit family. He may ask online for assistance, or he may contact someone in the network directly.

Mediation may occur through Facebook for the purchase, and someone may make the purchase online through DSB and receive money, or someone may go out to the machine and assist with the purchase.

In all cases, technology is the necessary mediator for the transfer (translation)

The actants in the network ensure that this translation occurs, indeed, asylum-seekers are rendered quite powerless regarding transportation because of language and lack of access without mediation. As Darryl Cressman of Simon Frasier University, writes, ANT is effective when it allows, “attention to how networks are performed instead of attempting to provide a snapshot of a network based on inputs and outputs.” (Cressman, 2009)

**An asylum-seekers’ experience of Venligboerne**

I had the unique opportunity as a Danish teacher, to introduce my students to Venligboerne, and to see how they reacted to it. Most did not really respond. They opened it on Facebook, some requested acceptance to the group. (Library cards were the same. I arranged for all to receive cards, but few actually used them.) One of my students became quite active in the group, in spite of the fact that he lives at a center rather far from Hyttebyen in Hjørring. This is our interview, with headlines in bold that mark themes that stand out regarding what he gets out of Venligboerne.

K. is a 40-year old Syrian man who is neatly dressed. He explains that he studied literature in Syria, but worked in a shop under the present leader. He was jailed for his writing. He is curious about Denmark and the Danes. He still writes in Arabic, and borrows books from the library in Arabic, which he has the local librarian order for him.

He posted for the first time in Venligboerne about the middle of March, he says. The response, he says, was not overwhelming.

He does not answer my question about how it feels to have people respond to his post. He seems not to understand my question, or to avoid it. He is not someone who has ever mentioned feelings, although he has a great love of literature. My hypothesis is that as a person who has a professional relationship with K. this is not an area that is open to discussion. Language is a hindrance, as well, in that we use a cell phone with google translate to facilitate communication. This does not function very well, and the main part of the interview is conducted without translation, in broken English, Danish, and with gestures and drawing. K. is quite patient.

He did not use Facebook in Syria because it was “not free”. It was under surveillance. And it was “dangerous”

K. says that one person wrote a comment on his first post. He is not aware of the “like” function, and that it means approval.

The response on his first post was enough that he wanted to try posting something again.

He says, “I like for people to understand that I’ve only been here for 4 months when I post.”

“Someone wrote a mean response, like ‘I don’t understand what you’re writing’”

This made me sad, said K.” (Interview with K. about Venligboerne, 2015)

#### Discussion

Although K. does not seem to be motivated by “likes” to post, it seems clear that he is sensitive to the response. His photos, as Zuckerberg mentioned, are a “gift” in the Maussian sense, a contribution to the community.

### Affirmation

“But another time, I deleted a picture, and someone wrote, ‘where is K’s beautiful picture?’ and that made me happy.”

“I like for people to see that the world is a nice place- these pictures show that- flowers, all pictures of nature- this is beautiful.

All people like nature- anyone who doesn’t like it, has a big problem.” (Interview with K. about Venligboerne, 2015)

Discussion

K’s contribution to the Facebook community is confirmed by another user who misses a photo that has been deleted. K. is confirmed in the fact that his contribution is worthwhile to others. K. selects photos of nature to post because he consciously wants to make a positive contribution. The culture on Venligboerne supports this type of contribution. Irony is often used as it is hard to translate- humor is also a little difficult to find on Venligboerne. (Both humor and irony figure in the **stories** of volunteers)

### Learning Language

K. has met two Danes through his posts on Venligboerne. They commented on his photos, and then asked to write through messenger.

He is very proud because one person, M. writes daily, in Danish. He has learned a good deal of Danish by writing with this person. Unfortunately, he cannot yet speak on the phone, because there are too many words he does not understand, and too many words he cannot pronounce. But he can write.

L. writes to him 2-3 times a week. (Interview with K. about Venligboerne, 2015)

#### Discussion

The language barrier has been overcome in this example. K. has been able to connect and have meaningful communication with a Dane, in spite of his lack of language skills. (He is presently learning more quickly than other students- perhaps because of the extra incentive) He has also been able to “translate” his online friendship into a “real life” connection. The growing sense of community created by Venligboerne is valuable to both Danes and asylum-seekers.

If Venligboerne provides solutions **for** individuals (like the “banking” assessed by Paolo Freire) **rather than** supporting the individual growth needed to find solutions, Venligboerne may not encourage growth. However the statements K. makes seem to show that the new group does indeed encourage growth and problem-solving.

### Exploration

He describes his use of Facebook as a hobby. The response he receives seems important.

He takes some of the photos he posts himself. In this way, he discovers his town and surroundings, looking for motives for his camera. He is physically active by walking in the area. He also takes closing photos from Arabic News on Facebook, if he finds them suitable. In this way, he maintains a link between two cultures. (Interview with K. about Venligboerne, 2015)

#### Discussion

K. is conscious of his contribution to the Facebook community or group he works with. He is able to both contribute and receive in this environment. He also explores his local community looking for photo motifs. He gets exercise and learns about his surroundings by being part of Venligboerne.

Learning language, meeting and understanding Danes, and making friends is an empowering way of entering Danish culture, that increases the individual’s power to make decisions and understand how to operate in the majority culture. The individual who is thus empowered, can then be a resource for his neighbors at the center. His own coping skills are increased, as we see through Antonovsky, and he is better able to manage and face future difficulties.

Fortunately, the first experience of receiving a non-supportive comment did not hinder K from continuing. This seems to point to the fact that, at least from the perspective of asylum-seekers, it is important to keep communication clear and positive to encourage participation.

### Just ask

J. lives in Tornby and is originally from England. She has been living in Northern Jutland with her husband, a fisherman and ski jump champion, for many years. She has a 42 year old daughter who is a musician.

Janice noticed the group Venligboerne around Christmas-time in 2014, because she usually works a lot during this period, and there are few tourists. Her home and studio are usually filled with people looking at ceramics. She attended a preliminary meeting in Hyttebyen at the office, which was about ideas and who did what. Mads Nygaard was the main force behind event planning at that time, and he planned a day with one of Janice’s acquaintances who has several horses and a large tract of forest. She, too, got involved.

The following situation in this section illustrates how empowerment takes place, and how social capital is transferred. Unfortunately, I realized the importance of this story after I completed my notes, and the story is only mentioned, not written out.

J. had 4 Eritrean women visiting her studio to work on making some ceramic things that they could use in their daily lives. Throwing pots was not terrible successful, however they were able to hand-build several pieces, and were satisfied with both the time spent at the studio, and being able to produce useful items. They did, however keep casting longing glances at Janice’s shelf.

It took J. quite some time to learn from them what it was that they were interested in. The women talked and worked happily. But there was a tension when they glanced at the shelf with teapots. Toward the end of the day, one of the women finally asked Janice if she had a 2nd quality teapot (the first quality ones seemed very expensive). Their teapot had recently cracked and was difficult to use.

J. laughed, and told them, “Just ask!”

They were able to do just this when they wanted chickens for Easter. (Hunter, 2015)

#### Discussion

Giving someone a teapot is not empowerment, but giving someone the courage to ask for what they need, giving them the right words, and letting them know about the rules of giving and taking in our particular society (Maussian exchange) is empowering them. In many societies, if one does not have the ability to reciprocate, it is wrong to ask. They have gained the knowledge, the social capital to understand exchanges, and the understanding to control these exchanges to their own advantage.

The flat structure of the group is a bonus in many ways, and can at times be problematic.

Flat structure means that no one is ultimately responsible for contact on the part of Venligboerne. An outside individual or group may know who they need to contact, Dansk Røde Kors, for example, contacted Merete Bonde Pilgaard regarding participation in Folke Møde. Journalist Niels contacted Mads Nygaard regarding an interview. I also contacted individuals, first in the open Facebook forum, and then after contact, wrote them privately on Messenger.

However, there are areas in which contact is hampered by the flat structure. An informant told me, informally, “I have stopped using Venligboerne because there is so much stuff on there. All of this personal things mixed with pictures and notices, it is too much.” (Barra, A.)

There are those who find this style refreshing- like myself. But my use at present is primarily for research, so it is an entertaining diversion to see stories, events, inspiring quotes and photos all put in one place.

## Large Events

A last type of way of participating on the Venligboerne network are through large events. This type of participation is not as unique as the first two types- personal and professional, but it is the one that is the most egalitarian, in that the events are open to all, and it is a matter of showing up, regardless of language or culture. The May 20 event, Musik uden Grænser is such an event.

I witnessed part of band practice when I showed up for the cafe with Jens Guldsmed Thomsen. It was apparent that the group were enjoying themselves, and that the challenge of working with an instrument was something that brought asylum-seekers and their teachers together.

An announcement for Musik Uden Grænser is shown below



Figure - http://www.mug2015.blogspot.dk/

## Cooking in Horne

Nygaard’s efterskole cooking project, is a contribution that is one of the more long-sighted of the group’s efforts. Mads was in a position to observe asylum-seekers at close hand every day from the café, and had the opportunity of seeing what initiatives might make a lasting difference, and what made sense. In the winter of 2014, the chef at Horne Efterskole became curious about Eritrean cooking after attending an event where he tasted the food. He wondered aloud to Mads if some asylum-seekers would like to come out and teach him how to cook. This agreement evolved into weekly cooking lessons held at the efterskole, where Eritreans, and now other asylum-seekers, are taught how to work in a large, production kitchen. (Nygaard, 2015)

#### Discussion

The cooks, who provide recipes, experience, and sometimes exotic ingredients, provide a hands-on opportunity to learn how foreign cultures approach flavors, textures and combinations. Students at the school who have kitchen duty, are integrated in the process of cooking. They also try learning from the foreign cooks. Asylum-seekers also learn the tone and banter of Danish young people in a comfortable setting- the kitchen.

This project is reportedly a great success, providing learning to both Danes and asylum-seekers; and allowing asylum-seekers the opportunity to share important skills.

### Homework (how not to help)

I personally encountered a dilemma in my experience with online homework assistance. I was approached online (received a message on messenger) after posting a note to an acquaintance on the Venligboerne group. The young woman asked if I would help her with some English homework.

I felt that our collaboration was productive in the beginning at the start. We established what she needed to achieve- she was to write a conversation that occurs (or could have occurred) 5 years after the short story , Hills like White Elefants by Hemingway (full transcript in appendix) The young woman I was helping wrote almost half of the number of words that she is supposed to finish, and then she writes,

“I really don’t know what to do. I don’t know what’s happening to me- this usually doesn’t happen to me”

I propose more suggestions, which she now writes –only asking questions when she does not understand. And we come to the point where she writes to me, “…but this is the conclusion and I still need 233 more words.” We go through several more suggestions, and I become more and more steering. At one point she writes, “But can’t you show me where you would write this- in what I have written?” (J., 2015)

I felt responsible for not ensuring that the young woman I was helping experienced a sense of coherence and meaningfulness in her work. This is one of the more difficult problems that I experienced because I wanted to help, but I had a clear conviction that I should not do her work for her.

#### Discussion

Helping asylum-seekers, or other people in need, out of a desire to help, is not a new. It is also not new that this situation can cause problems. The Economist writes of the phenomenon, “For decades, it was thought that the poor needed almost everything done for them and that experts knew best what this was... Instead, governments, charities and development banks built schools and hospitals, roads and ports, irrigation pipes and electric cables. And they set up big bureaucracies to run it all.” (The Economist, 2013)

I was very aware of the concept of empowerment because I was writing Social capital may be educational as in this case, where the assistant is working to improve the educational possibilities for the learner, who will hopefully attain a favorable educational outcome and eventually, a good job. (Baird et al., 2013)

Individuals’ networks, understanding, and connectedness can be shared. In this case, the experts do not act as middlemen and mediators of the transfer process. This, of course has its disadvantages, as I illustrate in my personal experience with homework assistance. But the almost invisible mediation of Facebook has, I would argue, far more advantages than pitfalls.

Venligboerne combines the power of an aid program and an integration program. An example of the networking advantages of Venligboerne is clearly illustrated by a train ticket. I was made aware online that Venligboerne was sponsoring a café with one of the more active volunteers as the host. I decided that I would invite some of my students from my language class in Vrå, so that I might meet this person, and have a look at how he worked as a volunteer. I was hoping to get a better understanding of how he viewed the workings of the group. I came with my small group of asylum-seekers to a sunny gravel-covered spot in front of one of the many “huts” (they were built as vacation bungalows for low-budget accommodation near the sports facilities in Hjørring) Café Sunshine was full of people with wind instruments- literally, there seemed people spilling out of the building. And nowhere could I see the man in the Facebook photograph, who I expected to be hosting the meeting. My students looked at me, and I did not know what to do. I felt I had dragged them out here for nothing. One of them suggested carefully, “perhaps it was not this evening?” My shoulders must have sagged a bit, because another student said, “My uncle teaches drums in Århus!” he started talking about wind instruments, which we did not have a common vocabulary for, and he said he wanted one. I struggled to understand what he wanted, but as far as I could gather, he wanted a saxophone, so he could learn to play. This request was not as far-fetched as it may seem, although it created a good deal of amusement in the group, because the band was actually lending out instruments so that asylum-seekers could learn to play and participate in Musik uden Grænser, being held on May 20. We found the director, and tried to negotiate an extra drum for the next practice session, which we succeeded in, just as the arranger of the evening arrived. I was quite relieved. My student made an agreement to come the next week, and a picnic table was unceremoniously dragged in place, followed by yet another table soon after, as we were 14 people- with people coming and going constantly. All were greeted warmly with smiles- some with hugs. There was a feeling of easy camaraderie- J. a Volunteer, had brought a home-made bean dish, J.G.T., the arranger, had brought soda and chips, D. , another volunteer, brought a number of great stories, which I heard bits of across the several people separating us. F., now a refugee, told us he had just flown in from Copenhagen. And we started talking about transportation. Rejsekortet is not available to asylum seekers because they have no CPR number. Wild Cards and other discounts are obtainable, but cannot be paid for without an account. Jens had a great deal of knowledge about all of the different options, and what was, and was not possible. My students listened attentively. The young man who had wanted a saxophone, now wanted a Wild Card. Which I could understand more than the sax, as he had family in Århus (an uncle, as we heard, and his family) I was asked if I could make the transaction if he fronted the money. I was actually reluctant because of my role as teacher, but said we would work something out. I wrote a note asking the assistant at the asylum-center if he would help, but he apparently could not. When my student asked me again later, the school internet was down, so I asked another student if he could facilitate contact over Facebook with Jens who could order the card on-line. My student went to Århus. Public transportation claims a relatively large amount of the income of asylum-seekers; who buy food (unless provided), clothing, transportation and other necessities with the money provided by the state

#### Discussion

The social capital provided by the contact with Jens from Venligboerne meant a great deal to my student, who could save a large proportion of his stipend by getting the discounts afforded by a Wild Card. The knowledge contained in the contact facilitated by Facebook was like getting a UCT (an unconditional cash transfer) because my student saved 50% of the price of a ticket to Århus. Manageability, according to Antonovsky’s Salutogenetic theory is improved. His context more meaningful when he is afforded the ability to arrange the contact with his family that he wishes. The young man is able to manage his own monetary resources better, and to manage his familial connection. He becomes self-reliant in terms of his mobility- a vector which is very important to him. He speaks often of his family, and being with them should afford him emotional support and comfort.

Some suggestions for further development of the site might be a section about transportation information and contacts-who can facilitate discount ticket purchasing (or an agreement with DSB). Another possibility might be a hitch-a-ride section, like (GoMore, 2015) or (Danmarks største pendlerside. Udnyt de tomme sæder i din bil, 2015) where individuals wishing a ride through Venligboerne could somehow be introduced to those announcing they have an extra space in the car. Social capital could save resources, as well.

### To call a taxi

Mads Nygaard related the story of two refugees who had been granted asylum, and needed to go to the train station. It is over a kilometer from Hyttebyen to the station, and they had some things they needed to take with them. Mads was surprised that no one from the office had called a taxi- a simple gesture of kindness. From this perspective, the omission is unkind since it is their last contact with the center.

From the perspective of the center, asylum-seekers need to learn to mobilize resources themselves. Or they need learn to follow rules governing their transport.

#### Discussion

Empowerment is a concept dealt with in many articles, Conger and Kanungo clarify aspects of empowerment in terms of management. They refer to Burke who says “to empower implies the granting of power, the delegation of authority“. (Conger and Kanungo, 1988)

It is difficult, in this case, to assess which expectation is the “right” way of empowering asylum-seekers. Is empowerment making the situation of leaving the camp more manageable by calling a cab (kindness)? Or is empowerment expecting asylum seekers to mobilize their own resources (they have, after all, come thousands of miles to get here)?

The previous discussion deals how best to empower others. But there more evidence that asylum-seekers have been empowered through their contact with Venligboerne.

At present, there is an asylum-seeker who has actually been able to assess problems in the network (it was hard to find old posts) and he has posted a solution to the problem. He has closed an iterative feed-back loop and demonstrated a high level of empowerment in using the system. By solving the problem with a contact from a connected network, and posting this on Venligboerne.



Figure - Facebook.com/venligboerne/

The post is in both Arabic and Danish and addresses the problem of finding older information in posts on the group page. This has been a problem because the page consists of a continuous scroll, rather than a menu connected to separate files or pages. Users have found it difficult to locate older information, and Kulturelle Broer (another web-site for primarily Levantine users) has posted a solution- simply looking up the post in the information window, and it will be found.

### Differences and tensions exist

A family of asylum-seekers at one of the centers in Northern Jutland has a car (I know this because I was asked to translate papers). The freedom this affords, to shop, and to visit relatives is highly prized. There are rumors and envy among the asylum-seekers about the nature of the income that finances the car. (I have heard these, also.)

#### Discussion

This example illustrates an already existing divide among asylum–seekers in terms of resources. In spite of the equality we promote here in Denmark, there will be gaps and differences in income, education, network- in social capital, in short. These differences can cause tension (rumors, discontent) which can in some cases build into action. Incidents of violence are not unheard of in asylum-centers. Jens Guldsmed-Thomsen states that according to the police, Hyttebyen has the lowest incidence of violence of asylum-centers in the country. He is convinced Venligboerne is the reason. I asked if I could quote him on that fact, and he agreed. (Participant observation 2, 2015)

Venligboerne may reduce violence at centers, and empower asylum seekers to solve their own transportation problems. This is a good start.

A Facebook group like Venligboerne cannot solve all problems.

Other tensions and divisions among asylum-seekers have been observed. Some of these differences of opinion based in race, religion, politics or other circumstances remain outside the scope of influence of Venligboerne.

Having stated this, it is relevant to note the logic in that the more that asylum-seekers and Danes interact with each other in a positive spirit, the better tolerance levels are, both internally and externally.

## Gifts

My experience bowling brought up a few concerns in terms of the socialization process. On 02.04.15, a friend wanted to show me how Venligboerne worked, and she said she had responded to an online request from a group of asylum-seekers. They wrote that they had never participated in this particular activity before. She had apparently contacted one of them personally on messenger to arrange a time and date.

The activity was very fun, and there was a lot of laughter, and many high-fives.

When it came time to pay, she asked how they would divide it, but she was left with the bill. No one stepped forward. I offered to pay half, but she insisted that the 400 kr. spent for the activity was not that bad in terms of her budget. It seemed quite unfair in terms of her initial expectation of sharing the bill. I admit, I also gave no thought to payment, until she asked about it. I think I had naively assumed that Venligboerne had reserved a lane, or had perhaps given a voucher.

In fairness, however, in many nations and societies, gift giving conveys status. It shows the wealth and connectedness of the giver. And such a gift on her part (paying the way for 6 bowlers) would cement her worth as an important person. (Mauss had observed potlatches and other exchanges and came to this very conclusion)

I, unlike Mauss, or the anthropologist I should have been, was embarrassed and rather angry on her behalf. I reflected somewhat bitterly in my notes on the aspect of exchange, although I did not ask the asylum-seekers why they did not pay, and in all fairness, I was not a good example, because I did not contribute myself. I had no cash, and would have used an ATM to pay her later. (Participant observation, 2015)

#### Discussion

It would be a good idea to make all arrangements about payments, entrance fees, transportation, and number of participants very clear before starting on the activity. This is for the sake of the volunteer and the asylum-seekers. Informing asylum-seekers that in Denmark it is customary to share expenses unless otherwise specified, helps them to integrate and understand one of the norms of our social interactions. It is generous to pay for them, but this does not empower them to be citizens in an egalitarian society, or to understand how important their contribution can be.

It is also possible that some Danes might be excluded from participation because they felt they did not have enough money to provide an activity for several refugees, whether it be cooking a meal or going out to the beach. (There could be a feeling a volunteer may lack social capital for the gift exchange) Creating a fairly level playing field for both Danes and asylum-seekers seems advisable, and in the spirit of the democratic tone on the site.

## Love

This short section has been one of the most problematic. As a former hospice nurse and teacher, I returned to this bit of writing many times, to try to understand my reaction, to “get” why I did not like love.

I was told with a smile by the asylum-seekers that the young man and the young woman were in love. One was a volunteer, the other an asylum-seeker. Romeo and Juliet, as it were. They sat at the end of the long table, wrapped in each other’s arms and my response was not as positive as I would have liked. (Participant observation, 2015)

#### Discussion

Changed power relationships and inequalities due to loss of social status are an integral part of being an asylum-seeker. Maintaining and growing a serious emotional attachment in this phase of transition is a study in equilibrium and faith.

Asylum-seekers are in crisis- in the true sense of the word- they are in a period of change from one phase of their lives to another. And love is a possibility that somehow, can defy all odds. Unfortunately, often, it does not. Volunteers should be aware of a “professional” responsibility to the network.

The possibility of exploitation is always a threat on Facebook, or in any virtual- or real communicative environment. It would seem best to address it frankly.

## Those who are Denied Asylum

The network of Venligboerne conveys social capital to asylum seekers. Some, after living in Hjørring and making friends in Denmark, are denied the privilege of staying.

Janice mentions one of these people in her interview. They are very real in the memory of many volunteers who have worked with Venligboerne since the beginning. I was asked several times by different volunteers,”Did you know L.?” (Hunter 2015)

The question as to whether the continued welfare of asylum-seekers who are denied asylum, should be of concern to the network, and how to accept their departure from the country is a matter of concern for the group. If Venligboerne meets all asylum seekers with friendliness, then how does it part from some of them? How does it justify who is worthy of staying?

These concerns are echoed by a volunteer from another center, who expressed sadness about a woman and her children who were sent home, while other asylum-seekers who were “bandits” were allowed to remain.

#### Organization

The tension in Venligboerne between a tighter organizational structure, and more openness seems like the product of the meeting of two different cultures- the institutional and the artistic. (This is a somewhat artistic, Geertzian explanation) Both are dependent on the other for a successful group. For the group to function, an agreement must be in place with the municipality and the operator of the center, and some structure must be present. However, for the group to thrive, the spontaneity and creativity of the volunteers must be embraced and encouraged. This is a constant tension and a balance to maintain, and it has been successful for its users so far, though not without a price.

## Suggestions for Venligboerne

This section points to a number of issues that could be addressed to facilitate or support the present work of Venligboerene, or other groups that work with informal integration. See **Future Perspectives** for suggestions on a broader scale.

* Some refugees may be more personally withdrawn, or may belong to cultural traditions where it is risky to interact on the net. These asylum-seekers might meet at the volunteer office at Hyttebyen (or other center) perhaps in a group, to talk about the possibilities Venligboerne offers
* Some refugees have minimal language skills. Some activities like soccer viewing on television (or playing), or knitting that can be participated in with minimal language skills, on a regular basis (weekly? With one or two volunteers signing up for a week
* In the case of homework assistance, communication is one-dimensional on the net. Body language and other cues are lost. It might be an idea to set up some guidelines for both givers and receivers.
* Assessing the needs and interests of asylum-seekers can be difficult due to barriers. Information gathering online or in person might ensure that activities provided match interests, and ensure cooperation like that seen in Cooking in Horne.
* At present, funding is out-of-pocket. Venligboerne might proactively look at where paragraph 18 funds could be used to help those with few resources participate in integration work. If an organization expects private initiative to comprise a large part of the work, then it might be possible for low-income participants to provide some activities.
  + example, “We’ll pay 75kr. per person for food, if you invite a refugee to dinner.”
  + Or, “we’ve rented 2 lanes on the local bowling alley every Thurs- sign up to take someone bowling.”

Networking can then occur, not just with those privileged with resources, but also with those who might be marginalized in their own society.

Having a contact person and phone number (with opening hours) listed for the group is important so that individuals and organizations know who to call with questions.

Security of asylum seekers is extremely important. Ensuring their understanding of how Danish Facebook and networking works, and the possible risks involved, is a subject worth informing about before participation.

# Conclusion

Facebook provides a platform for communication that enables Venligboerne to bridge many of the barriers between immigrants and Danes. Facebook is an excellent platform because it is easily accessible to most Danes and asylum-seekers (on mobile devices).

Venligboerne on Facebook addresses the following barriers to integration:

**Many issues of language**: the first is language itself. Asylum seekers and Danes may choose a Facebook platform in Danish, English, Arabic, or a number of other languages a “see translation” option exists for texts that are posted in a different language than the platform in use. This makes it possible for those who can read in their own language to understand other languages. (Venligboerne has opened a separate language training site as of this writing Venligboerne Dansktræning)

**Written communication**: on the Facebook platform, gives asylum-seekers the time to read, understand, and reply in their own time- without seeming uninterested in the conversation. Deciphering a message sometimes requires time because the words do not stand alone in conveying meaning. Facebook affords other entertainment, so waiting seems natural.

People with few language skills will still be at a disadvantage.

**Facebook allows spontaneity**. Asylum-seekers may easily post photos and text. They are rewarded with”likes”, and notification that their postings are online.

**It addresses “The unity of them”-** or prejudices about others, - one is given the opportunity as a Dane, to meet and talk to people that one may see as a uniform mass of “others”. Learning that asylum-seekers are as different and unique as “us”, helps us to identify with them as people.

**Social capital**, Mauss: Venigboerne helps asylum-seekers to feel that they have something to offer. Photos that get “liked”, posts and communications on messenger affirm the asylum-seekers’ ability to contribute, in spite of their loss of material goods. The “gift” exchange is respectful. The flow of social capital in the network from Danes to Asylum-seekers (and back) appears similar to that of students starting at University, and the transfer of social capital is fluid and direct, mimicking the Unconditional Cash Transfers of successful aid programs.

The technology provides an opportunity for this exchange. But the technology alone cannot ensure the exchange occurs. Venligboerne was built on an existing network of municipal and organizational actors, and was promoted in the media.

Danes are presently the main movers of events in the group. But it seems that asylum-seekers are now posting often, and even show ownership for the group by posting solutions to problems.

As a tool to support integration, Venligboerne does not cost the Danish central government money, (paragraph 18 funds come from the municipal account) and Venligboerne provides a network to both Danes and immigrants. Anders Ladekarl of the Danish Red Cross states, “If there is one initiative that stands out, then it is Merete’s Venligboerne...”

The transfer of social capital is fluid and direct, mimicking the **U**nconditional **C**ash **T**ransfers of successful aid programs, and providing connections for asylum-seekers like those provided for new students through University Facebook programs.

ANT has provided an excellent framework for analyzing the process of narrowing the field after inception of the group on Facebook. It has, however, provided no basis on which to judge the ethics of this process. This should be done from an assessment of what benefits the asylum-seekers and Danish society the most. Technology does affect our collective path in the world, as Verbeek asserts. We should note that problems such as exploitation of volunteers or asylum-seekers are possible when these groups are exposed to one another. However, these problems exist independently of Facebook. It is important to ascertain whether the benefits outweigh risks. (This would provide an excellent basis for further quantitative, or a qualitative studies). Many of the basic building blocks are already in place for informal integration (perhaps with the exception of Eritrean language interfaces). Having examined how Venligboerne promotes informal integration on a Facebook platform, the question remains how to optimize the site. This question might be the basis of yet another study. (Eazyintegration.dk is a Venligboerne 2.generation site)

The initiative Venligboerne represents, could theoretically be replicated in larger corporate or educational cultures. Here, large numbers of new employees or students, could bet met and helped by members of the established culture. Volunteers could be found to “befriend” or mentor new members using Facebook, or an internally utilized SNS, and socialization could be promoted through group activities as well as individual interpersonal interaction. Incentives such as the “Love Machine” system (or other systems) which was mentioned in findings could be put in place to support and encourage cooperation. Funding could be provided to reimburse for personally initiated activities. This could also represent a way to harmonize corporate cultures after mergers or take-overs.

Venligboerne affects power relationships with its version of soft power. The positive influence of helping others, and seeing pictures of, and reading stories about people helping makes it more likely that policies may change.

Venligboerne empowers asylum-seekers to start creating an identity within Danish society, independent of the identity created by the UNHCR, the asylum center, other institutions or the municipality. In spite of the fact that asylum-seekers are missing a central aspect of Danish identity, a CPR number, they may know that they have something of worth to contribute.

If refugees are empowered not to ask, but to find answers, then their integration will be strengthened. When we all participate in a culture of mutual commitment and responsibility, our own efforts will be strengthened.

Politicians and policy-makers would do well to note the humanity and personal engagement shown by these citizens in their small-scale solution through Venligboerne on Facebook. This group provides an illustration of soft power by providing an example of positive behavior that is worth following. The many new Venligboerne groups all over Denmark attest to this.

# Future Perspectives

Venligboerne (or other immigrant networks) may in the future, through their networking capability, contribute to a shift in the political discourse in Denmark.

ANT implies that politics may well follow in the slipstream of a movement like Venligboerne LaTour “matters of concern”. Issues, such as the repatriation of Danish-born children of immigrants who are refused asylum, or health care issued according to the N: U: S: principle, may be politically defining if diffused though a network, and transferred into votes. There may be pressure to improve conditions in general at asylum centers in the future. There may also be other more polarizing issues that shift discourse. So far, Venligboerne has resisted all moves to politicize its message.

According to the UNHCR: “In April 2014, the European Union adopted the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, representing a commitment of over EUR 3 billion for the next seven years (2014-2020). A major portion of this fund will be allocated to Member States' national programmes to complement their own domestic budgets, which should help improve asylum systems, reception modalities, and integration policies.” (Refugees, 2015) Funding might be sought at the national or international level to create and study similar initiatives.

The initiative that Venligboerne represents, could theoretically be replicated in larger corporate or educational cultures. Here, there are large numbers of new employees or students, who could be helped into the existing culture by experienced members. Volunteers could be found to “befriend” or mentor new members using Facebook, (or an internally utilized system). Socialization could be promoted through group activities as well as individual interpersonal interaction. Incentives such as the “Love Machine” system (or other systems) which was mentioned in findings could be put in place to support and encourage cooperation. Funding could be provided to reimburse for personally initiated activities. This could also represent a way to harmonize corporate cultures after mergers or take-overs.

Using this Facebook volunteer-based integration technique could encourage the formation of virtual “classes” on a social level at universities which might be physically separated by virtual learning platforms, and distance-learning possibilities. This networking might encourage support and social cohesion to help students achieve academically (an interesting area for further study).

When weighing the moral aspects of the Facebook culture, one might take an alternative tack in terms of platform, and instead of defining the integration experience as primarily social (and using Facebook) one might define it as educational, and use an educational platform, like Google’s (there are several languages already available)

A website modeled on Venligboerne has been started in Skive called Eazyintegration.dk has been started. It has delineated many of the functions it offers as separate buttons on its menu. There is a menu to choose what one would like to provide as a volunteer. It makes use of Facebook’s suggestion for selling sponsor wares to raise money. The calendar is large and lovely. It makes contact very easy because there are photos and a phone number. Gone are, however, the personal stories, appeals for contacts and pictures of family, friends and endless stream of comments. It is unknown whether this will prove to be a 2.0 version of Venligboerne. (It is not on Facebook, so lacks “likes” and newsfeed notification, which might be crucial to continuous use.)

No actual analysis of Facebook culture (other than the “gift economy”) has been done in this study. It is stated that Facebook reflects American cultural values (the number of “friends” is noted, the number of “likes” is recorded under a post, etc.) In future work, it would might be beneficial to see how Facebook culture actually affects a group Like Venligboerne.

I analyzed Venligboerne, which is a fascinating, grass-roots initiative that works. This analysis also provided a view through a keyhole to a vast, humbling area of knowledge including techno-anthropology, learning, politics, social work, foreign aid theory and language. I barely managed to open the box.

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