

Refugees as an empowering practice: Former refugees' experiences with empowering other refugee families towards participation in sports clubs in Denmark

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Abstract

In 2021, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) initiated a program in which DRC recruits former refugees as volunteers and educates them in the empowerment method for them to support an assigned refugee family in the process of coming to participate in civic clubs in Denmark. In this article, I will examine how these volunteers are taught the method of empowerment and explore how they experience their contact with the affiliated refugee families they are to support. I will answer these questions based on Elisheva Sadan's conceptualisation of empowerment (Sadan 2004) by observing meetings and workshops for volunteers in the DRC and conducting interviews with volunteers and employees of the DRC. This article contributes to research in forced migration and sport by pointing out how former refugees may come to take up roles as volunteers rather than merely participants in sports clubs. In addition, the study will provide organisations like DRC with knowledge about applying the empowerment method to support former refugees as volunteers and assist newly arrived refugee families in taking part in civic activities.

Keywords:

Immigrant;
volunteer;
organisation;
empowerment;
civic clubs

Introduction

Participation in a sports club can allow people to encounter each other across social, ethnic, and religious boundaries, where jointly solved tasks can contribute to understanding democratic processes (Ibsen & Eichberg 2006; Sadan 2004). In the wake of the influx of refugees and migrants into Europe around 2015, several attempts have been made to integrate these newcomers into the receiving society (Mouritsen, Jensen and Larin 2019). New programs organised by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC)

are supporting refugees in their efforts to become volunteers. This is very novel since other sports programs involving refugees have followed the deficit model in which active sports participation is seen as a path to integration. Roles as a volunteer, fan, manager, or reporter are often excluded in discussing integration through sports programs (Toffoletti and Palmer 2017). To take up the role as a volunteer, you must have specific resources (Sadan 2004). Not all refugees have the same resources, and some may suffer from war pretentions or PTSD, limiting their partaking in the receiving society (Nickerson et al. 2011; Fazel et al. 2005; De Jong et al. 2001). DRC, however, sees great potential in former refugees supporting other refugees' involvement in Danish sports clubs. Recently, the DRC has launched the: The Leisure Corps, an initiative that aims to educate volunteers in supporting newly arrived refugee families to become more involved in sports clubs in Denmark. In particular, DRC is focused on educating volunteers with refugee backgrounds in an empowerment approach that is to be used further in supporting newly arrived refugee families' involvement in sports clubs in Denmark. Therefore, it is a two-part empowerment process in which DRC facilitates the empowerment process of volunteers with refugee backgrounds and volunteers have a facilitating role in empowering refugee families towards participation in civic sports clubs. The volunteers are trained to take up roles as volunteers who use empowerment as a method and become the liaison between the refugee family and the sports club. The tasks consist of helping with cultural translation, providing support, and helping with practical questions from both the sports club and the refugee family (DRC 2021).

I will utilise Elisheva Sadan's conceptual framework for exploring the empowerment process of former refugees as volunteers and how volunteers facilitate empowerment in supporting a refugee family towards participation in sports clubs in Denmark. This conceptual framework is relevant because it elaborates the double empowerment processes in DRC's initiative, as processes of change encompassing individual- and community empowerment, and professional empowerment, respectively (Sadan & Churchman 1997; Sadan 2004). There may be a paradox in having refugees as a voluntary empowering practice, as they possibly still are in their empowerment process even though

it could potentially be a strength for the facilitation of empowerment and the support of their affiliated refugee, as voluntary refugees are aware of the challenges of being new in Denmark and in civic clubs.

I will utilise a research design, which may provide insight into volunteers with refugee backgrounds, former experiences with volunteering, leisure time activity, and being a newcomer to the Danish society, which potentially could be beneficial in supporting a refugee family. To be more specific, I have conducted interviews with two former refugees who have gained asylum. One has a temporary residence permit in Denmark, and the other has a permanent residence permit. These interviews also gain insight into their experience using an empowerment method in supporting a refugee family. I have also conducted three interviews with the DRC, responsible for DRC's new initiative, to explore how they experience the processes of educating former refugees in the empowerment method. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine the experience of educating former refugees in an empowerment method and to further explore how voluntary refugees experience facilitating empowerment as a method in supporting an affiliated refugee family. My research question is: How do employees from the DRC and people with refugee backgrounds experience the education in an "empowerment approach" to support (other) refugee families' *participation in sports clubs in Denmark?*

My article will start with reviewing the existing literature about organisations, empowerment, refugees and voluntarism.

Former studies of refugees and empowerment

A study by Mwanri et al. (2012) has attempted, through an empowerment approach, to describe empowerment as a method can be helpful to support participation in local organisations among former refugees. Empowerment can be achieved by having a community empowerment approach to former refugees, as this approach can support the process leading towards more control over one's own

resources (Mwanri et al., 2012). Community empowerment can be achieved by participating in programs organised by organisations. Participation may result in the person with a refugee background understanding social, political, and economic forces. Therefore, participating in organisations interventions programs can empower refugees (Paloma et al. 2020; Mwanri et al. 2012). Another study by Steimel (2017) mentions the demand for accurately communicating empowerment as an organisation. Steimel (2017) points out that refugee organisations contribute the necessary information and cultural knowledge that refugees need before finding their place in society. Therefore, it is also essential to focus on how the empowerment process is communicated. Steimel (2017) also points to the need to explore refugee organisations' understanding of the empowerment concept, because their definition is not always equivalent to the refugees' actual need for empowerment (Steimel 2017). Steimel (2017) mentions the problems of professional practices, addressing the outcome of the empowerment process. For example, by saying that empowerment must result in the individual gaining more control over their own lives, which is, for example, done by getting a job, achieving more control must also be associated with getting into work, in the refugees' perspective. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of asking the refugees what they think is more control over their own lives. Then the professional body or organisations can then help the refugees with what they desire and support stability and more control over their own lives (Steimel 2017; Paloma et al. 2020). The same study also mentions the need to recognise the individual's history so that refugees are not perceived as homogeneous, thereby not adapting the empowerment process to the individual refugee (Steimel 2017). A study by Harrel-Bond (2002) believes that migrations organisations often have difficulties in supporting refugees' empowerment process. A consequence of this is that the migrations organisations often treat refugees as a homogeneous group, where the empowerment process is not adapted to the individual refugee. Rather, the process towards empowerment is instead determined by predefined programmes (Harrel-Bond 2002; Rajaram 2002).

Heimo et al. (2020) highlight how having refugees as volunteers can empower other refugees and themselves. Here, refugees can function as *an empowering mirror*, where other refugees can mirror themselves with someone with whom they share the same cultural background (Heimo et al. 2020). By reflecting on themselves with individuals who have control over their own lives, Heimo et al. (2020) and Paloma et al. (2020) suggests that this can positively affect the empowerment process (Heimo et al. 2020; Paloma et al. 2020). However, Heimo et al. (2020) found that it can be challenging to transfer empowerment to a peer group (Heimo et al. 2020). Here they suggest that an expert should be affiliated to guide and support the participants in the peer group, where there must be a professional expert and an expert with a refugee background. Heimo et al. (2020) believe a combination of NGO professionals and refugees can contribute positively to the empowerment process of a peer group (Heimo et al. 2020). Paloma et al. (2020) mention the same in their studies: NGO professionals and refugees are critical stakeholders for a favourable development promotion among refugees. Similarly, refugees' involvement in intervention programs can help NGOs show cultural sensitivity and help them overcome language barriers (Paloma et al. 2020).

Kwherostianov and Remennick (2016) emphasise, contrasting Heimo et al. (2020), that a successful empowerment process often occurs for refugees who help versus refugees who get help. To explain this, they mention that it may be due to refugees' motivation to be a volunteer (Kwherostianov & Remennick 2016). They emphasise that immigrants often choose to volunteer for integration benefits. Here, volunteering can help refugees understand the new culture and show their willingness to integrate into contemporary society. On the other hand, those who receive help are often not as motivated as volunteers to be integrated into their new community, possibly affecting their empowerment process (Kwherostianov & Remennick 2016).

Another study by Slootjes and Kampen (2017) shows that volunteering can also lead to a sense of empowerment in the new community (Slootjes & Kampen 2017). The study shows how volunteering can be a tool for integration and contribute to an empowered citizen. Here, their

participation as volunteers contributed to getting more confidence and self-worth. Equally, volunteering also contributed to some women in the study getting the courage to get a job (Slootjes & Kampen 2017).

Eliasoph (2016) discusses how volunteering has several downsides from an empowerment standpoint. He highlights, among other things, that traditional volunteering is not sustainable and does not do anything good for volunteers' personal development (Eliasoph 2016). Its attempt at overcoming or reducing structural inequalities reifies the helper–recipient relationship, taking away the latter's agency (Eliasoph 2016). Carlsen et al. (2020) mention how the interaction and the dialogue between volunteers and refugees must be strengthened. They emphasise that *a friend in common* perspective can be used (Carlsen et al. 2020). This perspective helps to override the unequal relationship. They think this is a simple way to dialogue with refugees, as being friendly and open are universal, fundamental human abilities (Carlsen et al. 2020).

In sum, previous research has focused on refugees as volunteers for a peer group of other volunteers (Heimo et al. 2020; Paloma et al. 2020). In addition, it is discussed how this voluntary approach can be beneficial for the volunteer's empowerment and integration process (Eliasoph 2016; Carlsen et al. 2020; Slootjes & Kampen 2017; Kwherostianov & Remennick 2016). I want to examine further the experiences of refugees supporting other refugees' empowerment processes through intervention programs organised by DRC. Existing literature does not examine volunteers with refugees' backgrounds and their experiences in supporting other refugees' empowerment processes based on learned empowerment techniques. I will now turn to Sadans (2004) theory of empowerment, which will help me examine the intervention program of DRC, where voluntary refugees work as empowering support for other refugee families.

A theory of empowerment

Empowerment can be defined as a theory and a method/practice directed toward overcoming powerlessness (Sadan & Churchman 1997; Malloy 2014; Sadan 2004). Empowerment is a method, in the sense that it is an approach that can help ensure that the, in this case, refugee family, feels included in their own case, but also that the support is facilitated based on what the refugee family's resources (Andersen & Brok 2021). In Sadan's (2004) theory of empowerment, she emphasises that empowerment is about power and not rights. Her definition of power is inspired by John Gavanta (non-resistance, powerlessness), Steven Luke's (Three-dimensional power), Michael Foucault (Knowledge/Power), and Anthony Giddens (Social structure) (Sadan 2004; Malloy 2014). Based on these thinkers, she argues that power is central to the discussion of empowerment since power should be acquired and exercised. Yet, Sadan believes that power is productive and the basis of development (Sadan 2004).

Sadan (2004) describes empowerment as: "*A transition from a state of powerlessness to a state of more control over one's life, fate and environment*" (Sadan 2004 p. 13). This means that empowerment is a transition, which aims to change the individual's social state. Sadan (2004) separates this process into three action levels: *the individual, the collective, and the professional practice* (Sadan 2004). By dividing the concept of empowerment into three dimensions, it becomes clear that empowerment is an internal- (individual empowerment) and collective/civic process (community empowerment), but also a facilitating process that can be supported by a professional empowering practice (Professional empowerment) or a community planner (Sadan 2004; Sadan & Churchman 1997).

Individual empowerment focuses on what happens on the individual's personal level. In this dimension, the individual can go from a powerless position to more control of one's life (Pinderhughes 1983; Sadan 2004). Therefore, it involves the individual's ability to act and take initiatives concerning the environment (Sadan 2004; Malloy 2014). The individual empowerment

process outcomes can be gaining personal skills in the form of critical awareness, engaging in relations, handling frustrations, and entering meaningful discussions about the environment in which they are located (Kieffer 1984; Sadan 2004). The individual transitions from a passive state to an active state. The process involves self-acceptance, self-confidence, social and political understanding, and the ability to take control of the resources in the environment (Sadan 2004; Malloy 2014). For this reason, empowerment, on an individual level, is an internal change that emerges from the ability to believe in your skills, make decisions and solve problems on their own, but also an external change that appears in how the individual manages to implement the acquired knowledge, skills, information, and new resources, for example by participating in political decision-making processes in the local environment (Sadan 2004).

Individual empowerment is just one element of the empowerment process because empowerment is not exclusive, as powerlessness is never only a personal problem but also a social and structural matter (Sadan 2004). The argument is that people are generally not powerless because of their individuality but more because they belong to a particular group. Community empowerment involves organising and creating a community in which this process leads to the development of a sense of responsibility and commitment towards this community (Sadan 2004). By participating in this political decision-making process, the individual develops skills to solve problems and participate in political discussions in which groups, organisations, or other communities participate. Therefore, participating in conversations about collective well-being is central to community empowerment. In their article, Sadan and Churchman (1997) describe that people who can take care of their own lives and have acquired skills through individual- and community empowerment can facilitate empowerment (Sadan 2004; Sadan and Churchman 1997). These people are not professionals; they can be referred to as a Community planner interested in creating a community or strengthening an existing one to whom the person belongs.

Empowerment as a professional practice is a facilitating intervention that attempts to support the empowerment process of powerless people and thereby contributes to solving social problems (Sadan 2004; Malloy 2014). A professional or community planner can entail different roles, e.g., resource, teacher, coordinator, and lawyer. Therefore, it is also necessary that the person who attempts to utilise an empowering practice must acquire the skills of individual and community processes (Sadan 2004). As a facilitator for empowerment, one must try to support the powerless persons' resources. If not, there is a risk of becoming a client of society and thus not feeling involved in their own life (Andersen & Brok 2021). This process can be supported by either a professional or a community planner (Sadan and Churchman 1997). The facilitator of the empowerment process must use different techniques in the conversations with the powerless person, for example, active listening, patience, and curiosity. These techniques can be helpful to support the family's empowerment process because they can contribute to the person feeling heard and therefore involved in their case (Andersen & Brok 2021).

Empowerment can also be perceived as a form of education; you learn a range of skills and knowledge that you must try, with the support of an empowering practice, to apply in the process of becoming an active citizen (Andersen & Brok 2021). The DRC offers education for volunteers with refugee backgrounds, and this program is an empowering practice. Therefore, there is a two-part empowerment process in the DRC's initiative's work: 1. The volunteers with refugee backgrounds are educated in empowerment as a method, 2. The refugee families are empowered to know the explicit and implicit rules of participating in civic clubs supported by a volunteer. While volunteers with refugee backgrounds can be defined as community planners trying to strengthen the local environment (in similarity with professional empowerment), refugee families are undergoing individual and community empowerment processes supported by the volunteer.

Method

DRC's newly started initiative has been the basis of the empirical material in this field study. The empirical data of this study was conducted over four months, from 10 September up to and including 10 December. I have used observations and interviews for answering this study's purpose. I have participated in days of education, where volunteers learn how empowerment is used as a methodological framework. I have been a participant at meetings where volunteers evaluate the education days and their experiences with facilitating empowerment as a method.

Observations can help identify central themes or disputes that can be further explored in in-depth interviews. Participant observation includes various interviews, conversations, and dialogues as part of participating and observing (Thorpe & Olive 2016). Combining observation and interviews allows me to gain insight into what the volunteers say they do and experience what I see they do. Markula and Sil (2011) inspired my observation strategy to ensure the quality of my observations. I had written down some focus points for both the workshop and the evaluation meetings.

Using participant observation as a method, I can gain insight into key themes, disputes, and a general understanding of the field, giving me ideas of what might be exciting and relevant to explore further in an in-depth interview. As Troja (2006) points out, observations and interviews are interactive, as interviews are a form of observation, where observations of the field contribute to insight into the normal, the typical, and extraordinary, which the informant may not be interested in talking about in an interview (Troja 2006). However, by incorporating in-depth interviews as a methodological approach, it can help me capture: "*(...) How people describe, perceive, construct meaning and express their understanding of themselves, their experiences and their surroundings*" (Launsø et al. 2011 p. 135). Therefore, by combining interviews with observations, I can gain a deeper understanding of the ideas behind the days of education and how the volunteers found it to be trained in an empowerment approach that they should try to use to support the refugee family's participation in the sports club. I have decided that my in-depth interviews with volunteers and employees in the

DRC will have a semi-structured guideline to create openness and be open to exploring topics that the informant generates during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Brinkmann & Tanggard 2010).

Each interview with the volunteers lasted between 60 and 70 minutes, and the interviews with the employees of the DRC lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. Before the actual interviews, I had an hour-long conversation with the volunteers with refugee backgrounds, Ahmed and Enzo, contributing to my understanding and their knowledge of my project. When interviewing people with refugee backgrounds, is it possible that some will become sad when talking about certain aspects of their lives (Temple and Moran 2006). Before the interview, I expressed sensitivity to this issue, while the informants told me I could ask them anything. I have changed the names of all of my informants, the cities they are located in to protect the anonymity of my informants.

My interviews have been analysed based on the strategy of reflexive thematic analysis inspired by Braun and Clarke's six phases for the thematic analysis to find patterns across the empirical material (Braun & Clarke's 2006; 2017; 2020). I started by reading all the transcripts to get an overview of my empirical data (phase 1). After reading the transcripts, I coded the material, which resulted in several codes, which were data-controlled (phase 2). In phases 3-5, I started to form topics by reading my codes and then colouring every relevant code within a specific theme. This resulted in several themes that have been conceptualised with the help of Sadan's theory of empowerment in particular (phase 6).

Findings

The following presentation of my findings is structured around my research question. To answer my research question, I will start illustrating how DRC experiences and defines their initiative and how they experience recruiting and later educating volunteers. It is also relevant to analyse how volunteers with refugee backgrounds experience volunteering and work as an empowering practice.

How DRC experience the initiative

DRC is trying, with The Leisure Corps, to increase the opportunities for refugee children's well-being and integration in Denmark (DRC 2021). DRC has the ambition to work with the refugee parents' resources because DRC believes that parents' participation in children's leisure time is central to their continued involvement. Empowerment is, used as a methodological approach, where volunteers work as an empowering practice (DRC 2021). One of DRC's project consultants describes how DRC uses empowerment as a method:

" (...) We educate the volunteers to meet the people they help based on empowerment. So, everything we have made of materials and all the advice we give to the volunteers is based on supporting the families around the first encounter and then supporting them in the further process. And, of course, they have to be able to withdraw at a time when the family is ready for it. " (Marie, l. 110-115)

The volunteer has the primary contact with the newly arrived refugee family and is a facilitator for the family's empowerment process. DRC hosts a workshop where the volunteer must participate before becoming a volunteer. At this workshop, the volunteer learns about empowerment as a theory and practice. One of the project consultants of the DRC mentions the complexity of using empowerment as a method and that it requires training and experience to practice the method:

" When they come to the workshop, it doesn't matter how much they know about empowerment, but after the workshop, they must understand the concept of empowerment. And as long as they have an understanding of the method, we believe that they will probably be good volunteers.

But when it comes to something as abstract as empowerment, I think it's vital that you get it trained in one way or another, but some of it will be learning by doing. " (Emilie, l. 188-198, 465-467)

After the workshop, the volunteer must understand what empowerment means and how the concept can be used as a method. However, the consultant mentions the complexity of the technique and that the method as a practice requires 'learning by doing'. Still, the volunteer should know that the refugee parents' resources need to be the starting point for supporting them. But the project coordinator mentions that it can be challenging to understand and that DRC itself is in the process of clarifying how this should be done:

"We have this approach of including the parents' resources. It may be a bit understandable... And we are still in the process of understanding how to do it... How we talk about it and how we translate it. Understanding and action are two different things. And when it is a challenge for us to become specific about how we do it, it is also quite sure that the volunteers need an explanation. And then you could say... Why do we choose to do it as a workshop? It's also... Now we have decided that we have moved away from it. Not that we should not educate them, we must educate them! But we have to do it in some other ways. "

(Marie, l. 285-295)

DRC primarily has people with refugee/immigrant backgrounds to carry out the task of volunteering. It is not a goal to have volunteers with minority backgrounds in 'The Leisure Corps', but DRC would like a diverse voluntary group. Both project consultants point out that volunteers with minority backgrounds can break down language barriers. The project coordinator highlights the potential of having volunteers with refugee backgrounds:

"(...) we would like to have volunteers with a minority background because we can see that it works better. And because there is also some learning for the volunteers with a refugee background in helping a newly arrived refugee family. (...) So we have to remember that there is also an element of learning among the volunteers in this project.

(Marie, l. 330-337)

According to the consultants, the overall objective is to support refugee family's participation in sports clubs. By involving refugees in DRC's initiative, Paloma et al. (2020) highlight how this can support DRC's cultural sensitivity and help overcome language barriers, as both project consultants mention (Paloma et al. 2020). Volunteers with a refugee background, with acquired empowerment skills, must support the process by involving the parents in their children's leisure time. Yet, there is another empowerment element in the initiative, as most of the volunteers themselves have refugee or minority backgrounds (Sadan 2004).

Volunteers recruited, educated, and awarded a newly arrived refugee family are still, themselves within an empowerment process (Sadan 2004; Andersen & Brok 2021). Concurrently within the volunteers' empowerment process, the volunteer must act as a facilitator for the refugee family's empowerment process. Here, the volunteer will, among other things, provide knowledge and information about the sports club, which members of the newly arrived refugee family would like to participate in, and help them to apply for membership fees. To facilitate and use empowerment as a methodological approach, the volunteer should use techniques such as Sadan (2004) refers to when defining professional empowerment. Sadan (2004) highlights, among others, as a professional or a community planner, one must support the process of achieving more resources, create a positive connection to the system and offer knowledge about the local environment (Sadan 2004). It seems that the purpose of DRC's initiative is for their volunteers to contribute to this empowerment process.

DRC's initiative can be compared with Sadan's (2004) concept of *mutual empowerment*. There is an empowering element in those who facilitate help and those who get help from an empowering practice. However, studies show that those who have participated in a group who have provided help have gained more satisfaction, self-confidence, and self-esteem by participating in the self-help group than those who have received help (Kwherostianov & Remennick 2016; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Maton & Rappaport, 1984). This also resulted in a successful empowerment process for those who provided help and a less successful empowerment process for those getting

help (Kwherostianov & Remennick 2016). Therefore, it will be interesting whether volunteers with refugee backgrounds will assist the refugee families' empowerment processes and not just support their own empowerment process. The following section will expand on how DRC seeks to recruit volunteers.

How DRC experience recruiting refugees for an empowering practice

When recruiting volunteers, DRC aims to build a diverse group of volunteers who already have experience with parenthood, participating in a sports club, and being new in Denmark (DRC 2021). All volunteers must participate in a workshop. Afterwards, the volunteer should be able to execute the following tasks: supporting the communication between the newly arrived refugee family and the sports club, cultural translation, and helping with practical questions about membership, driving, etc. (DRC 2021). This communicative and supporting role may require experience with volunteering, being new in a sports club, or as one of the project consultants mentions:

“A lot of it is not possible to read about. Well, you can read about it, and then you can try it in practice, but it is actually about a view of human nature”. (Emilie, l. 390-392)

All three employees of the DRC mention that interest in helping a newly arrived refugee family and curiosity are parameters that DRC looks for when they assess the volunteer's capability of fulfilling the role as an empowering practice. To carry out such an assessment of the volunteer, DRC conducts an individual interview. Here an assessment is made of whether the applicant is appropriate for the task of supporting the participation of refugee families in sports clubs:

"But there's some kind of... I don't know what this is called, but a kind of screening of the volunteers (...) I think... My personal and academic approach, which I'm sure my consultants share, is that there must always be a conversation with the volunteer when they have agreed to be a volunteer. And that's not enough... the interest in helping a newly arrived family is not enough. (...) But I think we have to make demands; we have to say that it has to be the right

person. If you get a sense of discarding, if you give them a chance, then it often turns out that this is not what they desired, it was not what they were interested in, they were not driven by helping or supporting families to participate in sports clubs. " (Marie, l. 186-196)

In DRC's screening of volunteers, they assess the individual volunteer's personal and human qualities. The project coordinator also mentions that the volunteer should be interested and driven by helping refugee families. This may indicate that, in the screening, a judgement has been made of or requirements have been set for individual and community empowerment outcomes (Sadan 2004). Despite the volunteer's motivation towards helping a newly arrived refugee family, the volunteer's language skills have been seen as a barrier:

"We have also learned that there has been a language barrier that has made it difficult... We have also sometimes recruited volunteers who had such major language challenges that it also became a barrier. And we don't want that. They wanted to and had the desire and motivation to help, but when they came to the sports club, their limited language skills made it difficult to support the refugee family". (Marie, l. 234-242).

DRC finds the lack of Danish language skills as a barrier for helping the associated refugee family. According to the project coordinator, compromise of Danish language skills must occur, as they would like to have a diverse voluntary group. DRC considers it as a potential of having refugees or minorities as volunteers, as they believe that experiences with being new in Denmark or recently, having experienced how difficult it can be to become part of a sports club in Denmark, are experiences that may be useful in the interplay with the empowerment:

"Well, we do a lot to recruit the right people. We want a diverse voluntary group, so there will be some different experiences. It may be important when helping a newly arrived refugee family, that you as a volunteer, have some experience with being new in Denmark or new in a Danish sports club." (Pernille, l. 58-64)

DRC is doing a professional and personal assessment in their recruitment process of volunteers for the so-called Leisure Corps. They assess whether the volunteer is appropriate for the task, whether the volunteer is motivated and whether the volunteer has the required skills and experiences. DRC can be presumed to determine the volunteer's individual and community empowerment skills as they assess whether the volunteer is interested in helping others in their local environment and has the necessary human and social competencies (Sadan 2004). However, when DRC recruits' volunteers with refugee backgrounds, their particular experiences, e.g., being new in Denmark or new in sports clubs, may obscure the necessity for individual and community empowerment skills. However, Heimo et al. (2020) emphasise that refugees with relevant experience can act as an empowering mirror. Here, it seems that the experience of being new in Denmark and in sports clubs may be just as crucial for whether you can act as an empowering mirror. Drawing on Heimo et al. (2020) study, it may seem that the volunteer's experiences of being new in Denmark and sports clubs also can positively support other refugees' empowerment processes.

Sadan (2004) emphasises skills such as critical awareness, the ability to enter into relations, and participation in discussions about the local environment's welfare, as skills acquired through individual empowerment (Sadan 2004). The individual goes from a passive state to an active state (individual empowerment process), in which the process involves self-worth, self-confidence, social and political understanding and the ability to take control of the resources in the environment (Sadan 2004). At first, it seems that there are no requirements for being in possession of these empowerment outcomes, in DRC's screening and recruitment of volunteers. On the other hand, DRC stresses motivation and knowledge about human nature as necessary qualities of a suitable volunteer. Slootjes & Kampen (2017) mentions, however, that being a volunteer result in more confidence and self-worth (Slootjes & Kampen 2017). This may suggest that voluntary refugees may possess individual empowerment outcomes after a successful volunteering period. Still, volunteers with refugee backgrounds' individual and community empowerment skills can be questioned because of the

missing assessment of the volunteer's empowerment skills. Therefore, it is not presumed that the volunteers in The Leisure Crops possess all outcomes of empowerment processes (Sadan 2004). This may affect how empowerment is facilitated because the missing assessment of the volunteer's individual and community empowerment skills is not explicitly examined.

How the workshop about empowerment is experienced

At the workshop, the volunteers learn what their role as volunteers entails and how empowerment must be used to support refugee families' participation in sports clubs in Denmark. I participated in two workshops, one of which was DRC's first workshop and the second held three months after the first workshop. The volunteers also learn more about sports clubs and learn what to talk to their affiliated refugee family about. Here they are told that they must use empowerment so that the parent's participation in the sports club can become persistent. Steimel (2017) highlights the importance of communicating empowerment, thereby strengthening the possibility of a successful empowerment process (Steimel 2017). At the first workshop, I did experience, difficulty in being specific with communicating empowerment as a theory and a practice. However, I did not experience this at the second workshop. The lecturer from the DRC was very clear in his communication and formulated short and precise sentences about empowerment as a practice. Still, DRC stresses the complexity of empowerment as a theory and a practice and still finds that it can be a difficult concept to operationalise:

(...) We are also still in the process of understanding how we do it and how we talk about it. Practice and theory are not the same. And when it is a challenge for us to understand, it is inevitable that the volunteers also find it difficult. " (Marie, l. 285-290)

The project coordinator emphasises the importance of being transparent and specific in communicating empowerment as a theory and a practice. As the project coordinator mentions that DRC is learning about empowerment as a theory and a practice, it can affect how empowerment is

communicated. Steimel (2017) stresses the importance of organisations, clearly speaking the idea of empowerment to an empowering practice. Steimel (2017) emphasises the importance of talking about empowerment so that the recipient does not perceive themselves as powerless (Steimel 2017). The volunteer must be able to use empowerment to highlight the resources from the refugee family (Sadan 2004). Similarly, the volunteer does not have to address the application and outcome of a successful empowerment process regarding the refugee family, as this can lead to the parents feeling powerless (Steimel 2017). One of DRC's project consultants emphasises that empowerment is only something that is discussed at the workshops and is not something the volunteers should communicate to their affiliated refugee family:

It is essential to mention that when the volunteers are with the refugee families, they are not talking about empowerment; it is something we are talking about " (Pernille, l. 150-152).

DRC gives their volunteers a guide, describing how they should access empowerment as a practice. The guide is the framework for the workshop. The project coordinator emphasises the importance of being educated for an empowering practice because it can be challenging to understand how empowerment should be used as a method:

This guide is the foundation of what the volunteer needs to know. I personally never read these things... You always get a stack of papers and think, uh... I'll look at this on Saturday. But you just never get it done. So, we need to talk about what is in our guide. (Marie, l. 300-305)

DRC must be transparent in their communication, as empowerment can be a complex concept to understand and apply in practice. It looks as if, as the DRC communicates, how complex empowerment can be as a theory and a practice, the focus on how empowerment is implemented as a methodical approach is forgotten. Also, by mentioning that DRC is learning about how empowerment is applied, may this indicate that it has not been specified how the volunteer should

highlight the parents' resources. Perhaps by degrading empowerment to a method, it becomes difficult to operationalise the concept. But instead, one might learn how to be empowering or as the project consultant, Emilie says, it may be more of a view of human nature than a method (Emilie, l. 390-392).

DRC stresses that the first interview with the refugee family is essential. DRC does emphasise at the workshop how curiosity, respect, and knowledge-sharing can be facilitated in the conversation with the refugee family. DRC does not underline that techniques such as active listening and patience can be used in the conversation to support the parents' based on their resources (Andersen & Brok 2021). DRC stresses that an empowering practice is based on the parent's resources and not on turning parents into clients of the system. DRC writes in their guide to volunteers what the role of volunteer entails:

"As a volunteer, your role is to strengthen the family's competencies and knowledge in connection with participation in the sports club. Therefore, it is essential to be curious about the family's existing experiences and resources. There is a basis for ownership and commitment by supporting the family's resources, which is also required when people have to find their strength and drive. This is also called empowerment. (DRC 2021)

DRC emphasises that curiosity, respect, and knowledge-sharing are specific techniques used when the volunteer encounters the refugee family. Sadan (2004) and Andersen and Brok (2021) also mention these techniques as relevant for a professional or a community planner (Sadan 2004; Andersen & Brok 2021). Still, active listening and patience are not highlighted as relevant techniques in DRC's guide for volunteers or at the workshop. But Enzo highlights how he tries to meet the refugee family with curiosity, respect, and knowledge sharing:

I approach the family with a smile. If I tell them something important or something that they need to know, I always try to say it in such a way that they don't feel that I'm talking down to them. I always try to say that I'm here for their benefit, and I'm happy and smiling when I tell them things they need to know. " (Enzo, 268-271)

Carlsen et al. (2020) would mention that Enzo can be friendly and open towards the affiliated refugee family, which can help overcome the uneven relationship between helper and recipient and support the empowerment process (Carlsen et al. 2020). Yet, as Enzo shares the same cultural background as his affiliated refugee family, this can also support the operation of Enzo becoming an empowering mirror (Heimo et al. 2020). Like Enzo, Ahmed does not find it difficult to understand how to act empowering. But still, he is left with some questions after the workshop. He was not quite sure exactly how he should base his support on the refugee family's resources:

"I don't think it's easy. But you have to go to the website and read about it yourself. (...) I think DRC has shown how we should proceed with it. But it requires you to spend a little time actually, but it's not complicated. But for me, every time I work as an empowering practise, I learn something new. (Ahmed, l. 335-340)

Ahmed and Enzo's experiences with applying empowerment in practice may indicate that DRC can provide sufficient information and knowledge about how empowerment should be facilitated. However, Ahmed also points out that it is not easy to use the method, and therefore it requires that the volunteer himself reads about how the technique is operationalised. This speaks in favour of empowerment not being downgraded only to a methodical approach, but rather to a view of human nature.

DRC, Ahmed, and Enzo all mention that an empowering practice requires regular evaluation meetings because of the complexity of facilitating empowerment. This supports Heimo et al. (2020) and Sadans (2004) argument about affiliating professionals to an empowering practice, as they can guide the process in the right direction (Heimo et al.2020). Enzo and Ahmed are still dependent on DRC as they set out meetings where empowerment is discussed, which helps operationalise empowerment as a method (Sadan 2004).

Former refugees' experiences with sport, volunteering and coming to Denmark

DRC stresses the quality of their volunteer's experiences of being new in Denmark or sports clubs in Denmark. I will therefore unfold my two unique informants with refugee backgrounds' experiences with being a newcomer in Denmark. I will exemplify this with smaller narratives, where I briefly describe the volunteer's path to Denmark and their experiences as a newcomer in Denmark.

Enzo

Enzo is from Iraq and fled to Denmark in the 1980s. He has therefore lived in Denmark for the majority of his life. Keeping this in mind, he does not have a long experience with sports and volunteering from his home country, but in Denmark, he has volunteered ever since he came to the country. He did not do any sports in Iraq and was not conscious of the meaning of being a volunteer before coming to Denmark. Soon after he arrived in Denmark, he met a Danish woman in a refugee camp in northern Jutland that became his girlfriend. She and her family have taught Heiwa about Danish cultural values. For Heiwa, this meant that he felt welcome in Denmark. He was all alone when he fled to Denmark at the age of 19. But despite his young age, he has always helped his friends and fellow citizens become part of Danish society. Therefore, before his work as a volunteer in the Leisure Corps, he had some experience being a volunteer, but not as a volunteer affiliated with an organisation.

Enzo has been a volunteer in Denmark, but he has never been affiliated with an organisation. He saw that DRC was looking for volunteers on a website, so Enzo contacted the DRC. He wanted to be a volunteer because he sometimes feels lonely. He does not have a wife anymore nor any children. But Enzo is not only a volunteer because he wants to meet people and be social, but he is also motivated towards helping his fellow countrymen because he knows how difficult it is to settle in Denmark. Through his time of volunteering, he has learned that it is essential to set boundaries:

When I come to a refugee family, they expect more of me as we're countrymen... They have every possible expectation of me; can you help me with that and that. And then I'll just say, no, you need to get in touch with an economist, a lawyer, or a caseworker. (...) But it is an advantage that we share the same cultural background because we understand each other. And I also appreciate Danish culture. So, I'm right in the middle. " (Enzo, l. 300-304)

Enzo has experience as a volunteer in Denmark and is new in Denmark, which means he has acquired knowledge that he believes can benefit refugee families. Enzo is motivated towards helping other refugee families who experience difficulties or cultural differences within integration processes. This may indicate that Enzo is not an example of a volunteer refugee motivated to volunteer for his integration benefits (Kwherostianov & Remennick 2016). It seems, due to his many years in Denmark and his experiences with volunteering, Enzo does not seek to be a volunteer because he wants to be better integrated in Denmark. He is driven by helping others and strengthening his local network in Denmark, thereby not feeling lonely. Kwherostianov and Remennick (2016) believe that by volunteering, Enzo will expand his network and experience a more significant social insertion and a sense of empowerment (Kwherostianov & Remennick 2016). In this way, Enzo's empowerment process will also be strengthened from being an empowering practice.

Enzo also plays an active role in the discussions during the evaluation meetings. He can discuss the problems that other volunteers have experienced with their affiliated refugee families. Similarly, Enzo also has a critical awareness as he reflects on implementing the new knowledge about empowerment as a method. Overall, this may indicate that Enzo already possesses individual and community empowerment outcomes. These skills can support his facilitation of the refugee family's empowerment process (Sadan 2004). Enzo also has experiences of being new in Denmark and knows about the cultural differences that can be difficult to understand when you are either new in Denmark or in a civic club. During his time as a volunteer, Enzo has experienced that because he shares cultural backgrounds with the people he tries to empower, it has sometimes meant that he was asked if he could help answer legal or financial questions. He stresses that he has learned that he must set boundaries to be able to help with what he has experience and knowledge of.

Ahmed

Ahmed came from Ethiopia and came to Denmark in March 2011. Before he came to Denmark, he worked as a social worker. He played football in his home country, but it was not organised like in Denmark when they played football. There was a coach, but they played at random times. Ahmed was well aware of what a volunteer is before he came to Denmark. He was an interpreter in the refugee camp in which he was placed. When Ahmed came to Denmark, he received much help from two Danish pensioners. It meant a lot to Ahmed that a Danish family took care of him and helped him with the challenges he had with being new in Denmark. He wants to be a volunteer because he wants to share his experiences and tell other refugees that they should not give up but instead look forward to the future.

Ahmed has made an active choice of becoming a volunteer. He appears to hold a strong motivation to be an active citizen and a firm belief that he has the skills and experience to help a newly arrived refugee family. Ahmed shows confidence in his abilities, and by choosing to help other refugee families, it may suggest that Ahmed possesses individual empowerment skills, as he believes in his own abilities to support other refugee families (Sadan 2004). Ahmed also participates in evaluation meetings, where he expresses his care for his affiliated refugee family's wellbeing and expresses the challenges by using empowerment as a method. He can participate in discussions about the welfare of his affiliated refugee family, which can indicate that Ahmed possesses community empowerment skills as he tries to support social change (Sadan 2004). I observed at the evaluation's meetings how Ahmed managed to take part in the political discussion about how the family should be helped and how he had challenges in applying empowerment as a method:

"The family has a hard time driving their child for swimming. Ahmed has therefore offered to drive their child together with his daughter. (...) He mentioned that it was impossible to facilitate empowerment because the family needs more than an empowering practice. He was a bit annoyed with this, but right now, it works fine because his daughter is attending the same swimming class. " (Observation, Volunteer-day 1. November 2021).

Ahmed believes he supports the newly arrived refugee family in the best possible way. But he does not think he can use empowerment as a method because of the family's limited transport possibilities. However, this is not only due to their limited opportunities for transport; the refugee family which Ahmed is affiliated is tormented by illness and cannot take care of their child's participation in a sports club. Ahmed finds this frustrating and even hopes to be affiliated with a new refugee family because he can't be an empowering practice with his current refugee family. It shows that refugee families who seek help from the system may often be afflicted with more extensive problems than not participating in a sports club (Nickerson et al., 2011; Fazel et al. 2005). This may suggest that empowerment as a methodological strategy is not always relevant when strengthening refugee control over their own lives. It seems that, before one can act empowering, structural conditions must be in place, and then a volunteer with a refugee background can support refugee families participating in a sports club in Denmark. As Ahmed shares the same cultural background as the refugee family and has experience with being new in Denmark and in sports clubs, this can be a unique opportunity to help the affiliated refugee family or even be an empowering mirror (Heimo et al.2020). However, these experiences do not seem to be realised as Ahmed's affiliate refugee family is limited by structural difficulties and is afflicted by physical and mental illness.

In this example, Ahmed is motivated to volunteer and act empowering. Therefore, it seems that the empowerment process occurs for Ahmed to a greater extent than for his affiliated refugee family, supporting Kwherostianov and Remennick (2016) argument. Still, Ahmed's refugee family is presumably motivated towards participating in a civic sports club because they requested help from DRC. Due to structural conditions, is it likely that the empowerment process cannot be implemented to the family, as Ahmed is there to help their child become active in a civic sports club and not help them with other problems related to being new in Denmark. This can support Steimel's (2017) argument that the empowerment process is often not adapted to the actual need for empowerment. Rajaram (2002) also mentions how migration organisations often treat refugees as a homogeneous

group. In Ahmed's case, the predefined programme, where his help is limited to the refugee families becoming a participant in a civic club, affects the refugee family's empowerment process, as they need help with structural problems (Rajaram 2002).

Discussion

Through observations of workshops, evaluation meetings about experiences of using empowerment as a method and interviews with two unique refugees, I have gained insight into experiences of facilitating an empowerment method in supporting refugees' families in becoming participants in a sports club. My study shows that volunteering can empower volunteers, supporting Heimo et al.'s (2020) arguments. However, my study also shows that structural problems in refugee families may limit the facilitation of empowerment processes, supported by a volunteer. It is unknown whether Enzo and Ahmed can act as an empowering mirror, still, their experiences of being new in Denmark and civic clubs can be contributing insight that can support refugees' empowerment processes. It may seem that the combination of experiences of being new in Denmark and civic clubs and professional empowerment techniques can positively support the empowerment process of refugee families. My study also shows that Enzo and Ahmed have not opted to volunteer for integration benefits, counter argumentative for Kwherostianov and Remennick (2016) study. On the other hand, they are motivated to strengthen their local environment's participation in sports clubs in Denmark.

Both Enzo and Ahmed feel that they have gained more confidence by participating in The Leisure Corps (Slootjes & Kampen 2017). Enzo finds that he is gaining a more extensive social network by volunteering, counter argumentative for Eliasophs (2016) study. Enzo emphasises that he uses a friendly approach when meeting refugees, possibly supporting the refugee family's empowerment process (Carlsen et al., 2020). In addition to the literature on volunteers who support other refugees for civic participation, my study can contribute to how to attribute empowerment techniques to people with refugee backgrounds. Enzo and Ahmed find it possible to use

empowerment as a methodical approach. At the same time, Ahmed believes that it is necessary to be curious about the method and that support from the DRC is essential for the facilitation of the method. This is in line with Paloma et al. (2020) argument about having NGO professionals and refugees as stakeholders for a positive development promotion for refugee families.

My interviews with two volunteers with refugee backgrounds have provided unique insight into how refugees may come to take an active role in the Danish society. They are motivated to support other refugee families to become involved in sports clubs in Denmark. They act as community planners and use empowerment as a methodological approach in conjunction with their experiences of being new in Denmark and or new in Danish sports clubs (Sadan 2004). Both volunteers had experiences of being volunteers (translator, teacher of friends and acquaintances utterly free of charge), even if they do not define these roles as volunteering. Previous studies indicate that the sports experiences of asylum seekers may be crucial for their involvement in sports-related contexts in the receiving societies (Spaaij 2017). My findings also show that being new in sports clubs and Denmark can also be relevant for the support of other refugees in combination with an empowerment approach.

My observations and interviews with DRC indicate that people with refugee backgrounds can learn empowerment as a method. DRC conducts regular follow-ups on how empowerment is facilitated, where this can be found necessary, as volunteers with refugee backgrounds may experience challenges in operationalising the empowerment method (Paloma et al. 2020). It seems that a workshop and ongoing evaluations can contribute to a gradually better understanding of DRC's ideas of using empowerment as a methodological intervention. However, when DRC mentions, at the workshops, how complex empowerment is as a theory and a method, it also seems that the focus is shifted away from how empowerment should be used to support the empowerment process based on refugee parents' resources. Here, it may be an idea not to use empowerment as a method but instead a view of human nature.

Using Elisheva Sadans's (2004) theory of empowerment has contributed to analysing the different levels of the empowerment process of the DRC initiative. Sadan's (2004) concepts may contribute to examining how DRC assesses whether their volunteers possess individual and community empowerment competencies to act as community planners. It is questionable whether DRC in their recruitment process assesses individual and community empowerment skills or whether it is more important to have experience of being new in Denmark and or sports clubs. Yet, the idea of making assessments of individual and community empowerment skills does not seem to be necessary. This may suggest that experiences of being new in Denmark or understanding cultural differences can contribute, perhaps more or possibly better, in supporting refugee families' participation in civic clubs in Denmark.

The concept of professional empowerment can illustrate the two sides of DRC's empowerment initiative. DRC acts empowering, as it teaches and supports volunteers with refugee backgrounds to take up volunteers. Volunteers with refugee backgrounds work as community planners and learn to use professional empowerment techniques. However, the extent to which volunteers with refugee backgrounds can use professional practices such as active listening, curiosity, and patience in conversations with their related refugee families must be explored further.

A postcolonial perspective can be included in the discussion of empowerment as this belief is trying to move away from the sight of the colonised (in this case refugees) as powerless. Homi Bhabha believes that the western discourse can be perceived as 'the truth' (Bhabha 1997; Huddart 2006). According to Fanon, this may result in the colonised starting to "mimic" the Western culture. Bhabha points out that the colonial encounter with Western cultures can contribute to something bigger than just 'mimicking'. In this connection, Bhabha describes the concept of *hybridity*. Bhabha's postcolonial construction of hybridity suggests that the hybrid offers innovation and creativity (Bhabha 1997; Huddart 2006). Bhabha believes that the encounter between the coloniser and the western society can create new ideas, thoughts or subjectivity. This means that the

colonised is not referred to as ‘the other’ or ‘the orient’, as Edward Said otherwise would believe the encounter between the West and non-Western countries could result in (Said 1985). The relationship between the west and the colonised should not be a situation where the colonised is silent. This perspective may be relevant to include in the idea of empowerment. Empowerment can maintain an unequal power relationship between the one trying to facilitate empowerment and the one being helped (Sadan 2004; Eliasoph 2016; Andersen & Brok 2021). Involving people with refugee backgrounds in an empowering practice can break down the otherwise unequal relationship between the west and the colonised. As volunteers, people with refugee backgrounds can possibly contribute creatively and innovatively to being a volunteer. DRC and Enzo mention that volunteers must set boundaries for their help. Analysed with Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, the volunteers are not provided with the opportunity to develop a hybrid understanding encompassing their own former experiences and DRC’s knowledge of the role (Bhabha 1997; Huddart 2006). Enzo and Ahmed explained how they have been used to helping other families with matters related to Danish authority and language difficulties. Here they show a comprehensive understanding of volunteering beyond what DRC wants volunteers to help refugee families with.

Conclusion and further perspectives

This study contributes with insight into how DRC experience educating people with refugee backgrounds to act empowering for other refugee families. DRC finds it difficult to operationalise the concept of empowerment as a methodical approach. However, regular follow-ups and monthly meetings help both DRC and volunteers become specific on using empowerment as a method. Ahmed finds it challenging to work empowering with his affiliate refugee family. He believes that they are not in a mental and physical state form where he can support their participation in civic clubs. Enzo does not find it challenging to facilitate empowerment because, without knowing it, he had experience with this methodological approach. It has worked for him to have an open and friendly approach to the people he supports, but this has also meant that he has learned that he has to set boundaries for what he can help with.

DRC finds it possible to educate people with refugee backgrounds in empowerment as a theory and a practice. However, DRC is still in the process of identifying how empowerment should be facilitated as a method. DRC mentions that volunteers should base their empowering support on the associated families' resources. However, the DRC is still in the process of operationalising this. DRC mentions techniques such as curiosity, respect and knowledge-sharing, which can be used when the volunteer is trying to empower a refugee family. These techniques can be characterised as common human qualities but may still be relevant to operationalise (Carlsen et al. 2020). Sadan (2004) and Andersen and Brok (2021) mention that relational/social qualities must be supplemented with professional techniques to achieve a successful empowerment process. DRC does not mention how active listening, curiosity, and patience in the conversation with the refugee family can be supportive of their empowerment processes (Andersen & Brok 2021). These techniques could potentially be relevant when empowerment is to be used as a method.

DRC highlights that volunteers must set boundaries for their support, as volunteers are only allowed to support refugee families towards participating in civic clubs. However, by setting boundaries and

just allowing support of participation in civic clubs, the refugee family cannot benefit as much from volunteers with refugee backgrounds experiences of being new in Denmark. Enzo has found it necessary to set boundaries because otherwise he will be asked to help with legal and financial issues, which abstains him from helping with something he has knowledge and experience about. It seems that there may be more structural problems that troubles refugee families, even though they have requested help to participate in a civic club. As Ahmed stresses, he could not help his refugee family because they do not have the resources for empowerment; they need help with transport. It may seem that empowerment is a method to support families not afflicted by either mental or physical illness. Therefore, it appears that empowerment as a methodological approach is not always a sustainable way of supporting refugees' participation in civic clubs. For further research, it would be interesting to pursue the finding where empowerment could be a theoretical framework or view of human nature instead of a methodological instrument. The idea of empowerment as a theory could then be combined with experiences of being new in Denmark and sports clubs when former refugees try to support other refugee family's participants in civic clubs in Denmark.

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