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Choosing to learn the national minority language

Immigrant experiences of learning Swedish and finding community in Raseborg, Finland

Intercultural Encounters
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Immigrants in Finland have the choice between learning Finnish or Swedish, as both national languages are equal in the eyes of the law. In practice, however, the choice is often made by the authorities and not the migrant. 20 out of 33 bilingual municipalities have decided to only integrate immigrants in Finnish. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration determines the responsibilities of the state and the migrant in Finland. The act was recently revised in combination with a reform of welfare and employment services, giving the municipalities even more responsibility for integrating migrants than before. On top of this the government declared a quota of immigrants that should be integrated in Swedish. This creates an opportunity for bilingual municipalities, like Raseborg, to integrate more immigrants in Swedish. Previous research indicates a willingness of immigrants to learn Swedish, or both languages. Since Raseborg is often excluded from large-scale projects, this thesis aims to fill that gap by reporting immigrant experiences of learning Swedish in Raseborg. With thematic analysis of questionnaire data this study prioritized immigrant stories of choosing Swedish and finding community in Raseborg. The conclusion is that the respondents are very likely to enjoy the language education, use the language in their daily lives, and even consider themselves part of the local Swedish-speaking community. Ultimately, immigrant perspectives should be considered when developing integration and language education, especially before making the language choice for them.

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1 Introduction

Growing up as a Swedish-speaking Finn in a small town in Finland I was surrounded by a very homogenous population. Ekenäs, which was its own city until January 1st, 2009, had around 15 000 inhabitants of which the majority spoke Swedish (Lindberg, 2023). Aside from the few years of language immersion I experienced in kindergarden, I almost exclusively spoke Swedish in my daily life from first grade all the way through high school. Although Swedish language schools outnumbered their Finnish language counterparts, almost all immigrants who moved to the city were enrolled in the Finnish schools. Even as a child, I found this peculiar and wondered whether this was due to personal choice or local governmental policy. Today Ekenäs is part of the city of Raseborg, which consists of Ekenäs, Karis and Pohja, where the Swedish speaking majority is still maintained. Around 27 000 people reside in the municipality, of which 64 % speak Swedish, 30.7% Finnish and 5.4% other languages (Raseborgs stad, 2025). Despite the Swedish speaking majority, most immigrants receive integration training in the Finnish language. Although this is not surprising considering the status of the Swedish language at a national level, it is compelling to investigate locally.

Since Finland has two national languages, Finnish and Swedish, everyone taking part in integration training must choose to learn one of the languages (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (681/2023). Immigrants coming to Finland are supposed to be informed about the choice and be able to make a choice on equal grounds, but unfortunately that is rarely the reality. The available reports on language choice suggest that migrants are generally content with their choice of learning either language but require more information about them before making the decision (Creutz & Helander, 2012; Sundbäck, 2017; Teikari, 2015). Previous research indicates that the main reason that immigrants in Finland choose to learn Swedish, other than due to personal connections, is because it is perceived to be easier to learn than Finnish. They are motivated to choose the language that is perceived to be easier to learn to be able to enter the job market, start studying, or apply for citizenship as quickly as possible (Kuitunen, 2011; Teikari, 2015).

Many Finnish scholars have researched immigration integration and language acquisition, but the combination of the language, area and age-group of interest sets

this thesis apart from previous studies. Many reports on integration of immigrants in Swedish are commissioned in connection with grant applications, which leads to the agenda of the commissioner taking priority over the needs of the migrants (Kosová & Sundbäck, 2021). Substantial research has been dedicated to language learning of immigrant children in Finland, but much less to adult language learning (Kuitunen, 2011). Additionally, most researchers focus on either Ostrobothnia or the Helsinki region (Kosová & Sundbäck, 2021), and most projects focusing on other cities in the Uusimaa region are master's theses. This thesis contributes to filling this gap by exploring the language learning experiences of immigrant learners and speakers of Swedish in Raseborg.

There has been a recent shift in the understanding of integration. Previously it was assumed that immigrants integrate into an entire country, while many scholars of the past decade have been shifting their focus to a local context (Saukkonen, 2020, pp. 145-153). In Finland, where integration services are managed by municipalities, the local context indeed plays a large role in the integration of migrants. The topic of integration of immigrants in Finland is timely due to the recent revision of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (681/2023) in conjunction with the reform of healthcare- and wellbeing services and employment services. Additionally, the city council of Raseborg recently decided to welcome double the amount of quota refugees in 2026 and hopes to integrate some of them in Swedish (Almark, 2025). Both the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, the government's program for the promotion of immigrant integration, and the municipalities' own integration programs place significant value on language learning. In many ways, it is believed to be the gateway to integration into both society, community, education, and the labor market. Therefore, it is vital to understand real experiences of immigrants learning both of our national languages.

Additionally, this thesis contributes to existing research using the sociolinguistic concept of "new speakers" of minority languages in Europe (Pujolar, 2022). The concept is relatively new in the Finnish context and can shed light on inclusion or exclusion of immigrants into the language minority, as Bäckman and Haapamäki (2024) call for more research into the inclusion of new speakers in Swedish-speaking communities in Finland. Against this backdrop, my main points of interest are if migrants living in Finland agree with the presumption that learning a national

language helps their integration, what reasons they have for choosing Swedish, and finally, if integration in Swedish works in Finland. Since the focus of this thesis is on the Swedish language and on Raseborg, I have defined my research questions as follows:

1. For what reason do immigrants living in Raseborg choose to learn Swedish rather than Finnish?
2. What kind of experiences do migrants in Raseborg have of learning Swedish?
3. Does learning Swedish positively impact the integration of immigrants on a local level? If so, how?

I begin by presenting the terms and topics that are necessary to grasp to contextualize the results of this thesis. In chapter 2, a general overview of contemporary immigration and integration with a focus on Finland, is presented. In chapter 3, the status of the Swedish language in Finland is discussed and presented in combination with the integration program of Raseborg. Chapter 4 presents previous research efforts on the integration of migrants and on language learning in Swedish-speaking or bilingual municipalities in Finland, highlighting the existing gap in scholarship. Chapters 5-7 revolve around the chosen research methodology and analysis of the results. The thesis aims to give the reader a good understanding of the reality of immigrant integration in Swedish in Finland, by showing real immigrant experiences.

I am aware that other minority languages exist in Finland, and that they should receive attention too. Unfortunately, including all of them in this thesis would widen the scope too much. I am choosing to focus on the two national languages according to the constitution, in which integration services are provided. On a practical note, I use a mix of Swedish and Finnish names for cities and institutions in this text. I follow the general guidelines to use the name that the recognized majority language of the city uses, if more than one name exists. For example, I refer to *Raseborg* rather than its' Finnish translation *Raasepori*.

2 Immigration and integration

In the light of the incendiary public rhetoric around migration, it is crucial to provide a critical, nuanced description grounded in research. In this chapter central terminology is presented and critiqued.

2.1 Immigration: a short history

The International Organization for Migration [IOM] (2025) proposes the use of the term 'migrant' as "an umbrella term covering a vast range of people moving away from their home" (para. 2). A migrant is thus a person who is leaving/has left their regular place of residence either voluntarily or involuntarily to move either within a state or across state-lines. A person's legal status, their reason for moving, and the length of their stay, does not affect them being a migrant, at least not according to IOM. The legal status of a migrant depends on their reason for leaving, a potential visa in the new state, the regulations in the new state, and their means of transport. Some migrants move, for example, to find employment or to reunite with family, while others are forcefully displaced by conflicts and war. IOM does not define types of migrants underneath the umbrella term but simply mentions refugees and other especially vulnerable migrants. The point with using an umbrella term is to understand that migration is a complex phenomenon, and all migrants should be taken into consideration (the International Organization for Migration, 2025). According to UNHCR, a refugee is someone who fulfils the criteria of the 1951 convention (The UN Refugee Agency, n.d). The convention states the following:

> as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951, art. 33)

The definition above is from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It was updated in 1967 so that the definition of a refugee, and the legal rights that apply, are universal. The main idea behind the convention was to create (minimum)

standards for how refugees should be treated, and what rights they should have in the states that have ratified the convention. This includes accommodation, education and the right to work while being displaced in the host country, as well as the non-refoulment principle stating that refugees should not be sent back to their country of origin if they face significant threats to their freedom or their life there (The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.).

In this thesis I am using the terms migrant, immigrant and international migrant interchangeably, as any immigrant in Finland is also both a migrant and an international migrant. I would prefer to use (international) migrant more than immigrant, since the word immigrant is commonly connected to American politics and scholarship, but since the Swedish translation of immigrant, *invandrare*, is the most used in the Swedish context, I will switch between the two depending on the context.

Contrary to popular belief, global migration is not on the rise but has been relatively stable over the past half century. However, due to fears of possible consequences in both countries of emigration and immigration, the prominence of migration in political and public discourse has grown immensely. This is due to the change in the character of migration, and the discourse around those changes (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2014). As Europe and Finland receive more international migrants than before from Asia, the Middle East and Africa, fears of disruption in society, misuse of the social welfare system and access to jobs arise. However, an analysis of the available statistics shows that the wages international migrants in Finland are paid are covered by the taxes they pay, and that international workers and students make up a significant amount of the current and future work force in Finland. It would be important for the public discussion to focus less on costs and possible threats, and more on the investment in the country's future that international migrants can provide (Myrskylä & Kainulainen, 2025).

In this thesis I focus on migration, mainly to and from Europe, starting in the mid-20th century. I start in the 17th centrue to show how the characteristics of migration have changed over time. Since the human species was the first primate species to start populating the entire planet, humans have in fact always migrated. Human history is characterized by migration due to scouting for new land, as well as

formations of empires, nations, and finally states (Manning and Trimmer 2004, 22-60). In the 17th century European colonialism produced many different types of migration. The largest movement of people was migration from Europe to Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania. From the 17th to the 19th century millions of Europeans settled either permanently or temporarily in colonized areas to escape poverty, or in search of resources not found in Europe. The slave systems that were put in place became the forefathers of modern labor migration. With the resources and wealth extracted from the colonies, the industrial revolution started around the same time, prompting migration to North America and Oceania. Labor migration within Europe also blossomed during the 19th century and early 20th century. After the wars international migration has taken on a different character than before (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2014, 84-95).

Unfortunately, there are significant gaps in the existing data on migration from earlier centuries, and numbers may be highly underestimated. However, de Haas has extracted data from two different databases to show a realistic estimate of international migrants in the world from 1960-2017. According to the World Bank (2023, as cited in de Haas, 2023), there were about 93 million international migrants in the world in 1960, a number which increased to 247 million in 2017 (United Nations Population Division, 2017, as cited by de Haas, 2023). By themselves, the numbers show a remarkable increase in international migration, but when including population growth, a much more insignificant change presents itself. The world population grew from a mere 3 billion in 1960 to 7.6 billion in 2017, meaning that the number of international migrants (divided by the world population) has only risen from just over 1% to almost 3% (World Bank, 2023; United Nations Population Division, 2027, as cited by de Haas, 2023). In 2024, the world population had grown to 8.1 billion, with 304 million international migrants. This indicates a slight growth of 0.7% since 2017, as the number of international migrants as a share of the world population was 3.7%. This suggests only a modest growth in international migrants over the last 60-70 years. Or at least modest growth in comparison to the exponential growth of the world population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2025).

Although the increase in international migrants divided by the world population is not huge, an increase has nonetheless happened. Almost double the number of

international migrants was on the move in 2024 compared to 1990. The region to receive the most international migrants in 2024 was Europe with 94 million international migrants in total. There has been a shift since the early 2000s making Europe the continent that hosts the most international migrants annually. After 2020 the numbers have only grown due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. While these numbers clearly show a shift in the geographical location of migration, most international migrants in Europe are born in another European country. 74% of international migrants in Europe only migrated within the region. A final interesting number to look at is the number of refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced people in need of international protection. The UN started collecting data on refugees in the 1950s, and the highest number of forcibly displaced people was recorded in 2024 as 51.7 million (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2025).

Evidently international migration has looked very different throughout history. Looking back at the 17th century, large masses of people migrated from Europe to other continents, looking for resources and opportunities. This trend continued as colonization and industrialization changed the world and the existing dynamics, alongside plenty of intra-regional migration within Europe. To this day most migrants in Europe are still from another European country, but nowadays Europe outranks all other regions in numbers of international migrants and numbers of displaced people rise with them. What does the situation look like in Finland?

2.2 Immigration to Finland

The territory that became Finland in 1917 was a land of emigration rather than immigration for most of the 20th century. The first larger groups of migrants arrived there in the 1990s (Forsander, 2002). Most immigrants living in Finland have moved to the country because of their partner. Since 2006, however, also labor migrants make up a significant number of international migrants in Finland. Refugees granted asylum in Finland have generally remained at a stable level since the 90s, apart from the occasional surge due to humanitarian crises (Creutz & Helander, 2012). Large numbers of Finns emigrated to other European countries after the wars, but the great new generations born after the wars made it possible for Finland to survive without attracting labor migrants. As those generations grow older simultaneously as nativity

is slowing, the need for labor migration is estimated to be very high in the future (Forsander, 2002). Unfortunately, the high taxes, geographical location and many other factors lead to (especially so-called highly skilled labor) migrants opting for other countries of destination than Finland. Therefore, social integration programs should be invested in for all types of immigrants (Koskela, 2010).

In 2024 a total of 63 965 people immigrated to Finland. This indicates a slight decrease from the previous year, but all in all a large increase over time. In 2005 the annual immigrants rose above 20 000 for the first time, slowly increasing to around 25-35 000 between the years of 2010 and 2021. In 2022 Finland experienced a significant increase in immigrants with almost 50 000 registered immigrants, and a record-breaking number of 73 236 in 2023 (Suomen virallinen tilasto, 2025a). Dividing the number of migrants with the population of Finland, in the same way the UN does for worldwide statistics, immigrants made up roughly 1.1% of the Finnish population in 2024. Similarly, in 2017 immigrants made up less than 0.6% of the population of the country. With a change of 0.5% this indicates approximately the same, and slightly smaller, increase as in global immigration. At the same time, it is apparent that the overall immigration to Finland is much smaller than the average global immigration.

Apart from 2015, and recent years, Finland has generally received only a few thousand applications for asylum annually. In 2015 roughly 32 000 people, of whom the majority were Iraqis, applied for asylum in Finland (Alho, Penttilä & Välimäki, 2023). Before and after the record number of applications in 2015 only around 1000-3000 immigrants a year were granted asylum in Finland. In the subsequent year of 2016, that number rose to 7745 (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2026). Due to the war in Ukraine over 50 000 Ukrainians arrived in Finland between February 2022 and April 2023, and they were all afforded a new type of residency, temporary protection (Alho, Penttilä & Välimäki, 2023).

The statistics for the full year of 2025 are not yet published, but the figures from January to September indicate some fluctuations in migration. Due to the stagnation of economic growth in the country, the applications for residency on the grounds of employment have plummeted along with a slight decrease in international students, and a noticeable decline in applications for asylum. Most applications for residency

have been made on the grounds of family and education. The international students already in Finland are actively applying for jobs, with an increase of 42% since the same time in 2023, and family connections continue to provide reasons for immigration, especially amongst students (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2025). When applications for residency are declining, it is of utmost importance that the integration of people with immigrant bakground lready in the country is prioritized. As the war in Ukraine continues it is vital that the people protected by temporary protection in Finland can continue to integrate locally. The increase in international students wishing to stay in the country shows promise and should be supported with integration services.

2.3 Integration

This thesis is written based on the presumption that integration is a complex process that involves both immigrants and society and focuses only on parts of what the concept of integration encompasses. Political scientist Ernst B. Haas (1958, pp. 4-18) dissects community and integration in Europe after the world wars. He refers to the new nations that were created or reestablished as political communities, which are characterized by loyalty, group conflict, and common belief. A political community does not need to take the shape of a federal state, but states are examples of it. Haas argues that the ideal political community is inherently pluralistic, and therefore so is the process of (political) integration. Integration is a process where the perception of interests and values of all actors involved align.

The word integration, in the context of migration, was coined after the Second World War when the need for terms describing the process of immigrants settling into a new country arose. The need for such terminology stemmed from the politization of migration and the increased attention in media. Previously the term ‘assimilation’ had been used widely both in academia and public policy. The term was, however widely criticized for referring to immigrants literally blending in and conforming. Integration was introduced as a new and more abstract term to use when referring to immigration policy (Saukkonen, 2020, p. 17).

Unfortunately, practices do not automatically evolve when terminology does, and by now the term integration is often considered just as problematic as assimilation was a

few decades ago. In practice, most integration policies aim for assimilation as their content focuses almost solely on the immigrants' adjustment to the host country (Favell, 2019). In Finland it was agreed that the word integration, although better than the former term, was not desirable. The term was both closely linked to integration of the European Union, and to an understanding of integration as a one-sided process. Therefore, Finnish experts introduced the words *kotoutuminen* and *kotouttaminen*. The words stem from the Finnish word "*koti*" or "*koto*", meaning home. Kotoutuminen refers to the immigrant's personal process of settling in, whilst kotouttaminen refers to the efforts by the state and municipality to promote the integration of the immigrant (Saukkonen, 2020, p. 17). For lack of a better word, and since it is the most widely accepted and used term, I am using the word integration in this thesis. However, I acknowledge that both the term itself and integration policies in general can be problematic.

As the term integration was coined to be able to produce integration policies it is inevitably linked to those policies and rights. Penninx (2005, 137-139) identified three main dimensions of citizenship that are present in European integration policies. The first dimension being legal or political encompasses a person's legal rights and acceptance into the political community. The second dimension, the socio-economic dimension, includes access to employment and social benefits. The third and final dimension is the cultural and religious dimension. This dimension concerns cultural and religious rights to organize and be accepted in society. These dimensions can be used to evaluate integration policies, as the three dimensions are essential parts of civic integration.

Integration is a two-way process where both the host state and the migrant bear responsibility. Integration is not only impacted by policies, attitudes of locals and access to job markets and social settings, but also by the immigrant's own beliefs. For integration programs to be successful, they must align with the aspirations of both the state and the immigrant. The sense of belonging, an inherent part of integration, does not look the same for everyone. Therefore, incorporating migrant experiences into integration theory can help explain discrepancies in the outcomes of integration programs (Hur, 2023). Additionally, integration is not a linear process, and while

some features of integration may be universal, some are highly local and dependent on the host society and local community (Wilkinson, 2013).

Both research and policy documents highlight the importance of language in the integration process. The language can be used as a tool when obtaining further dimensions of integration. The importance of language is exemplified in the following section that describes integration of immigrants in Finland.

2.4 Integration of immigrants in Finland

Finland has an Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration which defines the legal obligations of the state to promote integration of immigrants. According to said act, an immigrant is a person who has moved to the country and resides in it with a permit issued not for tourism or other short-term reasons, or someone whose residence has been registered or has been issued a residence permit (Act on the Promotion of Integration 681/2023, 5 §). The act has been formulated to promote 1) immigrant integration, 2) immigrant employment and entrepreneurship, 3) immigrant competency and work-life skills, 4) the realization of equal treatment, participation and equality for immigrants, 5) immigrant well-being and health, 6) good relations in and receptivity of society, 7) access to necessary and refined integration services, 8) cross-sectoral collaboration between services promoting integration, and 9) coordination of integration-promoting planning and development with other national, regional and local planning and development (Act on the Promotion of Integration 681/2023, 1 §)).

In the Act on the Promotion of Integration (681/2023, 5 §) integration is defined as the individual's personal process that takes place in conjunction with society, during which the equal treatment of the individual, as well as their participation in the labor force, education, organizations or other forms of civic life deepens and becomes more advanced. Promotion of integration is also defined in the act, as follows: promoting integration by providing immigrants with the services referred to in this act, by supporting the immigrant's possibility to use their own language and culture, and by developing society's receptiveness.

The Act on the Promotion of Integration (681/2023, 52 §) determines that the government must develop a new program for promoting integration of immigrants every four years, which is overseen by the ministry of economic affairs and employment. The most recent, and current program has been formulated for the period of 2024-2027. According to the current program (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2025) the key themes are integration through employment, more responsibility to the immigrants themselves, prevention of separate societies and integration of the whole family. The program includes 32 concrete measures to be taken and clearly highlights a change in the dynamic between the state and the immigrant. During these four years the government wishes to transform the existing integration services by rewriting the integration act, from emphasizing the newly arrived immigrant's rights to emphasizing their responsibilities and obligations. Perhaps connected to the new emphasis on the immigrant's own autonomy and responsibility, an increase in integration in Swedish is stressed. The authorities should be more transparent about the possibility to learn Swedish, and the objective is for 5-10% of immigrants to learn Swedish.

The act was reformed at the same time as the TE-reform in Finland. Previously, employment of migrants was handled by the TE-offices, while the rest of the integration services were provided by the municipality (Kuntaliitto, 2025). As of 2023, Finland reformed the health and social care system by establishing wellbeing service counties that oversee the health and social care, which in turn necessitated the other two reforms. As of 2025, the TE-offices no longer exist, and the municipalities oversee all integration services through cross-sectoral cooperation (Kuntaliitto, 2026). All immigrants living in Finland are entitled to services promoting their integration provided by the municipality, but only quota refugees, unemployed immigrants looking for work, immigrants receiving benefits for providing home care for their children who have come to Finland maximum three years ago are entitled to an evaluation of needs for an integration plan. Therefore, only they are entitled to paid integration services including language training (Act on the Promotion of Integration 681/2023, 14 §).

3 The Swedish speaking minority in Finland

3.1 History and the present

As stated in both the constitution and the language act, the two official languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. Finnish is widely spoken, whereas people registered as or identifying as speakers of Swedish mainly live in areas close to the coastline. Åland islands are excluded from the Language Act, as their rights to their language are stated in their own Autonomy Act (Oikeusministeriö, n.d.). The purpose of the Language Act is to ensure that registered speakers of both Finnish and Swedish are able to use their own language when interacting with courts and other governmental institutions. The municipalities play a big part in the access of services in the respective languages, as they are either considered to be bilingual or unilingual. The language status of municipalities is updated every 10 years based on official demographics. A municipality is determined to be bilingual if at least eight percent or 3000 inhabitants are registered as speakers of the less spoken language. It is also possible for the municipal council to decide to adopt the status of bilingual, even if the minimum number of registered speakers is not achieved (Act on the Promotion of Integration 681/2003, 2-5 §). Although the legal status of the languages is equal, theory and practice seldom correspond (Carlsson, 2017; Creutz & Helander, 2012; Carlsson, 2017, Forsgård, 2025).

As the Swedish kingdom was formed in the late Middle Ages, it included western provinces of today's Finland. For many centuries Sweden was a multilingual kingdom where mainly Swedish was used in administration and governance. By the 19th century when the empire fell apart, the Swedish language dominated in all provinces. For the territory now known as Finland, the Swedish rule meant a simultaneous close integration of the western provinces into the Swedish empire, and the beginning of a formation of a geographical and cultural identity. Although Finnish was used by the majority of the population in what became Finland, all administration and education was being managed in Swedish. When the Swedish empire lost Finland to the Russian empire in 1809, Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy still following the Swedish constitution and being administered mainly in Swedish. Slowly the Fennoman movement, a movement advocating for the Finnish language, started gaining followers along with support by the Soviet authorities. This resulted in an

increase of administration and education in Finnish. The status of Finnish improved in all of society simultaneously as inhabitants identifying as Swedish speaking migrated or assimilated, and by 1917 when the country became independent, a mere 13% of the population spoke Swedish as their first language (Kuvaja et al., 2007). In the Language Act of 1922, the bilingualism of the new nation was confirmed when both languages were included in the paragraphs. Since then, many different actors and groups, including the Swedish people's party, have advocated for keeping the status of the Swedish language, even though the percentage of Swedish speakers continues to decrease. The idea of a "Swedish-speaking" Finnish identity formed around this time and has since become part of both academic and common vernacular (Hårdstedt, 2023, pp. 245-255).

Since 1880 all Finnish citizens must register one language as their primary language of use (Stenbäck, 2024). When a child is born in Finland the parent(s) or guardian(s) need to fill out a form stating the child's name and first language. (Often referred to as "mother tongue" in Finland). Only one language can be registered as the child's mother tongue and should be considered carefully when the family is fluent in more than one language. If the child's language is another than Finnish or Swedish, they will study Finnish or Swedish as a second language (KEHA-keskus, 2024). In 2024 a total of 285 360 people were registered as Swedish speakers in Finland (Suomen virallinen tilasto, 2025b). Divided by the population of Finland in 2024 (around 5.636 million), that amounts to around 5.1% of the population. Stenbäck (2024) points out that even though the percentage of the population is low, the number is roughly the same as in 1880 when the registration started. The peak of registered Swedish speakers in Finland happened in the 1950s when around 350 000 people spoke the minority language. However, due to mass emigration to Sweden, the number decreased significantly within the next decade.

Most Swedish speaking Finns live in cities close to the coastline, over half of them in areas where the Swedish language is still dominant. Even though statistical prognoses indicate that the number of people registered as or identifying as Swedish speakers will stay relatively stable, with only a slight decrease in the coming decades, the status of the language continues to be weakened. Many bilingual families are registering their children as speakers of Swedish, but simultaneously the number of people that are registering foreign languages as their mother tongue is on the rise. Therefore,

promoting integration in Swedish may become integral for maintaining the status of the Swedish language in Finland (Saarela, 2021). Immigrants, potential new speakers of the language, could potentially increase the number of people registering and/or identifying as Swedish speakers.

Researchers of regional minority languages have in the recent decade developed a category called “new speakers”. In this context, new speakers refer to non-native speakers who are learning or have learned a language through formal schooling, often as an adult. Researchers have for example studied new speakers of Basque, Catalan and Welch (Pujolar, 2022), and recently also Swedish in Finland (Bäckman & Haapamäki, 2024). The category differentiates new speakers from so called “native speakers” and therefore contributes to studies of sociolinguistics and language identities that defy colonial perspectives on nations and languages. As our societies continue to become more multilingual, we need ways to understand them (Pujolar, 2022).

The case of Swedish in Finland differs from many other contexts where a regional minority language is learned, for example Catalonia and Wales, because migrants in Finland seldom learn both the Swedish and Finnish language alongside each other. Such efforts are not supported by the Finnish state, since migrants are encouraged to choose one of the languages. In studies from Catalonia and Wales most participants are not migrants, but rather majority language speakers learning the minority language. Therefore, new speakers of Swedish in Finland are in many ways unique and could offer a lot of knowledge to the academic field of minority languages (Bäckman & Haapamäki, 2024). Through interviews with four new speakers of Swedish, Bäckman and Haapamäki (2024) conclude that migrants in Finland have unequal opportunity to choose which language they want to learn, along with unequal opportunity to invest in learning a local language. Although most participants who have chosen Swedish are content with their choice, some express doubt about being accepted into the local Swedish-speaking community or the national Finnish community. These experiences highlight the need for a category like new speakers, for all speakers of Swedish in Finland do not identify themselves as Swedish-speaking Finns.

The discourse around new speakers also highlights how new speakers can change the character of traditional minority groups, and the potential for adding numbers to regional linguistic minorities (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2015). For actors wishing to strengthen the status of Swedish in Finland, integrating migrants in Swedish could be seen as an opportunity. However, learners of Swedish need to be accepted into the local communities, if they wish to be, for their language learning and integration to be successful (Bäckman & Haapamäki, 2024).

3.2 Integration in Swedish in Finland and Raseborg

When an immigrant who is entitled to the integration program moves to Finland, one of the first choices they must make is whether to learn Finnish or Swedish. This decision is made in conjunction with the initial evaluation of needs and competency, where a plan for education and other services promoting integration are agreed upon. Some factors that may influence language choice are previous residency in another Nordic country, previous knowledge of another Nordic or Indo-European language, the language majority of the municipality they are moving to, and future goals and plans. In general, learning Finnish opens up more opportunities as it can be used all over the country, while the Swedish language can be useful in a local context, for taking advantage of the Swedish education route that is available all the way from primary school to university, and for Nordic cooperation (KEHA-keskus, n.d.).

Integration services for (eligible) adults are planned according to the person's competency and needs, including mandatory language courses and a final proficiency test for quota refugees. The person needs to achieve elementary proficiency in Finnish or Swedish (Act on the Promotion of Integration 681/2003, 26 §). A person immigrating to Finland should be informed about both languages, as it is their personal choice to choose between the two. Unfortunately, this does not always happen and is rarely possible in practice. Of the 308 municipalities in Finland, 49 are bilingual or fully Swedish speaking. 20 out of the 33 bilingual municipalities (excluding Åland islands) have decided to only integrate immigrants in Finnish (Kuntaliitto, 2022). There seems to be an issue with both understating and overstating the status of the Swedish language in Finland. Some migrants have complained about never being presented the option of Swedish, whilst others have complained about embellished versions of the truth (Sundbäck, 2017). Due to both a

lack of resources and an assumption that all immigrants will want to move to another city eventually, even in areas dominated by Swedish, instructions are only given in Finnish (Pöyhönen & Simpson, 2021).

For integration in Swedish to work in Finland, it is important that all immigrants, especially those obligated to take part in the official integration language courses, are given consistent and correct information about the languages. On top of this, it is integral that the third sector offers additional support to migrants. In many cities Swedish education is available only as a paid service, whereas the Finnish courses are free, urging many to choose Finnish (Sundbäck, 2017, pp. 12-16). In other European countries where historical minorities reside, it is common practice to enforce education in the local language. Finland has the unique opportunity to offer a choice to migrants, that should be seen as that and not a burden (Carlsson, 2017).

There is no data on exactly how many people classified as “immigrants” are living in Raseborg. However, there are numbers available that give us an understanding of approximately the number of people who fit into that category. According to Statistics Finland (2025b, 179 people immigrated to Finland and settled in Raseborg in 2024. I look at the following numbers: persons speaking a foreign language (1683), foreign citizens (1316), foreign born people (2057) and people with a foreign background (1878) (Suomen virallinen tilasto, 2025b), to get an understanding of how many international migrants reside in the area. The issue is that many individuals likely fall into several categories. However, looking at the numbers, I deduce that around 1600-2000 international migrants or people with foreign backgrounds lived in Raseborg in 2024. In the integration program, the writers have chosen to use the people who have registered speaking a foreign language as their point of reference, probably because they are most likely to need the services of the integration unit. The 1683 registered foreign language speakers make up 6.2% of the population of Raseborg, while 30.4% are registered speakers of Finnish and 63.4% Swedish. The most spoken foreign languages are Russian, Estonian, Arabic, Ukrainian, English, Kurdish, Thai, German and Tagalog (Ljung-Hägert, 2024).

As of 2025, the city of Raseborg agreed to co-operate with the city of Ingå and Hanko by producing integration services together. The co-operation with Hanko goes back

about 15 years, but the new contract includes both Hanko and Ingå purchasing services from Raseborg. In conjunction with this new contract, the integration services team has merged with the region's team in charge of employment services for people who speak foreign languages. This merger showcases the aims of the city councils to work together to aid both those looking for work and those outside of the working force in hopes of them staying in the area (Forsgård 2025, pp. 109-110). To me, these changes signal a clear will to provide services to a wider range of migrants, and to tailor the services available to the needs of migrants.

On the 1st of December 2025, the city council of Raseborg decided that the municipality will welcome double the usual amount of quota refugees in the coming year. This decision was made partly due to the government's goal to increase the number of immigrants who are integrated in Swedish, partly due to the increase in support, and partly because welcoming a larger group enables better services to be offered. For example, language courses in different languages and of different levels can only be offered if the demand is big enough. The plan is to integrate at least some of the migrants in Swedish (Almark, 2025). The municipalities create their own integration program that they follow in their work. The current program was updated in 2025 in connection with the aforementioned reforms (Ljung-Hägert, 2024).

The principal part of education during the integration period is the integration training which includes both language training and work-life training. The purpose of this education is to achieve a B1 level (lower intermediate) of Finnish, get to practice the language in a real-life setting, and integrate into the labor market. The education is organized by a third party chosen by the units in charge. The current courses are taking place in Karis. The course is currently not offered in Swedish, but if someone requests to take the course in Swedish it needs to be provided (Ljung-Hägert, 2024). For international migrants not entitled to an integration plan, the commonly used educational paths are voluntary studies in Swedish or Finnish at Lärkkulla folkhögskola, LUKI-courses for people who lack the ability to read or write at MBI Raseborg, and primary education for adults at Kanneljärvi institute. In addition to these paths, there are also other language courses available in the region that can aid integration into both the local and national community (Ljung-Hägert, 2024).

4 Previous research

Since research on adult migrant language learning and integration in Swedish in Finland is limited, I present some examples that inspired this project both by its contents and by its limitations. Due to the lack of large-scale projects reporting immigrant experiences, some of these sources are thesis level, starting off with two like-minded thesis projects situated in Helsinki.

Teikari (2015) conducted a survey study in the Helsinki region on immigrants who have chosen to study Swedish rather than Finnish. She wanted to find out if there were any similarities, like linguistic background or motivations, between the people who had made that choice. Teikari also wanted to establish whether the respondents use the language in their day-to-day lives, and if so, in what kind of situations. Teikari created a survey mixing open-ended and closed questions, ultimately inspiring my own survey. The survey received 27 responses, of which the majority stated that they frequently use Swedish in their day-to-day lives in Helsinki. Other than that, there did not seem to be any significant similarities between the respondents, other than the fact that many chose Swedish because of their Indo-European linguistic background. The findings point to there being potential in Swedish-language integration of immigrants in the Helsinki region. Unfortunately, Källberg's research, which was conducted five years later, does not show the same promising results. Perhaps the differences depend on what participants the researcher reaches.

Källberg (2021) conducted five interviews with immigrants of different backgrounds, living and studying Swedish in Helsinki. The focus of her thesis was to give voice to the people who have chosen to learn Swedish, hoping to learn whether Swedish integration is a good option in Helsinki or not. She found that even though the option of choosing Swedish is there in theory, it is rather hard to implement in practice. Not only are migrants barely informed about the Swedish option and even discouraged to choose it, but they struggle to find spaces outside of the classroom where they can practice their language skills.

"What can be concluded from the interviews with the informants is that learning a new language is a gateway to understanding the new country" (Källberg, 2021, p. 52). The interviewees highlight that language learning is an integral part of getting to

know a new country and a key into society, community, education, and the labor market. Without learning a basic level of at least one of the national languages you cannot "fully integrate" since you cannot, for example, enter the education system as a refugee, or the job market on equal grounds as native Finnish speakers. Källberg's findings influenced questions about the importance of knowing a local language in my survey.

Moving on to the area that this thesis tackles - Therese Söderman (1997) published a report on language choices and their consequences amongst 14 Kurdish refugees who had settled in the western part of the Uusimaa region (including the towns that today make up the city of Raseborg). She studied the experience of being an immigrant in a country with two official languages, and the effects of having learned Swedish and/or Finnish as a second language. Söderman's report differs from the previously mentioned sources in this chapter because it includes exclusively quota refugees that have been directed to the area and have taken part in the official integration program. Söderman's main finding is that no matter what language the respondents learned, they were mostly satisfied with their choice but had wished to receive more information about the actual status and use of the two languages before choosing. Seven of the interviewees had learned Swedish and seven Finnish. All participants expressed being able to conduct themselves in the language they have learned and showed a high level of acculturation. Söderman postulates that this could be the result of all participants being relatively well-educated. Whatever the reason may be, the results are certainly promising and support offering Swedish as an option for immigrants in bilingual municipalities.

Söderman's report influenced Kuitunen (2011) to investigate whether any changes had happened in the area since the late nineties. Kuitunen's survey received 10 responses, five written in Swedish and five in Finnish. Due to the nature of the questions, she did not know whether any of the respondents were quota refugees or not, but she speculated that a few of them might be because of their country of origin. Kuitunen states that the information about Finland's languages given to the immigrants at arrival was very limited. Most of the participants who had learned Swedish chose to do so because of family connections or a job requiring it, and because they perceived it as easier to learn. They were happy with their choice, but all

agree that it would be useful to also speak Finnish. The participants who had learned Finnish were also happy with their choice but share some experiences of not getting by in Finnish in their town.

Finally, Linda Bäckman's (2021) article about new speakers of Swedish in Finland, and Saara Haapamäki's (2024) chapter regarding language learning patterns of immigrants living in Swedish-speaking areas of Finland is of significance to this thesis. The municipality of residence is not disclosed in either of the texts, so I cannot be certain in what part of the country the interviewees are living. However, a large part of their work is situated in Ostrobothnia. Bäckman's (2021) results show that not all migrants have made the decision to learn Swedish themselves, but that those who have, show a strong sense of agency in regard to their decision. She also concludes that although the interviewees have taken different paths to the Swedish language, they speak of the language as both a resource and a lack of resources in Finnish society. Bäckman and Haapamäki (2024) analyse interviews with migrants in Finland and find that the choice of language is not equal to all immigrants, that only so called "white collar migrants" are the ones who are able to choose freely. They highlight the complexity of immigrants not being given a choice regarding something that often ends up affecting their lives. Although not explicitly asked, the questions in my questionnaire may elicit responses describing whether the participants made the choice to learn Swedish themselves or not, shedding light on this issue in Raseborg.

In conclusion, the existing research on immigrants learning Swedish in Finland suggests that the immigrants themselves value learning the local language. Most participants are satisfied with their language choice regardless of which one they chose, whilst highlighting that they should have been better informed about them before making the choice. For many, the ideal situation would entail learning both languages. In this thesis I am using the existing literature and research as grounds for creating a survey that investigates whether extralinguistic factors have a bigger effect on language learning and integration than the perceived difficulty or ease of learning the language. I want to know what learning Swedish and living in Raseborg looks like for people with immigrant backgrounds, and whether the language has helped them integrate into the local community.

5 Research design and methodology

To collect data for this thesis I decided to create an online questionnaire. To distribute my questionnaire, I reached out to the migrant services of Raseborg, Raseborgs medborgarinstitut and Lärkkulla-stiftelsen, as they are responsible for organizing language education for immigrants, and others, in Raseborg. The teacher in charge at Lärkkulla confirmed that the questionnaire was sent out to their current Swedish-course participants. Due to course timing, the survey could not be sent out directly to the students at Raseborgs medborgarinstitut. To reach a more diverse group of participants, I also posted the questionnaire in local Facebook groups and made use of personal contacts in the area, hoping to receive between 20-40 answers.

5.1 Survey research

Survey research is a multifaceted method that can be used for different types of research, often used for quantitative studies meant to generalize and make predictions about populations based on the data collected. However, survey research can also include different types of questions, such as open-ended questions, designed to fit the needs of the project. Survey research is typically used to collect people's attitudes, wishes and experiences, and should therefore be designed to ask for relevant background information and approach the subject from various angles (Andres, 2012). The questionnaire is a mode of survey research that is frequently used in projects investigating language attitudes. Two types of questions are used to obtain information about the characteristics and attitudes of the participants. The first type is open-ended questions, which allow the participants to describe their experiences freely without being confined to parameters. Open-ended questions generate qualitative data, while the second type of questions, closed questions, provide quantitative data when the respondents are made to choose their answer from a set of predetermined answers (Kircher, 2002).

Survey research is used to describe, analyze or evaluate data. One advantage of such research is that it can produce data based on real life events and the experiences of real people through their own words in the answers to open questions. Another advantage is the possibility to produce large amounts of data in a short amount of time with limited resources. However, there is no way to make sure that the data has

depth to it, or that it is accurate. Additionally, the quality of the data can be impacted by the choice of questions and the ability to secure a high enough response rate (Kelley et al., 2003). While there are obvious differences between survey research conducted in person and online, most of the fundamental components are the same. The choice between onsite and online research comes down to time, costs, flexibility, accuracy of answers, anonymity, and access to respondents (Hooley et al., 2012, pp. 39-52). Conducting an online survey by using a questionnaire is appropriate for my project since I do not have immediate access to the participants or their contact information, I have limited resources and time, and I want the participants to be able to stay completely anonymous.

I created a questionnaire with 26 questions, including both open-ended and closed questions. The closed questions range from simple yes and no questions to multiple choice check boxes. The questions are sorted into three different categories: 1) language learning, 2) language use, community and integration, and finally, 3) background information. To prevent the respondents from writing short responses due to cognitive fatigue, the simple questions of background information are placed at the end of the survey, while the questions that require reflection are placed at the beginning and middle. The questions are available in both Swedish and English next to each other, enabling learners at different stages to answer the questionnaire.

Before formulating the actual questions, I considered who can be included in the target population of my research. Laaksonen (2018, pp. 6-9) defines five different populations that one should consider defining for themselves when conducting survey research. The first one is the population of interest, synonymous with the population that one wants to reach. In my case the population of interest is immigrants living in Finland who have chosen to learn Swedish, who did not know Swedish before moving to Finland. However, since the initial population is often broad and hard to reach, a second population is defined. The more realistic population determined next is called the target population. This population should be defined within some kind of parameters, for example, a period of time or an area. I have narrowed down my target population to immigrants in Raseborg who have studied or are currently studying the Swedish language. The third and fourth populations are not relevant to this thesis, as there was no frame from which I found

the respondents. The fifth and final population is the population that was in fact used, the survey population. It is highly desirable for the survey population to be comparable to either the target population or the population of interest. In this case the survey population equates to immigrants living in Raseborg who are studying or have studied Swedish and chose to answer the questionnaire. That essentially equates to the target population I have in mind.

An important aspect of an online questionnaire is the introduction to the project. Not only does it introduce the possible respondent to the content of the questionnaire but also explains what kind of respondent is fit to respond to it. Keeping my target population in mind I describe the requirements for respondents as follows: 1) you are 18 years or older, 2) you have immigrated to Finland from another country, 3) you are living in Raseborg, and 4) you are learning/have learned Swedish in Finland. This project targets adult migrants who have moved to Finland and chosen to learn Swedish themselves, and therefore the age limit is set at 18. Since the language choice for immigrant children is made by their parents, they are not relevant for this thesis. The last requirement was added to exclude immigrants from Sweden, or other countries, who already spoke Swedish before arriving in Finland.

The first section of the questionnaire poses questions about the participants' language learning. Key questions include 1) How long have you studied Swedish? 2) Why did you choose Swedish? 3) At what level is your Swedish? and 4) Did you learn Finnish before learning Swedish? All four of these questions are relevant to understand both the motivation behind the language choice, but also the level of knowledge at different stages of learning. At the end of the language learning segment, the participants are asked to choose the answer that best represents their own experience of learning Swedish in Raseborg and Finland. This part of the segment tells me about the participants' attitudes towards the language, both before, during and after having learned the language. In the analysis, I will look at how the length of language studies, choice of language, level of Swedish and opinions on the language and language learning can impact the experience of integration and community. This segment helps me answer the first two research questions.

The second section of the questionnaire deals with language use, community, and integration. First, the participants get to describe when, where and with whom they use Swedish. This is followed by choosing the answer that feels most in line with their own experience regarding language use and community. Finally, two open ended questions about the link between language and integration follow. This section of the survey is created to map in what contexts the respondents use the Swedish they have learned/are learning, in what way they perceive themselves to be treated by locals when they use the language, and if they experience a correlation between language use and integration. This section helps me answer the second and third research questions.

The final part of the questionnaire is designed to gather background information that can be relevant when analyzing and understanding the other answers. Only information that I deemed relevant for this cause is requested. This includes age brackets, nationality, reason for moving to Finland, information about how long they have lived in Finland/Raseborg, as well as which specific city they live in. The background information provides me with insights on whether factors like age, nationality and city of residence can have an impact on immigrant language learning and integration. In the analysis they are used together with the participants' opinions to get an understanding of what factors influence language choice, language learning and eventually finding, or not finding, community withing a language minority in Finland.

5.2 Ethical considerations and positionality

Before creating the questionnaire, I familiarized myself with the University of Helsinki's ethical guidelines for research, as well as other sources specifically discussing survey research and questionnaires. Since questions regarding immigration can be sensitive, I decided that the participants should be able to stay completely anonymous so that they cannot be identified by their answers. Answers to all questions are compulsory, but some include an option of "I prefer not to say". An example of this is the question of what region of Raseborg the respondents live in. In addition, I do not collect any data on the name, sex or gender or occupation of the participants. Ages and time lived in the country are all divided into brackets, which further make it harder to identify any participants. Since Raseborg is a rather small

municipality the possibility of recognizing details in the responses are higher than for other bigger cities, so when reporting the results, I also make sure to exclude any details that could potentially identify the respondent, and do not refer to specific respondents when quoting them.

At the end of the questionnaire, all participants give me permission to use their answers in my research. It is stated in the beginning that the research is completely anonymous and that the full answers will not be read by anyone but me and my supervisor. If at any point the participant no longer wishes to participate, they can simply close the tab before submitting the answers. Lastly, I ask the respondents to include their email address at the end if they wish to read the finished thesis. The email addresses will be used exclusively for that purpose and deleted afterwards. Another aspect that I considered throughout the entire process is language. Because no information about sex or gender was collected, I refer to everyone using they/them pronouns and “respondent” or “participant”.

Since I am a registered speaker of Swedish, and identify as a Swedish-speaking Finn, I find it important to consider my positionality to this research. Although I possess some similarities with the respondents, such as having lived in the same area, having struggled with learning and being comfortable with speaking one of Finland’s national languages and being part of a minority in Finland, my lived experience is very different than that of my respondents. I possess the advantage of having been born a Finnish citizen, living here my entire life and being considered a Finnish person (although a Swedish-speaking Finn) by the state and society. Because of my background I am biased against the Swedish language in Finland, which can potentially affect the reporting of data. Keeping this in mind, I will attempt to report the findings as objectively, and accurately as possible.

5.3 Analysis

When analyzing the data from the survey, I used thematic analysis. As survey research is multifaceted and flexible, it seems only fitting to use a method of analysis with the same characteristics. Thematic analysis is a common tool and method used to analyze quantitative data that goes beyond simple content analysis. Being both structured and flexible at the same time, it offers a unique opportunity to detect

patterns in qualitative data (Ahmed et. al, 2025). Thematic analysis is used to identify, analyze, and report themes within gathered data. Narrative analysis and grounded theory are examples of methods that are inherently thematic. Therefore, although thematic analysis can be defined and presented as the method of analysis, it is often not. What is important is that the tools and methods used to analyze the data are described so that others can evaluate the results (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) argue that even though thematic analysis is used extensively, its meaning and application has been poorly demarcated. Therefore, they set out to define some important questions researchers should consider when opting for the method, as well as a six-step process for researchers to use when conducting analysis of qualitative research. First off, the researcher should consider what counts as a theme. A theme can be some type of patterned response within the data, that is determined by the character and size of the project. A theme does not have to be mentioned a specific number of times but rather needs to be relevant to the research questions. Another important question to consider is whether the result is going to be an in-depth description of one aspect of the data or an overview of relevant themes for the entire dataset. The former is relevant when researching one specific question, whilst the latter lends itself better to under-researched areas and unknown opinions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 81-85).

My sample consists of 29 questionnaire responses. I look for themes that are explicitly present in the participants' answers, and relevant to my research questions. For example, experiences of language learning and local integration. Since the data set is rather small, I am going to present an overview of relevant themes for the entire dataset, using chosen individuals' quotes to represent the data. When analyzing the data, I follow the six steps of Clarke and Braun (2006, pp. 81-85), 1) familiarizing yourself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. The qualitative data generated by the closed questions supports the participants' own words by providing visualization and numbers for interpretation.

6 Results

29 people responded to my questionnaire during the spring and summer of 2025. After careful consideration, 28 out of 29 respondents met the requirements. I have decided to remove one of the respondents since they do not represent the target population. The respondent in question had only visited Raseborg for a few weeks at a time and attended parts of a Swedish language course while visiting a friend. The respondent lived in another area of Finland only for a limited amount of time and was never planning to stay in Finland. Therefore, the respondent does not meet the criteria for this project. 22 out of 28 participants responded in Swedish, and the remaining in English and Finnish. Therefore, some quotes are translated by me.

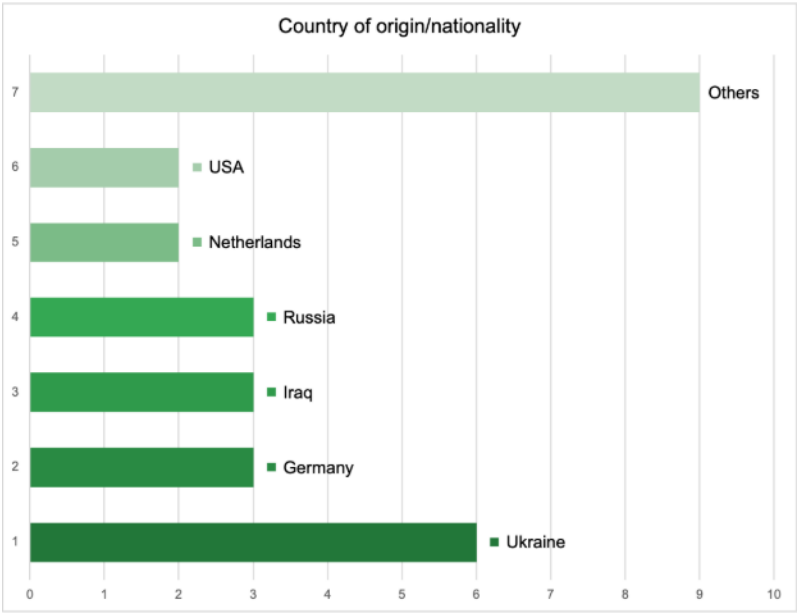


Figure 1: Country of origin/nationality

The nationalities of the respondents are diverse, as 15 countries are represented in the data (see Figure 1). Since nationality and country of emigration do not always coincide, it is possible that some respondents have a different nationality or have immigrated from another country than stated. However, for the purpose of this thesis I am assuming that they have stated their nationality or the country they have resided in for the longest before moving to Finland. As seen in the graph above, the six respondents from Ukraine make up the largest quota with six people accounting for roughly 20% of the respondents, whilst three respondents come from Germany, Iraq, and Russia and two each from the United States of America and the Netherlands. The

rest of the respondents make up a third of the group, with one respondent respectively originating from Australia, Belgium, Brazil, the Philippines, Great Britain, Iran, Kurdistan, Panama and Spain. Most of the respondents are between 25-54 years old, with only two being younger than 25 and three older than 55. This means that everyone in the group is of working age, except for one respondent who states having retired before moving to Finland. The reason for moving to Finland varies a lot, from studies to work and asylum, with the most common reason being immigrating for family or a partner (nine respondents).

The participants were able to choose multiple answers for where they have studied/are studying Swedish. 26 out of 28 have studied at Lärkkulla at some point, three at MBI and six mention other schools or ways of learning. Other schools mentioned are Helsinki and Espoo Arbis, Axxell, online courses and various forms of self-study. I asked the participants to evaluate their own language proficiency on the CEFR levels used in European contexts. The CEFR levels start from A1 and end with C2 being the highest level of proficiency. A1 and A2 represent a beginner; B1 and B2 represent intermediate language skills, and C1 and C2 represent advanced languages skills (Council of Europe, n.d.). Eight of the participants were not able to evaluate their own knowledge, and no one opted for the most advanced (C2). Two participants each chose C1 and A2, and one person A1. Finally, most participants evaluated their knowledge to be intermediate, with eight selecting B1 and seven B2.

In short, the 28 respondents simultaneously represent both a diverse and uniform grouping of immigrants living in Raseborg and learning and/or speaking Swedish. The participants come from many different countries and backgrounds and have immigrated to Finland for various reasons. The time they have lived in Finland and studied Swedish also varies largely, giving me many different perspectives to consider. The next three sections are dedicated to results that are used to answer the research questions.

6.1 Immigrants learning Swedish in Raseborg

This section is dedicated to a more comprehensive presentation of characteristics of the participants. Only three of the respondents have lived in Finland for less than two years, while the rest have lived there from two years up to over 10 years. Roughly the

same numbers are true of how long they have lived in Raseborg (pictured in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below) as most respondents seem to have moved directly there. 16 respondents (57%) live in Ekenäs, eight (29%) in Karis and three (11%) in Pohja. Additionally, one person has chosen not to disclose which part of Raseborg they live in. Over half of the participants express that they knew that Swedish is spoken in Finland before moving here. This number corresponds to Teikari's (2015, 33). She acknowledged that many of the respondents who knew of the language had moved to the country for a partner or family member.



Figure 2: When did you move to Finland?

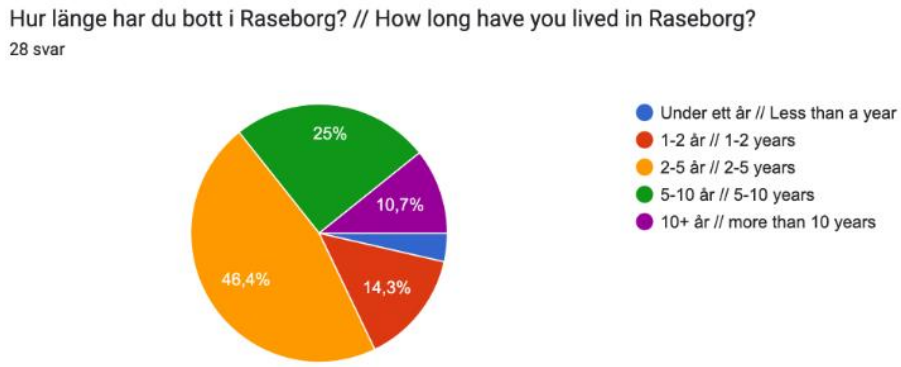


Figure 3: How long have you lived in Raseborg?

Shown in Figure 4 are reasons for moving to Finland. The most common reason within the group of respondents is because of family or a partner, which roughly a third of the respondents stated (10). Eight respondents mention having moved to Finland for work or studies, and seven having applied for asylum, being a refugee or arriving in Finland due to war in their country. The remaining three mention wanting

a better life, wanting to live in northern Europe and moving for friends. These numbers correspond with the most common reasons for immigrating to Finland reported above, for family, studies and work, and in some years asylum and war (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2025).



Figure 4: Why did you move to Finland?

Multilingualism is also apparent in the results. On an average the participants list speaking almost 2.5 languages (not including Swedish or Finnish), many of them speaking three to four on top of Swedish. This is not necessarily a characteristic of exclusively immigrants who choose to learn Swedish, however, both Teikari (2015) and Källberg (2021) acknowledged the same phenomenon in their theses. English, German, Ukrainian and Russian are mentioned most frequently, and some have included descriptive words for their knowledge, especially in Swedish and Finnish, such as “little” or “intermediate”. Half of the respondents have not considered learning any Finnish before choosing to learn Swedish, while the other half recounts having learned a little either after learning Swedish or quickly switching to Swedish after experiencing difficulties learning Finnish.

There are two exceptions, one participant who first lived elsewhere in Finland, where they learned excellent Finnish and took up Swedish later to apply for jobs requiring Swedish skills, and another who did not enjoy the teaching methods in the Swedish course they partook in and therefore holds that they learned better Finnish.

“Jag studerade finska eftersom jag planerade att studera vidare på universitetet. Och det är en stor fördel att tala två officiella språk. Finska är ett svårt språk, men precis som alla språk kräver det logik och tålamod i inlärningen.” (*Quote 1*)

[I studied Finnish because I wanted to continue studying at the university. And it is a huge advantage to speak two official languages. Finnish is a difficult language, but like any language it requires logic and patience when learning.] (*Quote 1*)

In Quote 1, above, the respondent reflects on the advantage that comes with having learned both languages. Some respondents who elaborate have similar ideas. The Swedish language has aided them in their local integration, by expanding their social circles and employment opportunities, and given them a better understanding of their environment. After finding that initial security and success, some choose to learn Finnish as well, to further aid their integration and multiply their opportunities.

6.2 Learning and using Swedish as an immigrant in Raseborg

The point of my first research question is to understand why immigrants living in Raseborg decided to learn Swedish, and the second research question is aimed at the experience of learning the language. The questionnaire makes it possible for respondents to choose multiple options and explain further. Most of the respondents have chosen at least two options for why they decided to learn Swedish. The responses are shown in Figure 5. (The full English translations are not visible in Figure 5, but can be found in Appendix 1). Only one respondent has ticked the box for knowledge of another Scandinavian language influencing their decision. However, several participants later mention the benefit of Swedish resembling other Scandinavian languages.



Figure 5: Why did you choose to learn Swedish?

Three of the options have received quite a lot of attention with over 40% of all respondents choosing each. They are 1) because my family, partner or friend speaks Swedish, 2) because I thought it would be easier to learn than Finnish, and 3) because I use the language at work or school. The most popular reason for choosing to learn Swedish is because the majority in Raseborg speaks it. When asked to elaborate, the participants mention both other reasons for choosing the language but also provide in-depth explanations for their previous choice. A few participants mention wanting to learn the language of the kindergarten or school that their child is enrolled in. Another few simply state that learning the language has helped them to get a job, a passport and eventually citizenship, and that it was recommended to them by a random stranger on the street, a friend or family member, or the TE-office. Many answers include a mention of the region. Respondents mention wanting to learn Swedish for an easier integration into Raseborg and the Swedish speaking community in Finland. Quote 2 and Quote 3 are examples of this:

"Mina barn går i en svensk skola och utövar sina hobbyer på svenska, mina vänner pratar svenska, och när man söker jobb i ***Raseborg*** *är svenska en stor fördel."* (*Quote 2*)

[*My children go to a school for Swedish speakers and take part in hobbies using Swedish, my friends speak Swedish and when applying for jobs in Raseborg Swedish is a big advantage.*] (*Quote 2*)

"*De flesta av mina vänner kommer från* ***Raseborg*** *och hjälpte mig att immigrera till Finland för några år sedan. Eftersom de alla prata mestadels svenska tänkte jag att det vore bäst att börja där.*" (*Quote 3*)

[*Most of my friends come from Raseborg and they helped me immigrate to Finland a few years ago. Because they all speak mostly Swedish, I thought it would be best to start there.*] (*Quote 3*)

When it comes to learning the language, the responses vary a lot. 21 respondents fully or partly agree that they thought it would be easy to learn Swedish, and 18 that it has been easy, while the rest find it hard to say and one participant disagrees with both. 20 participants fully agree that they like the language and 22 that they think it is good to know Swedish when living in Raseborg. The most divisive question regarding language learning and use is whether Swedish is good to know in the country as a

whole. Eight respondents have chosen “fully agree”, ten “partly agree”, nine “hard to say” and one “partly disagree”. Although the question divides the respondents, no one fully disagrees. Figure 6 shows where and in what kind of situations the respondents use Swedish in their everyday lives. At work, in stores, with neighbors and strangers, and with the authorities are chosen most often. Respondents also mention reading Swedish books, using the language when receiving healthcare, and when traveling to Sweden and other cities where Swedish is spoken.

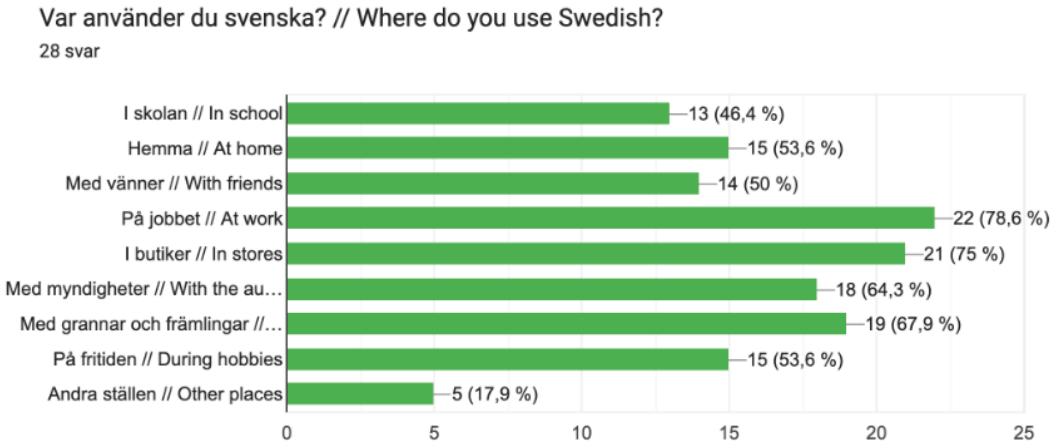


Figure 6: Where do you use Swedish?

The participants who have found it easy to learn Swedish do not elaborate a lot about the language learning itself, other than commenting on enjoying the studies or wanting to study for a longer period. The participants who find the language learning hard provide tangible reasons for their dissatisfaction, such as it being difficult to find the time to study while working a full-time job, the course being too short and difficulty finding the courage or place to speak. One participant recounts struggling immensely in the beginning, but after a breakthrough they started grasping the language and have now mastered it, as seen in Quote 4:

“De första tre månaderna av att lära mig svenska var hemska och jag förstod ingenting. Jag kom hem från lektionerna i tårar - inte på grund av lärarna, utan för att jag kände mig dum. Men efter tre månader började jag förstå och prata och situationen blev bättre. Nu uttrycker jag mig utan problem och har fått finskt medborgarskap baserat på mitt YKI-resultat i svenska.” (Quote 4)

[The first three months of learning Swedish were horrible and I understood nothing. I came home from the lessons in tears - not because of the teachers, but because I felt stupid. But after three months I started understanding and speaking and that helped the situation. Now I can express myself without any issues and have received Finnish citizenship based on my YKI-results in Swedish.] (*Quote 4*)

The course at Lärkkulla is described as a 9-month long course that takes place five days a week and includes outings to different locations where the participants get to practice both their listening comprehension and speaking skills. The time a person spends at the course depends on their own availability and the level they want to achieve, but generally the Swedish language course is 9 months long. The immersive format seems to be both well-liked and successful, but at the same time difficult to access for working individuals.

6.3 Integration, language and community

In the third section of the questionnaire, the respondents are asked whether they felt the need to learn Swedish to integrate into the local community in their town, and if they believe that learning the language has helped them integrate. The response on both questions is affirmative except for three respondents who vouch for the English language. One participant who is retired recognizes that if they were working the situation would be completely different. However, as a retired migrant living in Raseborg they can manage well using their mother-tongue, English. If their mother tongue was another language, the situation might be very different. The two other participants in question mainly use Finnish and English at their workplace and therefore find Swedish excessive in their own daily lives. Another participant states that even though you can use English, as Finnish people are very skilled in English, learning Swedish or Finnish for integration purposes still pays off. One respondent highlights the local differences even inside Raseborg:

"Absolutely. You must know 1 native language in order to belong, participate & know what's going on around you. In Ekenäs, where I used to live, Swedish was more useful. Here in Karis, where we moved, Finnish (which I don't have) is needed half the time..." (*Quote 5*)

Even after stating that Finnish is needed half of the time, the respondent recounts feeling less isolated after learning Swedish. Words like communication, comfort, respect, inclusion and belonging, all highly connected to integration and community are used in connection with learning and using Swedish.

"De flesta här talar svenska, och även om de också talar finska, använder samhället mestadels svenska. Genom att tala svenska här gör du det lättare för dig själv att passa in och få vänner." (*Quote 6*)

[Most people speak Swedish here, and even if they do speak Finnish, Swedish is used the most in society. By speaking Swedish here, you make it easier for yourself to fit in and make friends.] (*Quote 6*)

Quote 6, above, is from a participant who already had Swedish-speaking friends in Raseborg before moving there, and has made many new friends after learning to speak the local language. They bring up something that can be discerned in other answers as well, that is the language of society. Several respondents describe taking part in hobbies, courses and language cafes now that they comprehend the language in which the courses are taught, as well as being able to read signs and posters around the city. I also posed questions about integrating into the Swedish-speaking community in Raseborg, and the results can be seen in the pie charts below. 22 respondents agree either fully or partly that the Swedish language has helped their integration in Raseborg, with just two disagreeing and four struggling to decide (pictured in Figure 7). To the statement "I want to be part of the Swedish-speaking community in Raseborg" 19 participants responded with "fully agree", two with "partly agree" and seven with "hard to say" (pictured in Figure 8). On top of that, 18 participants agreed that they already feel like they are part of the Swedish-speaking community, with only four disagreeing and six answering "hard to say" (pictured in Figure 9).

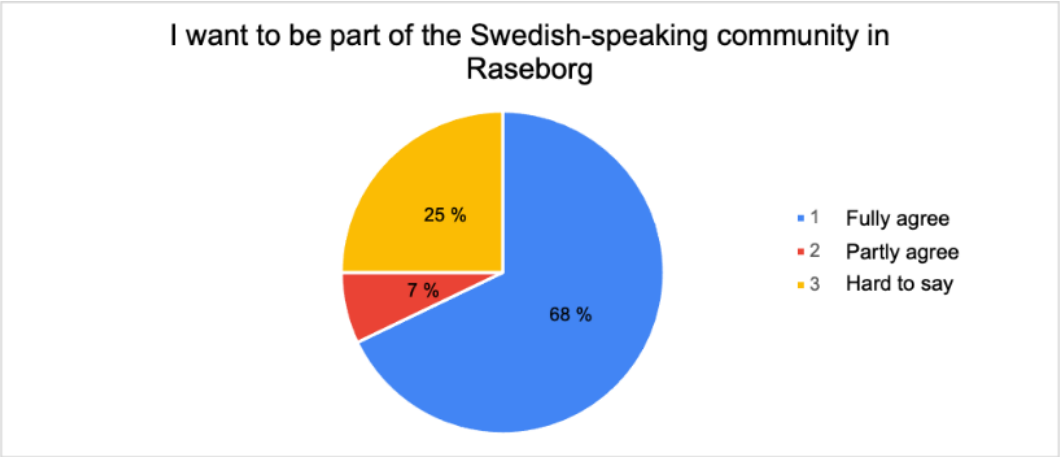


Figure 7: I want to be part of the Swedish-speaking community in Raseborg

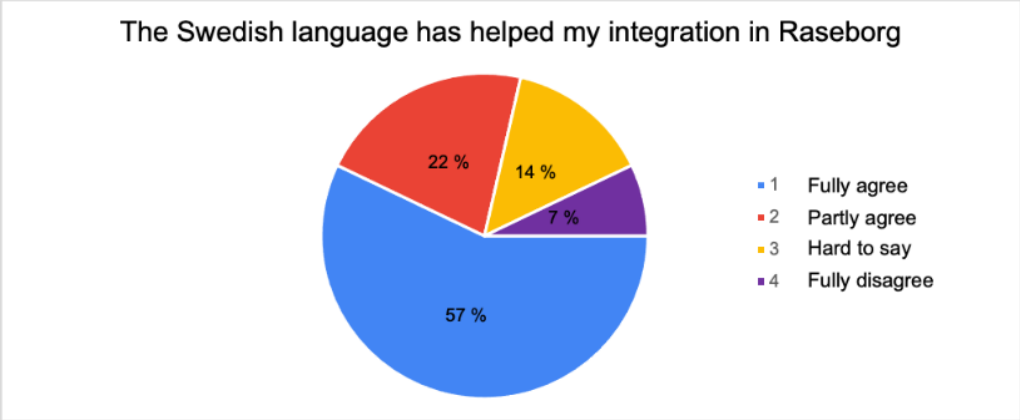


Figure 8: The Swedish language has helped my integration in Raseborg

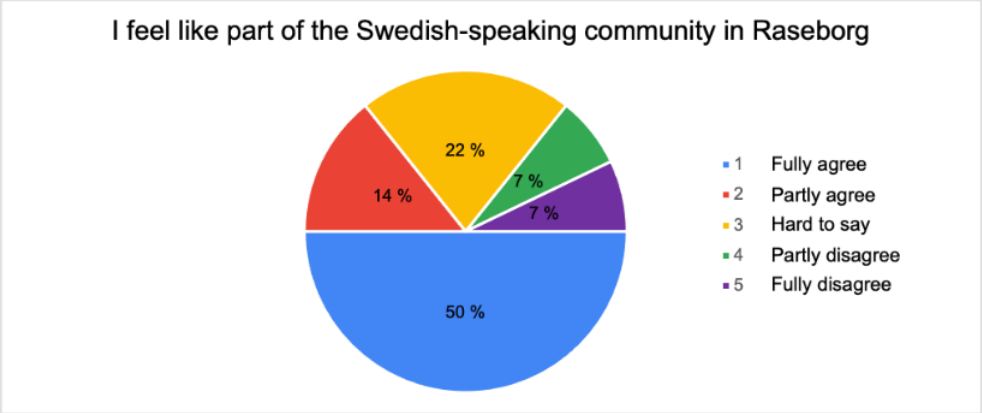


Figure 9: I feel like part of the Swedish-speaking community in Raseborg

While the results are positive on a local level, many of the participants seem doubtful about the use of Swedish on a national level. 25 out of 28 believe that Swedish is

useful in Raseborg, but the opinions are varied on its usefulness in general Finland. One example can be read in Quote 7 below:

> *Certainly. It's an ongoing process, though (I'm about to graduate from Lärkkulla). It's given me confidence & enabled me to be more independent. It's removed some of the stress of not knowing what's going on around you. It's opening up more job opportunities & networks. But, it's only relevant/useful for this small Finn-Sve bubble, unfortunately…* (*Quote 7*)

Some participants also dwell on the language conflict between Swedish and Finnish in Finland and how it affects the accessibility of services in Swedish in other areas of the country. One participant reflects on he similarities between the "language war" of Ukrainian and Russian in Ukraine. They conclude that they feel discouraged to learn Finnish, because of the bad experiences they have had with people who identify as Finnish speakers, when attempting to speak Swedish to them. Another describes being annoyed when the documentation of the health care they have received in Swedish arrives only in Finnish. Finally, a couple respondents express their concern and support for the status of the Swedish language and integration in Swedish in Finland. At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents are asked if they are planning to stay where they are currently living, or not. Figure 10, below, shows that 20 respondents are planning to stay in Raseborg and 21 in Finland, making up 75% of the participants in this questionnaire. Five respondents have not made up their mind yet, and two are not planning to stay.

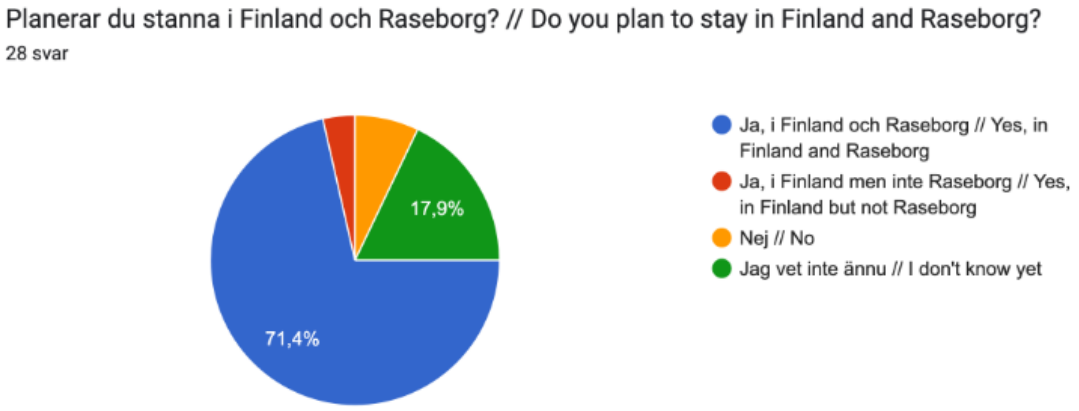


Figure 10: Do you plan to stay in Finland and Raseborg?

7 Analysis and discussion

The results of this study are striking as they portray a positive view of integration in Swedish in Raseborg. The stories of learning Swedish in Raseborg have many commonalities. In general, negative attitudes towards the language or region are explained by factors unrelated to the language or region itself, such as the lack of personal motivation, teaching methods that do not align and dissatisfaction with the status of the Swedish language in the rest of the country. Unfortunately, when dealing with a minority language, politics and the lack of resources will always play a role. Although some participants mention these disparities, they simultaneously recognize the potential of the Swedish language, especially in Raseborg.

The two main themes that I discovered in my data are a positive attitude to the Swedish language and a focus on local integration. The themes can be observed in the results and quotes above and are further exemplified and established in this chapter. First, however, a short reflection on the participation and limitations is needed. As mentioned in the method chapter, I was hoping to receive 20-40 responses from people of different national- and migrant backgrounds. The number 29 (28 fulfilling the criteria for the survey) both fits within that range and gives me enough material to work with to make some curious observations and meaningful statements. Although the sample is meagre, the heterogenous nationalities, age, reasons for moving to Finland and levels of Swedish make it possible to visualize what it is like for migrants living in Raseborg to learn and use Swedish. The conclusions are made to amplify the voices of the respondents.

7.1 Choosing and learning the Swedish language

One thing that motivated this study was the lack of public knowledge on people who have immigrated to Finland and settled in Raseborg. While working at the integration services in Raseborg, I mainly interacted with those partaking in the integration program, quota refugees and Ukrainians fleeing the war. I wondered if migrants who have come to the country under other circumstances might have different experiences of choosing what language to learn.

As the last time a large group of quota refugees were taught Swedish as part of their integration plan was in the 1990s (Söderman, 1997), I expected that most of my

respondents would have moved to Finland for other reasons than being granted asylum there. As seen in Figure 4, that assumption was mostly correct. 18 out of 28 participants moved to Finland for family, friends, school or work, which are also the most common reasons for immigration in Källberg (2021) and Teikari (2015). Unlike in the studies by Källberg and Teikari, a fourth of my respondents came to Finland as refugees or fleeing war, indicating that refugees learning Swedish is more common in Raseborg than Helsinki, although it is uncommon even there. It is likely only this group of migrants who have received language training as part of their integration plan. The rest are not eligible for an integration plan and therefore need to obtain their language training themselves. However, those not eligible for the integration plan do not have an obligation to learn either of the national languages. This means that all participants have intentionally chosen to learn Swedish, although due to different circumstances.

As expected, the reasons for moving to Finland influence the decision of what language to learn, with over 40% of participants choosing to learn Swedish because of a partner, family member or friend, or because of work and studies. The other two popular options are because they thought it would be easier, and because the majority in Raseborg speaks Swedish. These results are interesting as neither Källberg's (2021) nor Teikari's (2015) questions included the option of language majority, as the language dynamics in Helsinki are different. Kuitunen (2011) focused more on the opinions on the language choice rather than the reasoning for the choice, making this novel information. That 20 out of 28 chose to learn Swedish because the majority speaks it, contributes to Saukkonen's (2020) claims that integration happens locally. The participants value the knowledge of the local language and take it into consideration when making their choice. If immigrants place this much importance on the local majority language when choosing what language to learn, should the city not follow suit? As Mattila and Björklund (2013) discovered, those who learn Swedish in a city where Swedish is the majority language tend to stay in the area. In conclusion, immigrants living in Raseborg have different reasons for choosing to learn Swedish rather than Finnish. The reasons are similar to those reported in previous studies, except for the addition of Swedish being the language majority in Raseborg. This option being the most significant, proves both the connection between language and integration, as well as that integration happens locally.

Moving on to the experience of learning Swedish. As mentioned in the chapter above, the participants are mostly satisfied with the language courses, even though some have struggled more than others, learning a new language in a limited amount of time. The downsides of the immersive courses are that they are hard to combine with a full-time job, and that it can be difficult to advance beyond the basics. For the purpose of learning to speak fluently, it is vital that the participants find places where they can and feel safe to practice the language. Unfortunately, those places can be hard to access (Creutz & Helander, 2012; Källberg, 2021).

"Utbildning var mycket intressant och inte helt lätt att uttala. Men nu jag besöker ofta språkcafeér och studerar som programutvecklare på svenska. Jag tycker att svenska är en viktig del av Finland." (Quote 8)

[The course was very interesting and not so easy to pronounce. But now I often visit language cafés, and study to become a programmer in Swedish. I think Swedish is an important part of Finland.] (Quote 8)

Quote 8 shows how a participant first had a hard time grasping the Swedish language but then found places to practice and now even studies in the language. They started learning the language 2-5 years ago as they moved to Finland for their partner, friend or family member, and have found it instrumental to their own integration. They use Swedish frequently in their day-to-day life, ticking five out of nine options.

Another interesting and positive result is the use of Swedish among the participants. Figure 6 shows that more than 50% of the participants indicate using Swedish in all other places than "at school". The "at school" number is likely the lowest because most participants are not currently attending a school. 22 participants using the language at work is a significant number, especially considering that most participants have only taken part in or are currently taking part in a language course that lasts 5-9 months and then keep learning and practicing by themselves. Not only is the number high, but it is the highest of them all, indicating that Swedish is highly useful for employability in Raseborg. One participant's story underpins this argument as they recount the TE-office recommending them to learn Swedish. Since one of the dimensions of citizenship and integration is socio-economic (Penninx, 2005), these results point to successful socio-economic integration using language as a tool.

The participants' opinions on the Swedish language are largely positive. Most participants state that they thought the language would be easy to learn, and that it also has been so. Surprisingly, the one person who opted for the "fully disagree" option on both, states that they like the language. They also mention having enjoyed their studies and wish to study more. Although they are not happy with their own knowledge of the language yet, they are eager to learn more, in order to apply to a university where Swedish is used. Most other participants also state that they like the language and that it is useful when living in Raseborg, further strengthening the positive relationship between the language and integration in Raseborg.

The results indicate that many are sceptical to the usefulness of Swedish on a national level, as the responses are almost equally divided into "fully agree", "partly agree" and "partly disagree", although not a single respondent completely disagrees with the statement. The divisiveness can be seen in the open questions as well, with some detailing their frustrations about the status of the Swedish language in other parts of the country and some pointing out that English can be used pretty much all over the country. The participants seem to agree with the authorities, KEHA-keskus (n.d.), that choosing which language to learn is an important choice where both the local and national perspective should be considered. With that said, the consensus is that learning Swedish opens up many opportunities in Raseborg.

7.2 Integration in Swedish in Raseborg

The respondents make the connection between language and integration themselves, whether that is a result of the Finnish government and authorities perpetuating the importance of language in order to gain citizenship, or their own perception of the language opening doors to new opportunities and connections. Either way, the importance of knowing one or both national languages is evident in almost all the data. Additionally, most participants in this study believe Swedish to be the language that can help their integration the most. The following quote stands out to me:

"Ja. Jag upplever periodvis stress när jag kommunicerar med människor som inte kan svenska. Vi börjar sedan kommunicera på engelska, vilket är väldigt konstigt för ett land där det andra officiella språket är svenska och inte engelska." (Quote 9)

[Yes. I experience stress periodically when communicating with people who can't speak Swedish. Then we start communicating in English, which is very strange in a country where the other official language is Swedish and not English.] (Quote 9)

It is fascinating to see several respondents reflect on the relationship between Swedish and Finnish in Finland, and even show concern for the Swedish language. I argue that this concern shows a clear identification with the language community. Perhaps the multilingualism and minority status make them more prone to relating to the Swedish-speaking Finns. Either way, the respondents are very aware of the language dynamics in the country and over half knew about them before moving there.

As mentioned in the results, most participants responded that they felt the need to learn Swedish to integrate into the local community and that the language has helped their integration. Many mention that learning the local language(s) is essential for getting a job, getting into school, speaking to locals and to be comfortable in and taking part in activities in the area. These descriptions of what integration means aligns in many ways with both the new Act on the Promotion of Integration (681/2023) and the current government's program for promoting integration of immigrants (Bruun, 2025) that highlight employment, responsibility and taking part in civic society. The latter is mentioned by many as an important aspect of integration that only happens when you understand the language of society, of your local community. Understanding a language means more than just being able to communicate with people, it also includes understanding the surroundings, culture and taking part in activities. Language acts as a tool that is used to get into the right spaces and groups. One of the respondents shares how when they were learning Finnish, they couldn't find a space to practice the language, so with the help of other locals they opened up a language café. Since then, a Swedish language café has also opened with the initiative of immigrants. These initiatives show both willingness of migrants to create places where they can meet locals and create community, as well as willingness from locals to do the same. I argue that these initiatives are examples of successful integration, and integration being a two-way process. Hur (2023) underlines that successful integration requires responsibility from both the migrant and the host society, a sense of belonging and personal opinions. Coming together to create a space to meet and educate each other is a prime example of this.

Speaking of taking part in activities and coming together, the questionnaire also enquires about the local, Swedish-speaking, community. As seen in Figure 7, 75% of the participants want to be part of the Swedish-speaking community in Raseborg, and 64% feel that they already are (Figure 9). The figures also show that no one disagrees with the first statement and only four with the second. These results are remarkable, considering that the group consists of different immigrant backgrounds, nationalities and levels of language skills. Because of the strikingly positive results I was curious to see if there are any similarities between the respondents who consider themselves part of the Swedish-speaking community. Perhaps that would show that only participants who moved here for a partner or family member are likely to become part of the local community. I found that the reason for moving to Finland doesn't necessarily make anyone more prone to consider themselves part of the local community, but rather the time they have lived in the area. Respondents who have lived in the area for 2-10+ years are more likely to state feeling like a part of the local community than those who have lived there for a shorter amount of time. Amongst the respondents are both people who have been granted asylum, people who moved here for a partner or family member, people who moved for work or school, as well as other reasons. Although many of the respondents who agreed live in Ekenäs, because most of the general respondents do, I was pleased to notice that not everyone does. I also looked at the reported skill level and did not find any correlation between a higher skill level and a higher chance to feel like part of the community. These results show that successful integration into the local community is not necessarily dependent on already existing connections in the area, or on the language skills one possesses.

One final number that requires analysis is the percentage of respondents that disclosed their wish to stay in Raseborg. Figure 10 shows that 21 respondents wish to stay in Finland and 20 of them are planning to stay in Raseborg. Five respondents have not made up their mind yet and only two have made the decision not to stay. These numbers are just as striking as the ones concerning local integration, which prompts another look at the individual responses. I presumed that the respondents who are not planning to stay, or haven't made their mind up, might have moved there only for work or school and might be planning to move on to a bigger city, but it turns out most have moved there for their partner or family member. Since the city of

Raseborg has not taught Swedish as part of the official integration program since the 1990s,I was also pleasantly surprised to see that six out of seven refugees (or people with similar background) are part of the people planning to stay. This supports the plans that the city has to promote integration in Swedish more to coming quota refugees.

7.3 Discussion and further research

Since the results of this thesis are strikingly positive towards both the Swedish language and integration in Swedish in Raseborg, I argue that bilingual cities, like Raseborg, could benefit from offering Swedish language course to immigrants. As the understanding of immigrant integration has moved towards a local approach (Saukkonen, 2020), cities have everything to gain from considering the wishes of those residing in the area. Since the municipalities in Finland are responsible for providing integration services, the Finnish system is set up to promote local integration. Bäckman (2021) reveals how the choice of what language to learn, that is supposed to be individual in Finland, is seldom made by personal wishes but more often by authorities, social pressure, ignorance, or other outside factors. However, both her and my research show that whether the choice to learn Swedish was intentional or not, it can lead to successful local integration, and even identification with the local language minority. Studying these migrants as new speakers of Swedish gives us a better understanding of both how they position themselves within Finnish society, communities and languages, as well as how Finnish society accepts, or doesn't accept new speakers into its midst.

The concept of new speakers has been examined in the context of revitalization of regional minority languages in other European countries (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2015). As more people register their children as speakers of other languages simultaneously as the number of people identifying as Swedish-speaking Finns slowly decreases, promoting integration in Swedish may be integral to the future of the Swedish language in Finland (Saarela, 2021). When doing so it is of utmost importance to consider that not every new speaker of Swedish identifies as a Swedish-speaking Finn, and everyone who identifies with that identity is not accepted as such. Therefore, the concept of the new speaker has potential to be applied more to research on immigrant learners and speakers in Finland (Bäckman, 2021; Bäckman &

Haapamäki, 2024). Since Bäckman and Haapamäki (2024) concluded that many migrants expressed doubt about ever being accepted into either the Swedish-speaking community or the larger Finnish society, the results of this thesis are positive.

In the context of Rasborg, the participants of this study show significant interest in being part of the local Swedish-speaking community, and many of them consider themselves to be included already. In order to further this development, more resources should be allocated towards migrant language education, and the wishes of immigrants need to be taken into consideration when creating the courses. Although the respondents in this study are generally happy with the education they received, very few of them have studied longer than a year and many stated wanting to study longer. Some struggled to advance after the course ended, and others struggled to take part in the intensive study course because of work. Most respondents in this study are not eligible for the integration plan, and therefore not participants of the Swedish language courses included in the program. These respondents finance their own language courses. In many municipalities in Finland, Swedish education is offered only as a paid service whereas Finnish is free of charge, creating unequal opportunity to choose (Sundbäck, 2017, 12-16). More accessible services would likely support integration in Swedish even more by making it a viable choice for everyone. Research should focus on how to make that possible within the means available.

Considering that the new integration act and welfare services bestow even more responsibility than before onto the municipalities, simultaneously as the government has declared a quota for refugees integrated in Swedish, it seems to be the ideal time for research to focus on how to improve local integration procedure. The process has been streamlined from the state's perspective, so how can it now be optimized from the perspective of the immigrants? How do we ensure that the two-way process of integration works in both parties' favour? Like Sundbäck (2017), I call for large-scale research on language choice and competency in bilingual municipalities.

Research has yet to focus on adult immigrants' linguistic and overall integration in Finland. The field is saturated with projects focusing on specific groups of immigrants that fail to include diverse migrant perspectives. Many of them focusing on migrants working in international arenas in the capitol area, where they might not

feel the need to learn either language. Since the scope of this study is limited, it would be compelling to see a similar study done on a much larger scale, and perhaps one including and comparing with the Finnish language. This way we could learn how to improve immigrant integration according to the people taking part in it.

8 Conclusion

The relevance of researching immigrant integration continues as the phenomenon has been politicized and scrutinized in public discourse. Although humans have always migrated, the change of the direction and destination of migrants in the 20th century has prompted a surge in policies regarding migration (de Haas, Castles & Miller, 2014). Immigrant integration has received attention in Finnish academia; however, few scholars focus on the experience of adult migrant learners of the Swedish language. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration was recently updated to underline the responsibilities of the migrants, together with a reform of welfare and employment services, transferring the responsibility for immigrant services in its entirety to the municipalities (Kuntaliitto, 2025).

The case of Swedish in Finland is unique in many ways as no other territorial linguistic minorities in Europe have the same status as a national language. Because of its status, all immigrants, or those entitled to an integration plan or wishing to become a citizen, must choose to learn either Finnish or Swedish. Though the right to choose is there in practice, the reality often looks quite different. The city of Raseborg is an interesting case too, as they have not taught Swedish to quota refugees for over thirty years, although most locals speak Swedish. Urged by the government's goal to integrate more immigrants in Swedish, the city plans to welcome double the number of quota refugees in 2026 and hopefully integrate some of them in Swedish.

The aim of this thesis was to find out why immigrants have moved to and stayed in Raseborg, why they have chosen to learn Swedish, what their experience of learning Swedish and living in Raseborg has been like, and ultimately, if the language has affected their integration into the local community or not. By using a questionnaire that combines questions on characteristics with statements and open questions about thoughts on the Swedish language and the area, I collected data that supports both the importance of knowing a local language and the premise that integration happens locally. This study shows that Raseborg is home to migrants with diverse backgrounds and lives. Some have moved there for family members or work opportunities, while others have arrived seeking asylum. Some have lived there for over ten years while others only just arrived a couple years ago. Multiple nationalities

are represented with many being multilingual. Other than multilingualism and being of working age, the respondents don't have much in common. Although the respondents have different backgrounds and lead different lives, their thoughts on the Swedish language and integration in Raseborg are relatively homogenous. The respondents paint a largely positive picture of the language learning process no matter how long they have lived in the area. When it comes to integration almost all respondents agree that the Swedish language has helped their integration in Raseborg, and the most popular reason for choosing to learn the language is the fact that the majority speak it. Additionally, the respondents show a high regard for the Swedish language and Swedish-speaking community in Raseborg. The longer they have lived in the area, the more likely they are to already consider themselves part of the local Swedish-speaking community, and not a single person states not wishing to become part of it.

Overall, the results of this thesis are striking and indicate that immigrants living in Raseborg place value on learning the local language. They find Swedish easier to learn than Finnish and therefore use it as a tool to find work, get into schools, make friends and even become a citizen down the line. However, some do point out that the language is mostly useful in the right cities and circles, and knowing Finnish would be useful as well. I argue that many migrants would choose to learn both languages if they were given the option and had the time and patience for it. The results of this questionnaire and previous studies support immigrants feeling the need to and wanting to learn both languages. For many respondents the Swedish language has been easier, and therefore faster, to learn and has helped them initiate the process of integration in their city. In an ideal situation they could find a place of comfort in their local community after having learned Swedish and later learn Finnish in order for more opportunities to present themselves. However, this requires plenty of effort from both the individual and the state. After all, integration is a two-way process where both parties bear responsibility, and the aspirations of both parties should be taken into consideration and ideally be met.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 The questionnaire

Section 1: Frågeformulär om det svenska språket och integration i Raseborg // Questionnaire about the Swedish language and integration in Raseborg

Mitt namn är Sofia Lindholm och jag studerar intercultural encounters med fokus på migration och integration på Helsingfors universitet. Jag har vuxit upp i Ekenäs, Raseborg och är därför intresserad av att forska i området. Min magisteravhandling kommer basera sig på detta frågeformulär som utforskar språkval och integration i Raseborg. Jag vill lyfta fram erfarenheter av invandrare som bor i Raseborg och har valt att lära sig svenska.

Om du uppfyller följande kriterier, svara gärna på detta formulär:

- Du är 18 år eller äldre

- Du har invandrat till Finland från ett annat land

- Du bor i Raseborg

- Du lär dig/har lärt dig svenska i Finland

Studien är fullständigt anonym och svaren kommer endast läsas av mig och min handledare. Fyll i formuläret genom att svara på alla frågor och skicka in svaren. Om du i något skede väljer att inte fortsätta är det bara att stänga fliken. Då sparas inga av dina svar. Dina svar kommer inte användas för att utvärdera dina kunskaper i svenska eller din skolas utlärning, utan för att lyfta fram din erfarenhet, så svara gärna så ärligt som möjligt även om du haft dåliga erfarenheter!

Om du vill läsa avhandlingen då den är färdig kan du skriva din e-postadress i slutet av formuläret. Jag sparar inte adressen för något annat syfte och kontakter dig endast med den slutliga avhandlingen.

Tack så mycket för att du tar dig tid att fylla i formuläret. Jag är otroligt tacksam för det!

☆☆☆☆☆

My name is Sofia Lindholm and I study intercultural encounters with a focus on migration and integration at the University of Helsinki. I have grown up in Ekenäs, Raseborg and therefore I am interested in researching that area. My master's thesis will be based on this questionnaire that explores language choice and integration in Raseborg. I want to know about the experience of immigrants living in Raseborg who have chosen to learn Swedish.

If you fit the following criteria, feel free to fill out the form:

- You are 18 years or older

- You have immigrated to Finland from another country

- You are living in Raseborg

- You are learning/have learned Swedish in Finland

The study is completely anonymous, and the answers will only be seen by me. Complete the questionnaire by answering all the questions and submitting it. If you wish to stop at any point, just close the tab and none of your answers will be saved. Your answers will not be used to evaluate your learning or your school's teaching, rather your own experience will be highlighted, so please answer as truthfully as possible, even if you have had bad experiences!

If you wish to read the finished thesis when it is done, please write your email address at the end of the form. I will not use the address for any other purpose and will only contact you with the finished thesis.

Thank you so much for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. I am deeply grateful!

Section 2: Språkinlärning // Language learning

Vilka språk talar du? // Which languages do you speak?

Visste du om att svenska talas i Finland innan du flyttade hit? // Did you know that Swedish is spoken in Finland before moving here?

- Ja // Yes
- Nej // No

Hur länge har du studerat svenska / How long have you studied Swedish?

- Under 1 år // Less than a year
- 1-2 år // 1-2 years
- 2-5 år // 2-5 years
- Mer än 5 år // More than 5 years

Var har du studerat svenska? // Where have you studied Swedish?

- MBI
- Lärkkulla
- I en annan skola // in another school

Om du svarade 'i en annan skola', var? // If you chose 'in another school', where?

Varför valde du att lära dig svenska? // Why did you choose to learn Swedish?

- För att min partner/familj/vän pratar svenska // Because my partner/family/friend speaks Swedish
- För att majoriteten i Raseborg pratar svenska // Because the majority in Raseborg speaks Swedish
- För att jag trodde att det skulle vara lättare att lära sig än finska // Because I thought it would be easier to learn than Finnish
- För att jag talar ett annat skandinaviskt språk (danska, norska, färöiska, isländska) // Because I speak another Scandinavian language (Danish, Norwegian, Faroese, Icelandic)
- För att jag använder det på jobbet eller i studierna // Because I use the language at work or school
- Annan orsak // other reason

Berätta gärna mera om varför du valde att lära dig svenska! // Please tell me more about why you decided to learn Swedish!

På vilken nivå är din svenska? // At what level is your Swedish?

- A1
- A2
- B1
- B2
- C1
- C2
- Jag vet inte // I don't know

Lärde du dig finska före du började lära dig svenska? I sådana fall, på vilken nivå? Och hurdan var din inlärning av finska? // Did you learn Finnish before learning Swedish? If so, what level is your Finnish, and how was learning Finnish?

Välj svaret som passar bäst gällande svenska språket // Choose the answer about the Swedish language that feels the most correct

1. Jag trodde det skulle vara lätt att lära sig // I thought it would be easy to learn
2. Det har varit lätt att lära sig // It has been easy to learn
3. Jag tycker om språket // I like the language
4. Svenska är bra att kunna i Raseborg // Swedish is good to know in Raseborg
5. Svenska är bra att kunna i Finland // Swedish is good to know in Finland
6. Min åsikt om språket har blivit bättre när jag lärt mig det // My opinion on the language has improved after learning it
7. Jag är nöjd med mina kunskaper i svenska // I am satisfied with my knowledge of Swedish

- Helt av samma åsikt // Fully agree
- Delvis av samma åsikt // Partly agree
- Svårt att säga // Hard to say

- Delvis av annan åsikt // Partly disagree
- Helt av annan åsikt // Fully disagree

Hur har du upplevt att språkinlärningen har gått? Berätta fritt! // How has the language learning been for you? Speak freely!

Section 3: Språkanvändning, gemenskap och integration // Language use, community and integration

Var använder du svenska? // Where do you use Swedish?

- I skolan // In school
- Hemma // At home
- Med vänner // With friends
- På jobbet // At work
- I butiker // In stores
- Med myndigheter // With the authorities
- Med grannar och främlingar // With neighbours and strangers
- På fritiden // During hobbies
- Andra ställen // Other places

Om du valde 'andra ställen', var? // If you chose 'other places', where?

Välj svaret som passar bäst // Choose the answer that feels the most correct

1. Jag använder mycket svenska i vardagen // I speak a lot of Swedish daily
2. Jag klarar mig på svenska i Raseborg // I can manage in Raseborg by speaking Swedish
3. Jag klarar mig på svenska i Finland // I can manage in Finland by speaking Swedish
4. Jag blir väl bemött när jag pratar svenska // I am treated well when I speak Swedish

5. Svenskspråkiga personer pratar gärna svenska med mig // Swedish-speaking individuals happily speak Swedish with me
6. Jag vill vara en del av den svenskspråkiga gemenskapen i Raseborg // I want to be part of the Swedish-speaking community in Raseborg
7. Jag känner mig som en del av den svenskspråkiga befolkningen i Raseborg // I consider myself part of the Swedish-speaking community in Raseborg
8. Det svenska språket har hjälpt min integration i Raseborg // The Swedish language has helped my integration in Raseborg

- Helt av samma åsikt // Fully agree
- Delvis av samma åsikt // Partly agree
- Svårt att säga // Hard to say
- Delvis av annan åsikt // Partly disagree
- Helt av annan åsikt // Fully disagree

Känner du att du behöver lära dig svenska för att integreras/bli en del av gemenskapen i din stad? Varför/varför inte? // Do you feel the need to learn Swedish to integrate into the community in your town? Why/why not?

Upplever du att det har hjälpt din integration att lära dig svenska? Varför/varför inte? // Do you believe that learning the Swedish language has helped you integrate? Why/why not?

Section 4: Bakgrundsinformation // Backgroundinformation

Land du invandrade från/din nationalitet // Country you immigrated from/your nationality

Ålder // Age

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44

- 45-54
- 55+

När flyttade du till Finland? // When did you move to Finland?

- Under ett år sedan // Less than a year ago
- 1-2 år sedan // 1-2 years ago
- 2-5 år sedan // 2-5 years ago
- 5-10 år sedan // 5-10 years ago
- 10+ år sedan // more than 10 years ago

Varför flyttade du till Finland? // Why did you move to Finland?

- På grund av familj eller partner // Because of family or a partner
- På grund av arbete // For work
- På grund av studier // For studying
- Jag sökte asyl // I applied for asylum
- Jag var flykting // I was a refugee
- Annan orsak // Other reason

Om du svarade 'annan orsak' på den tidigare frågan, förklara gärna här. // If you chose 'other reason' on the previous question, please elaborate here.

Hur länge har du bott i Raseborg? // How long have you lived in Raseborg?

- Under ett år sedan // Less than a year ago
- 1-2 år sedan // 1-2 years ago
- 2-5 år sedan // 2-5 years ago
- 5-10 år sedan // 5-10 years ago
- 10+ år sedan // more than 10 years ago

Var bor du? // Where do you live?

- Ekenäs // Ekenäs
- Karis // Karis
- Pojo // Pohja
- Jag vill inte säga // I prefer not to say

Planerar du stanna i Finland och Raseborg? // Do you plan to stay in Finland and Raseborg?

- Ja, i Finland och Raseborg // Yes, in Finland and Raseborg
- Ja, i Finland men inte Raseborg // Yes, in Finland but not Raseborg
- Nej // No
- Jag vet inte ännu // I don't know yet

Har du övriga kommentarer eller något du vill att jag ska veta? (skriv din e-postadress här om du vill läsa den färdiga avhandlingen) // Do you have any comments or anything that you want me to consider? (write your email address here if you wish to read the finished thesis)

Genom att skicka detta formulär bekräftar jag att jag ger Sofia Lindholm rätten att använda mina svar i sin forskning. // By submitting this form I allow Sofia Lindholm to use my answers in her research.

- Ja // Yes