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**PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN
HYBRID LIBRARIES AMONG IMMIGRANT
COMMUNITIES**

Case: Library Ambassadors in Tampere, Finland

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences

Master's Thesis in Social Sciences

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Abstract

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Multilingual services and community-based approaches enabled by public libraries in Finland assist the integration of immigrants. In this thesis, the author evaluates a project in Tampere, the Library Ambassador program, where volunteers provide free services to newcomers, speaking multiple languages, to help them navigate the hybrid library services. Through the five-dimensional model of confidence and self-esteem, trust and relationships, cultural integration and preservation, community awareness and engagement, and political integration, the study examines the role of ambassadors in culturally inclusive library practices using the five-dimensional framework developed by Grossman et al. (2021). Further, this study used a qualitative, interpretive approach to get insights into the experiences of the volunteers. The researcher interviewed seven language and cultural specific Library Ambassadors through semi-structured interviews to collect appropriate data. The data analysis was done through thematic analysis and it showed that ambassadors have a significant mediating effect on making new immigrants feel confident using library services, particularly overcoming language barriers and use of online systems. Ambassadors can help build trust by means of empathetic communication and shared migration or by means of culturally sensitive advice that will strengthen the idea of the library as a secure and friendly environment. The study concludes by finding that the Library Ambassador program enhances the ability of libraries to serve diverse populations. The recommendations are comprised with suggestions such as to add multilingual collections, provide more ambassador training and make more outreach to underrepresented groups. For future studies, it is necessary to include service users and library personnel, investigate long-term effects, and investigate the possible role of libraries in civic education.

Keywords: Library Ambassadors, immigrant integration, cultural diversity, hybrid libraries, public libraries

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Chapter 01 – Introduction

In the contemporary world, there is a trend that presents an increase in migration of western countries, particularly from developing countries, which in turn creates a necessity for implementing effective integration programs for international immigrants as it is vital for the democratic governance and the long-term prosperity of a country (Vårheim, 2014). Referring to OECD (2023), in 2021, Finland has welcomed a total of 29,000 permanent or long-term new immigrants, which is a 23% increase when comparing with 2020. Due to this surge, the Finnish Government in association with collaborating organizations and integration agencies, are preparing immigration laws along with an inclusive immigrant integration program that can provide support and overcome the challenges vested with the complexities of integration and migration procedures in Finland.

Further, Working Group for Cultural Policy & Immigrants and Promotion of Cultural Diversity (2021) in Finland has stated that, due to international migration, the diversity in has enhanced over the years. As a country, Finland has traditional minority communities and a considerable immigrant population and the country has experienced the growth of communities who are from diverse religions, ethnicities and users of diverse languages. Hence, it is necessary to consider this multilingualism and cultural characteristics as useful human resources and a crucial addition to Finnish culture, however, this rise in diversity presents challenges for the Finnish cultural policies as well.

As discussed above, the enhancing diversity of Finland, especially within Tampere, creates number of challenges for democratic institutions similar to public libraries to provide services effectively and efficiently, for communities representing diverse cultural backgrounds while fostering cultural integration. Although multiculturalism enhances local culture and creativity, it might impose challenges in terms of the aspects such as communication, civic engagement, and social inclusion. Hence, it is evident that, empowering cultural diversity and integration in Finnish hybrid libraries has become a critical aspect in contemporary multicultural society. Specifically, the libraries that are managed by government or local authorities have to identify effective and successful methods to cater the immigrant communities that have a diversity of languages and cultural values.

Library Ambassadors project is one of the volunteer-based initiative taken by the Tampere City Library to address these issues and facilitate effective communication between the immigrants and local community. Ambassadors are volunteers who represent diverse cultural backgrounds and they introduce library services and provide services to the newcomers while serving as intermediaries between the Finnish society and immigrant communities. Therefore, having a deep understanding about the contribution of the voluntary program “Library Ambassadors project” towards cultural integration and social cohesion is beneficial as the Tampere city library is providing services for a diverse immigrant population.

The research objective is to **understand how hybrid libraries can contribute in promoting diversity and cultural integration among immigrant communities**, with a particular reference to the project of Library Ambassadors in Tampere, Finland.

This study is mainly focusing on understanding how Finnish hybrid libraries can serve as drivers of enhancing diversity and cultural integration among the international immigrant communities in Tampere, Finland. Public libraries have the ability and necessary resources to develop accessible and welcoming environments for immigrants through their traditional in-person services and online services which integrates advanced technology with initiatives such as community engagement programs. In addition to providing valuable information and resources to immigrants, public libraries facilitate networks, discussions and interactions among people from different cultures which ultimately results in enhanced knowledge, respect and appreciation while offering opportunities to be a part of a larger community.

Based on the above discussed concept, the research question is developed as follows.

Research Question: How do hybrid libraries contribute to promoting diversity and cultural integration among immigrant communities?

The study examines the involvement of immigrants in hybrid library settings in Tampere, Finland and with the Library Ambassadors Project as an example of cultural inclusion and community building. Further, it explores the role of hybrid libraries that combine digital and physical services in advancing cultural diversity, social trust and integration among the immigrant communities. Using a participant-centered approach, this research address the experiences, perceptions, and

motivation of library ambassadors who engage with multicultural programs. Chapter one explains the research background, problem statement, research objectives and research question while highlighting its importance in sustainable social integration. The second chapter is the literature review in relation to the existing literature on diversity, cultural integration, immigration and role of public libraries, with specific reference to the five dimensions of Grossman et al. (2021), in order to identify the theoretical and empirical gaps that are being addressed by this research. The third chapter; methodology discusses the qualitative case study design, the respondents selection, and the thematic analysis method to be used and interpret the interview data. The fourth chapter discusses and presents the findings in a thematic manner highlighting the patterns relating to confidence, trust, and diversity of cultures and engagement of a community. The findings are presented in the fifth chapter concerning previous literature to explore the contribution of library ambassadors' project to the five dimensions. Lastly, the sixth chapter summarizes the study by displaying its key findings, implications on library practice and policy, and suggestions to improve culturally inclusive and hybrid library services.

Chapter 02 – Literature Review

This chapter discusses the existing research on the importance of the role of public libraries in assisting immigrant communities to successfully integrate into the Finnish society and promoting cultural diversity, particularly how these functions change in hybrid library settings. It explores how libraries act as a resource for inclusive community that enhances the information availability, intercultural communication and social integration of immigrants. This review mainly relies on the framework presented by Grossman et al. (2021) that focuses on five dimensions that help immigrants in integrations, including confidence and self-esteem, trust and relationships, cultural integration and preservation, community awareness and engagement, and political integration.

2.1 Cultural Diversity

As discussed by Lin (2019), cultural diversity is a controversial and boundless concept which often consists of “*diverse knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, religions, languages, abilities and disabilities, genders, ethnicities, races, nationalities, sexual orientation*” among humans. This statement points out diverse factors that differentiate people from others that are commonly used in the contemporary world, however, this concept extends its scope to discuss how individuals interact and continue living with this aspect of reality.

With reference to European Commission (2024a), cultural diversity refers to a wide-range of cultural aspects that exist in a society that incorporates people from varied cultural backgrounds. When considering this definition, it is evident that grasping the concept of “culture” is crucial to get a better understanding about the cultural diversity. European Commission (2024a) defined culture as the unique characteristics of a community or a social group, in terms of ethereal, material, psychological and sentimental in nature, in addition to the features that differentiate societies such as ways of life, ways of cohabiting, values and morals, customs and habits, opinions and viewpoints and art and literature. Referring to European Commission, these definitions are derived from the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity which focuses on protecting and promoting cultural diversity among member countries of United Nations.

In 2001, UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity introduced several principles to promote cultural diversity with the belief that intercultural communications are the most appropriate method to promote peace among countries while dismissing the notion that cultures and civilizations are always coming into conflict (UNESCO, 2002). Those are, namely;

- Article 1: Cultural diversity is considered as the shared heritage of humanity
- Article 2: Shifting from cultural diversity to cultural pluralism
- Article 3: Cultural diversity as a component of development
- Article 4: Cultural diversity is ensured through human rights
- Article 5: Cultural rights fostering cultural diversity
- Article 6: Encouraging equal access to cultural diversity for everyone
- Article 7: Cultural heritage stimulating creativity
- Article 8: Considering cultural goods and services as unique commodities
- Article 9: Fostering creativity through cultural policies
- Article 10: Boosting universal creation and dissemination
- Article 11: Promoting collaborations among both public, private sectors and community
- Article 12: Role and the responsibilities of UNESCO

Through above articles, UNESCO tries to bring up the cultural diversity to a status where it is considered as vital for humanity while highlighting that ensuring the ethical necessity of protecting cultural diversity is significant and it cannot be separated from human dignity. There are two main objectives of this declaration: first, safeguard cultural diversity not as a heritage but as a dynamic and sustainable asset for the future and second, eradicate violence and discrimination practices that breaches the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 2002).

Moreover, as discussed by Algan et al. (2012), cultural diversity and cultural identity are considered as key issues of political debates in most of the western countries. These controversial discussions are highly motivated, specifically in Europe due to the growing political tensions surrounding the increasing immigrant population. As a result, the contemporary European societies face a significant challenge of addressing issues stemming from ethnic and cultural diversity. However, it is important to note that, the argument between perceived advantages and shortcomings of cultural diversity is already a very strong and controversial.

In order to get a better understanding about the political consequences and impacts of cultural diversity and identity, it is significant to clearly define the population that are included in these discussions. This necessitates more detailed consideration of the words “immigrant” and “migrant” and as they are critical factors in determining the cultural dynamics especially in European societies.

2.2 Immigrants/ Migrants

Definitions for Immigrants/ Migrants

One of the main concerns of this study is the notion of “immigrant or migrant”, hence, having a better understanding of the concept and defining it in the context of cultural integration is necessary to proceed further.

According to the definition by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there is no specific legally binding definition for international migrant, however, the majority of professionals agree that a migrant is an individual who relocates from his or her regular residence, despite the reason for switching locations or legal status. There are two types of migration considering the duration of stay at the new location, namely, temporary or short-term migration where the person is planning to spend three to twelve months and permanent or long-term migration where a person is relocating from the country of residence for over twelve or more months (United Nations, 2024). Similarly, International Organization for Migration (2024) stated that, when considering the point of view of the country of arrival, when an individual moves to a new country other than the country of his or her origin/ nationality or residence, the country of destination will convert into the new country of residence. Even though the notion is not defined under any international law, it consists of clearly defined statutory categories of communities, including individuals whose status and movements are defined by law such as migrant workers and individuals who are not precisely defined under international law such as international students.

However, the definition of migrant and immigrant are different to some extent when considering the European context. Immigrant is a narrower term whereas migrant is a broader concept. According to European Commission (2024b), an immigrant is someone who relocates to a European Union (EU) member country to stay for at least one year, after residing in another EU member country or a different country for some time. When defining the concept of migrant, according to the European Union (EU)/ European Free Trade Association (EFTA) context, there are two aspects to look at. The first part includes the definition of the immigrant whereas the second part emphasizes that a migrant can be an individual who previously usually resided in any member country of EU/EFTA but no longer is it his / her usual residence for a period of one year or expected not to stay at least for one year. Further, it is highlighted that a migrant is generally interpreted while considering any scenario where an individual is taking the migration decision freely, without any external influences, based on his/ her personal decisions such as enhancing living standards or having more social opportunities and this can include relocating alone or with family members (European Commission, 2024c). However, considering these differences, the main consideration in this study is given to “immigrants”.

Distinction between Immigrant/ Migrant and Refugee

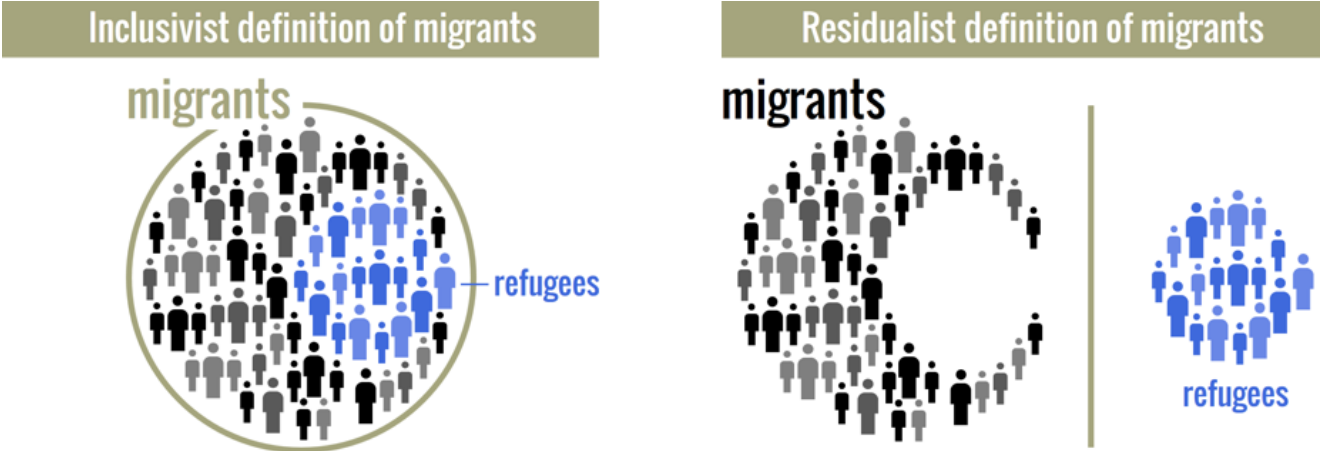
One of the significant factor that is stressed in many sources is that there is a difference between the notions of “immigrant” and “refugee” and having this knowledge is crucial for this study when deciding the scope of the study.

With reference to UNHCR (2024), these terms cannot be used as synonyms as there are considerable differences between them. Further explained that refugees leave their home countries mainly as a result of a potential threat to their freedom or life. Therefore, they are defined under specific global legal framework and protected by it. In contrast, migrants are not defined in any international legal framework and diverse stakeholders define the notion in different ways. Primarily, migrants are considered as people who move to a different country according to their preference, not by force or external reason such as escaping conflict, harassment or injustice. According to United Nations (2024), refugee is a person who is living outside his/ her country of origin due to reasons such as generalized violence, conflict, feared persecution or any other reasons

which significantly threatened the public order, and therefore, aforementioned person is in need of international protection.

As described by Carling (2024), there are two types of perceptions that distinguish migrants and refugees, namely, inclusivist view and residualist view (Figure 1). Inclusivist view describes people who have left their usual residence without considering the legal status or motivating factors behind doing that, for instance, international students, foreign employees, refugees, trailing spouses and trafficking victims are recognized in this view as migrants. When referring to residualist viewpoint, migrants are considered as people who have shifted away from their usual residence for any reason besides running from a persecution or war.

Figure 1: Inclusivist and Residualist view of Migrants



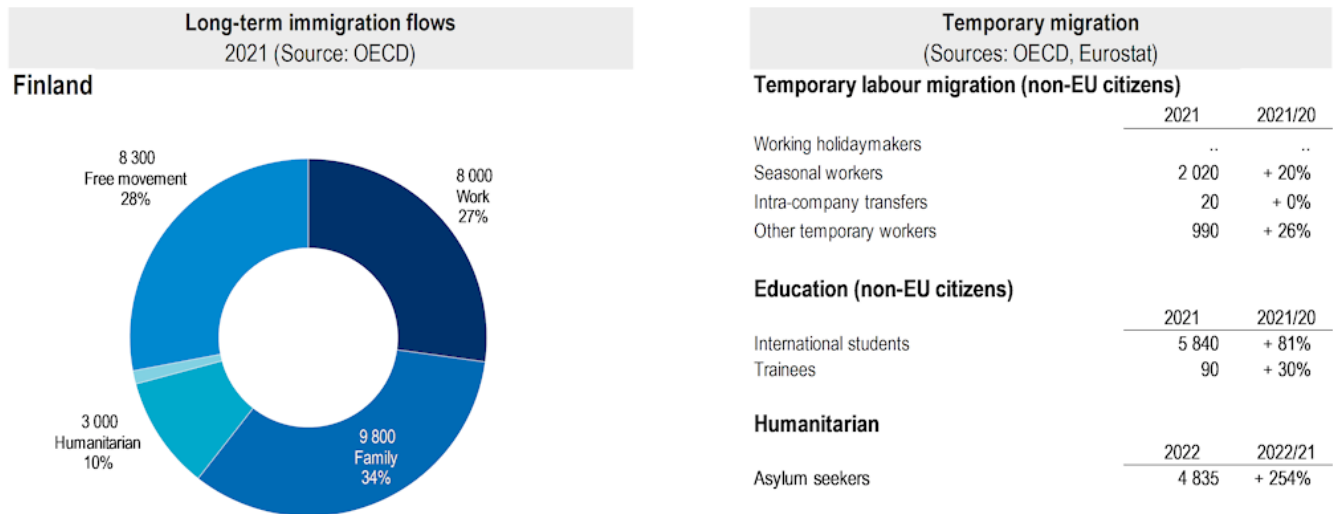
Source: Carling (2024)

Immigrants/ Migrants in Finland

With reference to the World Population Review (2025), Finland is considered as one of the least populated countries in European Union, and its population density is considerably very low. Even though the country has a high level of homogeneity and the majority of the population are ethnically Finns, there is a continuous inflow of 38 immigrants per day is recorded. As discussed by Hosseini (2023), according to the current context, Finland is gradually transforming into a multicultural country, similar to the situation in many other countries in European region, because migration and mobility rates are on the rise. As a result of this, fostering the development of cultural diversity is considered as one of the strategic priority of the country over the last few decades.

As shown in figure 2, with reference to the statistics of International Migration Outlook 2023 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2023), 29,000 new immigrants reached Finland in 2021, on permanent basis, which results in 23% increase from 2020. Considering the composition of this migrants population, there were 33.4% of family members including escorting family, 28% of immigrants who have free mobility benefit, 27.2% of migrant workers and 10.3% of humanitarian migrants.

Figure 2: Key figures on Immigration - Finland



Source: (OECD, 2023).

The highest three nationalities of new arrivals in 2021, consisted of Russia, Estonia, and Ukraine respectively. When considering the top 15 countries of origin, inflows to Finland increased most sturdily in Estonia (+800) whereas it decreased most in Iraq (-200) when comparing with the previous year (OECD, 2023).

As a prominent initiative, the new non-discrimination Act enhanced its scope by expanding the definition of harassment with intention of including collective actions which are targeted on a specific groups of communities and also broadened its scope to workplace discrimination. This act was partially implemented in June 2023 (OECD, 2023).

2.3 Public Libraries

Referring to UNESCO (1994), a public library is an establishment which provides free library services to its users (i.e. public) and these institutions are funded by the state or uses government funds. These institutes act as a supporting education facility that offers diverse and numerous opportunities to the public community mainly for self-education while providing all kinds of informational and educational resources with credible information, freely and without any biases.

As discussed by Paola Picco (2008), public libraries play a major role in democratizing information, facilitating quality education and lifelong learning, fostering individual creativity and promoting local culture and as a result of this, they are viewed as agents of social change within a community. Further, over the years, public libraries have changed their scope and services in response to the diverse needs of the library users. Initially, almost every library only focused on printed materials, however, in the current age, they provide information in various formats and facilitate new technologies for information sharing. Therefore, it is clear that the modern libraries have diversify their services that goes beyond the traditional functions according to the changes in the society. Specifically, when it comes to the countries where immigrant population is high, libraries have introduced multicultural services in order to cater the socio-cultural developments while ensuring multiculturalism. These services assist immigrants to be linked with their cultural background as well as integrate with the new society. The materials or valuable resources of

guidance and comprehension which public libraries offer for the immigrants mostly includes language classes, job search support and workshops on citizenship education.

Furthermore, public libraries addressed the social determinants related to well-being by supporting immigrants in numerous ways as they are getting adjusted to a life in a new country and by enhancing their educational, social, and community outcomes. Considering all the services provided by the libraries, Language courses and discussion groups were among the frequently offered educational opportunities for library users. These programs offered immigrants a valuable opportunity to develop social networks and bonds, and get a deeper knowledge about the new country and its communities. Immigrants were able to ask questions and get answers as well as learn more about social practices and traditions when they spent some quality time in the library while interacting with librarians (Grossman et al., 2021).

Public libraries in Finland

Finland has one of the cutting-edge and prominent public libraries in the world. The libraries in Finland exercise two fundamental values, namely, equality and education which are highly supported by libraries. In Finland, libraries are among the foundations of democracy and education, and they have long been most significant aspects of people's daily lifestyles. Finnish libraries are considered as public resources that allows everyone to access to them as they are funded by the government and there are laws and regulations to safeguard the uniformity and quality of library services. The Public Libraries Act was first passed in 1928, and in 2017 it underwent a revision that made it effective (Libraries.fi, 2022).

As presented by InfoFinland (2024), Finnish public libraries provides wide range of services, however the most important services include multilingual library, e-library and ask a librarian service. The Multilingual Library offers resources in more than 80 languages and this library is located in Pesila district, Helsinki. However, the users have the opportunity to check out materials from the collection of Multilingual Library, from any location in Finland. When it comes to e-library, the users can borrow electronic resources like books, magazines, and films for use. However, there are limitations of the use of e-library, while some resources can be accessed without a library card and PIN, others can be found exclusively online. Further, library users can

find the answer to any question by using the Ask a Librarian service. There are three language options; English, Swedish, and Finnish, therefore users can submit the question regarding the library services in online form. The response will be sent to user's email address which will also be posted on the service website.

How public libraries promote cultural diversity

Historically, libraries have considered as instrumental in creating spaces for diverse immigrant communities to satisfy their informational, educational and social needs. For example, in the 1870s, cities such as Cincinnati and Chicago had an extensive collection of international newspapers, with the intention of catering the informational needs of various immigrant communities that lived in those areas (Wiegand, 2015). Similarly, Carlton (2018) stated that, over the last several years, librarians have become more aware of the importance and necessity of providing services to the immigrant communities that are tailored to their particular needs.

Even though most people relate libraries with borrowing of books, they have a wider scope of resources and services for the community (De Rosa et al., 2014). Lankes et al. (2007) highlighted that, most of the libraries in modern world is equipped with technology-related programs with a focus on improving connectivity of immigrants with their friends and family worldwide and to access diverse set of information. Further elaborated that, with these resources, libraries are given an opportunity to enhance the service delivery to the local community better while fostering participatory networks. Put simply, libraries are not merely reacting to the technology, they are guiding it with their unique principles, commitment to service, resources and infrastructure. Moreover, public libraries assist immigrants to build confidence and social connections while supporting them to orient themselves in the new country by offering educational and citizenship classes within library premises (Sirikul & Dorner, 2016; van der Linden et al., 2014).

Meanwhile, highlighting the role of conversation clubs in public libraries in relation to political integration of immigrants, Johnston & Audunson (2019) pointed out that these discussion programs has a considerable influence on integration as they make voices of immigrants represented in mainstream through the development of linguistic skills, enhancing social networks and encouraging information sharing via messy conversations. In addition, libraries offer an

independent meeting space and platform for the minority community while fostering open discussions and, ultimately reinforces sound democratic practices.

With reference to the Finnish context, the country has two official languages; Finnish and Swedish and the language learning is an important part of the Finnish Integration Program. The notion behind the Finnish language learning is to assist immigrants to become members of the Finnish society and Finnish working life as soon as possible. In this regard, Finnish public libraries are playing a major role as they offer free and equal access to the Finnish language books, audio and visual materials and more other resources with the intention of enhancing the literacy of immigrants. Put simply, this highlights that the Finnish public libraries are no longer consider as a passive provider and storage of books, but rather an information house that serves all the people in Finnish society including minority and immigrant communities.

2.4 Conceptual Framework for the study

In contemporary society, most of the libraries are actively involved in building stronger communities through novel and innovative programs and enhancing the engagement of the community members as well as the local government and private and public institutions. Further, building alliances within the community and having a strategic advantage over joining networks that cover a large span of interests have favored the libraries to increase visibility and engagement while helping improve the well-being of the communities they are involved with (Bourke, 2005).

Numerous library systems nowadays actively seek out immigrant communities in order to assist them comprehend the resources available and spread the awareness on the services of the library while trying to understand the needs and interests of the immigrants. However, it is important to note that, welcoming practices of libraries are distinct from the corrective measures and disciplinary actions, and they are not neutral towards the immigrant community. The main objective of these actions are strategically designed to improve the relationship between the library and the community while establishing trust between the two parties (Williams, 2015).

Grossman et al. (2021) pointed out five different ways that public libraries helped immigrants in adapting to the life of a new country, namely, (1) Confidence and self-esteem, (2) trust and relationships, (3) cultural integration and preservation, (4) community awareness and engagement and (5) political integration. These dimensions reflect different facets of immigrant experiences ranging from individual empowerment to civic engagement and these factors are used as the guiding themes in this study.

When it comes to *confidence and self-esteem*, as Johnston (2019) highlighted, libraries are playing a significant role in diminishing the misconceptions and stereotypes between the immigrants and library staff as a result of the interpersonal discussions that facilitated cultural awareness. In addition, libraries are considered as spaces that met diverse literacy requirements of immigrants including information, academic, financial, health and children literacy (Yoo-Lee et al., 2016) which assist in building self-confidence in immigrants. Referring to *trust and relationships*, public libraries often assist immigrants in creating a sense of belonging and trust while building social connections in the new country and enable them to navigate and learn about the new environment more effectively. Hence, public libraries are generally perceived as safe and accommodating places for immigrant communities (Shepherd et al., 2018). The third factor is *cultural integration and preservation*. The public libraries are instrumental in promoting awareness about the new country among immigrants through their collections of books, exhibits and other resources (Shepherd et al., 2018). Further, Audunson et al. (2011) pointed out that libraries are considered as a medium which helped to bridge the gap between the experiences, culture and history of the native country of immigrants with their new land. Considering *community awareness and engagement*, Rodriguez (2019) and Shepherd et al. (2018) discussed that public libraries were used as places where immigrants interacted with the local communities and obtain general and valuable knowledge concerning the local culture. Moreover, as discussed above, public libraries satisfy the information needs of immigrants, particularly in the initial stages of relocation and settlement and offers a cultural meaning to the newly obtained information (Boamah, 2018). Concerning *political integration*, it is noticed that the support from libraries, particularly when the libraries are funded by the public, are addressed less often. According to Paola Picco (2008), there were some libraries that offered classes regarding citizenship and other libraries mostly assisted immigrants in navigating the new environment and culture which resulted in high level of civic engagement. In

addition, Audunson et al. (2011) described that the civic engagement could be improved due to the discussion classes regarding rights and new opportunities available for the immigrants in the new environment.

The following table illustrates the main concepts of the literature review, particularly in relation to the five dimensions of Grossman et al. (2021). This will be adopted by the researcher as a part of the interview guide to direct questions on the role and experiences of library ambassadors in fostering cultural diversity, assisting with the integration of immigrants to the Finnish society and promoting engagements and interactions within hybrid library settings.

Cultural Diversity	Immigrants	Public Libraries
A variety of cultural or ethnic groups present in a society. in relation to cultural diversity in a library setting, focuses on inclusivity and equal access to information for people from diverse backgrounds	People who leaves their native country with the intention of staying for an extended period or permanently in another nation	A community-based institution that offers free and equal access to information, knowledge and cultural resources for the community
Dimensions (The role of public libraries in assisting the integration of immigrants to the life in a new country)		
Confidence and self-esteem	How to make immigrants feel secure and confident utilizing library and its resources	
Trust and relationships	How to transform libraries into safe and friendly places	
Cultural integration and preservation	How to assist immigrants find a balance between learning Finnish culture and maintaining immigrant’s own culture	
Community awareness and engagement	How to assist the immigrants with accessing services, opportunities, and the community	
Political integration	How to enhance the awareness of rights and civic participation	

Table 1: Conceptual Table: Mapping key concepts of the study

Chapter 03 – Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology that is used to identify how the Library Ambassadors project in Tampere, Finland in facilitating cultural diversity and immigration integration in relation to hybrid library settings. The researcher has used a qualitative design to understand the real-life experiences, perceptions and motivations of volunteers who act as Library Ambassadors with the intention of serving as mediators between the library and the immigrant communities.

This chapter consists of research design, philosophical orientation, data collection processes, research participants, and the data analysis methods to further explain the impact of Library Ambassadors. The author used five dimensions of integrative relevance by Grossman et al. (2021) which include (1) confidence and self-esteem, (2) trust and relationships, (3) cultural integration and preservation, (4) community awareness and engagement, and (5) political integration and used thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as the primary analysis tool.

Research rationale and research design

The philosophical orientation of this research is constructivist and interpretive which assumes that reality is a social construction created through interaction, language and shared meanings (Schwandt, 1994). In this paradigm, the objective of this study is to get a better understanding about the experiences and perceptions of the Library Ambassadors in Tampere with relevance to the promotion of cultural diversity among diverse immigrant communities. The author used a constructivist approach in this context as it focuses more on individual perspectives and personal experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge. This supported the objective of this study which is to get a deeper insights in relation to the subjective meanings that ambassadors emphasize on their volunteer experience with the diverse library communities.

In this context, the knowledge is produced during a form of conversation between the researcher and participants rather than discovered (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Moreover, it is important to understand that all the Library Ambassadors have a different cultural, linguistic, and social

background which influences their perception of integration, inclusion, and diversity in the Finnish library system. As a result of this, the author had to carefully approach their perspectives, in an interpretive manner while handling the responses of the library ambassadors as noteworthy representations of personal as well as collective volunteer experience.

This study is also based on the increased academic acknowledgment that libraries are social institutions that promote cultural knowledge, trust, and belonging (Grossman et al., 2021; Audunson et al., 2011). Nevertheless, even though the previous literature has examined how immigrants utilize libraries as a way of adjusting to a new country, it is noted that, a limited literature has investigated the perceptions of immigrant volunteers who serve as the mediator between the library and the various immigrant communities. This gap explains why this study should be conducted to explore the contribution of Library Ambassadors in order to enhance cultural diversity, integration, and multicultural engagement in hybrid library settings.

A qualitative interpretive research design is used in this study to identify the personal experiences of Library Ambassadors in Tampere, Finland. This approach focuses on the process of understanding individual perceptions and interpretation of realities that they live (Smith and Osborn, 2007). In this instance, the research aims to present how library ambassadors perceive their volunteer position and how their performance is connected with the wider social and cultural dynamics of inclusion and diversity in the library system.

The qualitative design is well-aligned with this topic as it enables an in-depth analysis of aspects such as personal meaning, emotion, and reflections that could not be quantified with quantitative tools (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Therefore, with the use of narrative data, this study uncovers how participation in volunteer activities at hybrid libraries foster mutual trust, self-confidence, cultural integration and community awareness among immigrants, as defined by Grossman et al. (2021).

Data Collection Methods and Sampling Strategy

The data collection for this study was done using semi-structured interviews, which is considered as both flexible and focused. According to Birgili, Seggie and Oguz (2021), semi-structured interviews are more useful in interpretivist research as they offer participants opportunities to share their lived realities while allowing the researcher to identify and explore meaningful concepts in more depth. The researcher interviewed the participants using a semi-structured interview method as they had a firsthand experience in the Library Ambassadors Project at the Tampere City Library. Some of the questions that were included in the interview guide were the motivation held by the participants to participate in the project, their experiences in the hybrid library space, the feeling of trust and inclusion, the challenges, and the recommendations on how to promote multicultural engagement.

The length of the interviews were around 45-60 minutes and were either face-to-face at the library premises or through Microsoft Teams considering the availability and convenience of the participant. It is important to note that, the face-to-face interviews assisted the researcher to conduct more authentic communication and acquire in-depth knowledge on the research context. However, all of these semi-structured interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and the transcribed word-to-word for the analysis purposes. Moreover, in order to facilitate transparency and adherence to the ethical standards of the Tampere University, an information sheet were provided to every participant detailing the purpose of the study, policies concerning confidentiality and highlighting their right to withdraw at any time.

The sampling method used for this research is purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling methodology, in order to identify and recruit individuals who are most likely to provide rich and valuable information regarding to the topic of this study. As referred by Creswell and Poth (2018), purposive sampling refers to an intentional procedure of selecting appropriate context, material or participant selection that have particular characteristics that are relevant and can respond to the research question concerning the interest of the study. This approach made sure that all the participants of the research were directly engaged with the hybrid libraries and particularly, the Library Ambassadors project in Tampere.

As presented in Table 2, the study entailed seven participants including seven ambassadors (including one project coordinator), and it is important to note that all of them are volunteers. This team represented different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, including Turkish, Afghan, Iranian, Chinese, and Sudanese. Every ambassador volunteered at least for three months, providing them an opportunity to reflect on the process of library taking part in promoting cultural integration, in a meaningful manner. For the interviews, the participants were approached through library networks and consulted them about the purpose of this study and ethical considerations and protection measures that were provided after taking part in the study. The research interviews were carried out in the course of a four-week period in September and early October 2024. The recruitment process started in late August and was conducted until September 5 to October 3, 2024, through seven semi-structured interviews. This period enabled the researcher to arrange sessions within his own convenience based on the availability of the participants and also made sure that all the interviews were done before the first week of October.

Participant	Nationality	Role	Interview Type
1	Afghan	Ambassador	Online
2	Turkish	Ambassador	Face-to-face
3	Sudanese	Ambassador	Online
4	Turkish	Ambassador	Online
5	Chinese	Ambassador	Online
6	Iranian	Ambassador	Online
7	Turkish	Ambassador/ Coordinator	Face-to-face

Table 2: Participant Overview

Data Analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis technique. This approach aims at identifying, interpreting and recording repetitive patterns, or themes, in qualitative data with a view of forming a detailed analysis of experiences of participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is appropriate as it follows the interpret approach of the research, where there is a desire to comprehend how interventions of the immigrant participants create meaning based on their experiences in hybrid library settings. It enables the researcher to analyze direct words and their implications in the stories delivered by participants, which offers complete comprehension of their experiences in inclusion into a particular culture, in building trust, and engagement in their community (Mishler, 1991).

The thematic analysis proved to be one of the most appropriate in this study, as it allowed the researcher to focus on various dimensions of the Library Ambassadors Project, including motivation, empowerment, intercultural communication, and the social role of the hybrid library, without interfering with the subjective realities of the participants. Through the systematic identification of recurring trends throughout the interviews, the researcher could put together themes that reflect the knowledge of the entire community of immigrant ambassadors and their experiences in the Finnish hybrid libraries.

Coding Process

The process of data analysis was divided into a number of systematic steps to make the process of coding and interpretation comprehensive, credible, and transparent. In this study, the six stage model suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) is used for the thematic analysis.

- Familiarization with the data: The researcher read and listened through the interview materials many times to get the general idea of the experiences of the participants.
- Initial Coding (Open Coding): All the interview transcripts were analyzed line-by-line in order to determine important data blocks concerning the research objectives. Preliminary codes were given to phrases or statements which identified the core of the experience of participants. As an example, a respondent who said that assisting new members in the library would make them feel more confident was given the first code, which was

confidence and self-esteem through volunteering. An additional participant who said he felt welcome among the staff of Finnish was given the code of trust and relationships in institutional environment.

- Building themes: Following the initial coding process, the researcher was able to group similar codes into general conceptual categories which ultimately resulted in identifying the patterns and relations among the experiences of the participants. As an example, the codes like, confidence-building, recognition, and sense of equality were categorized under confidence and self-esteem. In the same way, codes such as cultural exchange, preserving heritage and learning Finnish culture were grouped under the cultural integration and preservation category. Further, the development of the themes was meant to respond to the main research question: How do hybrid libraries facilitate cultural diversity, trust, and integration among the immigrant communities in Tampere?
- Reviewing themes: The themes were checked on the entire dataset to determine their coherence and relevance and the repeating or overlapping themes were combined accordingly.
- Defining and naming the research themes: Theme definition and naming: The last group of themes was aligned to five major dimensions of Grossman et al. (2021), which would allow the theoretical alignment but allow emergent subthemes.
- Preparing the report: This stage focuses on converting the thematic results into a logical story with the direct quotations of participants, theoretical interpretations while referring the previous literature.

All of these themes provide an idea of what a hybrid library can be, as a place of inclusion, empowerment, and intercultural connection. They act as a background to the findings and discussion chapters in which each theme is discussed in more detail as compared to the existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 04 – Findings

This chapter presents the results of seven semi-structured interviews with the Library Ambassadors in Tampere, Finland. The participants of the study is comprised with diverse nationalities including Afghan, Turkish, Sudanese, Chinese and Iranian which is an indication of the multicultural structure of the program. The thematic analysis of the data was performed based on the interpretive phenomenological method and with the help of the five dimensions presented by Grossman et al. (2021) as the framework of analytic analysis:

- Confidence and Self-Esteem
- Trust and Relationships
- Cultural integration and preservation
- Community awareness and engagement
- Political integration

The following sections show how these dimensions were reflected in the lived experiences of the Library Ambassadors. With the intention of retaining the authentic voices of the participants, the researcher used direct quotations throughout the chapter.

Theme 1: Confidence and self-esteem

All seven participants highlighted how the libraries are a friendly and empowering place where immigrants slowly build confidence in navigating a new cultural and informational setting. To most of the people, the initial phases of migration were characterized by a sense of confusion and disorientation over library processes, internet tools and language difficulties. Participant 6 commented that *“becoming a member and getting a card is what most newcomers want, but many don’t know about the mobile application or the connection between libraries.”*

Further, ambassadors outlined the way their volunteering effort had solved these insecurities. Participant 1 clarified that *“we welcome them in their mother tongue and show them step-by-step how to use the facilities”*. Likewise, Participant 7 confided that *“we try to play a role of guiding*

newcomers gently showing that the library is for everyone and they can feel comfortable even if their Finnish is limited.”

These stories are in line with the conclusion Grossman et al. (2021) have reached that libraries improve the self-esteem of immigrants by interpersonal communication that resolves stereotypes. Some of the ambassadors associated empowerment with activities in literacy. Participant 2 noted, *“The multilingual approach allows many immigrants to find books in their native language. Their presence here is acknowledged.”* Participant 4 went further to explain that these experiences *“create a sense of belonging and independence.”*

The personal growth of ambassadors was also achieved through volunteering. Participant 5 reasoned, *“I felt more confident because of assisting my country people to access services easily”*. This feeling was common among others as participant 7 stated that when *“explaining digital catalogues and self-check machines to others improved my own communication skills.”*

Generally, the results reveal that the ambassador program does not only enhance self confidence amongst the immigrant population, but it also equips volunteers as a cultural intermediary who reflect the spirit of inclusiveness at the library.

Theme 2: Trust and relationships

The theme of trust and relationships came out as one of the main themes of all the interviews. The participants referred to the library as a secure, neutral and non-judgmental environment in which intercultural relationship would thrive. The summary of participant 3 was as follows: *“the library is free and is available to everyone, you can pose simple questions without embarrassment.”*

Trust was also built deliberately by the ambassadors through personalized service and emotional closeness. Participant 2 said, *“We are also immigrants; when we talk to immigrants, we can empathize and understand their problems.”* This compassionate approach resembles that of Varheim (2011), who has underlined that libraries establish social trust on daily interactions.

Regarding this aspect, a number of ambassadors gave specific examples. Participant 4 remembered, *“Once I met a newcomer who was shy to ask about borrowing books. I guided her*

step by step, and she said she felt more comfortable returning next time.” Participant 1 continued, *“When people understand we volunteer our time for them, they feel very comfortable.”*

Moreover, participant 7 explained that his strategy was *“to build trust by being visible and consistent”*. The reason he pointed out that ambassadors were collaborating with the staff in the libraries was to demonstrate that the program is not a one-time initiative but a component of the library system. This visibility served the purpose of confirming new users that the kind of support provided to them was solid and institutionally acknowledged.

However, the development of trust was limited in some cases due to time and language. Participant 4 stated, *“Communicating with people can be tricky due to cultural differences, and being patient is the key”*. Nevertheless, barriers did not stop the participants and it remained that trust was gained as the participants acknowledged the commitment and honesty of the ambassadors. Thereby, it can be noted that the Library Ambassador program serves as a micro-community of trust, which aligns with Grossman et al. (2021) argument that the key to integration is relational warmth and inclusiveness.

Theme 3: Cultural integration and preservation

Participants understood cultural integration as a two way process whereby they learn the Finnish culture while still upholding their own. According to Participant 3, *“Immigrants get to know Finnish culture through books, films, language cafés, and talking with Finnish patrons”*. Similarly, Participant 6 stated, *“Library ecosystem is itself a Finnish culture. There are many things you can learn if you just decided to visit and observe.”*

Further, the participants noted that the events such as multicultural days, language cafes and cultural workshops were considered to be critical. Participant 4 remembered, *“One event had people from different backgrounds share traditional music and food. Finnish participants also shared local customs and it was real cultural exchange”*. Participant 7 also noted how cultural heritage can be preserved by libraries while pointing out that *“Having books in various languages and exhibits about other cultures can help to remind people that their identity is valued*. This was confirmed by Participant 1 who responded saying, *“people read books using their languages and feel at home”*.

However, the participants have recognized the constraints or limitations as well. According to participant 6, *“For my culture, there aren’t many Finnish resources and I hope libraries could fill this gap.”* This was also expressed by participant 7, who proposed increased cooperation with immigrant associations to organize cultural exhibitions.

These considerations prove the fact that libraries are both acts as mediators and reflectors since they integrate immigrants to the Finnish culture but reflect the identities of the immigrants themselves. This duality is in line with the findings of Audunson et al. (2011) who explained that libraries are intercultural bridges that encourage feelings of belonging without insisting on conformity.

Theme 4: Community awareness and engagement

Every ambassador considered community outreach as an important element of their work. For example, participant 1 explained that they engaged in *“social media and personal invitations to tell others about library activities”* whereas participant 5 mentioned that *“sharing information in WhatsApp groups and encouraging others to join events”* was the method used in exchanging information with the immigrant communities. Furthermore, participant 7 gave a thorough description of outreach processes pointing out that *“we cooperate with the library’s communication team, translating posts and promoting events through community pages. It helps reach people who otherwise wouldn’t know about library opportunities.”*

When it comes to the areas that the immigrants were most interested in were comprised of employment, learning the language and family activities. Participant 4 noted that *“immigrants are most interested in language learning programs, job-related workshops, and activities for families”*. Further, the participant 3 has contributed stating that *“Employment seems to be the top concern for newcomers.”*

Another topic that kept on appearing was digital inclusion. There were some participants who said immigrants had limited knowledge on e-services and some said they had better knowledge. Participant 6 described, *“In my community, most have access to digital resources and if they know the digital services exist, they can manage”* highlighting the importance of enhancing awareness about digital services.

These outreach initiatives of the ambassadors illustrate the way in which libraries can build the community through linking immigrants to information channels and social opportunities. Participant 7 pointed out this in an efficient way by stating *“Libraries can’t reach everyone alone. Ambassadors extend the library’s arm into the community.”* These factors support the claim by Grossman et al. (2021) that libraries can assist newcomers to find their way into key life areas, including employment, housing, and education, thus increasing the speed of social integration.

Theme 5: Political integration

It is important to note that most participants did not focus on political integration, however some forms of civic awareness were noticed. Participant 4 stated that *“sometimes people ask about rights or how public services work, and when that happens we guide them to reliable sources.”* Similarly, participant 5 recalled that *“seeing events about democracy and elections information”* in the library setting. Participant 7 has a more subtle view regarding this matter and pointed out that *“libraries might not be political in nature, but by providing space for discussion and access to information, they support informed citizenship.”* This remark is in line with Johnston (2016) who discovered that language cafes and discussion groups could develop civic engagement indirectly.

However, some ambassadors considered that they were not within the bounds of explicit political education. Further, the participant 2 discussed that *“we felt there was a lack of help in different languages, and that’s where we focus”* highlighting the priority for improving service of library ambassadors lies within breaking language barriers. Nonetheless, according to what is said by participant 6, *“immigrants are expected to participate in elections at some point, so empowering them with knowledge is important”*.

These findings correlate with the findings of Grossman et al. (2021), who hold that libraries serve as a source of political integration by providing access to civic information, but not advocacy. Put simply, as demonstrated in the Tampere ambassadors’ project, ambassadors can help in fostering civic confidence by making immigrants feel knowledgeable and able to contribute to the society.

Chapter 05 – Discussion

In this chapter, the findings reported in Chapter 4 are interpreted using the framework offered by Grossman et al. (2021) concerning the role of libraries in helping immigrants adapt to new societies. It puts the Tampere Library Ambassadors program in larger theoretical frames of cultural diversity, social capital and integration.

As shown in the discussion, the purpose of Library Ambassadors is to be cultural mediators, while resolving the disconnection between Finnish institutions and immigrants. Their stories show that there is a cross-over between personal empowerment, cross-cultural dialogue, and community inclusion and how libraries can be used by the people as neighborhood revitalized and belonging space. The five dimensions, including confidence and self-esteem, trust and relationships, cultural integration and preservation, community awareness and engagement, and political integration are addressed one by one, referring to the participants' voices and the existing academic literature of the topic.

Theme 1: Confidence and self-esteem

The most frequently observed outcome of the Library Ambassador experience were confidence and self-esteem. Most of the immigrants who visited the Finnish library for the first time had their first experience as being intimidating, technologically challenging, or a place only for foreign language-speaking community. Further, participant 1 noted that immigrants find online services the most challenging in the beginning, whereas Participant 4 noted that the online services, which include using the online catalog or booking systems, tend to be the most difficult. These statements resonate with Grossman et al. (2021), who reported the role of the library in shaping the self-efficacy of immigrants in the form of literacy and technology training.

The library ambassadors reduced this fear by offering personalized counselling in the mother-languages of the users. One of the ambassadors said, "*We receive them with a smiling face in their mother languages and provide coffee and snacks*". This kind of interpersonal warmth made a foreign and unfamiliar environment a friendly place to learn. In relation to this, Bandura (1982)

conducted research which proved that mastery experiences provide the most efficient source of self-efficacy; every successful contact with catalogues or borrowing systems made users confident in their abilities to move around in public institutions by their own

However, it is significant to note that, this was a two-way process. Volunteers themselves also communicated that they experienced an improvement in confidence due to learning how to communicate and lead. Participant 6 commented, *"I have begun with myself and expanded my knowledge about the library and practice Finnish language, so then I can assist others."* This empowerment proves that the process of confidence building is not one-way process but is co-created, which is consistent with constructivist perspectives that learning is a negotiated process in society (Wenger, 1998).

Confidence and self-esteem, according to the framework of Grossman et al. (2021), is a psychological and social creation. Libraries reduce stereotypes because they facilitate direct interpersonal interactions between immigrants and staff where narratives of linguistic or cultural incompetence are challenged. According to the interview data gathered, the self-esteem of users became visible as ambassadors were used in mediating small successes such as logging into e-resources, printing documents, or coming up with library cards. For example, participant 1 stated that, *"it happened many times when I showed them how to log in to online services and it surprised them"*. These small but impactful activities of accomplishment slowly enhanced the abilities of the immigrants, which was in line with Dali (2013) who discovered that libraries were confidence boosters among immigrant newcomers.

In addition, social participation was promoted through literacy programs, which included language cafes, reading hour (among children), and health-information programs. As discussed by participant 2, activities arranged with families with children, regardless of whether their language competence is adequate or not, helped to socialize mothers, their capacity to be involved in life and, therefore, improved their self-confidence. This is similar to those of Fisher et al. (2004), who pointed out that everyday literacy encounters in public libraries led to psychological empowerment among immigrant communities. To conclude, the Ambassador program helped to strengthen the self-esteem of volunteers and users as the library was no longer a passive information storage, but an active place where competence is built, and interpersonal confirmation is reached.

Theme 2: Trust and relationships

The emotional aspect of the Library Ambassador initiative was trust and relationship building. As Participant 3 says, an ambassador is a person who has to facilitate and translate, not only the language, but also the culture and needs. This mediator role is in line with Vårheim (2011), when he described libraries as institutions of trust that help communities grow more together with the help of inclusive programs. To immigrants, who are required to adopt and deal with new bureaucratic structures, trust in the library is an extension of the trust in the Finnish society.

Trust was created by ambassadors by means of empathy and common identity. Participant 2 elaborated, *"We are also immigrants living here. Thus, we can sympathize and realize the problems of immigrants when we communicate with them"*. The fact that people may be known justifies a feeling of trust. This recognition is what Putnam (2000) refers to as bonding social capital connections in which there is a shared experience that offers emotional security. Since ambassadors became trustworthy among staff and customers, they also contributed to bridging social capital, connecting immigrant networks and Finnish institutions together. This is because the two-way connection of the existence of bonding and bridging trust that depicts the dynamic relational structure while maintaining inclusion.

Moreover, consistency and hospitality were also used to build trust. Serving coffee, speaking local languages and taking time to show systems were all indications of care. Participant 4 explained that trust was established by listening to their needs, being patient and interested in helping them feel a part of them. Through this, the ambassadors introduced what Audunson et al. (2011) referred to as the low-intensity meeting place where informal interactions create trust in civic institutions in the long term.

However, there were still challenges when it comes to building trust. Many participants added that sometimes language was a barrier in building trust and long-term relationships. For example, participant 4 acknowledged, *"it can also take time to build trust. However, being patient, respectful, and consistent usually helps overcome these challenges."* This can be seen as an anxiety/uncertainty management theory put forward by Gudykunst (2004), and according to this theory, intercultural trust is built over time as people become less anxious because of having positive interactions with each other.

Apart from that, trust was also mediated by digital communication in hybrid situations. WhatsApp and other social media helped ambassadors update communities on the events, expanding the influence of the library beyond the building. This online trust is in line with Shepherd et al. (2018), who discovered that hybrid outreach enhances the perception of libraries as welcoming and open space to the immigrants. With reference to the interview data, it can be said that, the concept of trust which is the second dimension of Grossman et al. (2021) can be considered as a form of relationship confidence that occurs both in the face-to-face and online context.

Simply put, the integration dimension was highly based on trust and relationships. This is portrayed as Participant 7 put it, “*when people trust you and come back for help, you realize the library is more than a building, it’s a community.*” This observation reflects the essential quality of the Ambassador program. The library ambassadors act as an intermediary party while turning institutional trust into interpersonal relationship and it also helps maintain the civic attachment in the long-term.

Theme 3: Cultural integration and preservation

Cultural integration and preservation is maintaining a balance of learning the Finnish society and the preservation of the heritage. The findings showed that libraries offer a secure intercultural environment for immigrant communities in which these two objectives can be united. Participant 5 noted that library ecosystem is a Finnish culture in itself. You can learn a lot of things there once you pay a visit and see how many there are. Similarly, participant 6 pointed to the fact that the multilingual library resources collections have the advantage of helping immigrants to maintain connection to their cultural identity. More importantly, the participant appreciated the presence of foreign-language sections in the library settings as they provide the opportunity to understand and learn new cultures and wanted to enjoy seeing more cultural events in the future as well.

This relationship encourages the integration approach suggested by Berry (1997), successful adaptation or integration occurs when people move and retain some elements of their original culture and at the same time embrace the ways of living of the new society. This is put into practice in libraries, symbolically and practically, for instance, by the presence of multilingual books,

cultural exhibitions, and intercultural events and programs. Participant 4 remembered that one time there was an event in the library on a multicultural day and people from various backgrounds along with the Finnish community, shared traditional music, food, and stories with each other. This experience is a representation of what Dali (2013) outlined as an intercultural librarianship, a form of program that understands difference as a learning resource, and not as a problem.

However, the integration of culture also showed the structure gaps. Certain ambassadors believed that the non-European cultures were underrepresented. Participant 6 noted, "*In my case at least there are not a lot of Finnish resources to market my culture in Finland*". This criticism agrees with Caidi & Allard (2005), who notified that European libraries tend to underservice the minor linguistic groups. In responding to this imbalance would enhance the inclusivity of the library and its position as a protector of multi heritage.

Further, the cultural engagement was further promoted by the hybrid access. Virtual exhibitions and online catalogues enabled ambassadors to remotely suggest materials, which increased the participation of those who were too shy to visit in person. The access to cultural participation cannot be connected to geography, and, as Shepherd et al. (2018) pointed out, hybrid models make it a democratized process. In Tampere library, digital platforms were used to enhance physical activities, and culture preservation and exchange increased at the same time.

Hence, to summarize, cultural integration and preservation did not work against each other but rather supported one another. The library strengthened the sense of identity of immigrants as it promoted intercultural awareness which is an actual manifestation of Finland multicultural principles.

Theme 4: Community awareness and engagement

The fourth dimension is the community awareness and engagement and it explains how the ambassadors expanded the library and awareness about its services into larger immigrant communities. The participant 3 expressed that they spread the word by creating flyers in our community's languages and sharing them through social media channels and by word of mouth. Hence, it is noticed that ambassadors served as intermediaries of information between the immigrants and library and municipal services and social services. Participant 1 mentioned about recommending their own community members regarding the multi-language services provided by the city official institutions, which proves that the ambassadors acted like navigator of Finnish information setting. In this way, libraries played the integrative role outlined by Boamah (2018) as they offered appropriate assistance so that newcomers can make sense of information in their cultural contexts.

Another aspect in which the community was involved was in the planning of participatory activities. Activities like volunteer days and workshops created a feeling of group ownership. According to participant 4, teamwork between ambassadors and library staff is particularly effective, and the multicultural approach that enables all members of the staff to share ideas and experiences works well. This partnership is a reflection of Listwon and Sen (2009) who discovered that a greater number of immigrants in library governance increases the relevance and sustainability of services.

Apart from that, online communication has increased interactions. The majority of the ambassadors said that they were using social media or WhatsApp groups to promote activities. Participant 5 described that he shares information in their respective community WhatsApp groups, social media accounts and invite personally. In hybrid library settings, these channels reduce the gaps between physical and virtual space of the community. Shepherd et al. (2018) referred to these practices as examples of networked inclusion where online interaction is used to complement in-person involvement to help maintain civic relationships.

Besides, the subject matter of interaction usually went beyond the library utilization to the settlement necessities, which included jobs, housing, and learning the language. With reference to Grossman et al. (2021), these are high-priority information areas among the participants when

settling early in a new country. Participant 4 concluded, “*The most popular with immigrants are language learning programs, job-related workshops, and family and children activities*”. These initiatives help to transform common integration objectives into practical advancements of life, which ultimately enhances the role of the libraries as the learning community centers (van der Linden et al., 2014).

However, ambassadors identified several challenges, especially with regards to digital literacy and awareness. Participant 1 pointed out that there must be a change of the mindset and they are volunteering to make that change happen while highlighting the importance of their role as cultural mediation during the adoption of technology. According to Khoir et al. (2015), digital inclusion cannot exist without social inclusion, therefore the ambassadors project case shows that peer mentorship may become a useful tool to address this gap.

Overall, community awareness and involvement was reflected in both outreach to immigrant communities and into the local discussions inward inside the library planning with the intention of pushing the library visibility to the maximum level. This two-way interaction is a good example of participation in governance in multicultural information institutions.

Theme 5: Political integration

The last dimension of the Grossman et al. (2021) framework is political integration and this was not very explicit, however it was not less important. Though the civic education was not part of the formal responsibilities of the ambassadors, some of them explained some experiences where their civic knowledge was indirectly taught. Participant 4 added that the immigrants would, in some cases, asked general questions concerning life in Finland, including rights, duties, or processes surrounding some of the social services provided by Finnish government or authorities. Therefore, by giving advises and guiding them to the relevant authorities, library ambassadors assisted in enhancing their civic information literacy needs. This goes in line with Mihailidis & Thevenin (2013) who referred that when people possess civic media literacy skills, they have the ability to engage with public information in a more critical way and this enhances their confidence when taking part in civic democratic processes.

Some of the participants noted that the library had events about democracy or citizenship. Participant 5 remembered about information sessions about the elections, about the Finnish society and civic participation workshops. This type of programming corresponds to the ideas of Paola Picco (2008) who claimed that public libraries promote civic engagement by providing civic-education materials. The linguistic mediation of the ambassadors did not always involve direct interventions, but it assisted in letting the information reach to different audiences. Further, participant 6 provided a more subtle idea, stating that, *“This is Finland. If the visitors are interested in something like that, the library can arrange it, and the volunteers will help. It is good to somehow empower them with knowledge and help them make right decisions.”* This statement points out that the library is in a position of an impartial civic group, a place of conversation as opposed to political activism. The difference resembles the concept of Grossman et al. (2021) that libraries facilitate political integration indirectly by empowering rather than influencing.

In theoretical terms, these results are consistent with the civic-community model proposed by Putnam (2000) according to which trust and engagement in local institutions serves as essential requirements of wider political participation. The Tampere Library Ambassadors develop these conditions through the promotion of confidence, social networks, and access to information, which are the prerequisites of democratic inclusion. The more the immigrants feel at ease in the civic culture of the library, the more they are likely to join the civic culture of community decision making, volunteering and ultimately, political discussions.

Nevertheless, there were several weaknesses mentioned during the interviews. Certain ambassadors were of the opinion that political issues are still sensitive or language-specific. In addition, participant 4 admitted that there are those who are slightly shy whether their language knowledge of the Finnish language is not strong. This highlights the fact that, as argued by Johnston and Audunson (2019), civic involvement of immigrants depends on the language and information accessibility. Hence, by increasing the civic resources in more than one language might enhance the role of the libraries in political integration.

Overall, political integration was the least elaborated aspect of the discussions with library ambassadors but this is a potential hidden concern. Through the advancements of civic literacy in

supportive, trust-based relationships, libraries can foster knowledgeable citizens who believe that they can play a role in the democratic life of their new home.

To summarize, in all five dimensions, the Tampere Library Ambassador program demonstrates that in hybrid civic infrastructures, the Tampere Library can potentially operationalize cultural diversity. Inclusion was promoted and facilitated through confidence, strengthened by trust, cultural integration and retention supported identity, involvement was increased by community engagement and political integration was positively leading to long term civic membership. The combination of these dimensions create an all-inclusive representation of immigration integration, in which human connection is considered as the means and end of library practice.

Chapter 06 – Ethical Considerations and Limitations of study

Ethical Considerations

This research has followed strict ethical principles with the intention of ensuring the rights, integrity and well-being of the participants involved in the research. Since the primary focus is placed on the immigrant volunteers who works as ambassadors in the public library, the concerns of privacy, autonomy, and voluntary participation were in the interest of the this study.

Before data collection, an information sheet was given to all the participants explaining the purpose of the research, data collection procedures, possible risks, benefits to be expected, and voluntary nature of participation. This fact was reinforced through words to make the information well understood especially since some of the participants were not original English speakers. This would be a good method that corresponds with ethical guidelines that the participants have to be informed of what is involved in the research before consent (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013).

Informed consent was given by all the participants and indicated their consent to participate and enable the researcher to record and analyze their responses in the interview. They were clearly told that they could leave the interview at any point without having to explain the reason and no adverse impact, which is in line with the autonomy and the respect of persons' provisions of the current research ethics guidelines (British Psychological Society, 2021)

In order to maintain privacy and guarantee the terms of confidentiality, a multi-level data protection was applied in the study. The participants were given pseudo names (e.g. Participant 1-7) and no other identifying features like name, ethnic subgroup or any specific personal information were provided in the final thesis. Any interview recording, transcripts, and analysis notes were placed in encrypted online folders, which only the researcher is able to access. As any physical documents (for example, handwritten notes), they were stored in a secure and locked cabinet. These provisions also made the information of the participants remain confidential during the duration of the study.

Moreover, since the participants were volunteers in a community-based program, further measures were utilized to prevent the possibility of participants being influenced to participate in the study

and influencing their relationship with the library or their volunteer status. The participants were assured that the study had nothing to do with the administrative procedures that are applied at the library and that the research information would not be disclosed to the program coordinators in a personally identifiable manner.

Limitations of the Study

Although the research produced significant results about the importance of Library Ambassadors in facilitating the cultural diversity in hybrid library environments, certain shortcomings must be mentioned.

First, even though the sample size of seven participants is sufficient in qualitative research, but it might not be enough for generalization of the findings. The Library Ambassador group is rather minor and the experience of these volunteers might not correspond to the opinions of all immigrant communities in Tampere and Finland. As Guest et al. (2006) depicted, with reference to the qualitative sampling literature, a larger and more diverse sample size would widen the scope of the participant viewpoints and increase the applicability of findings.

Second, since interviews were based on self-reported experiences, it is possible that the participants gave socially desirable answers or that negative answers were underreported due to discrimination that might occur against negative experiences associated with the program, cultural tensions, or inability to use library services. Even though the researcher used open-ended, non-leading queries, as discussed by Mishler (1991), with the intention of reducing influence of the interviewer, it is not clear that the bias on the responses is completely eliminated. To reduce this threat, interviews were carried out in a secluded and informal setting, and confidentiality was assured on numerous occasions, according to the principles of the qualitative interviewing as outlined by Weiss (1994).

Third, the research is limited in the context of its scope as it is only related to the Library Ambassador Program in Tampere. This program might have a very different structure, goals, and

cultural characteristics than the similar programs that might be promoted in other cities or nations. Therefore, results should be understood in this particular local setting.

Fourth, the interpretive position of the researcher is another source of limitation. Since qualitative analysis is a matter of subjectivity, especially when applied in an interpretive framework of phenomenology, the researcher's cultural background, assumptions and theoretical considerations might have been incorporated to construct or develop a theme. Moreover, the research process remains adaptive although it is impossible to be absolutely neutral in the process of interpretive analysis.

Furthermore, while a few of the participants mentioned specific events or interactions in the library, the research was primarily focused on the interview and did not involve the use of extended ethnographic observations and documentary analysis in a systematic manner. These would have been an addition to the data and offered more analysis. In addition, the study was done in a time period in which the Library Ambassador Program itself was relatively new. As a result, respondents could not have experienced the entire program operations, and the community impacts in the long-term, for instance, permanent integration success, could not be measured in this research.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the study is a productive contribution to understanding the role of immigrant volunteers to cultural diversity, social inclusion and community awareness in a hybrid library setting.

Chapter 07 – Conclusion

This chapter is the final part of the research on “Promoting Cultural Diversity in Hybrid Libraries in Immigrant Communities: Case of Library Ambassadors in Tampere, Finland”. It summarizes the most important research findings, connects them with the theoretical frameworks that were applied to the study, and also reflects about the practical implications.

The study examined the role of Library Ambassadors, who are immigrants, in ensuring cultural diversity, inclusion, and integration in the hybrid library setting in Tampere. Based on the five-dimensional framework provided by Grossman et al. (2021), this study has explored how confidence and self-esteem, trust and relationships, cultural integration and preservation, community awareness and engagement, and political integration can be used by the public libraries to assist immigrants adapt to their new country.

This is a qualitative study conducted through seven in-depth thematically analyzed semi-structured interviews and it revealed that the Library Ambassador program is a learning example of participatory inclusion highlighting the importance of libraries as a space of intercultural communication, community trust and civic learning.

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

This research aimed to learn about the role of libraries and, in particular, hybrid libraries; both digital and physical libraries, as social inclusion mediators. The data for the study were collected based on a qualitative case study approach whereby seven participants (six ambassadors and one founder of the project) were interviewed using semi-structured interviews.

Thematic analysis revealed that there are five significant areas of impact, namely, developing self-esteem and confidence, building trust and relationships, integration while retaining own of culture and its values, community education and involvement, and lastly, the limitations and challenges that needs more improvements. Further, the analysis has shown that the Library Ambassadors Project is a successful bridge in closing cultural, linguistic and social differences between the

immigrants and the Finnish community. The project also turns the library into a participatory citizenship by having the immigrants participate as cultural mediators and volunteers.

Theme 1: Confidence and self-esteem

Ambassadors referred to libraries as places of empowerment of library users and of volunteers. Immigrants were also uncertain about digital resources, loan schemes and services in Finnish language at first and then ambassadors assisted newcomers by getting them through these difficulties through interpersonal guidance which was provided in familiar languages and empathetic tones. This face-to-face interaction has enhanced the confidence, self-esteem while fostering a sense of belonging.

This research supports the idea that the Finnish public libraries provide inclusive and democratic environment for immigrant communities where they feel confident, independent and socially recognized. Further, the Finnish libraries providing access to resources free of charge, for all communities regardless of their ethnic background, while encouraging a friendly environment with the intention of reducing the feeling of exclusion and discrimination among immigrant communities. In addition, the mentoring activities offered by the library ambassadors add value to this process of empowerment and enable newcomers to act as less nervous visitors and more confident members of the community.

It is important stating that the ambassadors themselves became confident due to volunteering. In doing so, through assisting others, they enhanced their own communication skills, digital and linguistic skills which was a concept of self-efficacy as discussed by Bandura (1982). The library was therefore an ecosystem of empowerment in which mutual competence and self-esteem were established through knowledge sharing.

Theme 2: Trust and relationships

Trust was found to be the basis of other integration processes. The ambassadors served as a link between immigrant groups and the library staffs and fostered trust by using regular attendance, kindness, generosity and comprehension of languages other than Finnish. For instance, according to one of the participants, when people realize that we offer our time and services to them, they will be very comfortable.

This social trust and its significant impact was previously discussed by Varheim (2011) and Putnam (2000) who view libraries as institutions of trust, which build social capital. The same principle applied to the role of the ambassadors and the fact that they were all immigrants themselves meant that they were credible intermediaries that can cater to the psychological distance between new immigrants and institutions. However, it is important to recognize that the trust was not only emotional but also structural, which guaranteed the continuous of engagement between two parties.

Theme 3: Cultural integration and preservation

The research concluded that libraries do not foster integration by means of asking immigrants to embrace the new culture entirely but they facilitate healthy intercultural balance. This understanding among the communities can be encouraged and strengthened by organizing diverse set of activities which includes multicultural days, cultural workshops and language cafes and Tampere library ambassadors are planning to hold few events in the upcoming year while keeping these intentions in mind. In addition, having the access to multilingual collections of books and other library materials encouraged the immigrant communities to sustain their own cultural and linguistic identities.

Furthermore, the hybrid nature of the library setting which provides the opportunities to experience not only physical but also the digital space, has empowered the intercultural education among immigrants. The public libraries enable the immigrants the ability to learn and participate in the Finnish culture by observing and engaging without losing their cultural identities by facilitating multilingual materials and events. Hence, it can be noted that this project reflects the vision of

cultural diversity presented by UNESCO (2002) which highlights the importance of development, and not adaptation.

Put simply, integration works best where people are able to preserve their culture whilst assuming a part of the host culture as presented by Berry (1997) in his Acculturation Model. It was this balance that the Library Ambassadors promoted by holding events that embraced diversity and linked the participants with the Finnish traditions and values. Nevertheless, some ambassadors noted that there was a lack of materials in less represented cultures, which also emphasized the importance of ongoing collection development as inclusive.

Theme 4: Community awareness and engagement

The involvement of the community was significant and practical in this context. The ambassadors assist the immigrants to get more opportunities in the fields of employment, education, health, and recreation in libraries with the help of word of mouth, social media, and personal networks. Their outreach is an indication of the Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) model (Savolainen, 1995) in which libraries form daily information centers that allow social participation.

Furthermore, volunteering in the Library Ambassadors Project creates civic responsibility and social integration. As cultural intermediaries, ambassadors will inform others about the library services that are available, encourage them to join and also make Tampere a vibrant multicultural community. This concept resonates with Putnam (2000) and Johnston and Audunson (2019) who state that civic participation fosters social cohesion and democratic resiliency.

Another characteristic of hybrid inclusion that the program demonstrated is the way it extended the library into digital channels while insisting that the physical space was not the only place where library users access e-services. For instance, one participant pointed out, public libraries can never reach everyone. In addition, library ambassadors also reach out to the community with the library. This type of outreach boosted civic literacy and made the library a significant community point of access.

Theme 5: Political integration

Political integration was not directly affected but rather emerged indirectly in the form of rights, duties, and civic engagement. There were ambassadors who led the users towards democracy related events or information regarding Finnish government. Their welcoming and supportive nature goes in line with Johnston (2016), who believes that libraries help to facilitate civic engagements by providing places where people can communicate and learn freely.

Volunteering in the Library Ambassadors Project creates civic responsibility and social integration. The library ambassadors act as cultural intermediaries, and they educate and inform other communities, particularly immigrants, regarding the library services that are provided by the library, while motivating them to be a part of this library community. With reference to Putnam (2000) and Johnston and Audunson (2019), civic engagement has a significant impact on the developments regarding the democratic stability and social integration and cohesion of a country.

To conclude, participants agreed that libraries were not political bodies but in an indirect way, they help foster civic competence, a vital step towards inclusion in democracy. This dimension shows the undiscovered potential of the public libraries to help in the informed society and citizenship by making education and communication accessible, multilingual and inclusive for everyone.

7.2 Practical Implications of Findings

- For Libraries

The Tampere Library Ambassador program offers a model that can be used by libraries that want to better serve the immigrant populations and following mentioned are few steps for guidance.

- Establishing volunteer ambassador programs that are based on organized training in intercultural communication and digital literacy.
- The multilingual resources and the communication should be expanded to accommodate the diversity of users.
- Using hybrid communication measures (social media, multilingual online materials, and other mediums) to address digitally marginalized groups of people.
- Engaging libraries to serve as community intermediaries, which enables the collaboration among local NGOs, schools, and immigrant associations.

Through these strategies, libraries can create a better position for themselves to enhance their mandate as social community centers where in addition to the delivery of information, social integration and democratic engagement are promoted.

- For Policymakers and Integration institutes

The policies of immigrant integration must be able to appreciate libraries as key partners towards ensuring inclusion. The social trust and the cost of integration could be improved through investment in social activities such as the Library Ambassadors as it is community based. They should also focus on:

- Helping with funding and training of the volunteers on the multilingual outreach.
- Promoting cross-sectoral integration among cultural, educational and integration services.
- Using qualitative indicators of social value of library programs such as confidence, participation, and belonging, not just the attendance.

The actions would enhance the role of the library in the overall multicultural policies in Finland, which align with the EU 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Good Governance).

- For Immigrant and Community Organizations.

The community associations need to work together with libraries to develop culturally relevant programs jointly. The performance of the Library Ambassador program proves that initiatives that are led by immigrants may become effective tools of inclusion. Considering these facts, they could focus on:

- Staging cultural events and exhibitions in other languages together.
- Volunteer recruitment via the community.
- Providing feedback of service accessibility and language requirements.

These kinds of partnerships make the process of integration participatory and community-based as opposed to top-down.

7.3 Directions for future research

This study offers some very useful information on the importance of the Library Ambassador program to foster cultural diversity and integration of immigrants in Tampere. Nevertheless, the results also show that there are several directions in which the future study may enhance the knowledge and expand the scope of the findings. One of the significant step would be to increase the number of participants, as well as volunteer ambassadors to other participants, namely library staff, immigrant service users, and municipal integration officers. Such a multi-perspective study would enable researchers to contrast the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding the role of the library in the integration process and identify the areas where the expectations intersect and where they do not. Another interesting consideration would be immigrants who do not use libraries services since they can offer important information regarding the barriers to access and perception that affects engagement.

Another research opportunity is the longitudinal research of the long-term effects of enrolling in Library Ambassador Program. Although this research was able to capture immediate perceptions, it did not follow the development patterns of integration of the volunteers, language development,

social capital formation, or civic engagement over time, as a result of involvement. Longitudinal designs (repeated interviews during several years) would also demonstrate whether the ambassadors become more confident, develop effective social networks, and cultural competencies after the volunteering experience.

The differences between diverse cultural or linguistic groups should also be studied in future. Even though this research involved ambassadors of various backgrounds, it failed to explicitly compare their experiences and to examine how cultural norms, knowledge of languages, or migration histories influence their interactions with library services. Other than that, comparative studies, either between the immigrant communities in Finland, or between the cities and library systems, can provide a better understanding about the structural and cultural factors influencing the effectiveness of hybrid library models in promoting inclusion.

Moreover, it also became evident that the characteristic of political integration was the least developed in the present research, and it might be necessary to conduct a specific research with references to libraries as civic learning sites. Researchers might want to understand whether libraries can be a neutral environment where people can engage in civic discourse, rights-based information or democracy- especially newcomers who might not trust formal institutions. To enhance this dimension, the exploration of novel formats, including multilingual civic workshops, co-created citizen guides, or discussion forums organized in libraries, would be a useful practical insight.

7.4 Closing Remarks on Conclusion

The research has established that hybrid libraries that are supported by community based volunteer programs are useful tools in assisting in the fostering of cultural diversity, social trust, and integration of immigrants. As it was demonstrated by the case of Library Ambassador in Tampere, the intercultural contacts on the basis of empathy, mutual learning, and availability of language may contribute to addressing the population to an inclusive civic environment.

Through the operationalization of the integration framework created by Grossman et al. (2021), this study reveals that libraries can help immigrants to adapt in psychological, social, cultural, and civic aspects. The results also support the notion that inclusion not a one-way process, but rather an ongoing relationship between the immigrants and the host communities through communication and shared experiences.

As participant 7 pointed out, when you have people who come back to seek your assistance as they trust you, you see that the library is not a building it is more of a community. This quote represents the key point of the research which is libraries are not sources of information stored in a place but an environment of trust and community. The Tampere Library Ambassadors represent this change in that they show that even the most basic of voluntary services can bring deep social impact. Their writing shows that the road to cultural diversity and integration is not only about policy or program but people who open their doors, speak other languages, and build continuous understanding within the community.

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