

Voices From Tensta

Report of a pilot project in Tensta, a suburb of Stockholm



Photo credit: Interpeace. March 2014.



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"In Tensta, everyone knows each other (the ethnic communities, the elders, the youth, etc.) and maintains close relationships with his/her neighbor and friends. Despite their various identities, which complement each other, the people of Tensta all have one thing in common: exclusion."

Consultation with a young person,
Tensta, February 2014

About Interpeace

Interpeace is an independent, international peacebuilding organization that is recognized for a proven methodology to help resolve conflict and build peace. Interpeace believes that peace is possible. From 20 years of experience in peacebuilding, Interpeace knows that peace cannot be imported from the outside and must be built from within a society. Interpeace tailors its methodology to each society, together with local partners on the ground. It helps to establish processes of change that connect communities, civil society, governments and the international community.

Interpeace supports peacebuilding initiatives in more than 20 countries and regions in Central America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. As a strategic partner of the United Nations, Interpeace is headquartered in Geneva (Switzerland) and has offices in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Brussels (Belgium), Guatemala City (Guatemala), Nairobi (Kenya) New York (USA) and Stockholm (Sweden).



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Voices from Tensta synthesizes the key findings from a district-wide consultation process that identified the main challenges and sources of tensions that stand in the way of social cohesion.

It captures the energy, enthusiasm, stories, and current challenges as seen by the residents of Tensta today.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Tensta Subway Station. Photo credit: Interpeace. January 2014.

Executive Summary

Protesting youth in urban contexts

Over the last decade many European cities have seen uprisings by young people. The protests, that often turned violent, are their reaction to economic difficulties, lack of opportunities and, more broadly, social marginalization. Young people, especially from the suburbs, took active part in these agitations, demanding their voices to be heard.

Most recently, the suburbs of Stockholm have seen such riots. They brought to light a number of underlying challenges facing Swedish society. Levels of unemployment and poverty in Sweden remain relatively low in comparison to other European countries. There is, however, a significant gap between people with an immigrant background and other Swedes. The cultural and socio-economic differences between these two groups have become more pronounced in recent years.

The district of Tensta, a suburb of Stockholm that is largely home to immigrants, experienced social unrest and protests in 2012 and 2013. Tensta is perceived by many Swedes as one of the most dangerous areas in Sweden, and often portrayed negatively in the media. However, its residents are proud to live in such a multicultural and diverse environment. These differences in perception make it difficult to bridge the gap between residents of Tensta and the rest of Swedish society.

Interpeace's pilot project in Tensta

Interpeace is currently assessing whether its tested inclusive and participatory approach could help address some of the emerging tensions in the suburbs of Sweden's capital city. Recognizing the need to better understand the factors undermining social cohesion in Tensta,

Interpeace launched a district-wide pilot project in the fall of 2013.

The project engaged local actors such as the police, teachers, religious leaders, families and young people in a consultation process to take stock of the challenges in Tensta. Initial findings revealed that young people have the potential to play a central role in Tensta and could be a driving force for positive change.

Recognizing this positive force, Interpeace engaged Tensta's young population in an innovative and constructive way with the use of participatory video. Giving young participants a video camera they produced a video documentary that told their stories, their hope, and their dreams.

Main challenges identified by the people of Tensta

The findings revealed the complex nature of the challenges facing Tensta today. While all local actors confirmed that Tensta faces a multitude of problems, they also pointed out that there are positive forces in the district, such as the potential of young people to bring about change.

- Identity

As in many other immigrant suburbs, Tensta's youth are often caught between two worlds: the traditions of their parents who immigrated to Sweden and modern Swedish culture. Navigating the complexities of being a young person, an immigrant and a Swede is not easy for many of them.

Despite the challenges of forming their identity, young people from Tensta have developed a strong bond with their district. They spoke passionately about Tensta as a multicultural and community-based area.

- Marginalization

The consultations also revealed that the residents of Tensta feel excluded from the rest of Swedish society. This feeling is fueled by a perceived neglect from state authorities. Tensta residents perceive that the local municipality for example is not providing Tensta residents with the same amount of services as their neighbors in the area of Spånga. The people of Tensta have expressed that politicians are disconnected from their realities and that they do not take their needs into consideration when drafting policies that affect them.

The way Tensta has been portrayed by the media is another factor contributing to this feeling of marginalization. Journalists often reinforce existing negative stereotypes about the area and its residents. However, the young people Interpeace met in Tensta challenged this negative image of their neighborhood and were eager to dispel these stereotypes. All residents met were extremely proud to be from Tensta.

- Socio-economic challenges

Unemployment and economic disparities are another obstacle for people in Tensta. With difficult socio-economic conditions come rising levels of criminality, which in turn discourages businesses from setting up a shop in the neighborhood. This limits local economic opportunities in the district.

Despite these challenges, residents are generally very positive and spoke of their dreams, especially with regards to the importance of achieving higher levels of education. Moreover, there are activities and initiatives in Tensta that give reason for hope, such as youth centers that offer tailored support for former criminals or guidance for young job seekers.

The following report provides the findings and insights which have emerged from the Interpeace pilot project in Tensta. In June, the findings from this report were shared and reviewed in the framework of a workshop with local stakeholders. Potential areas of future work were also explored with participants.

INTRODUCTION



Tensta Subway Station. Photo credit: Interpeace. December 2014.

Introduction

The recent years have seen uprisings in Swedish suburbs that have a high number of migrants among their population¹. The violence and riots shook local residents and politicians and put a spotlight on what many see as insufficient social integration in Sweden.

Sweden is home to a multitude of nationalities and has one of the most generous refugee policies among Scandinavian countries. The steady influx of asylum-seekers and refugees, family members of migrants who are already resident in the country, as well as foreign students has now reached record levels².

Sweden's long-successful economic formula of capitalism interwoven with its substantial social welfare system was challenged in the last two decades, especially by the global economic downturns. Similar to global trends, rising social inequality and neoliberal capitalism's drive toward privatization and the cuts of public services, illustrate austerity measures that people elsewhere are also facing.

Young people, who represent a quarter of the world's population³, are the most affected by the current challenges: youth unemployment in particular has become a major international crisis⁴. New 'youth' movements and uprisings have emerged as a consequence of the lack of socio-economic opportunities and of the space for self-fulfillment.

Youth: a rising force

There is growing recognition that the ongoing global economic and socio-political crisis has created a 'global social youth movement' that is

stronger than ever. From occupying public squares across Europe and in the United States to the mass demonstrations in the Arab world, young people have been taking action and are demanding change and to have their voices heard.

The prolonged global crisis is fueling tensions, and fostering protests. In many instances, young people have played key roles in agitating for change, but the reforms they are calling for speak to society as a whole, not just to their generation.

Interpeace, an international peacebuilding organization working in more than 20 countries around the world, believes that youth are a key stakeholder and can be a positive driving force in shaping the future. Recognizing the importance of engaging marginalized sectors of society, Interpeace has for a number of years strategically worked with youth as one of the ways of helping reduce violence and consolidating peace in fragile and/or conflict-affected countries. By fostering their engagement in inclusive change processes, the Interpeace experience has demonstrated the value of involving the youth sector in dialogue to both better understand the circumstances of the challenges they face and to engage them in a meaningful role.

It is in this context that Interpeace undertook a pilot project in Tensta to explore whether Interpeace's inclusive and participatory approach could be useful in the context of emerging tensions in the suburbs of Stockholm.

¹ The latest episode of violence occurred in May 2013 in Husby (a district on the outskirts of Stockholm), when a group of 40-60 young men set over a hundred cars on fire vandalized communal as well as private property following the shooting of a 69-year-old man in Husby. The unrest escalated to larger rioting over five days and spread to neighboring suburbs and the cities of Gothenburg, Malmö and Örebro.

² FOCUS MIGRATION. Country Profile: Sweden. No. 18 December 2009.

³ Twenty five percent of the world's population is aged between 10 and 24 years old. Source: Population Reference Bureau. "The World's Youth, 2013 Data Sheet", 2013 (<http://www.prb.org/pdf13/youth-data-sheet-2013.pdf>).

⁴ Coy, Peter. "The Youth Unemployment Bomb", *BusinessWeek*, February 02, 2011.

The Tensta Pilot

Drawing on lessons learned and parallels from its work with the youth sector, Interpeace launched a pilot project in Tensta, a suburb of Stockholm. Located on the outskirts of Sweden's capital city, Tensta is an area whose residents are largely immigrants. Tensta has been affected by sporadic episodes of urban violence over the last decade, and is generally perceived as a dangerous place by many Swedes.

The objective of the pilot project was to engage local actors, especially those working with the youth sector, from state and society in a consultation process about critical sources of tension and identifying possible options to address them. To better understand the challenges that residents are facing in the district of Tensta, Interpeace undertook consultations with a wide-range of stakeholders, that included young people and families from Tensta, municipality representatives, civil society and social actors, local associations, teachers, police, and religious leaders.

The consultative process created a better understanding of the challenges youth are facing and the way the people of Tensta are affected by the tensions related to youth. It also helped to identify key actors in the district and the constraints some of the current initiatives.

In order to engage youth in an in-depth discussion about the opportunities and challenges they face in Tensta, Interpeace used participatory video as a tool for initiating dialogue⁵. A number of young people from Tensta were selected to participate in the creation of a short video documentary capturing the voices and perceptions of youth.

In accordance with the Interpeace approach, 27 focus group discussions were organized in Tensta with some 50 stakeholders. The findings of this report were validated on 3rd June 2014 with key stakeholders from the area. The consultations opened a discussion on exploring options for the continuation of the pilot project.

This report captures the findings of the consultations and desk research Interpeace conducted from October-March 2013. Following a short overview of Tensta's recent history, the report looks at the main challenges that were identified by stakeholders during the consultation process. These challenges include identity, marginalization and socio-economic challenges. This section is followed by a short overview of the different actors and ongoing youth-related initiatives in Tensta. Finally, the report considers options for future implementation.

⁵ The use of video documentation is at the heart of the Interpeace approach. It is used to stimulate dialogue, but also to link people that usually do not meet due to cultural, ethnic and geographical constraints. In the context of Sweden and considering the technology era in which we are living, the use of video was the right tool as a way to get youth engaged in a dialogue. Participatory video is a set of

techniques to involve a group or community in shaping and creating their own film. The idea behind this is that making a video is easy and accessible, and is a great way of bringing people together to explore issues, voice concerns or simply to be creative and tell stories. (Source: www.insightshare.org/pv/pv-nutshell).

THE STORY OF TENSTA



*The Municipality Building of Spånga-Tensta's City District.
Photo credit: Interpeace. January 2014.*

The Story of Tensta

Development of Sweden's suburbs

During the first five decades of the nineteenth century, the area of Tensta, located on the outskirts of Stockholm, was characterized by farmland which was used as a terrain for military maneuvers by the army⁶. The birth of Tensta as a residential area dates back to the early 1960s, when the Swedish government undertook the colossal project of building one million new home units to respond to the housing shortage in Sweden.

Between 1965 and 1974, new housing units were built around Sweden's largest cities. The national project, which aimed to provide housing for the Swedish middle-class, was a response to the growing number of farmers moving to large urban areas in search of better living conditions.

However, the newly built housing units did not suit the intended target population as many felt the suburbs were too far from the city centers and disliked the architecture and design of the newly-built apartments, creating a surplus of housing on the outskirts of Sweden's large cities.

This situation was further compounded by delays in the construction of basic infrastructure and public transportation. In Tensta for example, the set-up of provisional bus lines and delays in the construction of the metro line as well as unfinished footpaths and inadequate social service added to people's daily burdens⁷, further discouraging Swedes from moving to the newly constructed suburb.

This coincided with a period of reforms on migration policies in Sweden, which opened the door to continuous waves of immigration from the late 1960s. Newly arrived immigrants settled in the newly constructed suburbs all over Sweden's large cities⁸.

Large waves of migrants and newcomers settled in Tensta in the past three decades because rents were affordable and family members of immigrant communities had already settled in the area. Like many suburbs of large cities around the world, Tensta was known to be a 'transitional location' where migrants that had initially settled in Tensta and now reached a more comfortable social status, moved to another area of Stockholm and were replaced by impoverished and less well-established residents⁹.

However, this phenomenon of 'selective migration' has gradually shifted in recent years, making Tensta a neighborhood where people come to stay.

Spånga and Tensta: one district, two worlds

Tensta was an independent municipal district until 1997, when reforms undertaken by the City of Stockholm prompted its fusion with the neighboring district of Spånga¹⁰. Spånga is a high-income neighborhood with individually designed houses, whose residents are mainly Swedish. In contrast, Tensta is a low income area

⁶ Tensta is situated on the Järva field, which was used as a military training ground from the early 1900's. Nowadays the buildings constructed between 1960-1970 share space with graves, rune stones, old churches and the former military training grounds that have now been turned into a protected nature reserve.

⁷ Hall, Thomas. *Stockholm: the Making of a Metropolis*, 2008, pp.107-108.

⁸ Ziliacus, C., "A Million New Housing Units: The Limits of Good Intentions", *New Geography*, 2013.

⁹ Andersson, Roger. Bråmås, Åsa. "Selective migration in Swedish Distressed Neighborhoods: Can Area-based Urban

Policies Counteract Segregation Processes? *Housing Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2004, p.518.

¹⁰ Reforms included the introduction of 18 City Districts and Councils to enhance and strengthen local democracy and participation, to improve the quality of municipal services and to allow for greater efficiency. Today, the number of City Districts has been lowered to 14, one of which is the City District of Spånga-Tensta from of Stockholm's 14 municipal city districts, encompassing the areas of Tensta, Bromsten, Solhem, Lunda, Sundby and Flysta.

where a large part of the population has a foreign background (table 1).

Table 1: Population in Spånga-Tensta and in Sweden, by age, and with a foreign background for 2012¹¹

	Spånga-Tensta	Sweden
Population	38,282	9,555,893
Men	19,427	4,765,905
Women	18,855	4,789,988
Population with foreign background¹², (share of the total population)	21,865 (57.12%)	1,797,889 (18.81%)

Note: Official statistics for the City District of Spånga-Tensta include data from both areas, which are socio-economically very different. If numbers were to be dissociated, statistics would likely show that the percentage of the population with foreign background is much higher in Tensta. An article released in 2008 states that for that year, 85.9 percent of the population in Tensta had a foreign background¹³.

At the time of the fusion, it was argued that Tensta could positively benefit in merging with Spånga. But according to many, the high hopes were not translated into positive conditions. In fact, many residents of Tensta indicate that the two neighborhoods do not really have much in common on which to build and bring them closer. The clear economic and social difference and

lifestyles add to this challenge. Moreover, large roads and a small river geographically separate Spånga and Tensta.



The City District of Spånga-Tensta.

Source:

<http://stockholmmaccommodation.wikia.com/wiki/Sp%C3%A5nga-Tensta>

Tensta today

Because of recent episodes of urban violence, Tensta is today perceived by many Swedes as one of the most dangerous areas in Sweden¹⁴. Despite negative images conveyed in the media, Tensta's residents affirm being proud to live in such a multicultural and welcoming area. These differences in perception make it difficult to bridge the gap between residents of Tensta and the rest of Swedish society.

¹¹

<http://statistikomstockholm.se/omradesfakta/index.html>

¹² The population with a foreign background represents people born abroad and people born in Sweden with both parents born abroad.

¹³ The City of Stockholm Executive Office, "Youth work and projects in Tensta", p. 4.

¹⁴ <http://www.stockholmnews.com/more.aspx?NID=8542>

MAIN CHALLENGES



Tensta Subway Station. Photo credit: Interpeace. December 2013.

Main challenges

The stakeholders that were involved in the consultative process pointed out the following challenging issues: **identity, marginalization, and socio-economic challenges**. Some of the issues presented in this report are cross-cutting and highlight the horizontal nature of the challenges as seen by the people of Tensta (diagram 1).

All stakeholders consulted – teachers, principals, local police officers, members of a local parental association, religious leaders from the Muslim and Christian communities, social workers, youth workers, parents, students as well as disenfranchised youth – agreed that there were many conflicting issues and problems in Tensta, but also stressed that there are positive driving forces coming from the district.

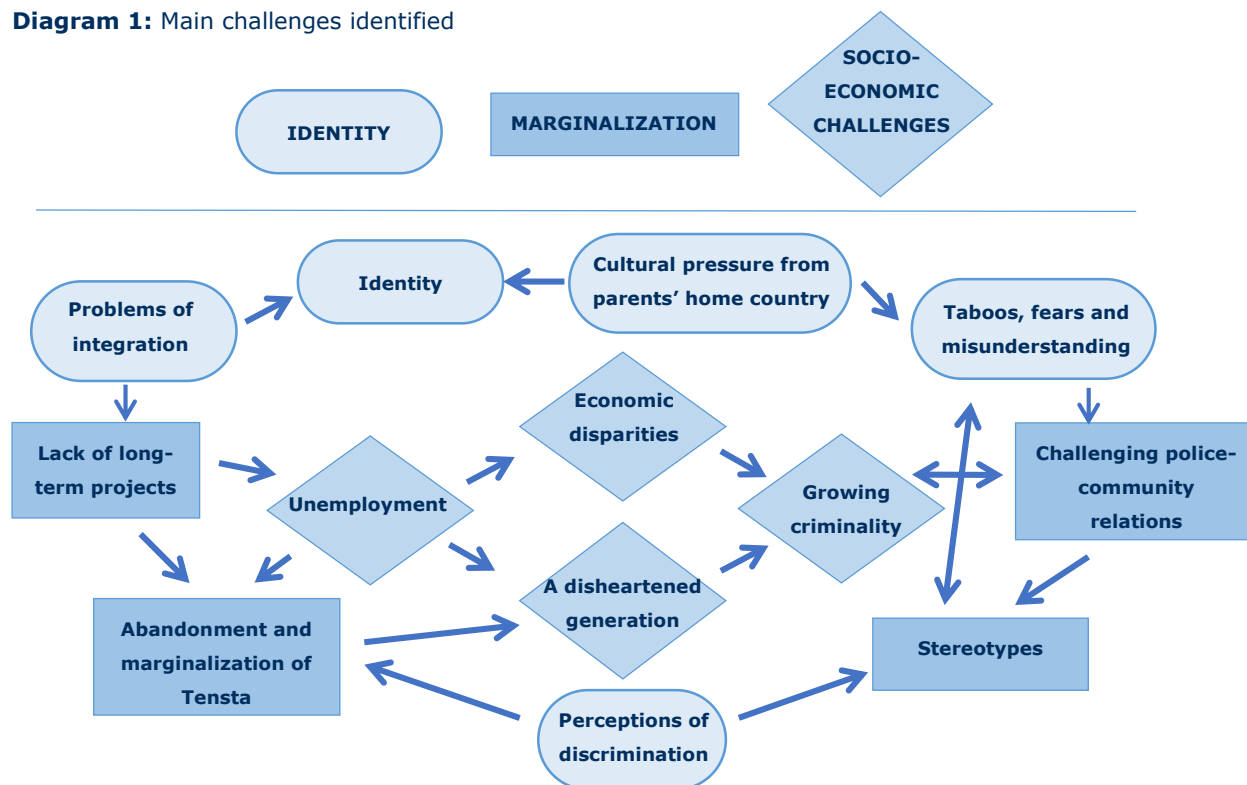
The challenges and opportunities for change can be divided into three main areas: 1) identity and the limited levels of integration with Swedish

society, the relationship with the home country, the cultural background of the parents as well as the creation of an identity that is based on the suburb as the principal foundation of identity; 2) the marginalization of Tensta and its residents and feeling of exclusion from Swedish society, which can be influenced by external actors such as the political elite and the media; and 3) the socio-economic challenges, specifically unemployment, the quality of education and criminality. It is important to note that all these issues have not only been identified as challenges but as potential opportunities for change in Tensta.

The findings of this research are based on participatory consultations and not the subject of an extensive academic analysis. This document seeks to bring to light some of the main challenges affecting the population of Tensta and reflects their views and perceptions.



Street of Tensta. Photo credit: Interpeace. February 2014.

Diagram 1: Main challenges identified

Issues of concern that emerged during the consultations, classified in three main themes: identity, marginalization and socio-economic challenges. The arrows indicate the influence of one issue on another.

IDENTITY



Drawing at a Youth Center. Photo credit: Interpeace. January 2014.

Identity

***"...I have two identities...in Sweden,
I am an immigrant from the
suburb...but when I go to my home
country of Iran, I am considered a
Swede."***

**Consultation with a youth worker, Rinkeby,
December 2013.**

This quote describes the complexity and the struggles of youth and their identity in Tensta, and in Sweden. Navigating the complexities of being a young person, an immigrant, a Swede and a suburbanite all at the same time is not a simple task. It requires understanding and using different cultural codes and references in a context where adults often have high expectations and where sensitivities can vary according to status and culture. This was especially expressed by young women who are often caught between the rules of their native countries and those of the Swedish state where they experience exclusion.

Sweden: a multicultural society

Sweden has had a long history of welcoming migrants from many countries around the world for the last 40 years. Until the early 1970s, most of the immigration in Sweden consisted of labor migrants from neighboring European countries, especially from Northern Europe and the Balkans¹⁵. Today, it is estimated that the population with a foreign background has reached 20.75 percent of the total population,



'The Tree of Flags' represents Tensta's cultural diversity.

Photo credit: Interpeace. January 2014

and is largely concentrated on the outskirts of Sweden's large cities¹⁶.

Over the last 30 years, the district of Tensta has consistently received waves of migrants¹⁷. More than 85 percent of the population has a foreign background, and Tensta counts more than 30 nationalities among its residents¹⁸. In January 2014, Somalis represented 15.8 percent of the population in the area of Spånga-Tensta, Iraqis¹⁹ 13.9 percent and Turks 9.9 percent. Among these groups, youth represent a large percentage of the population: 14.4 percent of the

¹⁵ Due to a much stricter policy enacted in 1968 for non-Nordic labor immigration, labor immigration decreased, except from Finland.

¹⁶ Out of the 9.6 million inhabitants of Sweden, the population with a foreign background represents 20.75 percent (including native-borns with two foreign-born parents), or 15.9 percent if we only consider the foreign-born. (Source: Stockholm's statistics, http://www.scb.se/sv/Hitta-statistik/Statistikdatabasen/Variabelvaljare/?px_tableid=sd_extern%3aUtlSvBakgTot&rxid=825bb12e-45b4-468b-8828-d617b10149ac)

¹⁷ EUROCITIES - NLAO. "Demographic change and active inclusion in Stockholm: ABC parental support programme", *Cities for Active Inclusion*, June 2012.

¹⁸ The City of Stockholm Executive Office, "Youth work and projects in Tensta" & data from the Municipality of Stockholm, Statistics Department.

¹⁹ Official statistics with regards to the share of the population with a foreign background refer to the country of origin with no distinction of cultural and ethnic background.

population is aged 16-24, of which 18.6 percent are from Somalia, 15.4 percent from Iraq and 11.8 percent from Turkey²⁰.

Perceptions of discrimination

While foreign communities that have settled in Sweden enrich the nation's cultural landscape, many of those consulted spoke of how challenging it is for immigrants to find their place in the Swedish society. Young and old people pointed out that they were often confronted with discrimination because of their skin color or nationality, especially when they ventured out of the district of Tensta and into the city centre of Stockholm. A lack of Swedish language skills also contributes to this perceived feeling of discrimination.

"When a Somali speaks bad Swedish, it is seen as negative. When a British speaks bad Swedish, it is accepted."

**Consultation with a youth worker, Rinkeby,
December 2013**

Always outsiders

Young people spoke of relatives or friends that moved out of Tensta to other nicer and 'wealthier' districts but that they were never accepted or fully integrated in the new neighborhoods. This further highlights the perception of never being fully accepted or integrated in Swedish society no matter the area you live in. Nonetheless, people consulted also admitted that these perceptions are often not quite accurate, but the result of misunderstanding, lack of communication and absence of closer relationships. This was especially emphasized with regards to the relationship between young people and the authorities. This 'distance' has reinforced the

sense of exclusion of youth from Swedish society and has fostered animosity with law enforcement and other representatives of Swedish authorities, not just in Tensta but in many urban centers across Sweden.

"One of my friends moved out of the suburb because he had been promoted. He bought a house in a nice neighborhood where he was the only person with an immigrant background. His neighbors, treated him differently – almost as if he was a criminal. They never accepted him. Despite higher social status, people with an immigrant background always seem to naturally cause suspicion and are treated as outsiders."

**Consultation with a youth worker, Rinkeby,
December 2013**

The lack of interaction between those with an immigrant background and Swedes has been mentioned by the majority of stakeholders as contributing to the creation of 'ghettos' but also generating unfounded fears in people and distancing citizens. Many indicated that despite the various integration efforts and programmes that have been set up, there is a perception that these have fallen short.

However, programmes in Stockholm, and Sweden in general, identified the integration of immigrants as a main policy priority. Institutions and national actors in Sweden realized some decades ago that the integration of immigrants plays a crucial role in accruing the maximum benefits of immigration in terms of human capital and economic progress. In fact, Sweden was one of the first European countries that recognized

²⁰ Source: Municipality of Stockholm.

the importance of immigrant integration. Already in 1965, the first courses in Swedish for immigrants were launched²¹. Whereas in countries such as Denmark, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands, integration conditions have become increasingly restrictive in recent years. In Sweden the participation in integration courses is still voluntary and no integration requirements must be met for long-term residency or citizenship²². In addition, the Swedish integration programmes are characterized by an increasing number of labor-market related integration measures.

The rationale behind the flexibility of integration requirements in Sweden has a cultural dimension. Some Swedes met during the consultations shared that imposing codes and cultural behaviors on others goes against Swedish 'mentality'. This factor could partially explain why integration measures are perceived to have had a limited success in Sweden.

However, data collected from the OECD and Eurostat seem to indicate limited integration outcomes in Sweden, at least in terms of labor market participation. This is consistent with the findings of an OECD report on labor market integration of 2007 that indicates that half of the immigrants take up the offer of free courses²³. In fact, only 25 percent of the immigrant population takes full advantage of the possibilities of taking language classes²⁴. These statistics seem to corroborate, to some extent, this perception of the limited success of integration programmes.

Identity crisis

Many consulted spoke of being somewhat 'lost in identity' as they are always viewed as foreigners, despite having been born and raised in Sweden²⁵. It was clear that young people who were born in Sweden to immigrant parents, have a link to their parents' homeland that is often more than merely symbolic. It is genuine in the sense that their parents maintain communication across borders, and that they identify with their parents' homeland, even if they have never traveled outside Sweden.

"Young people whose parents immigrated to Sweden never really stand on two feet. They sometimes stand on their Swedish foot, and on other occasions, they need to stand on their parents' home country's foot. But often they don't know on which foot to stand; it's like they are flying and never feel grounded."

Consultation with youth, Tensta, January 2014

These young people who are second generation immigrants indicated that they have several identities that link them to multiple countries. They spoke of the difficulty of carrying two or more identities and trying to come to terms with defining themselves in a way that accurately reflects their emotional connection and symbolic belonging. Young people feel that one identity, by itself, does not fully capture the essence of who they are or what they believe. Divided between Sweden and their parent's homes countries, young people found it hard to know on which 'foot to stand'. Depending on the person

²¹ Dingy-Kyrklund, E., "Citizenship, Migration, and Social Integration in Sweden: A Model for Europe?", CERIS Working Paper No. 52, Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement, Toronto, 2007.

²² Wiesbrock, Anja, "The Integration of Immigrants in Sweden: a Model for the European Union?", University of Oslo, Department of Private Law, 2013.

²³ Lemaître, G., "The Integration of Immigrants into the Labour Market: the Case of Sweden", OECD DELSA / ELSA / WD / SEM, Paris, n°3, 2007.

²⁴ Wiesbrock, Anja, "The Integration of Immigrants in Sweden: a Model for the European Union?", *op.cit.*

²⁵ This situation is very common according to many youth in the consultations. The Swedish legislation provides every child born in Sweden with the Swedish citizenship.

they are speaking with and the environment they interact in, they adapt their discourse and identity.

A City District worker that has been working for many years with Tensta residents also recognized the challenging situation of the young people of Tensta. This interlocutor indicated that young people in the district were not free to make a clear choice about their identity because of parental pressures to keep close ties to the homeland, but also because they do not know that they have the possibility to make a choice.

"Many young people in Tensta are hostages of history, stuck between the parents' past and their present in Sweden. However, they need to know that they have the possibility to make a choice with regards to their identity. This would help them to accept who they are and live peacefully with their multidimensional identity. "

Consultation with a representative of the Spånga-Tensta City District, Spånga, January 2014

Two cultures, two generations

There are few changes in family values over generations and young people refer predominantly to their parent's cultural values. However, it was clear that many youth who were consulted felt that they struggled with more than the cultural divide between Swedish culture and that of their parents' home countries, but with a generational gap. Adolescents and teenagers who seek to define their own identity and

independence from their parents often experience this generational gap. Parents, who maintain close ties to their homeland, also spoke of being torn between the aspirations they have for their kids and the realities of Swedish society.

The majority of the population with a foreign background in Tensta comes from Somalia, Iraq and Turkey and arrived in Sweden as refugees or asylum seekers²⁶. Social workers, police officers and youth all spoke of parents bringing back traumatic experiences and events from their war-torn homeland. The emotional distress from post-traumatic events adds to the family stress and generational gap between parents and their children. Young people indicated that parents always had high expectations and didn't understand why their children complained of having a difficult life in Tensta when the situation back home was much worse.

In some cases, youth were challenged by changes in family dynamics and roles that occurred after coming to Sweden. Often it was easier for children to learn a new language and culture, which in some cases shifted the power structure in the family with kids taking on more responsibilities at home and often becoming the "heads of the family". These changes in the family dynamics and roles are difficult to deal with and often create tension among family members and a generational crisis.

The challenges are both internally within the family and externally between families and the outside world.

²⁶ A majority of the Somalis sought refuge in Sweden foremost as a result of threats and persecutions from Al Shabaab, but also because they were subjected to abuse and discrimination due to their belonging to a minority clan. The wars and subsequent periods of instability in Afghanistan and Iraq for the past decade also caused a comprehensive flow of refugees in Sweden. Source :www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Fakta-om-migration/Migration-till-Sverige---bakgrund-och-fakta/Somalier/Somalier-i-Sverige.html

[om-migration/Migration-till-Sverige---bakgrund-och-fakta/Somalier/Somalier-i-Sverige.html](http://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Fakta-om-migration/Migration-till-Sverige---bakgrund-och-fakta/Somalier/Somalier-i-Sverige.html) ;
www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Fakta-om-migration/Migration-till-Sverige---bakgrund-och-fakta/Afghaner/Afghaner-i-Sverige.html ;
www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Fakta-om-migration/Migration-till-Sverige---bakgrund-och-fakta/Irakier/Irakier-i-Sverige.html

Challenges external to family include:

- language barriers;
- difficulties navigating the welfare system and bureaucracy;
- challenges adapting to new processes;
- culture shock;
- discrimination and racism.

Challenges internal to family include:

- changes in family roles;
- power shifts;
- identity crisis;
- anxiety;
- sense of disheartenment, especially among young people.

Parental support, not parental education

Some stakeholders pointed out the low levels of education of parents and their limited Swedish language skills. This was not shared by young people who attested that their parents indeed need support, but not more education. This situation reveals a gap between what parents need in terms of support and what is perceived as a need for parental education.

The parents' disconnect from school life, and more generally from the 'system', also contributed to the perception that parents are not participating in their children's lives – and therefore for social workers and teachers to take on, to some degree, some parental responsibilities. However, by looking more closely, it was noted that the reason for this disconnect is not due to lack of interest from parents, but due to language barriers.

In fact, immigrant parents consider education for their children as one of their highest priorities, yet many find it extremely difficult to be involved in school issues, be it actively monitoring their children's educational experience or participating in meetings with teachers. The reason for this is often as simple as not having a person who can speak to the parent in his or her native language at school, and the parent not receiving vital written information in his or her native language. The result is that parents are effectively 'barred' from meaningful participation in their children's education, as well as from access to critical information concerning their children's education.

Taboos and fears

Immigrant parents have brought back with them diverse cultural baggage but also a distrust of authorities from their homeland. The application and enforcement of legal rules tend to be more mechanical in Sweden than in some war-torn countries, where the idea of rule of law are more flexible and situational. As a result, many immigrant parents maintain a deep mistrust of formal institutions, especially with regards to the police and the judicial system. These institutions often address situations that parents consider should be handled privately in order to minimize the risk of public scrutiny and shame.

Attitudes of immigrants and refugees towards 'external' support, such as requesting social aid, can be perceived as shameful for parents, especially vis-à-vis their cultural group or community in Tensta. The relationship with financial aid and money varies vastly according to socio-cultural backgrounds. Some students indicated that asking for money was so taboo that they did not even dare ask their parents for pocket money or money for extracurricular school activities. Some social workers and teachers alleged that the financial aid coming from social welfare benefits to help support families is often sent to the home countries as

remittances, whereas this money should be used for their children's extracurricular activities²⁷.

A small number of youth are sometimes forced to drop out of school due to family pressure and cultural norms from the parents' home country. Social workers spoke of young people who decided to stop their education and studies because upon graduating from the gymnasium and applying for university studies, students no longer have access to social benefits or financial assistance. As such, young people often opt, sometimes under parental pressure, to stop their education so that their families can continue having access to social benefits and assistance.

In addition, studying at university sometimes entails seeking scholarships and student loans. But for some Muslims and members of other faiths taking out student loans means payments of interests, which is not-compliant with their religious principles. As such, some young graduates prefer not to apply to university and choose other career paths.

Some of the parental and family tensions can be attributed to a lack of understanding about the legal, institutional and social structure of Swedish society. Having to rely heavily at times on inter-community structures and relationships, some of the parental misconceptions of Swedish society are rooted in informal and social networks that do not always have access to the right information. This was highlighted in a conversation with some parents that believe their children can be taken away by Swedish authorities if they are not giving them sufficient 'freedom'. The lack of information concerning children's rights and parental duties fuels fears among some parents.

"Parents are afraid of Swedish laws. They think the police can take their children if they spank them. As a result, parents let their children, especially boys, behave as they want."

Consultation with a civil worker of a parental support association, Rinkeby, December 2013

Where you live is where you belong

As a result of being torn between different identities and feeling marginalized by Swedish society, the young people of Tensta have created their own local identity and sub-culture. The value of identity, which is closely linked to the idea of citizenship, is gradually being replaced by a subculture that is rooted in the area where you live and where adolescents are shutting themselves off from the established society, authorities, and the family culture.

Being surrounded by friends and belonging to a group is a crucial stage in the life of a young person. This sense of belonging comes in part from the cultural background and suburban and hip-hop culture originally coming from the United States and the United Kingdom.

"I have a group, I have a voice; I don't feel alone."

Consultation with a youth worker, Rinkeby, December 2013

Loyalty is at the core of this 'Tensta sub-culture identity' and runs deep. It goes to the point where considering to leave Tensta is judged as a betrayal. Many stakeholders consulted in Tensta and Rinkeby agreed that if a friend or a peer moved out of the suburb, everyone would call

²⁷ Whereas data from remittances is deficient due to the lack of information on recipient countries, the 2012 World Bank report reveals that Sweden is one of the largest sending countries in Northern Europe. (For more details, see: <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/E>

XTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:22759429~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html). (Source: Engdahl, Mattias. "Migrant Remittances. An Overview of Global and Swedish Flows", The Nordic Africa Institute, Policy Notes, n°5, 2009, p.3).

him a traitor. A young person used the metaphor of a pot of crabs to best describe this phenomenon. Individually, the crabs can easily escape from the pot, whereas if numerous, they grab at each other in a competition which prevents any crab from escaping and ensures their collective demise.

"We are like crayfish in a bucket...every time we want to try and leave Tensta for a better place, we are pulled back and reminded of where we come from."

Consultation with youth worker, Tensta, December 2013

As with many sub-cultures, Tensta is also characterized by its own language, referred to as "Rinkeby Swedish"²⁸. Teachers and members of local associations noted that "Rinkeby Swedish" is predominately used by teenagers and has become an important sign of belonging to the Tensta sub-culture. It seems that the linguistic phenomenon and similar linguistic variants started emerging some 20 years ago in the large city suburbs of Stockholm, Uppsala, Malmö, and Gothenburg, largely in immigrant neighborhoods.

"The youth love Tensta, but they don't associate it with the rest of Sweden. The 'sub-culture' they have created is not related to Swedish culture and society."

Consultation with a religious leader, Tensta, December 2013

A gender divide

Young men and young women experience the 'Tensta sub-culture' in very different ways. Young women and girls are often more protected by their parents because of cultural norms and spend a good part of their lives indoors and surrounded by female friends and relatives. Young men and boys however, usually socialize outdoors and outside of the home. As such, the idea of creating a family unit with other young people living in similar circumstance and joining the sub-culture is indeed attractive to a young man with a difficult environment at home.

This difference between young men and women was also confirmed during a consultation with young people during a community mapping exercise (see below), which clearly showed the gender differences when it comes to areas for socializing in Tensta²⁹. While young men spend more time outdoors in parks or in places sheltered from the cold, like parking lots and basements during winter, young women often socialize indoors, at home and in after-school structures or sports clubs. During summer, dynamics shift and all young people seek outdoors activities. However, girls and boys stick with their groups of friends and tend not to mix.

Love and pride for the neighborhood

However, despite this sub-culture identity, many consulted said they were proud of being from Tensta. When asked about the one place they felt was home, people mentioned Tensta. The cultural richness of Tensta and the welcoming nature of its residents have been cited as the main reasons for this strong feeling of belonging and pride for the area.

²⁸ The 'Rinkeby Swedish' is a mixture of Swedish and Somali and uses words of slang. It is commonly used by criminal youth in the Tensta-Rinkeby area.

²⁹ During a focus group discussion, young people created a community map of Tensta. The exercise revealed that

women and men had different reference landmarks and went to different places, but also that these places depended on the season. For example, young men tend to gather in parking lots during winter, whereas women go to associations or do indoor sports.

"Tensta residents are very warm and welcoming. The people give love and receive back from their neighbors and friends. This is unique... you can't get it anywhere else."

**Consultation with a student of the local high school,
Tensta, December 2013**

How can the gaps be bridged?

Youth in Tensta face many cultural, generational and personal barriers. These various pressures have an impact on young people, who often encounter difficulties in finding their place in society. Adding to such complex issues, perceptions of discrimination and negative stereotypes have produced a generation that is subject to frustration and vulnerable to violence. How can the gap between youth from the suburbs and youth from other districts be bridged? How can parents, children and relevant district stakeholders be brought together to collectively discuss the challenges they face?



Community mapping exercise. The colored post-it represent places where boys and girls socialize in Tensta (blue for winter and red for summer). Photo credit: Interpeace. March 2014

MARGINALIZATION



Bridge separating Spånga from Tensta. Photo credit: Interpeace. January 2014.

Marginalization

During the consultations, many people indicated that marginalization is one of the main challenges for the district as it hinders integration and hampers social cohesion. Youth, social workers and local police officers all agreed that the residents of Tensta are excluded from Swedish society.

Marginalization is based on several factors and is perceived and experienced in different ways. Many residents we met felt a strong sense of belonging to Tensta. However, they have not developed a strong bond with the Spånga-Tensta City District and the rest of Swedish society. The tense relations with neighboring Spånga, the departure of the social services and municipal installations, combined with the stereotypes associated with Tensta, contribute to this sense of marginalization.

A growing distance between Spånga and Tensta

As indicated earlier, the areas of Spånga and Tensta form one district. However, the prosperous neighborhood of Spånga differs vastly with the socio-economically disadvantaged Tensta. Adding to the socio-economic and geographical divide between the two areas, the residents of Tensta do not feel connected to their counterparts in Spånga and never interact with them.

"There is no community vision for Spånga-Tensta. In the mind of the residents, the two neighborhoods are separate locations. What is missing in the leadership of Spånga-Tensta's municipality is the idea of building one cohesive community."

Consultation with a representative of the Spånga-Tensta City District, Tensta, December 2013

In fact, many indicated that the two neighborhoods do not have much in common, which makes it difficult to bring them more closely together. The clear economic and social differences and lifestyles add to this challenge.

Abandoning Tensta

The issue of marginalization in Tensta goes beyond the social and economic differences with neighboring Spånga. The majority of people that were interviewed mentioned the year 2007 as a major turning point for Tensta.

Structural changes occurred in 2007 with the aim of decreasing the administrative structures and making them more cost efficiency. In the City District of Spånga-Tensta, reforms meant the closing of municipality buildings in Tensta and the relocation of the main building of the administration in Spånga, leaving only one municipality building open in Tensta. This was perceived by the population of Tensta as a symbolic act of abandonment.

"The municipality should be the heart and soul of Tensta. Because the social welfare services and municipality moved out of Tensta in 2007, the people lost confidence and they don't trust the system anymore."

Consultation with a representative of the Spånga-Tensta City District, Tensta, December 2013

The removal of basic infrastructures and services from Tensta has affected the daily lives of residents. The area only counts a few shops, two small supermarkets and a couple of restaurants. The ATM in the Commercial Centre, *Tensta Centrum*, is the only bank servicing residents. For other banking and post office services residents have to take public transportation or

walk long distances to access them in other neighboring districts. The Medborgarkontor, the only municipal office remaining in Tensta, employs eight people that are charged with covering the day-to-day administration. For other official procedures or requests, residents must go to Spånga to address these.

Tackling the right issues

In addition to the geographic and socio-economic distance between Spånga and Tensta, a number of people, especially youth, stressed that external actors fuel the marginalization of Tensta. Youth groups highlighted that the political elite did not taken into account their needs and were completely disconnected from the reality in Tensta, but yet are making decisions that have an impact on their daily lives.

"The politicians don't focus on the right issues. Lately, they have invested money in rebuilding houses in Tensta, which is not a priority! Instead, they should invest in projects for those in need and address the problems of the community."

**Consultation with a youth worker, Tensta,
December 2013**

During interviews, numerous people talked about the many projects and initiatives undertaken by both local and state actors to promote social cohesion and integration in Tensta (see section 4 on main actors for additional information). They also indicated that most of these have been short-term in nature and do not address some of the deep rooted problems in the community. Concerns that were raised by a wide range of stakeholders include the lack of structures for young people to socialize and undertake recreational activities, which could help steer them away from criminal activities. Some even went on to say that

initiatives were often driven by personal interests and agendas.

Challenging police-community relations

Both youth and the police forces spoke of the challenges of police-community relations, which seem to be often characterized by a lack of communication, tension, fear and mistrust on both sides. From the viewpoint of young people, there is over-policing and police forces do not listen. Perceptions of racism and intimidation have also been identified. The police, on the other hand, report experiencing uncooperative behavior from young people and a general lack of respect for the police. Young offenders with a record also spoke of the fact that the police does not seem to care and respect them.

"Some youth blame the police of having a conspiracy theory. They think the police is not neutral and want to incriminate youth at any price."

**Consultation with a local police officer, Rinkeby,
December 2013**

The role of the media in reinforcing stereotypes

While not many Stockholm residents have made the 20-minute journey out to the suburb of Tensta, it is perceived to have a very high crime rate and not much to offer.

Residents of Tensta spoke of the lack of understanding of the various cultures by Swedish society and how the media cultivates and reinforces myths about their district, often painting a negative image of their community. Some even accuse newspapers of deliberately publishing 'twisted' stories or manipulated images of Tensta.

Negative images impact the fortunes of a neighborhood and its residents. However, despite the negative images about Tensta,

residents agree that Tensta is a lively and culturally-rich neighborhood with many outdoor festivals during summer. Regardless of the marginalization and socio-economic challenges in the area, residents enjoy living in Tensta.

Social workers, teachers, representatives of the City District and young people all concurred that Tensta does offer a lot of hope and opportunities for change. Many spoke of the residents themselves driving change, and not relying or waiting for authorities to help them transform their neighborhood. Some students spoke of being socially mobile without physically moving from the neighborhood and collectively changing the social fabric of the district.

"We cannot change what politicians or the whole Swedish society thinks of Tensta. But we can change ourselves, and how we want to act for change and promote Tensta as a peaceful neighborhood."

Consultation with a religious leader, Tensta,
December 2013

Changing Tensta's image and isolation

Residents spoke passionately of their desire to rebuild the image of Tensta as a safe and community-oriented neighborhood, and end the feeling of 'isolation' from other districts. Tensta is a district with a young dynamic and diverse population, which is an asset when seeking to rebuild a community image.

Tensta has a wealth of attitudes and opportunities to expand knowledge, share

experiences, promote collaborative responsibilities for the community, and develop synergies with other districts of Stockholm.

"There are more similarities than differences with other areas of Stockholm. Both Tensta residents and people from other neighborhoods think they don't have much in common. They should come together and see how their lives and the problems they face are much the same."

Consultation with a school principal, Tensta,
December 2013

How to rebuild Tensta's social fabric?

The feelings and perceptions of exclusion and marginalization have deeply affected Tensta's residents in their relationships and attitudes towards the authorities and Swedish society at large. The disconnect felt by the majority of youth regarding their needs and the reality has fuelled misunderstandings and created tensions. The widening socio-economic gap between suburbs, such as Tensta, and the center could enhance tensions and provoke renewed episodes of urban violence. Despite many youth's great potential and willingness to improve Tensta's image, disheartened and frustrated young people could play a disruptive role in a broad cohesion-building process. How can all actors come together to start rebuilding the social fabric of the district?

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES



Local police station in Rinkeby. Photo credit: Interpeace. January 2014.

Socio-economic challenges

"Some youth in Tensta are not equipped with the right tools to succeed in life. They don't have the same opportunities as other young people in the City Center."

Consultation with a school principal, Tensta,
December 2013

Stakeholders consulted identified socio-economic factors as another one of the main challenges affecting the residents of Tensta, especially young people. A combination of high rates of unemployment, a lack of public spaces to socialize as well as limited economic means have made for a challenging outlook.

The primary channels through which young people become integrated into society, such as education and early employment, are being cut back, making them inaccessible to many youth³⁰. With difficult socio-economic conditions often come levels of criminality, notably among vulnerable groups such as young people and newcomers to Sweden.

Unemployment

Unemployment was cited by almost all stakeholders when asked what is the main reason that holds back development of Tensta and its population. This perception is confirmed by official data that indicates that the high unemployment disproportionately affect immigrant communities in Sweden.

In 2009-10, Sweden had the highest discrepancy between native and immigrant employment rates among OECD countries³¹. Approximately 63 percent of immigrants were employed

compared to 76 percent of the native-born population. In Sweden, those with an immigrant background have lower employment rates than the native-borns with comparable levels of education. Reasons for this difference include less work experience and lack of domestic formal qualifications, such as language skills, among immigrants.

Some young people that had a criminal offence on record, regardless if misdemeanor or felony, also cited the difficulties in obtaining employment or even simple jobs. Generally speaking, more employers are conducting pre-employment background checks for criminal records. This makes even more challenging for ex-offenders to re-integrate as tax-paying citizens if they cannot find a job.

The residents of Tensta, especially those that are affected by increasing financial difficulties, referred to the continued rise of inequality in Stockholm between people who have easier access to resources and those who are excluded from opportunities. This is confirmed by statistics, which reveal that the average annual income in Spånga-Tensta was 13.6 percent lower than in Stockholm City in 2011³².

A quarter of the participants that were consulted revealed that their families struggle to pay the rent and pay for every day food. As table 2 indicates, many residents live with the help of financial assistance, among whom the majority are families with children and young adults.

Many interlocutors also indicated that limited income prevented them from affording extracurricular activities for their children, which

³⁰ Zill Zach. "Dimensions of the global youth revolt", *International Socialist Review*, Issue 81, 2012.

³¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2012. Settling In: OECD Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2012. Figure 6.5.

³² In 2011, the average annual income in Spånga-Tensta was 339.200 SEK whereas in Stockholm City it reached 392.400 SEK. (Source: <http://statistikomstockholm.se/omradesfakta/index.html>)

is hampering a new and young generation from improving their socio-economic status, learning new skills and being exposed to a wider range of social interactions and opportunities.

Table 2: Beneficiaries of financial assistance by age group and comparison between Spånga-Tensta¹ and Stockholm City, 2011³³

Location/Age group	Spånga-Tensta¹	Stockholm City
0-17²	13.5%	5.9%
18-24	13.0%	5.1%
25-29	9.6%	2.7%
30-39	9.1%	3.1%
40-49	9.2%	4.1%
50-59	9.1%	3.9%
60-64	6.6%	2.7%
65 and over	2.0%	0.7%
Average for all age groups	9.9%	3.6%

Notes:

1. Spånga is a prosperous area institutionally linked with Tensta. As such, the data presented may not accurately represent reality. With large socio-economic differences between the two areas, combining statistics for these two districts likely skews the data. In fact perceptions that emerged from the consultations point to a different set of conclusions. If the data were to be dissociated, it is likely that the perceived lack of employment in Tensta would be reflected in the statistics.
2. For the age group 0-17, families receive the financial assistance for their children.

An additional factor that is hampering the economic prospects is discrimination in the workplace. Direct or indirect discrimination of

immigrants in the workplace occurs in relation to job opportunities, wages, promotion possibilities and working conditions. It was reported that employers in Sweden are often reluctant to employ people with an immigrant background and largely prefer to take native Swedes³⁴. Such adverse treatment discourages immigrants in their search for employment, especially in areas outside of Tensta, and can even reduce the motivation to stay employed. Even though Swedish policies emphasize the values of diversity and multiculturalism, at the individual level it was perceived that employers tend to favor employees from mainstream Swedish society.

Growing criminality

In recent years, petty and drug related crimes have reached alarming proportions in Sweden. The combination of unemployment, idleness and lack of opportunities cause young people to choose crime as an alternative, and easier source of income. This is reinforced by the limited availability for young people to find alternative employment options available within their neighborhood³⁵.

Burglary was cited as one of the most common and widespread phenomenon affecting Tensta.

It's generally known that many immigrants living in the district have little trust in the banking system and choose to keep their savings in their homes. The likelihood that a burglary will pay off is making household burglaries an everyday crime.

The sale and consumption of drugs is also considered to be on rise but there is little information concerning the magnitude of the problem. Parents and teachers spoke of the easy

³³

http://statistikomstockholm.se/omradesfakta/pdf/SDO03_SVE.pdf

³⁴ Anja Wiesbrock (2013), "The Integration of Immigrants in Sweden: a Model for the European Union?", University of Oslo, Department of Private Law.

³⁵ Axnäs, Nina. Nord, Annica. "Evaluation of the cooperation to prevent social unrest in the Järva area", Project of the Polismyndigheten I Stockholms län, Stockholms Stad and Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union, 2012, p.8.

access to drugs, but youth and some police officers believed that they exaggerated the issue. However, it is important to note that this problem is not limited to Tensta but affecting other parts of Stockholm and Sweden more generally.

"In Tensta there are criminal activities, but it is exaggerated."

Consultation with students from the local gymnasium, Tensta, January 2014

Although there is limited data available on crime rates, the little statistics available reveal that for selected types of crimes, such as muggings and cases involving inflicted damage, the difference between Spånga-Tensta and Stockholm City is not flagrant (see table 3 and 4 below). However, it should again be noted that data for Spånga-Tensta includes statistics for the two neighborhoods, thus very likely skewing the data for Tensta.

Table 3: Number of reported muggings per 1,000 inhabitants aged 12-19³⁶

	Spånga-Tensta	Stockholm City
2007	22	18
2008	33	18
2009	27	18
2010	24	17
2011	39	18

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.98 Table 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.98 Table 9.

Table 4: Number of reported crimes involving inflicted damage (excluding graffiti) per 1,000 inhabitants aged 12-19³⁷

	Spånga-Tensta	Stockholm City
2007	193	154
2008	208	152
2009	213	155
2010	152	136
2011	183	138

The police force also highlighted that some youth are merely acting and projecting criminal-like behaviors, without committing any criminal infractions. This reinforces negative stereotypes and generalizes the perception that the young people of Tensta are criminals. The criminal images that have been painted about Tensta discourage people from moving into the district, including businesses. "Business owners avoid operating in the area, and authorities and other public services move their operations away from the area. The result is that it leads to a self-segregation driven by the bad elements in the area, which further hinders the integration of newcomers³⁸."

Many stakeholders highlighted that there were too few public spaces and structures where young people can gather and socialize. This was especially underlined by students who would like to have access to school facilities after classes have ended. This would keep them away from the streets and boredom.

The dark winters and harsh weather conditions of Sweden make this especially important for young people to find constructive ways to use their spare time, in particular during the

³⁸ Axnäs, Nina. Nord, Annica. "Evaluation of the cooperation to prevent social unrest in the Järva area", *op.cit.*, p.8.

afternoons and evenings. Parents also shared their frustration regarding the lack of facilities and after school services for their children.

Rising disheartened generation

Confronted with difficult socio-economic conditions, some young people find it hard to even consider the possibility of finding self-fulfillment. This generation of disaffected, unemployed, and marginalized young people can generate a negative environment where they become disheartened, disempowered, and disconnected from established institutions and society.

There is a growing sense that young people are resorting to bad behavior as a way of getting attention and support, both from their parents and authorities. Both youth workers and police officers acknowledge that breaking the rules seems to be a more effective way for getting attention and help for the marginalized and disfranchised youth.

Social workers and local authorities also spoke of the difficulty of approaching disenfranchised youth as there is little interaction outside of their groups, especially if they have a criminal lifestyle. Young women, who often stay at home and don't socialize outdoors, seem to suffer the most from this isolation according to youth and social workers. It was also highlighted that young people, both male and female, often have a hard time seeking help or don't know how to ask for help – further nurturing their isolation from society.

A good educational environment

Many teachers and social workers highlighted that students in Tensta are committed to their studies and achieve good results and grades. The quality of the education in the district is also recognized and attracts students from other districts. Students spoke highly of the positive environment and the support they receive in

school, which encourages them to do well and to realize their full potential.



*Ross Tensta Gymnasium. Photo credit: Interpeace.
January 2014.*

Three quarters of the people who were consulted highlighted that successful and positive youth actually represent the great majority of the young population of Tensta. Many spoke of the importance of identifying and promoting role models that can motivate young people to develop the skills and abilities to become engaged citizens that will make a difference. There are many artists, athletes and successful people that come from Tensta that can encourage and motivate young people.

"Positive young people are not seen because everyone focuses on the bad ones. But there are many good young people in Tensta, and we should make them proud and promote them as role models."

**Consultation with a youth worker, Tensta,
December 2013**

Despite the difficult socio-economic conditions, Tensta residents want the same things as their neighbors and fellow countrymen. All spoke of the importance of education as the best tool for creating wealth and happiness. Young people stressed that they had dreams and aspirations for the future and wished these could come true despite the difficult socio-economic situation and challenges.

"We are not born to burn cars. We want a peaceful life."

*Consultation with a youth worker, Rinkeby,
December 2013*

How to improve young people's social exclusion?

Frustration and hopelessness resulting from unemployment and a lack of alternative activities present major threats to social cohesion in Tensta. They create a generation of disheartened and disenfranchised youth, who sometimes undertakes criminal activities, as a last resort. Despite the majority of good intentioned and successful young people in Tensta, media and external actors seem to put their focus only on the disenfranchised youth. This reinforces stereotypes and further isolates Tensta as a dangerous neighborhood. What kind of activities should be implemented to stimulate those who are at odds with society?

OVERVIEW OF ACTORS INVOLVED IN YOUTH WORK



Drawing in a youth center. Photo credit. Interpeace. December 2013.

Overview of actors involved in youth work

Many initiatives that address a range of issues such as integration, safety and security, crime prevention have been promoted in Tensta with varying degrees of success. Overall, it seems that the priority is to work on broad fronts, but with a focus on youth related projects.

The leisure and social services departments in the City District administration, local schools, local police, and civil society organizations have traditionally taken the lead on these initiatives. However, more recently a number of initiatives that are supported by the City of Stockholm or the City District of Spånga-Tensta have emerged and are being driven by its residents. Generally, youth related projects in Tensta have focused on cultural activities and targeted groups under the age of 18. However, newly established projects are targeting disenfranchised and unemployed young people. It should be noted that the following section does not seek to provide an extensive mapping of all initiatives in Tensta, but to give a general overview of projects that have sought to address some of the challenges of Tensta.

Governmental

The **City of Stockholm** is represented in Tensta by different government institutions, such as schools, unemployment services, and the police force. Each of these actors have carried out different initiatives targeting youth. While the following projects do not represent the totality of the projects for youth in the larger area of Järva³⁹, they represent a snapshot.

- **The Tensta Community Center (TCC)**, managed by the Ross Tensta Gymnasium and supported by the 'Invest in Järva' programme⁴⁰, is an afterschool youth center that offers a space for boys and girls to do their homework and socialize. It provides homework assistance four days a week and has a dancing room with dedicated activities for young girls. It employs youth workers who organize both indoor and outdoor activities as well as camps in Sweden or abroad.
- **Jobbgaraget** is a youth and unemployment center, and is a part of Stockholm City's Employment Services presence in Tensta. It is a space where young people can seek advice and guidance regarding employment procedures but it is also a place where youth can socialize. The target group is unemployed or/and disenfranchised youth from the age of 15 to 25. The center offers support and accompaniment to young people as they are trying to find employment.
- The **Social Measures for Young Adults' Initiative** helps disenfranchised youth to reintegrate into society. Dedicated social workers provide close accompaniment and moral support to youth, including former criminal offenders. The initiative brings together various institutions, such as the Local Administration, the Housing Department, Unemployment Services, and others to work together to help individuals. The programme is designed as a comprehensive intervention that is based on continued assistance to criminal offenders as they try to successfully reintegrate into society.

³⁹ The Järva area is composed of the districts of Akalla, Hjulsta, Husby, Kista, Rinkeby and Tensta.

⁴⁰ The 'Invest in Järva' programme, or Järvalyftet, is a comprehensive initiative launched in autumn 2007

following a decision by the local council to give the Järva area an economic and social boost.

- The **Police** of Stockholm City are working on a project that is supported by the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union. The programme evaluates and enhances the cooperation amongst various local actors to prevent social unrest in the Järva area. The project seeks to connect the different actors working on issues related to youth.

At the District level, the **City District of Spånga-Tensta** provides financial assistance⁴¹ to many local associations. The residents of Tensta have access to programmes and initiatives such as culture, art, education, and sports.

Local Organizations

In Tensta, a limited number of local organizations have carried out initiatives targeted at youth in particular. These include:

- The **Blue House** (BlåHuset) is an independent youth center and meeting place for young people younger than 18 years. The various activities are based on the needs of young people. The Center's late opening hours make it a popular place for youth in Tensta. The activities include theatre, and sports such as gym, boxing, dancing, as well as homework support.
- **Love Tensta** is an independent youth-led association that acts as a platform where immigrants, youth and unemployed people can come together and discuss their situation and issues of concern. Love Tensta offers a space to students after school hours and to

disenfranchised youth during the afternoons and evenings. The after school opening hours are complementary to other youth centers and offer an alternative for those on the streets.

Religious associations play an important role in Tensta's community's scene⁴². Religious associations seek to reach out to youth, but acknowledge that it is sometimes difficult to approach them, especially the disenfranchised youth, because they are not attracted by religious messages and approaches.

Several **local organizations** and initiatives in Tensta aim to support parents and their children⁴³. Many activities offer support to newcomers to Sweden, such as seminars, lectures and awareness campaigns. Parents can learn more about Swedish law, child care, how to handle discussions about identity and other sensitive topics. The Women's Centre Hjulsta-Tensta is one example, and consists of both a community and training center. The local police also offers seminars to new comers and parents in Tensta and in the Järva area.

With the aim of enhancing collaboration amongst stakeholders in Tensta, a large number of local organizations as well as City District representatives meet on a weekly basis in Tensta. These '**Good Forces**' (*Goda Krafter*) have united under a common platform to communicate and share information with social workers and partners in Tensta.

The consultations indicated that the number of initiatives seeking to address youth challenges in Tensta have been on the rise, notably from the

⁴¹ Spånga-Tensta's City District allocated approximately 1'250'000 SEK to selected local associations in 2013 (equivalent to approximately 193'000 USD).

⁴² Despite the great religious diversity in Tensta, participants in the consultations indicated that Christian and Muslim communities represent the majority of the population. Little information is available regarding other religions, which do not have official religious associations in Tensta.

⁴³ Women's organizations like Livstykett and the Women's Centre in Tensta-Hjulsta, as well as parent's associations (ABF, the 'Coordinated parental support in Järva' among others) offer continuous support to parents and children. The police in Spånga-Tensta as well as the schools and religious associations also provide punctual workshops/courses for parents.

City of Stockholm and Spånga-Tensta City District. However, many young people indicated that the projects often target specific age groups and not a more broadly defined youth group. A few people spoke of the short-term nature of some of the initiatives and of projects suddenly ending because of funding cuts. It was noted that some initiatives do not address 'grievances' and the needs of all age groups.

***"In Tensta, projects are
implemented one after the other,
but they don't last. We are tired...
it's discouraging."***

**Consultation with a youth worker, Tensta,
December 2013**

Social workers highlighted the difficulty of engaging the 'hard to reach', such as former criminals, the homeless and disfranchised, making it challenging for them to better identify the needs of these young people. Since a lot of the projects do not cater to the needs of young people, they are increasingly frustrated and feel that their needs are not taken into account.

Finding ways to engage young people from different age groups will be key in ensuring that there is greater clarity and shared understanding about the needs of youth. This understanding can then lead the way for formulating strategies and transformative actions.

CONCLUSIONS AND OPTIONS FOR ACTION



Rinkeby Subway Station. Photo credit: Interpeace. December 2013.

Conclusions and options for action

The consultation process allowed Interpeace to hear and capture many voices from Tensta. The diverse stakeholders expressed a wide range of perspectives that highlight the complex nature of the challenges facing Tensta today. In light of the consultations, a number of suggested recommendations were made, which can be utilized by local stakeholders, such as the media, the law and order forces, municipal authorities, businesses as well as local associations and citizens of Tensta. These are presented here in no particular order:

- **Tensta is perceived to be an insecure and dangerous place by many Swedes, which contrasts with the views of its residents who see the neighborhood as a safe and welcoming environment.** Mainstream media have reinforced this stereotype by portraying Tensta negatively, affecting its image and residents. There is a need to change the image of Tensta. This requires working with the media to generate a better understanding of the issues and challenges that affect Tensta so that journalists produce more informed news reports that do not solely focus on sensationalizing problems or negative events. However, even more important is the need to create better connections with the rest of Swedish society in order to create greater awareness of the positive aspects of the district. The unbalanced perception of Tensta has led to a situation where businesses and new potential residents choose to establish themselves in other neighborhoods, which further contributes to Tensta's isolation. Therefore, it is important to establish a positive perception of Tensta within Swedish society.
- **The limited number of structures and spaces for young people to socialize in Tensta is an issue of concern.** Young people,

especially young men, have few areas where they can socialize after school or during weekends. Teenagers or young men hanging out on the street corners are perceived as a potential problem. Current support structures for young people serve only specific age groups and have specified opening hours. Youth are constantly confronted with signs that prohibit loitering and have few options for gathering and socializing. The creation of additional outdoor spaces, which are supervised by youth workers who conduct recreational activities, can address these issues. This would provide youth with a safe and natural environment in which to socialize amongst themselves, and create a space where they can interact with other members of the community. The establishment of a community center for people of all ages could also provide a good platform for community bonding and inter-cultural exchanges. Additional structures should also seek to offer complementary opening hours to existing venues so that all can have access to these environments. In addition, the creation of late night programmes would offer youth (and 'older' youth) with something safe and constructive to do instead of being out on the streets.

- **Generational and cultural gaps were often cited as sources of misunderstandings and pressure between parents and their children, especially teenagers.** This issue is especially challenging for young women coming from traditional backgrounds and growing up in a modern urban environment. Both parents and youngsters would benefit from programmes that focus on the entire family and where support is provided in an integrated and multigenerational manner. As such, children, youth, and families have the resources and support they need to

achieve greater economic success and social and physical well-being.

- **Mistrust and defiance often characterize the relationships between young people and law enforcement in Tensta.** The lack of positive interactions between the police and urban youth, particularly minority youth, causes constant problems and friction. Over time minor issues between urban youth and the police can develop into mistrust, fear, and even hostility on both sides. If these feelings of alienation are not addressed they will continue to contribute to a decline in the quality of life in Tensta. Creating a space for discussion and greater interaction with police officers outside of a law enforcement context is important to break down stereotypes. Facilitated discussions that are conducted in a neutral setting could help to identify issues of concern and find solutions. Developing better relationships will only occur if community leaders, youth leaders, and police officers work together.
- **Some residents, especially young people and those who don't master the Swedish language, struggle with knowing 'where to go' to find support services.** This was especially acute in the case of not knowing where to find information concerning employment, vocational and educational support services. As such, there needs to be greater emphasis on sharing information with residents on career options, education and training pathways. Already reaching out to young people while they are in school could also help better prepare the transition to universities or the job market.

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ANNEX

Annex 1: List of participants in the consultations

Group	Date	Undertaken by	No. of Male Participants	No. of Female participants	Total
Police officers	9-Oct-13	Interpeace Team	3		3
Civil Society Representatives	9-Oct-13	Interpeace Team	1	1	2
City District Representatives	9-Oct-13	Interpeace Team	1	1	2
Youth workers	10-Oct-13	Interpeace Team	1	3	4
Local youth organization	10-Oct-13	Interpeace Team	1		1
Local womens' organization	2-Dec-13	Interpeace Team		20	20
City District Representatives	2-Dec-13	Interpeace Team	1		1
Youth workers	2-Dec-13	Interpeace Team	2	4	6
Religious leaders	2-Dec-13	Interpeace Team	1	1	2
Civil workers	3-Dec-13	Interpeace Team		1	1
Police officers	3-Dec-14	Interpeace Team	1		1
School directors and teachers	3-Dec-14	Interpeace Team	3	2	5
Youth workers	4-Dec-13	Interpeace Team	1	3	4
Local organization for parental support	4-Dec-13	Interpeace Team	1	2	3
Students from the local gymnasium	4-Dec-13	Interpeace Team		1	1

Local womens' organization	5-Dec-13	Interpeace Team		1	1
Disenfranchised youth	5-Dec-13	Interpeace Team	2		2
Local security organization	5-Dec-13	Interpeace Team	1	1	2
City District Representatives	16-Jan-14	Interpeace Team		1	1
Students from the local gymnasium	16-Jan-14	Interpeace Team	0	3	3
Youth workers	17-Jan-14	Interpeace Team	1	3	4
Students from the local gymnasium	4-Feb-14	Interpeace Team	4	4	8
Disenfranchised youth	4-Feb-14	Interpeace Team	1		1
Youth workers	20-Mar-14	Interpeace Team	2		2
			28	52	80

