Creating active citizenship: strategies among young ethnically minoritized people in Sweden

Abstract
This article concerns active citizenship in the Swedish welfare state among young people from ethnic minorities. The aim is to explore driving forces to create active citizenship in everyday life. Their strategies are illustrated through analyses of the interviews with the migrants in a medium-sized Swedish town. The theoretical discussion on social citizenship in this article is broadened from the subject who acts to the acts as creating the subject – thus understanding the active citizen from the perspective of acts of citizenship. A three-dimension model of how active citizenship can be constructed and understood is presented in the article.

Keywords
acts of citizenship; civil sphere; ethnicity; lived citizenship; young people

Introduction
There has been an extensive literature written and research conducted on social citizenship during the past decades (Isin and Wood 1999, Kofman 1995, Lister 2007b, Schierup 2005, Turner 2001, Ålund 2005, Yuval-Davis 1999). The academic and the political debates in Sweden on social citizenship have identified structural social excluding tendencies along ethnic dividing lines inherently in the universal social citizenship (de los Reyes 2006, de los Reyes and Kamali 2005, Ålund 2005). The paradigm shift in Sweden, turning away from a universal welfare system towards stronger reciprocity demands as in the activation citizenship discourse, has had consequences for young people in particular and not least for ethnically minoritized citizens. The change also marks the start of a new Swedish integration policy aiming at a workfare policy. It is a political integration strategy used by the government, which is strongly influenced by assumptions that ethnically minoritized people do not participate on the labour market for personal reasons. Several studies have pointed out structural constraints such as ethnic discrimination and racism as the main obstacles for inclusion on the labour market (Rooth and Ekberg 2003, Carlsson 2009). These circumstances hinder ethnically minoritized citizens from full social citizenship. But while the debate and research on active citizenship has focused on conditional rights to social security and in particular in labour market participation (Dahlstedt 2009, Hvinden and Johansson 2007, Johansson 2001, Marionetto 2003, Bauböck 1994,
Schierup et al. 2006) the subjective and qualitative dimensions of citizenship have attracted less attention. Also the context of the civil sphere in relation to social citizenship has attracted minor interest.

The questions posed in this article are how young women and men navigate in everyday life in order to develop strategies for active citizenship. And how can their experiences be understood theoretically? The theoretical perspectives are built on Ruth Lister’s (2003) research on lived citizenship and Jeffrey Alexander’s (2006) research on the civil sphere. In this approach the concept of active citizenship is emphasized in the context of the civil sphere. This perspective is further advanced by including the shift from the subject who acts to the acts as creating the subject, thus interpreting the active citizen from the theoretical model of *acts of citizenship* developed by Isin and Nielsen (2008).

**The significance of everyday life experiences**

Various studies (Bassel and Lloyd 2011, Saeidi 2010) have explored how citizens’ aims and actions in public and private spheres should be conceived beyond the traditional understanding of citizenship as the relationship between the state and the citizen regulated by mutual rights and obligations. Saedi (2010) and Bassel and Lloyd (2011) have managed to capture new dimensions in citizens’ actions towards becoming active and activist citizens (Isin and Nielsen 2008). Drawing from case studies Saeidi (2010) argues that women’s acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008) in everyday life become part of transforming Iran into a more pluralistic society. Whereas, Bassel and Lloyd (2011) building on the concept of *acts of citizenship* (Isin and Nielsen 2008) challenge acts of citizenship as rupturing or reproducing relations of inferiority of Magreb women in France.
Ruth Lister has analyzed the significance of everyday life experiences i.e. of lived citizenship (Lister 2003:3) with its possibilities and limitations as a driving force for young migrants to become active citizens. In this study I use the meaning of lived citizenship in line with Lister’s (2007a) definition:

It is about how individuals understand and negotiate the three key elements of citizenship: rights and responsibilities, belonging and participation (Lister 2007a:168).

This means that it is how these young women’s and men’s experiences of social citizenship are manifested in everyday life, i.e., how they understand social rights and social responsibilities, belonging and participation in society. The study conceptualizes lived citizenship as a qualitative dimension of subjective social citizenship in which agency and positioning (Lister 2003b, Lister 2010) are connected with, for instance, experiences of social exclusion caused by ethnicity. Agency is related changing one’s social position in everyday life and to claims on inclusive social citizenship.

In order to explore the strategies for creating active citizenship experiences are analyzed through the theoretical model of acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008). Aiming at encapsulating more broadly how active citizenship can be created and understood as a theoretical and empirical phenomenon we need a dynamic way of looking at the interplay between lived citizenship, acts of citizenship and the civil sphere. This is significant for the understanding of how the participants become active citizens. In this article examples are given of how the three dimensions interact in the everyday lives of the young women and men in the study. I start by presenting the data-set and first line analysis, then present the theoretical model and the analysis. Finally, I will summarize with a three dimension-model how the creating of active citizenship can be understood.
Method, material and analysis
The data material in this article includes interviews of seventeen young people in the age range of seventeen to twenty-six years. The empirical data was collected from a group consisting of eleven women and six men with various ethnic and national backgrounds. There is a spread of ethnicity among young people in the town where the study is conducted and in accordance to that no specific ethnic background is in focus in the sampling process. On the contrary, a variety of ethnic backgrounds are to be found in the group of interviewees. Other variations are constructed on the economic, the social and the cultural living conditions which interplay with their positions in the education system, the labour market and the housing market. In order to acquire the experiences of social citizenship and social participation of those who study at the upper-secondary level the lower age limit was set at seventeen years. The upper limit of twenty-six years aims at including those who have probably finished their education and are in the phase of establishing themselves on the labour market or have already done so.

The period of residence in Sweden varied among the women and men interviewed. They were born either in another country than Sweden themselves or both parents were born elsewhere than in Sweden, to qualify for my sample. This implies that the period of residence in Sweden varied from being born in Sweden to have lived in Sweden for at least two years. I make the distinction between living for a long time in Sweden (from birth to at least the last seven years) and a short time (no longer than six years) and then having immigrated as young adults (from eighteen years). This is due to that time of residence in Sweden appeared to be pivotal to understanding the lived experiences of subjective social citizenship of the young women and men interviewed.
Research usually focuses on ethnically minoritized young people’s conditions in larger cities. This study focuses on young migrant people living in a medium-sized Swedish town. Choosing a medium-sized Swedish town as context of the study makes it possible to examine the social conditions for the group in a local context which differs from Swedish metropolitan suburban municipalities.

When discussing the concern of grasping the subjective dimension and complexity of the lived experiences of minoritized people Gunaratnam (2003:17) suggests that using narrative-based methods provides this kind of information. Semi-structured interviews with narrative elements were used in the study. Initially the data material was thematically analyzed and illustrated through portrait lines striving to put the informants’ life situations in a real context. Using portraits as analysis method allowed to give expressions to cohesion and a holistic view that easily get lost in a strictly thematic analysis. In this article the patterns of the young women’s and men’s strategies are further challenged theoretically through the notions of active and lived citizenship. In the analyse process I paid special attention to peoples’ willingness and intentions and how they argue for their acts respectively obstacles for acting. It was in the interplay between the theoretical and the empirical perspectives in the analysis that a pattern emerged of strategies for advocating social change against ethnic discrimination and for a more inclusive social citizenship (Kabeer 2005). A young woman, for instance, originating from Tunisia, tells me that she does not fear to bring up racism and discrimination for discussion with class-mates when they speak disparagingly about ethnically minoritized people. The reason is her wish to achieve a change of attitudes by questioning and contradicting discriminating prejudices which go against her conceptualization of social citizenship on equal terms.
I interpreted the intention to act and the social commitments that were described as directed towards finding a strengthened social position for oneself and for others, i.e., for the people they feel connected with due to ethnically minoritization, and beyond that for the Other, a third party (Isin and Nielsen 2008) that includes the Swedish population as a whole. This led me to the theoretical acts of the citizenship model (Isin and Nielsen 2008), which provides tools to further analyze their intention to act and social commitments as qualities to be taken into account when discussing the process of creating active citizenship.

**Strategies and social commitments – looking for new dimensions in understanding active citizenship**

Three principles of investigating acts of citizenship presented by Isin and Nielsen (2008) have been the analytical tools of the study. The first principle states that acts of citizenship should be valued and interpreted for their reasons and consequences, whether they are actualized for the purpose of making improvements that concern oneself, one's own group or others. As the act is supposed at the same time to be both ethical and political, there are expectations on the initiative taken to invoke change also for the Other. Acts of citizenship, in addition, are expected to disrupt social patterns and overstep practices and formal limits, while making claims about the common and social good. The authors distinguish between activist citizens (creators) and active citizens (doers).

While activist citizens engage in writing scripts and creating the scene, active citizens follow scripts and participate in scenes that are already created. While activist citizens are creative, active citizens are not (Isin and Nielsen 2008:38).

What comes out of the study does not replace this twofold description, but complements it. The definitions and the dividing line between activist citizen and active citizen is not clearcut. The interviewees rather tend to encapsulate both roles at
different points in time and also to move from one role to another. The stories told by the ethnically minoritized young women and men seem, in different combinations, to show patterns of being both creators and doers. These two concepts are not a sign of different personalities, but a sign of different patterns of behaviour at a moment in time or in relation to entering different spheres and tasks. In this manner they are not static but process-oriented, whereby a doer might become a creator. Isin and Nielsen’s (2008) approach does not answer questions like: When are scripts already written and scenes already created? When do the processes start? Can one be active without being creative? The borderlines are often blurred and activist citizens and active citizens might shift from one to the other throughout the process of making improvements while stating claims about the common and social good. Even though it is problematic to make a clear distinction between activist and active citizens in the way Isin and Nielsen (2008) argue, we are still discussing the active versus the passive dimension of social citizenship.

The second principle of theorizing acts of citizenship outlines the heuristics between acts producing actors and becoming answerable to justice. It is emphasized that citizens become answerable to justice against injustice as soon as they are involved in the process of acts (Isin and Nielsen 2008). There is a connection between the intention to change and do good, i.e., acts of citizenship in the name of justice are connected with the wish to fight injustice (Isin and Nielsen 2008). In relation to the second principle the material supports the idea that acts produce actors. Further, the production of actors is important for distinguishing the principle of justice. When the interviewees talk about issues related to the principle of justice it is clear that they also move into the roles of creators promoting change towards a more inclusive Swedish society. The reflection on justice as newcomers to Sweden also makes them
take a stand on these issues in relation to their country of origin. This means a transnational perspective on social conditions and change.

_The third principle_ of theorizing acts of citizenship emphasizes how these should be perceived only when such an act involves disruption and resistance of order and social patterns as well as an intention towards social change. The third principle is centred on the notion of civil obedience as a legitimate strategy for acts of citizenship. Isin and Nielsen (2008:39) offer an explanation in terms of the distinction between being responsible and being irresponsible. Now, thinking of this principle as civil obedience leads rather to recognizing two forms of being responsible, where civil obedience is a responsibility with only a different argument – in the name of a broader good or a different conceptualizing of we-ness (Alexander 2006).

_Social commitments and acts of citizenship_

I will here describe some cases from my study through the three principles of acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008). Generally, one can conclude that a strong commitment, feeling of social responsibility and wish subjectively to be a part of society was a major result in the study. This gives an empirical understanding of the grounds and consequences of the acts of citizenship as argued in the first principle (Note V) (Isin and Nielsen 2008:38). There are interviewees who give expression to how they meet obstacles to transforming themselves into active citizens when realizing that they do not have the _know-how_ to take initiatives truly in line with their social commitment.

A woman that was born in Iran twenty-one years ago and has been living in this medium-sized Swedish town for seventeen years would like to do volunteer work with children in need. She described that her argument for not putting this into practice was that she did not feel familiar enough with how to get involved in such a
job. Not finding the channels to volunteering hindered her from becoming more active. Active citizenship directed towards the others can though be made possible. This is illustrated by a twenty-one-year-old woman who was born in Russia and then migrated to Germany with her family and now lives in Sweden. She was driven to do well for ethnically minorititized young people in the local community. Her strategy was to talk informally through theatre performances. This was her way of wanting to address those with problems to become an active party of the community that actually is theirs. She hoped to contribute to a mutual understanding and extended tolerance between citizens in the Swedish multi-ethnic society where discrimination is present in people’s lived citizenship.

I do not want to go into politics. … There are many things you cannot change by merely one single person, in addition to working with film and theatre. People look at the movie and it might make them reflect on what they see and make them change their attitudes, for instance (Interview 11).

Her acts of citizenship were directed towards the others and also imply a third dimension in that they might have consequences for the Other by changing attitudes in society in a whole.

There were differences and similarities in the way the women and men describe their ambitions to contribute in society. Both women and men articulated their wish to contribute to increasing the understanding between ethnically minoritized people and the majority people so as to clear away mutual prejudices. Men talked about their actions as being, the aspiration to be a good citizen. This concept was not used by the women as a way to become accepted and included in society.

Acting towards a social citizenship on equal terms is another finding of particular relevance for the notion of acts of citizenship, which refers to the first principle as well. The interviewees acted by claiming full membership in society in
terms of not just formally entitled rights but also of actual substantial rights. They act without breaking the law but possibly create a scene with an actual universal social citizenship for themselves and for others (those who experience a restricted substantive social citizenship). Claiming their rights and offering resistance towards being discriminated against on ethnic grounds can bring about the need for a change of practices and policymaking in a long-term perspective. This can be interpreted as disrupting the order of social citizenship as exclusionary (Lister 1997, 2003, 2007b).

Examples are given from the interviews to illustrate what a fine line one has to balance on when making a distinction between activist and active citizens. I take as a point of departure Sarina, a twenty–year-old woman who was born in Cameroon and has lived in Sweden for eight years, of which the last two years were spent in this medium-sized town where she married an ethnic Swedish man. She thought that she was denied her right to benefits from the social authorities. She knew her legal rights and claimed the same access to them as any citizen. While finding out that other persons with similar situations as hers did get their request approved, she felt discriminated against and therefore made resistance by objecting to the turndown and re-applying. She told me that she did this for her own sake, but also to make clear that she did not accept a differentiation or ethnic discrimination directed towards her or anybody else. This concern beyond herself involves a thread of solidarity with the others (Alexander 2006), in this case other ethnically minoritized persons. By refusing to accept their decision, she further hoped for a change of attitude from the social workers. This example illustrates a form of acting where both the self and the intention to contribute to the common good for others are involved.

The next example departs from the intention to contribute to the common good. A nineteen-year-old man, who has lived in Sweden since two years of age, was
driven on the grounds of forgiveness and social justice. This was combined with his striving to be a good citizen in order to be recognized as a legitimate member of society, as Kofman (1995:122) puts it, and participate in society on equal terms. Wishes to improve one’s own and others’ social situation are revealed when discussing citizens’ reactions to injustice through a sense of moral answerability among the interviewees. It appears from the study that acts towards justice are actualized and equality, as is argued in the second principle (Note VI) (Isin and Nielsen 2008). The understanding of participation as centred around peoples' wellbeing, having a good social life, being treated fairly and the way one wishes to contribute to making life better for persons in need, might be twofold, in the way that the basis for the act is to care for others. The interviewees take action in the name of justice, promoting social change in Swedish society, but also from an international perspective. Those who have been concretely involved in acts of justice, equality and recognition have been oriented towards their respective country of origin and towards people sharing the same ethnic origin who live elsewhere in the world. This was illustrated by experiences from two women that have spent most of their lives in Sweden. Leila, a twenty-five-year-old woman was born in Iran and came to Sweden at an early age. When she returned to Iran for her first visit many years later, she met the man she is now married to. Visiting her husband, who was in the army and therefore still lived in Iran, she was asked by the local community for her professional expertise regarding local community organization.

When I am in Iran and see what the people want themselves I hope to make a change in one way or another. … When I went there I was asked by the municipality to help to sort out something in their organization. They asked for my recommendations based on my qualifications. It felt great that they asked me and that I could do something for them (Interview 15).

When she could help in this manner she felt great self-confidence in contributing to making a change. It was also important to her that people in Iranian society
understood that she was not critical of the nation like another foreigner. There were two reasons for this: first, she wanted to be assured she would not be prevented from returning to visit her husband in Iran. Secondly, they were both eager not to create problems for his forthcoming migration to Sweden. Another woman, Sarina from Cameroon, took on an education in health care in Sweden to be able to go back to her country of birth and support people in need. This originated from experiences in the civil sphere regarding relatives, especially her little brother, who could not get the needed health care. She was oriented towards returning to her native country with the aim of accomplishing something good there. She intended this, even though it would involve leaving her husband in Sweden, as he refused to live in Cameroon. The examples of these two women illustrate a transnational engagement directed towards answerability in the name of global justice and equality. However, there also seems to be a connection with their ethnic community in a sense of we-ness (Alexander 2006:43) extended to the people they feel they are connected to.

Social movements and activists raising claims have affected Swedish law and policy-making in the long term. Some changes have been formal only, while in practice the substantive entitlements have been very much neglected. Currently this concerns immigrants without residence permits in Sweden. Professionals, both ethnic Swedes and ethnically minoritized people from the health care, social work and education in Sweden do voluntary work to support these people’s needs. There is a current political debate whether to change or not to change the law to assure equal right to health care and school, which has been partly initiated through the objection made by the volunteer groups. These acts are not acts in the name of legislation but in the name of answerability, as they take place in the name of virtue of human dignity (Isin and Nielsen 2008) beyond legislation and formal status and therefore demand
moral courage from the activists. The acts focus on justice and on disrupting the current order. This enforces a process of improvement that is generically dependent upon activist and active citizens in different positions. It is necessary to exert pressure on policy making and legislation besides the acting of citizens based on experiences in lived citizenship, in the process to construct a multi-ethnic Swedish society. The impact of constraints such as prejudices and ethnic discrimination in citizens’ everyday lives in the local community makes people in the study give voice to and make their dissatisfaction felt to the general public. In the long term these objections have to become a part of the integration policy. There are no concrete empirical findings or explicit information in the study on acts of citizenship where the interviewees have transgressed the law due to their social commitment. What I mean is that no information was given in the interviews indicating that the interviewees had become claim makers and answerable citizens by breaking the law, as stipulated in the third principle (Note VII) (Isin and Nielsen 2008). This does not indicate that such acts have not occurred, but only that they are not explicitly mentioned in the interviews.

**Lived citizenship, acts of citizenship and civil sphere interact in creating active citizenship**

The article theoretically connects active citizenship (Lister 2003) and acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008) to forge a new model of understanding social citizenship which embraces both traditions in order to capture the broad meaning of political ability (Lister 2003:38). The new model gives analytical tools to understanding how the young people interviewed become active citizens through tensions in a dynamic interaction between lived citizenship, acts of citizenship and the civil sphere. This model contains a potential for creating active citizenship which originates from the informal social commitment in the civil sphere by the citizens.
interviewed. Experiences from lived citizenship cannot be separated from the social context and space where they occur (Lister 2007b:55). Leila, who is presented above, tells me about her different experiences of social participation in Iran and Sweden.

The social contexts of the two countries differ widely. She finds herself accustomed to Swedish society and appreciates the social right to get an education, for instance. This is the country where she prefers to live. The diverse social and cultural practices in the two countries also have an impact on the spaces for social recognition and community. She feels social recognition by the Iranian people and lacks it from the Swedish majority population. In this case recognition is most crucial for her to become an active citizen or participant in society. The feeling of social recognition makes her act in the Iranian local community when she visits the country where her husband lives.

The experiences of everyday life are impregnated with cultural, social and political practices in both public and civil spheres. The notion of civil sphere in this article lies close to the line of thought in Alexander’s definition, which stresses the solidarity aspect aiming at a harmonious social life that also goes beyond self-interest.

The premise of Civil Sphere is that societies are not governed be power alone and are not fueled only by the pursuit of self-interest. Feelings for others matter, and they are structured by the boundaries of solidarity. How solidarity is structured, how far it extends, what it’s composed of – these are critical issues for every social order, and especially for orders that aim at the good life. Solidarity is possible because people are oriented not only to the here and now but to the ideal, to the transcendent, to what they hope will be the everlasting (Alexander 2006:3).

The participation and actions (here referred to as citizens’ political acting in a broad sense) by the women and men interviewed take place in everyday life in the local community and the civil sphere. Let me illustrate these arguments with the example of Amina, an eighteen–year-old woman who was born and raised in Sweden in a family of Tunisian origin. The family is strongly connected to Tunisia and their relatives there. Amina combines the experience of everyday life in Sweden and the presence of
Tunisia in memories, emotional attachment and continuous communication with the relatives. Sweden is the country where she actually lives and makes plans for the future, while the uncertainty whether she and her family might move to Tunisia has an impact of her choices and strategies for her lived citizenship. Her choice of profession, for instance, lies in the area between a social worker if she stays on in Sweden and a teacher, which would probably fit better in Tunisian society. Her circle of friends mainly includes other migrants. This young woman conveys strong feelings of belonging to Tunisian society and to the friendly people that she has met there. She does not tell me about being personally discriminated against in the Swedish society. Instead she refers to general problems of not being really accepted because of being a migrant and to the importance that everyone has the right to be different. This notion is related to what she has heard in communicating with ethnically minoritized friends and to the general opinion of the conditions of migrants in Sweden. Taken together, these aspects of the daily experience of being a migrant constitute a backbone of lived citizenship and create a background for her engagement against social injustice in a local context and also affect her perspective on international conflicts. In discussing the conflict between the Palestine and Israeli people she expresses her solidarity with the Palestinian people, which is derived from her feeling of community and we-ness (Alexander 2006), since she is a Muslim herself.

Once I worked a lot on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I like to be engaged but I am not interested in party politics, rather in one issue at the time. …I am not one who sits thinking things over for a long time; I prefer to act. … Actually in this town it seems that nobody struggles for things. There are no demonstrations for any kind of issues. … It is very silent. It is a shame (Amina).

This young woman became a local activist trying to get others engaged in the issue. She acted by volunteering in a group which supported the Palestinian people’s political struggle. She also acted as a fund-raiser with the aim of helping Palestinian children. This was her way of contributing to a solution of the conflict by bringing the
question into the public debate among people in the civil sphere of the local community. Amina illustrates how personal/family memories, the creation of bonds of symbolic we-ness (Muslims, migrants) in relation to both transnational networks and local experiences and connections are interlinked in creating active citizenship. This is manifested in her solidarity both with the Palestinian people, with her Tunisian family and with migrant friends in Sweden. Following Isin and Nielsen (2008), her agency can be understood as acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008). These acts are parts of what can be understood as political ability in a broad sense (Lister 2003:38) – i.e. how young people belonging to often stigmatized categories of *immigrants* in Sweden find their frames of reference (or the *boundaries of solidarity* in Alexander’s (2006:3) terminology) in both local, national and international contexts. The interrelation between these contexts, or as the case of Amina illustrates, personally making sense of and bringing together different aspects of social injustice contributes to individual engagement and expressions of *acts of citizenship*.

According to the theoretical understanding of acts of citizenship, the notion of citizenship should be investigated beyond status and practices and from the perspective where the doer as the object of investigation is exchanged in favour of the deed (Isin and Nielsen 2008:2). Shifting the perspective from citizenship as an institutional category and citizens as agents to acts that disrupt traditional social patterns, as argued by Isin and Nielsen (2008:2), facilitates an in-depth understanding of what the young women and men interviewed in the Swedish study (Jacobson Pettersson 2008) expressed, to which I will return to below. Their attitudes towards what is right or wrong, just or unfair, responsible and answerable appeared to be the driving forces for them to become active citizens with the intention to make a change. Supported by the arguments of Isin and Nielsen (2008), that it is the intention to and
ground for a change that makes the act and the act that makes the citizen, the intention to act of the young women and men participating in the study are given a prominent position in the analyses. This is complementary to what is more often discussed as active citizenship, the actual acts.

In the understanding of acts of citizenship the dimension of answerability for others and the Other holds a prominent position (Isin and Nielsen 2008:28-35). Answerability closely connects to solidarity, which Alexander in turn gives a prominent position when discussing the understanding of the concept of civil sphere (Alexander 2006:213). Social relations and the local community frame the area of the civil sphere with its fundamentals and boundaries of solidarity. The role of the civil sphere in this study is the space from which arises the engagement and effort to create a decent social life. These are spaces to which the interviewees’ acts of citizenship are directed to do good to their own group and to the Other. A main issue is to create a more integrated society by contributing with their experiences of everyday life about the constraints and possibilities of being ethnically minoritized. A twenty-one-year-old woman who came to Sweden from Iran when she was four years old has built her political ideology on her experiences from everyday life in the Swedish society.

… parts of the policy is merely about improvements to the already well off. One does not think of those who are exposed which I think is the most important thing to do. … to make a change for those who become vulnerable due to economy, health and ethnicity in Sweden (Interview 16).

The social awareness, she told me, derives from her lived experiences, which have convinced her to vote in the next election. She wants a change in the political direction towards social justice.

**A three-dimension theoretical model of active citizenship**
The findings in this paper support the recognition of a broader model of understanding social citizenship. The model has turned out to be useful in
transforming the more general social citizenship discourse into a discourse on active
citizenship. The proposed model incorporates three dimensions of interaction in the
process of creating active citizenship as a theoretical framework and empirical
phenomenon as shown in Figure 1 below.

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Figure 1. *Three dimensions interacting in the process of creating active citizenship as a theoretical framework and empirical phenomenon.*

The first dimension is the subjective experiences from everyday life, i.e. lived
citizenship (Lister 2003:3). Such experiences have been illustrated and elaborated on
from the empirical findings as being driving forces for making active citizenship. The
second dimension act, defines acts of citizenship and how citizens become active
citizens through human agency and participation in society, in other words, political
levels, such as formal political activities and informal neighborhood interaction in the
civil sphere, strengthens and widens people’s sense of political competence (Lister
2003:38). It also clarifies how intentions to act and social commitments actualize acts
that turn people into activists and active citizens (Isin and Nielsen 2008). Active citizenship through participation is not contradictory to what Isin and Nielsen say about an act of citizenship, since the latter is the intention of the preceding step, meaning that acts produce actors (Isin and Nielsen 2008:36) or active citizens. The third dimension in this mode of thinking is the civil sphere as a dynamic space for democratic participation (Alexander 2006:5). This implies the idea of transforming society via the acting and social participation of citizens. The civil sphere is where most interviewees’ acts and willingness to act for a fair and good life, their own and other’s welfare in the name of solidarity actually set out from. It is the basis from which they take charge of their social lives and construct lived citizenship, and where they become active citizens and claim full membership in society. This dynamic theoretical model helps to give meaning not just to the acts but to the intentions and willingness to do good to oneself and to society.

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1 In this text, minoritized people are understood as being constructed as ethnic minorities by the ethnic majority people. This process comprises a power relation between the two groups in terms of subordination and superiority. The notion minoritized is used in the line of thought of Gunaratnam as *to give some sense of the active processes of racialization that are at work in designating certain attributes of groups in particular contexts as being in a “minority* (Gunaratnam 2003:17).

2 From the perspective of the theoretical acts of citizenship model one should focus on those acts when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due. But the focus shifts from subjects as such to acts (or deeds) that produce such subjects (Isin, E. F. & Nielsen, G. M. 2008:2).

3 The interviewees’ ethnic and national backgrounds are Brazil, Cameroon, China, Germany, Greece, Iran, Kosovo, Lebanon, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Tunisia.

4 The first principle of investigating acts of citizenship is to interpret them through their grounds and...
consequences, which includes subjects becoming activist citizens through scenes created (Isin, E. F. & Nielsen, G. M., 2008:38).

The second principle of theorizing acts of citizenship recognizes that acts produce actors that become answerable to justice against injustice (Isin, E. F. & Nielsen, G. M., 2008:39).

The third principle of theorizing acts of citizenship is to recognize that acts of citizenship do not need to be founded in law or enacted in the name of the law (Isin, E. F. & Nielsen, G. M., 2008:39).

The term we-ness is used in this article in line with Alexander’s understanding of we-ness. … I wish to understand civil society as the arena not of solidarity narrowly defined in a communitarian and particularistic way but in universalistic terms. It is the we-ness of a national, regional, or international community, the feeling of connectedness to “every member” of that community, that transcends particular commitments, narrow loyalties, and sectional interests (Alexander 2006:43).

Solidarity and community in universalistic terms, Alexander argues, is about shared feelings and symbolic commitments, to what and how people speak, think, and feel about politics and, more generally, about democratic social life (Alexander 2006:43).