



IMAGINED INDEPENDENCE

Institutional Conditions and Individual Opportunities
in European Labour Markets

YLVA WALLINDER

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Ylva Wallinder



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND WORK SCIENCE

Ylva Wallinder
Department of Sociology and Work Science
University of Gothenburg
Box 720
SE 405 30 Gothenburg
Sweden
ylva.wallinder@gu.se

Imagined Independence. Institutional Conditions and Individual Opportunities in European Labour Markets.

Author: Ylva Wallinder

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Abstract

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Author: Ylva Wallinder

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The studies presented in this thesis examine perceived labour market opportunities and conditions for labour market mobility for European employees. The European labour market strategy has created an opportunity-oriented employability-logic that emphasises individual characteristics and individual responsibility for employment. Within this logic, individuals are active job seekers and should continuously develop their employability skills, a one-dimensional focus on employability. In contrast, this thesis argues that the current employability discourse fails to account for two further relevant and interdependent dimensions of employability, namely the institutional context and the local recognition of employees' resources at the workplace. Thus, individual characteristics, institutional conditions and local recognition for resources are vital for employment. The institutional context influences individuals' access to education and employment, as well as employers' mode of recruiting employees. The resources held by individuals are also relational in the sense that they are influenced by everyday practices of recognition and workplace situations.

The thesis draws on both survey data and interview data. The first part of the thesis (**Paper I-II**) combines individual-level data from European Social Survey (ESS 2004 and 2010) with country-level data measuring national variations in terms of employment protection legislation, labour market policies and education systems. The second part of the thesis (**Paper III-IV**) analyses conditions for intra-European labour market mobility by examining a rather privileged group of labour migrants, namely highly skilled Swedish migrants with a university degree from Sweden and employment in Germany or the United Kingdom, with who in-depth interviews were conducted 2014-2015.

Paper I examines the influence of European countries' specific institutional contexts, such as labour market policies, education systems and employment protection legislations, on employees' perceived labour market opportunities. The results show that employability is a multifaceted concept. The detected interdependence between individual characteristics and the institutional context is further investigated in **Paper II**, which focuses on the effect of economic conditions on perceived employability amongst native-born and foreign-born individuals by comparing data prior to and during the aftermath of the economic crisis in 2008/09. The findings show a potential mismatch between employees'

opportunity-perceptions and their expected *de facto* labour market possibilities, as foreign-born employees perceive better labour market prospects than native-born employees. These patterns, however, vary depending on the applicable institutional context. The interdependence of individual characteristics and the institutional context is further examined in the final two papers, which focus on the relationship between national and transnational labour markets. **Paper III** and **IV** show that highly skilled Swedish labour migrants encounter difficulties during employment abroad, despite their high levels of recognized resources regarding their level of education and country of birth. However, the papers show that the migrants experience an inability to achieve a transnational recognition of their resources which causes a feeling of vulnerability abroad. **Paper III** conceptualises the collision between the self-image and the actual experiences of the migrants as *imagined independence*, depicting a tension between their specific experiences and their self-image; none withstanding the experienced vulnerability, their self-image as independent employee remains unchanged. Moreover, as **Paper IV** shows, the privileged position given education and country of birth is an important part of their self-image and enables them to challenge norms in the society/workplace. Overall, these two papers show that local workplace conditions and recognition of resources may be decisive for the individuals' potential labour market opportunities in the country of employment.

The theoretical argument of the thesis is that labour market opportunities are primarily socially framed, which challenge the current European opportunity-oriented policy approach. The process of social framing is a consequence of the dominant institutional conditions and the local social settings which provide or limit access to important labour market resources. As such, the thesis acknowledges that employability requires recognition of individuals' resources, and that this recognition is context-dependent.

Key words: perceived employability, labour mobility, highly skilled migration, institutional context, labour market policies, im/mobility of capital, imagined independence.

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*Till minne av min mormor, Birgit Wallinder
Till min lillplutt, Edda Birgit Wallinder*

*Till minne av min morfar, Sigfrid Wallinder
Till min storplutt, Emil Sigfried Wallinder*

*Till alla minnen vi har
Till alla minnen vi får*

Till Ljfvat

Paper I

Berglund, Tomas and Wallinder, Ylva (2015) Perceived employability in difficult economic times. The significance of education systems and labour market policies. *European Societies* 17(5): 674-699.

Paper II

Wallinder, Ylva (2018) Perceived employability among foreign-born employees. Before and During Crisis. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*. Advance online publication, doi: 10.1177/0143831X18804355.

Paper III

Wallinder, Ylva (Forthcoming) Imagined Independence among Highly Skilled Swedish Labour Migrants. *Sociologisk Forskning* (Accepted for publication).

Paper IV

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1

Introduction

The transnational mobility of people, capital, services and goods within European borders has increased over the past decades (Eurydice 2012). Europeans may consider transnational mobility to gain useful labour market experiences and improve career opportunities. At the same time, there is not one European labour market, as national contexts and labour market opportunities differ across European countries (Andreotti et al. 2015, Likic-Brboric 2011).

Research shows that many different factors impact the labour market opportunity and mobility of individuals, including geographic location, organizational conditions, social and political environment, existing inequality patterns and class structure in a given (national) context (see Andreotti et al. 2015, Devadason 2017, Weiß 2005). However, the current employability discourse in Europe places the responsibility for employment on the individual (Jacobsson 2004). In practice, this means that employees need to be adaptable, flexible, mobile and sociable in order to match different employers' requirements (Garsten and Jacobsson 2004, Cremin 2010, Sparrhoff and Fejes 2016). Free mobility within the European Union (EU) is currently described as an opportunity "for all" European citizens (see Littler 2018, also Merkel 2007), though it is clear that different welfare state designs affect access to intra-European labour mobility, e.g., differences in national education systems, labour market policies and legislation (e.g., Boman 2002, Bonoli 1997, Lundvall and Lorenz 2012, Morel et al. 2012). Figures show that most Europeans apply for positions in their home country and that only 1.5-2% of Europeans from the EU-15 countries move each year, even if the figure has slowly increased (Andreotti et al. 2015: 2, see also EC 2018).

This thesis focuses on conditions for labour market opportunities and labour market mobility within the EU in relation to the current European policy framework that claims equal opportunity for all employees. The thesis will further scrutinize the ways in which diverse institutional conditions influence perceived labour markets opportunities for Europeans as well as shed light on the types of resources and country contexts that are beneficial to labour market mobility. Finally, the thesis will analyse labour migrants' experiences and strategies in the intra-European labour market and it will contribute with an analytical framework for understanding conditions, experiences and strategies in European national labour markets.

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Historically, the concept of employability has been defined in manifold ways (Gazier 2001, Berntson 2008, McQuaid and Lindsay 2005). However, on a policy level the EU has created an opportunity-oriented employability-logic that emphasizes meritocratic competition and, thus, places responsibility on the individual (Brown et al. 2011, Littler 2017). In reality, though, intra-European mobility is a matter of competition on unequal terms. In this thesis, it will be argued that individuals' perceived ability to be mobile and employable are affected by both institutional context and individual characteristics. Moreover, the ability of employees to make use of their resources, is influenced by everyday local practices and situations. Altogether, these three factors are sometimes of advantage for the individual, but sometimes inhibit actual opportunities.

The institutional context includes particular country-level conditions available, e.g., via the individual's citizenship or country of employment. Institutional conditions such as governmental spending on labour market policies, labour market legislation as well as social and educational policies, curriculums and regulations can be supportive of or restrict individuals' opportunities in the labour market, which has direct consequences for their (work)life. For example, citizenship can influence the individual's access to schooling, training and the like. Individual characteristics influencing labour market opportunities are factors such as gender, age, country of origin and/or level of education (Acker 1990, 2006, Furåker 2005, Åslund et al. 2014).

It has been argued that institutional context and individual characteristics influence individuals' subjective labour market opportunities, that is, *perceived employability* (Berglund and Wallinder 2015, Chung and van Oorschot 2011). But why is it interesting to study individuals' *subjective* labour market opportunities rather than the *de facto* situations? Previous research has found that perceived labour market prospects are important for individual well-being, security and satisfaction (Berglund et al. 2014, Sverke et al. 2002). Therefore, studying self-perceptions and individual characteristics in relation to different institutional contexts can contribute towards an important analytical framework for understanding the conditions, experiences and strategies observed in European (trans)national labour markets. As argued in the thesis, institutional conditions, such as labour market legislation and welfare spending, can affect how employees view their employment options. Perceived employability then becomes an important 'coping mechanism' in handling high levels of job insecurity and low levels of employment protection, that is, "the job security of the modern labour market" (Berntson et al. 2006: 224) that stresses future employability rather than present job security within one and the same position (Clarke and Patrickson 2008).

Apart from the institutional context and individuals' characteristics, the arguments put forward in this thesis assume that an additional factor affects individuals' labour markets opportunities, namely the social workplace setting and relational character of employees' resources. In the thesis, social relations are seen as an important part of individuals' labour market situation, expressed via everyday practices and performances in the workplace (see Goffman 1990) and

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affected by social norms and institutional regulations. Moreover, individuals' characteristics can be seen as a culture-specific resource, giving access to local forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1990). Hence, capital theories are essential to understanding how individuals perceive their labour market opportunities in different local settings. Altogether, these three factors – the institutional context, individuals' characteristics and the relational character of employees' resources – are believed to bring forward important dimensions of inequality and thus challenge the opportunity-driven EU discourse that more or less assumes that every European citizen has the same labour market opportunities.

The thesis focuses on the highly skilled in the European labour market. Previous employability-related research has often focused on marginalized and disadvantaged groups with low levels of employment opportunities, such as the low-skilled individuals, the long-term unemployed, people on long-term sick leave or particular migrant groups more likely to remain unemployed (Garsten and Jacobsson 2013, Peralta 2014, Vesterberg 2016). Instead, the present study focuses on the comparatively privileged and resourceful: highly skilled¹ and educated employees (Favell 2008, Åberg 2004). This is an interesting group, because the European member states consider education key to access employment on the basis of meritocratic competition (Littler 2017, Lundvall and Lorenz 2012). Following the logic of existing policies, it is relatively easy for the highly skilled to get into the European labour market, although there are several factors that influence employability in the intra-European labour market, as mentioned above. This thesis will therefore further explore conditions for labour mobility by focusing on the perceptions, experiences and strategies of highly skilled Swedish labour migrants in the European labour market. Swedish citizens have historically enjoyed high security due to the generous unemployment benefits ensured by the welfare state and policies of 'de-commodification' (Edebalk 2013, Esping-Andersen 1990). Due to their resources, this group of highly skilled employees has been assumed to satisfactorily orient themselves in an intra-European labour market, and benefit from the opportunity-focused EU strategies that are driven by policy-makers, politicians and employers (cf. Merkel 2007, Eurydice 2012, EC 2018). By studying perceived labour market opportunities of highly skilled Swedish labour migrants, it is expected that more general conditions for transnational labour market mobility are found to be of importance. Problems faced by this privileged category of employees can be

¹ Studies of highly skilled labour migrants often refer to a mobile group of individuals who are employed in transnational corporations, moving within the same enterprise to a foreign district: These 'Managerial Elites' bring recognized knowledge, skills and intelligence across borders, as an inter-company transfer (ICT) (see Beaverstock 2005, Devadason 2017, also Bogren 2008). In this thesis, the term highly skilled labour migrants refers to individuals who themselves applied for jobs abroad and were not transferred within the same company/organization (see Appendix 3). Highly skilled migrants are further defined according to ISCO-08 Major Group 2 (*professionals*), with a skill level 4, that is, completed minimum *first or second stage of tertiary education* (i.e., comparable to group 6 or 5a in ISCED-97 classification) (ILO 2012). The use of highly skilled, rather than highly educated, in the following parts of the thesis is consistent with existing European policies and politics that facilitate the mobility of 'attractive' and skilled employees, in contrast to low-skilled employees (see Cerna 2014; Lundvall and Lorenz 2012; also, Eurydice 2012).

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assumed to be more severe for other migrant employees who are more vulnerable, e.g., due to low levels of education or stigmatized origins.

In sum, this thesis argues that the concept of employability has three sides: individual characteristics (resources, skills and competences), the institutional context (affecting paths to employment and employers mode of recruiting employees including governments preparedness to use demand stimulus in the economy) and the relational character of employees resources (affected by everyday work-practices and situations). Thus, it is argued that an ongoing interplay between these three sides needs to be recognized, wherefore we have to understand individual resources as a context-dependent form of capital. Therefore, this thesis examines whether distributional differences are solely based on country of residence and formal/legal citizenship or whether they are linked to other forms of (individual) resources, such as perceived opportunities used to allocate oneself a position in the transnational labour market; it also examines whether such embodied resources orient individuals in different directions in social space (see Ahmed 2007, Leonard 2010, Weiß 2005). The overall thesis framework will engage with the topic of labour market opportunities and examine potential conditions for employability as well as opportunities for labour market mobility.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The aim of this thesis is to improve our understanding of European employees' perceived labour market opportunities and of the experiences and strategies used by highly skilled employees in the European labour market. The thesis analyses how individuals' perceptions are influenced by (a) the institutional conditions on the country level, and (b) individual characteristics. The ontological and epistemological assumption that the meaning of individuals' (trans)national employment opportunities is subjective and context dependent supports the importance of both social and institutional contexts for individuals' perceived security and labour market prospects. Furthermore, this thesis analyses c) the impact of lived experiences and strategies that need to be understood interdependently and with reference to local recognition of individual resources.

The overall research questions addressed in the thesis are:

- (1) What institutional conditions and individual characteristics impact European individuals' perceived employability and labour market opportunities?
- (2) How can we theoretically and empirically understand the experiences and strategies of highly skilled labour migrants in European labour markets?

These two overall questions are complementary, highly intertwined and devised to help in understanding the nexus of the perceived employability, experiences

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and strategies of the highly skilled, as addressed in the following four research papers:

1. *What institutional conditions and individual characteristics impact European individuals' perceived employability and labour market opportunities?*
-

Paper I: How do individual and contextual (country-level) factors impact individually perceived employability among European employees?

Paper II: How do employees' country of birth and level of education impact individually perceived employability, and how does this effect vary with economic conditions and country-level factors?

2. *How can we theoretically and empirically understand the experiences and strategies of highly skilled labour migrants in European labour markets?*
-

Paper III: What expectations do highly skilled Swedish labour migrants have when seeking qualified employment abroad? In what ways do their experiences match their expectations? What strategies are used to handle the potential mismatch between expectations and experiences and with what implications?

Paper IV: How do highly skilled Swedish labour migrants experience and handle a sense of 'otherness' in the intra-European labour market?

By responding to these questions, the present study aims to deepen our understanding of conditions for Europeans' (trans)national labour mobility and perceived employment prospects.

1.2 Study outline

In this chapter, the background, key concepts related to the interdependence between individuals, their resources and country-level context in national labour market settings have been briefly introduced. These concepts and processes are further elaborated in chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 2 provides a background for the central concepts, presenting the general setting of current European policy and politics of labour market mobility in trans-/national society/ies. Chapter 3 presents the study's theoretical framework, bringing forward the numerous factors shaping both native-born and foreign-born employees' access to the transnational and national labour market. Chapter 4 describes the research process, methodological and analytical tools

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applied, providing a justification for sampling and analyses of both the survey data and the qualitative interviews. In addition, the approach of analysing both aggregated individual survey data and qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews is outlined. Moreover, the thesis' abductive approach is described, where data and theoretical concepts were interlinked from the very beginning of the research process. Finally, chapter 5 offers a concluding discussion and ideas for further research.

2

Background

In this section, a general background will be provided. First, the thesis discusses employability as an emergent policy concept. Thereafter, a focus on educational incentives and validation mechanisms for facilitating intra-European labour market mobility is described. Finally, potential contradictions between (national) welfare solutions and open borders for job mobility are discussed.

2.1 A policy shift in Europe

During the 20th century, Western industrial societies have undergone a radical shift. In the early period, bureaucracy, mass production, standardization, centralization processes and specialization dominated working life. The latter period of the 20th century was instead characterized by a greater degree of decentralization, globalization, uncertainty and unpredictability (Castells 1996, Freeman 2001). Peterson explains that this period is characterized by management flexibility and the process of individualization, for example via employees' enforced adaptability to "the customers' needs and employers' expectations" (Peterson 2005: 24, 34). Moreover, in the 1990s, a 're-commodification of the workforce' occurred in many Western societies, where individuals became more dependent on market forces for their well-being (e.g. Bengtsson 2017, Breen 1997, Svallfors 2006). Today, this individualization process has taken further steps, characterized as employee self-management, where individuals are increasingly forced to choose and assume responsibility for their labour – even in situations when their degree of freedom is largely restricted (Beck 2008). Altogether, with increased privatization and a shift in policy focus, where responsibility for employment has shifted from the government to the individual employee, societies in the European Western hemisphere have seen paradigmatic changes at least since the 1990s.

Related to this discursive and policy shift, a new European social model was launched that encouraged citizens to actively look for employment and to be prepared to undergo training and competence development to remain employable (e.g., Jacobsson 2004, Morel et al. 2012, Serrano Pascual 2007). This change of focus, starting in the 1990s, emphasized the individuals' own responsibility for being attractive to employers. Governments started to promote 'active solidarity' via labour market policies supporting active participation of individuals rather than passive financial governmental support during unemployment. In such a

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context, it was vital for the worker to have the right qualifications and attitudes to secure an employment position (Berntson et al. 2006, Berntson et al. 2011, Forrier and Sels 2003, Forrier et al. 2018). In parallel, universities in Europe are today required to teach their graduate students how to become ‘employable subjects’ (Sparrhoff 2016).

Historically, the concept of employability was introduced in European labour market politics in the early 20th century, during times of labour shortage, and introduced a binary distinction between employment/unemployment, thereby putting forward a discursive tool to combat unemployment (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005, Berntson 2008). However, towards the end of the 20th century, the employability discourse changed and instead emphasized *performativity*, indicating that employability must be produced and expressed in daily activity. Overall, the focus on employability during the past decades can be seen as an attempt to impact the ‘supply’ side of the labour market (i.e., the resources, such as qualifications, skills and performances, of jobseekers and employees) rather than the ‘demand’ side (i.e., employers’ requirements). A general policy tendency has been to increasingly emphasize individuals’ transitions between jobs, shifting from ‘job protection’ within one and the same employment position to “security through employment” by preparing individuals to change positions rather frequently (Gazier 2001: 4).

As a result of the current policy discourse, the employability concept has frequently been key in the political and policy framework during recent decades, as well as within scientific research. Employability has increasingly been cited in scientific publications during the past decade (Berntson 2008, Forrier et al. 2018, Sparrhoff 2016).² Nevertheless, the concept can have multiple meanings. The many definitions of employability in national policies during the past century indicate that there is no stable definition of the concept.

In the beginning of the 21st century, Bernard Gazier (2001) explored the importance of maintaining a balance between the supply and demand side of the labour market, when implementing the concept of employability in a policy discourse. According to Gazier, a dynamic understanding of employability acknowledges that whereas 1) individuals need to adapt their employability to existing labour market conditions, educational pathways and recruitment trends, 2) policymakers are required to adapt labour market conditions to the labour market supply. This is in contrast to the common use of the term employability in policy discourse, where it is viewed as an agency-centered (and one-sided) individualized project, as discussed above (see also Forrier et al. 2018). Along with Gazier, this thesis suggests that a dynamic and interactive definition of employability is important: The ongoing interplay between these two sides of employability, individual characteristics and institutional context, needs to be acknowledged. We must not forget how the institutional context designs and

² A citation report from *the Web of Science* indicates that employability citations increased after 2006 (see Appendix 1) and that academic research incorporates political concepts (and not the other way around). In fact, the overall figure signifies that the concept was hardly used in research articles prior to the early 1990s (not shown due to low grading).

shapes labour market conditions and educational pathways, because this affects individuals' possibilities to work on their employability. Nonetheless, this thesis further suggests that a third factor is of importance to individuals' employability: The relational character of employees' resources. Thus, the supply side (including individuals characteristics) requires recognition in the local society, irrespective of what kind of institutional conditions exist, and the level of local recognition most likely affects individuals' perceptions and future labour market prospects. We will return to this question below.

However, as previously suggested, the present employability-logic within the European Union has been shown to focus more on individuals' responsibility for their own employment, i.e., their responsibility, flexibility, sociability and adaptability to employers' requirements (Garsten and Jacobsson 2004, Cremin 2010, Sparrhoff and Fejes 2016). Such a focus disregards the impact of specific institutional conditions on individuals' perceived and experienced labour market opportunities. Thus, the supply side of employability is being promoted in relation to adaptation of individuals' characteristics and resources. To understand the current paradigm, we therefore need to look beyond the present context.

2.2 Education as social security and competitive advantage

Daniel Bell (1973) discussed how post-industrial society would develop; he predicted that increased demand for educated workers would be a characteristic of the post-industrial economy. Bell's description implied that educated workers would have greater autonomy in their work, owing to the increased importance of professional, technical and theoretical knowledge. Education was said to be a dividing mechanism in society, where the educated would have a greater degree of autonomy. What followed the predictions of the early 1970s was an expansion of tertiary education and lifelong learning, as well as a growing demand for highly skilled workers (Brown and Tannock 2009, Lauder et al. 2006). Thus, an expansion of educational opportunities in the so-called post-industrial society did occur.

Increased reliance on the global knowledge-driven economy emerged, which was believed to create more opportunities for upward mobility for Western workers. Educational merits became a form of security generator, giving rise to potential middle-class jobs. Belief in education as a security solution has been described as a form of "secular religion" (Brown et al. 2011: 15). Thus, a power shift from 'muscles' to 'brains' emerged, as hard work and diligent efforts came to be associated with qualifications and knowledge merits, fostering the eternal desire for lifelong learning. In this connection, faith in human capital development is expressed as a solution to existing social problems; it is a belief that empowering individuals will enable them to assume responsibility for their own livelihood.

Within the European Union, current governmental priorities and general educational policies are guided by incentives designed in the Lisbon Strategy and

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Europe 2020 (EU2020). However, the Lisbon Strategy and EU2020 combine different views on how states should take responsibility for citizens' well-being. The Lisbon Strategy was formed at the end of the previous century, a period with rather low employment and growth rates. Inspired by the flourishing development in the US, European policymakers wanted to introduce a more unregulated market as well as increase investments in knowledge capital and entrepreneurial skills (in order to create a knowledge-based economy). Further, the Lisbon Strategy was a kind of revitalization of the European Employment Strategy (EES)³, defined in 1996. The EU2020 was instead introduced during a period highly affected by the European financial crisis of 2008/09. In reality, the Lisbon Strategy defined the provision of "more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" as an important goal (Lundvall and Lorenz 2012: 334), while EU2020 focused more strongly on growth and employment – independent of the kind of job (as long as there is a competitive and innovative relation between knowledge and growth). These priorities arguably cause a weakening of social dimensions in welfare provision, as social cohesion needs to step back in favour of a focus on job creation and growth (see Bonoli 2010).

These contextual differences clarify the diverse approaches visible in the two strategies, even if similarities also can be found: Both strategies have goals such as social cohesion and knowledge economy, yet with different targets and priorities (Lundvall and Lorenz 2012). In both strategies, "development of relevant skills for the 21st century" (OECD 2011: 30) is a central theme. However, it might be difficult for employees to know what 'skills' are actually 'relevant', because this most likely varies, e.g., depending on the state of the market.

One could argue that the post-industrial society Bell (1973) depicted is a meritocratic society with regard to its logic, in that talent, performance and achievements rather than traditional class privilege are promoted.⁴ As previously described, such a society emphasizes professional, technical and theoretical knowledge, as the educated were supposed to gain increased autonomy in their work, as well as increased wages. Bell used the term 'meritocracy' to visualize how post-industrial society would produce new forms of social mobility. However, his vision emerged in a situation where a strong welfare state could compensate for the most severe effects of market-produced social inequality, upholding the distinction between "opportunity for social mobility" side by side with the goal to achieve "productive wealth" (Littler 2018: 41). As described here, the society that arose thereafter was shaped by a neoliberal vision of meritocracy, where the

³ The European Employment Strategy (EES) was later introduced in 1997, via the Treaty of Amsterdam. The main goal of EES was to "help coordinate employment policies of the Member States" (EU 2010: 1). The four priority pillars of EES are employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities (EU 2005).

⁴ For example, Boman (2002) argues that equality has been a fundamental part of Swedish educational policy during the 20th century, and that access to education and employment is based on principles other than traditional (class) privileges. In such a system, it is argued, *talent* should be the only factor producing inequality, and these inequalities can be legitimized as long as access to education is equal. From this perspective, educational policies can be considered to demonstrate the normative values that dominate in a society.

actual meaning of a ‘fair society’ was constructed by how competition between individuals has been expressed and extended.

In conclusion, the contemporary supply-oriented employment market (see Peck and Theodore 2000, also Garsten and Jacobsson 2004) emphasizes individuals’ adaptability in a ‘learning economy’. In such a society, the individual’s responsibility is emphasized in work as well as in private life. Furthermore, educational opportunities could be seen as a form of social security resource, providing opportunity rights to achieve potential middle-class jobs.

2.3 Opportunity rights and productive wealth

Ralph Dahrendorf (1994) made an important distinction between welfare states and citizenship when he defined them in terms of *provisions* and *entitlements*. Provisions can be seen as a set of opportunities and choices in society, whereas the term entitlements refers to general access to such opportunities. The distinction indicates the interdependency between two conditions: Entitlements without provisions would imply that ‘one and the same solution fits all’, and provisions without entitlements would most likely (re)produce existing social structures and (economic) differences in a society (or welfare state). Thus, such interdependency puts forward an important analytical distinction between social rights, either as entitlements or as opportunities (the latter viewed as individual choices). The aim of entitlements is inclusive principles, generating unconditional rights for a given population (Dahrendorf 1994, Turner 2006), whereas opportunities are more dependent on individuals’ achievements and recognition of their resources (Brown et al. 2011). Thus, entitlements are wider ranging, often connected to national citizenship, while opportunity rights are more fragmented. Along with the previous statement, a strict focus on available opportunities for social security disregards the fundamental fact that different categories of individuals might have different access to opportunity rights, which most likely affects their perceived social security.

Prior to the Lisbon Strategy, in the 1990s, researchers and policymakers promoted the so-called European *social investment strategy*, including the liberal ideal of equal opportunity for all citizens. This strategy could be contrasted to the more individual-oriented neoliberal era following the economic crisis of the early 1970s, with a stronger emphasis on corporate competitiveness, budgetary rigour and wage restraint (Morell et al. 2012). As a strategy, however, the social investment perspective also relied on market principles: ‘To succeed in the labour market, individuals and their families were called upon “to invest in their human capital” (Jenson 2012: 69), and this further required an “enabling state” that invests in social policies (Morell et al. 2012: 8). Accordingly, there are similarities between the social investment strategy’s focus on opportunity rights and the present employability paradigm, in which individuals are also encouraged to act and take advantage of, e.g., existing opportunities for intra-European labour mobility. As a result, *de facto* social security became a project of individual empowerment and

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the ‘opportunity’ to choose among various available alternatives. Hence, these social policy strategies promote greater market-oriented regulations, where individuals are given possibilities to succeed, facilitated by governmental involvement and generous spending on education activities, family policies and healthcare.

As shown, the social investment perspective encourages a knowledge-based economy, which relies on a skilled and flexible labour force (Bengtsson and Jacobsson 2013, Jenson 2012, Morel et al. 2012). Generous investments in education systems and active labour market policies (ALMPs) are important components of any social investment project. However, the main goal of contemporary ALMP is to curb unemployment and activate disadvantaged jobseekers. Instead of relying on passive financial governmental support during unemployment, citizens should actively look for employment and prepare to undergo continuous training to remain employable (Bengtsson et al. 2017, Bonoli 2012). Thus, it might not be the quantity of ALMP spending that constitutes the most significant factor for individuals’ entrance into the labour market. Instead, the particular direction of ALMP may be more important, and this has changed over time.

During the past decades, many European countries began to increasingly emphasize entry into low-skilled sectors rather than upgrading skills via training measures as a part of their ALMPs. This was a vast change in comparison to the predominant generous social policies during the high growth decades of the 1950s and 1960s, a period of labour shortage in many European countries. However, during the subsequent period (mid-1970s to mid-1990s) the situation transformed radically in many countries due to economic crisis and industrial changes. Active measures no longer meant a general orientation towards up-skilling, but mainly provided occupation for jobless and disadvantaged people (Bonoli 2012), i.e., those furthest away from the labour market. Altogether, the particular direction of welfare priorities, such as active and passive labour market policies, can shape patterns of inequality among citizen in a given welfare state. Such inequality patterns might further affect citizens’ ability to take advantage of different welfare systems simultaneously, as well as their ability to benefit from a transnational labour market with ‘open borders’ for labour mobility.

2.4 Welfare and ‘open borders’

Even if the notion of a welfare state embraces the idea of the state taking care of and having the duty to guarantee the welfare of all its subjects (Esping-Andersen 1990, Bauman and Torhell 2002), the relationship between guaranteed welfare protection and citizenship becomes problematic when transnational mobility comes into the picture. In the 1960s, the welfare state was often characterized using protectionist and nationalist terms: As described by Gunnar Myrdal (1960: 186), the welfare state was believed to be “narrowly and irrationally nationalistic”. The function of the welfare state was then described as a distributor of resources

between individuals, generations and geographical locations. Such transfers occur *within* a defined society, denoting who is inside as well as outside. Thus, one and the same welfare system both included and excluded people on the basis of *national* solidarity.

In relation to the contemporary idea of (intra-European) transnational labour mobility, such national solidarity is brought to a head when the European Union promotes open borders for those who seek employment opportunities within an expanded European labour market (see Likic-Brboric 2011). In an era of large-scale migration, where individuals migrate from their country of origin for different reasons, the very idea of the welfare state as a system that produces welfare *within* national borders gives rise to several questions: Who may take advantage of a system with relatively open borders for intra-European labour migrants? Who can manage to take advantage of different (national) welfare systems simultaneously? Who benefits from the current policy emphasis on individual responsibility and future employability? These questions might challenge the internally redistributive idea of the welfare state, which organizes the distribution of resources between individuals within national borders.

Resources do not only refer to money. Today, human capital – i.e., the share of an individual's educational qualifications, experiences and competences – is promoted as an accumulative and convertible social security resource (Becker 2006, see also Brown et al. 2011). National spending on education, to increase the possibilities for individuals to invest in human capital, is believed to bring about positive 'outcomes' for the national economy in general (Brown et al. 2011). Educational incentives are believed to generate wealth on both the micro- and the macro-level of society. However, from a more national perspective, the current intra-European mobility pattern has created a 'brain drain' of the former Eastern European countries to Western Europe (Parutis 2014), with migration from peripheral countries to the core cities of London, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels and Munich, as per the 'core-periphery' model (see Recchi 2015). During the aftermath of the Lisbon Strategy, many EU member states began adapting their tax system to attract business enterprises and individuals with relevant qualifications (Lundvall and Lorenz 2012). Thus, 'open borders' are more open for qualified European employees who wish to improve their wages. In comparison to forced migrants, highly skilled immigrant workers are more likely to have financial security due to income (Mahroum 2001), and are less likely to be regarded as a cost to the local country's governmental resources. As argued in the thesis, this positioning may affect the self-image of those who see themselves as responsible and highly skilled transnationally mobile employees who are able to take care of themselves.

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2.5 Job mobility in a (trans)national context

To increase job mobility and expand the potential labour market on which employees can apply for positions, institutional incentives and legislative changes have also been made to facilitate intra-European mobility. During recent decades, the Bologna Declaration was established, among others reasons, to create a unified European University system: the European Higher Education Area (Eurydice 2012). This involved the standardization of qualification aims to facilitate intra-European labour market mobility among highly skilled individuals in Europe. Meanwhile, the validation procedures for semi-professionals – lower-skilled mechanics, technicians and construction-workers – are said to be rather simplified; they are quick and effective validations (for the benefit of employers and particular projects). Some critics claim that these validations fail to consider the complexity and locality of the individuals' competences (see Diedrich 2017).

In the discourse accompanying the Bologna process, the value of a higher degree increasingly focuses on improving individuals' *transnational employability*, to become attractive to national and international employers (Lindberg 2016). This means, in practical terms, that individuals are encouraged, to a greater extent than previously, to voluntarily seek employment abroad after having completed their educational training. Although institutional incentives for increasing European citizens' transnational labour market mobility have been offered, the actual non-forced work-related intra-European labour market mobility (i.e., the 'EU-28 movers') has been rather low (EC 2018). In fact, the highly skilled, who have access to transnational connections and capital, often need to negotiate and compromise their mobility in relation to actors other than themselves, for example a potential partner or children (Boström et al. 2018). Thus, transnational mobility can involve personal conflicts. Therefore, individuals' mobility patterns may instead be conditioned by their general level of resources and personal characteristics, and not only by 'objectively' validated educational credentials. Furthermore, transnational mobility opportunities are fragmented, for example in relation to cultural differences based on racism and discrimination (Leonard 2010, Ryan et al. 2015, Weiß 2005).

Actually, previous research indicates that recruitment is often based on stereotypes and group belonging instead of on individuals' formal qualifications (Rydgren 2004). Stereotypes are often socially shared in a specific society, which is why stereotyping is very difficult to notice. Discriminatory behaviour in the labour market can also be connected to network recruitment, where 'gatekeepers' only give access to people who belong to the same type of network (see Granovetter 1995). This is a good example of "opportunity hoarding", i.e., an in-group practice that (often unintentionally) excludes various out-groups (Tilly 2005: 160ff).

In terms of European chain migration, or even circular migration, opportunity hoarding has been rather frequent, e.g., when directing cross-border resources in favour of certain (gendered, 'ethnic' or class-based) groups (Amelina 2016). However, some groups may still be fairly able to move freely across (European)

borders. Cross-border lifestyles are accessible for the rather privileged, highly skilled EU migrants living in larger European cities, i.e. *the Eurostars* (see Favell 2008), even though their opportunities may be hoarded based on particular (imaginary) belongingness (Tilly 2005). According to Andreotti et al. (2015: 10), “the highly educated are considerably more likely to have access to the linguistic, cultural, social and cognitive skills, and the competences necessary to fully participate in the transnational arena”. Thus, European employees have unequal capacity to participate in the intra-European transnational sphere depending on social class and individual characteristics – despite the fact that they all have the same legal right to be mobile within the European Union. The highly skilled Western European employees might not experience ‘ethnic discrimination’, although Favell’s (2008) findings show that these migrants often do not have access to relevant local networks for securing their employment positions, which is why they are unable to convert their skills on the labour market where they are currently employed. Moreover, it has been stated that culture and particular “know-how” skills are most important for integration and labour market success, as many highly skilled migrants face a “glass ceiling in professional advancement” (Favell et al. 2007: 21-22). However, there might be a difference within the category of highly skilled employees with recognized and validated skills and competences: Those who come from a higher (upper-middle-class) social strata might be better able to accumulate transnational resources and to cover the economic expenses required to maintain relevant job-related networks in both the country of origin and the country of destination (see Andreotti et al. 2015, Weiß 2005).

In conclusion, this thesis argues that current labour market inequalities in Europe need to be understood by analysing the interdependency between three factors: the institutional context, individuals’ characteristics and the relational character of employees’ resources. Furthermore, the thesis argues that a broad range of theoretical concepts are required for understanding and interpreting the (dynamic) relation between individuals’ characteristics, their culture-specific resources and the institutional contexts, such as welfare spending and priorities. Such concepts will be defined and discussed in the following theoretical section.

3

Theoretical chapter

The present theoretical approach focuses on the concept of employability and its application, stressing the centrality of recognizing individuals' perceived labour market opportunities from an individual- and an institution-oriented perspective. Here, individually perceived employability will be analysed as an interdependency between formal institutional conditions, individual characteristics and location-specific resources. In addition, the implication of current mobility trends among European employees, as well as the relational character of cultural capital affecting individuals' perceived labour market opportunities, will be emphasized. The relational character of employability is theorised in line with Goffman's (1990) conceptualization, and helps to define the link between institutional (macro-level) context and individuals' (normative) perceptions of the actual workplace.

3.1 Understanding labour market positions

The employability paradigm, as described above, promotes the notion that individuals must be ready for continuous learning if they are to meet employers' demands. However, no clear-cut definition of employability exists (see Forrier et al. 2018, Gazier 2001). In this section, the concept of employability will be compared with the concept of employment security. Moreover, a discussion about the centrality of analysing individuals' perceived employability is provided.

As argued in this thesis, employability needs to be recognized from different angles: on the one hand, we have the individual's ability to find a job (along with his/her resources) and, on the other, the institutional context. Moreover, we have the lived experiences of everyday practices in the workplace. Therefore, this thesis argues that there is a third relational side of employability, where, among other things, recruitment trends play a role. These recruitment trends are formed in relation to the prevailing institutional setting. As discussed in Paper II of the thesis, an economic crisis or the firmness of employment protection legislation can affect the type of individual characteristics and resources that have priority among recruiters. For example, certain migrant groups might be more affected by these trends, as employers are more likely to recruit employees similar to themselves in times of few job openings (Acker 1990, 2006, Furåker 2005, Wallinder 2018, Åslund et al. 2014). Such conditions most likely also affect employees' perceptions and labour market prospects.

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Another way to classify individuals' positions in the labour market, as reflected in the existing policy discourse and scientific research, is by using the concept employment security. The concept of employment security, used in Paper I, refers to individuals' actual possibility to find new positions in the event of job loss (Wilthagen and Tros 2004, Berglund and Wallinder 2015, Vulkan 2016). In contrast to the current employability agenda, employment security emphasizes the relevance of labour market policies for individuals' ability to remain in employment, although not necessarily with the same employer. In the flexicurity nexus (as discussed in Paper I), the concept of employment security operates in relation to social security (e.g., via compensating security for weaker groups), on the one hand, and enhancing the flexibility of labour markets, labour relations and work organizations, on the other. Thus, flexicurity attempts to combine different forms of security with flexibility, requiring that flexibility *and* security policies (such as job security, income security and combination security⁵) are developed and organized synchronously (Wilthagen and Tros 2004).

The concept of employment security is, to a certain extent, in juxtaposition to the present individual-oriented definition of employability. For individuals to acquire employment security, as addressed above, the political will to organize the institutional level is required, safeguarding individuals' conditions to find a new employment position on short notice in the event of job loss (e.g., by providing training activities and unemployment benefits). Instead, as we have seen, the current employability-logic within the EU starts from a more individual-oriented (thus one-sided) perspective (see Brown et al. 2011, Littler 2017), where the institutional level puts forward individuals' responsibility to seek employment via employment incentives as an important active measure (see Bengtsson 2017, Bengtsson and Jacobsson 2013, Bonoli 2012, Sparrhoff and Fejes 2016). Such an individual-oriented employability logic could also be characterized as providing a somewhat simplified relation between individuals' resources and the institutional setting, e.g., disregarding the fact that resources must be recognized in the local society. To understand *why* certain individuals are more successful in the labour market than others, we need a model that identifies *how* individual characteristics and resources intersect with institutional contexts.

Taking the above into consideration, the individual's position in the labour market also depends on his/her subjective position, as opposed to the *de facto* achieved position (in economic productivity terms defined as the 'labour market outcome', see Becker 2006 and others). Perceived employability is often defined as individuals' perceived possibilities to either remain in their present employment position or find a new position (Berntson et al. 2006). This definition of employability considers that individuals in a similar context may perceive their situation differently (Heijde and Van Der Heijden 2006, Vanhercke et al. 2014). In this thesis, perceived employability is defined in terms of (European) employees' perceived chances of transiting between jobs (Berglund and Wallinder

⁵ 'Combination security' addresses the ability to combine employment with other forms of responsibility and commitment, such as caring for children and the elderly (Wilthagen and Tros 2004).

2015). It is argued that individuals' perception of labour prospects may to some extent capture the constant interplay between employees' social and institutional context, which further affects how they view the amount of choices they will have available in the long run. As indicated, perceived employability can become an important 'coping mechanism' in situations of job insecurity and weak employment protection (Berntson et al. 2006, Clarke and Patrickson 2008) by affecting employees' general well-being and job satisfaction (Berglund et al. 2014, Sverke et al. 2002).

To be employable, the individual should constantly invest in recognized skills and competences (OECD 2011, Eurydice 2015) to ensure his/her ability to adapt to market requirements. This ideal employability brings forward the relevance of informal competences and *soft skills*⁶, namely: adaptability, communicability and displaying the 'right' attitude (Berntson 2008, Cremin 2010, Sparrhoff and Fejes 2016). However, the view of qualifications and abilities that stresses individual aptitude and social skills may disregard the fact that the possibility of promoting one's own competences is limited by social and cultural factors (Acker 1990, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Siebers 2018). For example, a mismatch between educational qualification and achieved employment position (or 'outcome') is then explained by inappropriate attitude or lack of initiative. Economists often hold that the 'investment' in human capital is supposed to yield financial returns (Becker 1976, 2006). However, the value depends on where, when and by whom the 'capital investment' is made (Bourdieu 1990, 2008, see also Nohl et al. 2014, Scheer 2012, Weiß 2005), e.g., as norms and values vary across institutional contexts.

3.2 Institutional conditions and everyday practices

The sociological definition of institution refers to social interactions that are taken for granted through the creation of norms and values that further affect individuals' interactions (Powell and DiMaggio 1991, Scott and Christensen 1995). Furthermore, institutionalization can be seen as a process whereby actors are restricted by formal and informal rules of cultural tradition, social acceptance and political legitimacy. Here, Goldthorpe's (1998: 169) "law of large numbers" is put forward as a situational and bounded rationality approach that acknowledges the important question of why different individuals have different access to information through informal networks and/or social contacts. The "law of large numbers" explains that individuals' actions are formed in relation to their peer group, implying that their social positions – deriving from class position, age,

⁶ As argued by Siebers (2017: 618), soft skills are very fuzzy and therefore difficult to define. Furthermore, soft skills are context dependent and gain their meaning through context-specific strategic use, for example via employers who might recruit their employees (subconsciously) based on ideas of "symbolic and social boundaries" (see also Lamont 1999). Soft skills are thus different from recognized educational diplomas, as validated educational diplomas are easier to operationalize in more 'objective' terms.

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gender or domestic background – restrict levels of choice and rationality. Rationality is therefore seen as subjective, which is why a situational understanding is required (Goldthorpe 1998, Boudon 2003, cf. general utility theory promoted by Becker 2006).

This thesis combines institutional theories that emphasize situational rationality with the terminology introduced by Bourdieu (1990) to analyse the re-orientation of policy measures and employment incentives in the local labour market. This analytical framework is able to consider both the institutional perspective on organizational practice and the relational perspective on social power most likely affecting employees' (perceived and experienced) labour market opportunities, via norms and values prevailing in a particular social context or *social field*, as defined by Bourdieu (1990, 2008). With reference to these social fields, a relational perspective on individuals' labour market situation further needs to consider the everyday practices and performances in the workplace (Goffman 1990) that are related to and affected by social norms and institutional regulations.

The combined analytical framework builds on institutional theory and everyday practice. This framework has a methodological counterpart in the use of both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Through the use of quantitative data, inequality patterns can be visualized within specific institutional contexts and enable comparisons of labour market outcomes of European employees in different national contexts. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the power and potential of using aggregated subjective realities and, thus, analyse individual perceptions quantitatively. However, such methodology also entails restrictions, which is why qualitative analysis using intensive research design can better approach the complexity of individual experiences, strategies and subjective realities (see Danermark et al. 2018). There is a need to look beyond the 'hidden relationships' produced by statistical figures and analyses:

Hidden behind the statistical relationships between educational capital or social origin and this or that type of knowledge or way of applying it, there are relationships between groups maintaining different, and even antagonistic, relations to culture, depending on the conditions in which they acquired their cultural capital and the markets in which they can derive most profit from it.

Bourdieu (2010:4)

Bourdieu describes how different actors reproduce the institutional order by taking things for granted without questioning them. These actors occupy different social positions, and therefore they have different possibilities to act, as well as to affect and transform, the dominant logic. We should not forget this perspective when trying to understand how the institutional system operates in practice. Bourdieu's capital theory is seen as complementary to Goldthorpe's situational and bounded rationality approach and as important to improve our understanding of how European employees perceive and experience labour market opportunities. Below, we turn to the relevance of recognition and valuation of individuals' resources, building on Bourdieu's capital theory and Goffman's theory of *impression management*. Impression management and social framing

mechanisms are found to be important to understanding situations in which employees feel unable to adapt to employers' requirements, situations that most likely affect their perceived labour market opportunities and well-being.

3.3 'The relational (and local) character of employees' resources

With Bourdieu's (1990, 2008) terminology, a relation between the logic of symbolic power in a social field and the individuals' bodily inherited lifestyles (expressed via their *habitus*) can be described as the strategic accumulation of a distinct capital available in a specific institutionalized market. All markets are institutionalized through social practices. Bourdieu borrows terms from the language of economics by adapting notions like 'capital' and 'profit' to describe how the stratification within the linguistic field is formed; "the market fixes the price for a linguistic production" (Bourdieu 2008: 77). Consequently, the linguistic market can be understood as a linguistic norm that determines the possibility for communicators to achieve symbolic profit. The norms define the ways in which specific kinds of resources can be used, and exchanged, in a metaphorical market. Therefore, resources may be conceptualized as forms of capital valuable in a social relation to power. This means that individuals' ability to accumulate (cultural, economic or social) capital into a recognized *symbolic capital* is highly context dependent and situational (Bourdieu 2008, see also Scheer 2012).

Two forms of cultural capital are believed to be of particular importance to employees in the transnational labour market: *embodied* cultural capital and *institutionalized* cultural capital.⁷ Embodied cultural capital refers to general implicit knowledge and skills: a 'modus operandi' in accordance with one's *habitus*. Thus, embodied cultural capital is bound to the person who possesses it, whereas institutionalized cultural capital is tied to formal credentials such as accepted professional qualifications (Bourdieu 1986, 2010). Both forms of cultural capital affect individuals' perceived employability and (trans)national labour market prospects. The argument brought forward is the following; these forms of cultural capital, together with implicit and explicit expectations and practices of labour market inclusion and exclusion, constitute important parts of individuals' labour market opportunities. Implicit expectations and practices, perceived via employers, affect employees' access to cultural capital recognition (in line with Nohl et al. 2014). Thus, regardless of their qualifications, employees need to 'package' attributes in accordance with the existing norms and values prevailing in the specific context. As stated by Brown et al. (2011: 142):

⁷ Thus, the third dimension, the *objectified state*, is here excluded. This dimension of cultural capital includes cultural goods, such as books, pictures, material collections, instruments and/or machines, which are believed to be of secondary importance considering individuals' status position in the labour market. Thus, the objectified state of cultural capital is seen as less important to individuals' perceived and experienced employability, as compared to embodied and institutionalized forms.

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Work and educational experiences have to be packaged in a narrative of employability which involves constructing life stories of productive achievements and future promise that must be constantly sold to employers throughout a career.

The quote above emphasizes how the individual is required to package his/her employability through ongoing employability construction, and to do this for him-/herself (referring to the significance of the perceived dimension of labour market opportunities) as well as for potential employers. Thus, the interdependence between employee and employer can be seen as an important dimension of individuals' employability constructions. This relationship is furthermore important for the employee's potential to make use of, and exchange, his/her embodied and/or institutionalized cultural capital. The interdependence between employer and employee signifies that cultural capital must be seen as context dependent, in terms of both function and recognition. Therefore, it is important to assess how an individual's knowledge and skills are valued in relation to being an employee in a specific national context that is different from where the qualification was attained:

The integration of highly skilled migrants is not only structured by the productivity of migrants' (foreign) knowledge and skills in labour markets. It is also subject to, on the one hand, symbolic struggles over *recognition* of credentials and individuals, and, on the other hand, access to state institutions.

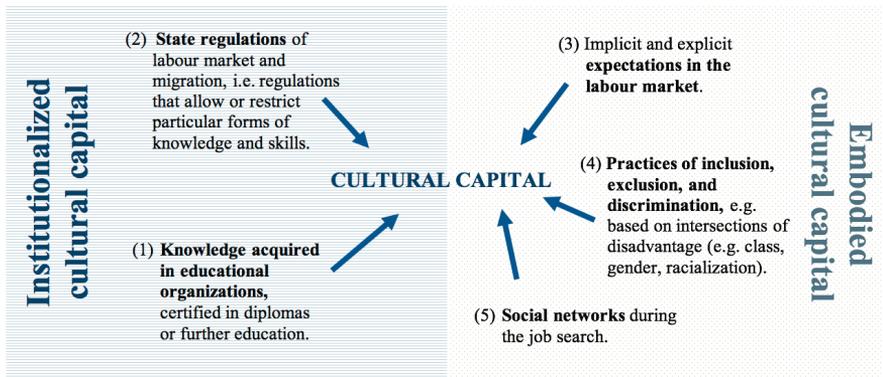
Nohl et al. (2014: 15; *emphasis added*)

As shown above, symbolic struggles over the recognition of soft skills required in a specific workplace, and access to institutions through knowledge about available provisions across national borders are important for employees' status position.

One valuable aspect of Bourdieu's reasoning and theorizing arises from the reproduction of power and privileges and how these are shaped in French society, producing local patterns of inequality (see also Lamont 1999). In one example from the thesis (see Paper III), a woman living in Munich speaks about her native English-speaking partner who never had to learn German. This exemplifies how one form of location-specific capital becomes hegemonic with the use of the English language (see Lan 2011). However, resources that may be of transnational nature do not only refer to language ability. As shown, citizenship can be an important part of accessing specific rights (and obligations) for perceiving social (and economic) security, as can knowing how to access and benefit from the social rights and obligations. Knowledge about benefits was clearly depicted in other examples from the thesis (see Paper III), e.g., the ability to transform nation-oriented capital (such as unemployment benefits) into *transnational capital*. The ability to access Swedish unemployment benefits while searching for jobs abroad was perceived as especially important for Swedish migrants, because such benefits allow them to concentrate on the job-search and remain unemployed until they found an attractive position, rather than having to take a less qualified job to survive.

As previously described, resources are often formed in a local setting. Furthermore, opportunities may be hoarded within different categories of individuals, for example based on constructions of ethnicity in network-based communities (Tilly 2005) or citizenship practices. Moreover, institutional career paths are often country-specific (Nohl et al. 2014: 40). For this reason, recognition of competences and skills needs to be acknowledged as relational, because recognition is performed through an interplay between employees, employers and macro-level institutions, defining the legal system, educational and labour market policies. In Figure 1 below, migrants’/employees’ status passages into the labour market(s) are distinguished as a consequence of their embodied and institutionalized cultural capital.

Figure 1. The relational character of cultural capital



Source: Author’s development, inspired by Nohl et al. (2014: 48).

As shown above, there are several relationships affecting the ongoing recognition of cultural capital. Many of these relationships have nation-specific consequences, generating particular cultural privileges and/or disadvantages for specific groups in society. Based on Figure 1, the (implicit and explicit) expectations (n. 3) and practices of inclusion and exclusion (n. 4) can be seen as an effect of knowledge acquisition (n. 1) processes and state regulation (n. 2) in a given (national) context. These latter two dimensions of cultural capital recognition, legally regulated social rights and general norms and cultures (e.g., acquired via educational institutions) change in a global market, with existing policy trends and hierarchies of belonging that further can provide institutionalized forms of cultural capital recognition that exist on both the national and transnational level. Considering the embodied forms of cultural capital, some people have a more natural “social and bodily orientation given that [their] bodies will be more at home in the world” (Ahmed

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2007: 160; see also Hannerz 2006), because their bodies will be more recognized in the local society. Thus, being a *white* Swede is associated with particular values, privileges of belonging and recognition within the European community (Lundström 2014, see also Leonard 2010), affecting embodied cultural capital recognition. Finally, referring to the embodied cultural capital in Figure 1 again, practices of inclusion and exclusion also affect the individual's social capital (Bourdieu 1990, 2008), and the advantages gained through social networks (n. 5) while applying for jobs.

Accordingly, individuals' perceived labour market opportunities and experienced (trans)national labour market mobility constitute an interplay between institutionalized and embodied forms of cultural capital. Perceived labour market opportunities and experiences of transnational mobility are therefore understood as a combined praxis of knowledge acquisition and evaluation, implicit and explicit expectations of the labour market, social networks and opportunity hoarding, practices of inclusion, exclusion or discrimination, and state regulations that guide employment mobility patterns. Thus, training the individual according to the dominant (local) logic, or teaching the required 'soft skills', is most likely nation-specific (see Siebers 2018) and is no guarantee that he/she will find an attractive employment position abroad.

3.4 Cultural capital among highly skilled Swedish labour migrants

As argued, a migrant's employment depends on his/her social status, given by the recognition of institutional and embodied forms of cultural capital, which tells us that the bodily dispositions are socially situated and conditioned by the particular socio-historical context (Bourdieu 1990, Scheer 2012). Swedish labour migrants are bodily oriented and guided by a self-image that they are able to do anything and can consume space through social action due to privileges associated with whiteness (cf. Ahmed 2007). This highlights, once again, the interrelation between individuals' actual position and their perceived labour market opportunities or level of choice. Yet the highly skilled Swedish labour migrants in the present study considered intra-European labour market mobility an opportunity that is available 'to all' and 'if you really want it' (Paper III: page 15). As shown in Paper III, those who did not engage with mobility opportunities were perceived of as lazy or not making enough effort. For the educated Swede employed in Germany or the UK, different privileges tied to norms and values affecting their conditions of mobility are identified, with privileges associated with being white and being able to return to Sweden if required (Paper IV, see also Ahmed 2007 and Hannerz 2006).

The aim is not to construct whiteness as an essential category or entity per se, but it does need to be related to other hierarchical relationships such as social class, nationality and gender (Leonard 2010, see also Mattsson 2011). According to Hage (1998), *nation-specific capital* is intimately tied to privileges of recognition.

The author describes how Australians with British backgrounds accumulate ‘white British upper-class capital’, which helps them to construct a new kind of capital as newcomers in Australia: Instead of turning into “second-hand Europeans” their difference elevates them to cultural aristocrats and “first-hand different Europeans” (Hage 1998: 197). In other words, the migrant status may generate *different* hierarchies of national belonging, and opportunities may also open up for new forms of capital accumulation and recognition. Such a perspective indicates that the current discourse on relatively open (intra-European) borders for labour market mobility and transportability of competences implies different realities for different categories of individuals depending, for example, on country of origin. This does not indicate that the formal and legal possibilities to be mobile need to be different, but rather that there are differences in terms of informal access and recognition within European (national) labour market(s). However, according to Burrell (2016: 8), whiteness is not a guarantee or a mutable category. In the case of Polish migrants in the UK, “the presumed cultural capital that comes with being white and Christian” has not prevented discrimination and exploitation. Considering the discrimination faced by Poles in the UK, white Polish labour migrants will probably see different opportunities than white Swedish labour migrants will.

Thus, the ability to transfer cultural capital such as educational qualifications across borders is more complex than first meets the eye and requires more than the mere validation of educational credentials accepted by authorities and recruiters. As shown in Paper IV, problems do occur in the actual workplace where competences are practised and performed. Furthermore, this gives rise to a critique of human capital theory: Human capital needs to be seen as an embodied and institutionalized form of cultural capital. As a matter of fact, recognition is required even for the institutionalized forms of cultural capital, such as professional titles. Nevertheless, the potential to be recognized and develop relevant social capital and networks varies depending on an individual’s social position, for example in relation to identity constructions, ideas and imaginations of national belonging and nationhood, constructing a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the labour market (see Cederberg 2015, Ryan et al. 2015, Tilly 2005, Weiß 2005). This distinction is developed by building on and combining Bourdieu’s (1990) capital theory and Goffman’s (1990) more performative conceptualization of everyday practices and labour market perceptions and practices. Goffman’s analytical concept *frame analysis* highlight the importance of impression management to understanding how micro- and macro-levels interact. This relation is further believed to affect individuals’ perceived (trans)national labour market opportunities.

3.5 The (macro-level) structure in everyday practice

Combining Goffman’s (1986) and Bourdieu’s (1990) conceptualizations helps us to understand process-making from an actor- and structure-centred perspective. Individual agency promoted in process-making with the individual habitus (i.e.,

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embodied dispositions) is hereby suggested to be situational and dependent on socialization. Therefore, individual agency cannot be reduced to habitus per se and individuals' dispositions are not fixed and require confirmation in everyday practices (see Scheer 2012).

Goffman (1986) defined individuals' everyday activities and behaviour as socially framed interaction. To maintain a shared social frame, regulation and control of participant members must occur (both consciously and sub-consciously). Simultaneously, frames can be violated, disrupted and/or even changed. However, it is primarily socially respectful people who are able to change the framing, because disrespectful people are more likely to be stigmatized as *outsiders* while breaking with a social frame. Clearly, frame analysis is useful for visualizing taken-for-granted norms in a given social context (compare with Bourdieu's (1990, 2008) definition of symbolic power in a specific social field), for example, in the workplace.

The workplace is embedded in a culture-specific context and what Goffman (1990) defines as a *primary framework*, creating a regulation of social interaction among employees in the workplace. These frameworks define how social events become meaningful within a particular group. By means of impression management, individuals in a particular workplace can influence their perception of a person, object or event to suit their needs and goals (Goffman 1990: 212, Huot and Rudman 2010: 75). Therefore, a social interaction between individuals from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds will most likely result in diverse meaning-making and a multitude of perceptions of a conversation (see Marshall and Foster 2002). On an individual level, taken-for-granted elements of everyday interaction and routines in a particular society are often incorporated via their impression management (Goffman 1990, Huot and Rudman 2010). Thus, impression management requires a team of performers who strive to maintain a situation in accordance with the dominant rules and ethos (Goffman 1990). For example, a person who grew up in Sweden and attended Swedish schools certainly has a particular relation to cultural distinctions such as gender equality, democracy and freedom (Hirdman 1998, Lundström 2010). Furthermore, these cultural distinctions, seen as part of Sweden's historical status, provide different macro-level orders that guide individuals' *micro-level actions*. Goffman (1990: 219) describes these micro-level actions as "the interaction order", defining social interaction as framed by particular norms and expectations in society. When individuals act in a particular (workplace) setting, a priority to maintain loyalty, discipline and circumspection is required. Such coherence suppresses the individual's impulses to act outside the frames (Goffman 1990). This suppression can be compared with Bourdieu's theoretical understanding of symbolic profit in a field-specific situation; these impulses mainly function when she/he has "a feeling for the game" (Bourdieu 1990: 66).

Thus, the frameworks that structure individuals' perceptions and self-understanding, affecting their experiences, perceptions, strategies and social realities, exist on different levels. In this thesis, primary frameworks are seen as a central element of culture, providing a system of belief and an important cognitive

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resource for individuals' actions (Goffman 1986, Huot and Rudman 2010). As emphasized here, individuals' labour market perceptions, experiences and strategies need to be understood and analysed as an interplay between social and institutional frameworks. These (formal and informal) frameworks further direct how competences and resources are confirmed across national borders, which is why some behaviours may be positioned and stigmatized in one social and/or country-level setting, while they may be highly cherished and respected in another setting.

Consequently, maintaining the impression within a social interaction is not always an easy task, particularly not when transcending workplace contexts in different countries. Individuals can be classified as outsiders while confronting the interaction order, though this norm-breaking behaviour need not be socially stigmatized. In Paper IV, workplace-related 'otherness' is classified as a social constraint, while it can also become a socially rewarding resource. Therefore, different workplace cultures may cause (unexpected) difficulties for mobile individuals who seek employment across (national) borders.

Thus, defining what is appropriate can be rather complex in a transnational setting. Nonetheless, Nedelcu (2012: 8) argues that a transnational social field, emerging through the contemporary "digital age", has created a possibility to "feel at home worldwide" (see also Jansson 2013). As argued here, however, the ability to feel at home worldwide is foremost related to privileges that affect individuals' identity and self. Most importantly, individuals who feel at home worldwide are often easily able to *exit* the present workplace setting (Hannerz 2006, see also Hirschman 1978). As shown in Paper IV, individuals who were on leave from permanent Swedish jobs seemed to be more likely to confront and question the dominant order, thus to have some kind of voice. Hence, an experienced transnational social field might be connected to a perceived ability (and the security) to look beyond the present situation, and this could be important to being able to confront a particular frame in the workplace.

In a similar manner, Devadason (2017: 2277) discusses the significance of having a "fall-back position" in your country of origin if things do not work out properly abroad. In fact, highly skilled migrants do not necessarily belong to an elite group; rather, their everyday life abroad may involve ordinary 'middling-ness' rather than privileges. Conradson and Latham (2005: 230) argue that "although they are well educated, many have jobs that are relatively insecure and short-term". Moreover, the social position in the country of origin appears to be significant, and many (upper-middle-class) transnational Europeans only 'partially exit' their original social position and location in their country of origin (Andreotti et al. 2015: 12, 177). In fact, migrants' social background may affect their potential to obtain (local) recognition of capital while searching for employment, e.g., via access to relevant networks and embodied cultural capital (in line with Bourdieu 1990). Such a pattern was evident in Paper 3; the majority of interviewees have parents who experienced upward social mobility and some were second-generation immigrants. These interviewees experienced a rather low level of social

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capital and networks to fall back on in Sweden. Despite this, self-empowerment was an explicit goal and motivation to move abroad in the first place.

In conclusion, the highly skilled interviewees in the present study helped in elucidating the potential consequences of transnational labour market mobility as a function of individuals' social status, for example, due to their level of (formal) education, social position in Sweden as well as Swedish (and European) citizenship. As indicated, however, social status is not solely dependent on formal recognition. Recognition and employment opportunities are also performed through individuals' impression management in everyday practice.

3.6 Final theoretical remarks

Thus far, the theoretical discussion has pointed out some common themes of focus in the four papers. The diversity of the papers, in terms of methodological scope and theoretical focus, raises the question of their commonality. In the thesis, individuals' perceived labour market opportunities (i.e., their perceived employability) is seen as an interdependent relation of formal institutional conditions and informal recognition of cultural capital. The four papers start from a more macro-oriented perspective, where the significance of formal institutional context is suggested (Paper I-II), and end up in a more micro-oriented analysis, where employees' embodied cultural capital and social interactions at work are in focus (Paper III-VI). Thus, the first two papers focus more on country-level institutional conditions and individual characteristics, while the second two study the embodied relation of labour market opportunities. The theoretical variation in the four texts indicates that, in order to understand individuals' labour market position, which must be seen in terms of both available and perceived opportunities, we need to consider the interplay between the micro- and macro-level order in contemporary European labour markets.

In the first two papers, the relevance of aggregated subjective realities is proposed, suggesting further that a contextual and situational understanding of individuals' perceptions is required. Therefore, quantitative analyses are used to illustrate how patterns of inequality and different policy directions in Europe might affect individuals' perceived labour market opportunities. In Paper III and IV, the patterns and practices of inclusion and exclusion in the present European labour market are further examined. These analyses underscore the relevance of particular locally oriented 'soft skills' and labour market discrimination, as well as specific privileges that may be associated with national origin, whiteness, bodily orientations and knowledge about how to access different welfare systems. Furthermore, besides emphasizing the contextual and situational dimensions of individuals' perceived labour market opportunities, this thesis underlines the importance of understanding employees' performances in the workplace as framed social interaction. Such frames guide individuals' understanding of appropriate behaviours in the workplace: Some employees manage to gain symbolic profit (and potential career opportunities), while others are positioned

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as outsiders. Therefore, norm-breaking behaviours are here considered to be an important research field for understanding the complexity of individuals' employability constructions: Employees' labour market positions need to be seen as socially framed, which further is a consequence of the dominant macro-level order and the field-specific rules of accumulating symbolic capital.

4

Research methods and materials

The methodological approach and empirical material introduced below demonstrate the ways in which the scope of the research and subsequent papers have developed in relation to one another, thus enabling analyses of different angles on perceived employability and labour market opportunities. In line with Miles and Huberman (1994: 41), the analysis builds on a complementary combination of survey and interview methods. Thus, the study's methodological approach is a combined methodological strategy (see also Ragin 2014: 69, 78f).

4.1 The research process

This thesis aligns with arguments suggesting that the research questions should determine the methodological approach, rather than the other way around (Hammersley 2012). Thus, this thesis draws upon quantitative and qualitative data and analyses in its examination of Europeans' perceived labour market opportunities and conditions for labour market mobility. Feilzer (2010), Tavory and Timmermans (2014), and others propose a pragmatic approach to combining different types of data, which emphasizes the 'best' solutions to solve problems and responds to research questions. Thus, the thesis is defined by a pragmatic approach to inquiry, an iterative research process and an abductive process with concurrent theorization and data collection. As defined by Tavory and Timmermans, abduction refers to "a creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence" (2014: 5).

During the research process, the quantitative analyses raised new questions about individually perceived labour market opportunities that could be explored in the qualitative interviews with highly skilled Swedish migrants in the UK and Germany. The theoretical framework was developed during the process of coding and analysis, including some main themes from the outset. In Table 1 below, an overview of each of the four studies' research questions, data sources and methodological approach is presented:

Table 1. Overview of research questions, data sources and methods.

<i>Overall research questions</i>	<i>Studies</i>	<i>Specified research question</i>	<i>Data sources</i>	<i>Methods</i>
What institutional conditions and individual characteristics impact European individuals' perceived employability and labour market opportunities?	<i>Paper I</i>	How do individual and contextual (country-level) factors impact the individually perceived employability among European employees?	European Social Survey (ESS), from 2010.	Linear regression multilevel analysis, combining individual-level data with country-level variations from 21 countries.
	<i>Paper II</i>	How do employees' country of birth and level of education impact the individually perceived employability and how does this effect vary with economic conditions and country-level factors?	European Social Survey (ESS), from 2004 and 2010.	Linear regression multilevel analysis, combining individual-level data with country-level variations from 16 countries and two points in time (2004 and 2010).
How can we theoretically and empirically under-stand highly skilled labour migrants' experiences and strategies in European labour markets?	<i>Paper III</i>	What expectations do highly skilled Swedish labour migrants have when seeking qualified employment abroad? In what ways do their experiences match their expectations? What strategies are used to handle the potential mismatch between their expectations and experiences and with what implications?	21 interviews with highly skilled Swedish labour migrants employed in the UK or Germany.	Constructivist grounded-theory-inspired coding and analyses of transcripts: Exploring what actually happens, how participants talk, what they say, how they construct meaning and make sense of experiences.
	<i>Paper IV</i>	How do highly skilled Swedish migrants, employed in the UK or Germany, experience and handle "otherness" in the intra-European labour market?	21 interviews with highly skilled Swedish labour migrants employed in the UK or Germany, plus three follow-up interviews.	

These four papers were not written in a linear or sequential order, as they each approach the overall themes of the thesis from different angles. Yet the ordering of papers does have a certain relevance to the direction of the analytical progression of the arguments.

Paper I focus on how individuals' labour market perceptions, and ways in which their perceived employability were conditioned by institutional context, and how such perceptions and prospects were connected to their educational attainment. The focus on perceived labour market opportunities, rather than actual achieved positions (see Sverke et al. 2002), takes into consideration that subjective realities are important as to how we organize and adapt to surrounding circumstances (see Danermark et al. 2018). In the subsequent papers (II-IV), conditions for labour market mobility are explored by focusing on the significance of country of birth and level of education. As shown in Paper II, intra-European migrants perceive better labour market prospects than do non-Europeans. However, there may be complex and "hidden" relationships behind the statistical correlations found between individuals' country of origin and perceived labour market opportunities in Europe (see Bourdieu 2010: 4). Further, by focusing on one 'blind-spot' category of European migrants, the highly skilled Swedish labour migrants, Paper III and IV aim to broaden our understanding of potential conditions for intra-European mobility. Here, the relative 'privilege' of this group is discussed in terms of both objective relationships (e.g., related to *de facto* legal systems and conditions facilitating transnational mobility) and subjective conditions (e.g., related to ideas of belongingness, cultural heritage and historical narratives; see Bauder 2011).

4.1.1 A combined approach

This thesis will make use of a combined approach, building on the analysis of (micro-level) individual material about action and processes, as well as institutional (macro-level) aspects on the country level, to provide different analytical angles on individuals' perceived labour market opportunities. The identified contradiction between country-specific resources and the intra-European labour market mobility makes it clear that it is difficult to delimit labour markets on a geographical basis in a context of global mobility of capital, goods, services and labour. However, institutional structures as defined by the welfare state are identifiable, even if the ways in which institutional (macro-level) structures – e.g. educational systems, laws and social citizenship – affect individuals working inside the new European context (i.e., the micro-level) is rather complex. The interdependency between the micro-, and macro-levels of the labour market is also important. This thesis will therefore conduct a conventional cross-national analysis and variable-oriented comparison (Paper I-II) as well as a complementary case-oriented study (Paper III-IV) (see Ragin 1992, 2014). The combination of methods offers an extended understanding of the relation between conditions and perceptions of labour market mobility in Europe that neither methodology can offer alone (in line with Ritchie 2003).

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For a conceptualization of interdependency, between the micro-, (meso-⁸) and macro-levels of the labour market, see Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. The interdependency between institutions, employers and employees.

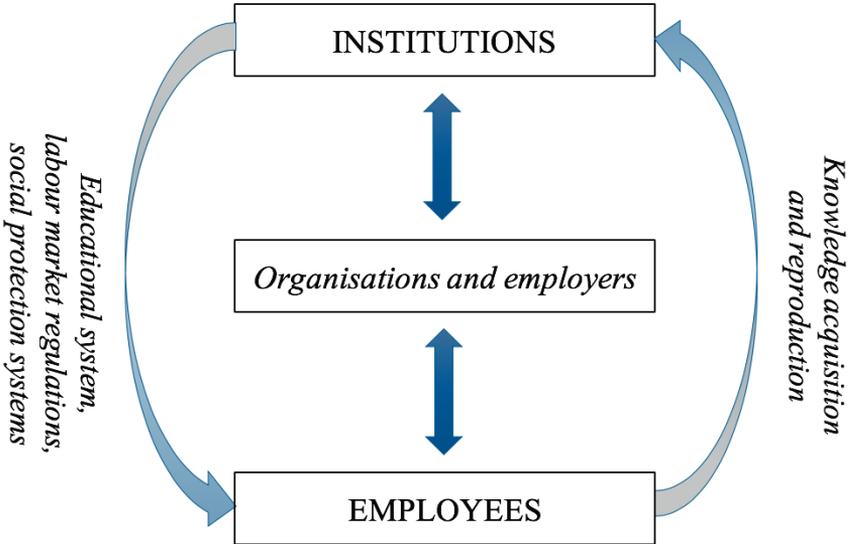


Figure 2 shows the conceptual map of this thesis (Ragin 1992, see also Miles and Huberman 1994) and how specific empirical cases (here, employees) are embedded in an organizational and an institutional structure (the former via the employer and the latter via the welfare/nation-state in the specific country of employment). The main assumption is that, in the contemporary context, individuals' labour market opportunities need to be understood in relation to the social circumstances and macro-level structure in which employees are located. Therefore, the selection of interviewees has been based on the theoretical assumption that individuals' labour market opportunities are latent subunits within national institutional structures. The institutional structure is also believed to affect the organizational level, and the ways in which individuals' perceive these structures depend on social framing mechanisms (as defined by Goffman 1986). Furthermore, employees' educational training could be seen as an important tool for developing critical thoughts and analytical skills, raising awareness and critical thinking that, in the long run, can challenge the way institutions operate. However, individuals may also incorporate 'social facts' (in line with Durkheim

⁸ Meso-level units (i.e., organizations and employers) are not analysed in the thesis. However, it is argued that values provided via the meso-level is largely shaped via an interplay between the micro- and the macro-level order, as discussed in the theoretical chapter.

1982) provided via educational institutions, and critical awareness may be difficult in practice.

In sum, Figure 2 pictures a relation between employees and the institutional context: a relation where collectively constructed ‘social facts’ become taken-for-granted elements of everyday practices and routines, through years of attending school within a particular school system (Goffman 1990). However, employees may also criticize and help to change institutional structures depending on their access to symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990) and ability to step outside the dominant social framing. While the ability to criticize and change the prevailing logic and framing mechanisms is restricted to favoured groups (Goffman 1990), transnational labour mobility among privileged highly skilled groups can be seen as an important part of challenging the dominant (macro-level) order in a given society.

Above, the national macro-level structure has been operationalized in terms of its diverse *social protection systems*, *labour market regulations* and *educational system*, and such structures vary with national context. The way in which organizations and employers operate on the meso-level is largely situated in relation to the way national (and supranational) formal institutions are constituted, but also in accordance with informal conditions guided by existing norms and values that determine employers’ requirements. Furthermore, individual employees may change and affect employers’ priorities even though their degree of influence is largely dependent on the institutional context. For example, the design of active or passive labour market policies or employment protection legislation affect the conditions of unemployment and may affect perceptions among employees (Berglund and Wallinder 2015, Wallinder, 2018, Sjöberg 2010). Employees’ degree of influence can be dependent on their ability to exit from the present workplace without losing some kind of social security (see Paper IV, also Hirschman 1978). Thus, individual perceptions of labour market opportunities are constructed within the ongoing and hierarchical interplay between institutions, employers and employees (see Figure 2).

This thesis has allowed for theory development and builds on the theoretical conceptualization of small-N data (in line with Tavory and Timmermans 2014) as well as on comparing and reflecting on this conceptualization in relation to the two large-N and quantitative variable-oriented studies (see Ragin 1992). The data and research process have allowed for a broader understanding of different institutional conditions that affect employees’ labour market perceptions.

4.2 Data and analyses

In this section, we turn to the presentation of the data and sampling strategies. First, data quality is discussed. Thereafter, different modes of analysis and coding are presented, with reference to both the survey and interview data.

Individuals employed in different European countries and national contexts constitute the focus of the two quantitative papers. A multilevel analysis has been

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applied and accounts for the variation between countries by combining independent variables on the individual and country levels (Hox 2010). This allows for analyses of how the national system and institutional context affect and condition the individual's perceived labour market opportunities. In these analyses, the thesis explores the relationship between perceived employability among European individuals, that is, between individual characteristics and the institutional context (i.e., educational system, labour market policies, employment protection regulations and the country's unemployment rate; see Paper I-II).

The two quantitative studies are based on individual data obtained via the *European Social Survey (ESS)* and country-level data collected from the OECD Statistics and Eurostat. Multilevel analysis allows for comparison between countries (ESS 2004, 2010) based on the significance of European employees' characteristics, such as their level of education, country of birth, gender and age. The effects of individuals' characteristics were also compared with reference to the country-level context. Notably, the OECD and Eurostat data are considered to be the most reliable country-level dataset available, as we required comparable data across the European countries. Therefore, OECD and Eurostat data were merged in the ESS dataset. The inclusion of such country-level data is also relevant as regards being able to compare with other studies (see Chung and van Oorschot 2011). However, such data have some limitations, particularly in relation to the difficulties of measuring and comparing national spending on Active Labour Market Policies (see Streeck and Mertens 2011).

The qualitative data comprise 21 in-depth interviews with highly skilled Swedish labour migrants in London and Munich. Sweden is not generally thought of as a sending country from which individuals migrate; migration from Sweden contradicts the established view of its generous universal welfare state (Edebalk 2013), and therefore since the mid-20th century Sweden been classified as a typical receiving country (SCB 2011, Gerdes and Wadensjö 2014). The qualitative papers focus on highly educated, 'successful' Swedish migrants, employed despite their lack of specific, local social capital. Through their transnational capital and knowledge acquisition, they have overcome barriers by moving to countries in which their skills were recognized (see also Weiß 2005). For the qualitative interviews, Western European destination countries were originally selected to enable a comparison between national and welfare contexts: Germany is an example of a corporative welfare state, Great Britain a liberal welfare state and Sweden a social democratic welfare state (see Esping-Andersen 1990). However, the analysis highlighted similarities rather than differences between the two destination countries, and the findings pointed towards *similar* experiences, strategies, conditions and vulnerabilities of Swedish migrants working in the two Westernized large European metropolitan cities. Instead, the focus and analyses indicated the significance of the experiences, strategies, resources and capital of the highly skilled intra-European migrants from Sweden.

Interviewing highly skilled Swedes in two countries provides greater variety while searching for similar patterns concerning the same phenomena. A further reason for interviewing highly skilled migrants in London and Munich is related

to the description of the intra-European mobility of the highly skilled as a rather circular migratory pattern, in relation to which capital cities in financially expanding regions in Germany and the UK are major destinations for intra-European migration (Andreotti 2015, Bruzelius et al. 2016, EC 2018, Favell 2008). In the following, the data and analysis will be explained more in detail.

4.2.1 Survey data

The data used in Paper I and II originate from the ESS, a biennial cross-sectional survey performed since 2002.⁹ The empirical findings are based on Round 2 from 2004 and Round 5 from 2010 (ESS 2004, 2010). The surveys included more European countries than those analysed in Paper I and II, as comparable country-level data and responses of foreign-born employees were insufficient in some European countries. The target group in both samples were employees aged 16–65 and living in the specific countries at the time of data collection. With regard to sample design, all countries follow the same basic principles of strict probability and representativeness.

The data are nested and exist at different levels, thus multi-level regression modelling is a useful approach (Hox 2012). The first level comprises individuals and their characteristics. At the second level, country-level variables provide an institutional dimension. The reason for combining these two levels in an interactive analysis is that national variations are assumed to impact individual inhabitants. The consistency of the multi-level technique includes independent variables at both the individual- and country-level.

The operationalization of perceived employability in the two quantitative studies focuses on individuals in employment and their subjective perception of their ability to move into new employment in the labour market. The dependent variable is the answer to the question: How difficult or easy would it be for you to get a similar or better job with another employer if you had to leave your current job? The respondents could answer on an 11-point scale, ranging from 0 = Extremely difficult to 10 = Extremely easy.

The individual-level controls refer to individual characteristics such as gender, age, country of birth and level of education. In addition, different work-related characteristics were included in the analysis, such as occupational group, type of employment contract and employment sector. The overall aim of the first two papers is to analyse how the significance of structural and institutional macro-level factors impacts employees' perceived labour market opportunities, as a counterbalance to the above-mentioned individual-level factors.

⁹ Further information: <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/ess/round5/surveydoc.html>.

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4.2.1.1 Analyses of survey data

The first paper¹⁰ focuses on perceived employability, defined as employees' perceptions of their possibilities to find a similar or better job if they should have to leave their current employer. By combining both structural and individual aspects, the paper takes into consideration the individual's competence and geographical and contextual factors to which the individual is connected and which eventually are decisive for one's experienced employability. This approach gives a clearer picture of perceived employability in difficult economic times: Is this a question of individual competences and qualifications or of a supportive institutional context? The chosen method renders it possible to compare different institutional contexts in Europe and to gain insight into how educational and labour market characteristics affect perceived employability. The data used come from the European Social Survey (ESS 2010), which collects data from 21 countries.

Paper II, also based on survey data, was developed using the results of Paper I. The aim was to examine institutional factors in relation to the financial crisis in 2008/09. By using ESS data, the results from 2010 were paralleled with results from an equivalent study carried out in a more stable economic situation prior to the economic downturn of 2008. In 2004, most of the European countries were blooming economically, with relatively low unemployment rates as a result. In 2010, the unemployment rate doubled in many European countries. A second important contextual difference between the time periods is the European enlargement of 2004 and 2007 (Likic-Brboric 2011). European expansion led to greater mobility within the European labour market and increased flow of people between member states, which also increased the competition for certain employment positions and therefore also affected employees' labour market perceptions. Again, using multi-level modelling, the study highlights the impact of individual and contextual factors on perceived employability. The analysis contains data from 16 countries. As shown, the paper examines how level of education differs in its subjective importance for native-born as compared to foreign-born employees in Europe. More specifically, in line with previous research (Acker 1990, 2006 Furåker 2005 and others), Paper II argues that foreign-born individuals are excluded from the labour market to a higher degree than are native-born employees, suggesting that this relationship affects their perceptions and labour market prospects. However, as will be discussed in the following section, foreign-born employees are a heterogeneous group with reference to resources, privileges and cultural heritage.

¹⁰ Paper I was co-authored with Tomas Berglund. Both authors were equally involved in the theoretical framework, as well as the analyses. Authors' names are in alphabetical order and Ylva Wallinder was the corresponding author. Both authors were involved during revision of the paper.

4.2.2 Interviews

The two qualitative papers focus on highly skilled Swedish emigrants, as they are often not classified as migrants in the public discourse (see Anderson 2018). The 21 interviewees were recruited through diverse social associations and organizations of Swedes living in either London or Munich, via their webpage or Facebook networks (see Appendix 3).

Eleven of the interviewees had migrated to Munich and ten to London. Different networks were contacted, creating variation within the sample. In both cities, adverts were distributed on various e-mail lists and Facebook groups of local Swedish churches (*Svenska kyrkan*)¹¹, which facilitated recruitment of Swedish citizens. Further, the email list and web-page of *Swedes Worldwide* (Svenskar i världen, SVIV)¹² constituted a platform for recruiting interviewees, as did the *Swedish Women's Educational Association* (SWEA)¹³, a global network of Swedish-speaking women living abroad. Other more general Facebook groups for Swedes in London and Munich also functioned as a channel for recruitment.

The interviewees were relatively active in the local Swedish community, either physically or through digital membership in local Facebook groups. In view of this, the sample procedure could potentially have favoured interviewees who are unwilling to fully integrate by remaining in contact with the Swedish community abroad. However, many of the interviewees were only followers of local Facebook groups and seldom met other Swedes through these networks (see further discussion in following section on *Limitations*, page 48).

Ten of the interviewees were men, and eleven were women, approximately equally distributed between the two countries. The sample is purposive and strategic (highly skilled Swedish migrants) but has not strived to achieve maximum sample variation within this group or between men and women to allow analysis of e.g. gender-specific patterns. The ambition was to focus on mid-career employees who were likely to have previous employment experience after graduating as well as prospects for future career mobility and most interviewees were between 27 and 45 years of age.¹⁴ As mentioned, these highly skilled and mid-career employees correspond to the ISCO-08 Major Group 2 professionals, with a skill level 4 and a completed minimum of first or second stage of tertiary education, comparable to group 6 or 5a in ISCED-97 classification) (ILO 2012).

All interviewees were born, raised and had graduated university in Sweden and had a period living and working in London or Munich; they were not accompanying partners. All respondents were professionals who typically worked in the finance/banking sector, in public health, international relations, human resources,

¹¹ For further information: <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/london> or <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/bayern> (2013-12-19).

¹² See <http://www.sviv.se/> (2013-12-19).

¹³ See <http://london.www.swea.org/> or <http://munchen.www.swea.org/> (2013-12-19)

¹⁴ Two of the interviewees were retiring, which explains why these interviewees mainly describe reflections from their past career in relation to their present situation.

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the auto industry or the IT sector, as graduate economists, pharmacists, lawyers, social scientists, and engineers.¹⁵ Most of the interviewees worked in the private sector and in multinational companies, for whom their managers figured as local representatives, being born and raised in Germany/the UK. These conditions most likely affected the actual workplace setting and the clashes between perceptions, expectations and actual experiences of employability, as analysed in Paper IV.

All in-depth interviews were conducted during 2014, at a time of elections to the European Parliament in Sweden, Germany and the UK. Awareness of the elections encouraged and prompted, rather naturally and spontaneously, discussions on voting behaviour, national belonging, identity and so forth. In preparation for the interview phase, a pilot interview was conducted, as well as a focus group of highly skilled Swedish migrants in London, to improve the interview guide and provide a basis for further data collection. All interviews were recorded with permission and anonymized during transcription and stored securely on a password protected separate hard drive.¹⁶ On average, the duration of the interviews was between one hour and two-and-a-half hours.

Three follow-up and in-depth interviews were conducted between December 2015 and January 2016. These were conducted to achieve theoretical saturation of the concepts *temporality* and *distance*, which appeared as important in the coding. In addition, the three interviewees had reflected on returning to Sweden at the time of the first interview. The temporality dimension, perceived employability and the experience of possibilities, whilst applying for jobs in Sweden, were of particular interest. Thus, the three follow-up interviews were important for understanding temporality and that the positioning as ‘outsiders’ may change over time. The returnees’ situation was also of significance in view of experienced difficulties re-entering the Swedish labour market and the fear that competences would not to be recognized.¹⁷

The interviews focused on general expectations, the reasons for seeking work abroad and the experiences of this process. Themes discussed include the decision to migrate, views on transnational mobility, social networks and communities, former careers and views on future careers, experiences and attitudes towards potential unemployment, pensions, work incapacity due to illness, having children/establishing a family, and general social responsibility in the country of origin and destination. As a researcher, I was careful to avoid ‘leading questions’ and thus did not use terms such as ‘the economic crisis’, ‘social security’, ‘social

¹⁵ The type of profession of each interviewee will be concealed in the extracts, due to claims of anonymization.

¹⁶ The interview quotes used in Paper III and IV have been translated from Swedish into English, aiming for the best possible representation of the content and avoiding losing meaning in the translation process. The general aim here was to contribute to an appropriate understanding of the interpreted experiences of the participants, avoiding that meanings gets lost in translation (along with van Nes et al. 2010).

¹⁷ There was (unfortunately) not enough space (and/or empirical material) to develop the returnee dimension of intra-European mobility within the frames of the present thesis. I will briefly return to this theme in Section 5, in the concluding reflection.

insurances', 'immigrant' or 'expat'. Instead, open themes were discussed (see Appendix 2).

Interviews were conducted in Germany, the UK and in Sweden, and the ongoing mobility across national borders exemplifies the transnational space that these migrants take advantage of (Faist et al. 2013). About half of the interviewees suggested we could meet in Sweden, if we could not arrange a meeting in either London or Munich, and many interviewees returned to Sweden frequently to visit friends and family or on business/work related trips. Hence, this is a transnational group in practice, not only in terms of social relations and cross-border identity, but also as employees (see Hannerz 2006).

4.2.2.1 Analyses of interviews

The coding preceding the interviews analyses was inspired by a constructivist grounded theory approach, as developed by Charmaz (2014). A constructivist orientation implies the existence of multiple and varied meanings, providing tools for understanding how the interviewees' aspirations, experiences and strategies are negotiated socially and historically. Thus, social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees is important to reflect upon when making sense of and interpreting the meanings interviewees expressed concerning their social world (see also Creswell 2007, Kvale and Brinkman 2014).

In analysing the data, positioning the interviewer as the audience means that how expressions are used, changes in voice, uncertainties and pauses highlighted while transcribing the interviews are of importance. For example, the interviewees often asked the interviewer personal questions, resulting in a dialogue that was of importance in building up trust and a reciprocal interaction (Kvale and Brinkmann 2014). Thus, even if the interview was guided by my own structure and purpose (as interviewer), themes and the order of particular questions were formed interactively. For example, many interviewees described their situation initially in general terms, believing that their listener did not know anything about the city where they worked, and the particular context within which they were placed. While explaining that I had lived in both of the regions for a certain amount of time¹⁸, due to studies or for family reasons, the interviewees started speaking more freely about where they lived and particular problems they had experienced in the region.

While conducting the interviews, continuous memoing provided a good foundation for adapting and developing new aspects to focus on in the following interviews, and these memos were helpful in structuring my ideas and reflections during fieldwork and analysis. Memoing refers to the notes taken and thoughts that developed before, during and after the interview. These were summarized and reflected upon between each interview and during transcription and analysis. The ambition was to take a pragmatist approach to theorizing and making sense

¹⁸ The researcher's own network did not affect the sampling procedures (see further discussion of Paper III: 4).

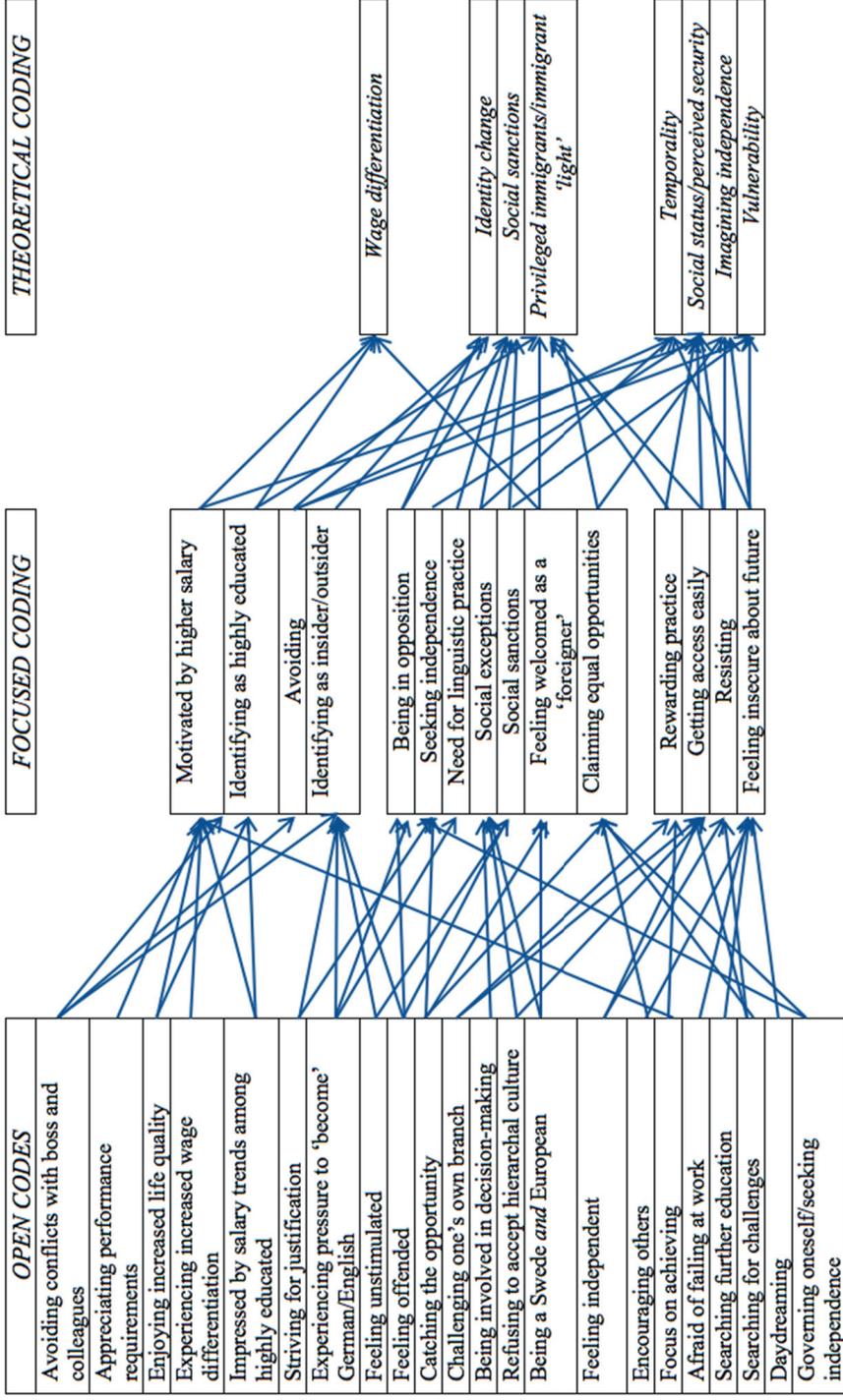
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of this empirical complexity in line with Tavory and Timmermans (2014: 19), rather than reproducing Charmaz' approach (2014). To accomplish this, reflexivity during the research process was important, and the memos aided this process of analytical development without the pressure of being too focused on theory construction. Still, theoretical understanding and creativity were important parts of the coding process, as well as acknowledging my own position as a researcher while making sense of the data. In addition, theoretical coding and conceptualization emerged by drawing figures and tables by hand.

Thus, this thesis draws upon a grounded theory approach mainly in terms of its two-stage coding procedure, which is inspired by Charmaz's (2014) method of using initial coding on a descriptive reading of the transcripts, section by section and line by line, followed by more focused coding. This involved coding process with help of coding gerunds to reflect actions and actors closely tied to the data. Focused and theoretical coding was helpful in distinguishing patterns in the data, ensuring that the theory produced was closely connected to the field (see Charmaz 2014). The two-stage coding process is, according to Charmaz's (2014) definition, a main criterion of grounded theory, as theoretical understanding emerges in an abductive manner (see also Tavory and Timmermans 2014). With reference to the latter, a continuous interplay between interview data and theoretical elaboration drawn from the data was maintained during the research process. Process-making and gerund-coding (such as *worrying* or *avoiding*) helped clarify agency and activity and were helpful in structuring the theoretical ambition as a continuum between micro- and macro-phenomena (as expressed in the theoretical chapter).

Figure 3 below includes some of the active codes that developed when identifying a collision between the migrants' imagined independence, on the one hand, and their perceived vulnerability, on the other (right column), whilst employed abroad. The tensions between the two are developed in Paper III. The figure below shows how some of the central contradictions in Paper III and IV were identified:

Figure 3. Extract from the coding process.



During the coding process, several ambivalent positions emerged. As shown in Paper III, an ambivalent feeling emerged between a longing for and expectation of being independent, whilst experiencing a feeling of vulnerability abroad (situations of *worrying, lacking knowledge and energy*). As regards managing this ambivalence, various forms of capital accumulation (Bourdieu 1990, 2008) were found to be important. The initial set of categories was summarized in the Atlas.ti software coding program. As illustrated above, many of the open codes were merged into more concise focused codes, such as *avoiding, searching and encouraging*.

I'm a little bit afraid of getting older in Germany, with regard to pensions and such. This is something I have no clue about. How am I supposed to make pension savings? So, this is the reason I don't save. It's one of those things I procrastinate about. Well, it feels as if, as if you're on your own, and there's not so much help available from the government. In Sweden, one could always ask someone who has a clue about those things.

Woman, mid-30s, Munich

Worrying
Lacking knowledge
and energy

I've thought a lot about insurances. Because, that is something I was aware of in Sweden, but in Germany... [silence]. For instance, I have not had home insurance during these years. I just couldn't be asked sorting that out.

Man, early 30s, Munich

Lacking knowledge
Lacking energy

In the excerpts above, focused codes are introduced on the right-hand side in *italics*. The extracts demonstrate how focused codes were developed via initial codes on the basis of what actually happened in the data (see left column in Figure 3). These focused codes are some examples that developed into the theoretical code *perceived vulnerability*, used in Paper III.

Finally, sample saturation was achieved by confirming commonalities among the interviews: The parallel procedure of connecting research questions with the process of interviewing, coding and transcribing resulted in sample saturation in line with Miles and Huberman (1994) linking the boundaries between the case, research questions, time-limits and general means for conducting the study.

4.3 Generalizability

The question of generalizability is important when combining methods, concerning whether the study may have broader significance beyond the actual individuals and countries included. For the quantitative studies, random sampling was used, which provides a certain possibility to generalize the results to a given population (Sirkin 2006). However, the country level includes relatively few cases, which is why the level of generalizability may be restricted to a European context. The purposive selection of interviewees for Paper III and IV is of analytical value for understanding the conditions for experiences and strategies in the intra-European labour market. Thus, the complexity of embodied and institutional conditions and privileges within an intra-European labour market is underlined by using highly skilled Swedish labour migrants as a case.

Finally, in line with Tavory and Timmermans (2014: 106), abductive theorization needs to consider the question of *the plausibility, relevance and transparency* of a theoretical conceptualization that *fits* the data. The analyses in Paper III and IV contribute with theoretical understanding and perspectives of labour migrants' experiences and strategies, which can be used and tested in future research in other contexts and groups (e.g. with reference to the relevance of the outsider-insider dimension among migrant groups). Furthermore, to achieve plausible and transparent analyses, continuous dialogue with relevant research communities has been central, and research findings have been presented in a variety of research networks as well as at seminars and conferences. The constant dialogue with colleagues encouraged alternative theoretical interpretations.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Appropriate ethical considerations have been observed in the quantitative and qualitative data collection. The European Social Survey (ESS) subscribes to the Declaration of Professional Ethics,¹⁹ and all applications to use the ESS are reviewed by the ESS ERIC Research Ethics Committee (REC) (ESS 2017). The collection of qualitative interview data followed the Swedish Research Council's ethical principles for conducting research in the field of social science and humanities (Vetenskapsrådet 2017). This involves guidelines concerning informed consent, confidentiality, and use of data. All participants gave their informed consent, and no details on interviewees, such as names or employment positions, have been disclosed.²⁰ All interviewees were informed about the general purpose of the study before the interview, and their right to withdraw at any time was emphasized. Furthermore, I informed them about the use of pseudonyms, highlighting my interest in general social patterns – not in particular individuals. Finally, I asked for permission to record and transcribe the interviews (see Appendix 2). While processing the memos and transcripts, it was important to reflect on the balance between regulation meant to protect human subjects and the scope of the analysis. Therefore, confidentiality was a central aspect of the research process.

Concerning the interviewees, a more complex ethical process emerges because the interviewer has an interpretative prerogative when making sense of the content and a reason for conducting follow-up interviews to confirm theoretical themes, ideas and interpretations (*via members checking*, see Creswell 2007: 252). Yet follow-up interviews add complexity, as interviewees tend to change their perspective over time (Ritchie 2003).

¹⁹ For further information: <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/about/ESS-ERIC-Ethics-Board-ToR.pdf>

²⁰ To ensure the interviewees' anonymity, I decided not to disclose their exact employment sector and employment position. In fact, the 'digital communities' of Swedes abroad in the two respective cities are rather small.

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During the final parts of the analysis, while publishing the analyses in research papers, it was important to make sure the interviewees could not be identified. For this reason, I decided not to classify the interviewees as individual subjects by including titles and profession, but only to classify them based on gender and age. These aspects are considered to be important when approaching the complexity of the analysis.

4.5 Limitations

Lastly, in terms of limitations, the concept of employability was examined by focusing on European employees' labour market perceptions (see Paper I-II). However, individuals' practical reality and *de facto* labour market positions may not match their cognitive perceptions. Therefore, we need to consider that the patterns only reflect employees' perceptions; we do not know anything about their actual prospects in the labour market. Furthermore, the group of foreign-born employees is certainly heterogeneous, and it is important to consider that we do not know whether the highly educated foreign-born respondents in the European Social Survey from 2010 graduated university in the country of birth or country of employment. However, in line with the findings from Paper III-IV, whether or not the respondents studied in their country of employment might affect their ability to achieve cultural capital recognition. This is one reason why the qualitative study provides important complementary information.

Considering the interviewees, it is necessary to reflect upon the potentially biased sample selection: All interviewees have a clear relation to a Swedish (digital) community, which they contacted on their own initiative. Their interaction in a Swedish network may explain why their reflections of belonging to a Swedish 'national' community seem to be rather natural. Therefore, it is important to stress that the group of intra-European highly skilled migrants from Sweden is most likely heterogeneous. However, the results can still be seen as identifying patterns of vulnerability that contrast with the highly skilled migrants' self-understanding, that is, their imagined independence. In addition, all quotations were translated from Swedish to English, and this process always entails some cultural distinctions and meanings getting lost in translation. Here, the aim was always to provide an appropriate understanding of the interpreted experiences of the participant, striving for the best possible representation of the content (in line with van Nes et al. 2010).

5

Summary of findings

In this summary, the main findings of the thesis will be discussed. I will present each part of the thesis, and thereafter describe the aim, method and theoretical scope of each paper, and further develop general reflections that were generated from the findings.

In general, the first part (Paper I-II) of the thesis demonstrates the importance of the institutional and national context for the Europeans' perceived labour market opportunities. The second part (Paper III-IV) focuses on highly skilled Swedish labour migrants in an intra-European labour market. In this part of the thesis, particular experiences and strategies among highly skilled migrant employees are in focus, e.g., when handling the new national context while employed abroad.

One overall aim of the first part is to broaden our understanding of European employees' perceived labour market opportunities, i.e., their perceived employability, in relation to the actual circumstances and conditions surrounding them. This focus initially led to the following question, which was examined in the first two papers: *What institutional conditions and individual characteristics impact European individuals' perceived employability and labour market opportunities?* Important contexts considered are different policy incentives, legislations and national security systems (in addition to the individuals' characteristics). These contextual variations were believed to impact individuals' perceived labour market opportunities.

The analyses of perceived employability among European employees in Paper I and II underscore the significance of the individuals' characteristics, such as age and level of education, along with the macro-level institutional context and arrangements. However, the effect of tertiary education differs for foreign- and native-born employees, with the effect being partly more positive for foreign-born educated employees (even if the effect is larger for the European-born employees as compared to the non-European born). These results also underscore the significance of individuals' characteristics (such as level of education, gender and age) and the relationship between national and transnational labour markets, something that was further examined in the following two papers (see Paper III and IV): *How can we theoretically and empirically understand highly skilled labour migrants' experiences and strategies in European labour markets?*

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In general, Paper III and IV show that even the privileged, highly skilled Swedish labour migrants encountered difficulties when employed abroad. First, they experienced difficulties in accessing the regular labour market, which would enable them to gain social rights and social benefits in the country of destination. Second, differences in normative values and procedures at the workplace were experienced, which restricted their level of recognition and appreciation in the collegial setting. Third, the migrants' perceived social security may partly be tied to their country of origin. The papers propose an analytical and theoretical conceptualisation of such experiences.

In the following, more specific findings from each paper will be presented.

5.1 Paper I

Berglund, T. and Wallinder, Y. (2015) Perceived Employability in Difficult Economic Times. The Significance of Education System and Labour Market Policies. *European Societies* 17(5): 674-699

In the first paper, the link between individuals' perceived employability and supportive institutional contexts is examined. The focus is important in the European context, where there is a political tendency towards reduced job security in favour of more individualized labour market responsibilities, where the individual employee is required to be flexible, adaptable and prepared for transitions between employers. These ideals, which have formed European employment policies during recent decades, are related to the current discourse on competence development in working life, in which the individual employee (in theory) is described as a highly flexible individual, constantly open to changes by easily acquiring new knowledge and adapting to employers' requirements. According to this argumentation, the individual will always adapt to difficulties that occur and remain employable even during economic downturns. This perspective is based on the assumption that the institutional context does not have a great impact on individually perceived labour market opportunities. Through multi-level modelling, the study analyses the significance of individual and contextual factors for employees' perception of their chances in the labour market.

The paper indicates that different types of labour market policies, education systems and employment protection legislation do influence European employees' perceived employability. As shown, a large share of tertiary educated in a country can be of positive significance for the perceived ability to find an equal or better employment position. Furthermore, specific education systems seem to be more beneficial than the general education system for the perceived ability to find a similar or better employment position – contrary to what was expected. We believed that general skills would have a more positive impact on perceived employability, because general skills are more transferable. Also, individual characteristics influence the effect of the country-level context;

younger employees, for example, benefit from increased opportunities for adult education. In general, generous spending on labour market policies was shown to be beneficial for more 'vulnerable' groups, such as youth. Thus, despite the fact that one's country of residence can be a member of the European Union, different membership countries have diverse educational and labour market contexts, which spill over onto individually perceived labour market opportunities.

All in all, the paper confirms that we need to analyse perceived employability from multiple perspectives: A combined analysis is required that includes individuals' characteristics, national education systems and labour market policies. Such an approach shows that there is more to answering the question of employability than just supply and demand (i.e., depending on individual characteristics and the business cycle of the national economy). Hence, a dynamic and interactive definition of employability is important, where existing pathways to educational activities as well as recruitment trends need to be emphasized, along with individuals' competences and qualifications.

5.2 Paper II

Wallinder, Y. (2018) Perceived Employability among Foreign-born Employees. Before and During Crisis. *Economic and Industrial democracy*. Advance online publication, doi: 10.1177/0143831X18804355

Paper II further develops the relation between individuals' characteristics and country-level context for European employees' perceived employability by examining how this effect might vary with economic conditions. Here, a comparison between native-born residents and foreign-born inhabitants is made, the latter category divided between those who were born in a European country other than their present country of residence and those who were born outside Europe but currently working in a European country. In general, the perceived employability among foreign-born employees was assumed to be more negative than for native-born employees, and this effect was believed to vary depending on the institutional context and labour market demand/economic cycle. In addition, individuals' level of education was assumed to be of different significance for native-born vs. foreign-born employees.

Previous research indicates that immigrants, in particular those born outside Europe, can be expected to face greater labour market difficulties and discrimination than native-born inhabitants, for example in terms of getting access to qualified and attractive positions. However, the results show a potential divergence between the foreign-born employees' *perceived* labour market opportunities and their *de facto* achieved positions. In fact, foreign-born employees demonstrate a slightly more positive view of their employment prospects (irrespective of whether they were born in or outside Europe). Furthermore, having a tertiary education seems to be more positive for foreign-born employees'

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perceived labour market prospects than for native-born employees'. These results need to be considered with some caution, as we cannot control for the employees' present position in relation to his/her qualifications, which most likely affects perceptions of how difficult or easy it is to find a similar or better job. The analysis further shows that the above-mentioned results are influenced by the firmness of employment protection legislation (contrary to Paper I) and the degree of competition for qualified positions, as well as general economic conditions. The rather contradictory results in Paper I and II indicate that the country-level context is important, because the results vary slightly depending on the particular countries included in the analyses. Furthermore, some groups of employees (e.g., foreign-born employees) might see better future prospects than they most likely will experience.

The results from Paper II are in accordance with the overall statement of the thesis, namely that perceptions are contextual and difficult to predict on a general level. Still, in the current European labour market context, it is likely that perceptions do matter for individuals' well-being, but also for their general feeling of autonomy and independence (even if the actual achieved position might be contradictory to their perceptions). Additionally, foreign-born employees were not more positively affected by country-level spending on training activities, thus leading to rejection of one of the hypotheses. However, the employee's place of birth, i.e. inside or outside the current country of employment, seems to influence the impact of a country's employment protection legislation and degree of tertiary education (which are assumed to affect the competition for qualified positions). In fact, the analyses show that a high level of competition for qualified positions seems to be more positive for foreign-born employees in 2004, while the same conditions affect foreign-born employees more negatively in 2010 (in comparison to native-born employees). Thus, a high degree of tertiary education can be assumed to be more beneficial when there is greater demand for labour. Besides, a strict EPL seems to be beneficial for foreign-born employees in the pre-crisis context, while proving to be more detrimental in 2010 when employers presumably had a more restrictive hiring process.

5.3 Paper III

Wallinder, Y. (Forthcoming) Imagined Independence among Highly Skilled Swedish Labour Migrants. *Sociologisk Forskning* (Accepted for publication)

In the third paper, strategies in and experiences of intra-European labour mobility are examined by focusing on highly skilled Swedish labour migrants employed in the UK or Germany. The idea of the third (and fourth) study was to shed light on transnational labour mobility among those with the necessary prerequisites for 'choosing' between different national labour markets, thus for moving rather freely between national borders. The particular research questions in Paper III

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examine the expectations that the migrants have for seeking qualified employment abroad, and further to what extent their experiences match those expectations. Moreover, the paper discusses potential strategies that the migrants use to deal with the mismatch between their expectations and their experiences.

A clear pattern emerging from the interviews is the interviewees' initial desire to independently manage their private and professional lives. In the paper, this desired independency was conceptualized as an *imagined independence*, accentuating particular imaginations of independence and the ability to 'choose' their own professional career paths, independent of the social and national context. Contrary to their expectations, however, the migrants experienced a lack of freedom, or free time, and they often felt disoriented in their new national setting. Therefore, most migrants put considerable energy and effort into trying to understand and cope with the society of residence.

The paper identifies particular strategies developed for handling the mismatch between migrants' expectations and actual experiences, which further relate to their (in)ability to access different forms of capital: (1) *a pragmatic adaptation* in accordance with existing hierarchies and circumstances in the migrants' new society of residence, (2) *making use of transnational resources*, e.g. by expanding national-bounded social rights into transnational capital or striving to get their locally embodied capital recognized abroad, and (3), *escapism* (in cognitive terms) from their present situation abroad. Moreover, the migrants' inability to make use of their embodied cultural capital affects their status position at work, which further renders them more insecure and vulnerable than expected. Nevertheless, the lack of recognition (via embodied cultural capital) at work does not seem to affect migrants' self-understanding, i.e., their imagined independence. The results identify patterns of vulnerability that contrast with the highly skilled migrants' self-understanding. In fact, a strong emphasis on performativity and self-empowerment remains alongside their *de facto* dependency on an institutional and social system they comprehend, and a perceived vulnerability in the new context.

As further illustrated in the paper, one aspect of these unexpected experiences abroad is found in relation to the migrants' self-image: they did not really identify themselves as migrants. Instead, the notion of *immigrant light* conceptualized their privileged migrant positions, allowing (most of) them to fit in with locals in the country of residence when required, e.g., by using pragmatic adaptation as a strategy. For this reason, the fourth paper focuses on the variety of 'otherness' among migrants, more specifically among highly skilled Swedish labour migrants.

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5.4 Paper IV

Wallinder, Y. (Manuscript) 'Otherness' in the Workplace among Highly Skilled Labour Migrants. Swedes in Germany and the UK. (Revise and re-submit, *Work, Employment and Society*, 2018-10-08)

The final paper examines the highly skilled Swedish labour migrants' mode of coping with existing norms and values dominating the employment situation in their respective countries of destination, i.e., Germany or the UK. Paper IV applies a social-psychological perspective, focusing on the migrants' actual job-related situation, in relation to their strategies and experiences abroad. The paper pays attention to how micro-level interactions in the workplace are interrelated with the existing macro-level context. The research question addresses how highly skilled Swedish migrants, employed in Germany or the UK, experience and handle potential norm-breaking in the workplace. As shown in the paper, certain values are often taken-for-granted, something they are confronted with when 'other' cultural norms appear, norms that are different than those they previously experienced as students and employees in Sweden.

The paper stresses that the understanding of an 'appropriate' behaviour in a professional context seems to be deeply related to a social frame (Goffman 1986), and individuals' (in)ability to behave appropriately is most likely restricted by their (in)ability to understand and master their surrounding world through a "feeling for the game" (Bourdieu 1990: 66). In other words, individuals' ability to achieve 'symbolic profit' via their cultural, economic or social capital is deeply situational and context bound. Awareness of the potential context dependency of competences and skills complicates the prevailing understanding of intra-European mobility and transferability of competences available to all European inhabitants, as promoted in the current labour market policy discourse and the Bologna Declaration.

The highly skilled labour migrants with a university degree from Sweden can be seen as belonging to the 'European mobile Elites' (Favell 2008: 87). Their position, however, may elucidate different norms and modes of behaviour in professional settings that are otherwise taken-for-granted. As such, the highly skilled Swedish migrants often have a rather privileged position, e.g. via their bodily compartments as white middle-class Europeans, and this is often reflected on in their self-image as free and independent individuals (as described in Paper III). Still, the reality that these migrants experience, as professionals in their new social, cultural and national setting, reflects the difficulty they have in getting their skills and modes of behaviour recognized in the present workplace setting.

6

Concluding reflections

The aim of this thesis is to examine the conditions for employability and labour market mobility. The main conclusions are paraphrased by terminology used in the title: “Imagined Independence: Institutional Conditions and Individual Opportunities in European Labour Markets”. The terminology of ‘imagined independence’ signifies the ambivalence faced by European employees in the intersections of expectations and experiences, thus pointing to potential problems and strains: Employment relations in 21st century Europe have emphasized employees’ flexibility and adaptability, both intended to meet employers’ requirements. The current policy discourse is simplified and framed in terms of a multitude of opportunities for (trans)national labour mobility and individuals’ responsibility for their own employability, a discourse that disregards institutional conditions. ‘Institutional conditions’ for employability/mobility refer to the impact of the institutional and national context for perceived labour market opportunities. ‘Individual opportunities’ are explored through individuals’ capital and characteristics, including social and national background, age, gender and level of education, and conditions for mobility are further examined by studying the experiences and strategies of highly skilled Swedish labour migrants.

The overall conclusions reveal that relevant employability-constructions relate to different levels of meaning-making with reference to the *(trans)national context*, *self-image*, embodied as well as institutionalised forms of *cultural capital* and the relation between *social class* and *(trans)national connections*. The significance of these themes are explained below.

6.1 The (trans)national context

The findings of this thesis emphasize that the nation-state and national identity are key to understanding the patterns of intra-European labour market mobility and employees’ perceived labour market opportunities. During the past decade, free mobility within the European Union has been framed in terms of providing an opportunity “for all” European citizens. However, in reality the different welfare state systems in Europe affect individuals’ access to the intra-European labour market, owing to the different national educational systems, labour market demands, labour market policies and legislation.

In this thesis, I have argued that the nation-state conditions individuals’ labour market opportunities: The national legal frames create a form of ‘negotiated’

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social citizenship granting the allocation of rights, benefits and privileges. More specifically, this thesis has shown that formal citizenship should be distinguished from ‘citizenship through practice’; the latter being a central aspect affecting individuals’ perceived labour market opportunities. In this practice, knowledge about how to access social rights and obligations is central, as are the embodied orientations shaping how individuals operate in social space.

To understand individuals’ labour market perceptions as well as existing conditions and patterns of intra-European labour market mobility, we need to focus on the country-level context as a system that reproduces social inequalities beyond the nation-state. Even if it is clear that national patterns of social inequalities affect individuals’ labour market opportunities (see e.g., Andreotti et al. 2015, Weiß 2005), the contemporary European system supporting global mobility of capital, services, goods and labour also provides possibilities for the upper and middle classes as well as educated individuals to transfer national resources into transnational capital. As shown, having the relevant education might not lead directly to a transnational career, because other resources and capital can become vital to orienting oneself in a new institutional and labour market context. The strategy of turning national welfare expenses into a transnational resource (as shown in Paper III) is therefore understandable.

6.2 Self-image and labour market perceptions

As shown in the four papers, the different institutional conditions impact individuals’ perceived labour market opportunities. Privileged individuals, with high levels of symbolic capital, may have more realistic perceptions than do the less privileged, such as foreign-born groups (Paper II) or youth (Paper I). Vulnerable groups in precarious employment situations are also forced to handle the consequences of individualized policy agendas, and the self-image of the prosperous driven employee may be a successful strategy. Although, the self-image of independence might not always overlap with actual labour market experiences. As outlined in the thesis, even rather privileged highly skilled Swedish intra-European labour migrants can feel vulnerable in an institutional context they do not fully comprehend.

As shown by the qualitative findings, the social setting in the workplace may be difficult to handle for migrant employees. Today, employees are increasingly encouraged to package life stories and productive achievements in terms of a “narrative of employability” (Brown et al. 2011: 142) when applying for positions and in everyday work practices. Work related self-perceptions are seen here as having developed as a coping strategy and in response to existing circumstances. Thus, the individual’s self-image and actual situation in the workplace may therefore appear rather contradictory (as paraphrased in the title) and may deviate considerably from the actual workplace situation (see also Paper III).

6.3 Cultural capital and performative norms

Thus, institutional contexts and local settings are fundamental to understanding European employees' perceived labour market opportunities and the experiences and strategies of highly skilled labour migrants in the intra-European labour market. The foundation for this argument finds support in Bourdieu's (1990) definition of cultural capital as an embodied and institutionalized resource and in the theorization of labour market practices as socially situated and embedded in social relations, hierarchies and norms (see also Huot and Rudman 2010, Scheer 2012).

In the present findings, institutional privileges are tied to practical circumstances and social relations that employees confront in everyday working life. Moreover, the allocations of rights, benefits, and privileges are subject to distributional differences not solely based on formal/legal citizenship. Rather, those distributional differences may be linked to other forms of (individual) resources, such as perceived opportunities to allocate oneself in a (trans)national labour market, and further embodied resources in social space that orient individuals in different directions (see Ahmed 2007, Leonard 2010, Weiß 2005). National and institutional contexts do not only affect individuals' nation-oriented perceived labour market opportunities, but also their potential to search for jobs across national borders. After all, employees (including the highly skilled) are quite local in their job searches and in everyday practice at work, despite having the legal right to apply for or 'choose' to apply for positions across European borders (see Andreotti et al. 2015, Devadason 2017, Favell et al. 2007).

The above-mentioned opportunity-driven model exemplifies a rather instrumental view of educational activities, where investments in education are supposed to increase individuals' employability. According to Bourdieu's capital accumulation theory, however, validation of foreign educational credits may only generate a certain level of cultural capital, as validation procedures often do not recognize the locality of competences (Diedrich 2017). Hence, while studying for a university degree, students also develop a network of social contacts and soft skills that are indispensable in local labour markets. Social assets such as these are reduced in value when crossing national borders after graduating and entering a new labour market (as shown in Paper III and IV). Access to social capital and local networks is also unevenly distributed and depends on employees' gendered, racialized or 'ethnified' position (Ryan et al. 2015). Therefore, the 'free mobility' framing promoted by current European policies is simplified, as freedom to move depends on the estimated value of symbolic capital in the (trans)national context.

6.4 Social class and (trans)national connections

The types of resources and country-level contexts that are beneficial from an employee perspective vary over time and with individuals' resources and characteristics; they are also dependent on patterns of social inequality that extend beyond the nation-state. Therefore, social inequality patterns might need to be

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(re-)framed in broader terms than the nation-state if we are to understand what types of resources and country-level contexts are beneficial for European employees. Andreotti et al. (2015) describe the emerging upper-middle class of Europe as people with transnational connections to call upon that are formed through class position and cultural capital – people who may (partially) exit without losing their social security. With reference to the interviewees in the present study, most had parents who experienced upward social mobility. Moreover, these interviewees had little access to professional networks and local connections. Therefore, moving abroad did not directly cause a reduction in social capital. Overall, the Swedish welfare state symbolized security as a form of capital that could compensate for their lack of contacts and connections in the country of origin as well as the country of destination. Thus, labour market measures such as unemployment benefits may be important to employees with low levels of social capital, as they are likely to experience more barriers to employment than those who have access to (trans)national social capital via their upper-middle-class background.

As argued, individuals' labour market situations are constructed through the interplay between their resources and characteristics, achieved recognition by employers/organizations and institutional characteristics, such as welfare spending, employment protection legislation and the educational system (as shown in Figure 2, page 34). However, contemporary opportunity-driven European policies rather promote the value of education in meritocratic terms, where individuals should compete on equal terms for qualified positions (see also Sparrhoff and Fejes 2016). As shown in the thesis, qualifications and skills are only one part of individual employment trajectories, as the interplay between the institutional (macro-level) context and individual (micro-level) factors impacts perceptions of employability in the labour market, within *and* beyond the welfare state.

6.5 Sociological relevance and further implications

The four studies included in this thesis contribute to our understanding of perceptions and conditions for employability and transnational labour mobility in the European context and become sociologically meaningful with theorization.

As discussed in Paper II, the development after the 1990s is characterized as a re-commodification of the workforce (in line with Esping-Andersen's (1990) conceptualization), where individuals became more dependent on market forces for their well-being (see also Bengtsson 2017, Breen 1997, Svallfors 2006). In many European countries, employment incentives have gradually replaced training activities. In Sweden, for example, it is no longer possible to qualify for unemployment benefits through university studies, as individuals are required to start searching for jobs all over the country from day one of unemployment (Bengtsson 2017). Moreover, the so-called work strategy (*arbetslinjen*) emphasized

geographic mobility and adaptation of social skills via employment incentives without ‘investing’ in professional skills, educational diplomas or the like (see also Siebers 2018 who discusses the importance of soft skills in the Netherlands). Thus, what seems to matter is the ability to accumulate embodied cultural capital and relational resources that are highly situational and locally oriented. As shown here, individuals’ knowledge and skills are valued differently in specific (national) contexts, something that becomes visible when they are employed in a different context than where their qualifications were attained (see also Nohl et al. 2014).

The contributions of this thesis are theoretical as well as empirical. Knowledge about how macro-structural and institutional arrangements affect employees’ perceived labour market opportunities is important and should be considered by policymakers and politicians. As shown, embodied resources are difficult to transfer from one local setting to another. (Re)training activities in the country of destination is therefore important to improving the validation of merits (to be used for employers’ recognition) and to accessing locally adapted knowledge, contacts and culture, which is activated during training. Re-training activities may therefore be an important part of developing relevant social and cultural capital in the country of employment that can be accumulated into symbolic capital.

The implication of local capital recognition can be found in the diverse perceptions among social groups; we act according to our peer-group. According to Goldthorpe (1998: 169), “the law of large numbers” helps us to define social ‘outsiders’ (in statistical terms *outliers*), as we tend to act as most people do, at least as those who we identify ourselves with. In Bourdieu’s (1990) words, such acting takes place along with our habitus. Thus, labour market perceptions need to be seen in relation to existing implicit and explicit expectations and practices of inclusion, exclusion and discrimination, often based on the construction of ‘ethnic’ or gender differences (see Figure 1, page 23). Hence, while all individuals are required to be flexible, adaptable and prepared for transitions between employers, it is not surprising that some groups are more successful than others. While employability can be seen as an ongoing practice incorporated into the institutional (macro-level) structure, perceived chances to remain employable are impacted by daily work-life practice, recognition from one’s social surroundings and maintenance of the impression of being employable. Therefore, the implications of individual-oriented policy strategies in Europe are found by exploring individuals’ employability constructions, and underline the potential ambivalence and contradictions between their existing labour market circumstances and their perceived ideals.

As argued in the thesis, employability needs to be understood as a social construction; a social label, constructed in relation to individuals’ surrounding context. Besides individual premises and characteristics and the institutional context, labour market opportunities depend on other people’s reactions, which vary over time and space. Failure to obey socially agreed-upon rules in the labour market can have detrimental consequences for future employment opportunities. Certain ‘rules’ may also be applied more strictly to some groups than to others.

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Thus, the freedom of mobility discourse, promoting intra-European mobility, needs to be qualified.

The present European policy discourse states that all individuals are free to choose their own career. However, the contemporary freedom of mobility discourse may impose different realities on different groups of employees. It is clear that the ‘endless opportunities’ of transnational mobility are not available to all Europeans – not even all highly skilled ones. People categorized as migrants are often dependent on their ability to ‘adapt’ and ‘fit in’ in the new country of residence. In sum, employability is a question of recognition and the dynamic relation between the institutional context, individual characteristics and the relational character of the employee’s resources. Thus, labour market diversity needs to be scrutinized if we are to move beyond the rhetoric of endless opportunities and freedom ‘for all’.

6.6 Moving beyond the four papers

In this final section some ideas for future research are shared that deal with the *significance of gender*, the ongoing *categorization of migrants* and identity constructions among migrant groups in *the post-Brexit UK*, as revealed during the research process.

6.6.1 The gendered pattern of labour mobility

The gendered pattern of transnational labour mobility among highly skilled migrants is of interest for further research. Previous research on gender and labour migration from Sweden has focused on international mobility in terms of temporality and family timing, factors that often affect the situation of Swedish women employed abroad (see Boström et al. 2018). Furthermore, gendered patterns of care- and family-related responsibilities may affect the initial decision to migrate in the first place (see Shmulyar Gréen and Melander 2018). An important finding of the present qualitative study was that women often talked about the problems that occurred while living abroad in general terms and voiced the need to feel secure (in the new country’s social system), whereas men emphasized their individual and *specific* problems in the workplace and were less likely to reflect upon their problems from a broader perspective. The results cannot be theorized at this point, but gender played a significant role in the quantitative analyses too, as women had a more negative view of their labour market possibilities (see Paper I and II). Further research on the gendered distribution of individuals’ transnational employability and constructions of career opportunities as well as perceived employability is therefore required.

One additional reflection on the above discussion is the influence of the connection between individuals’ *private* and *public* spheres on the maintenance of employability. This connection was articulated by the migrant employees while making meaning of their labour market prospects: The private sphere often

appears to be intertwined with the public sphere among women, as their career opportunities were framed as a negotiation between career opportunities and family members (in line with Boström et al. 2018). Moreover, previous research has found that Swedish women who emigrate to a (Western) welfare state with less paid parental leave and childcare benefits may feel more secure in the Swedish welfare system: In Lundström's (2014) study, Swedish women living in the US moved back to Sweden during pregnancy. Hence, transnational labour market opportunities are certainly gendered.

6.6.2 Classification schemes of 'migrants' versus 'mobile employees'

Bridget Anderson emphasizes the importance of new frames, stories and contexts for understanding migrants as a category (Sager 2018). The second issue in need of further research, supported by the present findings, concerns the terminology, categorization and definition of 'migrants' in Europe. Being classified as a migrant often has negative connotations, indicating there is 'a problem' (see Paper III; Weiß 2005) with lack of integration. However, the classification of 'expats' maintains a certain social status as an 'outsider', without being devalued or defined as a 'problem' due to, e.g., the lack of integration.

One question worth studying concerns the classification schemes used for national statistics, on the one hand, and the informal classification of migrants, on the other: Who is a migrant and how does this label affect perceived employability? Who is defined as a 'problem', and who is not? (see, e.g., Anderson 2017, Burrell 2016) To understand the biases inherent in the conceptualization of 'migrants', the study of migration needs to be broadened, to include not primarily the spectrum of forced migration (e.g., issues of 'how many migrants our country can handle', a calculation based on economic principles²¹), but also financially privileged, highly skilled migrants. Here, the ongoing politicization of tax avoidance and utilization of welfare (in terms of 'social dumping') needs to include wealthy, highly skilled Western Europeans who possess valuable and recognizable resources, which enable them to orient themselves transnationally in profitable ways. In fact, even the highly skilled migrant – who no one thinks of as a migrant or even an 'immigrant light' – may be in need of a local welfare system and recognition of his/her resources.

6.6.3 Post-Brexit UK

While interviewing Swedish migrants in the UK in 2014, prior to the referendum on June 24 in 2016 in favour of Britain leaving the European Union, Brexit was often brought up by interviewees: Will I 'become' a migrant if the UK decides to leave the European Union? It is possible that institutionalized cultural capital will

²¹ Compare this to the rhetoric in Sweden during the autumn of 2015 (see Åberg 2015).

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be diminished with Brexit. Given that institutional and embodied cultural capital often are intertwined, additional consequences of the Brexit outcome are to be expected. For example, the individuals' labour market perceptions and general understandings of migrants versus mobile employees (as discussed above) may be reframed.

At the time of writing, it is likely that the situation for highly skilled Swedish migrants in the UK has changed since the first interviews were conducted four years ago in 2014. The post-Brexit context has probably contributed to changing the self-image of many migrant workers in the UK, as well as UK citizen employed in other European countries, given the possibility of future restrictions resulting from Brexit (BBC 2018). It remains unclear exactly *how* the UK will leave the union. However, the re-conceptualization and social framing of 'migrants' started the day after the referendum. Thus a comparative study would be of interest, including additional interviews and perhaps even follow-up interviews with those interviewed for the thesis and those who decided to remain in the UK after the Brexit vote in 2016. The conditions today post-Brexit are of interest in any case, considering that follow-ups might be difficult to schedule after more than 4 years' time. The post-Brexit UK context may force Swedish migrants to 'choose sides', meaning that a 'transnational lifestyle' based on transnational embodied forms of cultural capital, attainable via institutionalized forms of capital such as the European citizenship, may not be possible in praxis. Therefore, in addition to a focus on Swedes who decided to remain in the UK after Brexit, interviews with returnees and migrants who returned to Sweden after the 2016 referendum are also of interest. The situation for returnees is important and underlines the notion that labour market experiences and competences are often framed in terms of local capital (as discussed in Paper IV) – contrary to the European policy discourse, which promotes labour mobility in rather idealized ways.

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Svensk sammanfattning

I denna avhandling studeras relationen mellan europeiska arbetstagares upplevda möjligheter på arbetsmarknaden och samtida policytrender inom utbildning och arbetsliv. Sedan 1990-talet har den europeiska arbetsmarknaden präglats av ett ökat fokus på individens eget ansvar att hålla sig *anställningsbar* och attraktiv för potentiella arbetsgivare. Samtidigt kan individens förutsättningar att uppfylla arbetsgivares förväntningar variera beroende av *vem, var* och *när* en individ söker ett jobb. För att förstå denna utveckling ur ett arbetstagarperspektiv studeras arbetstagarnas upplevda möjligheter, förväntningar, erfarenheter och strategier på en samtida europeisk arbetsmarknad. Avhandlingen kombinerar olika metoder; enkätdata, nationell statistik och semistrukturerade intervjuer.

Subjektiv anställningsbarhet (*perceived employability*) avser människors bedömning av sin arbetsmarknadssituation, deras upplevda möjligheter att finna likvärdigt eller bättre jobb om de tvingades lämna sin nuvarande position. I avhandlingens första del analyseras hur den subjektiva anställningsbarheten hos individer i Europa varierar beroende av nationell kontext. Den första och andra artikelns analyser bygger på data från European Social Survey (ESS) samt nationella kontextvariabler från Organisationen för ekonomiskt samarbete och utveckling (OECD) och Eurostat. Avhandlingens första artikel baseras på en flernivåsanalys av individdata från 21 europeiska länder och jämför europeiska länder med fokus på betydelsen av olika institutioner (såsom landets utbildningssystem, inriktning på aktiva och passiva arbetsmarknadsåtgärder, grad av anställningstrygghet, andel högutbildade och arbetslöshetsnivå). Artikelnen betonar vikten av att upprätthålla en dynamisk förståelse av människors upplevda möjligheter på arbetsmarknaden: betydelsen av individuella egenskaper och kompetenser behöver förstås som ömsesidigt beroende av existerande institutionella förutsättningar såsom vägar in i utbildning och rekryteringstrender bland arbetsgivare. Studien visar att utbildningssystemet har betydelse för arbetstagares upplevda anställningsbarhet. Exempelvis upplevs specifika utbildningssystem som mer fördelaktigt i jämförelse med generella utbildningssystem. Samtidigt har andelen universitetsutbildade i landet en positiv effekt på arbetstagares upplevda anställningsbarhet, och även andel av befolkningen i aktiva arbetsmarknadsåtgärder. Den andra artikeln baseras också på en flernivåsanalys av individdata från 16 europeiska länder, men med ett större fokus på personer med utländsk bakgrund i Europa och deras upplevda arbetsmarknadschanser. Här används enkätdata över tid (från 2004 och 2010) för att jämföra betydelsen av institutioner före och efter finanskrisen 2008/09. Artikelnen pekar på att utlandsfödda arbetstagares upplevda möjligheter i Europa bör förstås i relation till rådande förhållanden som skapar exkludering på arbetsmarknaden. Resultaten visar att utrikesfödda från annat europeiskt land upplever större möjligheter på arbetsmarknaden i

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jämförelse med arbetstagare födda utanför Europa. Vidare upplever utrikesfödda generellt större möjligheter på arbetsmarknaden i jämförelse med inrikesfödda arbetstagare, varför en reell skillnad mellan individers faktiska och upplevda möjligheter på arbetsmarknaden kan antydast. Effekterna varierar dock över tid och beroende av nationell kontext.

Avhandlingens andra del bygger på djupintervjuer med svenskar som sökt arbete utomlands, samtliga med en akademisk examen från Sverige. Intervjuerna utfördes år 2014–2015, och har analyserats genom aktiv kodning av intervjupersonernas utsagor. Genom att studera inom-Europeisk arbetsmigration utifrån ett mindre vanligt perspektiv står frågor om privilegier, förutsättningar och villkor för rörlighet och arbetsmobilitet i fokus. Den tredje artikeln fokuserar på hur de högutbildade svenska migranterna drivs av en idé om självständighet, vilket klassificeras som en form av föreställt oberoende (*Imagined Independence*). Den egna självbilden bygger på en föreställning om oberoende men kolliderar samtidigt med en mer sårbar verklighet. Sårbarheten handlar bl.a. om brist på erkännande och tillgång till olika trygghetssystem, där den svenska välfärden till viss del också skapar och möjliggör trygghet utomlands. Den fjärde artikeln fokuserar på arbetsplatsnivå och visar bl.a. hur det kulturella bagaget ibland är en tillgång (i termer av privilegierade immigranter), men också kan bli ett problem. Genom att fokusera på hur existerande normer upprätthålls, förändras och bryts på arbetsplatsen tydliggörs spänningen mellan migranternas självbild och deras faktiska erfarenheter. På så vis synliggörs olika informella villkor och exkluderande/inkluderande förhållanden som dominerar i en specifik lokal arbetsplatskontext. Samtidigt framgår att vissa normer kan ha en mer hegemonisk karaktär, något som de vita, högutbildade svenska migranterna upplever fördelaktigt på en transnationell europeisk arbetsmarknad och de klassificeras därför som *immigrant light*.

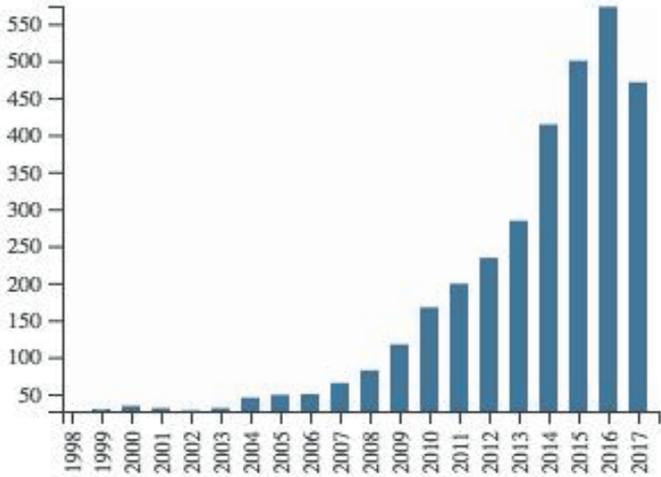
Sammantaget visar avhandlingen att (trans)nationell rörlighet på en samtida europeisk arbetsmarknad kräver tillgång till lokala, gångbara och erkända resurser i termer av institutionellt och kroppsligt *kulturellt kapital*. För att få tillgång till erkända, lokala kapitalformer kan individuella särdrag såsom klassbakgrund, kön, ålder och utbildningsnivå vara avgörande för hur individen upplever sina möjligheter och sin situation på arbetsmarknaden. Att benämna möjligheten att söka jobb som europeisk medborgare i annat europeiskt land som en reell möjlighet *för alla* medborgare kan därför vara missvisande. Avhandlingen har inte studerat arbetsgivares rekryteringsstrategier i termer av inkludering/exkludering, men teoretiskt argumenteras för att denna nivå är viktig för att förstå hur individer upplever sina möjligheter på arbetsmarknaden. I en samtid där de 'mjuka egenskaperna' värderas högt på arbetsmarknaden, dvs. egenskaper såsom arbetstagarens förmåga att passa in och anpassa sig till den lokala kontexten och arbetssituationen, så kan validering av kompetenser bli mer komplex än vad som ges sken av i den politiska debatten och Bolognadeklarationen. Individers möjligheter till rörlighet på arbetsmarknaden behöver därför förstås i relation till deras faktiska förutsättningar.

A

Appendix A

Employability citations (in Web of Science)

Figure 1: Number of articles with employability citations published in Web of Science (y-axis) per year (x-axis), from 1998-2017.



Comment: The bulk of the employability-related research can be found in the field of economics and social science.

B

Appendix B

Interview guide

Introduction: The purpose of the interview is to talk about your expectations, experiences, and motives to work abroad. Are there any – or different – expectations from different actors? I am interested in knowing how a transnational labour market may work in practice. The material will be anonymized, and your informed consent is important. The interview will be recorded, for the sake of remembering the content more in detail. I hope you agree to these conditions.

Temaområde	Intervjufrågor
Beslut att emigrera	<p>Hur kom det sig att du sökte dig till Tyskland/GB för att arbeta?</p> <p>Hur rekryterades du till din nuvarande position?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Hur fick du information om tjänsten?</i> <p>Har du haft några särskilda strategier? Var det en plan sedan tidigare att flytta utomlands och jobba, eller var det något som dök upp plötsligt?</p> <p>Vad var nödvändigt att tänka på/planera för inför flytten? Hur tänkte du kring praktiska frågor och överväganden?</p>
Transnationell arbetsmarknad [förväntningar & erfarenheter, mobilitetsstrategier: Vilka resurser finns, ex. internationell a-förmedling?]	<p>Vad finns det för utmaningar/svårigheter med att arbeta i ett annat land? Exempelvis när det gäller att få ihop vardagen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Svårigheter respektive möjligheter?</i> <p>Finns något som du varit orolig för under din tjänstgöring utomlands?</p> <p>Hur ser du på framtiden: är arbetet utomlands något tillfälligt?</p> <p>Vilka erfarenheter och förväntningar har du?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Inom vilka områden har du förväntningar?</i>
Mötesplatser, arenor	<p>Vilka sociala sammanhang och nätverk har du tillgång till?</p> <p>Vilka gemenskaper har varit viktiga?</p> <p>Finns sociala sammanhang och nätverk som du saknar från Sverige?</p>

<p>Jobb & karriär</p> <p>[hur de tänkt/handlat i 'karriären']</p>	<p>Kan du beskriva din yrkeskarriär?</p> <p>Vad vill du uppnå med din 'karriär'?</p> <p>Hur gjorde du för att förverkliga dina mål? [hur har du gjort, hur har du resonerat]</p> <p>Vilka svårigheter har du upplevt när det gäller att förverkliga dina mål? [hur har du gjort, hur har du resonerat?]</p> <p>Hur skulle du beskriva en framgångsrik karriär rent generellt?</p> <p>Har du upplevt olika sätt att se på framgång i Sverige respektive Tyskland/GB?</p> <p>Har du haft några särskilda karriärstrategier? Vilka strategier märker du att andra har?</p> <p>Vad är viktigt för att du ska uppleva trygghet i din karriärutveckling?</p> <p>Finns det specifika personer som varit viktiga för din karriär?</p> <p>Vilka hinder och möjligheter ser du för egen del?</p> <p>Hur upplever du konkurrens? - <i>Är konkurrens viktigt i din vardag?</i></p> <p>Vad använder du för språk i din vardag? - <i>Hur upplever du det?</i></p>
<p>Arbetslöshet, sjukdom, pension, familjebildning</p>	<p>Vad händer om du blir arbetslös?</p> <p>Vad händer om du skulle bli sjukskriven?</p> <p>Hur ser du på ditt liv som pensionär?</p> <p>Hur ser du på möjligheterna att kombinera arbete och familjeliv?</p>
<p>Samhällsansvar</p>	<p>Har du ett aktivt föreningsliv? Finns det nån typ av samhällsfråga som du känner ett starkt engagemang för?</p> <p>Vad är viktigt för dig?</p> <p>Vad upplever du vara viktigt för samhället i sin helhet?</p>

Framtidsplaner	Hur ser du på din framtida karriär? <i>- Vilka hinder och möjligheter ser du för din framtida karriär?</i>
Bakgrund	Ålder Tidigare jobb och studier (i Sverige?) Nuvarande arbetsplats (hur länge?) Position, yrkesbenämning? Familjebakgrund Nuvarande familjesituation

C

Appendix C

Recruitment-letter

The following letter was distributed in different digital forums, as well as via email correspondence within membership communities (see *Interviews*, page 39, for more information on the various groups that were contacted).

Hej.

Mitt namn är Ylva Wallinder och jag är forskarstuderande i sociologi vid Göteborgs universitet. Min avhandling handlar om en transnationell arbetsmarknad. Jag söker nu dig som själv tog steget att söka jobb i [*München resp. London*] med omnejd (alltså inte medföljande en partner som fått arbete). Du bör även ha en högskoleexamen i bagaget, från Sverige. Jag är intresserad av dina motiv för att söka dig utomlands för att arbeta, liksom dina erfarenheter och tankar om detta.

Känner du att detta är något du skulle vilja ställa upp på? Jag befinner mig i [*Tyskland resp. England*] under [*specifik period*] och bokar gärna in intervjuer då. Annars träffas jag gärna i Sverige. Kanske åker du till Sverige på semester i sommar? Jag är flexibel när det gäller tid för intervju.

Maila ditt intresse till: ylva.wallinder@socav.gu.se

Jag ser fram emot att höra från dig.

Bästa hälsningar

Ylva Wallinder, doktorand

Department of Sociology and Work Science

This thesis examines conditions for labour market mobility for European employees with institutional conditions and local recognition of resources in focus. Recent European labour market strategies promote work and employment as a function of individual activation: the individual needs to be an active job seeker and should develop new skills in order to attract potential employers. On a policy level, the European Union has created an opportunity-oriented employability-logic that places responsibility for employment on the individual.

The overall aim of this thesis is to scrutinize this employability-logic by exploring employees' experiences and perceptions of employability in relation to their surroundings. This thesis draws on survey analysis based on European Social Survey and country-level data from different national contexts as well as qualitative interviews with highly skilled Swedish labour migrants in Germany and the United Kingdom. The thesis acknowledges that employability and recognition of resources is context-dependent and is influenced by different institutional structures and specific local work-place settings.

Ylva Wallinder is based at the Department of Sociology and Work Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.



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