

Imagined independence among highly skilled Swedish labour migrants

Abstract

The political discussion on intra-European mobility differentiates between mobile, internationally employable individuals and immobile, locally employed ones. Mobile EU citizens, in turn, are subdivided into “attractive” highly skilled workers and “unwanted” lower skilled workers. Transnational labour mobility among the highly skilled often results from an individual’s free will to move, disregarding structural reasons. This article examines the expectations and experiences of highly skilled Swedish labour migrants seeking qualified employment in Germany and the UK, exploring their strategies and modes of handling the mismatch between expectations and actual experiences. The findings demonstrate that the vulnerability migrants experience while working abroad does not seem to affect their self-understanding of being independent, flexible and highly mobile European citizens. The interviewees’ self-understanding is therefore conceptualised as an *imagined independence*, and one that stands in sharp contrast to their experiences of vulnerability and unexpected difficulty in the host country.

Key words: Highly skilled labour migration, intra-European mobility, symbolic capital, im/mobility of capital, Swedish migrants

THE GERMAN CHANCELLOR Angela Merkel stated in a speech to the European Parliament in 2007, that freedom is a prerequisite for the diversity of nations, regions, people, languages and mentalities in Europe. For plurality to be accomplished, mobility within European borders needs to be encouraged (Merkel 2007). In fact, various legislative changes over recent decades have facilitated intra-European mobility (Eurydice 2012). However, a question still remains: freedom of mobility for whom?

The European Union’s legislation considers nationals of member states as free movers, and movement cannot therefore be controlled within the EU (Favell 2008). Still, researchers describe a complex stratification of migrants’ rights and statuses due to different subcategories of mobile EU citizens. This stratification implies that highly skilled workers are attractive and “needed”, whereas lower skilled workers often are

categorized as “unwanted” (Carmel & Paul 2013:59).¹ However, all labour migrants are bound to face challenges pending the social position of the country of origin and their experiences vary. The experiences of highly skilled Swedish migrants have been somewhat neglected in previous research because of the considerable privilege enjoyed by this group, their formal possibilities for intra-European mobility (see Eurydice 2012) and informal status among recruiters abroad (Bogren 2008). Therefore, this article focuses on highly skilled labour migrants with a university degree from Sweden, employed in Germany or the UK.

According to previous research, highly skilled migrants move to advance their (professional) opportunities as transnational mobility is considered to broaden work-life experiences, career management, status and self-realisation (Doherty & Dickmann 2009; Mau & Verwiebe 2010). Highly skilled migration also enables individuals to return to their country of origin with more work experience and increased human capital (Andreotti et al. 2015). The possibility of returning may therefore render the highly skilled migrant a visitor, or an “expatriate”, who might not be considered a migrant at all (Hannerz 1996:106; Lundström 2014). However, the positioning as an expat is rather exclusive, mainly referring to white Western migrants (see Leonard 2010; also Remarques Koutonin 2015).

The possibility of being included in an expat community most likely affects the migrants’ expectations in the country of employment. The mobility of Swedish “expatriates” has been associated with individuals’ quest for new perspectives, individual initiative, and an attempt to “seek excitement and adventure” (Gustafson 2001:377). Furthermore, educated and qualified intra-European mobile employees face little of the work-related discrimination and limitations that may pose restrictions on other migrant groups (Favell 2008:87). In order to understand the unequal patterns and conditions for labour mobility, there is a need to study existing intra-European mobility experiences and conditions for the highly skilled. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the implication of highly skilled Swedish labour migrants’ expectations and experiences of working abroad. Based on this interview-study of Swedish highly skilled migrants employed in London (UK) and Munich (Germany), this article examines migrants’ reasoning about seeking qualified employment abroad, inquiring into both the potential privileges and the problems encountered. The questions addressed are: (1) What expectations do highly skilled Swedish labour migrants have when seeking qualified employment abroad? (2) How do experiences match their expectations? (3) What strategies are used to handle the mismatch between expectations and experiences?

Previous research indicates that most intra-EU labour migrants are unlikely to claim social benefits in their respective country of employment due to “barriers such as a lack of information about entitlement to rights or insufficient language skills to access information about their entitlements” (Bruzelius et al. 2016:412). Similarly, the

1 Lower skilled workers from the former Eastern Europe may also be seen as an ‘attractive’ labour force for certain employers as they often accept lower employment conditions and salaries in comparison to local employees in Northern and Western Europe (see Woolfson et al. 2010).

interviewees experience the country of origin's system more accessible and feel more vulnerable abroad (see also Gustafson 2001). The findings point towards a considerable discrepancy between expectations and experiences on behalf of Swedish migrants in the UK and Germany. Despite such experienced difficulties, highly skilled migrants tend to perceive themselves as strong and independent individuals that take their professional as well as private lives in their own hands. Their desired independence has been conceptualised as *imagined independence*, accentuating particular imaginations about the ability to *choose* their own professional career paths, independent of social and national contexts. Such imaginations stand in sharp contrast to their experiences. The article begins with the study design and analysis, followed by the theoretical framework that developed during the subsequent coding and data analysis. Thereafter, the empirical findings are outlined before a concluding discussion is offered.

Study design and analysis

The notion of a “migrant” is often formulated as a rather abstract category, ignoring the heterogeneity among migrants as a result of intersections of potential disadvantage pending gender, ethnicity, “race” and social background (Anthias 2012:102). The highly skilled migrants in this study consists of motivated and privileged migrants with various forms of resources, especially related to their educational competences, among others. Furthermore, their country of origin, in combination with educational competences and qualifications, might generate an implicit status in the migrant's country of destination (see Bauder & Semmelroggen 2009; Erel 2010; Nohl et al. 2014). It also appears that being a Swedish migrant in the UK and Germany is beneficial, in comparison to, for example, highly skilled migrants from Romania, Bulgaria or Poland.

The empirical material consists of in-depth interviews with highly skilled Swedish migrants working and living in England (London) or in Germany (Munich), two countries that constitute main destinations for intra-EU migration (Bruzelius et al. 2016). This article focuses on the Swedish migrants' expectations about seeking qualified employment abroad and their actual experiences and strategies. The similarities were found more striking than differences between experiences and strategies in the two national contexts.

All interviewees were highly skilled professionals (according to ISCO-08 Group 2 classification, see ILO 2012)², employed in qualified positions primarily in the private sector, with positions ranging from engineers, graduate economists, lawyers to pharmacists in finance/banking, public health, international relations, human resources or

2 Highly skilled migrants are 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) (see ILO 2012). The use of highly skilled rather than highly educated is consistent with existing European policies and politics that facilitate the mobility of 'attractive' and skilled employees (see Cerna 2014; Lundvall and Lorenz 2012b; also, Eurydice 2012).

IT companies. Several interviewees were employed in multinational companies, with managers figuring as local representatives.³ Moreover, one third of the interviewees were on leave from a permanent position in Sweden when they initially embarked on employment abroad. Thus, the data comprise 21 interviews with highly skilled Swedish labour migrants (11 who migrated to Germany and 10 to the UK) and were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of their bond to Sweden, interviewing those who were born and raised in Sweden and had graduated from a Swedish university. Further, the interviewees were living and working in London or Munich (and had not migrated as an accompanying partner).

The interviewees were recruited through different social associations and platforms for Swedes in London and Munich and had actively decided to be part of a Swedish network. In both cities, recruitment was facilitated through the local Swedish churches (*Svenska kyrkan*)⁴ through email lists and Facebook groups. The email-list of *Svenskar i världen* (SVIV)⁵ constituted another platform for recruiting interviewees. A third organisation was *Swedish Women's Educational Association* (SWEA);⁶ a global network of Swedish speaking women living abroad. Finally, Facebook groups for Swedes in London and Munich provided a platform for recruitment.⁷

The interviews were conducted between April and October 2014. The majority were face-to-face interviews conducted in neutral places such as cafés, hotel lobbies or the like. All interviews were recorded and lasted between 1.5 – 2.5 hours. The interviews focused on general expectations and motives to seek work abroad as well as subsequent experiences. Ten of the interviewees were men, and eleven were women, with an approximately equal distribution between the two countries. The ambition was to focus on employees in the middle of their careers, due to the study's focus on labour mobility. Thus, the interviewees were between 27 and 45 years old.⁸

The coding procedure was inspired by a constructivist grounded theory approach as developed by Charmaz (2014). A constructivist orientation highlights the existence of multiple and varied meanings, providing tools for understanding participants' expectations, experiences, and strategies which are negotiated socially and historically. Thus, data collection and theorisation is an interactive process, which requires reflec-

3 The profession of each interviewee is concealed in the extracts due to claims of anonymity.

4 For further information: <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/london> or <http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/bayern> (2017-12-19).

5 For further information: <http://www.sviv.se/> (2017-12-12).

6 For further information: <http://london.www.swea.org/> or <http://munchen.www.swea.org/> (2017-12-19).

7 It is important to stress that the group, highly skilled migrants from Sweden, is a heterogeneous group. As mentioned, all interviewees have been recruited through a Swedish (digital) community, to which they have connected on their own initiative. Interviewees associations to the Swedish network may help explain why reflections of belonging to a Swedish *national* community appear as significant.

8 The exceptions are two interviewees who were retiring, and these interviews mainly describe reflections from their past career in relation to their present situation.

tion upon the role of the researcher (see also Creswell 2007).⁹ The main similarity to a grounded theory approach is the two-stage coding procedure used in this study (see Charmaz 2014).¹⁰ The initial and more focused set of categories were organised using the computer software ATLAS.ti. Additionally, memos were continuously written during data collection and analysis, providing a useful foundation for developing new aspects for future interviews and the theoretical coding procedure.

The analysis of the material, building on this two-stage coding procedure, points at the discrepancy between the migrants' assumed independence and their experienced vulnerability in the country of employment. Thus, feelings of vulnerability, economic insecurity and uncertainty capture an important part of these migrants' experiences. This, however, is rather contradictory to their described ideal of being independent individuals abroad.

Background

Since the early 1970s, the number of immigrants to Sweden has exceeded the total number of outgoing migrants, with incoming migration increasing drastically from 2005 onwards (SCB 2015). The period between 1970 and late 1990s was characterised by refugee and family-related immigration, and labour market immigration increased in importance after the mid-1990s. This development characterises Sweden as a typical receiving country. Nevertheless, the migration flows of recent decades are rather complex and many emigrants remain registered in Sweden despite having left the country. Thus, outgoing migration is often underestimated (Gerdes & Wadensjö 2014).

Consequently, highly skilled labour migrants *from* Sweden remain a somewhat hidden group, arguably due to their privileged position, and there is a considerable gap on them within existing scholarship on skilled migration. Existing qualitative studies focus on transnational labour mobility through Swedish companies (Bogren 2008), Swedish civil servants employed in Brussels (Casula Vifell 2013), accompanying partners and housewives migrating to the United States or Singapore (Lundström 2014), or "lifestyle" migration to southern Spain (Gustafson 2001; Lundström 2014). In relation to the above, this study attempts to examine the experiences and expectations of (highly skilled) Swedish labour migrants and ways in which they utilise various resources.

9 In this study, the similarities between the researcher and the participants relate to level of education and experiences of living and working in London and Munich. Having explained my familiarity with these two cities, the interviewees spoke more freely and detailed about particular problems and challenges faced. These dialogues were important for building trust and facilitate contextual and intercultural understandings (see also Kvale and Brinkman 2014). However, the researchers' own network and familiarity did not affect sampling procedures.

10 The first stage involves the application of initial codes with a descriptive reading of the transcripts, section by section and line by line, applying active codes through gerunds in order to reflect actions and open codes closely related to the data. Thereafter, the second stage of focused and theoretical coding was applied by distinguishing patterns in the data. This procedure ensures that the concepts and theory produced are tightly connected to the field (Charmaz 2014).

In many Western European countries, qualified labour migrants are welcomed as they are considered important for the country's demographic development. Therefore, many countries (explicitly or implicitly) facilitate incoming migrants who possess high levels of resources that can easily hold an employment position and settle down in the receiving country (Cerna 2014). Additionally, during the last decade, the Bologna Declaration created a united European University system; the European Higher Education Area (Eurydice 2012). In the discourse accompanying the Bologna process, the value of higher educational attainment is to improve individuals' attractiveness for national and international employers (Lindberg 2009). Further, the European Union introduced a BLUE card directive to facilitate the mobility of highly qualified individuals from third countries (Cerna 2014). These are all examples of existing European incentives promoting migration of the highly skilled and qualified employees.

Previous studies on highly skilled migration from Southern Europe to large European cities describe the mobility across borders as a rational career choice. In the country of destination "you stop being just a 'number' and start being valued accurately (by the 'market') for your own individual talents and achievements" (Favell 2008:63). The quote seems to capture a common outlook of many highly skilled labour immigrants: to be valued positively in the destination country and no longer be one among others. For the employee, transnational mobility broadens one's work-life experience and offer a possibility of feeling unique. Other studies of Eastern Europeans in London describe highly skilled migrants as having clear ideas and motives to work and live abroad: "Here, I am *investing* in myself" (King et al. 2016:16, *emphasis added*).

Current European supranational strategies promote the importance of validated educational qualifications when searching for job opportunities and career advancement (Eurydice 2012). The Lisbon Strategy and Europe2020 promote work and employment as a function of the individual's *activation*, i.e., the individual employee's ability – and responsibility – to actively search for employment positions, constantly captivate new skills and be creative in order to attract potential employers (OECD 2011; Lundvall & Lorenz 2012b). Here, a rather cumulative view on knowledge-production is put forward, similar to the human capital theory as introduced by economic theories.

Becker (2006) argues that human capital is a stable form; the investment in human capital yields financial return in terms of available employment opportunities. This perspective holds that human capital ought to be crucial in today's volatile (European) labour market, where individuals are forced to change jobs rather frequently (Lindberg 2009). However, others claim that the individual's ability to actually make use of his/her capital, including documented competences and skills, depends on his/her social position and local *recognition* (Nohl et al. 2014; Bourdieu 1986; Kelly & Lusia 2006). Specifically, in order to be recruited abroad, transnational resources such as relevant networks are required in addition to valid educational certificates. However, individuals differ in their ability to transfer different entitlement forms and informal resources across national borders due to their social position and national heritage which could be drawn on in the country of destination. Therefore, this analysis will

apply capital-theory, rather than the human capital approach, because it acknowledges that capital needs to be seen as relational.

Theoretical framework

As indicated, highly skilled migrants (from Sweden) may not only be conceived of as autonomous self-empowered individuals, but also as possessing different forms of capital and privilege recognised by recruiters. Drawing loosely on Bourdieu's (1990; 1986) definition of social, economic and cultural capital, cultural capital is, herein, defined as embodied and institutionalised forms of resources that can be converted into capital across national borders and social space. Embodied capital cannot be separated from the person who possesses it, whereas institutionalised cultural capital refers to formal credentials such as approved professional qualifications and educational attainment. However, the analysis in this article shows that even institutionalised forms of capital, such as educational credentials, are rather relational, dependent on local recognition.

According to Bourdieu, all forms of capital can be distinguished as 'accumulated labour-time' which is essential for converting one form of capital into another. What matters are the distinguished forms of "useful time" (Bourdieu 1986:253); that is, the time used for increasing one's cultural – or economic – capital. In fact, the possibility of making use of one's cultural and economic capital depends on "cultural habits and disposition", defined as "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977:14,54). To this end, Faist (2016) examines the connection between cross-border capital transactions and social inequalities by asking how different groups of individuals access different levels of symbolic capital. Therefore, this article wishes to highlight the relational character of capital accumulation and that the accumulation of capital requires social recognition in the society of residence. Thus, Bourdieu criticises Becker's conceptualisation of human capital formation as a monetary investment, arguing that we cannot explain labour market positions, or their outcome, only in terms of "investments". Instead, the recognition of investments, such as the amount spent on schooling and time devoted to study, varies between different social classes.

The systematic differences in the profit-making chances of a human capital investment can be understood via the significance of cultural capital as acquired by all individuals. However, migrant employees often acquire cultural capital outside the society of residence where they are currently utilising it. This article argues that different forms of cultural capital – both institutionalised and embodied – constitute an important part of an individual's social and professional labour market position. However, embodied capital is shaped by implicit and explicit expectations and practices of inclusion and exclusion, given by labour market opportunities as well as disadvantages (Erel 2010; Nohl et al. 2014). Therefore, economic theories which offer "an imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity" (Bourdieu 1986:241) are challenged here.

The im/mobility of capital

Thus, migrants' access to cultural capital, transferable across national borders (i.e., a transnational capital), depends on the recognition of their embodied cultural capital within the current national setting and their level of institutionalised capital. One example of such institutionalised cultural capital is that educational credentials became accepted across European borders, due to the Bologna Declaration. Likewise, other institutional forms of transnational capital can influence career possibilities outside the country of origin, such as citizenship:

Formal citizenship can be exchanged for other forms of capital. For example, citizenship can provide *access to economic capital* in the form of jobs and business opportunities available only to the citizens of a country. Citizenship can also *facilitate the creation of social capital* when it provides access to individuals, institutions, and networks (Bauder 2006:50, *emphasis added*).

Thus, a particular citizenship can facilitate access to economic and social capital, the former referring to financial resources and the latter to relevant social networks. Both economic and social capital are facilitated through institutional and embodied forms of cultural capital. Nonetheless, individuals with high levels of transnational cultural capital through merits acknowledged across national borders, may still experience low levels of useful social capital (Favell 2008; Bilecen & Faist 2015). In fact, a relevant network requires a particular social and local context to be useful, wherefore social capital often is a local advantage (Kelly & Lusi 2006). Thus, even if transnational and mobile elites develop cross-border networks during their stay abroad (see Faist 2000, Vertovec 2004), social capital can be experienced as an immobile form of capital as networks often are geographically situated.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the highly skilled migrants often possess certain forms of capital that are mobile across national borders, which may also be valuable resources for general well-being and career development. On the one hand, the highly skilled migrants' in this article can make use of their embodied cultural capital gained by a university degree, a form of bodily comportment expressed via their habitus (their *modus operandi*, see Bourdieu 1986). On the other hand, their educational level provides them access to institutionalised cultural capital via their formal degree that is validated across European borders (Lundberg 2009). Moreover, institutionalised cultural capital is further attained by their Swedish (and European) citizenship, allowing the Swedes to seek employment easily within the European Union (Berg & Spehar 2011). Besides, the life abroad for a highly educated Swede may allow for a salary increase that would not necessarily be possible in Sweden (Casula Vifell 2013), increasing their economic capital. In sum, social capital may well be a local asset and cultural capital is related to the ways in which (power) resources are being legitimised, which will be further developed in the following.

Images of immigrants and the freedom of mobility

Due to similar Western backgrounds in Germany and the UK, educated (white) individuals from Sweden may expect to be treated or validated in the same way as the majority population. Thus, s/he may not necessarily *identify* with other immigrants or with the category immigrant in the destination country (Bauder & Semmelroggen 2009). Most likely, institutional privileges are tied to citizenship and social welfare entitlement, but also more taken-for-granted cultural privileges and disadvantages differentiate individuals within the community of Western European citizens. For example, English-speaking Westerners possess a hegemonic linguistic capital, which may be converted into symbolic prestige (Lan 2011).

Swedish citizenship may be an important prerequisite for experiencing freedom of mobility. Lundström (2014) describes how Swedish citizenship becomes a particularly important capital for migrants in vulnerable financial positions living in a neoliberal United States. In her study, many of the Swedish migrant women benefited from the Swedish welfare system, even while not residing there, through affordable health care and paid parental leave (as many moved back to Sweden during pregnancy). Children of these migrants with Swedish citizenship also enjoyed free higher education. Besides Swedish citizenship, a so-called ‘white capital’¹¹ embodies a symbolic capital that can be converted into other forms of capital. According to Garner (2007), accessing white capital can create an awareness of privilege and dominance which shape individuals’ notion of mobility-rights, perceived opportunities and de facto possibilities. Such awareness is expressed through daily habits and taken-for-granted modes of being in the social world (Ahmed 2007).

The idea of white European worldwide dominance may be important for understanding access to cultural capital outside the country of origin given that it reflects ideas, imaginations of belongingness and identity as well as in/exclusion. The (post) colonial binary distinction between “We”/the West and “the Others”/the East provides inherited modes of orientating oneself in the social space. To this end, a nation can be seen as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of the group (Anderson 2006:6, 64). Such imaginations might be of importance to feel independent and mobile across national borders. That is, a white migrant may experience unconditional rights to make use of the territorial resources in front of him/her (Hage 1998). Furthermore, white migrants from North-Western Europe are not dependent on local recognition of capital in the employment country as their “Western cultural capital is universalised” (Erel 2010:648; see also Dyer 1997). All these capital forms may be important to reflect upon when understanding the various expectations, experiences and strategies used among the Swedish highly skilled labour migrants. In this study, the white Western cultural capital clearly affects expectations among the Swedish labour migrants, however, their expectations do not always match their experiences.

11 The concept of white capital is developed from Bourdieu’s (1986) conceptualization of different forms of capital (see e.g. Hage 1998, Lundström 2014).

Analysis: Contradictions and strategies

Expectations of mobility and independence

The interviewees' expectations upon searching employment abroad, as evidenced in the interviews, builds on their self-understanding and role models about how a "successful" migrant should proceed. The ideal migrant is often revealed while describing a rather close relative or acquaintance who fulfilled his/her desire to succeed with their own bare hands. This reflects the idea of self-empowerment by *trying*, *being courageous* and *making an effort*. Such statements go along with the current European employment strategies' rhetoric: the opportunity-driven idea where the individual needs to be an active and creative employee, ready for new challenges (OECD 2011; Lundvall & Lorentz 2012a). A similar rhetoric was expressed by the interviewees, reflecting an imaginative idea of who they aspired to be, as immigrants in their new country of residence.

The majority of the interviewees have parents who experienced upward social mobility and who were able to study at university due to the expansion of the Swedish educational system. In the eyes of the interviewees, their parents demonstrate the very example of self-empowerment, proving that hard work can improve one's societal social position. One dimension of this, brought up by interviewees, is the rural-urban dimension of geographical mobility: Interviewees with parents from the countryside of Northern Sweden *decided* to move to the city for university studies, future careers and family upbringing. Even if practical circumstances and inconveniences were mentioned, the ideal of *the self-made man* is still expressed and promoted:

Interviewer: Why did you apply for a job here [in Munich]?

Interviewee: Well, I have a longstanding relation with Germany. I worked in my home village in Northern Sweden. [...] One summer, the farm [where I worked] bought a machine from Germany [...] so I got a phone number and a www-address. I remembered this with my graphic memory. Then, I wrote to this German company [to ask for a job] and thought 'let's give it a try'. The worst they can do is to say 'no'. So, that I actually travelled abroad has a lot to do with my curiosity and stubbornness and, well, *that I actually dared*. (Man, Munich, mid-30s, *emphasis added*)

In the excerpt, an interviewee in Munich-area explains that his current position as an engineer in a big company was possible due to his own ambitions in early life. This was essentially stimulated by remembering a sticker on a technical product he saw in his youth. Via this contact, he became employed to drive trucks in Northern Germany; a position requiring low qualifications. However, he considered this position an entry ticket to gain access, while applying for positions after university. His view of having the guts to apply for a job supports the importance of individual effort to use the pos-

sibilities in front of you; you need to be an active individual to shape your own future, as in the words of another interviewee:

Well, there are many people for whom moving abroad is outside their comfort zone. Just because they think that it is so difficult and there are a lot of things that need to be organised and so on. So, I think that you really need, well, in a way, to be a little pushy. Let the others know that you actually can, *if you really want to*. (Woman, Munich, early 30s, *emphasis added*)

The interviewees' way of *making an effort* is often expressed in terms of assuming some kind of moral superiority in contrast to the "other lazy Swedes" who remain in their country of origin (or even their city of birth). The interviewees' effort to move abroad reflects an ideal picture of the mobile and inclusive European citizen (see Merkel 2007); freedom of mobility open to everyone, you just need to be *motivated* and *dedicated* enough as in the end, your own effort counts. Such self-empowerment – highlighting the myth of the self-made man – was mentioned irrespectively of the interviewees' social background. Furthermore, motivation and dedication were often expressed in relation to ideas about migrant workers:

I think I'm a immigrant, *technically speaking* [...] but I come here with *competences* and *skills* that are beneficial for [the company]. I provide *resources* for the whole region and I can take care of myself. Being an immigrant is perceived as a more negative term. (Man, Munich, early 30s, *emphasis added*)

In the quote, a migrant is categorised as a 'problem', someone who is dependent on others. This statement aligns with the public discourse on migration, for example distinguishing between an "expat" and a "migrant" (Hannerz 1996; Lundström 2014): his own emphasis on motivation and effort could be seen as a strategy of not being classified as a vulnerable migrant who cannot govern him/herself.

Second-generation immigrant interviewees from Sweden are impressed by their parents' free will to move, seek new adventures and possibilities, as their own experiences felt similar to those of the parents. Their parents serve as role-models and are described as strong individuals who had managed on their own in a new country, despite the lack of social contacts, network and friends. Just like themselves, their parents had to start from scratch in a new social position. These myths about the self-made man will, in this article, be defined as the migrants' *imagined independence*, conceptualising their expectations of opportunities generated by the self-made man and ways in which a successful and ideal migrant acts, expectations that often stands in contrast to actual experiences.

The migrants' initial motivations for searching employment abroad are often expressed in active terms, regarding themselves as active individuals who *decide* and *invest* in knowledge and experiences believed to be advantageous for their future careers. Furthermore, they emphasise the ambition *to be independent* and individu-

ally *govern* one's own situation, further reflecting an effort to *break up* from their former situation:

Well, I was born in a small village in Sweden [...] and I was forced to move in any case. I moved before starting upper secondary school to [a medium-sized town in Sweden] in order to go to school there. [The town] was quite small as well, so I was forced to move again [after graduating from university] to get a job. Then I thought: 'I could actually move abroad' as I was quite tired of Sweden [laughter]. I wanted to improve my English and I was looking for an adventure. (Woman, London, early 30s)

In the above excerpt, the interviewee decided to migrate in order to avoid being “trapped” in a Swedish small-town; a life associated with certain ways of organising both private and professional life. The same fear of getting “stuck” in Sweden is expressed by another interviewee, who further criticises “the Swedes” for being too dependent on the Swedish government, for example in terms of unemployment benefits and other social insurances. Thus, a clear motive for migrating in the first place reflects a general will to be *independent*, to manage your life on your own without support from the Swedish government.

The explicit goal of *governing* your own situation further reflects the idea that you can become whoever you want – despite your social background. The key to achieving is by *daring* to do things that are a bit awkward and inconvenient; new tasks outside one's comfort-zone: “As soon as you feel safe... and that you manage everything. In this moment, things are not exciting anymore. Because there is so much [out there] you just have to try” (woman, Munich, early 30s). Or, as expressed by another interviewee: “If you like changes, then this insecurity [in relation to employment and risk for redundancy] is no longer a problem. London is full of *possibilities*” (woman, London, early 40s, *emphasis added*). Such perspectives bring forward a connection between the level of risk propensity and the individual's chance of a successful career as the more you jeopardise, the more career possibilities you have to “choose” from. Such an emphasis on the individuals' motivation and dedication reflects the ideal of “equal opportunity” (Bourdieu 1986:241). It is your own effort that counts, and if you make a major effort, you will certainly be rewarded:

Munich changes rapidly, immigration is on the rise and large companies are open to international labour. So, if you bring along a good education and you work and *really try*, then there won't be any difficulties actually. (Woman, Munich, mid-30s, *emphasis added*)

In some cases, interviewees express that they actually feel rather fortunate, that their position in their new home country was a random coincident, an exposed opportunity that could have happened to anyone – yet they were “wise enough” to make use of this. Thus, the migrants' often feel “lucky”:

I didn't have to move, but there was an opportunity to do so and I took it. But, if you've got to sit there on your own [and apply for jobs] and if no opportunity arises and no needs arise externally, well, then I don't really know. (Man, Munich, late 30s)

The attitudes put forward above capture a general ideal of being courageous, where the different life courses seem to be a result of the individuals' degree of risk propensity. Even if a career opportunity can also be framed as a coincidence, it is still the individual's ability to make use of the opportunities put forward. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees simultaneously acknowledge a certain vulnerability in relation to their work abroad, experiencing a collision between their expected opportunities of the self-made man and the successful migrant, and their actual experiences.

Experiences of working abroad: a perceived vulnerability

The migrants' actual experiences of working abroad often reflect a perceived vulnerability due to the fact that they do not have the same knowledge, acceptance and understanding of the bureaucratic structures, norms and procedures dominating the society they are currently within. Thus, the described ideal of being mobile and independent often contrasts with a difficulty in understanding how to orientate themselves in their current system. Such frustration about the possibilities offered to them and their (future) children in their host societies, the UK or Germany, exemplify a posteriori distinction that appears while living abroad: The professional career abroad often contains a backlash, experiences do not match expectations. The expected and desired independence becomes a constituent part of the self-image despite experiencing the contrary: Migrants cultural habits and dispositions, for instance provided by their educational training in Sweden, is not always transformed into a transnational resource or acknowledged locally.

In fact, all interviewed migrants thought that the experience of working in a big European city would provide them with professional development as well as enriched cultural experiences. In reality, however, long working hours and time spent on commuting often result in low energy and a lack of time to actually learn new things out of inspiration and curiosity, as they had previously thought they would. Further, this does not permit them to explore cultural and outdoor activities which are offered in the respective cities. However, when family and friends from Sweden visit, they are forced to bring up the positive aspects with their life abroad, exploring what the respective European cities offer.

Acquiring the relevant dispositions (via one's habitus) means that one can understand the logic of the symbolic power in a specific social field (Bourdieu 1990). However, the interviewees' experiences in their new home country are often described in terms of weariness and hostile resignation, in that they lack access to relevant symbolic profit, i.e., embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). For example, many of them express negative emotions in handling their future abroad even if some things are ignored, as they feel such factors impossible to overcome. As stated, this perceived vulnerability

contains feelings of insecurity and lack of knowledge about how to handle the social security system in the host country:

I'm a little afraid of getting older in Germany, with regard to pensions and so forth. This is something I have no clue about, how to [save] – I know I should save for my pension – but this is the reason why I do not save. This is one of those things that I procrastinate about. Well, it feels like you are on your own. There is little help available from the government. In Sweden, you could always ask someone who knows about those things. (Woman, Munich, mid-30s)

Here, one interviewee describes that she knows what she should do to improve her economic security but she lacks the energy to actively do something about her situation since it is too difficult to know exactly what needs to be done. Another interviewee states that he has no home insurance for this very reason and getting an insurance is therefore continuously postponed. Such experienced uncertainty is often unexpected due to an underlying self-image of privilege and taken-for-granted modes of being (see also Ahmed 2007; Garner 2007; Lundström 2014).

Besides the difficulties in understanding how to access economic and social security, all migrants express a certain dissatisfaction and unpredictability in their present work situation. Thus, feeling predictability and security seem to be important for them – despite their initial strive for independence and adventure. A woman in her mid-30s, living in London, explains that she had three years of probationary employment in her present position. During this period, she was stressed due to long working days, new tasks and responsibilities, creating a constant feeling of unpredictability. The only thing that was predictable was the connection to Swedish culture and activities abroad, as well as maintaining social relations and networks in Sweden. For this reason, many of the interviewees keep a tight connection with local networks, organisations, activities and professional events in Sweden which are often described as more reliable and predictable.

The struggle for economic security also refers to changes in career prospects. As in most workplaces, the interviewees continuously seek recognition from their employers and colleagues, however, salary increases are considered the main way for them to be "seen". In reality, the majority of interviewees have experienced setbacks in their professional achievements and areas of responsibility, but financial improvement often compensates for this (in comparison to Swedish earnings). Thus, the assumed increase in cultural capital, via improved competences and professional skills in a new social and institutionalised setting, is not always achieved in their respective society of residence. Instead, it is the economic capital that most easily accumulates abroad (see Casula Vifell 2013). In these settings, social practices and normative ideals differ from those expected. Even if a professional degree is recognised, given that the migrants were hired in the first place, there might still be certain social norms and values affecting appreciation possibilities at work – thus attaining cultural capital. Such difficulties exemplify the relational character of cultural capital, where embodied capital becomes

shaped by implicit and explicit expectations and practices of labour market inclusion and exclusion (Nohl et al. 2014). As exemplified below:

I'm Swedish, traditionally and culturally, and [therefore] it is hard for me to promote myself and my achievements. I prefer to work quietly *in hope* that someone will notice the fantastic job that you do. This is a useless strategy in a modern and globalised company [laughter]. Because if you don't promote yourself someone else will always get ahead of you. (Man, Munich, late 30s, *emphasis added*)

Here, an interviewee explains how his experience made him identify certain personal qualities that had been rather negative for his career. Other narratives refer to similar feelings of not fitting in with the local work culture and procedures believed to be important for improving one's status in the work place. In other cases, the fact that the Swedish migrants are foreigners is emphasised as the reason why their professional careers have stagnated: "I think they do not want to have a Swede who is keen on consensus and such. You just want to have a boss who takes decisions and acts..." (man, London, early 40s). Thus, promoting a Swedish origin was also perceived as negative in their current work life, often contrary to what had been expected.

When seeking employment abroad, several interviewees were on leave from permanent positions in Sweden. Being on leave was often reflected upon as important for perceived security and to have something to fall back on if things would not work out. Upon losing access to unemployment benefits in Sweden, interviewees started to reflect on the economic security in their destination countries, leading them to strategically pick what they considered the best parts from both countries' social systems. One interviewee expresses a contradiction between, on the one hand, her gratitude towards the unemployment benefits from the Swedish government when losing her job abroad and, on the other hand, a distance towards (quoting) "the laziness" that educated Swedish employees display, being too picky in terms of the potential jobs they accept. Nevertheless, the Swedish income insurance gave her the possibility of being unemployed with 80% of her previous salary¹², meaning that she was able to maintain a qualified position and never forced to take simpler jobs, as would have been the case with the more limited unemployment benefit in the UK:

I lost my first job in England and was entitled to unemployment benefits from Sweden and that was 80% [of my previous salary]. This meant that I had quite a good life during the three months until I could secure a new job. This isn't the same way in England, at all, where you basically need to show that you are keen; make use of all the contacts in your network; be open to opportunities, and if you don't get a job, you may have to work in a café or as a secretary for a while, because those jobs exist... I think that people have more that sort of mentality

12 As she had been posted in London via a Swedish employer, she was as unemployed entitled to social security benefits from Sweden.

here. I meet people who, well, who have different degrees but who may work with something totally different for a while as this was the job that they could secure. There was no fuss about that. So, it feels like things are a little bit stricter in Sweden, and that you just should work in the area you studied in. People are a lot pickier [in Sweden]. (Woman, London, late 30s)

The excerpt expresses a common contradiction between the migrants' own experiences, in this case a form of dependency on unemployment benefits, versus a perceived ideal of entrepreneurial qualities as a key aspect of an individual's general ability to become employed (similar to the rhetoric reflected in current European policies and politics, see Merkel 2007; OECD 2011; Lundberg & Lorenz 2012). As mentioned, this ideal is expressed in terms of *making an effort* by being ready for new challenges where the individual needs to accept certain inconvenience, for example by accepting jobs below one's qualifications. However, a white highly skilled employee migrating from one Western country to another may expect to keep his/her institutional or cultural advantages (Bauder & Semmelroggen 2009), illustrated in the excerpt describing a migrant using Swedish unemployment benefits while searching for employment in the UK. Thus, she was actually relying more on the unemployment benefits than she may have thought she was. Her own practical reality collided with the normative ideal: the ability to be less picky in terms of which potential jobs – and salary – to accept.

The above example represents a frequent pattern that appears in the interviews. Certain privileges are often explicitly highlighted, for example the differences between immigrants from different countries, and that Swedes, in comparison, are often considered in positive terms. Such privilege is clearly expressed by a man living in Munich in his late 20s: "Being an immigrant leads to personal development. Even though, in reality, you are the light version of an immigrant, *an immigrant light*. You look like [the people] and speak the language and so on" (man, Munich, late 20s, *emphasis added*). Thus, white privilege allows for a particular and implicit freedom (see Lundström 2014), turning the highly skilled and white Swede into "immigrant light". The interviewees' privileged status as "immigrant light" reflect the universal Western cultural capital (Erel 2010), which might be important for feeling independent and mobile across national borders (Anderson 2006). Thus, their status position embodies symbolic capital that permits interaction with locals in the country of residence when required; whilst having the opportunity to seek support and recognition of other Swedes abroad when needed. Such ambivalent position means that the interviewees can feel strong and capable, abiding their individual efforts and achievements, meanwhile feeling vulnerable and exposed to precarious situations, for example due to unemployment and the inability of understanding the host country's social system. Again, the interviewees' imagination and self-understanding of own ability and opportunities – their imagined independence – often collide with perceived vulnerability in their country of employment. However, the privilege of an "immigrant light" is contradicted by one interviewee as she describes herself as a "non-typical Swede" with dark brown hair:

As I'm already an immigrant in Sweden [with parents born in southern Europe], then I may as well be an immigrant in Germany too. It doesn't make any difference to me. I'll always be an immigrant, wherever I live... Naturally, it [being an immigrant] depends on the context. I find a lot of advantages having grown up in Sweden, and I do consider myself Swedish. I went through the Swedish school system and that's something I'm grateful for. Absolutely. However, in the eyes of others, I will never be a *real Swede*, and in that respect, it doesn't really matter [where I am]. (Woman, Munich, late 20s, *emphasis added*)

In this case, the woman describes that she will always be viewed as an immigrant in the eyes of others. Thus, the view that a Swede seems “just like anyone else” among the white native employees abroad (Bauder & Semmelroggen 2009), for example by being labelled “immigrant light”, is not really reflected in her experience. She is aware of not being seen as a typical Swede, not even by recruiters in Germany (due to her name and “non-typical” Swedish attributes). Despite this, this interviewee was rather active on online-forums where she regularly helps Swedish nationals living in Munich to find e.g. accommodation, relevant insurance and social activities. As described: “I like Swedes. I enjoyed growing up there. I never would have wanted to grow up in Germany” (woman, Munich, late 20s). Furthermore, the Swedish community provides a feeling of safety, and her life in Munich had been full of difficulties that became manageable via the help of the online Swedish community abroad. The feeling of safety can be linked to different forms of embodied cultural capital gained by attending years of Swedish comprehensive school and university education.

Coping strategies for handling ambivalences

The following section analyses the strategies used to handle highly skilled migrants' imagined independence as a result of the discrepancy between their initial expectations and actual experiences of moving and working abroad. Three diverse strategies – *pragmatic adaptation*, *using transnational resources*, and/or *escapism* – are used to handle the experienced collision on the one hand between the “voluntary” migrant and its imagined independence, but on the other hand their experienced vulnerability in the country of employment. The interviewees employ more than one of these strategies or all three.

The first strategy identified is pragmatic adaptation, when the migrant decides to go all in and makes an effort to “become” like the native employees. This strategy reflects adaptation to their current situation by making use of available possibilities, although this often creates feelings of ambivalence, being unable to “be themselves”. In such cases, the status as “immigrant light” is important, as white (Western) privilege allows them an important local cultural capital recognition. To handle feelings of insecurity, the interviewees push themselves to over-compensate the perceived loss of, for example, economic security and professional achievements that they experienced in Sweden. In the end, life abroad often turns into a strategy of reaching self-achieved economic security by increasing salary, providing these migrants with feelings of increased life-

quality; for example, personal facilities and expenses are cheaper in their respective country of employment. However, this pattern also reflects their desire and a belief in the possibility of returning to Sweden when enough money has been earned (see Hannerz 1996), reflecting the idea – and perceived security – to only partially exit from the country of origin (Andreotti et al. 2015). For them, a life in Sweden would increase the opportunity of exploiting their embodied cultural capital by means of Swedish employers' recognition.

The second strategy is making use of transnational forms of capital (Favell 2008; Faist 2016). Here, the interviewees reflect confidence in the Swedish welfare state's social security system. For example, one man notes that it "would take care of me if needed, it feels secure to know that I can always return" (London, late 40s). These feelings express an underlying taken-for-granted attitude towards the Swedish welfare state (see Lundström 2010), side by side with their will to achieve and be independent. Recall the previous quote, describing the contradiction between an interviewee's gratitude towards the received Swedish unemployment benefits and the attitude towards 'lazy Swedes' who remain unemployed instead of accepting a job with low qualifications. The quote describes the strategy of expanding (Swedish) social rights into a transnational resource. In fact, many interviewees remain registered in Sweden for a few years, at the house of a relative or friend. In other words, a valuable capital within the Swedish labour market is transferred into transnational capital, available outside the welfare state's borders.

The strategy of using transnational forms of capital are also emphasised in embodied terms, i.e., transferring embodied cultural capital into a transnational resource. Implicit expectations in the labour market are put forward, comparing for example educated and non-educated migrants, as well as native English-speaking migrants with those who are more or less forced to learn a new language to equally compete with local colleagues and other professionals in the same field. One of the migrants living in Munich explains that her partner, a native English speaker living in Munich, never felt he had to learn German. Besides, "he has a doctoral degree in engineering, and [the husband] does not have to speak German in order to get a job". Accordingly, the highly skilled do not need to adapt to the local society or organisation – as long as they are indispensable for the employer. Furthermore, the English language is a hegemonic location-specific capital (Lan 2011). Thus, educational degree and language knowledge (in this case being an English speaker) exemplify both institutionalised and embodied cultural capital that can be validated across national borders.

A third and final strategy is escapism. Here, *escaping* from the present situation by *day-dreaming* about returning to Sweden is frequently described by interviewees as having an easing effect when feeling vulnerable and disoriented due to the inability to achieve capital recognition abroad. Such escapism is often expressed by the migrants labelling themselves as "the exception" compared to others living in the country of residence: "if you live here, then you nonetheless feel a little bit, well, special. When you say that you come from Sweden, they do show a positive attitude towards you" (woman, Munich, early 30s). Here, the ability to be different, via her Swedish origin and mode

of behaviour, is positively connoted. Such positive connotations frequently occur in the interviewees' private lives, however, less frequently in work-related contexts. Furthermore, being an exception via their Swedish origin exemplifies the possibility of being an "immigrant light"; someone who is perceived as superior to the regular migrant, thus allowing them to escape the regular position as a migrant in general. Another migrant, a woman living in London in her mid-30s, stated that: "You do always end up saying that you come from Sweden. That opens doors and conversation topics. In a positive way". Furthermore, the ability to travel back to Sweden as a "visitor" – as often as possible – is emphasised, as well as the importance of cheap flights which create opportunities to "go home" over the weekend: "The borders are wide-open, I mean, you can fly home over the weekend and you can have a chat with your family using a video-call app and you can read Swedish newspapers on the internet" (man, London, late 30s). Besides, the ability to return is frequently emphasised in a rather hypothetical way, as having the possibility of returning seems more important than actually doing so: "The possibility to return does always have to exist... only this thought gives already an enormous sense of security" (woman, Munich, late 30s). A life in Sweden, as depicted, is imagined to be emotionally easier. In most cases, the interviewees actually decide not to return after all. In fact, returning is often perceived as a failure.

As indicated, a high salary makes it possible to afford (and prioritise) private social security arrangements. Such statements are often more explicitly pronounced among the interviewees who have/plan to have children or family to support. Given the experienced unstable employment situation abroad, the instrumental search for new experiences, to add on the CV, can also be seen as a social security arrangement, connected to the pragmatic adaptation-strategy:

I believe that you are more dependent on a high income in London, because it's so expensive here. Basically, it may be natural to strive upwards the whole time, for status and such things. You always feel that: 'I should take that step now, and do this, so that I get it on my CV' [pause]. Otherwise, you don't really feel secure...
(Woman, London, early 40s)

Thus, a mode of constantly advancing and achieving expresses a way to compensate for the perceived economic insecurity. Such over-compensating can also be seen as an act of escapism, releasing a possibility of being independent and able to manage themselves. Still, it is the strategy of pragmatic adaptation that seems to be the most successful in getting recognition of the migrants' embodied cultural capital in the present national (employment) setting.

Concluding discussion

This article has analysed expectations and experiences of transnational labour mobility among highly skilled Swedish labour migrants. The findings partly support previous descriptions of highly skilled migrants who strive to improve their career and are driven by rational motives (Favell 2008; King et al. 2016). Such self-descriptions reflect the expectations of the migrants' in this study. The findings of this study confirm that migrants' desired and expected independence on the intra-European labour market collide with their actual experiences in the new country of employment. In this article, this has been conceptualised as a form of imagined independence (referring to the clash between expected and experienced labour market opportunities) within which particular self-understandings (of the self-made man and the successful migrant) are accentuated and, in turn, produce ambivalences. Based on interview accounts, the analysis illustrates that migrants develop strategies to cope with these ambivalences (in this analysis a matter of achieving recognition of cultural capital). As shown, three coping strategies were particularly evident; pragmatic adaptation, use of transnational resources and escapism. First, the ability to use a pragmatic adaptation-strategy is dependent on embodied forms of resources, as some have less opportunities to achieve cultural capital through the interaction with colleagues and others within and outside the workplace. Second, the capacity to transfer their cultural capital into a transnational resource is both related to their institutionalised forms of cultural capital (e.g. migrants' university degree and social citizenship) and the recognition of their embodied cultural capital within the current national (employment) setting. The third coping strategy, escapism, reveal that daydreaming about their possibilities to return to Sweden and imagining how "easy" a life would be at "home" in Sweden, is also related to their inability to acquire recognition of their embodied resources. In the following, a further theoretical discussion of these findings will be provided.

A clear pattern emerges from the interviews regarding the initial aspiration to independently manage their private and professional lives. This desired independency was conceptualised as an imagined independence, accentuating particular imaginations of independence and the ability of choosing one's own professional career paths, independent of the social and national context. Their desired independence coincides with an existing opportunity-driven rhetoric, as depicted in European Employment strategies (OECD 2011; Lundvall & Lorentz 2012a) and by European politicians (Merkel 2007). However, the desired and expected independence is, here, contrasted by an experienced lack of freedom and of free time, as most migrants put a lot of energy and effort into trying to understand and cope with the way work life, insurances and life in general is organised in the society of residence.

The feeling of being able to return home to Sweden whenever required is an important cornerstone for these migrant's self-image of independence. This might be a result of access to various forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) attained through their university degree (Lundberg 2009) and European citizenship (Berg & Spehar 2011), granting them freedom of (labour) mobility. At the same time, this feeling of

independence might only exist as an imagination: in reality, institutionalised forms of cultural capital do not produce the labour market access they feel entitled to. For example, obstacles highlight that embodied forms of cultural capital turns out to be a rather local asset. Thus, converting embodied cultural capital into *valuable* forms of capital, requires recognition of capital (Bourdieu 1986). The recognition of capital is, therefore, relational and highly dependent on the dominant culture and national setting (Nohl et al. 2014). As reflected by the interviewees, several unexpected situations appear abroad, causing anxiety and frustration. Therefore, the expectations of independence and self-image of being independent remain unachievable in real life.

In fact, the migrants often expect to be valued and appreciated for their achievements. However, the actual experiences report how difficult it is to benefit from the embodied forms of capital in the new employment context. On the one hand, the inability to exploit embodied forms of capital affects the status position at work, which further renders the migrants more insecure and vulnerable than expected. On the other hand, the lack of recognition at work does not seem to affect the migrants' self-understanding; their imagined independence. One reason for this might be that most of the migrants do not identify themselves as migrants at all, something which is often reflected upon in relation to their expectations: that their life abroad to a certain extent is believed to be rather easy as they expect to be recognized by their peers abroad, and that they always have the possibility to return. This view of inherent recognition and temporality reflect the privilege of enjoying "universalised Western cultural capital" (Erel 2010:648). Fitting in with the local society also reflects the privilege of embodying a form of white capital. This is highlighted by interviewees unable to make use of pragmatic adaptation as a main coping strategy since they express that they do not look like "typical Swedes". The ability to be an "immigrant light" reflects not only the embodied white capital, but also privileges associated with a form of "Swedish" capital abroad (see also Lundström 2014). In this case, the cultural capital mirror educational qualifications, Swedish citizenship and particular associations related to being a "Swede" abroad. However, the question remains whether the meaning of being "light" refers to being highly skilled or to a particular native origin or citizenship (Bauder 2006). Importantly, being *Swedish* immigrants allows these people to be European free movers (Favell 2008), affecting their perceptions despite their experiences.

This study demonstrates that the possibility of fitting in within local labour market, for example via the pragmatic adaptation to local culture and habits, seems to play a major role for the migrants' professional careers – rather than citizenship per se. Having said this, interviewees express appreciation towards the free university education in Sweden and continue to rely on its social security, partly because they lack the general know-how of how to access this in the host country (Bruzelius et al. 2016). Thus, the imagined independence allows highly skilled and professional Swedish migrants to feel secure by knowing that they can always return or, alternatively, take part of the Swedish (online) community abroad.

Considering the emphasis on economic improvement and economic capital, more may be said about the relationship between economic achievement and experienced

ambivalence, vulnerability and coping strategies. The trans-mobile employees may strive for financial security, compensating for insecurities in the new national system. Thus, financial resources can be seen as a sign of recognition of professional experience (see Casula Vifell 2013), and as an ability to communicate value as employees within transnational networks. In fact, highly skilled migrants from Sweden expect higher incomes in countries with less progressive tax systems such as Germany and the UK. Furthermore, they may choose to return to Sweden and therefore do not rely on social benefits in the new employment country to the same extent as do, e.g., forced migrants. Besides these institutionalised privileges, embodied cultural capital and informal resources are of high value for highly skilled migrants and provide an opportunity of being treated and validated in the same way as the majority population. As shown, these migrants with exceptional transnationally validated credentials, due to their Western university degree and associated cultural capital, struggle to orientate themselves professionally.

This study has identified a clash between expectations of independence and experiences of vulnerability, as defined by the privileged position enjoyed by the highly skilled Swedish migrants'. The patterns of vulnerability stand in contrast to the migrants' self-understanding, i.e., their imagined independence. In fact, a strong emphasis on self-empowerment and achievements coexist with *de facto* dependency on the institutional and social system that they comprehend and the perceived vulnerability in the new context. With regard to the Swedish interviewees of this study, their self-image is formed on the understanding that they are mobile and independent individuals regardless of context. This self-image also constitute a central distinction between themselves and others, i.e. between those who are mobile, resourceful and independent employees, and migrants in general. This categorisation juxtaposes independent and highly skilled migrant: As opposed to themselves, migrants are reduced to individuals in search of personal resource expansion in the country of residence. Thus, the self-image of being independent reflects the interviewees' identity as mobile employees, while their actual experiences tells a different story of feeling vulnerable and dependent on external resources and various forms of capital for being mobile in the first place.

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Ylva Wallinder disputerade hösten 2018 vid institutionen för sociologi och arbetsvetenskap, Göteborgs universitet. Avhandlingen studerar relationen mellan europeiska arbetstagaras upplevda möjligheter på arbetsmarknaden och samtida policytrender inom utbildning och arbetsliv. Ett särskilt fokus handlar om betydelsen av lokalt och relationellt erkännande på arbetsplatsen, och förståelsen för förgivet-taganden och normbrytande beteenden.