

Roads to the North: the importance of the migration experience for the life course in the narratives of highly educated migrants from Spain and Poland in the Nordic countries

The act of migrating, especially moving across national borders, is by researchers and the general public often understood as one of the most significant events in peoples' lives. Migration processes with their causes and consequences have almost become an unavoidable part of political discussions, public debates, and everyday life experience. Emphasizing the crucial importance of the migration experience for the life of individuals and communities has the consequence that studies of people who have moved across national borders are often focussing on them primarily being migrants. However, what meaning do individuals actually ascribe to their migration experiences in context of their biographies? To answer this question, autobiographical narrative interviews will be conducted with highly educated migrants from Poland and Spain living in three Nordic capital cities; Reykjavik, Oslo, and Helsinki. The autobiographical narrative interview method, a research approach developed by Sociologist Fritz Schütze, is applied in this project to analyse how and what narratives people tell about their lives.

The main aim of this research project is to analyse the biographical significance of the migration experience from the perspective of individuals. By understanding migrants' lives in a holistic way, this project will provide insights on the role of the migration experience in peoples' lives in relation to other significant events and experiences. The research project also reflects on the meaning of the collective narrative of the good life, the idea that we all thrive to lead a happy and fulfilling life, and its role in migration processes of highly educated migrants living in the Nordic countries.

The Nordic region is especially suitable for generating knowledge and understanding the intersections of the ideas of the good life, well-being and migration processes due to its image as a place that provides a high quality of life and where people are able to actualize their aspirations. The analysis of the biographical significance of the migration experience for the life course of highly educated migrants living in the Nordic countries can nourish reflection on what and why matters to people in modern societies. At the same time it allows for a critical analysis of the ways humans engage with the world and the interference of markets and states with migration processes and migration decisions.

The biographical approach, which is applied in this study, allows to shift the perspective from studying people who have migrated primarily in their role as migrants towards taking a closer look at what role they ascribe to their migration experiences. Going beyond understanding the migration processes per se, within this research project the aim is to deliver a necessary theoretical contribution to the development of the scientific discipline of migration studies, a field that Sociologist Hein de Haas has described as "a surprisingly under-theorised field of social inquiry".

Comparing stories of migrants from Spain and Poland living in three different Nordic capitals further provides a comprehensive perspective on the narratives of highly educated migrants of different cultural backgrounds living in diverse, yet comparable, social and cultural contexts. Answering among others the question on how does the national identity and culture of the country of origin influence migrants' performance and the way they interact and relate to people and places.

As policy-makers in the Nordic region are increasingly faced with the challenge to support highly educated migrants' inclusion into receiving communities, the results of this project provide insights that advance the research field on migrants' inclusion and can benefit both migrants and receiving communities. Moreover, the theoretical contribution derived from individuals' accounts on migration experience in context of their biographies can help to construct tools serving the evaluation of migrants' performance and well-being in a comprehensive way, thus supporting both migrants and policymakers. Although building a theoretical framework which shifts from the centrality of work to a more holistic way of understanding human life, this study will include considerations on migrants' professional performance and help highly educated migrants enter and acquire a good position in the Nordic labour market.