



UNIVERSITY OF  
NORDLAND

# MASTER THESIS

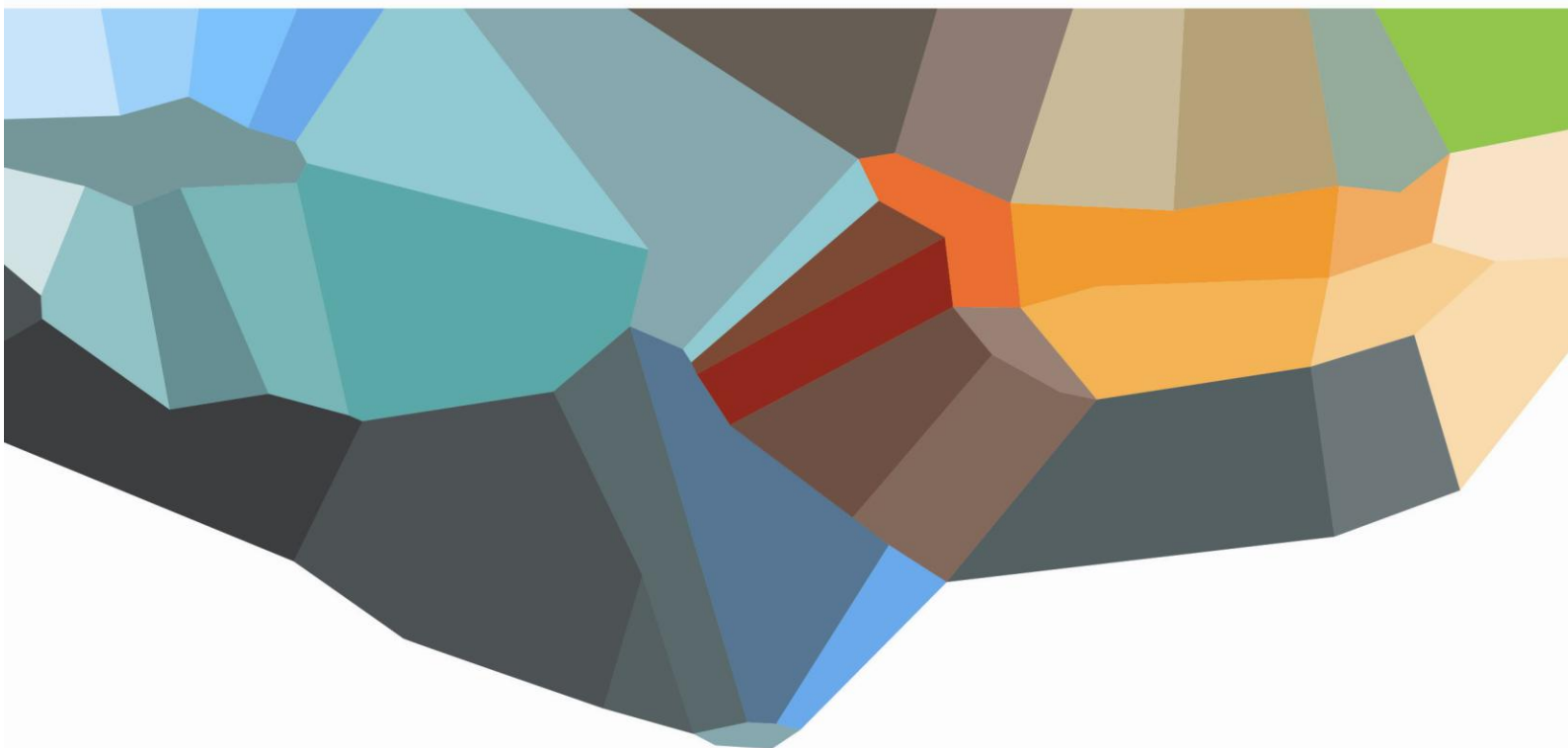
## MOVING TO FLOURISH:

*An empirical study on outcomes of graduate social work student  
mobility between Russia and Norway*

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**The Degree of Master in Social work with a Comparative Perspective,**  
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*For My Son*  
*Edwin Aleksander Lorentzen*

## Acknowledgements

The self is not something ready-made,  
but something in continuous formation through choice of action.

John Dewey (1916:361)

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Thank you,

Natalia Shavrina  
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## List of abbreviations

CAPI	Computer Assisted Personal Interviews
EIE	European Institute of Education
ERASMUS	European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
EU	European Union
F2FIDI	Face-to-Face In-depth Interviews
HE	Higher Education
IIE	Institute of International Education, Unites States of America
MSWCP	Master in Social Work – With a Comparative Perspective
NAFSA	National Association for Student Affairs,
NARFU	Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov
NOK	Norske Kroner, Norwegian Crones
NORRUS	Norway-Russia, social science research program on Russia and Arctic
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PhD	Philosophiae Doctor (lat.), Doctor of Philosophy
SIU	Senter for Internasjonaliserng av Utdanning
SWTN	Social Work Thematic Network
UArctic	University of the Arctic
UIN	Universitetet I Nordland, University of Nordland
UKCOSA	United Kingdom Council on Overseas Student Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WBIDI	Web-Based In-depth Interviews

## **Abstract**

The present study attempts to investigate the issue of graduate student mobility between Russia and Norway with focus on student motivations to enter the field of social work and participate in international mobility and outcomes for the students in the way of challenges they experienced under stay in Norway, benefits for their personal and career development and decision on the location choice after studies.

Internationalization of higher education and increasing cooperation between the countries requires understanding of the results it brings both for institutions and for the individual actors to analyze the possible challenges and development in the future. The present research is aimed at presenting empirical data on the outcomes of participation in MSWCP program provided by the University of Nordland. The study focuses on the subjective experiences and reflections of the students who participated in the MSWCP program from 2004 and later presented through 1 personal face-to-face interview and 9 web-based in-depth interviews with five participants living in Russia and five other participants living in Norway or other European country at the moment of research. The data has been analyzed by applying conventional content analysis. The research is framed by social constructionism theory by Berger and Luckmann, social self and “liquid modernity” theory, the “stranger” theory, theories on migration and acculturation as well as cultural theory of risk by Mary Douglas. The previous research and studies on this topic have been reviewed throughout the present study.

The findings of the study demonstrate that some students are motivated mostly by travelling abroad, while others are interested in getting new knowledge within social work and research. Social background, mobility capital and cooperation between universities play an important role in the decision to study abroad. The students under stay in Norway can experience different challenges like acculturative stress, social, psychological and financial barriers. The students perceived their personal development during the stay in Norway differently, while those who mention active participation in international activities stress out improving of intercultural awareness and personal traits as tolerance, curiosity, decisiveness, and better self-assessment. All the respondents admitted to the improvement of foreign language skills during their stay in Norway. The students presented a heterogeneous picture of employability benefits both in the Russian and Norwegian context after taking the program. Some of them stress out challenges, such as discrimination, while others put more attention on the rewards they have obtained.

**Key words:** Student mobility, migration, social work education, acculturation, mobility capital, internationalization of higher education, employability, personal development, social self, self-identity

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This master thesis discusses the issue of student mobility between Norway and Russia focusing on motivations of graduate social work students and outcomes of participating in the “Master in Social Work – With a Comparative Perspective program”. Norwegian-Russian cooperation in education and research has been active in the recent years and is continuing to develop. It exists in many different fields of research and on various educational levels. The most active region of the cooperation is Northern Norway or the area closest to the Russian border. The important Russian regions of cooperation between the countries have traditionally been Murmansk and Arkhangelsk, but geographical cooperation has extended to Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Komi and Siberia (Korteniemi, 2011). Several universities and university colleges have developed bilateral cooperation with Russian universities. The University of Nordland, formerly Bodø University College, takes a special part in the cooperation. Whilst being engaged in the cooperation with Russian institutions of higher education from 1991, it has educated about 4000 Russian students in a field of economy and business administration (ibid). Cooperation with NARFU, formerly Pomor State University, has established networks within the field of social sciences, where one of them is the field of social work. The University of Nordland has offered a bachelor degree program for Bachelor of Circumpolar Studies and the MSWCP program. This study will focus on the results of the cooperation in the field of social work and will take into consideration Russian students’ benefits from taking the master program in social work at the University of Nordland.

## 1.1 Background

*Student mobility* as a kind of academic mobility allows students to undertake undergraduate or graduate studies at foreign institution. Student mobility is considered as one of the manifestations of increasing internationalization of science (Nerdrum, Sarpebakken, 2006). According to OECD (2013), over the past thirty years the number of international students has risen from 2.1 million worldwide in 2002 to 3,7 million in 2009 and according to UNESCO data, student mobility has increased by 70 % from 2.1 to 3.7 million between years 2000 and 2009. Wiers-Jenssen (2013) points out that in 2012 there were about 19 000 grad students in Norway, and Russian students were in second place after Swedish students. The fresh data from Norwegian Center for International cooperation in Education (SIU, 2015) shows that for academic year 2013-2014 there were 1588 Russian students in Norway and they took the third place after foreign students from Sweden and Germany (see Annex – 3).

Student mobility experiences can vary in length and intensity and therefore are distinguished between *credit mobility* and *degree mobility*. Credit mobility usually lasts less than one year and



requires return to institution in home country in order to complete studies, while degree mobility last one or more than one year and implies completing Bachelor's degree, Master's degree or Doctorate.

This study focuses on degree mobility and concerns master degree students, both former students and those who have completed the first year of education. The student mobility is presented in different fields of science, where social work is one of them. The following research will present a study on graduate social work students' mobility between two countries, Russia and Norway. These two countries vary in system of higher education and its history as well as social policy, economical, political and welfare situation. The choice of the countries can be explained by the fact that the researcher is familiar with the situation of mobility as a Russian student of the international program in Norway. Choosing just two countries to analyze cooperation activity but not more can be explained by the fact that the smaller the number of countries included, the more detailed analysis of the context can be conducted and the easier it is to achieve more holistic understanding of the problem (Hantrais, 2004). As a result of reforms in the Russian higher education system and cooperation between the countries, the flow of human capital in the High North has increased.

### ***1.1.1 High-North cooperation and academic mobility***

In 1993 Ministers of Foreign Affairs and high representatives of Norway, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Island and the Commission of European Communities signed "Declaration on the cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region". Since then the cooperation between countries in the Arctic became one of the priorities of the states (The Barents Program 2014-2018, 2014).

The Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation is just one of many different organizations with interest to the Arctic region, such as the Arctic Council, the Northern Dimension, the European Union and other actors. The Barents region attracts particular interest from Europe and overseas, mostly due to its access to natural resources and its arctic location. Oil and gas, as well as minerals, create economic value for both investors and local communities. The downside to these increased opportunities can be the need to manage the environmental impact and related effects on peoples' living conditions.

The region also faces a demographic challenge, where the population is increasingly ageing and the younger population, especially young women, is leaving for the southern regions (ibid). There is thus a need to create an attractive living environment and employment possibilities in order to get people to move in, stay in or return to the region. One of the goals for the Barents region is to attract qualified workforce and develop people's skills through education and lifelong learning, which is considered to be the issue of great importance.

One of the priorities for the Barents Program 2014-2018 is “to foster mobility across borders for workers, enterprises, tourists and students” (ibid.). Human capital is important for all development areas in the region and in order to make change, education and research should be fostered. As the Barents program declares: “Student exchange and international study programs contribute to breaking down language and cultural barriers and lay a solid foundation for the Barents cooperation in the future” (The Barents Program 2014-2018, 2014). The Joint Working Group on Research and Education aims to enhance academic mobility, broaden the range of joint academic programs and training courses, and promote education and research as effective tools for regional socio-economic development. This and other initiatives in cooperation between northern countries created possibilities to obtain master degree in social work – with a comparative perspective, which is concerned in the present work.

### ***1.1.2 Master in Social Work Program – With a Comparative Perspective***

The development of international joint degrees is one of the priorities for Norwegian higher education. Several funding sources are available for Norwegian higher education institutions interested in developing joint degrees with international partners (SIU, 2015). The program “Master in Social Work – with a comparative perspective” (MSWCP) is one of the programs aimed to contribute to increased academic collaboration and student mobility in the High North.

As it is stated on official website (UIN, 2014), the program’s aims are to develop the students’ ability to critically analyze social work practice through a comparative approach involving different contexts, to educate competent professionals for fields of social work where an education at a higher level is required, and develop contacts and cooperation with educational institutions and research environments both nationally and internationally. The program cooperates with Nordic countries, EU, Russia, Canada, Malawi and Australia concerning teaching and student exchange. There is a particular focus on social work with indigenous people. The great advantage of the program is that most of the lectures may be followed over the Internet or on campus.

A master program with similar content exists at the University of Lapland in cooperation with Institute of Integrated Safety (NARFU, Russia). UArctic (2015) stresses out that there is “a regional need for social work professionals who understand the special characters of this region, which is also a border area between EU and Russia”.

Both programs were developed with cooperation with University of the Arctic, which is a “cooperative network of universities, colleges, research institutes and other organizations concerned with education and research in and about the North” (UArctic, 2015). UArctic was

created through an initiative of the Arctic Council in 1998 (Iqaluit Declaration) and officially opened in 2001. UArctic sees its mission in empowering the people of the Circumpolar North by providing educational and research opportunities, promoting northern voices in the globalizing world, cultural diversity, language plurality, gender equality, partnership between indigenous peoples of the North and other northerners. UArctic provides the inclusion of indigenous and traditional knowledge together with modern arts and academia. Almost everywhere in the Arctic it is possible to apply for different undergraduate and graduate programs in various fields of science from geology to culture studies. Development of e-learning master courses in a virtual campus, and facilitating student and teachers exchange is one of the goals of the UArctic cooperation. Promoting empowering of the northern people, UArctic aims to prove that people of the North, living in a region of increasing interest from different parts of the world because of the enormous natural resources it holds, have the right to choose a path to their own future. The sustainable use of resources, respect, knowledge and building northern competence can make northerners stronger and enable them to get fair benefits from the export value of northern resources (ibid).

Different UArctic thematic networks foster issues-based cooperation within networks and respond quickly to topical Arctic issues. The main activities of Social Work Thematic Network (SWTN) are

- developing common study programs and courses,
- facilitating conferences and seminars,
- lay foundation for cooperation between researchers, students and teachers.

Thus, in 2012 SWTN developed an international e-learning master course “Social Work Theories – 30 ects” and established “Social Work with Families” project, which is aimed at supporting families with complex needs (UArctic, 2015).

Most students from Russia participating in the cooperation educational programs get some kind of funding to fulfill studies abroad. Most students of MSWCP get so called “Quota Scheme” funding offered by the Norwegian Government to students from developing countries and countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The objective of the Quota Scheme is to provide relevant education that will benefit the students’ home countries when they return. The scheme normally includes courses at Master’s and PhD level in addition to certain professional/Bachelor’s degrees (ibid).

The present research will focus on the MSWCP program provided by the University of Nordland and discuss in what way participation in the international degree program affects future career and personal choices of the participants from Russia. Although the program will be offered in a different version from autumn 2015, many of the findings and discussions of the thesis can be relevant for new “generations” of students of master in social work or other joint degree programs provided by the UArctic.

## ***1.2 Motivation and possible contribution of the study***

The researcher entered the program MSWCP and the whole world of social work in order to try something new that probably could be beneficial for future career and to get a chance to expand my knowledge horizons by continuing study abroad after completing Bachelor’s program from UArctic. Considering personal background and experience as a student of the MSWCP program as well as other programs provided by UArctic, the motivation in understanding myself and the way of further development is worth mentioning.

Another source of motivation can be seen in an attempt to contribute to institutional and regional policy and the University of Nordland’s participation in the research projects on higher education cooperation between Norway and Russia by providing reflections on the impacts of the cooperation from the participant perspective.

Cooperation is developing, more and more people are crossing the borders, more and more joint programs are being developed and attract many people, and there is demand for experts in cultural diversity and international social issues. This research can analyze possible challenges for these kinds of experts and in some way contribute to further development of the program and cooperation in the field of social work. Moreover, this work can be beneficial for former and future students of the program as well as other international programs in order to make them more conscious about choices they make and opportunities they can meet. Every joint program and participation in it brings many opportunities and therefore many different choices. Why and how these choices are made, what makes people return to homeland or continue international career is worth discussing and analyzing.

The previous evaluation of the program MSWCP was aimed to make the program better, but the present research will try to explore the problem from another angle with regard to impact of the program to students’ personal and career development. All the students in some degree enhanced their mobile capital by making their experiences, skills and knowledge richer during the student mobility. How this way of investing in individual levels of human capital is perceived by students can vary a lot and therefore it’s interesting to reflect on what factors and conditions make them think differently. Analyzing possible barriers the students met can give some understanding of the

way their experiences are perceived. Following former students after some years of participating in the program can give a precious knowledge and evaluation on private and social benefits it brings.

### **1.3 Research questions and the main purposes of the study**

The following research will attempt to answer the *question*:

*What are the motivations and outcomes for the students of MSWCP program with regard to their career and personal development?*

*The main purpose* of the study is to present perceptions on how former students have benefited from the program in their career and personal development and try to find the reasons and factors which made them take different choices.

*Another purpose* of the thesis is to identify what motivations student had for entering the studies and what factors influenced return migration to home country or continuation of international career.

All the participants entered the program with different motivation and got information about this opportunity from different sources. To understand why student decided to study social work program abroad, the thesis will answer the following sub questions:

- ✓ What is the *motivation* for participation in the Master of Social Work international program? What are the academic and socio-economic background characteristics of the participants? What is the motivation to investigate this particular field of science?

To understand which barriers students experienced during their stay abroad, the following sub question is answered:

- ✓ What *challenges* do students face during their stay in Norway?

The following question will address the problem of personal and professional benefits for students of MSWCP:

- ✓ How did students *benefit* from taking this program? How has participation in the program influenced their employability and participation in a labour market? Did that increased professional success and earnings? What kind of personal skills did they manage to improve or obtain during their international stay?

In order to investigate why and how individuals decided to locate in a particular place and what could influence the decision-making process, the thesis will find answers for the following sub questions:

- ✓ Did their future perspectives changed during the period of studying abroad? When did participants decide to return to home country/stay in Norway or another European country? Did they have such a possibility of choosing? What was the decisive argument that influenced their final decision? What do they like most/least in Russia/Norway/Europe?

The next sub question, the thesis aims to address, considers student expectations about program content, mobility experience and employability before starting student mobility and how these expectations were met:

- ✓ Have the students' *expectations* been met?

To summarize, the present work aims to address the main question and all the sub questions mentioned above to create a whole picture of the phenomenon of master grad student mobility between Russia and Norway and its benefits for students' further development.

#### **1.4 The organization of the thesis**

The next chapter of the study consists of the review of previous research, where prior studies on student motivation, student mobility and internationalization of higher education, studies on employability and personal development and on decision about location choice have been presented. *Chapter three* illustrates the theoretical framework of the study based on the social constructionism theory by Berger and Luckmann, social self and “liquid modernity” theory, theories on migration and adjustment to a new culture, the “stranger” theory and cultural theory of risk by Mary Douglas. *Chapter four* describes the methodological approach of the study, where the issues of sampling strategy, personal and web-based in-depth interviews as the data collection method, content analysis as well as discussions on validity and reliability, constraints and limitations of the study are presented. From chapter five the findings and discussions and the empirical part of the study begins. *Chapter five* discusses motivations of the students; *chapter six* includes descriptions and discussions of challenges the students undergo during student mobility; *chapter seven* is about personal and employability benefits for the students; *chapter eight* describes discussion and empirical data on decision about location choice and challenges the former students experienced after stay/return and includes discussion on interconnection between perception of risk and the location choice. *The final chapter, chapter nine*, sums up general discussions and presents general conclusion of the thesis, where motivation of students, the creating and participating in diverse realities during international stay, the continuous self-formation through choice of action, benefits for students, and the experience of being stranger both in a foreign and own culture are discussed.

## **Chapter 2: Previous research**

This chapter focuses on providing a review of the previous studies that the present research draws on. Foreign study emerged as a topic of research in the end of 70s, but remained somehow peripheral for research the next decades. Altbach (1991:306) finds it surprising that international students have not been studied by social scientists as an important population to study and “as a manifestation of cross-cultural relations” and “knowledge transfer”. Most of the studies were carried out by educational scientists and psychologists. The research in this area have been sponsored by interested organizations as the NAFSA, IIE, UKCOSA, EIE and the ERASMUS program in the European countries. These organizations located in developed countries and their research reflects the concerns of the “host countries” and their academic institutions and usually relates to issues of flow, policy and adjustment. Since that time, international mobility has been studied from different angles including foreign students’ values, experiences, attitudes and motivations (ibid). This current chapter will describe the previous literature that helps to understand the phenomenon of graduate Russian student mobility within the field of social work. The prior studies on students’ motivation in social work occupation and student mobility, the issues on student mobility and internationalization of HE, the employability and personal benefits, and decision on location choice are regarded as relevant for the study and discussed throughout the present chapter.

### ***2.1 Research on student motivation***

#### ***2.1.1 Motivation for occupational choice***

The discussion of reasons for taking social work education has been going on since 1970s, when Pearson (1973), who studied social work students motivation at that time, declared that those who choose social work as profession reject “normal values of everyday life”, what “represents some form of primitive political rebellion”(ibid: 252). Holme and Maizels (1978) undertook their empirical study with 1423 social workers some years later and did not agree with Pearson about the fact that rejection of some social norms made social workers political deviant. But they, along with other researchers in this field (Solas, 1994; O’Connor et al., 1984), supported that social workers seek self-realization through their work, possibility to help other people and rejected some routine aspects of the profession. Hanson and McCullagh (1995) studied undergraduate social work students’ motivation for choosing this profession over 10 years. The findings of the research showed that the students are motivated by working with people and contributing to individuals and society.

Other studies (Golden et al., 1972) pointed out that social work as a profession tends to attract more from the lower socio-economic background than other professional schools. Some literature

(Hanson & McCullagh, 1995; DiCaccavo, 2002) connects motivation for studying social work with childhood experiences and argues that many social workers were involved in contact with social services from early years, because of poverty or other problems in need of intervention, help or counseling from social workers. Thus, according to DiCaccavo (2002), people in helping professions as social workers, counselors, psychologists tend to report emotional neglect, abuse and other difficult experiences from childhood. They work as ‘wounded healers’ when other’s pain can help them to understand their own. The study of Parker and Merrylees (2002) considers that biography of the social student and experience of emotional and traumatic event within the family or close environment, along with sense of altruism and service to others, influence the choice of social work occupation. Some studies in sociology of education (Brooks, 2003; Sjaastad, 2012) declare that interpersonal relationships are key factors to motivate the choice of profession for young people, where family’s and friends’ influence explains the decision-making processes. The present study will consider the previous research and include questions about previous experiences in the field of social work and the initial contact with the social services in order to disprove or confirm the findings applied to graduate master students from Russia and the context of Norwegian-Russian cooperation within the field of social work.

### **2.1.2 Motivation for student mobility**

Parey and Waldinger (2011) pointed out that motivation for participating in student mobility can be explained by gaining new experiences, which they can use in a labour market, improving language skills and broaden knowledge horizon. According to a new report from Norwegian Center for International Cooperation in Education (SIU, 2015), nearly 24,000 international students were enrolled at Norwegian colleges and universities in the academic year 2013-2014 and the number has more than doubled over the past 10 years. Wiers-Jenssen (2013) considers that Norway is considered to be high attractive country to study in because of free education and because studies in English are offered. Although Norway demonstrates overall growing tendencies in student mobility (see Annex – 4), student mobility from Russia has been slightly decreasing in the academic year 2013-2014, but mobility from European countries has been growing (SIU, 2015). The interest to the field of social and health studies, where we can place the MSWCP, seems to be gradually growing from year 2007 but it’s not the most popular study field of study for the foreign students (see Annex -6).

According to the report (SIU, 2015), different migration processes including labour migration has contributed to the high enrollment of foreign students in the Norwegian universities. Some studies on international student mobility suggest that unfavorable conditions at the home country (*the push factors*) and pleasant conditions at the host country (*the pull factors*) interact to stimulate



student’s motivations to study abroad as well as to stay/return upon degree completion (Altbach, 1991, 2004; Finn, 2007; Kim et al., 2011; Mei & Bray, 2007).

Mansoor and Quillin (2006) editing of a World Bank report, described the main patterns of migration after the Soviet Union collapse, focusing on the Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union migration processes trends. According to this report, it’s important to include broader quality-of-life considerations in a home country as an explanatory variable. Not only pleasant situation abroad and differences in earnings between countries, but also human rights situation, social and cultural development, differences in political and economical stability may also affect migration, because they can refer to different levels of individually perceived security. Risk-averse people will probably be less motivated by better earnings and conditions if their everyday life is perceived by them as comfortable and stable (ibid). The study summarizes push-and pull-factors influencing migration in a table below.

**Figure 1. Motivations for migration**

	Push factors	Pull factors
Economic and demographic	Poverty Unemployment Low wages High fertility rates Lack of basic health and education	Prospects of higher wages Potential for improved standard of living Personal or professional Development
Political	Conflict, insecurity, violence Poor governance Corruption Human rights abuses	Safety and security Political freedom
Social and cultural	Discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, religion and the like	Family reunification Ethnic (Diaspora migration) homeland Freedom from discrimination

Source: World Bank, in Mansoor, Quillin (2006: 78).

Altbach (1991) applied the push-and-pull factors theory to student mobility and argued that *the perceived value of a foreign degree* is one of motivating factors, because for the most of less-developed countries, a degree from developed county could gain an advantage in the job market. Some of students from less-developed counties find it easier to get admittance to western universities than to the local ones, therefore “*better opportunities*” factor is important for them. Individual, applying for foreign studies, measures *costs* of education, stay abroad and size of scholarship. For self-financed students this factor is very important, because many foreign students meet often serious economic problems, “sometimes resulting in an interruption of studies, part-time

work, health difficulties, the failure to complete degrees and others” (Altbach, 1991:311). The last motivating factor, which was mentioned by Altbach (ibid), is the *possibility of immigration*, because some students going abroad have no intention to return to homeland, something that makes the issue of “brain-drain” significant. Among other perspectives influencing decisions for student mobility, Altbach (1991) mentions sending and hosting country perspectives, which often imply cooperation in the field of internationalization of higher education.

## **2.2 Student mobilities, migration and the internationalization of higher education**

In the age of globalization, student mobility is stimulated by the increasingly global and independent nature of many political and economic systems, as well as personal desires and subjective awareness of global opportunities (Brooks & Waters, 2011). According to Teichler (2012) the Bologna Process has been stimulated by supra-national actors since the 1950s in order to challenge national borders in higher education in Europe. As Altbach (1991:305) noted, foreign students are placed in the center of a complex network of international academic relationships, and stated: “They are the human embodiments of a worldwide trend toward the internationalization of knowledge and research in an integrated world economy.”

Rizvi (2009:287) argues that changes caused by globalization have challenges to educational research and the researcher: “With deterritorialisation, pluralisation and hybridisation of cultures, the idea of a geographically bounded object and field of research has become hard to sustain. Educational research must therefore pay attention to the transnational spaces”...

International students find themselves in “in-between spaces” of institutional relations and knowledge systems (Popkewitz & Rizvi, 2009:9). As Ackers (2010) stated, advances in technology and in access to technology necessitate understanding of the plurality of spaces (f.eks homes, workplaces, international space and cyberspace) within which learning take place, what is especially relevant in discussion of distance international education.

There has been carried out different research aimed to understand how the processes of internationalization of higher education impacts on student mobility and modern universities. Thus, Brooks and Waters (2011) argued, that at the heart educational decision-making for student mobility is the desire on the part of many middle-class families to accumulate cultural capital and ensure social reproduction through their engagement with the national or international educational market (ibid). The study considers that for many students, a decision to move abroad for education is taken by the whole family, and is frequently seen as a family project. Moreover, analyzing student mobility of Asian students, Brooks and Waters distinguish between ‘international student mobility’ and ‘educational immigration’. They argued that many internationally mobile East Asian

students are also immigrants. Another study by Clayton et al. (2009) argues that social position influences student's decision making. They suppose that while the middle-class students are happy to have any opportunity to move away from home to pursue their degree, those with weaker economies will have markedly different attitudes.

Russian researchers Artamonova and Demchuk (2012) in an article where they analyze development of student mobility in Russia, note that student and university staff mobility existed in Russia since Soviet times to some degree; the new development is that academic mobility has become compulsory and got a tendency of "mass mobility" and these processes cause reorganizations in all the university activities. However, the researcher does not consider these processes as inflicted, but caused by modern changes in economical, social and cultural development. The study refers to conducted surveys among students of different Russian Universities, professors and management and reveals some problems around mobility of Russian students. According to this study, 53 % of respondents answered that they do not plan to participate in international student mobility and 25% of students were sure that there was no possibility to "credit" or short time student mobility at their university.

Internationalization of higher education is often discussed as an increasing global pressure on higher education systems imposed upon national policymaking by over-national organizations as, for example, OECD or UNESCO (Kelly, 2009). Brooks and Waters (2011) point out that there are complex articulations between global impacts and the priorities of particular nations and regions. To understand what drive 'internationalization' in general and student mobility in particular, we have to look beyond merely the economic sphere and take into account the important political, social and cultural factors, which are considerable for students' decision making (ibid).

Knight (2004) outlines five specific national-level rationales which determine involvement in initiatives to promote internationalization and student mobility as developing human resources and recruiting the brightest students from other countries; establishing strategic alliances with other countries for geo-political and/or economic benefit; generating commercial trade through the provision of various transnational educational service; nation-building; and developing diversity in social and cultural life.

The Norwegian state invests huge sums of money in cooperation with Russia. Thus, by application deadline February 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, the Cooperation Programme with Russia had received 27 eligible applications for project funding, at a total amount of NOK 77 442 757 (The Cooperation Programme with Russia, 2012). According to description of the cooperation program Barents 2020 (2006) and NORRUS 2011-2016 (2012), Russia has a huge potential for economic development and for that reason, it is important for Norway to widen and deepen its understanding of Russia today, and to be able to develop a picture of the future.

The movement of students across the borders around the world in order to get a higher education is affected by education policies and by policies in other areas, including employment and immigration. The next subchapter will discuss previous studies in the field of employability and personal improvement caused by student mobility.

### **2.3 Employability benefits and improving personal skills under student mobility**

Discussing the problem of employability benefits, Yorke (2004) defines it as a set of achievements and skills, as well as personal attributes that make graduates more likely to be successful in their career that benefits themselves, the community and the economy.

Brooks and Waters (2011:11) claimed that “in certain countries at least, an overseas qualification does often lead to substantial labour market rewards.” The Erasmus Impact Study, carried out in 2014 by EU workgroup, analyzed issues related to student mobility influence on employability, internationalization of higher education, curricula, cooperation between different higher education institutions and other related questions. The study shows that participating in student mobility enhanced employability and competence of the students. Students perceived mobility as a period of personal and professional development when they became mature and more self-confident. 90 % of all the respondents in the study improved so called *soft skills*, such as knowledge of different countries, ability to work with people from different cultures, communication and foreign language skills. Archer & Davison (2008) and Yorke (2006) found that regardless of the size of the company, in some employment areas, soft skills, which include team-working, were perceived to have more weight than technical or hard skills such as a good degree qualification. The soft skills like cultural skills and professional skills adapted to national requirements are included in the country-specific human capital (Chiswick & Miller, 2003; Duvander, 2001), obtained by students during their stay abroad. The country-specific human capital from abroad will certainly be in demand in certain segments of the labour market (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008). Moreover, students build broad *intercultural competence* (Deardorff, 2006), which can include different elements like tolerance, psychological strength and flexibility (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Teichler (2007) argued that it's not clear what role higher education institutions have in development of student's key *employability skills*, like written and spoken communication, information technology skills, problem solving, the ability to teamwork, self-management, time-keeping, the ability to work hard, and others. Campbell (2009) argues that obtaining of such skills neither starts nor finishes with the student's time in higher education institute. The skills an international student enters a new environment with are developed within the context of the home environment and a specific socio-cultural context.

While Crossman and Clarke (2010) consider that experiences and skills gained in a foreign country give an employability advantage to them, Dietrich and Olson (2010) point out that the question of transferability of employability skills to different labour markets is crucial. Key employability skills can vary between different social context and what is considered to be a key skill in Russia can be different perceived in Norway. Behle and Atfield (2013) argue, that especially for non-Western students returning to their home countries, it's unclear whether some skills and attributes, defined by Western society are relevant and compatible with the skills demanded by employees in the student's home country and with their previously obtained and culturally identified generic skills.

Wiers-Jenssen (2008) suggests that even if obtaining extracurricular skills is perceived rewarding from a personal perspective, this does not imply that "individual career opportunities are improved by studying abroad or that gained abroad are required in the jobs the graduates obtain" (ibid: 104). Other authors (Behle & Atfield, 2013) support this argument by arguing that increases in the individual's employability skills will not yield return in a labour market if the labour market has no suitable employment that requires those skills.

Jannecke Wiers-Jenssen (2008) compares early careers of Norwegian students who took part of education abroad with those who undertook all education at domestic high education institutes in order to find out if participating in student mobility lead to work in international companies and with international affairs, and got positive results. At the same time, Norwegian graduates with international diplomas generally faced more difficulties in entering the Norwegian labour market compared to domestic graduates where unemployment and overeducating were more prevalent. However, the economic rewards among employed were higher among mobile students a few years after graduation (ibid). Weirs-Jenssen (2008) argues that employers in the Norwegian context are not always competent to judge diplomas from abroad and select graduates with a known educational background and with experience in the national labour market.

Crossman & Clarke (2010) and Williams (2005) identified *language learning, cultural awareness and global competence* as the main skills students obtain during their international stay. Wiers-Jenssen (2008:124) pointed out that studying abroad makes a difference to the personal development and identity of students "independent of immediate vertical or horizontal career changes."

Teichler suggests student mobility can be both an effective, and relatively safe, means of challenging attitudes and engrained perspectives 'because of an all-embracing confrontation to a culture different from that at home' (Teichler, 2004:11). A similar argument is pursued by Murphy-Lejeune (2012:234) supported the argument by documenting the increasingly questioning

attitudes of mobile students in relation to both the concept of national borders and the meaning of ‘home’, calling mobile student “new strangers”.

However, there is evidence suggesting that, in many cases, educational mobility does not bring change in outlooks and international students often do not integrate well (Ehrenreich, 2008; Fincher & Shaw, 2009) and may even be a subject to ethnic discrimination (Collins, 2010). Singh et al. (2007) contend that international students experience being insiders and outsiders on both their places of origin and destinations and “in doing so, they contribute to the production of a distinctive cosmopolitan space’ (ibid: 196).

The existence of the ethnic discrimination problem in entering the labour market and exclusion at workplaces was confirmed by several studies (Drange, 2013; Aas, 2009; Hardoy & Schøne, 2008; Orupabo, 2014, Brekke & Mastekaasa, 2008, Fangen & Paasche, 2012). Midtbøen (2015) argued that these studies didn’t dare to conclude that ethnic discrimination is the main obstacle for the national minorities in the Norwegian labour market and concluded that politicians and organizations should recognize that the ethnic discrimination hinders the successful integration of minorities to the Norwegian society. However, Olsen (2013) argued that among the foreigners with a doctoral degree in the humanities and social sciences living in Norway for two years after disputation 70 % were employed in the educational sector. The next subchapter will explore some prior research related to the issue of stay abroad after graduating or return to home country.

#### ***2.4 Previous research on decision about location choice: stay or return***

International students of the MSWCP program need to decide whether they will return home or continue their international career. If a student decides to stay abroad, it can cause a loss of capacity and “brain drain” for the sending region (Venhorst, et al., 2011), but benefits to her/his country-specific human capital, because she/he learns more foreign language and culture, acquires different experiences and forms networks. Wiers-Jenssen (2008) considers, that returning home after working experience abroad and bringing international working experience with them to the domestic labour market, will contribute both to internationalizing of other countries’ and domestic labour markets. Those Norwegian graduates working abroad often have national rather international jobs and some of them choose to stay abroad mainly because of family reasons, but not because of obtaining international working experience. Anyway, Wiers-Jenssen (ibid) considers work in a foreign county to be an international experience.

Working and staying abroad is often related to marital status, whether one has children or not, and previous experience living abroad. Wiers-Jenssen (ibid) pointed out that decision to stay abroad and work abroad is often strongly influenced by having a foreign partner. Another study (Nerdrum, Ramberg, & Sarpebakken, 2003) declares that a partner is an important reason for

migration among highly skilled workers such as researchers. Wiers-Jenssen (2008) argued that there is no so much research particular in this field and future research should investigate this issue.

According to Wiers-Jenssen (2008), in some countries, governments worry that those who go abroad to study will not return and explain “brain-drain” by better labour market options and general living conditions in the host country than the home country. Some relatively recent studies (Oosterbeek & Webbink, 2011; Parey & Waldinger, 2011) acknowledge the potential risk of “brain-drain” associated to student mobility. Norway does not suffer from this problem (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008) because of comparatively generous welfare system and possibility of access to positive domestic labour market opportunities.

Altbach (1991) discussing immigrants from Taiwan and South Korea, argued that if circumstances at domestic markets change, combination of competitive salaries, attractive professional employment opportunities, improved standards of living, liberalization in both politics and culture will cause “reverse migration” to home countries, therefore the issue of “return” or “non-return” is quite complex. Brooks and Waters (2011) noted that the concept “brain-drain” has been “largely undermined over recent years, as alternative terms such as ‘brain gain’ and ‘*brain circulation*’ have gained currency.

Several studies from different countries (Marinelli, 2011; Venhorst, 2013; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Mosneaga & Winther, 2012) outline importance of both social networks and economic opportunities in the decision to stay abroad or move home. Some of the graduates are attracted back to their homes, because of social (family and friends) bounds and better knowledge of the home region. Thus, Hazel and Alberts (2006) argue that “family connections, personal circumstances, and even personalities, account for much of the variation between students” (ibid: 214) in relation to their location choice. The study by Mosneaga and Winther (2012) shows that the decision to continue international careers follows situational dynamics in which free will and contextual and enabling factors interact with each other.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical approach

This study draws on several theoretical perspectives in understanding social work students' experiences. By applying the theory of social constructionism by Berger and Luckmann (1966), the perception of moving between and constructing different realities during student mobility is discussed. The theory of social self and self-identity in "liquid modernity", theories on migration and adjustment to a new culture, "stranger" theory, mobility capital and cultural theory of risk are presented in the current chapter in order to understand the students' experiences under international stay in Norway.

### 3.1 Social constructionism by P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann

The work of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) is crucial for this study as long as it give explanation of the way people construct their realities and how they are constructed by these realities in a reciprocal way. Berger and Luckmann (ibid: 13) define reality as

*a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot "wish them away"), and ... knowledge as the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics.*

The specific agglomerations of "reality" and "knowledge" belong to specific social contexts and these relationships should be included in a sociological analysis of these contexts. Most people in the street don't usually think about what is "real" to them and what they "know" before they face some problem, they take their "reality" and "knowledge" for granted. But, from a sociological perspective, the reality cannot be taken for granted because of awareness of the fact that people in different societies take quite different "realities" for granted. Therefore, sociological interest in "reality" and "knowledge" questions is vindicated by the fact of their social relativity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The validity of the knowledge of everyday life is mostly taken for granted until some problem arises that can't be solved in the terms of it. In the case of this study, students travel from one country to another and therefore move from one reality to a different one, which is related to different social and cultural context. As a result of this moving, they need to "readjust" and adapt their reality to the new one, which they face in a new country, therefore the theory of Berger and Luckmann (ibid) in this study will help to understand the experiences of the students and their new realities that have been constructed and maintained in social situations.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), society exist both as *objective* and *subjective reality*, where a dialectic process between *externalization*, *objectivation* and *internalization* continues simultaneously. Each of these moments corresponds to essential characterization of social world as "*Society as a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product*" (ibid: 79). In other words, a member of society simultaneously externalizes his own being into the social



world and internalizes it as an objective reality; to live in society means to take part in its dialectic. The common objectifications of everyday life are maintained by linguistic signification. Through using language people can communicate meanings, which are detached from “here and now” moment and therefore language becomes the objective storage of meaning and experience accumulations, which can be preserved in time and transmitted to next generations as a social stock of knowledge (ibid). When students remember their experiences from taking part in the international educational program, they make present a new story, which will be meaningful in their ongoing reality of everyday life. Therefore, they can reconstruct their experience including reflections on the past that becomes their knowledge they got during international mobility and this knowledge can be transmitted to friends, family, countryman or even next generations.

The objectivity of the institutional world is human produced and constructed. The paradox here is that man produces a world that is experienced as something other than a human product. Children take the reality they are born in and socialized in for granted as given and self-evident. All the institutions of the reality are external to them and to understand them, people should go out and learn about them, whether they like the institutions and the fact of their persistence or not (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). When students move from one reality to another, they will learn about the institutions of the new reality, because they will be attached to the most important of them through their control mechanisms. Therefore, as usual the international students cannot get the “whole picture” of the new social world, but some fragments of it, while the large sectors of the new social world will still remain incomprehensible for them and can cause misunderstandings or be perceived sometimes as oppressive, because of their opacity for the actors.

Any action of human activity that is repeated frequently becomes a pattern, which can be reproduced with an economy of effort. When two persons or two different “selves” from different social worlds produced in segregations from each other meet and interact in the situation that has not been institutional for either of participants, they build reciprocal typification of actions. This will be habitualized for each in roles. The best gain from this development is that one can predict actions of another, therefore interaction of both becomes predictable and that will build the ground for stabilizing their separate action and their interaction (ibid). In the case of this thesis, this theory is relevant for the international students who often find themselves in situations of meeting people from different social worlds and different cultures. These worlds may have many things in common, but the actors should take into consideration the differences and build their own strategies in making predictable and understandable different conduct and different traditions to make interaction beneficial, productive and free for tension (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The world of everyday life of mobile students is threatened by the marginal situations of unusual experiences, both remembered and just imagined as possibilities. Family and friends play a great

role in maintaining the subjective reality of the individual. The most important tool of reality maintaining in this case is everyday conversation, which does not contain words defining the social world, but in easy formulation can confirm the subjective reality of the individual (ibid). Most of the students travelling abroad try to find the way to communicate with their family and friends at their home county as soon as possible. For many of them, making sure that they will have a possibility to ring or write messages to their family is very important preparation to their study abroad. They need these conversations as the confirmation of their subjective reality left at home.

For the students, who don't continue international career, participating in the international program in Norway can become temporary change in their subjective reality. The students' subjective realities undergo some changes, which can just remind the processes of primary socialization. Students don't begin their life from scratch when they travel abroad to participate in the international program, but they rebuild and reconstruct their subjective realities by combination of their "past" reality and the contemporary "now" reality of the international experience. For those students who will continue their international career and stay abroad for longer time, the process of reconstruction of the subjective realities will continue. In this case, students will meet new institutions of the new social world, will get familiar with more clusters of society and therefore they will build and define a new subjective reality. The students learn more and more foreign language, get more and more knowledge about the new society and adapt to its routines, by participating in different activities, institutions, and getting a new network of people. This study will consider motivation of the students for entering social work profession and participating in the international program, their personal and educational background and therefore will take into consideration the "baggage" of subjective reality the students came to Norway with. Further, using the theory of social constructionism by Berger and Luckmann (1966), the study will analyze how the new subjective realities of the students were constructed from their experiences during the international stay both in the case of continuing of international career or returning to their native country, and how this benefited to their personal and career development.

### **3.2 Social self and "liquid modernity"**

According to a pragmatic perspective, the social self is a recognition we get from others and therefore is formed in a discourse of social group. William James (1983) argued that we have many social selves and selves change over time and in different contexts.

Burkitt (2008:4) argued the following:

*The self may not be pre-given: it is not something hidden that we have to find, but something that has to be made. Self, then, is something to be created with other people in joint activities and through shared ideas, which provide the techniques of self-formation.*

According to Durkheim (1984), skills, interests, talents, professions, jobs and social status create a sense of self-identity and therefore we look to change the things if we want to change our selves and our lives. In the contemporary times we try to create an identity without a clear idea of the result in a world of disconnected episodes of our life, “that reflects back to us diverse images of who we are in the eyes of many disparate and disconnected people that we know” (Burkitt, 2008:175).

Social geographer Edward Casey (2001) argued that although social relations are becoming more virtual, people are still seeking the place in which they can find physical co-presence with others and share experiences and the more place is leveled down by modern technologies, the more people seek out the places where their interpersonal enrichment can flourish.

Educational opportunities in the modern world are opening up much more than before. Now people have an opportunity to move to other countries to get education and working experience, they can travel more because of changes in technologies and lifestyles, and connect with people on a global rather than a local scale. Nowadays people can easily rewrite their identities as ever-expanding and shifting network of relationships allows. Bauman (2000) describes this greater flexibility in people’s life as “liquid modernity”, because it liquefies all solid and stable human interconnections and makes them fluid across globalized space and time, and therefore this fluid world demands greater adaptability to changes. “Those who find themselves land-locked they cannot escape are the powerless within liquid modernity, whereas it is those who can instantly move and respond to changing conditions that are the powerful” (Burkitt, 2008:175). According to Bauman, this power “consists in one’s own capacity to escape, to disengage, to “be elsewhere”, and the right to decide the speed with which all that is done” (Bauman, 2000:120). This can be related to student mobility and the location choice the former students take after it. Burkitt (2008:182) stressed out:

*The power of individual selves in the contemporary social world therefore seems to be constituted not so much in the ability to be totally flexible, fluid, and to have completely freedom to move, but **to be able to choose** when to move and stay at the surface of experience or when to be rooted and search out the depth of interconnection with others in particular places.*

### **3.3 Migration and cross-cultural adjustment theories**

Different cases of migration refer to different outcomes observable from a sociological perspective. For instance, a person who moves within his home country does not have the same experience as an immigrant to a foreign country, or especially different types of refugees. As soon as there are many different reasons why people move from one place to another, there is no single theory which will give a comprehensive explanation for the migration process. Different theories of migration are important for the research, because they can explain and help to understand why international students move between different political, economical and social contexts.

#### **3.3.1 “Push” and “pull” factors**

One of the earliest migration theorists Ernst Georg Ravenstein is known as a German-English geographer cartographer developed his "*Laws of Migration*" (Ravenstein, 1885). He concluded that migration was governed by a "push-pull" process. In other words, unfavorable conditions in one place, for example, oppressive laws "push" people out, and favorable conditions in an another foreign location "pull" them out. Positive and favorable things in the area of destination attract and motivate to move to the area. According to Ravenstein (ibid), the primary cause for migration was the prospect of better external economic opportunities. He stated that the volume of migration decreases as distance increases and the most migrants choose the places which are not so remove from their home. Another of Ravenstein's laws declared that gender, social class and age influence a person's mobility. Thus, he considered women to be more migratory than man and to be a "greater" migrant. According to his findings (ibid), women tried to find works outside of their homes for domestic service, shops and even factories in industrial centers. In the case of the study, international students could weight disadvantages and advantages of moving to study in Norway and especially when they had to decide if they stay and continue an international career or move back home. Furthermore, they may take into consideration other factors as distance between the countries, travel costs and cultural barriers before they make a final decision.

Although Ravenstein's paper only focused on information from surveys within the United Kingdom, many theorists have followed and developed his research. Thus, Everett Lee (1966) reformulated Ravenstein's theory and created *a theory of migration* where he emphasized internal (or push) factors. Lee pointed out that age, gender, and social class affect how persons respond to push-pull factors, and these conditions also shape their ability to overcome different obstacles under migration. Besides these differentials, personal factors such as a person's education, knowledge of a potential receiver population and family ties can facilitate or slow down migration processes (ibid).

According to Altbach (1991:308), the pattern of foreign student flows is “complex and multidirectional”, but there are a great number of students from less developed countries who study in the “rich countries” and a small number of students from the industrialized nations who study in the developing countries.

Altbach (ibid) argued, that for the students from developing countries, there are both 'push' and 'pull' factors that motivate foreign study. According to Altbach (1991: 309), “these factors are of primary importance in determining flows of students and they are only partially subject to governmental and institutional policies.” Taking into account self-funded foreign students, one should consider the fact that such decisions can be based on individual and family priorities (ibid). Decisions about student mobility are the result of a complex of variables and they are made from at least three perspectives - the individual student (family), the sending country and the host country. Motivation for student mobility from the individual perspective has been discussed earlier in the study. Governments in the sending countries can experience economic difficulties leading to reduction in available state funds and other factors and host country governments consider such factors as the 'real' costs of educating foreign student, foreign policy priorities and other factors, which are summarized in the table 1 (see Annex -5). Another influential theory in migration studies, and in this study in particular, is the human capital theory.

### **3.3.2 Mobility capital**

Gary S. Becker declared that we all are living in the age of human capital or in the time when human capital is the most important form of capital in modern economies, and he (1964:10) defined *human capital* as “the stock of knowledge, skills and abilities embedded in an individual”. According to Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2012), human capital enables a person to make improvement in skills and earning capacity. Murphy-Lejeune (2012: 51) considers *mobility capital* as a “sub-component of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad”. Rodrigues (2012) points out that “mobile capital” makes individuals more attractive at the labour markets and enhances chances of successful career. Mobility capital is the distinguishing factor that separates those who study abroad from those who do not. According to Murphy-Lejeune (2012), mobility capital consists of four main constituent elements: family and personal history, previous experience of domestic and international mobility including language competence, the first experience of adaptation and the personality features of the student. The theory may explain why some students can have different experiences with the same things during their stay. Different students have different mobility capital before departure that can influence their perceptions during taking the MSWCP program. The students are raised in different families with different make-up, but according to Murphy-

Lejeune (ibid), it was not uncommon for students to have family members who had travelled abroad or even resided in another country.

Discussing the element of student's personality, Murphy-Lejeune outlines that mobility students describe themselves as outgoing, curious, eager for novelty or difference, with good social and communication skills and concludes that no matter the nationality, a certain type of personality seems to be more open to exploring and experiencing international experiences than others (ibid).

In spite of differences in motivations, mobility capital, personality traits, language competence and family background, all the students meet a new environment of the MSWCP program, entering the studies and moving to a new reality, and get own experiences of integration in the new world. The theoretical background of the following subchapters will outline these issues.

### **3.3.3 The “stranger” theory and integration barriers**

The sociological theory of “stranger” by Simmel (1908), Park (1928) and Schütz (1944) identifies stranger as a social type. The studies present a conceptual framework highlighting central characteristics of individuals in a situation of social change caused by migration or mobility (Murphy-Lejeune, 2012). This study that is devoted to the issue of graduate social work students will try to analyze the more specific case of the sociology of the stranger, that of student mobility.

Simmel (1908) gave the foundation for the sociological research of stranger with introducing stranger as an object of study. He described the state of being a stranger as “a specific form of interaction” and defines stranger as “an element of the group itself...whose membership within the group involves both being outside it and confronting it (Simmel in Levine, 1971: 143-144).”

According to Simmel (1908), the major areas in understanding stranger's experiences are position in space and time, social and symbolic position as well as identity issues. Spatially strangers are as “nomads caught in between places”, in time – “the person who comes and stays tomorrow” (Simmel in Wolff, 1950:402) and socially stranger take the marginal position in society and challenge established relations. Being both inside and outside, the stranger develops a special type of objectivity and freedom from prejudice, because migration and mobility create the necessary distance from which it's possible to observe habitual assumptions from outside. For some international students, in the case of contradictions of self-identity and ascribed identity, crossing the borders may be experienced as a treat to their identity. Others just perceive the whole situation as an exciting trip to a new county. Further, Simmel (1950) defines a paradox of stranger in social, psychological and symbolical dimensions by noting that “in the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near”. When international students travel abroad, they become strangers in a new culture and can perceive their strangeness in a way of “close but far” relationships with host country society.

Levine (1977:22) describes that situation as “when those who should be distant are close, however, the inevitable result is a degree of tension and anxiety which necessitates some special kind of response”. Future for stranger is a “permanent question mark, pressing on the issue of the length of the stay and of a potential return” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2012:16). The reaction to this pressure will depend on whether “the adventure is a result of a lasting desire etched in a personal life or an unbearable situation imposed by external circumstances” (ibid).

The postmodern discourse revitalized the concept of the “cosmopolitan citizen of the world” who easily crosses borders and easily lives in different countries without setting in any place. In this case, the identification will be transnational and more “above” than “in between” (Friedman, 1995). Stonequist (1937) described this type of people as easily bored and looking for new thrills. Siu (1952) described sojourner as another type of modern stranger, who establish roots in one place for a certain time with no desire for permanency. The international student of the MSWCP program should belong to some kind of “in-between” type of stranger: the duration of their stay is fixed institutionally, but at the same time it’s not definite. Most of the students are temporarily settled and the actual duration of their stay is uncertain, something that opens new worlds and new horizons for their future. Their temporary position in society does not make them assimilate or integrate in a new society and therefore the movement between the realities is not perceived as cost, but as a benefit. When some of the students decide to continue international career and stay for longer time in order to get a job and even start a family, they move to other categories of strangers and meet new challenges of integration in the society. Some of the theories of meeting and adapting to another culture will be outlined in the next subchapter.

### **3.3.4 Culture-shock and acculturation theory**

The issue of cross-cultural adaptation is well researched both in sociological and psychological theory that will contribute to understanding processes students undergo during their transition between different social worlds and contexts.

The theory of “*culture shock*” is commonly used to describe and explain different feelings and emotions people experience moving from one culture to another culture and learning the rules, norms, customs, and language of the new culture. The term “culture shock” was first proposed by Oberg (1960) and defined as “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (1960:142). The theory was supported by some scholars, as for example, Kenneth (1971) who noted that culture shock is a common phenomenon for the sojourners or in other words those who travel to a new culture for an extended time, but with planned limits, as for instance, international students.

Oberg (1960) identified four stages in the process where a sojourner transits from culture shock to satisfactory adjustment. *Honeymoon* stage is the first stage, which can last from a few days to a few months depending on the circumstances of the individuals, when the sojourner is totally fascinated by the new environment around him or her. In the case of the study, many students stay in Norway more than 6 months, so it could be relevant for them to experience the next stage of *crisis*, when the student will have to face and overcome real problems in life, such as understanding the foreign language, interaction with local population, fitness attending, getting medical help and so on. At this point, the second stage begins and the sojourner could feel frustrated, anxious and angry. Then comes the stages or *recovery* and *adjustment* to the new environment (ibid).

It's interesting to note, that Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) made focus on that some students experience the reverse culture shock with similar stages while returning home. Beginning with the trip home many individuals feel excited to be returning home. But after they get home, they experience things differently and enter crisis, but hopefully adjust afterwards. Therefore, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) suggested W-curve instead of Oberg's U-curve.

Figure 2. The W-Curve of Intercultural Sojourning



Based on Oberg (1960), and Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963)

Zheng and Berry (1991) re-defined the term “culture shock” as a form of acculturative stress, because that better matches the concept of acculturation as cultural adjustment and because of absence of cultural or psychological theory behind the term shock, while stress has a developed theoretical frame. According to Berry (2005:708), “acculturative stress is a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation.” Berry (1997) considered *acculturation* to be a more appropriate term, because cultural adaptation is a process of interactions between two cultures, while culture is a concept which has a mono context. Based on bi-dimensional model, which claims that acculturation implies interlaced process of the receiving-culture acquisition and heritage-culture retention, Berry (1997) outlined four kinds of acculturative strategies: *integration*, *assimilation*, *separation* and *marginalization*. In relation to Berry's theory



of different cultural adaptation strategies, one can assume international students' identity changes in the process of intercultural contact. If students after being abroad an extended period of time identify entirely with the host culture and at completely gives up own original identity, they are assimilated. If students treasure own heritage culture and does not identify with the host culture, they feel separated. If individuals consider both home and host cultures equally important, they feel integrated and if they see themselves low both in home and foreign culture, they are marginalized.

### **3.4 Cultural theory of risk by M. Douglas**

Every person faces different risks and dangers every day, but the risks are perceived differently by different people. Douglas and Wildavsky (1983) defined risk as “a joint product of knowledge about the future and consent about the most desired prospects” (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983:5).

Choice depends upon the alternatives, values, and beliefs that are considered are therefore there is no value-free choosing between risky alternatives (ibid). In order to understand why different people make different decisions, why someone will continue staying abroad and others will return back home, and what make them feel that it was the best decision at that moment, the study will consider the cultural theory of Mary Douglas on perception of risk.

According to Mary Douglas (1978) risk perception is socially constructed phenomenon and risks are usually not taken in isolation, but after consultation with friends and relatives, taking into consideration values, relationships and moral obligations and therefore group membership and social context are shaping what is regarded as risk.

Douglas and Wildavsky (1983) argued that the choice of risks and the choice of how to live are taken together and every form of social life has its own typical risks. According to the cultural theory of risk (Douglas, 1978), thoughts and beliefs about other people and nature are connected with worldview and perception of reality and way of life. Douglas (1982, 1992) defined four distinctive adherences that after Jordan and O'Riordan's (1997) work are well known as *individualists*, *fatalists*, *hierarchists* and *egalitarians*. The study will use this labeling.

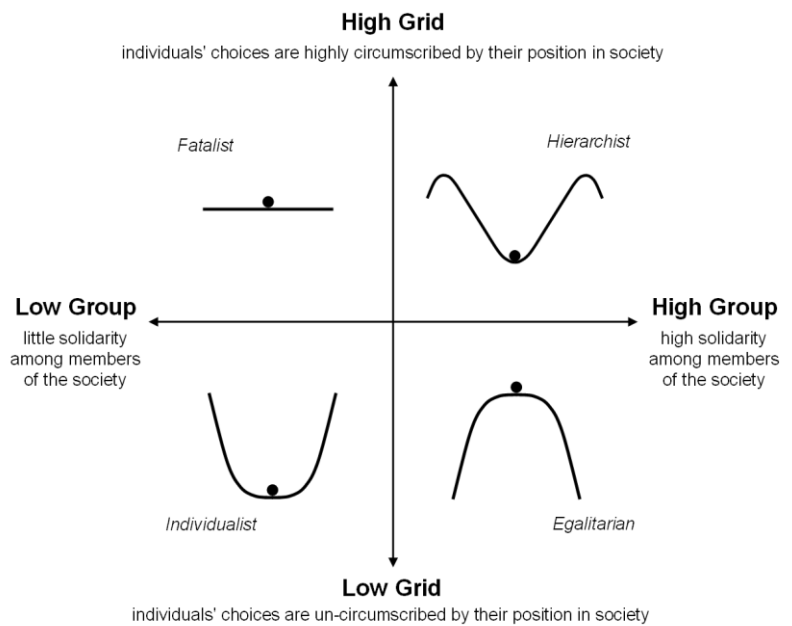
These types differ in a way they perceive and understand risks. *The individualist* sees threats to individual freedom as a risk and would not “flourish” in a state with a socialist government as soon as this will be regarded as a threat for freedom. Individualists support market liberalism and would like to keep their economical gains for themselves (Oltedal et al., 2004). *The egalitarian* is concerned with issues and development that could lead to greater inequality amongst people. Egalitarians choose left politically, support all the actions and activities in aiming to support social equality and are very concerned with ecological issues.

The hierarchical type fears what could jeopardize order in society and emphasize the “natural order” of the society. They fear social commotion, protests, demonstrations, and criminal activities. The typical representative of the group is a bureaucrat with faith in expert knowledge (Oltedal et al., 2004). Lastly, the fatalistic worldview is either unaware of risks or assumes them to be inevitable. The fatalists don’t participate actively in social life: they are indifferent about risk, because it’s perceived to be unavoidable to them anyway. In general, “fatalists try not to know or worry about things they think they can’t do anything about (ibid).

Douglas (1978) developed a *grid and group analytic framework*, which you can see interpreted by Hood (2000) at the figure 3.

**Figure 3: Douglas’ grid and group framework**

Source: Christopher Hood: *The Art of The State* (2000)



According to Douglas (1978), in this schema, “group” expresses the degree of group cohesiveness and “grid” refers to the extent to which individuals accept structural constraints such as hierarchy and procedural regulation (Renn, 1998).

Applying this theory to this study, we can suppose that Norway with its egalitarian values will attract like minded people. Douglas’ ‘egalitarian or enclave’ type is characterized by strong social cohesion and a high degree of freedom to take risks. In the reference to the study on Russian students attending MCWCP program, we can assume, that those who consider egalitarian ideas to be close to their values, will tend to have intention to stay after their studies, because Norwegian society and police has been based on egalitarian values as equality, solidarity and environmental protection (OECD, 2003). At the same time, individuals could also be attracted to Norway, if they, for instance, could perceive the county providing more freedom. Students-hierarchists will tend to move back home, because of their strong social cohesion and patriotism feeling. But they could also be attracted to Norway if they perceive criminality and unstable political situation as a main risk for staying in Russia. With regard to a fatalist worldview, we can assume that people with this worldview are not inclined to move to another country to take education: in a fatalist worldview there is no need for active decisions, because everything has been already planned by others.

Trying to verify the theory, different researches got different results. Thus, Wildavsky and Dake (1990) measured individual adherence to the hierarchical, egalitarian and individualistic way of life by different questions (see Annex-7). For instance, the index for hierarchy is based on patriotism, law and order; the individualism index supports economical growth as the key to quality of life, and private profits as the main rationale for hard work; the index for egalitarianism measures attitudes towards social equality of conditions. Dake (1991) declared that his study gave strong support to the cultural theory of risk perception. This research got a lot of criticism, because many researched failed to claim the same and confirm his findings (Oltedal et al, 2004). Thus, Marris et al. (1998) used Dake's measures for cultural adherence and only 32 per cent adhered clearly to only one of the worldviews while 81 respondents showed mixed adherences. Similar findings were presented by Sjöberg (1995) in Sweden.

The present study will use some of the questions developed by Wildavsky and Dake (1990) as clarifying question in the process of in-depth interviews in order to identify the main the worldview of informants and the main risk they fear. However, this framework should not be seen and used as a definitive explanation, but more as an analytic device. Some researches warn that these idealized groups are "too schematic to grasp the complexity of social life" (Zinn & Taylor-Gooby, 2006: 39). It makes the theory simplifying the complexities of risk and culture. According to Tulloch and Lupton (2003), individuals with similar levels of risk tolerance may act differently depending on the risk tolerance of the groups that they identify with. If we relate the statement to international students, the decision to move to another country and maybe stay there for longer time can also be influenced by identification with group members.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

Corbin and Strauss (1990) stated that the selection of research approach and methods depends on nature of research question as well as preferences of researcher. A *qualitative approach* to the *empirical study* is chosen due to its potential to be open-ended, flexible and penetrating the world of social actors (Hantrais & Mangen, 2006). According to Berg (2009), researchers use qualitative methods when they are interested in individuals and their life-worlds, when they focus on “naturally emerging languages and the meaning the individuals assign to experience” (ibid:16). These life-worlds can include motivations, emotions and other subjective aspects, and that is relevant for the present study, aiming to investigate motivations of the students and their perceptions on benefits from student mobility. The following chapter will describe sampling strategy of the present research, data collection method applied, as well as the issue of validity, reliability and limitations of the study.

### 4.1 Sampling strategy

The choice of the respondents is determined by participation in international cooperation within social work education and in particular the MSWCP program. All the participants of the MSWCP program of the University of Nordland from Russia will be contacted and asked about participation in the research. The main focus of the research has been be on those students who has completed one year of two years of study and those who have graduated or eventually dropped out after completing the first year of studies.

Determining sampling strategy in project proposal, the researcher of the present should imply purposive sampling with help of door opener who could easily get access to all the e-mail addresses and names of the program participants or in other words somebody from the Faculty of Social Sciences or university staff. Therefore, the head of the university admission office and then advisor at the Faculty of Social Sciences were contacted. Just then the naïve expectations of the inexperienced researcher faced the harsh and strict reality of the university laws and rules. Due to the law of personal information confidentiality, the university staff rejected all requests for accessing students' personal information.

At the next stage, another strategy should replace the inapplicable sampling and the *snowball sampling* came into account. This is the nonprobability sampling strategy, which is sometimes the best way to access subjects with certain characteristics necessary in the study (Berg, 2009). The basic strategy of snowball sampling involves identifying several people with relevant attributes at the first stage and then interviewing them. The people referred to the sample of the present study should have the necessary characteristics of participation in at least one year of MSWCP study and being Russian, characteristics that strongly limited the desired sample. Due to several leaves

I've had during all the long study period at the program, acquaintance with some students from different years had a positive impact on access to some informants and then the subjects were asked for the names and contacts of other people, who participated in the program, but kept no direct contact with me. So by asking one former student after another, or even students from other faculties studied at the same period at the university and probably could be acquainted with required students, the sample "snowballed" from a few subjects to more subjects (ibid). Even if the snowballing was not really perfect with meeting some stumbling blocks in a form of university connected staff and therefore limited by the laws of the personal information confidentiality, it "rolled" in the right direction and provided the minimum of participants required.

The biggest challenge for the present research was getting contact with students who participated in the program in its early beginning from 2004 to 2006. The possibility of getting access to alumni's master thesis projects helped a lot, because I got some names and possible references and could conduct some search through Google and some social network services as Facebook and LinkedIn. When I was sure that the person was connected to the study, I sent an e-mail or message if it was possible. This process brought emotions of different spectrum: from a great delight to a deep surprise and even confusion. Thus, once trying to get contact with one of the probably relevant person for the study and being absolutely sure that my suppositions were right, I got the answer "It was not me. I've never been in Norway", that accompanied apologies from my side and real feeling of confusion. This way of getting access, however, gave some fruit and the researcher came in touch with some precious participants, who had experience with the process of social research and understood how difficult it was to get the necessary sample, especially with so limited sample characteristics. It took longer time than expected and planned, but towards the end of the process, the sample consisted of ten female informants, living in different places and different countries.

#### ***4.2 A brief presentation of the informants***

In order to guarantee confidentiality, the participants of the study got new names that could not be associated with the names of participants of the program. Therefore, the false names are presenting a mix of the Russian, Norwegian, English and international names and mostly correspond to the letter of the case. Thus, case A is presented by name beginning with the letter A and so on.

**Case A – Alina** is 26 years old, has educational background in Northern studies, lives in a big city in a megalopolis in Russia, in a federal city. She works as a manager assistant in an international company.

**Case B – Benedicte** is 28 years old, has educational background in social work and northern studies, lives in a small town in Norway. She has worked at a home for the elderly, but is looking for a new job.

**Case C – Cecilia** is 28 years old, has educational background in pedagogy, lives in a big city in a European county. She works in a kindergarten, in the field of pedagogy.

**Case D – Diana** is 34 years old, has educational background in psychology. She lives in a megalopolis in Russia, in a federal city. She works in a field of information technology.

**Case E – Eli** is 27 years old, has educational background in social work, philology and pedagogy, lives in a small town in Norway. She is looking after her baby and still a student.

**Case F – Frida** is 27 years old, has educational background in psychology, pedagogy and linguistics, lives in a mid-size city in Norway. She holds a leading position in a field of pedagogy.

**Case G – Gina** is 30 years old, has educational background in linguistics, pedagogy and Northern studies. She lives in a small city in Norway. She works with administrative tasks in a private company related to the pedagogical field.

**Case H – Hanna** is 26 years old, has educational background in public relations. She lives in a megalopolis in Russia now, a federal city. She works as a project manager in a field of information technology.

**Case I – Iselin** is 29 years old, has educational background in Northern studies and history and lives in a mid-size city in Russia. She works in a field of pedagogy and social education.

**Case J – Janna** is 29 years old, has educational background in Northern studies, linguistics and philosophy. She lives in a mid-size city in Russia. She works in a field of education and pedagogy.

### ***4.3 Data collection method***

The first stage of the research involved studying of the background information of the phenomena of cooperation between countries and networks within social work education between Russia and Norway in order to define the context of the study. Answering the following questions provided contextual background of the regional policy within social work education and the program MSWCP as a part of it.

- ✓ What are the main goals of the University of Arctic in providing student mobility via students exchange and international degree programs?
- ✓ What are the main goals of the “Master of Social Work -with comparative perspective” program?

In order to attempt to answer the questions, analysis of documents from UArctic papers, conferences papers within social work network, curriculum of the international master program was conducted.

When participants were contacted for the first time, researcher presented herself and informants got a brief description of the project and its purpose. Then the letter of informed consent was sent to all the participants, and agreement was confirmed. The present study used *in-depth interview* as the main data collection method. Therefore, the interview guide was developed before applying for project approval from the Norwegian Social Sciences Data service. The supervisor reviewed and critically examined the interview guide in order to contribute to identification of poorly worded or suggestive questions, and then the researcher conducted ten in-depth interviews.

#### **4.3.1 Face-to-face in-depth interview**

The interest of the study in conducting *in-depth interviews* can be explained by the benefits of the method in getting more detailed and deep information about participants' perceptions. According to Mason (2002), interviewing can help to get "depth, nuance, complexity and roundedness in data" (Mason, 2002:65) and provide more detailed and "vivid" picture than the secondary data allow for. As a semi-structured type of interviewing, the in-depth interviews will involve both predetermined questions and freedom to digress, to ask additional questions, to make comparisons and clarifications (Berg, 2009:108). Design of interviews can be dependent on primary analysis of relevant document material that will determine sequential introducing of research strategies (Mason, 1996).

Unfortunately, only one face-to-face in-depth interview (F2FIDI) was conducted, because of nature of the sample required. Most of the former students are located in different and quite remote places from each other and from the researcher. Since the researcher has quite limited resources both in regard to time and financial resources to travel around the world to meet all the participants in person, and since not so many alumni located in the place near the researcher's location, the possibility to conduct one F2FIDI was perceived as a rare and good opportunity. However, the former students who participated in the study had a choice if they would like to meet in person or by Skype, and someone located near chose the Internet mediated method without use of camera, explaining this as "I write much better than I speak." For the personal interview, the researcher and the informant agreed about time and met each other in a café. The total time for interview was about one hour and twenty minutes. The process was like a natural conversation and very often we discussed much more than was defined by interview guide and included probing questions: the respondent took the initiative for discussing some themes related to the topic before being asked by researcher. During the interview time, we had some possibility to take a break and

drink a cup of tea with a cake, which made the process much more relaxing and allowed for trust and confidential communication. Plenty of nuance data was collected, because the researcher could observe body language and guessers of the respondent and note the pauses in communication, revealing some topics that the person would not like to speak so openly about. During the interview, the audio recorder was used to facilitate the process and provide opportunity to get more accurate data, with possibility to choose quotations for supporting and documenting the further analysis. Silverman (2006) noted some main advantages of using tape recordings and transcripts since they can be replayed to improve transcripts and since tape recordings preserve sequences of talk. At the same time, situations of damaged equipment and error with the information store could make all the data from F2FIDI invalid, and that presented the main risk with the use of audio recorder for this study. After the interview had been conducted, the data was transcribed in detail and the respondent was contacted again to get more reliability and accuracy in data.

Since most of the respondents resided in different and quite remote places in relation to the researcher, *online interview* was considered as the best alternative to F2FIDI.

#### **4.3.2 Web-based in-depth interviews**

As technology advances, methods used in qualitative research should strive to keep up and take advantage of the technological advancements (Berg, 2009). The more traditional survey-based procedures can be adapted and integrated in computer assisted personal interviews (CAPI) or even web-based in-depth interviews (WBIDI). The last method implies conducting interview online with use of the Internet as a research tool for conducting in-depth interviews and can be performed both in real (synchronous) and not real-time (asynchronous) environments (ibid).

The technology development and its availability to more and more people in the world, made it feasible to conduct synchronous WBIDI with people who were living thousands of kilometers from the researcher's physical place, something which is relevant for the present study because most of the former students are located in different places and even different countries. The present study used mostly WBIDI in synchronous environment facilitated by availability of the Skype software to all the participants of the study. Eight interviews were carried out in a synchronous environment and one interview was conducted in asynchronous modus. The first one implies that the researcher and the informant agree about the time and day of interview, meet each other in a real-time chat room and perform real-time threaded communication. According to Berg (2009), such environments provide the method most similar to face-to-face interaction by simulating the back-and-forth exchange of questions and answers. There is also a possibility to use video cameras to actually see the informants. The present study didn't use this possibility, because



some of the respondents hesitated to talk in camera with someone they had never met in person before. According to Zhao (2012), even if the camera provides information about body language and facial expression, it makes it much more difficult for the researcher to control the situation, because both researcher and informant need to write the text, if the method without audio facilitating is applied. The most precious thing with use of WBIDI without camera and audio is that the researcher saves time and efforts and escapes the process of transcribing the data, since data are provided in a form of structured text with marking of the real time spent on answering every question and the whole interview. This makes data analysis less complicated since data already have textual form and can be easily saved as a text document (Markham, 2004). One interview was carried out in asynchronous modus that implied in practice whereby the student got the interview guide and it was agreed the deadline to answer the questions and then the probing questions were answered within the next agreed deadline. This way of interviewing was not strongly desired for the present research, because this delayed interaction between the researcher and the informant for some days and the informant didn't replied as promptly as is natural for WBIDI in real-time modus and F2FIDI and, therefore, the part of conversational flow was missed (Berg, 2009). That didn't give the possibility for raising interesting, unplanned topics in conversation. It's important to note that this method was only used once and because of technical problems with informant's chatting software at that moment.

The first interview of the study was carried out as WBIDI in real-time environment and this process brought a lot of emotions of different nuances. The researcher was absolutely thrilled after one and a halve hour of communication online without breaks. The informant didn't show any signs of fatigue, while I as a researcher was emotionally and physically tired, if we take into consideration that the interview was carried out between about 20.00 and 21.30 o'clock. It was one of the longest in time interviews apart from the one which lasted during two days with a long break between interview sessions. Most of the interviews were carried out at the late evenings and some informants could ask about short pauses that were discussed and agreed before the interview session. Since there was no testing of the interview guide applied before the actual interview process, the first informant was asked to give some critical comments considering the interview process, structure and content. The informant advised to go even more in-depth, but recognized that the whole interview process would take much more time. Some technical flaws were revealed and the interview guide was adapted to cater for the moments after the first interview. Thus, since all the informants were female, the grammatical structure of the sentences in Russian was adapted to "her", not "his" peculiarities of the Russian language.

After conducting some more interviews the thrilling feeling of novelty changed with some routine perception of the process, when it was possible to see some similarities and differences in data

provided, although it brought different emotions later, when sensitive and shocking information was provided unexpectedly. Remembering one episode of her life, one informant provided striking and really touching information about her father's death and that resulted in a long pause when I didn't know how to continue further interviewing and could hardly find the right words to continue communication. The informant took the initiative to continue to herself, something that made me think that it was ok to go further, although the researcher remained emotionally affected for a long time.

To sum up, it's worth to note that the process brought good and detailed data, because the WBIDI provided opportunity to ask probing questions, raise interesting topics during the interviewing process and was close to natural "chatting" communication. Some participants commented that it had helped them to reflect better about their time in Norway.

#### **4.4 Addressing constraints and dilemmas**

##### **4.4.1 Face-to-face vs. web-based in-depth interviews**

During gathering data process, the researcher met some constraints which can be caused by weaknesses conditioned by the nature of the research method. Berg (2009:119) points out that in some situations "interview can be very *time-consuming* data gathering technique", but this time consuming can directly depend on the length of an interview and the type of interview.

As long as both F2FIDI and WBIDI were conducted, it's possible to see some advantages and disadvantages of the research methods. Most of WBIDI were conducted in evenings, and sometimes it was too late to continue interview and therefore we had to pause for some days to find time to meet online again to continue the process. The shortest WBIDI took about half an hour because of difficulties of the informant to use more time for the process. This resulted to sending more probing questions by-email than usually and spending more time to get answers. The longest WBIDI lasted about one and half hour and provided complete and detailed data that did not require many clarifying questions. The online interviews without video were more time consuming than F2FIDI, because typing of text took more time than speaking. Even if the only F2FIDI took almost same time as the longest WBIDI, the face-to-face interview flowed in a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere with long breaks when needed and provided twice as much and varied data, including information about body language and facial expressions, compared with the web-based one. At the same time, this drawback was compensated with producing textual data during WBIDI something that saved time transcribing.

The problem of *lack of visual observed information* during WBIDI could be solved by using camera, but most of the respondents admitted that they would prefer interview without camera because they didn't feel comfortable with using camera. Using different emoticons with meanings

of “glad”, “happy”, “confused” and other expressions could provide some of the complementary information, but in the situation of written communication they were absolutely under control of the respondent and some of the “feelings” could stay “invisible” for the researcher.

Due to the nature of the research, the WBIDI was considered as the beneficial research method since most of the respondents resided quite remote from each other and from researcher. This method, therefore, saved the problem of *minimizing costs* of travelling and made it possible to implement the research. By calculating the positive vs. negative effects of online interview without video, the researcher applied this method as the commonly used for the present study.

#### **4.4.2 Language and conceptual sensitivity**

All the informants in the study have the same mother language as the researcher. That made it quite easy to understand all the peculiarities of interview language and analyze use of language in a certain situation. At the same time all the data must be analyzed and translated to another language. The researcher could probably have conducted all the interviews in English, but this variant was less desirable, because it is much easier to get complete and diverse information in a native language than to make respondents to express themselves in English. That could cause difficulties both for informants and researcher, when one needs to find right words and conceptions to express meanings. This understanding resulted in the conviction that he researcher needed to conduct interviews in Russian (mother language) and translate all the data into English. Sometimes conceptual system and set of ideas expressed in one county’s language have no exact equivalents in other societies and languages (Lisle, 1985). Dealing with the problem, the researcher could just find approximation in translation of the concepts. For instance, some of the respondents used idiomatic language frequently and this information could not be translated absolutely directly and literally from Russian to English. The researcher found the solution of the problem in careful translation practice to English, with, for instance, approximating the Russian idiom that literally sounds like “to be in somebody’s skin” to the English idiom “to be in somebody’s shoes”, that have close and relevant meaning of being in a situation similar to that of another. The additional explanation with detailed nationally contextual information on the concept background could help in the situation with translation of Russian intrinsic concepts. Such practice can contribute to reducing loss of information and inaccuracy in translation and therefore diminish danger for misinterpretation (Hantrais, 2004).

#### **4.4.3 Ethical consideration and interviewer bias**

According to Guidelines for Research Ethics (Forskiningssetiske Komiteer, 2006), the researcher should avoid making unreasonable generalizations that can result in stigmatization of the group, provide confidentiality of the information and show respect to all the individuals of the research.

Confidentiality was provided by changing names of the participants with the false ones that could not be associated with their real names and directly indication of the involved informants was removed. All the transcribed data will be destroyed after its appropriate use. All the participants got necessary information about the research presented in a clear and easy to understand way with clarifications in their native language if they had some questions.

Another challenge of the study is to include “the researcher’s self” in the investigation. The researcher is a part of the relatively small group of Russian students and explores it both inside and outside. At the same time, the researcher has made some choices and has some experiences and therefore perceptions from participation in this program, something that should not result in the researcher bias and influence findings. According to the Dictionary of the Social Sciences (Reading, 1996:28), “bias is a systematic distortion influencing the outcomes of research.” The researcher should avoid producing analysis skewed towards the interviewer’s own opinions, prejudices and values. Keeping in mind and understanding the possibility of the problem as well as frequently asking myself “Am I biased?” during every phase of research from study design to data collection and analysis, helped to avoid the bias and to use “neutral lenses” in order to see all the shades of the investigated phenomenon.

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

To perform data analysis is both a demanding and thrilling process of organizing data and making some sense of it. It was quite difficult in the beginning to understand where one should start and how to go further, and although, it was clear intellectually, the inexperienced researcher got lost at the point in the actual coding of data for some time. Furseth and Everett (2013:119) called structuring the analysis as an “art of keeping a steady course”. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), the stage of data analysis requires careful management in order to avoid making accent on imposing highly structured coding rather than contributing to highlighting the meaning.

According to Berg (2009:341), “any items that can be made into text are amenable to content analysis.” The WBIDI and F2FIDI data presented easily made texts, which were available right after interviewing in the first case and transformed into transcript in the last one. Therefore, the present study considers *content analysis* to be relevant analysis technique. According to Neuendorf (2002), content analysis is a careful and detailed systematic explanation and interpretation of material in order to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings. Hsieh and Shanon (2005) argue that there are different approaches to conduct qualitative content analysis. The present study uses the approach called *conventional content analysis* that involves coding categories that have been derived directly and inductively from the raw data with the purpose of

theory or discussions and theoretical explanations generation of the document content under analysis (ibid).

To conduct content analysis for this study, the raw interview data were collected and made into texts (transcripts), then codes were analytically developed and linked to relevant parts of transcripts, and then codes were transformed into themes and material were sorted by these themes, identifying similar phrases, relationships and patterns. At the last stage, the identified patterns were considered in the light of previous research and theoretical background, code frequencies were compared and some generalizations were established. Thus, the thematic analysis provided systematizing and encoding data by involvement and interpretation from the researcher and focused on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data.

By this process at the first stage four main parts for the analysis were distinguished such as “Understanding students’ motivation”, “Challenges under stay”, “Benefits from student mobility” and “Decision to stay or return”. Then, these categories became subcategories as “Motivation for occupation choice” and “Motivation for student mobility” and at the last stage the identification of core categories for analysis such as for instance “Willing to live abroad and get new experiences”, “Network, family and background influence” and “The role of HE institutions and cooperation between countries” occurred. This process was described by Corbin and Strauss (1990) as *open coding* or unrestricted coding of data, related to the first stage and presented the themes in analysis which provided meaning of the content. Then *analytical coding* follows that goes beyond descriptive coding and presents the second subdivision. At the last stage *selective coding* is applied to provide identification of the core themes the research is focused on.

Conducting data analysis for this study, the researcher tried to describe, interpret data and connect it to theory because of the importance of data-theory interaction in analysis. The describing of data included quotations from the interview that should provide more accuracy and supporting to the researcher’s statements (Furseth & Everett, 2013). The interpretation of the data implied in practice comparing similarities and differences, as well as criticizing and discussing different themes. The reference to theoretical discussions of previous research and theoretical approach created discussions for the present study and relationship between theory and empirical data that is presented in the “Concluding thoughts and discussions” subchapters.

#### **4.6 Validity and reliability of the research**

When the researcher conducted data collection and analysis, it was important to keep in mind critical understanding of reliability and validity of the present study. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 246), validity “refers in ordinary language to the truth, the correctness, and the

strength of a statement”. In other words, it corresponds with data being logically or factually sound. To improve validity of the data, the interview guide was examined on presence of leading questions and if these were found, they were reformulated in the proper way. The sample consisted of former student from different years and both those who decided to continue international career and those who returned to Russia were presented evenly, something which could improve the validity of the research by providing a relatively broad sample.

Reliability refers to the “degree to which the findings of the study are independent of accidental circumstances of their production” (Kirk & Miller, 1986:20). According to Silverman (2006), careful transcribing of tape recordings and detailed describing of research strategy and data analysis method will make research more reliable and that principle was applied to the present research. Silverman (ibid) argued that reliability could be improved by comparing the analysis of the same data by several researchers. Although, the present research is based on the previous studies, no absolutely similar data were discussed in the regarded previous research and the findings will not represent the situation for all the student of social work or all the Russian mobile students from different counties who move to different countries, but will give more context specific information.

#### ***4.7 Limitations of the study***

The present study aims to investigate students’ motivations, their perceptions on the benefits from student mobility and the decision on location after completing the first year of studies in Norway or after graduation. The study focuses only on Russian students that can give more pointed focus. At the same time, including more nationalities in the research could provide more room for comparison and therefore could reveal some findings that could be generalized for bigger population.

The researcher tried to contact some male participants of the program but it was not successful and some previous students refused to participate in the study. Therefore, gender issue is not discussed in the present study. The study focuses only on one study program in social work, something that benefits more specific data and more detailed analysis for the concrete field. However, including more programs in the research could reveal peculiarities of student perceptions from different studies and some similarities and differences in experiences with student mobility in Norway.

The present study does not focus on difference in adjustment to culture and immigrants’ participating in labour market between Norwegian and other European countries and therefore is not discussed in the study.

Despite the limitations, the study includes the comparative element of discussing the issue of decision to continue international careers or returning to Russia. The focus on one nationality and

one study program has a potential to discuss several interrelated issues in one research. Thus, for instance motivation and outcomes of the student mobility can be connected like cause and effect of a phenomenon. Although the research leaves room for deeper and more detailed analysis with use of alternative theories within every relevant issue discussed.

## **Chapter 5: Understanding students' motivation**

The current chapter presents data and discussions on the issue of student motivation in entering the field of social work and participating in student mobility between Russia and Norway. The role of students' biography and network background along with other factors are discussed in the subchapter "Motivation for social work occupation." The role of HE institutions and cooperation between countries, personal interest and background influence is outlined in the subchapter "Motivation for student mobility."

### **5.1 Motivation for social work occupation**

#### **5.1.1 Role of traumatic accident**

Studies on motivation for choice of social work as profession conducted by Hanson & McCullagh (1995) and DiCaccavo (2002) connected social work occupation choice with traumatic childhood experiences. The participants of the present study did not reveal any traumatic childhood experiences, and on the contrary the most of them stressed out that their families did not have any contact with social work services during their childhood. Some of the participants, who actually did not have social work education in their educational background before applying for master studies, revealed the traumatic events in their lives happened shortly before their decision to apply for master studies in social work. Janna (case J) provided an example of such a heart-breaking event in her family:

*Afterwards I got personal experience with social work services when my father was ill. It happened a year before I applied for the program. My father had a stroke and the part of his body was paralyzed. Unfortunately, in this situation a person is left alone with his problem and just relatives can take care of him... Daddy died...*

Another student describes a striking episode of her life, which influenced the choice of master field in a direct way:

*I had to choose between pedagogical or social work master studies. A day before my entrance examination to pedagogical master studies, a man in the street died in front of me. I tried to call to the ambulance while many people passed by without putting attention to this case. I was not able to participate in the exam the next day... (Eli, case E)*

Eli admitted that this accident influenced her career and educational development. She would begin a teacher career without continuing education, if she did not enter the master in social work studies in Russia.

These events may illustrate the influence of traumatic experience on choice of field of studies both in a direct and indirect way, but cannot be considered decisive motivational factors, because of



importance to recognize combination of different motives influencing the decision, something that is discussed further throughout the chapter.

The findings complement some of the previous research mentioned above with the idea that the traumatic event influencing interest in the social work field could happen not only in childhood. However, the examples above confirm the findings of Parker and Merrylees (2002) that considers biography of the social student and experience of emotional and traumatic event within the family or close environment, along with sense of altruism and service to others, influencing the choice of social work occupation.

### **5.1.2 The role of biography, background and previous experience in social work**

Remembering the first meeting with social work field some students didn't recall any traumatic episodes of their life, but mentioned a woman, helping the older people:

*It was a woman who helped my grandmother to take care of herself and her house, because my grandmother did not want to move to our house and live with us. It was about 13 years ago (Cecilia, case C)*

*I was acquainted with one woman in Russia, who helped old people not for money, but for the idea of helping people. (Hanna, case H)*

Brooks (2003) and Sjaastad (2012) declare that interpersonal relationships and influence of family and friends are strong motivating factors in the choice of profession for young people. The examples of Alina, Benedicte and Eli show the influence of family members and environment in a choice of career. Thus, Eli (Case E) had family members and friends working in the field of health and social work: "My sister worked as a social worker in the psychiatric field and some friend work in other fields of social work. I worked as a social worker at school in Russia."

Another respondent mentioned the direct role of parents and family in choosing a social work occupation:

*I was 16 when I began to learn about social work. I was too young and I would admit that my parents decided much for me. I was not so good in math and therefore this field seemed to be attractive. When I began to learn more about social work, I understood that it was mine, it was so right for me. (Benedicte, case B)*

Alina dreamt to work within the field of social work from her childhood, but due to parents' influence and other circumstances, she did not choose social work as her bachelor degree. She got the first volunteer experience of working within the social work field while attending MSWCP program in Norway:

*The philosophy of helping people is very close to my heart. I had have a willingness to work within social work field since my childhood and I felt that I could get the opportunity to do*

*what I always wanted. During my stay in Norway I was lucky enough to work as a volunteer in Women's shelter, the crisis center for women. I helped the women with housekeeping and looking after children, while they were busy with cooking or taking a shower. (Alina, case A)*

In these different examples, we see how parents both influence stimulated interest to social work career and suspend its development, when other circumstances as “low wages” or “low status» came into consideration of the family.

Several former students admitted that their first meeting with the field of social work happened during their work or studies at a university in Russia. Thus, Janna and Diana have similar traits in their stories about first meeting with social work field:

*The first meeting with social worker took place when I participated in a sociological research about social work with elderly people. I was interviewer and perceived this most as gaining experience in conducting social research and communicating with people. We interviewed both clients and social workers. (Janna, case J)*

*The first social workers in my life were my students. I graduated in psychological studies and the social work and psychology was the one faculty at my university at that time. I began to work as a scientific assistant at the Social work and Psychology department. I was a lecturer for social work students while planning and implementing their study program. Moreover, I met social workers as a researcher conducting social studies and visiting homes for the elderly people. (Diana, case D)*

Benedicte (Case B), who also entered the field of social work through studies in the university, describes the first meeting with social workers as shocking and eye-opening:

*The first time when I saw a social worker was during my practice at university in the first year of studies. I understood the role of education. There is a difference between a social worker and specialist in social work in Russia. The latter one works in the field of social work management, the Pension fund or, for instance, at school. While social worker in understanding of overage Russian is a woman helping older people. I understood that without education you will not go so far in the social work career. A personal engagement means also a lot. I think, not everyone can work in this profession.*

Benedicte, realizing that education makes a difference, created a robust educational background in social work field and got job at the same university in the field of social work education and research. Another participant Gina did not have any social work educational background and applied for MSWCP from Norway after living and working in the country for some time; she had a job visa and relationships with a boyfriend before she applied for the program. For Gina (Case G) entering the MSWCP program was the first meeting with the field:

*I never had experience with social work before entering the MSWCP program. My motivation was to get a Norwegian education and a profession which can be applicable in Norwegian context, because I had already lived here. It was only possibility to choose this program in social work in the city I lived, because of my previous educational background and language competence.*

Other participants like Eli (Case E) mentioned plenty of experience in the field of social work in Russia before entering the MCWCP program:

*I've got experience as a volunteer in the social work organization "the Red Cross", practice at orphanages, centers for people with disabilities, drug and alcohol abused, homes for elderly people and other institutions.*

According to Parker and Merrylees (2002), a student biography has a great impact on choice of social work as an occupation and study subject and the examples from different biographies of the former students presented different aspects of this influence. While some students had just met some social workers in their life, who worked and helped family members or familiar people, other had social workers in their family. At the same time, the majority of the students of the present study entered social work field with no or little experience related to social work, and the education in Russia and in Norway introduced the first meeting with the social work field. In this light, other motivations to study social work are relevant to discuss in the following subchapter.

### **5.1.3 The philosophy of helping people**

Most of the participants mentioned the willingness to help others as the source of motivation for entering the MSWCP study. A number of studies (Hanson & McCullagh, 1995; Holme & Maizels, 1978; Solas, 1994; O'Connor et al., 1984; Parker & Merrylees, 2002) pointed out the sense of altruism and willingness to help people as one of the most important motivational factors for entering the field of social work. The following quotations from Janna, Hanna and Cecilia provide illustration of the argument:

*Even if I don't consider myself to be a professional social worker, I am convinced that everybody should be a social worker, at least to some extent. Everyone should help other people.* Janna (Case J)

*I wanted to do well to others and work with children with disabilities, because these children get so little, almost no help in Russia.* Hanna (Case H)

*I have educational background from a related field and I'm not a social worker. But I would admit that working with people, helping people, communicating with people, learning from people and being inspired with new ideas bring me joy.* Cecilia (Case C)

These former students mentioned that they do not identify themselves as social workers in a profession even if they got some education in the professional field, but the willingness to help and work with people gives meaning to be engaged in this field and provide the reason of its importance. Thus, Hanna (case H) from her point of view mentioned the least advantaged group of the population in Russia that stimulated the interest and willing to help others and to be engaged in this field. The following subsection continues to outline the motivation for the MSWCP program.

#### **5.1.4 Practical issue of social problems and entering the new field of professional knowledge**

The MSWCP program is perceived to be uniting for people with different educational backgrounds, where social work, psychology, philosophy, social studies, education and linguistics are interrelated and supportive. Some students entered social work field with master studies in social work both in Russia and in Norway. Especially those who had mostly theoretical education wanted to explore the practical issues of social work or try and learn something new. Iselin (Case I) describes her motivation as following:

*I thought that this education fitted well with my previous education in history and circumpolar studies. This education was important for me; we all live in this social world and in our life we all meet social work field in different aspects. I was interested to see more the practice of social work in Norway and learn more about qualitative and quantitative research methods.*

Janna (Case J), who has mostly theoretical and abstract education in her background, stresses out the same interest in practical issues as one of the sources of her motivation: “I wanted to enhance my educational background with some practical issues, like social work. Moreover, I was interested to learn more about practical issues of social problems”.

Eli as well as Frida wanted to get knowledge in a new field. While Frida wanted to get one more practical profession in Norway, Eli applied for master in social work studies in Russia and described her motivation as following:

*I wanted to try a new career field, help people and to learn something new. In spite of the fact that it was easier to continue the pedagogical career and enter master studies in pedagogy, I managed to enter the social work master program in Russia with a good score. (Eli, case E)*

As we can see from the participants’ statements above, some of them mentioned that they wanted to get knowledge and skills in a new field, something which is related to the human capital theory by Becker (1964). To get the second higher education in another field will usually cost money in Russia, but most of the students can have opportunity to get a scholarship from the Norwegian government and therefore they may obtain potential economic returns after considering both the known and unknown costs and returns of migration. Janna (Case J) got scholarship only for 6

months and considers distance learning as a good idea, because it benefited to enhancing of her human capital without high costs:

*This program was good for me, because I could combine obtaining an international master degree with my work without departing for a long time. It was possible to attend the courses in Norway for 6 months and then return to my workplace and continue education on distance. Moreover, I am interested in opportunity to continue education on PhD level.*

To sum up, it's important to note that all the participants mentioned more than one source for their motivation and the combination of the sources differ from informant to informant. However, most of the respondents mentioned the sense of altruism and willingness to help people as the one of their motivational aspects. Moreover, the MSWCP is an international program and the student's motivation for entering the field closely related to their motivation for student mobility and should be seen in their interconnection. The next subchapter will present data about the students' motivation for taking education abroad.

## **5.2 Motivation for student mobility**

### **5.2.1 Willing to live abroad and get the new experiences**

The students vary in their previous mobility experiences. Some of the students came to Norway or participated in mobility for the first time, while other students had already been mobile students. For Eli (Case E) it was the first experience as a mobile student: "Actually I was to study in Finland, but circumstances did not allow this. I did not choose Norway as my first choice; I just was interested in travelling aboard to study".

Several other students mentioned that participation in MSWCP was not their first visit to Norway and Bodø:

*I thought it could be a great idea, because I had been in Norway before and my friends had been here, I was acquainted with the country and the city. (Janna, case J)*

*It was usual at the faculty I graduated. I had been in Bodø before and I knew how the education was organized. (Iselin, case I)*

*I've been in Norway before while conducting some practice at University in Russia and I liked it. I knew a lot both about social work in Norway, but I wanted to see more how education is organized in this country. Benedicte (Case B)*

Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2012) considers previous experience of domestic and international mobility as one of the components of mobility capital, "enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad" (ibid: 51).

Frida (case F) explains her motivation to get the MSWCP education as following: "My motivation

was to get education in one more practical profession and see how students study in different countries, and to improve my Norwegian language skills.”

Here we can see that she focuses on the international aspect in her motivation as well as getting and improving different skills. Language proficiency is another element of mobile capital (Murphy-Lejeune, 2012). While some of the students have average proficiency in English, others like for example Frida and Hanna have already learned some Norwegian before student mobility. Hanna (Case H), moreover, stresses out the importance of an international element in her motivation to study at MSWCP program: “I wanted to live in another country and to learn about different cultures. I was interested to study in a multicultural environment and learn about social work practice in different counties”.

The personality of the student is also regarded by Murphy-Lejeune (2012) as one of the elements of mobility capital. In her study she found that no matter the nationality, a certain type of personality seems to be more open to exploring and getting international experiences than others. The participants described themselves correspondently with Murphy-Lejeune’s students: most of the informants of the present study described themselves as being outgoing, curious, eager for novelty or difference, with good social and communication skills already before participation in student mobility. Thus, Cecilia (Case C) argued: “I like changes and new experiences. Studying abroad was the perfect chance for me to get to know a new country.”

As soon as students vary in mobility capital, this theory can explain why some students can have different experiences and perceptions with the same things during their stay in Norway.

### **5.2.2 Network, family and background influence**

The studies on migration motivation (Mansoor & Quillin, 2006) and student migration in particular (Altbach, 1991) often regard push and pull factors theory. The participant’s statements demonstrate the presence of both factors, where the pull factors are mostly represented. Thus, Hanna and Cecilia had somebody wishing them to be closer, what can correspond with the willingness of family reunification as a social pull factor:

*My mother lives in Norway and was on vacations in Norway every year since I was 15 years old. I learned Norwegian language in environment and, therefore, I chose Norway for my international education; it made it easier for me to live in the country... And my mother wanted me to move to Norway. (Hanna, case H)*

Cecilia (case C) describes her motivation in the following way:

*It was important for me that I could get freedom to move between European counties. My boyfriend lives in Europe and I wanted to be closer to him. We had been dating 2 years before I began to study in Norway. Our relationship has been lasting for 4 years now.*

Altbach (1991) along with Brooks and Waters (2011) mentioned educational immigration and stressed out the fact that some students going abroad have no intention to return. The in-depth interviews revealed that some other participants had a distance relationship with some Norwegian citizens, although they did not admit participation in this program as a way to be closer to boyfriend. Cecilia thought it was quite formidable to speak open about it, but anyway she argued that the immigration factor was the strongest for her motivation to move to Norway to take the education. Cecilia's (Case C) explanation illustrates the statement in the following way:

*I can admit that choice of the program was strongly connected with our relationship, not my willingness to get more education. I tried to find some possibility to study in the country my boyfriend lives, but it didn't go well because of bureaucratic problems and strict language requirements. I considered another European country where one of my friends lives and works now, but when I was offered the possibility to study in Norway, I accepted it without hesitation.*

According to Brooks and Walters (2011), decision-making for student mobility is influenced by the desire of many middle-class families to accumulate cultural capital and ensure social reproduction. For many students in mentioned studies as long as for some in the present study, a decision to move overseas for education was taken by the whole family, and was perceived as a family project. Another study by Clayton et al. (2009) argues that the middle-class students are happy to have any opportunity to move away from home to pursue their degree. All the students in the present study reported that they grew up in middle-class families with some variations in prosperity features. Alina (Case A) described the situation around her motivation to choose education in Russia and Norway like this:

*I chose the University program in Russia which allowed to study more about Scandinavian countries. My big sister studied at the same faculty and the same study. It was a great chance to participate in student mobility, as it happened both for me and my sister. Our parents influenced a lot. Even if this education doesn't lead directly to prosperous career with high wages, the chance to study abroad was taking into consideration at the family meeting and influenced the decision a lot.*

We can see here that family orientation to mobility was defied with high priority already on the step of choosing education in a home country. The family project issue can also be seen in a situation around Hanna's motivation to move to Norway presented above, when mother influenced the daughter because she wanted her daughter to move to Norway. However, Hanna does not perceive this to be her main motivation. She (Case H) argued: "I had a strong desire to get education abroad and wanted actually to study in Sweden. I have a friend living there. One good friend lives in Austria."

Most of the former students admitted that they had acquaintances who participated in student mobility, that show a strong influence of network and friends in decision to move abroad:

*In Russia I was acquainted with a girl participated in student mobility in the US. When she came back, she was lost in admiration of her new experience and she looked very stylish. It was not so typical for middle-class Russian people at that time. I thought it was exciting.* Gina (case G)

*Almost all my former classmates continued education abroad as well as former students from my group at linguistic faculty at the University. My friends studied here at the program and they recommended this program to me.* Janna (case J)

The situation at the faculties with the two last participants relates to the study of Artamonova and Demchuk (2012) about student mobility in Russia, where they stressed out the “mass” character of student mobility, because of the compulsory organization of student mobility at universities caused by internationalization of higher education. The role of cooperation between the countries is discussed in the next subsection.

### **5.2.3 The role of HE institutions and cooperation between countries**

Internationalization of higher education contributed to developing of professional networks and projects aiming to facilitate student mobility between partner universities. According to Altbach (1991), foreign students are placed in the center of such complex network of academic relationships and represent “*human embodiments of a worldwide trend*” toward the internationalization of education and research (Altbach, 1991:305). Most of the former students in this study declared that they got information about possibility to take the MSWCP education in Norway through their network at universities in Russia, something that corresponds with the statements above. Thus, Janna (Case J) commented on this:

*There was no great choice of opportunities between countries because the University of Nordland cooperated with the University I worked at. I was recommended the concrete program in Norway and didn't know about the same opportunity to study social work in other countries like Finland at that moment.*

Diana stresses out the idea that the faculty had to send somebody as a mobility student that corresponds with Artamonova and Demchuk (2012) perception that the student mobility became a compulsory trend for universities. Diana's (Case D) statement serves as a good example:

*The year I participated in student mobility another person working at our faculty should take this education, but she refused and I asked for this opportunity. It was a splendid chance for me, because I wanted to study abroad. I didn't choose the country of mobility, I just confirmed that I had good English skills and it was enough. They had to send somebody.”*



Benedicte (Case B) describes the situation very similar to Janna:

*I didn't choose the country, because my faculty cooperated with Norway. I was interested in a special field of social work and my supervisor participated in cooperation with Norway. She advised me this program. And I really wanted to travel and study abroad. You must be a fool to refuse to study abroad, in Norway, with possibility to live in this country. I was attracted by this opportunity. It didn't look financially difficult because of the scholarship provided.*

As we see in the narrative, Benedicte stresses out the enticing factor of providing scholarship and possibility to live in a country with high standard of living. This can be perceived as strong pull factor, according to Mansoor and Quillin (2006), who regarded potential for improved standard of living and prospects of higher wages (scholarship in our case) as economical and demographical pull factors facilitating migration. For the same reason, self-financed students could be attracted by free education in Norway, as Hanna (Case H) declares: "I had also a strong will to get international education and considered Sweden, but that year this country didn't provide any free programs for students outside the EU." Hanna's statement stands in line with Wiers-Jenssen's (2013) findings that consider Norway to be high attractive country to get education because of free education and studies in English. Although, being self-financed student, Hanna had some difficulties during her stay and had to have two part-time jobs to support her stay financially. She did not finish her studies but commented on this as following: "I'd like to continue education and even apply for PhD, but I'll never go as a self-financed student again especially with regard to current situation in Russian economy (Hanna, case H)". Altbach (1991) discussing push and pull factors in the context of student mobility, pointed out that individuals applying for foreign studies measures *costs* of education and staying abroad and size of stipends, and this is especially important for self-financed students, because many foreign students often meet serious economic problems, "sometimes resulting in an interruption of studies, part-time work, health difficulties, the failure to complete degrees and others" (Altbach, 1991:311). In the next chapters different challenges under students' stay abroad will be discussed in detail.

### **5.3 Concluding thoughts and discussions**

The present study shows that combination of different motivational factors drive student to apply for the MSWCP program. Regarding motivation for occupational choice in a field of social work, four main sources of motivation as influence choice have been identified: traumatic events, the influence of biography and background in the social work field, the willingness to help people, and motivation for getting more practical aspects in educational background. This corresponds with the findings of Parker and Merrylees (2002) and adds some specific factors caused by the

international character of the program and its holistic heterogeneous focus on discussion of social problems interdisciplinary.

Discussing motivation for student mobility, the factors like willingness to invest in human and mobility capital (Becker, 1964; Murphy-Lejeune, 2012) by living abroad and getting new international experiences, family, network and background influence and important role of cooperation between universities caused by internationalization of higher education have been mentioned. The findings correspond with the ideas of Altbach (1991), who considered both individual level of motivation and host-sending countries interests and cooperation to be decisive in facilitating student migration. The study regards applying the theory of push-pull factors (Ravenstein, 1885; Mansoor & Quillin, 2006; Altbach, 1991) to be appropriate to situation of student mobility, where economical, demographical and social pull factors seem to be more significant for the students.

It seems that family, personal networking and background influence is both crucial for occupational choice and willingness to student mobility participation, which corresponds with findings of Brooks and Waters (2011), Clayton et al. (2009), Sjaastad (2012) and Brooks (2003). Moreover, interaction between different motivational factors for occupational choice and student mobility plays an important role, where various motivational factors show different priority. If one student is more interested in getting new knowledge, another one has the main motivation in participating in student mobility. Therefore, the finding can hardly be generalized to all the student population participating in the program, and every single case should be considered with taking into account all combinations of motivational factors. In other words, conclusions can be right for one case and can have its nuances for others, although some common patterns can be highlighted. Thus, most of the students referred to important role of established patterns of cooperation between universities in Norway and Russia, which corresponds with studies on internationalization of higher education (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Altbach, 1991; Artamonova, Demchuk, 2012). This study provides some evidence confirming the theory of some students have immigration as a motivational factor already before they apply for study (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Altbach, 1991). However, just a few patterns can be drawn definitely, something that implies the possibility to find some more common ideas and explanations through further investigation. Thus, the results of mobility for students and their decisions on location can possibly reveal some details helping to understand the students' motivation better.

## Chapter 6: Challenges under student mobility or “being in the migrant’s shoes”

The present chapter discusses challenges the students faced in meeting with new culture/cultures during student mobility. Multiple realities construction is discussed with reference to Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) social constructionism theory. The next chapters discuss the issues of benefits students obtained (Chapter 7) and the decision they made (Chapter 8) about location choice. The general findings and discussions are summed up in the last chapter (Chapter 9).

### **6.1 Meeting with the new culture – culture shock, surprise or discovery?**

Berry (1997) discussing meeting with and adaptation to a new culture, considered the term *acculturation* to be a more appropriate term than a “culture shock” proposed by Oberg (1960), because cultural adaptation is a process of interaction between two cultures, while culture is a concept which has a mono context. Benedicte (Case B) also insisted on the difference between the “culture shock” and the process the former students undergo, especially in the situation when they plan to stay in the host country for longer time:

*It wasn’t my first time when I visited Norway, but I liked everything here from very beginning. Then when I knew that I would stay here for longer time, the adult life began, when I had to solve problems with getting job and so on. I suppose the same difficulties are faced when people move from small towns to megalopolises in Russia. I would not call it “culture shock”, but the process of acculturation and adaptation.*

Several of the students participated in the study have been abroad for several times and they mentioned that they did not experience culture shock described by Oberg (1960) or any stress related to the process of adaptation to a new culture (Berry, 1997).

*I didn’t experience any culture shock; on the contrary I have always liked everything in Norway and the European country I live in now. I’m in love with the city I live in now even after several years of being here. Cecilia, (case C)*

*That time I didn’t experience any culture shock, and if I remember my first visit to Norway, I would call it discovery of the country, new culture, student housing, shops, university, people and so on. Iselin (case I)*

The examples corresponds with the findings of Murphy-Lejeune (2012) showing that many European students do not perceive the meeting with a new culture as a stress, but mostly as a discovery and surprise of a new culture. Furthermore, taking into consideration the culture shock theory (Oberg, 1960), the most students describe their “honeymoon stage” or the first time being in Norway more that a pleasant culture “surprise”. Several students like Eli (Case E) mentioned

friendly people, clean streets and polite bus drivers as the main pleasant culture differences the student noticed: “People talking foreign languages, the Norwegian lifestyle from bread slicing machines at the supermarkets to waste sorting, cleanliness everywhere, public transport and friendliness... It seemed so surprising and unusual for me”.

Kenneth (1971) noted that the first euphoria stage of the adaptation to a new culture, when a sojourner is fascinated by the new environment around her or him, can last from a few days to a few months depending on the circumstances of the individuals. Some students noticed some things they didn't like already from the first days of being in Norway. Diana (Case D) recalled the following: “I experienced culture shock; I was not used to streets without people and shops closed on Sundays.” Eli (Case E) argued: “I thought everything, especially school books, was so expensive, because I converted all the prices into rubles”.

In the case of the study, many students stay in Norway more than six months, so it could be relevant for them to experience some barriers in adaptation to a new culture. When Berry (2005) called such barriers as “acculturative stress”, caused by reaction in response to life events in a new culture, Oberg (1960) related it to the crisis stage of the culture shock, when the sojourner could feel frustrated, anxious and angry. The main barriers the students faced under their stay during the first year of education at the MSWCP are discussed further.

## **6.2 Experiencing barriers under stay**

### **6.2.1 Financial barriers**

Most of the Russian students of the MSWCP program got some kind of scholarship for participating in the studies, although it seems that it does not mean that these students do not meet any financial problems during their stay in Norway. The problems were usually caused by insufficient information to the students about the actual procedure of getting a scholarship. Diana (Case D) describes it as following:

*It was very difficult for me. But my situation can be quite different from others. I participated at summer school in Norway right before the MSWCP program and we got little financing in June. The courses at university began in august, but the first scholarship payment was in the end of September. It was quite long period between payments and I had not enough money, in spite of I had some cash from Russia. I had not expected this situation at all.*

Another participant describes the negative experience with payment caused by insufficient information:

*We were not warned that the second payment of scholarship will be transferred to a credit card. It takes time to make a Norwegian credit card, so it resulted in that we had to live on own money for a long period of time. I got information about the credit card from one PhD*

*student; the international office didn't inform us. There were several students from different educational programs who experienced the same. Eli (case E)*

Both for Eli and Diana it was the first experience of student mobility that can point to insufficient mobility capital that causes the problems of this kind. Most of the former students, especially those with long and various experience of international mobility, did not mention the same problem, but quite contrary were very satisfied with the financial support. Thus, Janna (Case J) stated: "I got scholarship for 6 months and it was pretty enough for me, I even saved some money for vacations."

Diana (Case D) also benefited financially from her stay in Norway, in spite of some problems in the beginning: "I saved a lot of money that helped me to move to the megalopolis where I live in now."

Some self-financed students experienced more financial problems during their stay in Norway something that corresponds with findings of Altbach (1991) about self-financed students' difficulties during their stay abroad:

*During my first stay in Norway on another program, I had a scholarship and my parents helped me with money, everything was fine. Then I returned home to Russia to finish my education and after one year I got the worker visa the next time I came to Norway. It was quite different experience, because I would not manage it as a self-financed student without help from my parents. Gina (Case G)*

*I got some scholarship for short time stay for 3 months and I got some part-time job after it. But I can admit, I couldn't manage it without financial help from my parents. Benedicte (Case B)*

Hanna (Case H), who was a self-financed student from the very beginning, had two different part-time jobs to support herself financially. She accepted that it was quite specific experience, but she concluded: "I managed to support myself financially. I even managed to save some money for vacations in Switzerland, France and Egypt." And sending smiling emoticons she added: "...and buy a couple of suitcases with clothes" Hanna (case H). So, not every self-financed student experiences economic barriers, therefore, other kinds of obstacles are worth to discuss in the next subsection.

### **6.2.2 Social and psychological barriers**

Most of the participants told that they got information and help from university when they need that and they had friends they spent their free time with. Some of the participants of the program had lived for some time in Norway before applying for the master degree as, for instance, Gina. She (Case G) told: "I was acquainted with some Russian guys who had lived in Norway for long

time and they could advice where I should go or whom I had to contact. I always got help if I need it.” The opposite perception is illustrated by Diana (Case D), who came to Norway alone to participate in the summer school first and then to study at the MSWCP program. She told a different story of her fist time in Norway:

*The weeks after summer school in Bodø I felt very lonely, because I was the only Russian left in Bodø from the group; sometimes I even sobbed because of loneliness. Later I got many friends, but the most of them were Russians.*

Alina and Cecilia admitted that understanding the social system and engagement in learning more about it, seems to be crucial to avoid serious problems and reduce the problems of the acculturative stress of adaptation:

*It was not my first travel to Norway, so I didn't experience any culture shock. And I didn't experience that during my first time being in Norway. I chose education in Russia focused on Scandinavian politics, culture, religion, lifestyle, social system, so I knew many peculiarities of the country before I travelled to Norway. Alina (case A)*

*I had to use dentist help and was happy to find information about student compensation of the expensive service. I just read information about different student discounts at the University internet page and found information about this possibility. Moreover, I asked the University social services about the issue and they gave me addresses of the dentists I could use. Cecilia (case C)*

Cecilia and Alina pointed to the importance of getting necessary information about the relevant issues beforehand as crucial during student mobility and as the indicator of mobility capital quantity and quality, while Diana (Case D) admitted that she was not familiar with the system something which caused many problems and misunderstandings:

*I had kidney infection at that time. But I had to wait for the medical help for more than two hours in the emergency clinic. Just when I became really bad, they helped me to go to the first aid room. And moreover, I had to pay for the treatment. It was very unpleasant experience, but I have to admit, that I was not familiar with the medical system in Norway at that time.*

Diana, Benedicte and Gina admitted that they missed family and friends in Russia a lot. Thus, Diana (Case D) stated: “I missed people, my family very much especially during first months in Norway, we called each other often and communicated via internet.”

On the contrary, some other respondents mentioned that they did not miss their family and friends in Russia so much:

*I can't say that I missed my family so much. I had no time for such things. We called each other one or two times a week on Skype, it was enough; the same with my friends in Russia. But I really missed my boyfriend, living in a European country; we called each other every*

*day. I always miss him... Thanks to living in Norway, I could travel to him and he could come to me easier, without visa problems, and stay for longer time. Cecilia (case C)*

*I didn't miss my family and my friends; we talked on Skype every day, so I had no feeling that I'm somewhere far away from them. Hanna (case H)*

The data from the interviews with Hanna and Cecilia illustrate that in contemporary time the perception of space has undergone transformations because of possibility to move easily and use technologies which create plurality of spaces (Ackers, 2010; Popkewitz & Rizvi, 2009). Hanna did not miss her family, because in cyberspace she could meet everyone and create the illusion of “being near” and available when possible, or being “far, but close” that is opposite to perception of the relationship with dominant and other cultures during student mobility. This illusion could not replace some other aspects: while most students did not miss the Russian food, Hanna (Case H) describes a different experience: “But I missed Russian food a lot. I have studied all the products at the local international food shops and found some similar products from different countries and sometimes Russian products.”

Discussing challenges during stay in Bodø, Alina (Case A) remembered:

*The only problem I met during my stay in Bodø was stereotypical labeling of Russian girls. Several times Norwegian guys reproached me for coming to Norway to get a Norwegian boyfriend. And all my attempts to explain that I don't need it were not met with respect. Apparently, Russian girls have some reputation here, although I don't consider it to be something bad. After being in migrant's shoes, I did begin to realize how it feels to be a stranger in some foreign country.*

Another participant, who did not mention any challenges during her student mobility experience, noted: “I began to see people's stereotypes much clearer, because during my last months of staying in Norway I shared kitchen with some people with homophobia.” Cecilia (case C)

Both Hanna and Alina describe seeing stereotypes clearly as something they began to notice during student mobility. The examples can be interpreted with reference to Simmel's stranger theory (1908), when the students can be seen as strangers coming to the Norwegian society and are situated both inside and outside of it. Simmel (ibid) discussed stranger in a way of developing a special type of objectivity and freedom from prejudice, because migration and mobility create the necessary distance from which it is possible to observe habitual assumptions from outside. Considering different strategies of adaptation to a new culture, described by Berry (1997), it's quite unreliable to apply them to situation with mobility students. Most of the students are temporarily settled and the actual duration of their stay is uncertain and their temporary position in society does not make them assimilate or integrate into a new society. When some of the students decide to continue international career and stay for longer time in order to get a job and even

family, they move to another categories of strangers and meet other challenges of integration in the society. Therefore, it's possible to discuss creating of multiple student realities during student mobility, something that is discussed in the next section.

### **6.3 Construction of multiple student realities**

Murphy-Lejeune (2012) called mobile student “new strangers” with reference to the theory of Simmel (1908), who described the state of being a stranger as a specific form of “close but far” or “both outside and inside” (Simmel in Levine, 1971: 143-144) relationships with host country society. When international students travel abroad, they become strangers in a new culture and can perceive their strangeness in a way of “close but far” relationships. The most of the students told that they did not socialize so much with local Norwegian and Russian people apart from some sporadic acquaintances that illustrate the “close but far” relationships:

*I met Norwegians not at the University, but mostly in the clubs or on parties through common fiends. In such way I met my boyfriend, we had some common friends, both international and Norwegian. Once I asked a girl at the bus to show me the right way, we began to talk more. And we are still friends now. I remember we discussed that international students were like intentionally isolated from the Norwegian ones, so little common events were organized. Eli (case E)*

Eli's quote shows that the relationships between international and Norwegian students are framed by “close by far” situation. Even if the students situated at the same university building, they perceived how the university treat them differently: they participated mostly in different activities and were concerned with different problems. Eli could feel and describe the border between the multiple constructed realities of the student mobility. The mobile students travel from one country to another and therefore moved from one reality to a different one, something which is related to a different social context. As a result of this moving, they need to “readjust” and adapt their reality to the new one, which they face in a new country. Moreover, when they meet an international environment, a new reality is constructed that is situated somewhere “in-between” or even “above” the realities of Norwegian and Russian social contexts in a transnational space (Friedman, 1995). The theory of Berger and Luckmann (1966) explains that this reality is constructed and maintained in social situations: most of the students mentioned that they participated in international activities organized by the University and by students; they communicated and gathered with international students at their student housing, cooked together and discovered Norway together. They talked English as the language of knowledge and meaning construction corresponding to the new reality. They put the knowledge they brought with them from their social context, added it to the common international reality and took with them the new



experiences and new knowledge reconstructed during the student mobility period. The students who gathered with international groups often during their free time noticed the enriching character of this experience:

*I really enriched my international knowledge. We had people from many different countries as China, Nepal, Canada, Palestine, Malawi and USA. We all were different but we were friends and we had good relationships with each other. We gather often in our free time and helped each other with studies. We told stories from our lives and they were so different. Hanna (case H)*

Siu (1952) described sojourner as another type of modern stranger, who establishes roots in one place for a certain time with no desire for permanency. Some international students of the MSWCP program can belong to the sojourners, but it is not necessarily: the duration of their state is fixed institutionally, but at the same time it's not definite, so they can choose to stay longer or move to other countries after they stay. The students who knew very early that they would stay in Norway, or students who applied from Norway, constructed quite different and even more complicated realities during their stay. Benedicte (Case B) described the transition from being a mobile student in the following way:

*Russian students who come for short time and those Russians who have lived in Norway for long time, and local Norwegian people belong to different groups; they have different problems and different attitudes to life here. I had a network of Norwegian people I mostly communicated with, because I got my boyfriend in Norway during my previous visits. When you begin to socialize with local people, your outlooks change and you don't refer to yourself as a part of international student group with their problems. Those who come for short periods of time often don't socialize with local people; they have their own life perception and different interests. Benedicte (case B)*

Educational reality, which is one more reality constructed "in-between spaces" of institutional relations and knowledge systems (Popkewitz & Rizvi, 2009:9), becomes the common reality for such students, but they do not share all the interests of the group of international students at their free time. The international study program implies communicating and sharing experience with people from different cultures. Some of the students admitted that meeting the new cultures was quite challenging for them:

*I'd admit that it was quite difficult to communicate with my classmates from African countries and Cuba. It's absolutely different consciences. Diana (case D)*

*It was quite complicated to communicate with people from some other cultures, because we are too different. I just confirmed my perception of other countries. Some things were really*

*shocking. For instance, the story about one African culture that still has a belief about if people eat an eye of another person, they will see well. I had enough that time... Benedicte (case B)*

Constructing the international reality imply that different people from different cultures and different social worlds produced in relative segregation from each other meet and interact in a situation that has not been institutionalized for either of the participants. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), in this case they try to build some typification of actions. The best gain from this development is that one can predict an action of another, and therefore interaction of both becomes predictable, something that will build the ground for stabilizing their interaction. The theory is relevant for the international students who occur often in the situations of meeting people from different social worlds. These worlds may have some things in common, but the students from these different social worlds should take into consideration the differences and build their own strategies in making predictable and understandable different conduct and different traditions to make interaction beneficial, productive and free for tension. The following quote from Hanna (Case H) illustrates the statements above:

*However we had some misunderstandings, for instance, when one from an African culture wanted to take my food from my plate with his hands. I was shocked but then I learned that it meant acceptance as the same and the highest degree of confidence.*

When crossing the borders, the students do not participate in interaction only between the host culture and the sending culture context; they actively construct different multiply realities, conditioned by different motivations and different situations they face during their student mobility. This interaction builds background for personal development, something that discussed in the next chapter.

#### **6.4 Concluding thoughts and discussions**

The present research shows that the most of the students perceive meeting with the new country as a surprise or discover of the culture. Some of the students, who got scholarship finding, mentioned that that did not experience serious challenges during their stay in Norway. The experience can also be explained by previous experience of travelling abroad, familiarity with the main features of the social system and personal engagement in problem solving that is defined by Murphy-Lejeune (2012) as mobility capital. The students with lower mobility capital and those who didn't engage actively in understanding all the basics and routines of the system beforehand mentioned more difficulties during their stay, as financial barriers because of delayed scholarship or social barriers, when they met, for instance, the medical care service. The self-financed students or students who got smaller grants, seems to experience more financial difficulties during their stay, that resulted in them taking on part-time jobs and need for support from parents, something that corresponds

with Altbach's findings (1991). However, some self-financed students managed to support themselves financially while engaging in two different part-time jobs during their international stay.

The students perceived differently their state of being far away from family and friends. When some students consider missing their family as the main social challenge they experienced under their stay in Bodø, other students did not feel the same because of the possibility to use video and mobile calling as often as they needed. Most of the students mentioned that they got friends during their stay in Norway; although some pointed out that they felt lonely during their first weeks in Norway. Moreover, the difference between perceiving of networking and socializing is apparent between the students who came to Norway initially with immigration intention and those who were mostly interested in international experience abroad. While the first group was not strongly motivated in participating in intercultural environment, the second one mentioned the enriching character of the international communication. Most of the respondents of the study mentioned that they didn't socialize so much with local Norwegian and Russian people in Bodø, and that illustrate the stranger position of most of international students with their "both outside and inside" position in the Norwegian society (Simmel, 1908). Some students mentioned the stereotypical thinking of both Norwegian and Russian people as one of the unpleasant moments they observed during their stay and this corresponds with the theory of Simmel (ibid), who considered that people can develop a special type of objectivity and freedom from prejudice during mobility, creating the necessary distance for observing habitual assumptions from outside. The present study found it inappropriate to use the theory of Berry (1997) on different acculturation strategies with reference to students staying for a short time with no intention to stay. Contrarily, the stages of adaptation to a new culture described by Oberg (1960) seems to be more relevant to the student experience, when after some period the euphoria or pleasant surprise students experience social and psychological barriers of adaptation to a new culture, although the passage of the stages and its depth vary a lot between students with different mobility capital background (Murphy-Lejeune, 2012) and motivations. However, the participants tended to change the concept "culture shock" with different words as "discovery", "surprise", "stress", "adaptation" that relates to the findings of Murphy-Lejeune (ibid) and corresponds with the attempt of Berry (2005) to reformulate the reaction on challenges the migrant meet in a new culture as acculturative stress.

The Russian students travelling between the different social contexts of Norway and Russia are situated "in-between" places during student mobility that allow them to participate in and actively create multiple realities during the stay in Bodø. The common educational reality, which is constructed by the university and students during the educational courses, implies contacts with people from different social worlds that sometimes need some adjustment. During their free time,

the students with immigration intention construct the new reality by maintaining networking with local Norwegian and Russian population, while the students who choose to socialize within international environment, construct social situations and common activities by use of English as a common language and thereby construct their own transnational reality. Applying the theory of Berger and Luckmann (1966), the present study shows that the new international knowledge is constructed within these multiple realities through the exchange of knowledge from different social contexts.

## Chapter 7: “Things will never be the same” – the benefits from student mobility

### 7.1 Improving soft skills

#### 7.1.1 Language skills

Students participating in the MSWCP program had differed in mobility capital before they came to Norway. According to Murphy-Lejeune (2012), mobility capital enables individuals to enhance their skills while living abroad, where language skills are one of the important components of the mobility capital. All the former students indicated the significant improvement of English language skills during their experience of being abroad. Diana (Case D) declared: “Of course I improved my English skills, undoubtedly. But I still haven’t learned any Norwegian.” Several students were, unlike Diana, interested in learning and even improving Norwegian language skills during their stay in Bodø:

*I definitely improved my foreign language skills, began to speak more fluently and understand better English and moreover, I improved my Norwegian skills significantly. However, I couldn’t talk Norwegian easily; it was difficult to understand Norwegian speech because of many different dialects. But I could present myself in Norwegian and I got “B” at the Norwegian exam. Alina (case A)*

*My English improved and I studied Norwegian at the University from the beginner level to advanced and graduated Norwegian courses successfully. Eli (Case E)*

*My Norwegian improved greatly, because I worked part-time in a kindergarten and had to speak a lot. Hanna (case H)*

*My English skills improved. Moreover, I learned basic Norwegian and one more European language during stay in Norway. Cecilia (case C)*

Some other students mentioned awakening of interest in different languages during their stay in Norway. Thus, Janna (Case J) described her experience as following:

*I’ve learned some Norwegian during Norwegian courses, but quitte soon, because the education pace was too slow for me. Then I began to learn Chinese, because it was a possibility to participate in the language courses at the university.*

The Erasmus Impact Study (2014), carried out by EU workgroup, showed that 90 % of all the respondents in the study improved so called *soft skills*, such as foreign language skills, knowledge of different countries, ability to work with people from different cultures, ability to adapt and to problem solve, as well as communication skills. The findings of the present study confirm the great impact of studying abroad on improving language skills both in English as a language of international communication and country specific language, as Norwegian in the present research,

as well as on awakening of interest to learn different languages. Along with the Erasmus study, Crossman and Clarke (2010), Maiworm and Teichler (2002) and Williams (2005) identified *language learning, cultural awareness and global competence* as the main skills students obtain during their international stay. The next subchapter will discuss intercultural awareness and competence as the skills student obtained during their studies in MSWCP.

### **7.1.2 Intercultural awareness and competence**

During international stay students get precious knowledge about different countries and cultures that enriches their mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune, 2012). Most of the former students of the MSWCP program declared the fact that they got knowledge about Norway as a host country as well as about other countries of the world. Teichler (2004) suggests student mobility to be both an effective, and relatively safe, means of challenging attitudes and engrained perspectives “because of an all-embracing confrontation to a culture different from that at home” (Teichler, 2004:11). Janna (Case J) demonstrated how her attitudes were challenged:

*I've learned so much about different cultures and countries, in particular Canada, China and African countries. Things will never be the same. Through personal contacts you understand that your own initial view of some countries could absolutely differ from the real one about what sort of people live there and what level of social well-being and security the country has.*

Several students indicate the role of extracurricular activities and international student housing in getting acquainted with diverse cultures of the international university community:

*I've learned more from different angles about Norwegian culture and other cultures presented at the University student housing where I lived.* Frida (case F)

*I learned a lot about different countries, especially with regard to that communication took place not only during education but at free time as well.* Diana (case D)

Some students admitted that to communicate and cooperate with international students was quite comfortable because of their previous experiences with student mobility or, in other words, their mobility capital helped them a lot. However, they accepted that they still improved their skills during the international stay in Bodø. Alina (Case A) argued:

*I'd already had experience with studying abroad before the program in social work, but I'd admit that my intercultural communication skills have improved. It became easier to communicate with people from different countries and I definitely became more tolerant to other cultures.*

Some other students got their first experience of studying in international environment during their stay in Bodø on the MSWCP program. According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), students during their stay abroad build broad *intercultural competence*, which can include different

elements like psychological strength, flexibility and tolerance. Deardorff (2006:247) defined intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes”. Eli (Case E) discusses her personal development in a way that corresponds strongly with the definitions:

*Since I had no experience of intercultural communication before the program, I’d admit that my fear of talking with foreigners disappeared during stay in Bodø. I became more confident and got better inner strength.*

Cecilia (Case C) stresses flexibility as the important skill she obtained during her first international experience with studying in Norway:

*I had no experience of studying in an international environment before so I think I’ve got skills of intercultural communication during the program. Working in a group of your countrymen is quite different from working and studying in an international collective. Here it’s important to understand the culture differences and mutually respect each other.*

However, several students got different experience of intercultural communication. Some of the participants were more interested in creating contacts with countryman both within studies and outside, as well as with Norwegian people. Both Benedicte and Gina admitted that they had relationships with Norwegian citizens at that time in addition to that they were acquainted with a broad network of Russian people living in Norway. Gina (Case G) illustrated the mentioned statements as following:

*I was not so motivated in international communication; it was not so important and interesting for me. I almost did not communicate with people from different countries and often confused the names. I experienced that Russian people socialized mostly with their countrymen. Gina (case G)*

Benedicte (Case B) describes situation with international cooperation in the following way:

*We had a lot of misunderstandings and although we tried to organize some food parties and gatherings, I was not so interested in that. I had another Norwegian network of people who were not connected to the University and the study program.*

The statements confirm in some way the suggestions of some studies (Ehrenreich, 2008; Fincher & Shaw, 2009), describing the fact that in some cases educational mobility does not bring about the development of intercultural competence. Although the fact that the former students were not integrated in international community points on their motivation to be integrated into Norwegian society more than to be a part of an international student community. That can point to a development of another type of intercultural competence, more oriented on the two cultures included: the interaction between the native Russian and the Norwegian as the host county culture, where different strategies like integration, separation, assimilation and marginalization described

by Berry (1997) are relevant to consider. The present research has not aimed to determine the concrete strategies the former students choose for the relationship with the host countries in the case of migration, but more specific focus on this issue can be a matter of future research in this field.

### **7.1.3 Communication skills**

Several informants described themselves as sociable persons and pointed out that they have always been easygoing people. According to Murphy-Lejeune (2012), mobility students describe themselves as outgoing, curious, eager for novelty or difference, and with good social and communication skills. She concludes that no matter the nationality, a certain type of personality seems to be more open to exploring and experiencing international experiences than others. This corresponds with the findings of the present study, because most of respondents described themselves in this way. At the same time almost all the respondents noticed improving their general communication skills during their stay in Bodø and some quotations below illustrate the statement:

*I became more open to everything new and unknown. I've always been sociable person, but in Bodø I had to communicate with people from different cultures in an environment unusual for me.* Hanna (case H)

*I became more communicative and sociable and this was caused by the situation of living in a foreign country, when you should learn how to help yourself.* Diana (case D)

The improvement of soft skills is regarded as an important benefit of student mobility. Together with learning and improving hard skills that is discussed further it brings difference in human and mobility capital of the students, enriching their knowledge and experience horizons.

## **7.2 Hard skills learning and improvement**

The Erasmus Impact study (2014) described hard skills as practical knowledge in some academic field, necessary for obtaining a qualification and is usually measured in some way during final exams and controls. In connection to the present study, hard skills are understood as knowledge a student learned in social work as an academic field, in other words, what actual knowledge students obtained by taking the MSWCP program. According to the Erasmus Impact study (2014), opportunity to experience different learning practices and teaching methods was very important for more than 80 % of all the mobile students participated in the survey. It is interesting to note that different students of the MSWCP program from different years perceived content and organization of the program differently, something which show the development of the program from year to year. Diana (Case D) mentioned the following: “There is a difference between research methods taught in Bodø and in our Russian University. In Bodø we learned only about



qualitative methods, and in Russia – only quantitative”. Janna (Case J) described her situation with obtaining hard skills at the program in the following way:

*I expected to get new knowledge and my expectations were absolutely met. I consider the program gave much knowledge, for example, in research methods. I don't know why, but in Russia this issue is not taught deep enough, even for sociologists. They know perfectly about quantitative methods, but have no satisfactory knowledge about qualitative research. It seems to be a shortcoming of the whole educational system in general. In Bodø I understood the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods that is not clear within Russian education. When I ask students in Russia about the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods, they are quite sure in that qualitative interview just implies more questions.*

The quotes illustrate that obtaining the education is perceived as rewarding if the former students continue their career in the field of research and education. Moreover, it seems like students without previous educational background in social work evaluate their new knowledge learning as various and enriching their hard skills:

*It was very well-organized education with combination of international teaching in Norway and in Russia, international professors and, of course, providing necessary literature for those who participated in cooperation projects between Russia and Norway. Karen Healy, the Australian professor, was our lecturer and presented social work in different countries. We learned much from examples from our lives. It's such a pity, that images remain in memory, but much of the content has been forgotten. I wanted to learn more about qualitative research methods and I'm satisfied with the result. Iselin (case I)*

*Now I understand that this program gave so much in understanding Norwegian society and about welfare state in practice. Janna (Case J)*

But not every student considered the level of teaching and organization of studies to be satisfactory. The expectation the students had, influenced by experiences of other students and their general knowledge about studying abroad and at home university, created a possible reality of their experience that did not always correspond with the educational reality they met at the university in Norway. Thus, several students, like Frida (Case F), expected better organization of education: “I expected a higher level of education. We got some exams that didn't correspond with the knowledge taught at the lectures”. Benedicte (Case B) who had much various practice in social work, teaching and research in Russia provided some critical arguments:

*I didn't get any skills in social work during the program; it was too different from that we learned in Russia. Social work is aimed to solve practical problems, but at the MSWCP study we just learned how to read books and write essays, but were not familiar with different*

*technologies of social work with different social groups. I consider psychology as an important aspect in social work to understand principals and mechanism of social work; it was not enough in this program. I expected better level of teaching, better organization and much more practice. It's impossible to completely understand theory without practice. I don't think the program presented social work field to a full extent so those without previous background in social work would learn a lot.*

Based on the comparison with the studying and teaching experience in Russia, the expectations of Benedicte were not met exactly as she wanted this when the educational reality of the university abroad was too different form the expected reality. However, the studies of Archer & Davison (2008) and Yorke (2006) showed that in some employment contexts soft skills were perceived to have more weight than technical or hard skills such as, for instance, a good degree qualification. The next subchapter will discuss the problems of employability in Russian and Norwegian context for the former students of the MSWCP program.

### **7.3 Personal development and employability benefits**

Most of the former students in the present study confirmed that they became more confident, independent and mature after their experience abroad. Janna (Case J) noticed that her confidence was caused by new knowledge and she stated: “Knowledge always gives confidence.” The Erasmus Study (2014) used the Memo© approach and methodology (2015) to investigate personal traits of students related to intercultural competence and future employability. The Erasmus study used the Memo© Factors (2015), that imply curiosity, decisiveness, confidence, self-awareness, adaptability, problem-solving, tolerance, position defending and self-assessment. The operationalization of these traits both from mobile student and from employer perspective is presented in the table in annex-8. According to this study, tolerance towards other people’s values and behavior, confidence and curiosity were perceived as the most important traits improved and gained during student mobility from the European employer perspective. The quotes from the students in the present study illustrating improving different personal traits were summed up in the table below.

#### **Factors improved**

#### **and gained**

#### **Quotes from the former students of the MSWCP program**

<b>Confidence</b>	<p><i>“I became more confident, got better inner strength.” (Eli)</i></p> <p><i>“I became confident in that I can achieve a lot.” (Diana)</i></p> <p><i>“My international experience gave me more confidence in job search. I get more confident with more proficiency in Norwegian language.” (Frida)</i></p>
<b>Curiosity</b>	<p><i>“The master degree and language skills opened many doors for me in job seeking. I became more adventurous.”(Frida)</i></p>

	<i>"I became more open to everything new and unknown and I think I can understand everybody now."(Hanna)</i>
<b>Tolerance</b>	<i>"I got more understanding and tolerance to other people and cultures." (Frida)</i> <i>"It became easier to communicate with people from different nationalities. Now I feel I understand migrants better."(Alina)</i> <i>"I have always been a "citizen of the world" and have always been interested and respected different people and cultures. But I began to see better people's stereotypes." (Cecilia)</i> <i>"You just begin to pay less attention to cultural differences." (Janna)</i>
<b>Decisiveness</b>	<i>"We all are the same but with different culture background. I feel now that I can understand everybody..."(Hanna)</i> <i>"I became more independent, deep and brave. Now I can see better my plans on future." (Diana)</i> <i>"I became adult and independent." (Alina)</i> <i>"I began to dream to travel more and don't tie my life with one place of living." (Frida)</i> <i>"I became more independent because I moved from my parents" (Gina)</i>
<b>Position-defending</b>	<i>"It became easier to defend myself and my interests and meet halfway with other people."(Diana)</i>
<b>Self-assessment</b>	<i>"Studying abroad is a way out of comfort-zone. I think I began to understand other people's motivations better"(Hanna)</i> <i>"A lot of stereotypes in my head disappeared." (Diana)</i> <i>"I got much better time to do sport and take care of my health during my stay in Norway and I still continue to exercise several times a week."(Cecilia)</i> <i>"I became more orderly, purposeful and ambitious. I learned to use my money more wisely."(Alina)</i> <i>"I think I began to react differently on the things I don't understand. I learned to find out the cause before drawing conclusions and judgments." (Hanna)</i>
<b>Sociability</b>	<i>"I am more sociable now and open to new acquaintances" (Alina)</i> <i>"It became easier to converge with other people" (Eli)</i> <i>"I became more communicative and sociable." (Diana)</i>

These personal attributes along with achievements of the students and other employability skills as written and spoken communication, information technology skills, problem solving, the ability to teamwork, self-management, time-keeping, the ability to work hard (Teichler, 2007) make students into more attractive candidates in the employer's eyes and enhance their employability. However, some students mentioned that they didn't develop any of the personal traits discussed above during their stay in Bodø:

*I didn't change. We didn't get student housing because we came for a short time, but the university provided private housing for the Russian students participating in the cooperation*

*project. At the end I was quite irritated by the situation. We met each other both at home and during studies. Benedicte (Case B)*

*I didn't get so many new experiences during my studies. Russian students lived in a private house, not in international student housing. I had some acquaintances, but we mostly communicated and socialized within the Russian group we came with. Iselin (case I)*

These examples stay in line with findings of Fincher & Shaw (2009) and Ehrenreich (2008), pointing out that in some cases educational mobility does not bring change in outlooks and creating of global competence. The students, due to specific motivations and circumstances, as living within the ethnically homogeneous group and short-time stay in Bodø, were not interested in integrating in the international environment of the University and probably therefore did not perceive the changes in personal development caused by it.

Wiers-Jenssen (2008) suggests that even if obtaining extracurricular skills is perceived rewarding from a personal perspective, this does not imply that students career opportunities are improved by studying abroad. Key employability skills and situation with job market can vary between different social contexts and what is considered to be a key skill in Russia can be different perceived in Norway. The following subchapters will discuss the employability of the former MSWCP students in the different Russian and Norwegian/European contexts.

### **7.3.1 Employability in the Russian context**

According to different studies (Chiswick & Miller, 2003; Duvander, 2001), the soft skills like cultural skills and professional skills adapted to national requirements are included in the country-specific human capital that is obtained by students during their stay abroad. Considering the MSWCP, the students obtain human capital with the international and Norwegian-specific perspective. Wiers-Jenssen (2008) argued that the country-specific human capital from abroad will certainly be in demand in certain segments of the labour market. Janna (Case J) illustrates the statement:

*Considering the fact that I work in the context of higher education, I would consider myself to be a more attractive employee after participating in the international program. Firstly, the knowledge I got during the studies stimulated development. I teach subjects related to the field I expanded my knowledge in during the program. This year I was a professor for the international students and I used some teaching methods I was inspired by international professors during my studies in Bodø. I understand the western approach, can give some examples from practice and use it often in my teaching. Students like it.*

Iselin (Case I) described her career development and skill application in the following way:

*During the stay in Bodø, I've already had some perspective on job in Russia. After completing the MSWCP education, I "rooted" in the field of education and now I work within civil education field, educational personnel's professional development and with different target groups as specialists the field of youth policy, youth and other. I use skills I got during my studies in Norway discussing problems of our society; I read English literature and participate in international activities. I think I can apply for more prestigious and well-paid jobs, but I'm satisfied with my career development right now.*

While some studies (Crossman & Clarke, 2010) consider that experiences and skills gained in a foreign country give an employability advantage to them, something that corresponds with the examples above, other (Dietrich & Olson, 2010; Behle & Atfield, 2013) pointed out that the question about transferability of employability skills to different labour markets is crucial. Alina and Diana did not want to continue their previous career in teaching and research. They both moved from their home town to the federal cities in Russia, but comparing with Diana who did not even try to find a job within social work field or international companies, Alina (Case A) describes her experience with job seeking as following:

*I think I became more ambitious and I didn't want to stay at my previous job and in my home town anymore. I tried to find a job in my home town and in the federal cities in the field of social work but it was not successful. I was looking for a job in a social work field and in international company with possibility to apply my knowledge. I got international education, but the domestic work experience was required everywhere. Moreover, nobody could provide me with a well-paid job corresponding with my educational background, at least at my home town. It's too little demand for specialists with this education. I decided to move to the federal city, a megalopolis to look for better paid job. Now I'm administrative assistant in a well-known international company, which products among other aimed on helping people with different diseases. I use written English at work, and I believe that international experience made me a more attractive employee.*

Findings of Behle and Atfield (2013) show that sometimes the labour market in "home countries" has no suitable employment that require the skills obtained abroad. Both Alina and Diana mentioned that they were looking for well-paid jobs and didn't know where they could apply their knowledge and international education, especially at the labour market of their home towns that are relatively small in the Russian context, something which caused "brain-drain" (Oosterbeek & Webbink, 2011; Parey & Waldinger, 2011) to the most advantaged regions. Thus, Diana (case D) argued: "When I came to the megalopolis, I didn't know where to apply my knowledge, I applied to different jobs and then I chose the information technology field".

Hanna (Case H), who was a self-financed student at the program, found job at information technology field as well in her home town that is a megalopolis in Russia, and she described her experience as following:

*I changed my field of activity and work now as a project manager in an international information technology company. I got this job primarily because of my experience in intercultural communication. I tried to find some job relevant to my educational background, but social work in Russia can be just a “hobby” or a volunteer work in a situation when unemployment benefits are higher than social worker’s wage, while information technologies is a perspective and well-paid job. I should admit that I wouldn’t get this job without my international experience at the MSWCP program, although it doesn’t relate directly to my educational background.*

Several students mentioned that they became more interested in obtaining international jobs after participating in international studies. Janna (Case J) considers that participating in international student mobility facilitated her international career in some way, but does not admit that it was the decisive factor regarding her previous educational background. She described her career development in a following way:

*I feel like I can freely move up the career ladder. I worked with administrative tasks within international cooperation network before, now I teach. I constantly use English at my work and cooperate with international partners. Moreover I participate in some international research projects.*

The examples above correspond with finding of Jannecke Wiers-Jenssen (2008) who found out that participating in student mobility often lead to work in international companies and with international affairs. Regarding the former students from Russia participating in Norwegian labour market, we can also consider the international working experience. The next subchapter will present the issue of employability in the Norwegian and European labour market contexts.

### **7.3.2 Employability in the context of Norway and European countries**

According to Wiers-Jenssen (2008), the Norwegian labour market is not so friendly to graduates with international diplomas who generally faced more difficulties with getting a job, where unemployment and overeducating were more prevalent compared to domestic graduates. However, the economic rewards among employed were higher among mobile students a few years after graduation. Moreover, she argues that employers in the Norwegian context are not always competent to judge diplomas from abroad and select graduates with a known educational background and with experience in the national labour market. Benedicte (Case B) describes her experience in the way confirming the problems outlined above:

*I got confirmed by master's degree education from Russia and I can't say that MSWCP education facilitated my career development. The jobs I worked at in Norway are at the lowest level of social work and don't require master's in social work. It was quite irritating that I have to do the things when I have this level of education. The employers here are not interested in overpay, and with master degree you become an expensive employee. It's very difficult to find a job corresponding with my level of education, when bachelor degree is the requirement for most of the vacancies. Moreover, I think it's very difficult to find any job in a small town in Norway without a good network.*

But Bendicte (Case B) sees a brighter future, when she discusses possibility to apply for the PhD studies in Norway:

*I'd probably like to continue education and apply for the PhD. I worked as a research assistant in Russia, I participated in social research design and implementing and taught students. I would like to continue doing the same things, because I can do it and I like it. But I'm not ready yet, I'd need some inspiration.*

According to Olsen (2013), among the foreigners with doctor degree in humanities and social sciences living in Norway for 2 years after disputation 70 % was employed in the education sector and many of them were related to public administration that creates better employment chances and correspondence with the level of education.

Both Gina and Frida admitted that now with obtaining master degree they can apply for better paid jobs of a higher level, as leader or manager. While Frida (Case F) was sure that, "Norwegian language skills and master degree opens many doors," Gina (Case F) was skeptical as to whether obtaining an international master degree will actually facilitate career development:

*It's a big question if obtaining the MSWCP influence getting better jobs. I didn't try to find a job in the field of social work, I'm satisfied with the administrative job I have now, but obtaining the master degree didn't influence my wages in any way.*

However, Frida (Case F) working at the leading position in a day-care center argues that obtaining the MSWCP along with her previous educational background influenced her employability and her wages in a positive way:

*My international experience gave me more confidence. I use mostly Norwegian language at my work, sometimes English, because the parents can be from different countries, so I think my intercultural knowledge is useful.*

Cecilia (Case C) who also works at a day-care center right now, hope and believe that the obtaining of the MSWCP degree in the future will help her career development:

*I moved to a European country and it's very difficult to get any job with international education and without knowing the local language here. So my international experience in*

*Bodø didn't bring great benefits to job search, but my education as a teacher from Russia helped me a lot. I just need to pay back my scholarship now and that affects my budget negatively. I hope after graduation, the MSWCP degree will bring some rewards in the future.*

At the same time Cecilia (Case C) along with several other respondents told how many difficulties she had to go through to get some employment in the new county:

*It was not easy to find the job. Sometimes it seemed I'd never find it, because I sent from 10 to 20 CV every day, but got no answers. But I knew that I should never give up and everything went well at last.*

The statement illustrated the findings from many different studies (Drange, 2013; Aas, 2009; Hardoy & Schøne, 2008; Orupabo, 2014; Brekke & Mastekaasa, 2008; Fangen & Paasche, 2012) showed that foreigners often meet discrimination in entering workplace in Norway and some European countries and sometimes experience exclusion at workplaces as employers. The challenges and difficulties the former student experience after their decision to stay in Norway or to return to Russia will be discussed more detailed in the following chapter of the thesis.

## **7.4 Concluding thoughts and discussions**

The present study shows that students of the MSWCP program obtain different personal benefits as a result of student mobility. All respondents pointed to improved foreign language skills in English, as the language of international communication and the working language of the study program, and some informants pointed to improving Norwegian as a local language of the hosting country and awakening interest to other foreign language learning. This corresponds with the findings of the previous studies (The Erasmus Impact Study, 2014; Murphy-Lejeune, 2012; Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Maiworm & Teichler, 2002; Williams, 2005). Moreover, most of the students mentioned improved intercultural awareness and building of intercultural competence. Most of the students participating in the MSWCP program mentioned improvement of such personal traits as confidence, tolerance, curiosity, decisiveness, sociability, position-defending and better self-assessment, and this corresponds with the findings of the Erasmus Impact Study (2014), used the Memo© (2015) approach in investigating personal benefits of student mobility related to intercultural competence and future employability. The connection between motivation to participate in international activities and communication seems to be important factor in developing the skills mentioned above, because the students not involved in intercultural environment mentioned lower or zero improvement in intercultural competence and did not mention changes in outlooks and obtaining personal changes that stays in line with findings of Fincher, Shaw (2009) and Ehrenreich (2008). Most of the students described themselves as outgoing and sociable that relates to study of Murphy-Lejeune (2012), but some students pointed



out that they changed a lot during student mobility and became more sociable and open to communication with other people. Students with different educational background and from different study years perceive obtaining of hard skills in a various way. While some focused on the new knowledge they got and how they can apply it after the studies, other mentioned some critical arguments as insufficient practical experience and lower level of teaching than expected. This may show that different students create different possible expected realities before they move to study abroad.

Analyzing employability of the MSWCP former students in the Russian context, the certain patterns were discovered. Some students participating in the student mobility continue working at the field of education and research and consider the education rewarding for their practice in a way of getting new knowledge and improving their teaching practice, something which corresponds with Wiers-Jenssen (2008) conclusions about relevance of international experience and the country-specific human capital from abroad to some certain segments of the labour market. However, they do not experience any economical reward within their working context after participating in the MSWCP program. Another group of participants changed the field of activity and was oriented towards applying their education and skills to the better paid jobs. For some of these participants this caused moving almost right after their international stay in Norway from their home towns to the megalopolises, providing better employment opportunities. This corresponds with Behle and Atfield's findings (2013), showing that sometimes the labour market in home places has no or very limited suitable employment that require the skills obtained abroad. Some of the informants participating in the Norwegian or European labour market, pointed to the problem of discrimination, overeducating and problems with entering the Norwegian labour market with higher international education that relates to different previous studies (Drange, 2013; Aas, 2009; Hardoy & Schøne, 2008; Orupabo, 2014; Fangen & Paasche, 2012). However, other participants pointed out that obtaining the master degree in Norway and their international experience has been beneficial to their employment in Norway. Some of the respondents pointed to how the well-build combination of their previous educational background benefited to their employment in Norway and European countries, as for instance, obtaining pedagogical education in Russia. The focus on the positive experiences with entering the Norwegian European market and its prerequisites can be the issue of the further research. In the following chapter the present study will discuss the factors influencing the decision to stay abroad or return to Russia and the challenges the former mobile students faced after making their decision.

## Chapter-8: “You always have a choice” - the decision to stay or return and challenges after

### 8.1 Decision to stay – love makes the world go round?

Discussing Norwegian graduates, Wiers-Jenssen (2008) pointed out that some of them choose to stay abroad mainly because of family reasons and that working and staying abroad is often related to marital status or having a foreign partner. Another study (Nerdrum, Ramberg, & Sarpebakken, 2003) argued that that partner is an important reason for migration among highly skilled workers. Most of the respondents of the present study pointed on the partner factor as the decisive one for their migration. The illustration of the statement follows in the next quotes:

*Once in a while I thought about coming back to Russia. You always have a choice. But the plan occurred by itself, when I got married and got a family here: since then I had to find a job and continue to integrate in the Norwegian society. Gina (case G)*

*I got a family in Norway; my son was born here. Eli (case E)*

Benedicte and Cecilia told about their long term distance relationships with a boyfriend from abroad. According to social geographer Edward Casey (2001), although social relations are becoming more virtual, people are still seeking the place in which they can find physical co-presence with others and where their interpersonal enrichment can flourish. The respondents describe it as following:

*I met my boyfriend two years before, during my summer vacations abroad. That which seemed to be just a summer fling at the beginning has grown into love when we continued to chat on distance. And then a year of mutual visits between the counties required visa began. Norway became a prefect visa-free solution for us. I didn't know what I would do after the program end; the answer came some months before the end of the program: I could move to the country where my other half lived. So the decisive argument for me was love. Love makes the world go round. Cecilia (case C)*

*I happened by itself... I didn't have any particular plan about immigration to Norway, but I had certain life criteria that I would be satisfied with as quality of life, standard of living, the feeling of own contentment with life, my private criteria that I follow, no matter if I live in Russia or in Norway. I met my Norwegian boyfriend a long time before I came to Norway to participate in the MSWCP program, so I had some certain circumstances to stay. Now I'm married and it has been the decisive factor in choosing the location. I like to say, that we can always come back home. Benedicte (case B)*

Only Frida (Case F) explained her decision in another way, stressing out the other push-pull factors of her migration:

*I made the decision to continue international career at the moment when I decided to come to Norway to study. And the divisive arguments were better comfort, development and good ecology.*

The study by Mosneaga and Winther (2012) shows that the decision to continue international careers follows situational dynamics in which free will and contextual and enabling factors interact with each other, that can explain the decision of the respondents. All the respondents in this study who decided to stay in Norway or move to other countries in Europe after studies mentioned that they could choose between the alternatives and the free will along with the factors enabling migration like relationships with Norwegian/European citizens or better conditions in Norway made them decide in favour of immigration. Although some of the respondents mentioned that the question of choice of permanent location is not completely answered and resolved. Being strangers in the Norwegian society, the former students often perceive future as a “permanent question mark, pressing on the issue of the length of the stay and of a potential return” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2012:16). The next subsection discusses the issue of homecoming and decision of the students to return home.

## **8.2 Decision to return – understanding the homecomer**

Several students mentioned that they initially travelled to Norway without any intention to stay and continue international career in Norway. Thus, Iselin (Case I) explains her motivation to return home as following: “I didn’t consider the alternative to stay in Norway: I didn’t have any inner desire to stay. The main decisive factor for returning back home was my deep conviction to live in Russia.”

Wiers-Jenssen (2008) considers, that returning home after international experience will contribute both to internationalizing of other countries’ and domestic labour markets. Thus, Janna (Case J) argued:

*I didn’t look for possibilities to continue an international career in Norway and my plans didn’t change during my educational mobility in Bodø; rather the horizon of opportunities expended. My studies were over and I returned home. I believe that you can make international career staying in the home country, it’s even faster.*

However, during the in-depth interview Janna (Case J) acknowledged that she applied for another master program in Norway and she added: “One day I’ll move closer to my boyfriend in Norway to make my private life: we have been dating for 4 years and mostly on distance.” The example recalls the supposition of Brooks and Waters (2011) who argued about the relevance of reformulation of the concept “brain-drain” to ‘*brain circulation*’, stressing out that migration flows are quite complex and multidirectional.

Most of the homecomers mentioned long separation with family and friends and homesickness as the most important pushing factors caused return migration. Alina and Diana admitted:

*I couldn't find any job, so decided that I should not stay in Norway. I'm happy now that it happened as it happened. Moreover, until that time it was 9 months of separation with my family and friends, and this factor played a crucial role along with the scholarship financing end.* Alina (case A)

*I decided that I wanted to return home to Russia during the spring before financing ended and the decisive factor for me was homesickness. It was very emotional choice. If I really wanted to stay in Norway, I'd find the strength to learn Norwegian, find a job and pay the scholarship back.* Diana (case D)

In several studies from different countries (Marinelli, 2011; Venhorst, 2013; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Mosneaga & Winther, 2012), researchers outlined importance of both social networks and economical opportunities in the decision to stay abroad or move home and some of graduates are attracted back to their homes, because of social bonds and better knowledge of the home region. Hanna's parents live in different countries: father in Russia and mother in Norway. Moreover she had a boyfriend in Russia, so she (Case H) really had to choose where she would stay:

*My plans changed during my stay in Bodø: I understood that I wanted to live in Russia after I got working experience in Norway. It was much fun with studies, but I faced some troubles at work all the time. Working as a shop assistant I felt that I was constantly blamed that I did everything wrong. I felt like only I was forced to do all the dirty work. Although I was the only person with higher education at this job, I was the most stupid in the opinion of the manager. The Norwegians complained on me all the time without any significant reason: they were wearing a set smile when met me, but complained to manager behind my back. I felt that the people I worked with were very dissatisfied that they had to work with an immigrant. But I'm sure that some solid companies don't have such a problem, although my Russian mother living in Norway experienced the same problems. I decided to quit the studies and moved to Russia. I decided that I wanted to live home. Sometimes it's much more difficulties here, but everything is more akin to me and much more understandable. My mother was upset with my decision to return, but my father was very happy about it.*

Hanna acknowledged that the feeling of discrimination at one of her workplaces made her decide to move back home to Russia. The problem will be discussed further in relation to former students decided to stay in Norway or another European country after studies in Bodø.

## **8.3 Challenges after and changes in self**

### **8.3.1 “Close but far” – the immigrant perspective**

Cecilia (Case C) described the challenges in the adaptation period in the new European country, after she moved from Norway, as following:

*I can't tell that I feel discrimination so much, but it does exists. The local people were not so interested in talking their language to me in the beginning when I tried to learn it; they preferred talking English to me, although my English was at the same level. So in the beginning I had some difficulties with language barrier, but they are away now. But I can admit that it was very difficult to find a job.*

We have already discussed the experience of Cecilia with job search in the European county. As mentioned above in relation to employability in the Norwegian context. The problem of discrimination in entering the labour market and exclusion at workplaces exists, like a great number of studies confirm (Drange, 2013; Aas, 2009; Hardoy & Schøne, 2008; Orupabo, 2014; Brekke & Mastekaasa, 2008; Fangen & Paasche, 2012). According to the studies, immigrants have problems with entering the labor market, work part-time jobs more often, are more often overeducated and have worse pay rises than the majority population. Midtbøen (2015) argued that in spite of two decades of discrimination studies in the Norwegian context, they did not dare to conclude that ethnic discrimination is the main obstacle for the national minorities in the Norwegian labour market. Benedicte (Case B) describes her experience in the following way:

*I felt like Norwegians care much more about people of color, feel sorry for them and try to help, but East European migrants are more like “workhorses” or “dregs”. I felt like some Norwegians don't like East Europeans and try to humiliate them. I don't understand that, because of my perception and my experience, the East Europeans cause least of the problems with social dependency. The main challenge for me now is looking for a job appropriate to my level of education.*

Benedicte stressed out several times that it's quite difficult to admit that she has to work within low-skilled jobs after working as an education and research assistant in Russia. The way Benedicte identify herself or her self-identity is connected with the education and the working experience she got in Russia. According to the pragmatic perspective, the social self is a recognition we get from others and therefore is formed in a discourse of social group. Moving to another social world, she felt that she got the implied identity and was connected with the social group of low-skilled East European immigrants. William James (1983) argued that we have many social selves and selves changes over time and in different contexts. Benedicte experienced the radical change in her life caused by immigration to Norway and her self-identity as a qualified

researcher seems to contradict with the low-skilled worker implied identity that causes challenges in the Norwegian context.

Another respondent, who presents the immigrant perspective, argues the following:

*I had difficulties in accepting the situation that you have to clean floors or work as a waitress or doing something that you would hardly work with in Russia. This passed not without problems from me: when you get more familiar with the situation around you and understand the Norwegian context better, everything gets not so cheerfully as you expected and to earn a living you need to do that you absolutely are not eager about and don't want to work with. Depressed mood, discontent and dissatisfaction, I experienced everything. Now I accepted the situation and after some years I got a job I'm more or less satisfied with.* Gina (case G)

Gina described the crisis she went through during first years in Norway. According to the stranger theory of Simmel (1908), immigrants crossing the borders can experience a threat to their self-identity when contradictions of self-identity and ascribed identity occur. The identity of East European immigrant is the ascribed identity these former students struggle to accept that often does not correspond with their self-identities and the social identities they got in Russia. Midtbøen (2015) concluded that politicians and organizations should recognize that the ethnic discrimination hinders the successful integration of minorities to the Norwegian society. According to Berry (2005), acculturative strategies as assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization imply that individual members of minority groups have freedom to choose how they want to acculturate. But the integration strategy can only be chosen and successfully pursued when dominant society is open and inclusive, non-dominant groups adopt the basic values of the larger society and at the same time the majority society is prepared to adapt education, health and labour institutions to meet the needs of all the groups of the plural society.

Some of the respondents didn't mention ethnic discrimination in their life as the challenge experienced in the Norwegian society. Eli (Case E) who has no working experience in Norway illustrates the integration strategy of the adaptation:

*I don't feel the Norwegian discrimination. Maybe I just didn't participate so much in the purely Norwegian team. On the contrary, people at the museum, shops, kindergarten ask me a lot about my country and culture when they know that I'm Russian. It's much easier to integrate in the Norwegian society now, when I begin to speak better Norwegian and concern understanding and tolerance. But I'm not going to eradicate my culture and will try to create bicultural environment in my family.*

Frida (Case F) participated in the Norwegian labour market but didn't mention discrimination as a problem for her, but describing challenges she experienced in Norway she noted the following:

*The challenge was that people in Norway have mostly very different attitude to work: I'm used to think that work is an important thing in my life where I try to do my best, for many Norwegians work is the place where they socialize. Moreover, romantic relationships revealed some challenges: expectations were not always met and difference in cultures might startle.*

Discussing the changes in self she underwent under student mobility and stay abroad, she (Case F) declared:

*After participating in student mobility in Norway I began to dream about travelling and decided not to bend my life with one place of living. Long stay abroad and travelling around the globe open eyes on how the world works. It's diverse and exciting. What is considered to be a norm in one country can be unacceptable in another one. But after living abroad, instead of taking everything for granted, you can choose what resonate with you and change your outlooks radically.*

The outlooks correspond with the theory of Burkitt (2008:182) who argued, that the power of individual selves in the contemporary social world implies “*to be able to choose* when to move and stay at the surface of experience or when to be rooted and search out the depth of interconnection with others in particular places.”

### **8.3.2 Homecomer perspective: stranger at home?**

An English idiom says: “There is no such thing as a free lunch”. In Russian language its equivalent is used: “There’s always free cheese in a mousetrap” that means that it’s impossible to get something for nothing. Travelling abroad, most of students are excited by getting scholarship in Norway, but some of them will pay money back, while other will pay the price in a way of changing themselves and their lives. When students make choice about the definite location, they lose a potential gain from another alternative, but get some benefits from the chosen one. According to Durkheim (1984), skills, interests, talents, professions, jobs and social status create a sense of self-identity and therefore we look to change the things if we want to change our selves and our lives. The former mobile students can easily rewrite their identities with shifting network of relationships, what Bauman (2000) called as “liquid modernity” with its greater flexibility in people’s life. Some respondents pointed to changes in themselves that made them change their lives after coming back home from Norway:

*When I came back home, I felt that I changed inside, but all my background didn't. I had some depression because I didn't know where I could apply my new knowledge and experience. Everything seemed so bad and uncomfortable at my home place. Because of little demand for people with this type of international education in my home town, after one month I decided to*

*move to a megalopolis to seek new opportunities. And I need to admit that I don't regret anything, I'm satisfied now. Alina (case A)*

*I began to see how many stereotypes people in my network in Russia have in their behavior, private life, and attitudes toward other people. Nobody understood me when I came home; it was stereotypically assumed that everybody wanted to immigrate when they move abroad. I was not satisfied with my wage, work, people around... And I decided to move to a megalopolis to find another job. Diana (case D)*

Allina and Diana illustrated the feeling of being stranger in own culture after coming back home, when everything seems different and after being “in-between” places, they began to perceive many things differently, that made them reconstruct their subjective realities and take the decision to move further. Both Alina and Diana, along with some other participants, mentioned that they experienced the reverse culture shock, describe by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), when they felt bad about own culture, surroundings, could see stereotypes, feel depressed after the excitement of travelling back home. Several former students who participated in the student mobility for short time up to six months mentioned that they did not experience reverse culture shock. The same students had previous experience of living abroad:

*I had some reverse culture shock, but it was so long ago. I was just happy coming home from Norway no matter weather or other things. Janna (case J)*

*After return everything was just fine, I found job at once. I just felt that ecology was not so good and not everything is perfect, but it's much more opportunities here. Self-realization is much more important for me than safety and serenity. Hanna (case H)*

Hanna perceived discrimination she experienced during her stay in Norway as a serious risk to her need for self-realization. According to Douglas and Wildavsky (1983), there is no value-free choosing between the alternatives, because choice depends on one's beliefs and values. According to the cultural theory of risk by Mary Douglas (1978) risk perception is socially constructed phenomenon and risks are usually not taken after consultation with friends and relatives with taking into consideration values, relationships and moral obligations. Therefore, group membership and social context are shaping what is regarded as risk. Four cultural adherences as hierarchist, egalitarian, individualist and fatalist were regarded in the study in order to understand the location choice of the respondents.

#### **8.4 Perception of risk and the location choice**

The present research has initially considered the cultural theory of risk by Mary Douglas (1978) as the possible analytic tool in understanding the choice of location after studies. The respondents were provided with description of four adherences (see Annex-7) by Wildavsky and Dake (1990)



and asked about choosing the group they fell to be most resonating with. Moreover, some additional questions were asked during the in-depth interview like “What do you think is the best/worst with living in Norway/Russia?” and so on in order to discover the perception of main informants’ risks. Only one of the participants could classify herself in one particular group, while 50 % didn’t feel comfortable with the procedure and the formulation of the descriptions and reacted as “Nothing of that relates to me” and just four participants found some main and complementary groups they could relate themselves with. These findings correspond with the failing attempts of the several researchers (Sjöberg, 1995; Marris et al., 1998) to relate all the informants to one particular adherence using the operationalization by Wildavsky and Dake (1990). Most of the respondents, who related themselves to some of the adherences, chose “hierarchist” as the main category, something that probably can correspond with their identification with Russian culture and society, although no patterns pointed on the influence of the adherence to the choice of location were found: both return and non-return students could choose this adherence. Furthermore, no correlation between choice of egalitarian adherence and decision to move to Norway was founded. The only interesting observation was provided by Hanna (Case H), choosing between staying in Norway and returning to Russia. She chose “hierarchist” first, but then she added that actually she resonated with both “hierarchist” and “egalitarian” groups. Iselin who mentioned that she did not choose and knew that she would return to Russia described the same 50/50 relationship, admitting that inequality in Russia is a serious problem. No one of the respondents chose “fatalist” as the possible adherence that might confirm the supposition that “fatalists” do not tend to participate in student mobility. The unclear patterns and findings of the present study could be explained by the adherences operationalization limitations mentioned by several researchers (Sjöberg, 1995; Marris et al., 1998) failed to apply it to their studies. The present research considers enhancement of the operationalization as the solution for better and more reliable further research.

### ***8.5 Concluding thoughts and discussions***

The findings of the present study show that partner and family reasons is the important factor in decision to stay in Norway or immigrate to another European country. Most of the respondents mention family reasons as the decisive motive to stay in Norway and continue their international careers. This corresponds with the studies by Wiers-Jenssen (2008) and Nerdrum, Ramberg, & Sarpebakken (2003). Better comfort, ecology and possibility for development were mentioned as the other push-and-pull factors for immigration. The findings relate to the study by Mosneaga and Winther (2012), who argued that the decision to stay abroad is a complex interaction of free will, contextual and enabling factors.

Several informants who returned to Russia mentioned that they did not consider immigration to Norway as a possible alternative, however it was revealed some possibilities for “brain circulation” (Brooks & Waters, 2011) connected with possible migration plans in the future. The present study confirms findings of the previous research (Marinelli, 2011; Venhorst, 2013; Hazen and Alberts, 2006; Mosneaga & Winther, 2012) about social bonds and better knowledge of the home region as the most important push factors that caused return migration along with reduced economic opportunities after the scholarship end. One respondent mentioned discrimination at the workplace as the decisive push factor to move back home to Russia.

Most of the immigrant former students mentioned ethnic discrimination in entering Norwegian and European labour market as the main challenge after their decision to stay abroad, and this corresponds with different studies (Drange, 2013; Aas, 2009; Hardoy & Schøne, 2008; Orupabo, 2014; Brekke & Mastekaasa, 2008; Fangen & Paasche, 2012). This caused negative feelings and threat to self-identity caused by ascribed low-skilled East European immigrant identity. However, several students did not mention discrimination as their problem in the Norwegian society. Future research should therefore focus on influence of cultural differences and the level of tolerance to difference in the Norwegian organizations as the factors causing discrimination and the possibility to predict, control and prevent ethnic discrimination with regard to positive cases of integration and its prerequisites.

The possibility to choose between places of living, easily shift network of relationships and rewrite identities called by Bauman (2000) as “liquid modernity” allowed some students change their career field, location, network and self-identity after returning from Norway. Several students mentioned that their outlooks changed and this pushed them to move to megalopolis with better opportunities for applying the new knowledge they got under student mobility. The students mentioned that the changes happened right after returning home, while they experienced the reverse culture shock (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). However, some students did not experience reverse culture shock that can be explained by different amount of the mobility capital between the students and length of stay in Norway.

The present study tried to analyze the perception of risk as the influencing factor in choosing the location after studies. The findings revealed difficulties with using the operationalization provided by Wildavsky and Dake (1990) applying to the context of the present study. No reliable patterns were revealed, although prevalence of hierarchist adherence can be mentioned, but at the same time the findings did not show any valid correlation with the location choice. The future research should consider enhancement of the operationalization tool as the solution for more reliable research.

## **Chapter -9: Discussions and conclusion**

The present research has voiced the experiences of the Russian students during their stay in Norway at the MSWCP program and after its completion and attempted to answer the main question:

*“What are the motivations and outcomes for the students of “Master in Social Work – with a Comparative Perspective” program with regard to their career and personal development?”*

The study has presented data on motivations on entering the MSWCP program both with regard to the motivation for social work occupation and participation in the international degree student mobility. The findings show that usually motivations on entering this program are influenced by different factors, so interaction of different motives should be regarded. Student biography, where some traumatic accident can take place, social and educational background, as well as will to help people and learn more about social work practice influence choice of the science field. However, motivation for student mobility is often most influential and determined by cooperation between countries and universities, willingness to live abroad, and by that investing in human and mobility capital, as well as family, network and background influence. The economical, demographical and social pull factors like prospect of getting scholarship/better wages in future, personal development or moving closer to family/partner seem to be more significant for the students than push factors, described in this study by Ravenstein (1885), Mansoor and Quillin, (2006), Altbach, (1991). The study shows that in spite of the main objective of the scholarships and Quota Scheme to provide relevant education that will benefit the students’ home regions when they return, some students consider immigration to Norway and European countries as one of the motivational factors. Most of the respondents in the study highlighted the important role of established patterns of cooperation between universities in Norway and Russia in their participation in the student mobility. However, various motivational factors show different priority in different cases and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to all the student population participating in the program.

The outcomes for the students are analyzed within different areas: the challenges students experienced during international stay, the benefits for their personal and career development, the location decision and challenges that follow after the decision.

### **9.1 Diverse realities within “in-between” place**

The present study considers applying the theory of culture shock (Oberg, 1960) to be relevant to the experience many students undergo during student mobility, but at the same time finds the critics of the concept “shock” to be appropriate, while most of students tried to describe the

experience in different words like “discovery”, “surprise”, “stress” or “adaptation”. Several students mentioned social, psychological and financial barriers during their stay in Norway.

The present research demonstrates that the quality and amount of mobility capital can influence students’ experiences during student mobility. Active personal engagement in problem solving, familiarity with the main peculiarities of the social system of the host county, including knowledge about practical things, like medical care service or routines around financing, influence the quality of personal experience and level the social, financial and psychological barriers under the stay. Self-financed students along with student with short-term grants generally experience more financial difficulties than students getting a scholarship, and this results in the necessity to be engaged in one or more part-time jobs and causes financial dependency from family in Russia. The respondents in the study perceive their separation from family and friends differently: while some mention homesickness as the main psychological challenge they experienced under mobility, others point to the possibility to connect via internet or telephone as a satisfying way of communication.

Difference in perceptions of experience between students who came to Norway initially with an intention of immigration and those who were mostly interested in international experience abroad has been observed. The students involved in international environment mentioned being both “inside and outside” Norwegian society since they did not socialize with local population. These students mentioned that they participated in international activities organized by the University and by students at their student housing, made food together and discovered Norway together. On the contrary, those who already had a personal network in the Norwegian society were not highly interested in international communication within the university framework. Thereby, conditioned by different motivations and different situations students face during their student mobility, they actively construct different multiply realities and their stay is not conditioned only by interaction between the host culture and the sending culture contexts. Through the social constructionism theory by Berger and Luckmann (1966), we understand that the position “in-between” places resulted in multiply realities the students created and participated in during their educational period at the MSWCP program by using common language, contributing with the knowledge from different social contexts, socializing within different environments, getting different perceptions and different knowledge from their experience, by taking into consideration the differences in social worlds they interact with and by building strategies in making this interaction understandable, beneficial, productive and free for tension. By doing that, the students created and reconstructed their own international knowledge through exchange of the knowledge from different social contexts that stimulated their personal development in the future.

## **9.2 The self-benefits and self-formation through choice of action**

Every single informant of the study mentioned English language skills improvement during international mobility and several students noted awakening interest to learn other languages as Norwegian, other European languages and Chinese. Most of the students improved intercultural awareness and intercultural competence, personal traits such as confidence, tolerance, curiosity, decisiveness, sociability, position-defending and better self-assessment, but the connection between motivation to participate in international activities and communication seems to be important factor in developing the skills mentioned above. The students giving lower priority to intercultural communication and participation in international activities mentioned less improvement in intercultural competence, changing outlooks and personal development. Students with different educational background and from different study years perceive obtaining of new academic knowledge in the field of social work and social research differently: while several students pointed out well-organized and informative content of the program, other mentioned some critical arguments as insufficient practical experience and lower level of teaching than expected.

The present study attempts to analyze the perception of risk as the influencing factor in location choice after studies. Although no reliable and definite patterns were revealed and no valid correlation between risk perception and the choice of location was discovered, prevalence of hierarchist adherence and mostly mixed adherences can be mentioned. The present study considers enhancement of the operationalization tool as the solution for more reliable research in the future.

The student's choice of location seems to be connected with partner and family when it relates to the decision to stay in Norway or Europe: the most participants mentioned this as the decisive factor in the issue of the location choice. Other pull factors were better opportunities for development, better ecology and level of comfort. Social bonds, better knowledge of home region and home culture and reduced economical opportunities in Norway were mentioned as push-and-pull factors attracting the students back to the home region. However, the decision to stay or return seems to be complex and should be seen as a combination of different factors as background and contextual characteristics, enabling factors and free will. Thus, in spite of family connections and possibility for reunion, sometimes a participant can choose the location feeling discrimination and threat for self-identity and self-realization, as in Hanna's case (Case H).

Analyzing informants participating in the Norwegian or European labour market, the present research finds that several former students have experienced problems with entering the Norwegian labour market with higher international education, as well as the effect of overeducating and discrimination. The respondents described negative feelings and threat to self-identity caused by ascribed low-skilled East European immigrant identity. However, several

students did not mention discrimination as their problem in the Norwegian society and pointed out that obtaining the master degree in Norway and their international experience has been beneficial to their employment in Norway. A good combination of various previous educational backgrounds also benefited their employment in Norway and European countries, for instance in the field of education. The present study sees the focus on the positive experiences with entering the Norwegian and European market and its prerequisites as the issue for further research, discovering the possibilities for learning from the positive examples of integration to a new culture.

Discussing employability of the MSWCP former students in the Russian context, the following patterns were discovered. The students, who continued working in the field of education and research after their return, considered the education rewarding for their practice in the way of getting new knowledge, western-specific human capital and improving their teaching practice, even if they did not experience any economic benefit from taking the education. Other participants decided to change the field of activity and apply their knowledge to the better paid jobs. Since the home region had limited employment possibility for specialists with this type of education, these participants moved from their home towns to the megalopolises, looking for better employment opportunities. The problem of limited attractive employment possibilities in the Russian Northern region, since the periphery is connected with the common problem of modernity when people move from less advantaged to more advantaged regions, or from periphery to center. According to the Barents Program 2014-2018 (2014) it causes demographic challenge for the whole Barents region when the younger population, especially young women, move from the region to the south regions and megalopolises, therefore creation of better employment opportunities for Northerners is considered as one of the most important goals across the Barents region (ibid). The findings of the present study show that Norway and European countries are perceived by some students as more advantaged regions and therefore attract people from peripheral Russian regions on a par with the federal megalopolises in Russia, something which creates a problem of “brain-drain” (Oosterbeek & Webbink, 2011; Parey & Waldinger, 2011) for less advantaged regions.

### ***9.3 People are strange when you're a stranger***

Being a stranger in the Norwegian society during student mobility often entails changes in outlooks and worldview. Some former students who moved to megalopolises mentioned that changing in outlooks during student mobility pushed them to amend their environment and look for better opportunities for applying the new knowledge. It's worth mentioning that the changes happened right after returning home, while they admitted they experienced the reverse culture shock (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) and the correlation between reverse culture shock experienced and the radical changes in future seems to be significant. The students who did not

experience reverse culture shock and did not mention changes in outlooks during student mobility had a good amount of the mobility capital and shorter length of stay in Norway.

Several students mentioned the stereotypical thinking of both Norwegian and Russian people as one of the observations they made during their stay and after returning to Russia. Being strangers in the host society and after getting back home with obtained brand-new and unique knowledge for their home places, some former students develop a special type of objectivity and freedom from prejudice during mobility, creating the distance necessary for observing habitual assumptions from outside, that makes them see the stereotypes clearly and remain “strangers” at home.

The students staying in Norway or moving to other European countries also remain the strangers in the host societies when they feel ethnic discrimination in entering Norwegian and European labour markets or in everyday life or when they observe the cultural differences sometimes shock them. The focus on influence of cultural differences and the level of tolerance to difference in the Norwegian organizations as factors causing discrimination should determine future research as well as the possibility to predict, control and prevent ethnic discrimination with regard to prerequisites of positive cases of integration. Comparative research between different European countries could reveal some common tendencies and the peculiarities hindering or facilitating integration and inclusion in the Norwegians social context.

The possibility to easily rewrite identities, choose between places of living and create a new network as the traits of “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000) give much more flexibility and freedom for the former students, when they can change their career, interests, network, self-identity and even country of living when they feel they need that. Making choice and change always implies losing potential gain from other alternatives, but getting benefits from the chosen one. Being excited of getting a scholarship, it’s wise to keep in mind that it’s impossible to get something for nothing and “There’s always free cheese in a mousetrap”. The changes can be the price the students pay back, even if they decide to return to their home country.

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# **Annexes**

## ***Annex - 1: Interview guides – In-depth interviews with former students***

### ***1: Interview guide in English***

#### ***1. Establishing rapport***

Introducing myself and presenting the goals of the study.

#### ***2. Personal and educational background information***

##### **2.1 Personal background**

- Name
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Place of birth, living, taking education
  - Socio-economic characteristics
- 1) How can you characterize your socio-economic background before applying to the degree?  
Has it changed now?
  - 2) How can you characterize socio-economical status of the family you were raised in?
  - 3) What are your parents' occupations?

##### **2.2 Educational background**

- Getting information about the program
- 1) How did you know about opportunity to take the Master degree in Norway?
- Previous education and experience
- 1) Have you had bachelor degree within the field social work before applying the master program in Norway? What other education and degrees did you obtain before applying for the master degree in social work?
  - 2) Have you had any experience within the field of social work? What kinds of experience (work, participation in volunteer organization, NGOs and so on)?

#### ***3. Motivation for entering the field of social work and participation in the program.***

##### **3.1 Social work as a profession**

- Why have you decided to be a social worker? When did you decide that?



- Did you have any experience with social work before applying for your studies? When was your first contact with a social worker and this field? Can you describe it?
- Have someone from your family worked in the field of social work?

### **3.2 Participation in international degree program**

- Why did you decide to obtain international master degree in social work?
- Why did you decide to come to Norway to study?
- Did you get any financial support and what kind of support?
- Do you have any friends or acquaintances who participated in international degree or exchange programs?
- Did you have any expectation about your international stay? Have these expectation been met?

## **4. Perception of personal and employability benefits**

### **4.1 Soft skills improving**

- Have you improved your foreign language skills during your stay in Norway?
- Has your knowledge of different countries and cultures has been richer? And in what way?
- Have you become better in working in groups, working with people from different cultures and countries?
- Have you improved your general communication and cooperation skills?
- Can you notice some aspects of your personal development during your stay in Norway? Have you become more self-confident, self-secure, independent, mature?
- Can you say that this program has changed you and your perceptions about different countries, own country, your identity? And in what way?

### **4.2 Employability benefits**

- Have you got any benefits from taking the program in your career development? Can you say you became more attractive person at the job market?
- Has your international experience benefited your employability? In what way?
- Can you apply for better and more variable jobs because of obtaining international education?
- Has obtaining of the master degree/participating in the program has increased your earnings in general?
- Is your contemporary career connected with the field of social work? What position do you take now?

- In what way do you apply your skills obtained during participation in the master program? Do you need to use English in your career? Are you working in an international environment?
- Could you think to continue academic career and apply for PHD degree?

## **5. Challenges under stay and return**

- **Social and cultural barriers**
  - 1) How do you perceive living in a different culture during your stay in Norway? What challenges did you meet? Have you experienced culture shock during your stay in Norway? In what way?
  - 2) Did you get friends and acquaintances during your stay? How did you do that?
  - 3) Did you get help every time when you needed that?
- Did you miss being with your family during the stay? How often did you contact, see them? Did you miss some home culture parts like food, traditions and so on?
- **Financial barriers**
  - 1) How was your economical situation during your stay in Norway?
  - 2) How did you manage high prices under your stay?
- **Language barriers**
  - 1) How did you communicate with your classmates, Norwegians, people from other countries?
  - 2) Did you learn Norwegian language during or before stay?
  - 3) Did you have contact with Russian speaking people living in the area?
- **Return or continuing international career**
  - 1) Did your plans and perspectives change during your stay in Norway?
  - 2) Did you have a possibility to choose between returning to home country or staying in Norway, or maybe continuing international career in another country?
  - 3) When did you decide to return to home country/stay in Norway or another European country?
  - 4) What was the ultimate argument influenced your final decision?
  - 5) Which challenges did you meet after returning home, staying in foreign country? Have you experienced culture shock coming back to your home country? In what way?
  - 6) What do you like most/least in living in Russia/Norway/Europe?

**Thank you for your time.**

## //: Interview guide in Russian

### 1. Представление

Здравствуйте! Спасибо за ваше участие в исследовании, посвященном выпускникам и студентам программы «Сравнительная социальная работа». Целью нашего исследования является выявление факторов, повлиявших на мотивацию студентов, выбор карьеры, места жительства, а также определение личных и карьерных выгод для выпускников. Интервью содержит примерно 42 открытых вопроса. Вы можете сделать перерыв, когда Вам это будет необходимо.

### 2. Личная информация, образование.

- Возраст
- Место рождения, обучения, проживания в настоящий момент.
- Как Вы можете оценить Ваше социально-экономическое положение до поступления на программу «Сравнительная социальная работа»?
- Как вы можете охарактеризовать социально-экономическое положение семьи, в которой Вы выросли?
- Кем по профессии являются ваши родители?
- Как Вы узнали о программе «Ср. Соц. Работа» в Норвегии?
- Закончили ли Вы обучение по программе «Бакалавр (специалист) социальной работы»? Какое дополнительное образование Вы имеете? Есть ли у вас другие научные степени?
- Был ли у Вас опыт работы или волонтерской деятельности в сфере социальной работы до поступления на программу «Ср. Соц. Работа» в Норвегии?

### 3. Мотивация участия в программе, социальной работе как деятельности.

- Почему и когда вы решили стать социальным работником?
- Припомните Ваш самый первый опыт, встречу с социальным работником. Кто это был? Когда? Как часто вы сталкивались с социальными службами как клиент до поступления на эту программу?
- Кто-нибудь из Вашей семьи, знакомых работал - работает в сфере социальной работы?
- Почему Вы решили получить степень «Мастера (магистра) социальной работы» и участвовать в этой программе?
- Почему Вы решили приехать именно в Норвегию для продолжения обучения?
- Получили ли вы финансовую поддержку и какого типа?
- Кто-нибудь из Ваших друзей, знакомых, родственников участвовал в международных программах, программах по студенческому обмену?
- Были ли у Вас какие-нибудь ожидания от нового места обучения, программы, коллектива и тд? Ваши ожидания были оправданы?

### 4. Личные и карьерные выгоды.

- Улучшили ли Вы знание иностранного языка/языков во время пребывания в Норвегии?
- Пополнились ли знания о других странах, культурах во время пребывания в Норвегии и каким образом?
- Как изменились Ваши навыки работы в группе, работе в международном коллективе, с людьми из разных стран и культур?
- Как изменились Ваши навыки общения и коммуникации, взаимодействия с другими людьми?

- Заметили ли Вы изменения в Вашем личностном развитии? Стали ли вы более уверенной, самостоятельной, зрелой, взрослой и т.д?
- Можете ли Вы сказать, что эта программа изменила Вас, Вашу идентичность, Ваше мировосприятие, восприятие других стран, культур, своей страны? Каким образом?
- Изменилось ли Ваше карьерное развитие после обучения по этой программе? Можете ли Вы себя назвать более привлекательным кандидатом для работодателя?
- Как изменился процесс поиска работы после обучения по это программе? Как международный опыт обучения поспособствовал получению работы, продвижению по карьерной лестнице?
- Можете ли Вы теперь заявлять на более престижные, хорошо оплачиваемые должности после получения международного образования?
- Повлияло ли участие в программе, получения степени в социальной работе на Вашу зарплату, достаток в целом?
- Связана ли Ваша карьера с социальной работой в настоящее время? Кем вы работаете?
- Каким образом Вы применяете навыки, полученные в ходе обучения по программе, в своей работе? Используете ли Вы английский или норвежский язык на работе? Работаете ли Вы в международном коллективе или с иностранными партнерами?
- Хотели бы Вы продолжать обучение, получить степень доктора наук?

#### **5. Сложности во время обучения и возвращения.**

- Как Вы можете описать, охарактеризовать Ваши впечатления о жизни в другой стране, культуре? С какими трудностями Вы встретились во время пребывания в Норвегии? Можете ли Вы сказать, что испытали культурный шок? Как это проявлялось?
- Были ли у Вас друзья, знакомые во время пребывания в Норвегии? Как Вы познакомились с новыми людьми?
- Получали ли Вы помощь или совет каждый раз, когда Вам это было необходимо?
- Скучали ли Вы по Вашей семье, друзьям на родине? Каким образом вы общались и как часто? Скучали ли Вы по еде, традициям, обычаям родной культуры?
- Как Вы можете оценить Вашу экономическую ситуацию во время обучения (пребывания) в Норвегии? Вам удавалось содержать себя, несмотря на высокие цены?
- Каким образом /на каком языке Вы общались со своими одноклассниками, норвежцами, людьми из других стран?
- Изучали ли Вы норвежский язык во время пребывания в Норвегии?
- Общались ли Вы с русскоговорящими жителями этого города?
- Изменились ли Ваши планы на будущее во время пребывания в Норвегии?
- Могли ли Вы выбрать между продолжением международной карьеры и возвращением на родину?
- Когда Вы сделали выбор о возвращении домой или продолжении международной карьеры?
- Каков был самый важный окончательный аргумент в пользу выбранного решения?
- С какими трудностями Вы встретились после возвращения домой, продолжения международной карьеры? Испытали ли Вы культурный шок по возвращению домой? Как Вы это переживали?
- Что Вам больше нравится/не нравится в России/Норвегии/Европе?

**Спасибо за Ваше время!**

## **Annex - 2: Informed consent letter**

For a Master Thesis in Comparative Social Work:

### **“Moving to flourish: An empirical study on outcomes of graduate social work student’s mobility between Russia and Norway”**

I am a Master student in Social Work – with a Comparative Perspective at the Department of Social Science, University of Nordland, Bodø, Norway. I would like to invite you to participate in a master thesis research about **perceptions of master students in social work** about the personal and career benefits from participation in the program “Master in Social Work – With A Comparative Perspective”, their motivation for entering the studies, possible challenges during the stay in Norway and return to home county or continuing international career. This study is academic and will be shared only with my supervisor and other university staff related to Department of Social Science of University of Nordland. The result of this study will be a master thesis which will be published in a hard copy and stored at University of Nordland. The project proposal has been reviewed by The Ombudsman for Privacy in Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

Your participation will imply **online interviewing** by Skype or another alternative service. You don’t need to have a web camera and use it; the chatting function and writing the answers are preferable for the research. The only thing you need is your pc with keyboard and some free time. In some cases, if you are in Bodø, we can meet each other for personal interview. You can choose the way you will take the interviewing in this case.

**The most important thing you should know, that the research will be conducted with a guarantee of confidentiality and will provide the anonymity of all the participants:** nothing from directly identifying data like names, date of birth, address or even indirectly identifying data will be used in the research.

The project should be finished and submitted by **15<sup>th</sup> of May 2015**. All the data and your personal information will be destroyed and deleted after this date. Supervisor for the research is Trude Gjernes, Department of Social Science, University of Nordland.

It’s voluntary to take part in the research and it’s possible to withdraw any time without any explanation. Participation in the project will be a great help to me and the social science in a whole.

I appreciate your participation in the study.

Thank you! Kind regards, Natalia Shavrina ([shavrinka@yandex.ru](mailto:shavrinka@yandex.ru), tlf. 40305511)

Please, sign here if you are willing to participate in the research\_\_\_\_\_

date\_\_\_\_\_

### **Annex – 3: Foreign students in Norway, academic year 2013-2014**

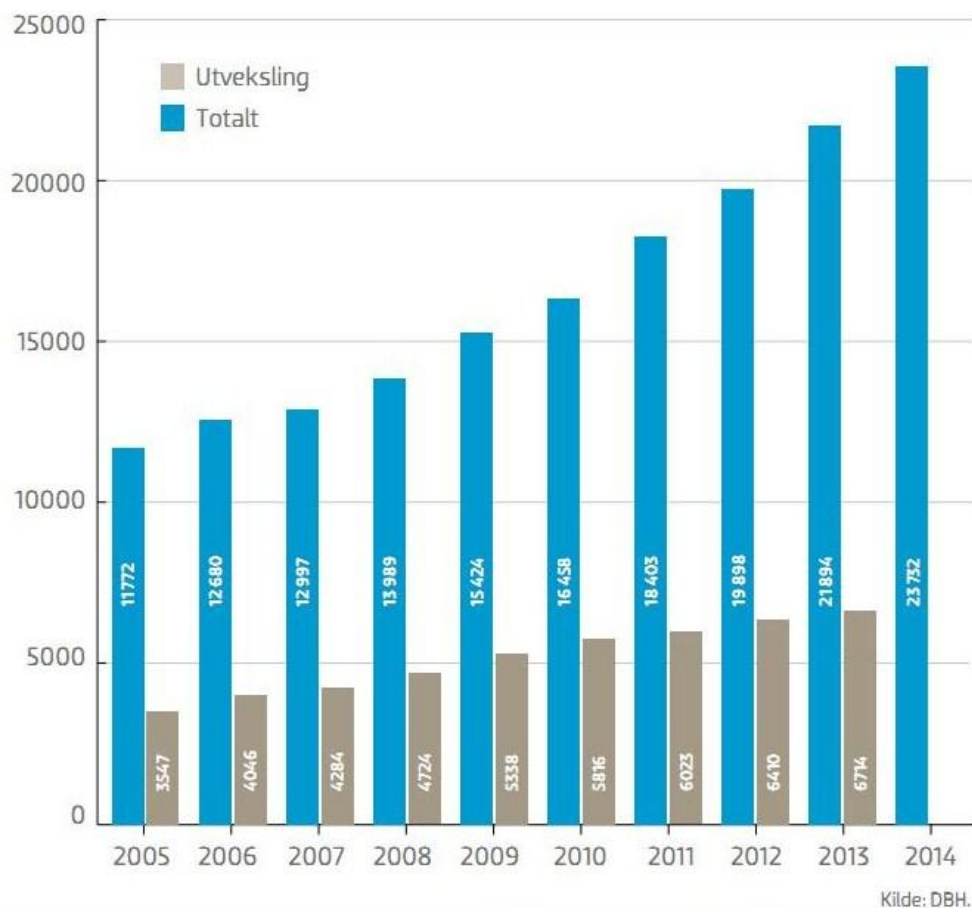
	Totalt 2014	Totalt 2013	Utvexling 2013
Sverige	2245	2002	110
Tyskland	1764	1677	1190
Russland	1477	1588	220
Kina	1063	1080	121
Danmark	1058	869	179
Polen	799	637	163
Frankrike	779	716	769
Spania	594	556	582
Nepal	530	508	48
USA	528	528	194
Nederland	521	464	315
Iran	460	527	3
Finland	411	342	100
Island	410	356	20
Italia	401	345	299

\*Utvexlingsstudentene inngår i totaltallet. Antall innreisende utvexlingsstudenter vil være klart våren 2015.

Kilde: DBH. Høstsemesteret.

Source: SIU (2015)

## Annex – 4: Foreign students in Norway 2004-2014



Source: SIU (2015)

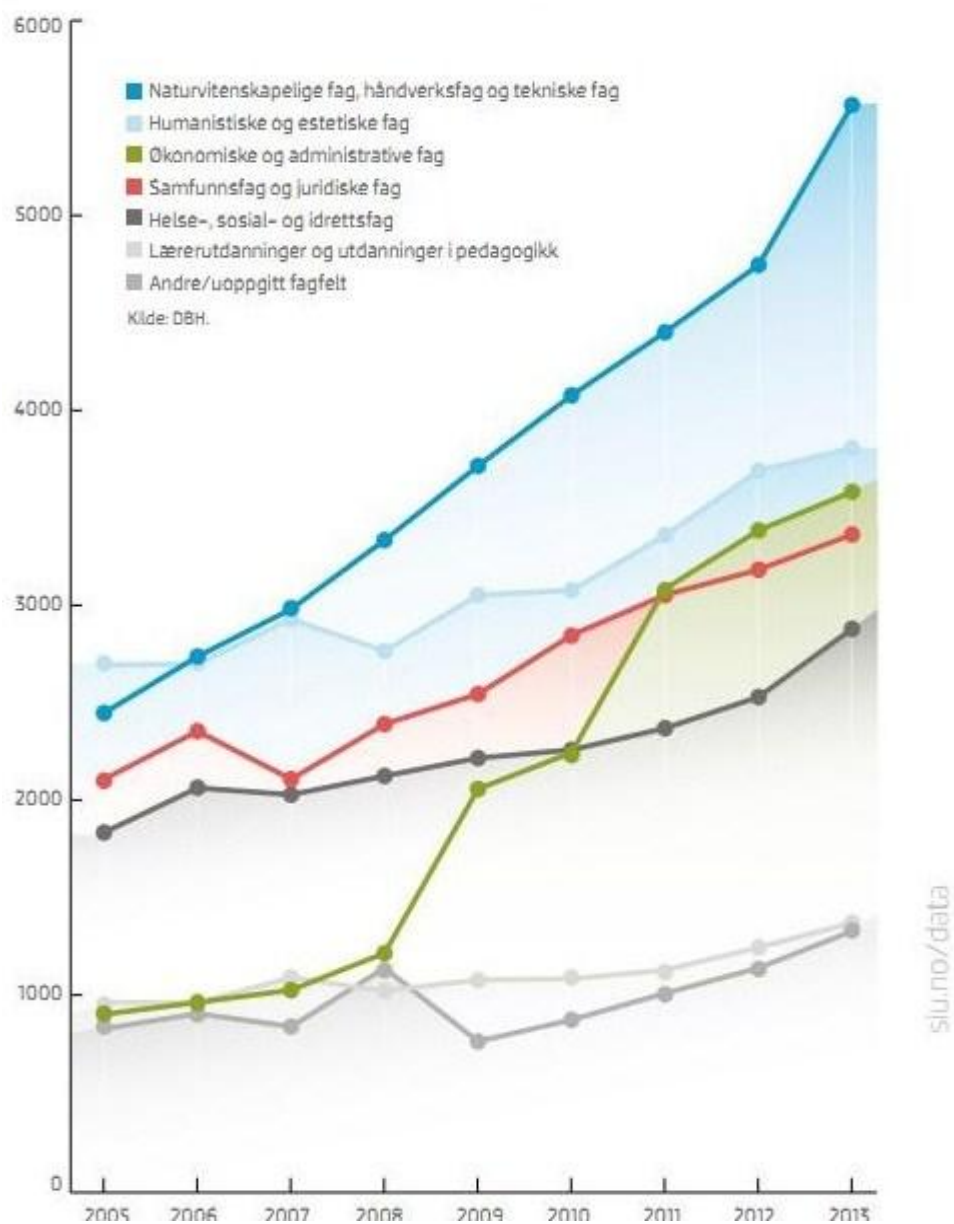
**Annex - 5: Variables affecting the magnitude and direction of major flow patterns**

<b>Host country variables</b>	<b>Sending country variables</b>
Economic difficulties leading to restrictions on international students through measures such as higher tuition fees, e.g., United Kingdom, Australia	Economic difficulties leading to reduction in available state funds as well as available foreign exchange, e.g., Nigeria, Venezuela
Population changes leading to increase in available student places, e.g., some states in the United States	Economic boom leading to expansion of demand for trained personnel and hence an increase in numbers of students going abroad, e.g., oil producing countries
Changes in foreign policy leading to completion of bilateral agreements	Economic policy changes leading to emphasis in areas with a dearth of requisite personnel and training facilities, hence necessitating that students go abroad, e.g., China
Reemphasis on political commitments leading to increase in inflow of international students from a given politically volatile region, e.g., Afghanistan	Political changes (such as revolution) leading to change in foreign policy and hence change in flow direction, e.g., Nicaragua
Education policy changes leading to emphasis on international area and language studies and hence a greater commitment to study abroad programs, e.g., U.S.	Educational changes such as completion of appropriate training facilities - thus reducing numbers of students abroad, e.g., India.

Table 1. Source: Impact and adjustment: foreign students in a comparative perspective, Altbach (1991:309).



## Annex – 6: Foreign students distributed by studies in Norway



Source: SIU (2015).

## ***Annex - 7: The cultural measure of four adherences***

### **Hierarchy (15 items)**

I think there should be more discipline in the youth of today

I would support the introduction of compulsory National Service

I am more strict than most people about what is right and wrong

We should have stronger armed forces than we do now

The police should have the right to listen to private phone calls when investigating crime

Those in power often withhold information about things which are harmful to us

One of the problems with people is that they challenge authority too often

It is important to preserve our custom and heritage

I think it is important to carry on family traditions

In my household, family members have their own places at the dinner table

I always sort out clothes into separate categories before washing

I value regular routines highly

I think being on time is important

My time-tabling of meals is haphazard

I like to plan carefully so that financial risks are not taken

### **Individualism (9 items)**

In a fair system people with more ability should earn more

A free society can only exist by giving companies the opportunity to prosper

If a person has the get-up-and-go to acquire wealth, that person should have the right to enjoy it

It is just as well that life tends to sort out those who try harder from those who don't

Continued economic growth is the answer to improved quality of life

This country would be better off if we didn't worry so much about how equal people are

Making money is the main reason for hard work

I don't join clubs of any kind

I tend to be sceptical of health food fads

### **Egalitarianism (11 items)**

If people in this country were treated more equally we would have fewer problems

The government should make sure everyone has a good standard of living

Those who get ahead should be taxed more to support the less fortunate

I would support a tax change that made people with large incomes pay more

The world could be a more peaceful place if it's wealth were divided more equally among nations

Social security tends to stop people from trying harder to get on

Racial discrimination is a very serious problem in our society

What this country needs is a "fairness revolution" to make the distribution of goods more equal

Most of the meals I eat are vegetarian

Health requirements are very important in my choice of foods

I prefer simple and unprocessed foods

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**Fatalism (11 items)**

There is no use in doing things for other people – you only get in the neck in the long run

Cooperating with others rarely works

The future is too uncertain for a person to make serious plans

I have often been treated unfairly

A person is better off if he or she doesn't trust anyone

I don't worry about politics because I can't influence things very much

Most people make friends only because friends are useful to them

I feel that life is like lottery

Even if you work hard you never know if that will help you do better

It seems to me that, whoever you vote for, things go on pretty much the same

I have few financial investments

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Source: Wildavsky and Dake (1990).

## Annex - 8: Memo© factors in relation to employer's survey, quotes

<b>Memo© factors</b>	<b>Quotes from Students regarding perception of skills</b>	<b>Quotes from interviews with employers</b>	<b>Employers Survey (important)</b>
Confidence in and conviction regarding one's own abilities (memo© factor, <b>Confidence</b> )	"Confidence", "Increased self-confidence" "Self-confidence" "I became amazingly more independent" "Self-confident" "Confidence and strength of character" "More autonomous" "Erasmus gives us safety" "Independence, maturity and responsibility"	"They use the language of some academically acquired knowledge to apply for a job" "Open-minded, self-sufficient, evaluate the real value of money, they learn to cope with problems on their own, working under pressure, teamwork, all the soft skills that are needed are a part of learning abroad"	94%
Openness to and curiosity about new challenges (memo© factor, <b>Curiosity</b> )	"Non-mobile students are more down to earth" "More persevering, more creative" "It opened a lot of doors for me" "It opens your mind, it is good for the market" "New language, new culture, new people" "You get perspectives for future business connections"	"Fresh air to our company" "They learn to work together ... all that you did not learn in any university" We noticed that they are more independent. Additionally, they are much more prepared to listen and learn. Generally they are more interested in learning" "I think that we -Erasmus students -have a broader view of things in life"	94%
Better knowledge of what one wants and reaching decisions more easily (memo© factor, <b>Decisiveness</b> )	"My independence" "More positive attitude" "It helped me to understand what I really want to do in the future" "More positive attitude towards the problems facing the future" "Applying for Erasmus is a deliberate step in search of a job" "It is a step further" "Choosing the meat at the supermarket is a personal development" "I was not as active a person as I am right now" "I can travel alone with no problems" ""It changed my life and the way I think. Thanks to Erasmus I started travelling alone around the world, and I became strong and adventurous; I stopped being afraid of following my own convictions."	"An Erasmus student shows me that he/she has been able to seek life and has chosen mobility" "Their expectations of employment are then obviously much broader" The exchange interns do have less fear when it comes to the contact with customers and communication in general" "They have a greater ability to solve problems"	92%
Awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses (memo© factor, <b>Serenity</b> )	"Being outside of your comfort zone" Now, I don't get lost in critical situations" "Better team working" "How to manage my time better"	"Erasmus students solve problems faster than people who have not faced them, and they are brave. They have no fear of the unknown" Living outside your home country for a while and getting used to a different environment helps to distinguish yourself from others."	94%
Tolerance towards other people's values and behaviour (memo© factor, <b>Tolerance of Ambiguity</b> )	"Less judgmental regarding differences" "destroying stereotypes" "More tolerant and communicative" "more tolerant and open" "To enlarge one's horizon with other cultural perspectives and values" "adaptable, easy going" "Tolerance, adaptability" "Much more flexible" "I learnt to be more self-confident, and to communicate with different people, even those I don't like." "Open-mindedness to different cultures"	"They have knowledge of another culture, understanding or sensitivity to people who are not like you""Mobility leads to a certain basic flexibility. Additionally, mobility causes an intellectual opening and the readiness to engage with new topics""The European student, is much more tolerant" "These cultural skills are very valuable; "Mobile people are more empathetic towards foreign cultures and contexts" "Everything which implies an international experience, relating with other cultures and other languages... is a bonus for us."	96%

Source: The Erasmus Impact Study (2014)