Chapter 11
Global Horizons and Regional Mobility: Russian Student Mobility to Northern Norway and Northern Sweden

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11.1 Introduction

In this chapter, Russian student mobility to northern Norway and Sweden is investigated. Drawing on educational biographies of Russian students at Luleå University of Technology (LTU), Umeå University in Sweden (UmU), Nord University (formerly University of Nordland (NU) and the Arctic University of Norway (AUN, formerly Finnmark University College and University of Tromsø) in Norway, and the Northern Arctic Federal University (NarFu) in Arkhangelsk, Russia, the aim of this chapter is to investigate different motivational factors behind student mobility from northern Russia to northern Norway and Sweden. This chapter will also put student mobility in this region in dialogue with comparable studies of regional mobility in addition to highlighting the particularities of the Barents Region. This chapter resonates closely with other chapters in this book while also offering the special angle of comparative national dimensions and putting this mobility in the context of earlier and ongoing studies of student mobility on a global basis (cf. Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 2008; Waters 2003, 2005, 2008; Lee and Koo 2006; Sidhu 2006; Sin 2009; Gurüz 2011; Mellström 2012; Brooks and Waters 2013; Forstorp and Mellström 2013, forthc.; Collins et al. 2014).

Russian students in the Barents Region are moving within a regional eduscape that is characterized by an existent and emerging regional infrastructure. The Barents Region is currently being consolidated as a transnational political and cultural space and a region that stretches from northern Norway through the Ice Sea to the distant forests of western Ural. The concept of a regional Barents eduscape is used here to depict the transnational movements of people and ideas with regard to

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higher education and research in this geographical space. As such, it resembles other educational regional eduscapes where historical connections and geographical proximity are used to rejuvenate old connections and ties in a globalising world that presents challenges as well as opportunities to national systems of higher education (see, for instance, Collins et al. 2014). Drawing on anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's conceptualisation of global cultural flows (1996), the concept of eduscapes (Forstorp and Mellström 2013) is generally used to conceptualise global flows of higher education. It is defined as the transnational flow of ideas and people related to research and higher education, where nodes of knowledge centres, peripheries and positional dynamics shift over time but are connected through modern communication technologies and different epistemic, ethnic and learning communities (see also Kynäslahti 2001; Ambrosius Madsen 2005, 2008; Luke 2005, 2006; Beck 2008; Carney 2008, 2010, 2012; Ambrosius Madsen and Carney 2011; Caluya et al. 2011).

I argue that the present (asymmetrical) exchange between northwest Russia, northern Norway and Sweden can be understood within such a regional eduscape in combination with a wider globalism in higher education that directs educational choices, strategies, locations and places of desirable universities. The educational mobility within this regional eduscape is understood on an individual level in relation to analytical notions and empirical categories such as transnational families, globalism, cultural capital, the welfare state, gender, sexuality and nationality. Furthermore, the different national contexts, educational policies and regulatory frameworks of Russia, Norway and Sweden provide an empirical and analytical ground for discussing how educational routes are formed and directed. I additionally tap into current arguments in studies of globalisation and higher education that refer to the state and its institutional arrangements as important mediators of global and regional influence, where the particularities of politics, history and culture at the national level help to determine how particular countries respond to discourses of a seemingly unstoppable globalisation (Sidhu 2006, p. 123; Brooks and Waters 2013, p. 37; Forstorp 2013).

11.2 Background and Context

As Wiers-Jenssen (2014) has pointed out, the number of Russian students has grown considerably since the beginning of 2000. In 2014 close to 1600 Russian students were registered in Norwegian HEIs in comparison to a little over 400 in the year 2000.[1] The overall number of international students in Norway has increased from 6000 in 2000 to more than 21,000 in 2013. Russian students constitute 8% of the international students in Norway; the third largest group, only surpassed by Swedish

[1] Wiers-Jenssen (Chap. 10 in this volume) is giving a comprehensive overview of the Russian student mobility statistics, so I will not go into elaborated statistical details but rather give a short background of the Norwegian and Swedish situation, and then move on to more qualitative data which will complement Wiers-Jenssen's aggregated approach.

and German students. Within the country, the largest receivers of Russian students are the northern universities of University of Nordland and the Arctic University of Norway, with just over 50%. The STEM-subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine) are most popular with 31%, closely followed by Business Administration with 25%. Fifty seven% of the students are taking a bachelor's degree while 43% are enrolled in master's programs. Females comprise 72% of the student population, which is a higher proportion than among other nationalities. For western countries the females represent 59%, while for eastern and southern countries it is 42%. Another characteristic feature of the Russian student population in Norway is that a high proportion of the students' parents hold higher education degrees (Wiers-Jenssen, Chap. 10 in this volume).

The Swedish situation has been similar to that of Norway in many ways. However, certain major aspects have drastically changed since 2011; the main reason being the introduction of tuition fees for non-EU students from the Autumn of 2011. This change in policy has dramatically decreased the influx of international students from non-EU countries by approximately 90–95% depending on year, university, subject area, country of origin and so on. There are no general statistics available, but individual Swedish HEIs communicate similar drops in incoming non-EU students. Numbers are slowly picking up again with different scholarship programs as incentives to attract talented students from developing countries, but they are far from the figures prior to 2011 and are never expected to reach anywhere near those numbers again. In the academic year of 2009/2010, the number of international students in Sweden was 41,907, as compared to 25,570 incoming students for the academic year 2005/2006. On average the number of international students in Sweden increased by 12–13% per year between 1999 and 2010 (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, Statistics Sweden 2011, Report UF 20 SM 1101). It is the number of freely-moving international students that has dropped since fees were introduced. In the academic year 2009/2010, Swedish universities received 27778 free movers and 14377 exchange students, with Lund University in the south of Sweden and the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm being the most popular destinations. The gender ratio of all incoming international students in the academic year of 2009/2010 was 56% men and 44% women, with a similar subject preference distribution as in Norway with regard to STEM-subjects and Business and Administration. Russian students in Sweden have been much less prevalent than in Norway. In the academic year of 2009/2010, the total number of Russian students was 498 (1.18% of all incoming students to Sweden 2009/2010), out of which 376 were women (75%) and 122 were men (25%) (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, Statistics Sweden 2011, Report UF 20 SM 1101, p 9.)

In general, the two Nordic sibling countries had experienced a very similar development of increasing numbers of incoming international student until the autumn of 2011. Reactions to the introduction of tuition fees have been mixed, however, from the university sector as well as leading Swedish politicians and industrialists, they have mainly been negative. In November 2011, three months after the fees were introduced, two leading Swedish industrialists, Bennet and

Ekholm, claimed that the reform had been a "serious mistake", that the Swedish higher educational system and Swedish industrial sector would suffer a great loss of technical competence, and that Sweden would lose out on the global labour market. Likewise, former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Eliasson claimed that important international contacts and possibilities for bilateral cooperation would be lost in the process. In the beginning of 2015, critical public voices and debates have been less prevalent.

Nonetheless, in interviews conducted for this as well as parallel projects, we continuously hear criticisms of current educational policies concerning losing out on the global talent pool in science and engineering; not the least of which include subjects and research areas that attract few Swedish engineering students, such as mining and metallurgy. The big demand for competent engineers in these areas was largely filled by graduates from developing countries such as India and Pakistan in the mid-2000s, but the field is now characterized by a constant shortage of skilled engineers. Despite this fact in an increasingly xenophobic political climate there seem to be few politicians, educationalists, and/or industrialists who are ready to bring questions regarding engineering competence, higher education, multiculturalism, immigration and tuition fees to the forefront.

In summary, the differences between Sweden and Norway concerning these issues are likely to remain unless the Norwegian government changes their stance by introducing student fees for non-Norwegian students. This is, indeed, an issue that has been aired by different Norwegian politicians and is probably the most likely scenario if any changes of Norwegian national higher education policies may be forecasted.

11.3 Material and Method

The empirical material for this chapter draws on oral and email interviews with 35 Russian students (23 female and 12 males) at the five different universities listed in the introduction. Ten interviews were conducted in Sweden, 20 interviews in Norway and 5 interviews in Russia. The interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2013 as part of the research project, "Transforming the Northern Future through Student Exchange? Building of a Research Network on Internationalization of Education". In addition, I also use a survey conducted at NArFU. The questionnaire, "Education Abroad", was conducted among 210 students (100 females and 110 males) at the Department of Mathematics and the Department of Information and Space Technologies at NArFU in 2013 (Saburov 2014). Students at different educational levels have been interviewed: doctoral, master's and undergraduate students, including students of varying ages from 20 to the mid-30s. The oral (31) interviews were semi-structured with the guidance of an interview scheme focusing on family background, schooling and educational trajectories, and future plans. The email (4) interviews were focused on the same themes. Aside from the 210 students of mathematics and information and space technologies, 15 interviews were conducted with

students in STEM-subjects and 20 interviews with students in the humanities and social sciences. Three of the interviewers spoke Russian and conducted their interviews in Russian, while the other four conducted the interviews in English.

The interviews that were conducted in English were occasionally characterized by troublesome language dilemmas in terms of missing vocabulary, overly short self-presentations and very brief accounts of diverse incidents and happenings. At the same time, they provided an opportunity to practice the language that so many of the students had listed as the prime reason for going abroad. A majority of the students we interviewed are partaking in exchange programs; particularly the students at NU in Bodø where many are in the program Bachelor of Circumpolar Studies (BCS), which is a cross-university program focusing on the circumpolar region, including the Barents Region. Concerning the general picture of the interviews, there is huge diversity in terms of length, content, substance, context, and intelligibility, but with such a fairly large set of both qualitative and quantitative data, there is also fair possibility to catch the most important themes representing different motivational factors of student mobility in the Barents Region. I begin with one of the most prominent ones.

11.4 The Power of English

In the survey conducted at NArFU over 70% of the students answered that the main reason they wanted to study abroad was to improve their proficiency in a foreign language (read English). Although none of the students or faculty at any of the investigated universities have English as a native language (with possibly one exception), this was still the predominant reason given in the NArFU survey, by far, for studying in Norway and Sweden. In Wiers-Jenssen's (2014) survey the factor "English taught programs and courses" ranks as one of the most important reasons, along with factors such as "no tuition fees", "improving my career possibilities", and "safe, and technologically advanced society". There is, thus, an interesting discrepancy between the Russian students' responses in Russia and those in Norway.

Nonetheless, the oral interviews unquestionably substantiate the orientation towards learning English as one of the primary reasons for coming to Norway and Sweden:

> Irina from Arkhangelsk: *I also would like to improve my English language skills; for example, how to write assignments correctly and learning to include several sources of information in my work.*
> Ekaterina from Arkhangelsk: *…honestly, one of my goals in going to Norway was to improve language skills, courses were less important*

In many ways, the English language is a symbolic container that represents many different things to Russian students, and that also resembles and correlates with desires, requirements, career plans, employability, and so on; factors we observe in many other studies of student mobility around the world (Lee and Koo 2006;

Sidhu 2006; Park and Bae 2009; Brooks and Waters 2013). At the same time, the English language also carries many ambivalent and particular associations that mirror the complex history of Russian-western relations. As such, the experiences of the interviewed Russian students point to the importance of contextualizing how globalisation and ideologies of globalism always take local forms and have to be interpreted in relation to space and place; that is, geopolitical dynamics and socio-cultural particularities. Without going into details of any such historical complexities and previous/current political tensions here, we are sticking to interpretations of how this affects Russian student mobility in the High North in the context of the interviewed students.

When comparing our material to that of similar studies, we can note an analogous belief in the idea that mastering the English language is seen as an indispensable requirement for success in a globalised economy (Robertson 2006; Sidhu 2006; Park and Bae 2009, p. 368; Brooks and Waters 2013, p. 62). As such, the desire and need for learning English is presented as a positional advantage in a competitive labour market that is characterized by high entry levels and anticipated individual determination. In the northwest Russian context it also seems to be accentuated as a dividing line between home-boundedness, national sentiments and international orientation. This may not seem controversial from a "western" perspective, but two of the students express concerns that their Norwegian study experiences will not be favorably viewed by Russian employers in the wake of growing anti-western sentiments and pro-Russian campaigns in Russia. On a parallel note, in an excerpt from one of the interviews, we follow ideas on how these political tensions are transplanted into everyday plans, strategic educational choices and different stances with regard to the growing pressure of increasing nationalism:

> Interviewee: *It happens sometimes that a person who has studied abroad tries to contribute something new, for example, in the humanities sphere, but he is blamed afterwards for betrayal of the motherland.*
>
> *You see, my difficulty is also in the fact that I myself don't see what might be changed here. And in the next 5–10 years, I don't think that there will be some kind of change that will lead to flourishing, to stability of our state and so on. It was totalitarism and it is still totalitarism, maybe the walls of the cage became a bit more soft. That's it, it was a cage and it is still a cage. That is why our students leave, they try to get education because they know that they wouldn't be employable with our diploma, not whether we stay here or go abroad.*

The English language is apparently becoming something much broader than just the world lingua of communication that everyone needs to master in order to move around in a global world. In the politically loaded local context, whether or not it is intended by the individual, English represents both a road to something else – a possibility to leave the country – and a possible implicit statement on domestic politics. In many cases, the individual person is supposedly interested in opening a wider window of opportunities, rather than making a statement about domestic politics. The dilemma of possibly being politically positioned due to an individual preference to study abroad is something that seems to accompany mobility decisions along with a commonly held desire to improve one's chances at a better life. The latter motivation is something that our interviewee's articulate in a number of

different ways. In an interview with an administrative staff member in Arkhangelsk, the person responded to our question, "What do you think is our students motivation to live abroad?' with the following:

> Interviewee: [smiles and lowers the voice] *Honestly? To leave the country. This is the major thing that I see in our students. They do not see any future prospects in our country. They want, it is understandable, they want to live better, they don't believe in the "bright" future here [in the meaning of good welfare and state support], that is why they hope to change their lives.*

Still, in the broader context, language, mobility and migration are key components in the geography of international education and large-scale power dynamics (Brooks and Waters 2013, p. 168) where linguistic migration:

> …is driven by globally dominant ideologies of English that constitute highly specific views of language, place and social space (Park and Bae 2009, p. 368).

As in the previous quote, the same interviewee puts a similar interpretation into the context of Russian student mobility, which is very asymmetrical in the context of the Barents Region:

> *…this academic mobility that we have at our university now, now it is not academic mobility, we work for the educational system of other countries. It is not academic mobility, we don't see any profit for ourselves, there is no use for our university, only for the reports.*

As such, this interview excerpt seems to reflect the indisputable fact of an overwhelming asymmetry in the exchange relations between northern Norway, Sweden and northern Russia. If anything, this reminds us that academic and student mobility in higher education is an uneven process and that different positions can inhabit differnet locations in a stratified chain of regional, national, and global knowledge production and consumption (Forstorp and Mellström 2013, p. 20). In this uneven process of supply and demand it is important to recognize the particularity of mobility and contextualize questions surrounding location and opportunities. We also see that students in a periphery like northern Russia create certain ways of knowing and being in the periphery that feed upon regional, national and global eduscapes. So, although neither of the involved HEIs in the Barents Region could claim any sort of premier position in a global eduscape, we learn that the peripherality of a regional eduscape is by no means fixed but rather characterized by a cultural dynamic of multi-layeredness and gradual differences. Thus, as Brooks and Waters (2013, p. 115) state:

> Academic mobility is a spatial and human practice filled with social, political and cultural meaning on regional, national and transnational levels.

Consequently, in the broader cultural context, the interview excerpt above also reflects a more general sentiment expressed by several of the young Russian students we have interviewed. It is the feeling of a skewed and unfair balance that spills over into cultural stereotypes about the motivations for studying in Norway and Sweden, particularly when it comes to female students, in addition to commonly held stereotypes about excessive alcohol consumption among Russian male students general expressions of "Russophobia". The next section addresses how such emotions influence student mobility and academic exchange in the Barents Region.

11.5 The Gender Politics of Student Mobility in the Barents Region

As noted earlier, over 70% of the incoming Russian students in Norway and Sweden are female. In comparison to other international students grouped by nationality, this is an unusually high number. Correspondingly, in our interviews we find that important reasons for many of the female students to leave their country are articulated in terms of gender conservatism, gender equality and individual freedom. In an interview with Nadja (23 years), a female Russian student at Luleå University of Technology, she explains what she sees as a confined gender system for women:

> *Either you stay in your hometown, get married early, have children, and try to be the nice domesticated women you are expected to be, or you see the possibility of another life in other parts of the world. It was a reason for me to come to Sweden.*

One of Nadja's friends, Anna, also articulates that she feels very restricted in northern Russia, with a patriarchal gender regime that she feels is the very opposite of the kind of life she anticipates for herself as a young woman. These young women interviewed see few alternatives to leaving their hometowns and country. In our interpretation, there is unquestionably a deeply gendered dimension of student mobility in the Barents Region. One clearly discernable "push" factor is an articulated gender conservatism in the north Russian context, which strongly contributes to the unusually high percentage of female students. Tatjana, a student in the BCS program at NU, is another student who voices similar concerns when reflecting upon gender differences and heteronormative family patterns:

> *Your women are more independent, they are not going to suffer in a relationship, because they just go. Russian women are often suffering from beatings, but they stay. In Russia there are not enough men, maybe 60–40%, but not enough men. You will get something from a man even if he is drinking; because if you are not married, it is also about stigmatization. Especially if you are more than 30 years old, there is the traditional way of thinking and the restriction of the mind; If you are not married, you are not successful. Even now, I am 25 and not married, but I am glad that it is becoming better, because before when you were 25 and not married people thought that something was not correct with you. But now it is becoming better. But mostly all my classmates have family and they think that their success is already achieved; to have children and family. If you are not so educated and if you haven't made any goals in your life but have created a family, and if you find a man, that means that you are successful.*

As it seems this gender conservatism is working in parallel with new and changing mobility patterns in the Arctic regions, possibly furthering the impetus for young women to leave their native places:

> …there is a new pattern emerging of higher female education in the Arctic resulting in higher rates of female emigration, first from smaller to larger settlements and then out of the Arctic either to the metropoles of the Arctic states or abroad, in search of work commensurate with their skill levels. While men also migrate away, they tend to do so on a temporary basis, while women tend to leave permanently. (UArctic 2014, p. 70)

Student mobility is thus part of broader gender-imbalanced migration patterns on a local and regional level, not only in northern Russia but also in other parts of the Barents Region and the Arctic region as a whole, although more accentuated in the Russian Arctic regions (UArctic 2014, p. 93). We can thus observe how gender is a decisive dimension of an uneven geography of transnational higher education that connect social imaginaries of regional and global eduscapes in various ways. In the case of Russian students in the Nordic countries we clearly observe that educational mobility is part of larger migration flows that feed upon diverse expressions of gender and sexuality, among other things. Thus, educational mobility is closely connected to the search for identity and expression in a broader sense, where the idea of expressing oneself in terms of less normative gender and sexuality arrangements is becoming increasingly more important for many young people around the globe.

Another dimension of the gender politics of Russian student mobility to Norway and Sweden is found in everyday experiences of sexism and recurrent expressions of gender stereotypes connected to Russian women. Several of the interviewed female students have been witness to such behaviors among fellow Norwegian and Swedish students, other Swedes and Norwegians, and possibly those of other nationalities as well. Tanya, who studied the BCS program at NU, recalls a situation when she and a friend asked for directions in Bodø:

> *We asked people and they were very kind, and one couple was very interested and walked with us to the Police College, and then the man said that here you will find strong Norwegian men; you should hunt them. I was shocked! Why should I hunt them?!*
>
> *My second bad experience was in this club, "Samfunnet". There I noticed that Norwegian guys were drunk. They are usually more shy, but when they are drunk, they just go to girls, and when some came to us, they treated us like whores. You are Russian girls, you come here to find husbands, to stay here, just to become housewives and get children, and do nothing. It was humiliating. They were drunk, but when they are drunk they say what is in their head, what they really think. After this experience my attitude towards Norway has changed.*

In our interviews with female Russian students at LTU in Sweden, they reiterated several similar incidents of having to face sexism and gender stereotypes because of their nationality. Olga, a doctoral student at LTU, has developed a strategy of trying to avoid mentioning her background because as she says:

> *…it always compels people to comment on prostitution, politics, mail-order brides, vodka or whatever that they connect with Russia, and I'm not really interested in talking about these things because I'm here to do my doctorate…*

Olga speaks fluent Swedish with a hardly discernable accent. Beyond trying to avoid the ethnic and gendered stereotypes in daily conversations, she also emphasizes the importance of mastering the language to the degree that you almost pass as a native speaker. For her, this has been an empowering key to what she feels has been an overall positive migratory experience. She has been living in Luleå on a permanent basis since 2009 and is now established in her academic career at LTU. However, being cornered by "Russophobic" prejudices is something that seems to recur throughout many of the migratory experiences of the interviewed

Russian students. These students are culturally cornered with prejudice by ethnic Swedes and Norwegians and even by ethnic Russians in Russia, according to Janina, a student from NArFU on an exchange semester at NU:

> *…like some Russians, and also Norwegians, think that Russian women only want to find a man to marry, so that is the reason why I have lost some of the communication with old friends because it is about jealousy, it is about understanding, because they don't think it is about studying.*

Being "othered" by ethnic Swedes and Norwegians via gendered and ethnic prejudices, in combination with similar marginalization by fellow countrymen−women, seems to create a certain translocational space (Anthias 2002, pp. 501–502) for these students; where they do not feel comfortable in what is supposedly their designated home space nor in the receiving country. This is, of course, an experience they share with migrants of different kinds, but also something that is unique and points to the particularity of student mobility in the Barents Region. This is, in large part, a gendered particularity created by normative expectations, rules and prejudices on both the sending and receiving ends. This translocational space is characterized by degrees of liminality, a sense of in-betweenness, which may not only be seen as a cultural hindrance but also as a window of opportunity. It can turn out to be empowering, as in the case of Olga; a new possibility that develops from the particularity of the given circumstances in translocal positions and locations. As such, it refers to a complex interplay of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, nationality, and class (Anthias 2002, p. 502).

We can thus see that student mobility in the Barents Region is being conducted within a regional eduscape that is characterized by translocal particularity, in which English is a symbolic container and gender politics are two crucial parameters in the cultural imaginary and the everyday life experiences of the interviewed students. Beyond these preliminary conclusions, it is also important to stress the academic institutional infrastructure, welfare contexts and geographical proximity as essential parameters for channeling mobility patterns and structuring individual experiences. It is to these themes we turn in the next section.

11.6 Institutional Arrangements and "Welfare Statism"

Throughout our interviews we have come to see that institutional arrangements are emphasized as an important reason for the possibility to study abroad. To move within an institutional arrangement that provides a feeling of personal security, a sense of cultural familiarity and a safe environment is hardly something unique to Russian students; it has also been seen in previous interviews done in Sweden and Malaysia (Mellström 2003, 2012), in addition to many other studies of student mobility. In the case of student mobility in the Barents Region, these factors are also connected to the wider and presumably inviting context of the welfare state/s in

Norway and Sweden. This is what I refer to as "welfare statism" as a "pull" factor in transnational student mobility.

In most cases, decisions to migrate, or just leave for a semester, are channeled through family, friends, kin and even clansmen/−women. In previous work (Mellström 2012; Forstorp and Mellström 2013) we have also seen that migratory experiences with higher education as the driving force do not merely concern individuals; for many of the interviewees, it is also part of their family stories. It governs their lives and has, in very many cases, governed the entire family history. Considerations and concerns about safe accommodation, travels and a non-hostile student environment, in general, are crucial aspects of these discussions. Not surprisingly, this is particularly emphasized by female students and their families. Many of the students that have taken the BCS program at NU, overwhelmingly female, mention the good relations to Norway and the known institutional arrangements as important factors in, their mobility decision. A sense of cultural familiarity, similar climate and geographical proximity are other factors mentioned by these students. Viktor, who took the BCS program, says:

> *The module I enjoyed most was focusing on security of the circumpolar world. I am interested in this theme because we – as neighbors in the Barents Region – have a lot in common. And history is important in order to avoid conflicts and ensure a life in peace together.*

One interpretation of Viktor's statement could be that, in moving between places, we are also helping to construct these places and bind them together. Transnational migration processes connect places by contributing to the construction of space and by "locating globalization" in different places and in different scale dynamics from the local to the regional and global spheres (Smith 2001; Featherstone et al. 2007; Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009; Hedberg and Carmo 2012; Hedberg et al. 2014). As such, it is important to also recognize that institutional arrangements are channeling these spatial bindings "from above" (Hedberg et al. 2014) in an interplay between different scale levels of transnational mobility. Institutional arrangements seem to be an underestimated dimension in studies of student mobility, where most studies have taken a perspective "from below":

> The agency of individual migrants, migrant communities and migrant organisations is often highlighted in transnational migration studies. (Hedberg et al. 2014, p. 515)

In the case of Russian student mobility to northern Norway and Sweden, we do observe that institutional arrangements, such as the BCS program, are truly important in combination with a general desire for "modernity" in terms of welfare state arrangements, socio-economic conditions and high-quality educational facilities.

One crucial part of the welfare state's institutional and ideological arrangements, in terms of access to higher education and social equality in the Barents Region, is the absence of tuition fees – currently in the Norwegian higher education system and previously in the Swedish system as well. In Wiers-Jenssen's study (Chap. 10 in this volume) we learn that the absence of tuition fees ranks as the second most important reason for choosing to study in Norway. To put it simply, most of the free-moving students we have interviewed would never have been able to come to

Norway, nor Sweden previously, if not for the absence of tuition fees. Irrespective of any political stance taken in this matter, there is unanimous agreement among researchers, politicians and educationalists in Sweden that a unique window of opportunity for non-EU citizens who lack resources to obtain higher education has been shut down. As a consequence, the prism of nationalities and individuals has drastically shrunk at Swedish universities since 2011. From the perspective of global eduscapes, it is an evident and straightforward hierarchization in a global political economy of higher education.

Other important "pull" dimensions, within the frame of the welfare statism argument that we are advocating here, are the presumably positive aspects of a welfare state; e.g., gender equality, social security, welfare schemes, and a peaceful and non-hostile environment. This is something that many Swedes and Norwegians may not unanimously agree upon. Nonetheless, this image of the two Nordic countries is no doubt a powerful one expressed by many international students we have interviewed; Russian students, in particular. This welfare statism cultural imaginary of Norway and Sweden is a broad palette encompassing many aspects, a few of which we will touch upon.

Throughout her interview, Maria, an exchange student of social work at AUN, contrasts her perceptions of Norway with the conditions in her Russian hometown. The narrative structure of the interview is built on a very rosy picture of Norwegian social conditions and welfare, in contrast to a rather dull picture of Russian conditions. The latter is difficult to evaluate, however, Maria's overly enthusiastic praise of the social welfare system in Norway feeds into a cultural imaginary that is often of equally great importance as the actual physical mobility. As such, it is a compelling force of imaginary in the everyday lives and prospects for future betterment in terms of social mobility and equality, and moving between social facticity, individual desire and collective imagination/s (see also Forstorp and Mellström 2013). Collins et al. (2014, p. 664) advocate an understanding of desire in this context:

> … as not only taking us to other places, literally in student mobilities, but also about transforming ourselves and the social spaces we inhabit.

The experiences of Russian students in Norway and Sweden continuously move in such a transformative terrain, and have comparative cultural contrasts at their general narrative core, which repeatedly circulate around social conditions, learning styles, pedagogical techniques, and university facilities. The experiences are also naturally conditioned by the topic areas of programs and courses. It is, therefore, no big surprise that we have a traditional gendered division of labour where Maria, who is studying social work, focuses on social conditions, while Ragnar, who is a doctoral student of metallurgy at LTU, emphasizes the importance of high-class technical equipment and research facilities. As such, Maria and Ragnar represent the standard gender division between the female-dominated areas of social and behavioral sciences and the male-dominated STEM-subjects that we see in our material.

Nevertheless, and despite this and many other forms of division in the student group, there is one topic that seems to cross the subject disciplines; namely, learning

styles and pedagogical techniques (Forstorp, Chap. 7 in this volume). Informal student-teacher relations, differences in study cultures and critical reflection are the most commonly mentioned topics for observation among the students interviewed. Several of the Russian students, as well as many other international students we have previously interviewed (Mellström 2012), highlight what they see as an unusual informality between students and teachers. They mention the ease with which they can access teachers as well as the informal styles of socializing and teaching. Maria says:

> *…as if there is almost no difference between teachers and students. It was confusing in the beginning, but eventually I learned to appreciate it…*

This is something that is appreciated by students, for the most part, although there are many different views on the matter. Some students think that studies are more demanding in Russia; a view they substantiate by mentioning that Russian students often have two or even three degrees when they finish university, which is most uncommon among Scandinavian students. Irina at UiN says:

> *The first thing I noticed is that it is more difficult to study in Russia than here. You spend more time at the university and the study programs are bigger.*

Others, such as Maria at AUN, appreciate what they see as a laid-back learning style that places more responsibility on the individual student. Along the same lines, Maria and other students at NU and LTU mention that the individualized responsibility is also demanding because it often implies expectations of critical reflection on class discussions, assignments and student essays. What this actually means can be rather confusing, but is also a welcome challenge for students who are used to a more authoritarian style of learning, according to Maria. Views on the effectiveness of different learning styles vary considerably within the group of interviewed students; there is hardly a consensus with regard to the subject. However, there is apparent consensus on the fact that there are big differences in learning styles, and it seems to be a constant topic of discussion among Russian students in Norway and Sweden.

To sum up, we see that institutional arrangements are an overall crucial mediating factor for student mobility in the Barents Region. As such, they are embedded in a broader context and cultural imaginary of what I refer to as welfare statism, which includes the absence of tuition fees (until 2011 in Sweden), a safe and peaceful environment that generates a sense of personal security, relative gender equality, a sense of cultural familiarity, and geographical proximity. In the decision to migrate on a long-term basis, or just to leave for a shorter stint, these factors work parallel to the importance of the exchange programmes, good facilities and high-class technical equipment at the local universities. As we put these different incentives together we can see that:

> …international students do not necessarily desire the object of an 'overseas degree' in itself but rather what it expresses in terms of the value of overseas education socially, culturally, educationally, and in terms of future trajectories. (Collins et al. 2014, p. 664)

We now turn to future trajectories and prospective careers.

11.7 Prospective Careers and Higher Education as Cultural Capital

As previously noted, two important characteristics of the Russian student population in Norway are the high proportion of females and the high proportion of students with parents who hold higher education degrees (Wiers-Jenssen 2014, p. 821). Wiers-Jenssen (2014) also reports that these students are more likely to have lived abroad and/or have parents who have lived abroad. The qualitative interviews lend support to Wiers-Jenssen's results in different ways. I will, therefore, extend her analysis by further discussing family backgrounds and the class dimensions of student mobility in the Barents Region.

For a majority of the students we have interviewed, there has been an early orientation towards education, which is credited to parents and family background in the interviews. There are a number of solid middle-class occupations among the family backgrounds of these students, such as doctors, teachers, military personnel, lawyers, and so on. In most cases, the decision to study abroad for shorter or longer periods has been actively supported and discussed in the family circle. The advantages and disadvantages of leaving the country for higher education are presumably a topic that is currently on the agenda in many middle-class Russian families, if we are to judge from our interviews. Darya, who had been accepted to a PhD-program at the engineering faculty at LTU when interviewed in 2009, recalls her thoughts and the discussion with her family:

> *Well, my father even has two higher education degrees from Russia but he was still saying "Just go to get education abroad and have a different life than here in Russia". For my parents, they or rather we have this kind of impression that abroad everything is good, and better than back home, and that there is not that much corruption and the education is better so it's some kind of prestige to go abroad and study. So that was my parent's perspective. And also we said that I could easily give up and go back and start studying in Russia again…*

The possibility to foresee a different and "better" future for your children as the most important motivating factor is something we have come across in just about all different interviews conducted in this and parallel projects for the past 10 years. In the growing international literature on student mobility (cf. Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 2008; Waters 2003, 2005, 2008; Lee and Koo 2006; Sidhu 2006; Sin 2006, 2009; Brooks and Waters 2013), we also learn that the degree of family involvement is subject to much cultural variation, but nonetheless lies at the core of middle-class families' reproductive strategies to accumulate different forms of economic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) around the world. In particular, studies of student mobility in East Asia have shown how the acquisition of education is:

> … fundamentally a 'family project', imbued with familial expectations and goals affecting students at all levels (Brooks and Waters 2013, p. 53)

As Brooks and Waters (2013), and many others scholars of student mobility, have argued, educational choices are a form of strategic transnationalism by which many

families navigate, where accumulation strategies for academic credentials are part of a broader sense of cultural capital accumulation. Essentially, this is no different for the families of the Russian students we have interviewed; however, it may not involve the same overly enthusiastic embrace of "overseas" academic credentials as we find in studies of East Asian contexts. As previously argued in this chapter, in the Russian context, the symbols that are connoted by the words "overseas", "abroad", "western", and the like, exist in an ambivalent political landscape with the national sentiments of many pro-Russian and anti-western stances taken by the current regime, in addition to the complexity of a post-socialist society carrying a myriad of historical imprints of resolved and unresolved "east-west" tensions.

In comparison to East Asian contexts (Waters 2003, 2005, 2008; Lee and Koo 2006; Collins 2008; Sin 2009) we also trace a lesser degree of family involvement in Russia. Parents and families are unquestionably important in educational decisions, but we cannot find any evidence of extended financial dependency between parents and children, nor any relocation of entire families such as has been reported in studies from Hong Kong and South Korea (Lee and Koo 2006). On the contrary, many of the Russian students we have met seem to be rather independent and detached from close-knit extended family networks, and many manage on their own without any evidence of support from their families. The willingness and eagerness to which quite a few, like Darya and Olga, have assimilated on their own in Sweden, with astounding integrity in a relatively short time period, is possibly another sign of student mobility that reflects less centripetal cultural force than that of East Asia. We have not come across any widespread remittance system among the students either. This may, of course, occur on an individual basis and would most likely not be brought up in an interview situation, but to answer that question would require deeper ethnographic knowledge.

In some cases, the landscape of political ambivalence found in our interviews with regard to the value of "overseas" education is also a matter of skepticism related to a sense of lost pride in an empire that has seen better days, also in terms of higher education. Additionally, it is the result of imposed ideas of "globalism" being orchestrated by a discourse on an uncritical embrace of anything global with an English-language stamp on it. To discuss the degree to which this may also imply a domestic devaluation of an established educational system such as the Soviet/Russian systeme would hardly be more than speculation, however, we certainly observe a culturally implicated ambivalence throughout our interviews. Tatjana, a student of social work at NArFU, doing an exchange semester at AUN, expresses her view:

> *I don't like the system of bachelor and master. In Russia we have another system. We have 5 years and then you are a specialist. But now this kind of western system is imposed on us. I don't like it because I think the Russian system was more….it gave better quality specialists.*

The self-evident celebration of mobility that is the hallmark of neoliberal discourses on an "inevitable and unstoppable globalization" (Sidhu 2006, p. 123) of higher education, which we have often come across in the internationalization rhetoric of

all the universities involved in this study, generally comes out in a much more ambivalent way when talking to the students. In the rather one-sided celebratory version of mobility, immobility tends to be forgotten; or as Floya Anthias (2012, p. 125) reminds us:

> The freedom to move to western educational institutions brings with it a visceral reminder of those who they leave behind.

Longing, nostalgia, and home-sickness are naturally individualized parts of the educational biographies. However, these emotions are also articulated in terms of the omnipresent ambivalence of existing between a state of lost glory and self-esteem and a place of uncertain but hopefully promising future possibilities. I do believe that this state of in-betweenness is characteristic of the Russian student mobility we explore here, and, as such, it reflects the current tensions of living in a circumscribed political space while also seeing few alternatives for immediate improvement, as described above by one of our interviewees. In some cases, the will to move beyond such a state of cultural nostalgia in order to search for new opportunities seemingly creates a very strong impetus to navigate in terms of a far-reaching strategic transnationalism, where the studies in Norway or Sweden are but one stop in a territorial career path to another spot in the global food chain of differently-ranked universities in an educational market. Tatjana, a student at NU, describes herself as a future-oriented polyglot with the ambition to end up at a prestigious university in an English-speaking country. She says:

> *I'm saving half of my scholarship from NU to pay for accommodation in Canada next.*

The only twist, at the time for the interview, was that her boyfriend:

> *…doesn't speak English very well, but as soon as he learns we will leave the country and go to Canada. That is the plan.*

Unfortunately, we don't know if she ended up in Canada or not, nor do we know if her boyfriend eventually learned English. In any case, a strategic transnationalism involving the planned trajectory of a territorial career, where Sweden or Norway is but one stepping stone to a longer educational journey, is by no means unique to student mobility in the Barents Region. Rather, it is something that characterizes accumulation strategies for many international students interviewed (Mellström 2012). This was the case for West African students, in particular, who came to Sweden between 2004 and 2008. The majority of the ones we could follow either continued on to the UK or the US for further studies or/and work in the low-paid service sector. In comparison, Russian students seem to strategize less and do not talk about the same extensive networks of family, friends, clan, and relatives as we have documented with West African students and among international students from other parts of the world. The strategic transnationalism among Russian students seems to be more individualized, though an elaborate longitudinal approach would be required to answer this question in more detail.

In summary, our interviews reveal a well-known pattern of strategic transnationalism for acquiring and accumulating cultural capital through higher education

thatis characteristic for many middle-class families (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 2008; Waters 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012; Lee and Koo 2006; Sidhu 2006; Sin 2006, 2009; Brooks and Waters 2013). In many cases we also see that educational decisions are part of a family project, though not to the extent reported in other parts of the world. Rather, it seems that many international Russian students in the Barents Region are educational sojourners who preferred to follow an individualistic trajectory and are proud and capable in their present positions, whether living at home, pursuing a doctorate in Sweden, or on the move to another place in a territorial career that could span multiple continents. To learn and speak English with confidence is repeatedly stressed as a requirement in order to acquire cultural capital through higher education. In this context, the English language as a symbolic container is also connected to an ambivalence expressed through cultural nostalgia, political instability and repression, and doubts about the value of "western" education when compared to that of Russia.

11.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how Russian student mobility in the regional eduscape of the Barents Region is formed and channeled through interferences (Mellström 2012) between global discourses and national systems of higher education, geographical proximity, exchange programs, institutional arrangements at universities, and collective and individual images. In particular, politics with regard to gender and the English language have proven to be two crucial explanatory keys to understanding student mobility in this region as it relates to a broader understanding of the geopolitical conditions of academic exchange in the Barents Region. Furthermore, the importance of localizing the celebratory global discourses on internationalizing higher education is advocated in relation to an uneven distribution in the production and consumption of higher education. It is demonstrated that this asymmetrical relationship, with an overwhelming outflow of Russian students in relation to the influx of students into Russia, is closely connected to desires and aspirations that are rooted in English as a symbolic container and a requirement for anticipated success in an increasingly global labour and educational market, while also signaling "modernity" in the domestic national arena. The English language is thus a container full of dreams and hopes while also provoking considerable ambivalence in the Russian context due to its perceived role as a symbol of Anglo-globalisation and global academic capitalism that rests on English as the predominant lingua franca.

In the context of this study, such ambivalence is also related to a circumscribed political space of growing anti-western sentiments, pro-Russian values, and skepticism about the value of a "western" education in Russia. The experiences of Russian students are mediated by such contradictions and, therefore, generate a translocal space; a sense of in-betweenness that feeds upon cultural contrasts and reflections while also producing a transformative terrain and a strong impetus for individual

empowerment and achievement through strong determination and integrity, demonstrated in the academic work and career of various individuals. It is in this translocal space – which is experienced, created and maintained by the students, and involves expectations, cultural stereotypes and personal encounters on both the sending and receiving ends – that the "grassroots" of academic mobility are formed in different ways. Moreover, it is through the very encounters that take place in such spaces that distinct "navigational capacities" (Collins et al. 2014) are acquired and new opportunities and structures are fostered. Furthermore, it is by acknowledging and integrating such aspects into the scalar dynamics of international higher education that we can also understand how to tackle questions of equity and access in the uneven distribution of higher education on a global scale.

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