Twists and turns through organised education and regulations to work as an MD in Sweden. Experiences of migrants in rural areas.

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Abstract and 3 – 5 keywords (up to 150 words)

This paper critically describe and analyse the opportunities and obstacles highly skilled migrants in rural areas face on their roads through the education system and national regulations to be able to work as an MD in Sweden. Through an ethnographically inspired study in three rural municipalities in the north of Sweden and their organised career development for migrants the case of three migrant women from non EU/EES countries is used to discuss how migrants understand and construct individual agency and space for action in relation to place, gender, race and educational structures and institutions. By drawing on literature in the field of high educated migrants and theories of space, place and gender, power relations are made visible as different national and local support systems and access are put in place determining rights and obligations.

Keywords: Migrants, rural education, MD, career development, social justice

Relation to the conference theme (up to 50 words)

The research presented touches upon several of the conference themes. Highly educated migrants’ transitions to work in line with their profession regards issues of social justice not only in terms of institutional and everyday racism but also the different opportunities and conditions in rural areas constitutive for individual agency.

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework (up to 600 words)

Becoming employable and get a foothold on the labour market is often described as a central aspect of integration. Highly educated migrants are often seen as a privileged group in this respect not having too much trouble finding work and employment. High educated migrants are also a group sought for by many countries for their skills and competences (Povranovic Frykman & Öhlander 2018). This discourse is also present in the rural north of Sweden where migrants at least to some extent are seen as a resources in times of depopulation. As a highly educated migrant in a rural area there are potential obstacles such as less educational opportunities, difficulties to find work in line with your profession as well as being the “other” in a small community. But there are also potential benefits such as prospects to find work within your profession as rural areas are desperate for skilled workers. There might also be better opportunities for cultural integration in a smaller community with less housing
segregation (Rosvall 2017). But despite being viewed as a privileged group among migrants and with wanted skills and competences highly educated migrants are not a homogenous group and are not facing fundamentally different challenges than migrants with lower educational backgrounds. Research points to several complex and interrelated aspects that condition their opportunities such as the reasons behind migration, gender, age, family situation, national rules and regulations, educational structures, and local and national government routines (Povrzanovic Frykman & Öhlander 2018). Whereas previous research on highly educated migrants, especially within the MD field, has provided important insights into the challenges of everyday racism and belonging facing migrants at their workplaces as well as in private life and the need for networks and friends (Magnusson 2014, Salomonsson 2014, Liversage 2009) less attention has been paid on migrants in rural areas. Furthermore, the research tend to be conducted from an urban perspective not taking into account the centre-periphery divide.

It is therefore important to critically describe and analyse the opportunities and obstacles highly skilled migrants in rural areas face in their career development. This paper contributes to the different and varied experiences of highly educated migrant’s integration in Sweden through the stories of three migrant women with an education in MD living in two different rural communities in the north of Sweden. The three women come from different countries outside the EU/EES countries and have migrated for different reasons. The research questions that guide the paper are:

- How do migrants understand their opportunities for career development and transitions to work as an MD in Sweden in relation to living in the rural north of Sweden?
- How do migrants navigate the Swedish education system, local institutions for education and employment and national/transnational regulations on MD licences to practice?
- How do migrants understand and construct their individual agency and space for action in relation to place, gender and race?

To understand the opportunities and obstacles facing high educated migrants career development in rural areas I draw on previous research on high educated migrants in Sweden and globally mainly focusing on transitions between countries, career development, inclusion and racism within the MD profession. Theoretically, I primarily use Massey’s (1194) theories of space, place and gender in combination with postcolonial feminism (de los Reyes 2011) to analyse the power relations inherent in the conditions for migrants transitions and career development in rural areas. Place as well as gender and race are viewed as relational and intersected in complex and situated ways where the global is present in the local and the local is present in the global.

**Methods/methodology (up to 300 words)**

The paper is part of a project on integration of adult migrants in rural areas focusing on adult education and transitions to higher education in three municipalities in the rural north of Sweden. The municipalities differs in population, number of migrants, educational organisation and labour market opportunities. Despite differences they are organised in a collaboration called “Akademi Norr” (Northen Academy) founded to support adult education in the rural north of Sweden. The study takes its inspiration from ethnography (Hammersley 2006; Harmmersley & Atkinson 1995) and progressive focusing (Stake 1995) to provide a flexible approach. It allows for continuous planning, site visits, data, and analysis to pursue issues raised during fieldwork and analysis. As of now the material consists of
field notes from site visits and classroom observations, interviews with principals, study counsellors, teachers, and students as well as with public officials at the local offices of the Swedish Public Employment Services (SPES). The site visits have made it possible to find migrants with higher education participating (or have participated) in adult education (Swedish for immigrants, municipal adult education) in these rural communities. Interviews with three of these migrants with medical training previous to their immigration to Sweden constitute the main material for this paper. Interviews were conducted with one woman living in Sweden for over two years with medical training and work experience from a South American country. And two interviews were conducted with two sisters, one with a completed MD education and one with part of an MD education from an African country, living in Sweden for under a year. The interviews focused on their experience of immigrating and living in the rural north of Sweden; educational opportunities and obstacles in learning Swedish, validation of education and further education; ambitions and career development; and future living and family life.

Outcomes/ expected results (up to 200 words)

In navigating necessary language education, continued education and validation for an MD profession, the three migrants expressed different experiences from their local communities where gender, place and race are interconnected. The two sisters as resettlement refugees in a somewhat larger community had better access to national and local institutional support systems than the third migrant. In the rural north one can gain support through the close community but also be in the hands of bureaucratic rules and dependence on a single reluctant public official at the SPES. In the case of “Maria” this almost jeopardized her participation in “Korta vägen” (Short cut), a language and career development education for highly educated migrants. “Korta vägen” is however located in a larger city resulting in Maria, a mom of a 2-year old, having to be away from her family. The road to an MD licence for Maria with a medical training outside EU/EES is long making Maria question whether it is at all possible to once again practice medicine and living in a rural area in Sweden. Since her medial training is from a Spanish speaking country she is considering moving to Spain where she already has a job offer.

References