



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

# How Do They Make It?

Perspectives on labour market participation  
among descendants of immigrants in  
Sweden

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# Abstract

This is a compilation dissertation based on a comprehensive summary and four empirical articles. The overarching aim of the dissertation is to study influences on the occupational aspirations and attainments of employed descendants of non-European, non-Western immigrants in Sweden, from their own perspectives. The results are based on qualitative interviews with 9 men and 12 women, all born in Sweden with two immigrant parents. At the time of the interviews, the respondents were aged 25–35 years and had been employed for a minimum of six months, most of them for at least three years.

Article I analyses and discusses family influences on the occupational aspirations of the descendants of immigrants. It employs a theoretical framework of cultural capital to demonstrate that descendants' interpretations of their parents' experiences and living conditions before, during, and after migration shape and positively influence their own occupational aspirations. The article also shows that siblings may function as important transferrers of knowledge and information.

Article II examines how the descendants of immigrants perceive that interactions with public officials have benefitted their occupational aspirations and attainments. Using the concept of social capital as an analytical tool, the article draws three conclusions. First, public officials who establish a sense of connectedness in interacting with descendants of immigrants may transmit substantial symbolic resources to them. Second, it is important for public officials to support their clients' personally meaningful goals and to focus on possibilities for achieving those goals. The article also shows that public officials may help descendants of immigrants to form and fulfil occupational aspirations by transmitting important knowledge and information to them.

Article III explores how descendants of immigrants understand labour market conditions, and how these conditions influence their occupational pathways and strategies. The article employs the concept of habitus to analyse approaches and strategies on the labour market in relation to objective conditions. Three themes are presented in the article. The first theme, being in the “right” field, covers respondents working in branches with labour shortages and/or a high demand for employees with an immigrant background. These respondents used their personal backgrounds as “selling points”, turning the general disadvantage of having an immigrant background into an advantage. The second theme covers respondents who could learn through failing in entering and participating on the labour market, indicating a trial-and-error approach. The third theme deals with respondents who had actively searched for jobs in branches which value their particular skill set. The article highlights the important relationship between active individual agency and external, objective opportunities and constraints.

Article IV explores perceptions of labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals among men and women of migrant descent. Starting from the literature on work, family, and gender in a context of migration, and in relation to the Swedish social and political context, four themes are presented in the results. The male and female respondents viewed labour market participation from different, gendered, perspectives. The women saw labour market participation as a source of emancipation, whereas the men perceived it as a means for providing for a current/future family. Thus, while they depicted themselves as dedicated to norms of gender equality, they also expressed gender-biased views on work and family arrangements. These gender-biased views largely reflect those of Swedish people in general, as demonstrated in earlier studies. Nonetheless, the results reveal that the immigrant heritage of the descendants of immigrants influences their views on labour market participation, perceptions of gender norms, and parenting ideals. The article shows how these descendants interpret and actively challenge gender inequalities in the immigrant generation in ways that support intergenerational changes in work-family arrangements.

# List of selected papers

This dissertation is based on the following articles, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I.** Aslan, P., Ahmadi, N., Sjöberg, S., & Wikström, E. (2019). What works? Family influences on occupational aspirations among descendants of Middle Eastern immigrants on the Swedish labour market. *Nordic Journal of Social Research*, 9, 134–160. <https://doi.org/10.7577/njsr.2235>
- II.** Aslan, P., Sjöberg S., Wikström, E., & Ahmadi, N. (in press). Door openers? Public officials as supportive actors in the labour market participation of descendants of Immigrants in Sweden. *Nordic Social Work Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2019.1680418>
- III.** Aslan, P., Ahmadi, N., Wikström, E., & Sjöberg, S. (2019). Choice from non-choice? Occupational pathways and strategies of immigrants' descendants in Sweden. Under review by the *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*.
- IV.** Aslan P., Wikström, E., Ahmadi, N., & Sjöberg, S. (2019). 'Kids' in between? Views on work, gender and family arrangements among men and women of migrant descent in Sweden. Under revision for *Community, Work & Family*.

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Pinar Aslan

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# I. Introduction

This is a compilation dissertation based on a comprehensive summary and four empirical articles. The comprehensive summary includes an introduction, a review of the literature, a presentation of the theoretical framework, and a description of the research approach. It concludes with a summary of the articles and a discussion, tying the results to current debates about descendants of immigrants in Western countries and to the discipline of social work. In this introduction, I present the research problem and overall aim, some key concepts, and an outline of the dissertation.

## Background

In most Western European countries, individuals born in that country with immigrant parents are generally in an unfavourable economic situation compared to those with native-born parents, even when socioeconomic factors are taken into consideration (OECD, 2016; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2017). A large body of research has demonstrated that this is also the case in Sweden, where the unemployment rates of immigrants' descendants are higher, their earnings are lower, and they are less often, and to a lesser extent, awarded for their educational degrees in comparison to their majority peers (Ekberg, 1999; Nielsen et al., 2003; Hammarstedt & Palme, 2006; Statistics Sweden, 2010; Hedberg & Tammaru, 2010; Schröder, 2010; Reisel et al., 2012; Behtoui, 2012; Schröder, 2015). In Sweden, as in other Western countries, people with a non-European and non-Western origin are at particular risk of labour market exclusion (Liebig & Widmaier, 2009; Statistics Sweden, 2010, Ekberg, 2012; Westin, 2015).

Descendants of non-European, non-Western immigrants are a growing and increasingly diverse group of individuals in Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2010). Through an extensive body of literature, we now know a great deal about the mechanisms that work against them in school and on the labour market. Many of these individuals grow up with low-educated parents and a lack of practical support; they have limited access to homework assistance and do not speak the national language at home, putting them in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis peers as early as the pre-school years (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012). We also know that they are subjected to labour market discrimination in virtually all Western countries, particularly in the recruitment process, and have to apply for jobs substantially more often than descendants of native-born to receive an interview invitation (Carlsson, 2010; Carlsson & Rooth, 2007; Heath et al., 2013; Kaas & Manger, 2012; Midtbøen 2016). Moreover, immigrant networks more often contain job contacts in low-skilled, low-paid sectors of the labour market

(Carlsson, Ericsson & Rooth, 2018), which may lead to less rewarding social networks with respect to labour market participation for descendants of immigrants.

Despite facing the challenges mentioned above, however, descendants of immigrants in Europe and the USA are making progress in terms of education and labour market participation compared to their parents' generation (Alba, Kasinitz & Waters, 2011; Schneider & Lang, 2014). Scholars in the field of migration and ethnic studies are thus now beginning to focus more on the social and economic mobility of these individuals (e.g. Rezai, 2017; Konyali, 2017; Keskiner & Crul, 2017). The positive roles of the family and of being embedded in cohesive ethnic networks have been highlighted in the literature (Louie, 2004; 2012; Dreby, 2010; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016, Zhou & Kim, 2006). Other scholars have concentrated on the effects of institutional arrangements and social political impacts on the educational and occupational attainments of immigrants' descendants (e.g. Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012; Guiraudon, 2014).

In Sweden, there are palpable patterns of intergenerational social mobility among descendants of immigrants, and they are doing better in terms of education and labour market participation than descendants of immigrants in other European OECD countries (see e.g. OECD, 2016; 2017). Compared to research focusing on processes that lead to the social and economic exclusion of immigrants' descendants, however, there are relatively few studies exploring mechanisms that contribute to their upward mobility.

This dissertation builds on the literature mentioned above, but also presents new aspects by considering an interaction between individual, familial, community-level, and institutional influences. Essentially, the dissertation is concerned with the mechanisms and processes influencing the labour market inclusion of immigrants' descendants. Thus, it focuses on descendants of immigrants who have entered the labour market and are gainfully employed. Most of the study participants had a university degree, and all of them had jobs corresponding to their education. Nonetheless, many were also raised by parents who were low-educated and excluded from the labour market.

These individuals deserve special attention for two main reasons. First, their labour market participation and occupational attainments shed light on the conditions and processes involved in exceeding one's parents' socioeconomic status (cf. Harvey & Maclean, 2008; Keskiner & Crul, 2017). Second, focusing on these individuals may contribute to insights and methods of including those in the reverse situation; that is, those who risk exclusion. Learning more about the labour market inclusion of descendants of immigrants is also a step towards reaching social cohesion in general. The workplace is an important arena for attitude formation, and scholars have highlighted the important role of workplace diversity for interethnic friend formation and the social integration of people with an immigrant background in Western countries (Kokkonen, Esaiasson & Gilljam, 2015; Laurence, Schmid & Hewstone, 2017).

More specifically, the overarching aim of this dissertation is to study influences on the occupational aspirations and attainments of employed descendants of non-European, non-Western immigrants, from their own perspective. This is explored via four research questions, which are answered in the respective articles:

1. How do employed descendants of immigrants perceive the influence of family members on their occupational aspirations? (Article I)
2. How do employed descendants of immigrants perceive that interactions with public officials have benefitted their occupational aspirations and attainments? (Article II)
3. How do descendants of immigrants understand labour market conditions, and how do these conditions influence their occupational pathways and strategies? (Article III)
4. How do employed descendants of immigrants perceive labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals? (Article IV)

## **Migrants and their descendants in Sweden**

In 1970, more than 60 percent of migrants living in Sweden were born in a Nordic country, and just over 90 percent were born in a European country (Aldén & Hammarstedt, 2014; Sweden Statistics, 2010). Today, nearly 1.9 million of the approximately 10 million people living in Sweden were born abroad, and the majority of them migrated from non-European countries (Statistics Sweden, 2019a). The background of migrants in Sweden today varies significantly with respect to aspects such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, regional origin, educational level, and reasons for migration. From World War II onwards, the main reasons for migration to Sweden have been economic growth in the country, war, and reuniting of families. These different causes of migration and varied backgrounds of migrants signify large differences in the migrant experience.

In the 1960s, people migrated from Nordic countries and southern Europe to fill labour shortages in Sweden following an economic and industrial boom. The employment rates of these migrants were high, although they were mostly employed in low-skilled and manufacturing jobs (Schierup et al., 2006; Bevelander, 2000). From the late 1970s to the 1990s, most migrants came to Sweden to escape war and conflict in their home countries. They came from Latin America, Middle East, the Balkan countries, and Africa, and encountered quite

unfavourable labour market conditions following the economic recession of the 1990s. During this time, many native-born Swedes were also unemployed and looking for jobs (Brekke & Borchgrevink, 2007), but migrants, particularly those from non-European countries, were especially vulnerable to unemployment. While unemployment rates in Sweden in general rose from 1.4 percent in 1989 to 8.1 percent in 1996, the unemployment rates of immigrants increased from 3.4 to 17.2 percent over the same period (Behtoui, 1999). The risk of unemployment in the 1990s was twice as large for immigrants of non-European heritage compared to native-born (Arai & Vilhelmsson, 2004). This disadvantaged labour market situation of immigrants persisted even after the economy recovered, and many of these immigrants ended up in long-term unemployment (Lemaître, 2007).

The children of the migrants who arrived during the 1980s and early 1990s have now reached working age, and are entering and participating on the Swedish labour market. In 2017, the Swedish population included about 1.3 million individuals born in Sweden with at least one parent born abroad (Statistics Sweden, 2019b). Of these, about half a million have two foreign-born parents, constituting about five percent of the population. The majority of these individuals are between 15 and 34 years old (Statistics Sweden, 2019b), and their parents are mostly from non-European countries. The descendants of immigrants also make up a large share of the younger age cohorts. According to Statistics Sweden (2017a), nearly fourteen percent of children aged 0–17 in Sweden have two foreign-born parents, with Syria, Somalia, and Iraq being the most common parental birth countries of these individuals.

The living conditions of descendants of immigrants are generally different than for their majority peers. Compared to descendants of native-born, immigrants' descendants more often live with single mothers, have more siblings, and tend to live in rented dwellings (Statistics Sweden, 2017a). Many of them grow up in immigrant-dense and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of Sweden. For example, fifty percent of children aged 0–17 in Botkyrka and Södertälje have a foreign background (either foreign-born or native-born with foreign-born parents), while the corresponding figures for Lekeberg and Hammarö are four and five percent (Statistics Sweden, 2017a). Levels of education and labour market participation are generally lower in these immigrant-dense areas, whereas poverty and health risks are higher (Olofsson, 2018; Andersson & Malmberg, 2018; Edling, 2015; Chaix, Rosvall & Merlo, 2007). These aspects constitute negative impacts on the educational and occupational outcomes of young people living there (Bygren & Szulkin, 2010).

In many ways, the backgrounds of the descendants of immigrants interviewed for this study (see Chapter IV) reflected these general living conditions of immigrants' descendants in Sweden. Some respondents grew up in single-parent households, many of them with non-working and/or low-educated parents, and the majority were brought up in disadvantaged and segregated areas of Sweden. As mentioned earlier, however, an overwhelming majority of the respondents had

university degrees (n=17/21), and they were all employed in job positions matching their qualifications. Against this background, the respondents in this study may be conceptualized as an advantaged group within a disadvantaged group. Thus, this dissertation mainly focuses on influences that contributed to the respondents' occupational aspirations and attainments, sometimes *in spite of* and other times *in relation to* challenging contexts and circumstances.

## **Key concepts**

Some key concepts in this dissertation have been interpreted in various ways by scholars, depending on research discipline and tradition. In order to clarify my approach to the study area, below I present my understanding of and positioning in relation to these concepts.

### *Descendants of immigrants*

Native-born individuals with foreign-born parents have been described in several ways in the field of migration and ethnic studies. The most commonly used concept is “second-generation immigrants”, which has been employed by a number of scholars (e.g. Portes & Zhou, 1993; Elke & Guido, 2013; Klinthäll & Urban, 2014; Meurs et al., 2017). My main reason for not using this popular concept is that referring to native-born individuals with immigrant parents as second-generation immigrants is not only technically inaccurate (they have not migrated) but may also result in additional segregation and ascribed exclusion. As pointed out by Westin et al. (2015), there is a risk of reinforcing processes of differentiation by referring to individuals born in the country as “immigrants”.

Other scholars have used the term “children of immigrants” (Crul et al., 2017; Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012). While this concept is fair, I have experienced some problems using the word “children” when referring to adults, due to the risk of confusion with “child studies”. Like some other scholars (e.g. Behtoui, 2012; Tucci et al., 2013), I have chosen to refer to this group of individuals as “descendants of immigrants”. I believe this concept captures both the historical background and the current situation of my respondents better than the other concepts used in migration research.

### *Perceptions*

The concept of perception has been employed in many research disciplines and in various ways. The definition of the concept in this dissertation is from a sociological perspective, and includes individuals' subjective judgements of circumstances, opportunities, and constraints. Perceptions are part of an individual's incorporated history (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66), and are formed in a

context of presuppositions, rules, and demands which influence how individuals orientate and move in the social world (cf. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Individuals' perceptions reveal their practical beliefs and the state of their bodies on the one hand, and their possible dispositions of action on the other (Bourdieu, 1995). Based on past experiences and possible understandings of the present, certain things are assessed as sensible, practical, and functional while other things are seen as inappropriate or unreasonable.

I have employed the concept in a way similar to other scholars focusing on migration and labour market outcomes (e.g. Coutinho & Blustein, 2014); that is, studying thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and feelings as interrelated parts of subjective perception. This way of looking at perceptions increases an understanding of what is viewed as enabling/hindering on the labour market, whether it is about feelings of being included/excluded or notions about labour market demands.

It is worth noting, however, that it is not my ambition to distinguish between the emotional and intellectual aspects of perceptions. As highlighted by Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 998), perceptions are practical judgements related to “principles, schemas, or typifications from past experiences”, in which emotional responses cannot be separated from cognitive ones because emotions may in themselves be subjectively experienced as intelligent and rational.

### *Aspirations*

Aspirations may be seen as products of the way people subjectively perceive their living conditions and the social world. More specifically, they may be conceptualized as the subjective judgements of circumstances, opportunities, and constraints leading to certain plans, hopes, and ambitions. As such, aspirations are intrinsically linked to ideas of the self in relation to perceptions of a social world. They form in a self-reflexive process of evaluating past selves in relation to *present* ideas of the self, which contributes to an ongoing process of changing that self. In everyday life, a future self is imagined; and in this imagining, aspirations are formed to become that future self (Kaya, 2018). In other words, aspirations are future-oriented but always connected to the past and the present.

Appadurai (2004, p. 67) has argued that “aspirations are never simply individual. They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of life”. This means that while aspirations are part of the individual self, they are developed in relation to familial, institutional, political, and social structures (Hart, 2016). Intentions of “one day I will become this” or “I have to do this in order to get that” are based on what is considered meaningful to pursue, but such meanings are more or less socially constructed (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013). As Archer (2010, p. 1) puts it, “race/ethnicity, social class and gender all play a key role in shaping not only the nature and direction of young people’s aspirations, but also the processes through which these aspirations are formed”. From this viewpoint, subjective meaning-making may occur consciously, while also being rooted in

ideas, values, and notions that are more or less hidden constructs of the social world (Hart, 2016).

The concept of aspirations is here studied first in relation to goals of labour market entry and participation, and second in terms of actual efforts to achieve these goals. I view the respondents as active agents who plan their future and act according to these plans while also being influenced by the actors and structures surrounding them (Portes, Vickstrom, Haller & Aparacio, 2013). Against this background, I have aimed to employ a multi-layered and dynamic view of aspirations. This view includes a recognition of both conscious and unconscious elements of motivation that may drive a person's occupational aspirations, and an acknowledgement of the variety of influences — individual, familial, institutional, and social — that form and contribute to such aspirations.

### *Labour market entry*

In defining labour market entry, I have paid attention to the meanings my respondents ascribed to entering the labour market, with respect to context and situation. Their descriptions of entering and participating on the labour market were retrospective, so at the time of getting a certain job they might not have viewed this as a question of “entering the labour market”. During the interviews, many of them frequently spoke about casual work and temporary jobs before “actually” entering the labour market. Some of these jobs were performed while studying in upper secondary school and university, and others were performed after graduating. Such jobs were sometimes perceived as important to get a foothold in the labour market, but they were not considered “real jobs”.

For most respondents, it was getting a secure full-time job that amounted to labour market entry. For the few who had started their own businesses after casual work and temporary employment, labour market entry was essentially defined as starting to make a living from the business. Others had been employed on projects that later led to permanent contracts. Against this background, the concept of labour market entry is contextual, and essentially represents finding a job that instils a sense of security and stability, depending on the individual situation.

### *Occupational attainment*

The concept of attainment here mainly refers to respondents' descriptions of their lived realities. It is related to the definition of aspirations described earlier in this section, although here it is a question of *actual* achievements from the respondents' point of view; that is, perceptions of having fulfilled certain goals in relation to their aspirations. However, because people's lived realities contain influences from their social spaces and contextual frameworks (see e.g. Sewell &

Hauser, 1975), the respondents' subjective perspectives were related to objective opportunities and constraints.

Their descriptions of occupational attainment included references to aspects that are usually included in sociological models of attainment, such as income, influence, occupational prestige, and "generalized esteem in the community" (Haller & Portes, 1973, p. 52). Thus, although I started from their subjective perceptions of occupational attainment, objective opportunities and constraints provided important backgrounds for my analysis of the respondents' attainments.

## **Outline of the dissertation**

The next chapter of the dissertation is a review of the literature on the advantages and disadvantages of descendants of immigrants in relation to their labour market participation in Sweden and other Western countries. I mainly focus on aspects related to the family of origin, non-family agents, public institutions, and labour market conditions. Chapter III describes the theoretical framework of the study and introduces the concepts of social capital, cultural capital, and habitus. These concepts constitute the tools used to interpret and analyse the results of this dissertation. Chapter IV presents the methodological approach of the dissertation, including methodological choices, the research design, a description of the respondents and the sampling process, the analytical process, and issues concerning the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter V describes the results, in the form of a brief summary of the main content in the four articles on which this dissertation is based. Finally, Chapter VI gives my interpretation and discussion of these results with reference to the field of migration and ethnic studies, clarifies how this dissertation adds to the literature, and offers a discussion of the relevance of the dissertation to the social work discipline and profession.

## II. Review of the literature

In this chapter, I present earlier studies on the labour market entry and participation of immigrants' descendants. In each section, I include both international and national studies on the subject, to make clear the important commonalities and differences between immigrants' descendants in Sweden and in other Western countries. I begin with an overview of the challenges that immigrants' descendants face on the labour market, and some explanations for this, and then present studies that describe and explain contributions to educational and occupational attainments among immigrants' descendants, focusing on the role of family members, non-family agents, and ethnic communities. Following this, I give an outline of the resources that researchers have found to be available to descendants of immigrants on the labour market. Finally, I discuss research on how certain welfare state arrangements and labour market conditions may affect the labour market outcomes of immigrants' descendants.

### **Labour market challenges for immigrants' descendants**

Numerous studies have examined the labour market entry and participation of immigrants' descendants (e.g. Borjas, 1993; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Alba et al., 2011; Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012). Generally, labour market disadvantages are most profound in the hiring process, both regarding job access in general and in terms of obtaining secure employment (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2017; Witteveen & Alba, 2018). These difficulties in entering the labour market decrease substantially with higher educational levels (OECD, 2017), but significant gaps in employment and unemployment rates remain between immigrants' descendants and their majority peers even after controlling for educational background (Witteveen & Alba, 2018; Belzil & Poinas, 2010; Statistics Sweden, 2010).

The disadvantages faced by descendants of immigrants are partly due to so-called ethnic penalties on the labour market. Labour market discrimination against individuals with a migrant background has been detected in virtually all Western European countries (Midtbøen, 2016; Carlsson, 2010; Kaas & Manger, 2012; Heath et al., 2013). Despite having an equivalent educational background, descendants of immigrants have to apply for work substantially more often than natives' descendants to receive an interview invitation from recruiters (Adida et al., 2010; Meurs et al., 2006; Silberman, Alba & Fournier, 2007; Rafferty, 2012).

Studies carried out in a Swedish context are in line with the abovementioned findings. Compared to descendants of native-born, individuals of migrant origin are generally disadvantaged in entering the labour market, and these

disadvantages cannot be entirely explained by sociodemographic factors (Westin, 2015; Bursell, 2012; Behtoui, 2012; Nordin & Rooth, 2009; Nekby, Vilhelmsson & Özcan, 2008; Hammarstedt & Palme, 2006). As in many other Western European countries, the most profound disadvantages have been detected in the hiring process and among those with non-European heritage in particular (Reisel et al., 2012; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2017). In 2008, the employment rates of descendants of non-European immigrants in Sweden were fifteen to twenty percentage points lower than for descendants of native-born (Statistics Sweden, 2010). These figures are associated with lower levels of education, but even after controlling for educational levels, a significant gap remains between descendants of immigrants and native-born (Behtoui, 2012).

There have been many explanations for the increased risk of labour market disadvantages faced by immigrants' descendants (see e.g. Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). First, scholars have attributed these disadvantages to a lack of education, skills, and competences; that is, human capital (Liebig & Schröder, 2010). However, the prospects of attaining such qualifications are themselves affected by external structures, and do not always compensate for labour market challenges.

One important aspect highlighted in the literature is that immigrants and their descendants generally have less extensive and less rewarding social networks compared to their majority peers (Carlsson, Ericsson & Rooth, 2018; Behtoui, 2006). Compared to descendants of native-born, they are more likely to live in segregated neighbourhoods, attend segregated schools, and have parents and relatives who are disadvantaged on the labour market (Schröder, 2010). In light of these aspects, immigrants' descendants generally tend to have networks that contain more socially disadvantaged individuals, fewer ties to the labour market, and less access to rewarding jobs.

Another important theme in the literature is that descendants of immigrants face negative consequences from their parents' social and economic exclusion (OECD, 2017). Limited access to resources among family members and ethnic communities is important in explaining the lower educational and occupational attainments of immigrants' descendants (Belzil & Poinas, 2010; de Matos, 2010; Tasiran & Tezic, 2007; Ali & Fokkema, 2015). For example, Sania Ali et al. (2017) highlight that many immigrant parents lack knowledge about the educational system and face difficulties on the Swedish labour market. Along with language barriers, these factors make it more difficult for immigrant parents to help and support their children with homework and finding employment.

## **Labour market participation of immigrants' descendants**

To demonstrate the challenges that the descendants of immigrants are generally up against, the previous section covered the main disadvantages that these

individuals face on the labour market, and offered some explanations for these disadvantages. In this section, I focus on the opposite situation; that is, the labour market participation of immigrants' descendants and what contributes to this participation. Research in the USA has overwhelmingly focused on Asian Americans as a "model minority" in this area (cf. Crul et al., 2017). In comparison to members of the Black or Latino communities, the descendants of Asian Americans are especially prone to pursue higher education and successfully enter the labour market, despite parents' lower education and low-income status (Lee & Zhou, 2014; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou, 2005; Louie, 2004).

These between-group differences have been discussed with reference to social and cultural resources in the family and community (Louie, 2004; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Coleman et al., 1966), but also in relation to the different social structures that ethnic groups are subjected to. As Zhou and Kim (2006, p. 4) have stated, the incorporation of immigrants and their descendants largely depends on "a group's position in the class *and* racial stratification systems, labour market conditions, and residential patterns in the host society".

In Europe, no single minority group has been presented as particularly successful in terms of education and the labour market (cf. Crul et al., 2017). There is, however, an increasing interest in studying the mechanisms and processes contributing to the upward socioeconomic mobility of immigrants' descendants. Scholars have recently started to focus more on descendants of low-educated and socially excluded migrants who exceed their parents' socioeconomic status by obtaining favourable educational and occupational outcomes (Crul et al., 2017; Konyali, 2017; Rezaei, 2017; Schnell, Keskiner & Crul, 2013). In the following sections, I present the general trends and patterns shown in these studies.

## **Resources in the family of origin and ethnic community**

A number of scholars in the field of migration and ethnic studies have looked at how family members affect the job attainments of immigrants' descendants. Most studies in this area have demonstrated that family background characteristics are the main determinants of the educational and occupational outcomes of immigrants' descendants (e.g. Van Ours & Veenman, 2004; Tasiran & Tezic, 2007; Belzil & Poinas, 2010; de Matos, 2010). Parents' educational and occupational background, in particular, has been highlighted as an important influence.

However, many descendants of immigrants exceed the socioeconomic status of their parents (e.g. Luthra & Soehl, 2015; Luthra & Waldinger, 2013). For these individuals, other influences are more important than parents' education and occupational position. Fernandez-Kelly (2008) demonstrated how class-based knowledge obtained by immigrants in the home country contributed to their

children's attainments in the USA. Other studies have focused on the high expectations that immigrant parents place on their children to obtain university diplomas and attain valuable labour market positions (e.g. Hofferth & Moon, 2016; Taylor & Krahn, 2013), which have been attributed to the migrant experience (Dreby & Stutz, 2012). As Louie (2004; p. 123) put it: "The immigrant experience is traumatic, bringing as it does loss in any number of dimensions, from language and status, to social and kin networks, or, in short, an internal map of the way the world works". Many immigrants expect their children to make up for these losses, and their children feel an obligation to do well at school and on the labour market (Dreby, 2010). Researchers have referred to this phenomenon as "immigrant optimism" (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016), "the immigrant bargain" (Dreby, 2010; Louie, 2012), and "the second-generation advantage" (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

Schnell, Keskiner, and Crul (2013) argued that most research in the field of migration and ethnic studies on the role of the family is narrowly framed. They also stated that siblings are the main reason that descendants of immigrants of disadvantaged backgrounds enter higher education. This argument has been confirmed by other studies identifying siblings as an important source of information and support in school and on the labour market (Rezai, 2017; Crul, 2010; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008).

Swedish studies on family members' involvement in the educational and occupational attainments of immigrants' descendants are relatively new, but reflect findings from other countries. Lundqvist and Olsson (2012) reported that descendants of Chilean immigrants in Sweden attached high importance to educational and labour market success, which was partly related to parents' lower social positions in the host country. In her dissertation, Lundqvist (2010) found that the educational and career aspirations of Swedish youth with an immigrant background were associated with their parents' expectations and social position. In another Swedish study, Behtoui (2015) reported that descendants of Turkish immigrants in Sweden considered parents and siblings to be more important for their education compared to natives' descendants. The study indicated that migrant parents more often than native-born spent time "checking their children's homework, talking with their children about school and studies, and meeting with or talking to teachers" (ibid., p. 55). Behtoui suggested that this may relate to immigrant parents' higher expectations for their children, while also noting that immigrant parents were less able to provide their children with practical help.

A number of studies have described positive socioeconomic outcomes of growing up in and being embedded in ethnic communities. In the USA, there have been reports of favourable educational and labour market outcomes for descendants of Asian immigrants with a close connection to their ethnic communities (Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Bankston & Zhou, 1996). Similar results have been demonstrated in Europe. Vermeulen and Keskiner (2017) analysed

network organizations founded by descendants of Turkish immigrants with a strong foothold in the ethnic community, and found that these organizations helped descendants of Turkish immigrants to improve their positions on the labour market. A Swedish study reported that being connected to the Chilean diaspora community positively influenced the careers of Chilean immigrants' descendants (Olsson et al., 2007). The extent to which valuable resources may be transmitted and allocated between members of an ethnic community depends on several factors, including group members' educational and occupational position in the host country (cf. Vermeulen & Keskiner, 2017).

### **Non-family agents as providers of social and institutional support**

The literature on the role of non-family agents in the attainments of immigrants' descendants has mainly focused on education. Studies have shown that while low-income and low-educated immigrant parents are important providers of encouragement, motivation, and emotional support for their children, they often lack the ability to offer substantial practical support when it comes to schoolwork and making educational decisions (Crul et al., 2017, Louie, 2004; 2012; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Non-family agents may compensate for this by providing immigrants' descendants with practical support and information that goes beyond what is available from family members and relatives (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). According to Portes and Fernandez-Kelly (2008), such non-family agents can be teachers, councillors, or family friends, providing immigrants' descendants with knowledge and guidance that contribute to their educational attainments.

Rezai (2017) showed that the relevance of non-family agents also applies to the labour market participation of immigrants' descendants. Early in their career paths, it is often peers from college who help immigrants' descendants by providing information about job openings and internships. After finding a job, however, senior colleagues and/or supervisors become more important for career advancement (ibid., p. 234-235). Behtoui and Leivestad (2019) demonstrated similar findings for academics with a PhD applying for work in Swedish universities, showing that while academics of migrant descent were more often unemployed and had lower incomes than those with native-born parents, descendants who made a career in Swedish academia had had the support of senior colleagues and/or a powerful and resourceful supervisor.

## Welfare state context and institutional arrangements

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I dealt with the labour market disadvantages and advantages of immigrants' descendants, focusing mainly on family- and network-related influences. However, since the social, political, and institutional contexts matter for how individual, family, or community resources become relevant (cf. Crul et al., 2017), in this section I review the literature on how national and institutional structures affect the labour market entry and participation of immigrants' descendants.

Researchers are becoming increasingly focused on the role of the welfare state in explaining the educational and occupational outcomes of immigrants' descendants. This is partly related to academic debates in the field of migration and ethnic studies. In the early 1990s, scholars in the USA started to question the classical linear theory of integration and the assumption that migrant groups would gradually integrate into "mainstream" society with intergenerational progress (Alba & Nee, 1997; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Waldinger & Perlmann, 1998). The critics of this classical integration theory argued that the interaction between familial and community resources on the one hand, and political, institutional, and economic structures on the other, would result in varying integration outcomes for immigrants' descendants (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

The question, according to these scholars, is not whether immigrants' descendants will integrate or not, but into what *segment* of society they will integrate (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Concepts of the "second-generation decline" (Gans, 1992) and "segmented assimilation" (Portes & Zhou, 1993) reflect the argument that integration is an unfavourable outcome if it means integration into a poor, urban underclass. Moreover, these concepts refer to a process of *intergenerational decline*, highlighting that some descendants of immigrants in the USA show less favourable integration outcomes compared to their parents (Gans, 1992). Against this background, scholars have argued that some descendants of immigrants would have a better chance of obtaining educational and occupational attainment if they remained integrated in and drew on resources from their families and ethnic communities (e.g. Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Zhou, 1997).

European studies have shown that there is no evidence of a second-generation decline or a process of "downward assimilation" among descendants of immigrants in Western European countries (Behtoui, 2012; Silberman et al., 2007; de Graaf & van Zenderen, 2009). As stated by Thomson and Crul (2007, p. 1033): "Even those children of some ethnic groups, like second-generation Turks, who are considered to do less well than children of other ethnic groups, are still upwardly mobile compared to their parents". The main explanation for these different outcomes is that the USA and Western European countries are radically

different in terms of welfare state regimes (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1990). In comparison to the USA, Western European welfare states generally have stronger social safety nets and a higher degree of public intervention (Behtoui, 2012, Vermeulen, 2010; de Graaf & van Zenderen, 2009).

However, welfare state arrangements in Western European countries developed divergently after the Second World War (Esping-Andersen, 1990), and studies have demonstrated different educational and labour market outcomes for descendants of immigrants living in these countries (Guiraudon, 2014; Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012; Bean et al., 2012; Crul & Schneider, 2010; Crul & Vermeulen, 2003; Heckmann, Lederer & Worbs, 2001). This is also the case for descendants of immigrants of the same ethnicity and comparable socioeconomic backgrounds, meaning that within-group differences across countries can be explained with reference to the welfare state context (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012). In the following sections, I present the conclusions of studies regarding how welfare state and policy arrangements may contribute to the labour market outcomes of descendants of immigrants.

### *Educational arrangements that influence labour market outcomes*

According to scholars, some educational arrangements contribute to the labour market outcomes of immigrants' descendants, while others create obstacles. Academic study facilitates labour market entrance, and to a large extent determines the kind of jobs that become available to individuals (Statistics Sweden, 2010; Guiraudon, 2014). According to Reisel et al. (2012), a comprehensive school system, as in Sweden, with early school start and longer years of joint learning (as opposed to early track selection) leads to a higher share of immigrants' descendants in white-collar jobs. The comprehensive educational system opens doors to higher education and betters the chances of securing white-collar jobs. Dumas and Lefranc (2012) conclude that an early school start benefits immigrants' children more than children of native-born. Early education means an exposure to the majority language at a younger age for those who speak a different language at home, leading to better school performance (Crul & Schneider, 2010). Moreover, an early school start and longer years of joint learning implies "a mixed social environment, and better chances to acquire the necessary skills and level of schooling to enter higher qualifying strands of education" (Crul & Schneider, 2010, p. 10). A "mixed social environment" here refers to a more varied composition of students with regard to class background.

However, the extent to which immigrants' descendants have access to "mixed social environments" and chances of acquiring skills to enter higher education has also been discussed with regard to school segregation (e.g. Nordin, 2013). The Swedish school system has undergone many transformations over the past couple of decades, including decentralisation, shrinking resources, and an outsourcing of schools to private providers (Wiborg, 2015; Righard, Johansson & Salonen,

2015; Werne, 2018). In Sweden, the municipalities, who have a considerable degree of autonomy, became responsible for managing and financing public schools after the decentralisation from state to municipalities that was implemented in the 1980s by a social democratic government. This means that there is no nationally standardized way of allocating funds to disadvantaged schools, which leads to rather heterogeneous school outcomes across the country (OECD, 2016). The “free choice reforms” implemented in the 1990s by a liberal conservative government were based on the belief that equal choice opportunities would lead to a higher degree of socioeconomic integration of youth with a migrant background (Barmark & Lund, 2016; Lund, 2015). However, scholars now report an increased school segregation, with pupils of migrant descent concentrated in schools located in socially disadvantaged areas (OECD, 2016). This process of segregation is related to the fact that a large majority of immigrants live in socially disadvantaged areas (Westin, 2003), and that immigrant parents less often make active school choices for their children (Brandén & Bygren, 2018; Böhlmark, Holmlund & Lindahl, 2015).

School segregation has negative implications for the educational outcomes of immigrants’ descendants. Since many immigrant parents are unable to help their children with school choices and schoolwork, the support provided to these individuals from school personnel is important. However, the share of certified teachers in Sweden is lower in schools where the majority of students are of migrant descent (Hansson & Gustafsson, 2016), correlating with poor student performance (Andersson & Waldenström, 2007). Scholars have shown that descendants of immigrants of lower socioeconomic backgrounds who managed to obtain favourable labour market outcomes had the support of both parents and school personnel (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Louie, 2004; Rezai, 2017). Thus, schools that are systematically arranged to compensate for a lack of support from home contribute to the educational and occupational attainments of descendants of immigrants.

### *Family policies and NEET rates of female descendants of immigrants*

Soehl, Fibbi, and Vera-Larucea (2012) argued that although welfare state arrangements influence the labour market participation of *all* women, they particularly affect women of migrant descent. Scholars have highlighted the role of family policies in explaining employment rates for female descendants of immigrants. Large differences in rates of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) among female descendants of immigrants with similar ethnic and social background have been found across Western European countries (Crul et al., 2012; Guiraudon, 2014). For example, in 2008, 46.6 percent of female descendants of Turkish immigrants in Berlin were NEET, while the corresponding figure in Stockholm was 21 percent (Reisel et al., 2012). According to scholars, this is associated with Swedish family policies which

clearly encourage the labour market participation of female descendants of immigrants in the country (Soehl et al., 2012; Guiraudon, 2014; Eichhorst & Hemerijck, 2008).

Increased labour market participation among women has been a goal of Swedish social democratic governments since the early 1930s. The decades following saw adjustments of various policy areas, such as family policies, in order to promote gender-equal participation in both the labour market and parenting (Lundqvist, 2011; Edström, 2009). Examples of policies aimed at this include individualized tax reforms, the right for children aged over 12 months to attend pre-school, a right to three months of non-transferable parental leave, and extra benefits afforded to parents sharing parental leave days equally (Lundqvist, 2011; Lister et al., 2007; Hinnfors, 1992). According to scholars, these reforms have contributed to significantly lower NEET rates for female descendants of immigrants in Sweden (Reisel et al., 2012; Soehl et al., 2012; Guiraudon, 2014).

## **Labour market conditions for immigrants' descendants**

Just as welfare states change, so too do labour markets. In order to discuss the labour market entry and participation of immigrants' descendants in Sweden, it is first necessary to describe the relevant labour market conditions. Immigrants' descendants in Sweden and other Western countries are affected in many ways by conditions that aggravate the labour market integration of young people in general (see e.g. Olofsson, 2014; Olofsson & Wikström, 2018). As explained by Wadensjö (2014), individuals in younger age brackets are especially vulnerable to financial crises and deteriorations of the labour market because they have not yet gained a labour market foothold. Having a migrant background brings additional disadvantages. Young people of migrant descent in Western Europe, including Sweden, are overrepresented among both those who are NEET and those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and risk long-term unemployment (Schröder, 2015; 2014). In this section, I describe some important labour market conditions in Sweden which influence the labour market entry and participation of immigrants' descendants today. Some of these conditions affect young people in general, while others are particularly salient for those of ethnic-minority origin. It is important to note, however, that it is not my ambition to give a comprehensive overview of the Swedish labour market, but rather to highlight conditions that are important for understanding hindrances and opportunities for descendants of immigrants who enter and participate on the labour market in Sweden.

*A "bumpier" and less linear labour market establishment*

Labour market conditions are shaped not only by national economies and policies, but also in an international context of transnational ties, internationalised migration, and internationalised economies (Konyali, 2017; Gerhards & Hans, 2016; Thompson & Kaspersen, 2012; Favell, Feldblum & Smith, 2007; Hunter, White & Godbey, 2006). This entails a higher degree of economic interdependence between countries, a more rapid technological development, and more quickly changing markets (Låstad et al., 2016). In light of a deregulated economy with increasing competitiveness and higher demands for flexibility, firms and organisations take actions to survive; for example, in terms of outsourcing, privatizations, staff reductions, and increased project-based and temporary employment.

A couple of decades ago, industries in Sweden were more inclined to invest in young people by offering long-term full-time employment, including training and a substantial increase in wages over the course of their career (see Olofsson, 2014, pp. 28-29). This provided for a more linear and structured labour market entry (Marsden, 2007). However, the decline of the industrial economy and the internationalization of the labour market has put pressure on companies and industries to quickly adapt to changing circumstances, to changing technology, and to an increased national and international competition (Marsden, 2010). Consequently, industries and companies of today want workers who can be productive from the outset, and are less inclined to take responsibility for their employees' long-term skill development.

In light of these processes, young people's labour market establishment is more complex today than before, and those who are entering the labour market face a higher degree of insecurity. Allvin et al. (2011) argued that the "usual" work contract, characterized by the 8am–5pm job and remaining at the same workplace year after year, is on its way out. Instead, working life today is characterized by a higher degree of flexibility. As highlighted by Schröder (2015), these changes are reflected in the drawn-out school-to-work process, longer periods spent in temporary employment, and the higher prevalence of part-time work among young people in Sweden.

These changes are underpinned by the increase in labour market deregulation trends, where a decline of institutional regulation and legal interventions have made it easier for employers to offer temporary employment. This has been described as leading to a segmented labour market, where certain groups of people are highly protected on the labour market whereas those at the margin of the market (e.g. young people, migrants, and low-educated people) are offered insecure and flexible jobs (Barbieri, 2009).

### *An information-intensive labour market*

As Olofsson (2018) has argued, the increasing disadvantages facing young people, and in particular those of migrant origin, are related to changing labour market

conditions regarding aspects such as job opportunities and qualifying requirements. Over the past couple of decades, the traditional industry sector has declined while the service- and knowledge-based sectors have increased. This means that education is more important for gaining a labour market foothold today than in former industrial economies (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Whereas earlier even young people who had relatively weak educational backgrounds had major opportunities to obtain secure and long-term employment, those who do not have an upper secondary school certificate today face substantial risks of labour market exclusion (Statistics Sweden, 2017b; Björklund et al., 2010).

There has been a general increase in labour market demands for knowledge, skills, and qualifications. As discussed above, whereas firms previously used to take responsibility for employees' skill development, job applicants today are increasingly expected to be trained before their labour market entry. The growth of what has been referred to as a "knowledge economy" puts new and much more stringent demands on the educational system, which is expected to produce knowledge adapted to quickly changing market demands (cf. Wieringen & Attwell, 1999). There has also been an increase in expectations of individual responsibility, where employees must prepare for an ongoing process of up-skilling and informal learning in order to meet labour market demands for flexibility (Olofsson & Wikström, 2018).

### *Labour market discrimination against immigrants and their descendants*

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, an extensive body of research shows evidence of labour market discrimination against people of migrant origin in almost all Western European countries (Midtbøen, 2016; Carlsson, 2010; Kaas & Manger, 2012; Heath et al., 2013; Adida et al., 2010; Meurs et al., 2006; Silberman, Alba & Fournier, 2007; Rafferty, 2012). Researchers investigating discrimination in Sweden have used correspondance testing (Bursell, 2012; Carlsson & Rooth, 2007) and situation testing (International Labour Office, 2007), both of which involve testing whether equally-qualified job applicants with foreign-sounding and native-sounding names receive job interview invitations or job offers to the same extent. These studies have shown that individuals with foreign-sounding names (mainly Middle-Eastern or African) are significantly less likely to be called in for an interview or offered a job in comparison to those with Swedish-sounding names.

Scholars have distinguished between two main types of discrimination: preference discrimination and statistical discrimination. Preference discrimination is when employers discriminate on the basis of dislike towards certain ethnic groups (Schröder, 2010). Statistical discrimination, on the other hand, is when employers choose to not recruit someone on the basis of the *believed* productivity of the ethnic group to which they are assumed to belong (Schwab, 1986; Aigner & Cain, 1977). Statistical discrimination is based on the

notion that recruitment means taking risks, meaning that employers will choose someone they believe is a “safe bet”, especially in labour markets with high employment security (Hermansen, 2013; Schröder, 2010).

Carlsson and Rooth (2007) argued that labour market discrimination is generally a “male problem”; mainly executed by men against other men. This is underscored by Bursell’s (2014) study, demonstrating that labour market discrimination in Sweden is directed against men with Arabic and African-sounding names. Midtbøen (2014) investigated the decision-making processes of employers in relation to stereotypes towards members of ethnic minorities, and found that negative stereotypes were generalized between ethnic groups and across generations. This means that job applicants can be subjected to stereotypes directed towards ethnic or immigrant groups that they may not actually belong to.

### *Growing demands for “cross-cultural” knowledge*

Western European labour markets are increasingly characterized by the migration of people, knowledge, and skills, and by ethno-cultural diversity, entailing new labour market conditions for immigrants’ descendants in both private and public sectors of the labour market (see for example Konyali, 2017; Gruber, 2013; Hedberg & Pettersson, 2012). For example, in Swedish social work practice and the health sector, long-standing debates have been going on about the growing share of “migrant clients” and the need to develop cross-cultural knowledge and skills in human service organisations (Righard & Wikström, 2019; Hedberg & Pettersson, 2012; Ahmadi & Lönnback, 2005). In relation to this, concepts such as “cultural competence” have emerged including the idea that employees in various public institutions need special competence to work with migrants and their children (Righard & Wikström, 2019).

The concept of cultural competence has been criticized for alienating and generalizing groups of migrants (Eliassi, 2015; Gruber, 2016) while disregarding the growing diversity of people within social, ethnic, and religious groups (Blommaert, 2013). Vertovec (2007) introduced the term “super-diversity” to address the increasing range of differences not only between but also *within* ethnic and religious groups. Crul (2016) has emphasized that there are differences between people from diverse social and educational backgrounds, between different generations, and between men and women in various ethnic and religious groups. Nonetheless, concepts such as cultural competence are widely used in the public sector, and in some ways have determined the opportunity structures of immigrants’ descendants working in this sector. For example, Gruber (2016) highlighted that the concept of cultural competence has produced a tendency in social work practice to hire staff with a migrant background to deal with what are perceived as “migrant-related issues/needs”.

### *Ethnically niched jobs*

A recurring theme in the literature is that individuals with an immigrant background often find work in internationally operating firms or run ethnically niched ventures. Konyali (2017) showed that immigrants' descendants in transnationally operating businesses made use of career opportunities based on their ethnic background. Thomson and Crul (2007) described the growing literature on ethnic labour market niches for immigrants' descendants, and Zhou (2013) showed how it has been becoming more and more common for descendants of immigrants, just like their parents, to be disproportionately concentrated in ethnically profiled business sectors. Some scholars have suggested that these processes are related to structural inequalities affecting immigrants and their descendants, leaving few choices but to work in such ethnically profiled work positions (Volery, 2007; Boyd, 2000; Bun & Hui, 1995).

### III. Theoretical framework

This dissertation is focused on influences on the occupational aspirations and attainments of descendants of immigrants, from their own perspectives. In understanding and analysing these influences, I have employed the concepts of *habitus*, *cultural capital*, and *social capital* introduced by Bourdieu (e.g. 1977a; 1986) and applied and developed by many other scholars (e.g. Jæger & Breen, 2016; van de Werfhorst, 2010; Broady, 1998; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Whereas the concepts of cultural capital and social capital describe how people's external conditions bring forth distinct assets and opportunities, the concept of habitus deals with how such assets and opportunities are embodied and practiced in everyday life through subjective perceptions, expectations, and actions (Bourdieu, 2000).

Bourdieu developed his theoretical framework over the years throughout his voluminous writings. My ambition has not been to either describe or adopt this framework in its entirety. Rather, I have drawn on the concepts of habitus, social capital, and cultural capital in ways that are relevant for understanding the research problem in this dissertation. The concept of habitus is used to analyse the ways in which descendants of immigrants understand labour market conditions, and how such conditions influence their occupational pathways and strategies. The concept of cultural capital is used to understand what symbolic resources have influenced and contributed to the occupational aspirations and attainments of immigrants' descendants. Finally, the concept of social capital is used to study the ways in which the occupational aspirations and attainments of descendants of immigrants have benefitted from interactions with public officials.

An important theoretical starting point of the dissertation is what Bourdieu (1990) has conceptualised as structuralist constructivism; meaning that I have started from the idea that respondents' subjective perceptions and their objective life conditions are linked and formed in an ongoing interaction with one another. Studying influences on their occupational aspirations and attainments from their own perspectives requires looking at how they subjectively perceive such influences, but also taking into account how they describe objective opportunities and constraints. The theoretical framework of the dissertation thus forms a bridge between the individual agent and objective social structures (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002).

The theoretical concepts have been used in an indicative and tentative manner, meaning that the aim, research questions and interview guide have not been theoretically generated, but formed in relation to previous knowledge in the field of migration and ethnic studies. The theoretical concepts have been used as sources of information and inspiration during the data collection process, rather than rules to be governed by (cf. Sjöberg, Rambaree & Jojo, 2015). An ongoing

interaction between my initial understanding of the research problem and the gathered empirical data led to a more refined and elaborated theoretical framework. This process of going back and forth between theory and data is known as the abductive approach (see e.g. Feilzer, 2010), and has infused the research process in this study. Further details and implications of applying such a method are given in Chapter IV of this dissertation.

## **Habitus, subjectivities, and structures**

As Costa and Murphy (2015) have written, habitus may perhaps be the most important concept in Bourdieu's theoretical framework, since it helps explain why and how the social world is perceived, reproduced, and shaped by the individuals living in it. Habitus can be described as an *embodied system of dispositions*, continuously developed over a lifespan of being subjected to multiple, varied, and sometimes contradictory objective social conditions (Bourdieu, 1990; Broady, 1998). Bourdieu (2000, p. 64) argues that the habitus has "the primordial function of stressing that the principle of our actions is more often practical sense than rational calculation [...]". As a practical sense, it orientates, but does not determine, how individuals think, behave, and act in relation to the social world (Reay, 2004; Bourdieu, 1990).

The habitus includes values and notions of what is natural, what is possible or impossible, and a recognition of a situation or a context with which one can identify (Broady, 1998). Thus, the degree to which a person's inner world is in harmony with the outer world determines that person's feelings of being "at home" or "out of place" in a social situation (Bourdieu, 1977b). The concept frames the ways in which human action shapes social structures while simultaneously being shaped by already existing structures (Silva, 2016).

In studying how immigrants' descendants perceive influences on their occupational aspirations and attainments, I have used the concept of habitus to consider the interaction between what they carry within them, and the social world that is surrounding them. This world, according to Bourdieu (1986), is accumulated history. We are agents in many different social positions, which we are either born into or have acquired over our life-course, such as work position, gender, social class and ethnicity. These social positions all have a collective history, and a person's individual experiences are "selected and stamped by membership in collectives and attachment to institutions", as Wacquant (2014, p. 120) puts it.

The relationship between individual, familial, community, and institutional history is central to understanding the collective aspect of habitus (Bourdieu, 1989). Individuals' histories comprise more than a set of events personally experienced by the individual in question. For example, there is a gendered habitus, since people's living conditions are affected by the collective histories of

constructions of masculinity and femininity (Wacquant, 2014). The positions that people are born into or manage to acquire over the life-course bring forth different sets of symbolic and material resources (capital); economic, social, or cultural. These resources are both objectified, as material assets, and embodied, as thoughts, predispositions, tastes, actions, and values (Bourdieu, 1986). Together, they reproduce and produce a person's living conditions.

In developing his theoretical concepts, Bourdieu (1986) sought to go beyond perspectives that were focused on either individuals' subjective approach to the social world (e.g. rational theory) or structures that dominate and form human action (e.g. structuralism). Instead, he aimed to explain how social structures could lead to opportunities and constraints for individuals, *and* how individual agency is practiced in relation to those structures.

From this perspective, descendants of immigrants are embedded in social structures; their approach to labour market entry and participation is influenced by how they perceive possible courses of action, and how they interpret and react to those structures. For example, they may choose higher education as a response to perceived/experienced labour market discrimination (Urban, 2012), or they may pursue a career in ethnically niched firms or corporate branches with "international" profiles, because such positions allow them to use their ethnic background as an asset rather than it becoming a burden (Konyali, 2017).

Those who place Bourdieu's theoretical work into the category of "reproduction theory", however, may view the concept of habitus as unsuitable for this dissertation, which to a large extent deals with individual strategies and processes of change. Butler (1997), for example, has offered serious criticism of Bourdieu, who she considers to have overlooked the individual capacity to manoeuvre around dominating structures:

This excess is what Bourdieu's account appears to miss or, perhaps, to suppress: the abiding incongruity of the speaking body, the way in which it exceeds its interpellation, and remains uncontained by any of its acts of speech. (Butler 1997, p. 155).

Bourdieu himself rejected categorisations of his work as determinant (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and in his more recent works (e.g. Bourdieu, 2000), he repeatedly addresses what are deemed to be misconceptions about his theoretical concepts. The criticism of Bourdieu is particularly aimed towards some of his earlier works, such as *Distinction* and *La Reproduction*. In the Swedish preface to *La Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2008, p. 7), Broady writes that, to some extent, the authors could not blame anyone but themselves for this criticism. The title, as well as the first quarter of the book, certainly gives the impression that they are trying to portray the educational system as a machine for reproduction. McNay (2001) claims that while it is true that some of Bourdieu's earlier work tends to exaggerate the domination of structure over

individual agency, this “arises from a failure on Bourdieu’s part to integrate these concepts sufficiently with his idea of the field” (p. 146). I agree with McNay on this point, and conclude that while some of Bourdieu’s works fail to highlight more clearly the mismatch between the habitus and objective structures, his theoretical framework per se does not suffer from such failure. Rather, Bourdieu repeatedly discusses the disjunction between individual action and social structure; or, in other words, opportunities for the active agency of individuals to influence the social order.

As Wacquant (2018) states, one major virtue of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, including the concepts of habitus, field, and capital, is its general ability to link macro-level structures to institutional constructs and individual practice. In his more recent work, Bourdieu focuses more intensely on tensions between the habitus and the field, including aspects of individual agency, conscious individual strategy, and possibilities for social change (e.g. Bourdieu, 2000; 2004; 2008). In these works, Bourdieu states that people may be subjected to many differing and sometimes contradictory social structures at once, so that they may develop a cleft habitus that more or less mismatches the structure of particular fields. It is in relation to such mismatches that social change is possible. However, the existence of a cleft habitus, marked by discrepancies between the present and the past, depends on the social conditions in which it is shaped and practiced, and “can and must therefore be measured and explained empirically” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 64).

Against this background, a theoretical starting point of this dissertation is that individuals can develop conscious strategies when faced with unfamiliar and difficult situations. Those who have contingent experiences working in their favour (cf. Bourdieu, 2008); that is, a wide array of promising courses of events, circumstances, and situations, have more potential to reach their goals in such situations. Similarly, studies show that descendants of low-educated and socially excluded immigrants obtain educational and occupational attainment through a series of fortunate opportunities which they promptly take up (e.g. Crul et al., 2017; Keskiner & Crul, 2017; Konyali, 2017; Rezai, 2017; Waldring, Crul & Ghorashi, 2014). Some of these opportunities are random and personal, such as happening to come across a supportive neighbour, while others are structural, such as political and institutional arrangements that contribute to their success (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Guiraudon, 2014).

## **Social and cultural capital as products of individual and collective histories**

At the most basic level, social and cultural capital are defined as material and immaterial resources derived from a person’s social and cultural position and in relation to other social agents. These forms of capital are both related to

institutions; on the one hand, they are produced and reproduced by institutions, and on the other, they are used by individuals to attain their goals in those same institutions (Bourdieu, 1986). As pointed out by Broady (1998), aspects such as characteristics, beliefs, practices, and information may only be conceptualised as social and cultural capital if these aspects are acknowledged and valued in dominant societal institutions. In the sections below, I present more elaborated discussions of how these concepts are understood and employed in this dissertation.

### *Cultural capital*

According to Bourdieu (1986), the concept of cultural capital deals with symbolic resources that are *generally* valued and perceived as desirable in a society, but only available to privileged groups of individuals. These are the individuals who manage to enter the widely acknowledged institutions that are responsible for handling the (re)production and distribution of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2008), such as the higher educational system or specific labour market branches. Of course, those institutions also have an established set of entry rules and requirements which favour people who already possess cultural capital (Dumais, 2002). Lamont and Lareau (1988, p. 155) explain Bourdieu and Passeron's argument in the following way:

[...] schools are not socially neutral institutions but reflect the experiences of the "dominant class". Children from this class enter school with key social and cultural cues, while working class and lower-class students must acquire the knowledge and skills to negotiate their educational experience after they enter school.

From this perspective, the conceptualisation of symbolic resources as cultural capital depends on the extent to which social and cultural conceptions, values, practices, and knowledge may transform into a generally acknowledged and valued form of capital in widely recognized institutions (Stempel, 2005). This means that what is conceptualised as cultural capital in one context or country is not necessarily cultural capital in another. It also means that those who lack cultural capital but still manage to enter widely acknowledged institutions may be obliged to work harder or have alternative resources to attain desirable positions in those institutions.

To explain more clearly what Bourdieu conceptualised as cultural capital, Broady (1998, p. 7), asks: "if you belong to the upper class, but do not have money, what do you have then? The answer to that question reveals what cultural capital is." Cultural capital can essentially come in an embodied, institutionalized, or objectified form (Bourdieu, 1986). The embodied form is related to the incorporation of knowledge, culture, or "refinement" of a person's habitus. The appropriation of an *embodied* form of cultural capital takes time and effort, and

occurs subconsciously. More specifically, it may be described as subtle unspoken forms of knowledge and cultivation, such as knowing how to behave during a job interview or being able to make a good impression on a high-ranking agent in a particular field. Cultural capital in its *institutionalized* form is more tangible than its embodied form, and refers to the acquisition of institutionally produced and acknowledged qualifications, such as academic titles. The *objectified* form, e.g. academic diplomas, derives from such qualifications.

An embodied form of cultural capital may remain in place even when institutionalised or objectified forms of cultural capital disappear. The self-image of being a highly-skilled professional and the forms of knowledge and cultivation that come with this do not disappear upon migration, despite a risk of depreciation of academic diplomas earned in the home country (cf. Gang & Zimmermann, 2000). Although individuals in this position are not guaranteed an institutionalized form of cultural capital, they may still carry with them embodied forms of knowledge and cultivation acquired in the home country. These embodied forms of cultural capital can subsequently influence the accumulation of cultural capital among their descendants (Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). Following this line of thought, social origin may be seen as more important for a person's possibility to acquire cultural capital than their current socioeconomic position.

The accumulation of cultural capital is partly related to subjective notions of what are "natural", "possible", or "impossible" courses of action. Generally, individuals brought up in families who possess cultural capital are more likely to accumulate cultural capital themselves (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2008; Broady, 1998; DiMaggio, 1982). However, individuals brought up by low-educated and socioeconomically disadvantaged parents also have possibilities to acquire cultural capital (Crul et al., 2017; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Thus, the mechanisms that drive the accumulation of cultural capital may vary. In this dissertation, it is assumed that whilst cultural capital can be intergenerationally transmitted, it can also be produced through channels other than parents' socioeconomic position.

The "immigrant bargain" that was mentioned earlier may be seen as an important driver for the accumulation of cultural capital among descendants of immigrants (cf. Smith, 2002). Immigrant parents' high expectations for the educational and occupational trajectories of their descendants form part of this immigrant bargain (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016; White & Glick, 2009; Kasinitz et al., 2008). While many immigrant parents are not able to provide their children with substantial support in the form of homework assistance, help with writing CVs, and having job contacts, their encouragement and expectations of their children to obtain occupational attainment positively influence the accumulation of cultural capital. This implies that a context of migration (or some other radical change of social and political context) may entail an image of educational and

occupational attainment as possible or even natural, whereas such attainments might have been seen as impossible in another context.

### *Social capital*

The concept of social capital has been much debated within and across different scientific disciplines. Virtually all interpretations of the concept involve the basic idea of social capital as monetary or symbolic resources derived from social relations (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Behtoui, 2006; Haikkola, 2011; Heizmann & Böhnke, 2016). However, such resources have been understood and analysed on different levels (Portes, 1998); on an individual level as assets belonging to and used by single individuals (Bourdieu, 1986), and on a collective level as the degree of trust between individuals, maintaining the level of solidarity of social groups or even whole societies (Putnam, 2000).

The application of social capital in this dissertation is based on Bourdieu's (1986, p. 88) definition of the concept: it is the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources" that derive from a network of more or less institutionalized connections, endowing its members with a collectively owned capital. Collectively owned capital refers to resources which are individually owned by social agents or ingrained in institutions but can benefit all those who are affiliated with that agent or institution. These resources may derive from interactions with, for example, kin, friends, or acquaintances, and are based on conscious or unconscious material and symbolic exchanges between social agents who are affiliated in some way (Broady, 1998). A central aspect here is that social capital has a multiplier effect on the other forms of capital that an individual possesses. For example, it is not guaranteed that a person will be rewarded with a desired job position after obtaining a university degree. However, having social contacts in that workplace or being affiliated with someone who has valuable information about the job-search process increases the chances of attaining that job (cf. Behtoui, 2006).

In this study, I employ social capital as a conceptual framework from which to study how interactions with public officials contribute to the occupational aspirations and attainments of immigrants' descendants, from their own perspective. Against this background, social capital in this dissertation is analysed as individual assets that derive from institutionalized connections with public officials, characterised by mutual recognition, solidarity, and conscious or unconscious transmission of profits (cf. Portes, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

The transmission of social capital from public officials such as teachers, social workers, and employment officers to descendants of immigrants occurs in an institutional context of instrumental ties. One important aspect to consider here is that public officials are agents in positions of power in relation to their clients. As Bourdieu (1985) states, societies tend to be structured according to a symbolic power system. It is thus relevant to consider the impact of unequal power

relations on the encounters between public officials and their clients (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Järvinen (2002) argues that the relation between a public official and a client automatically involves a power imbalance due to the authoritarian position of the former. There are, nevertheless, possibilities for individuals who belong to different social groups in an asymmetrical power relation to meet and engage in a transmission of resources (Bourdieu, 1985). However, having, for example, an assigned employment officer, teacher, or social worker does not automatically lead to a transmission of social capital. Lin (2001) argues that both a personal supply of resources and institutional arrangements affect whether public officials are able to transmit resources to their clients.

Against this background, this dissertation focuses on social capital in terms of both the characteristics which allow a resource transaction to happen and the symbolic resources that are transmitted to descendants of immigrants and positively influence their occupational aspirations and attainments. Here, the relational approaches used by public officials, from the respondents' perspectives, are examined in relation to the resources accrued by descendants of immigrants in interacting with the public official. Symbolic resources refer to e.g. received knowledge, advice, or coordination that become valuable in a context of forming and fulfilling occupational aspirations, and the prospects created for entering and participating on the labour market.

## IV. Materials and Methods

In her dissertation, Louie (2004, p. 191) writes that “one of the many things I enjoy about research is that you are never sure of what you will find”. Indeed, many research projects take unexpected turns, and just like Louie’s, this dissertation has ended up in a different place from my initial anticipations. When I started out, I wanted to examine labour market challenges as perceived by employed descendants of immigrants in Sweden, focusing on aspects such as family background and social networks. I had read numerous studies illustrating the same pattern; that immigrants’ descendants were struggling on the Swedish labour market. I therefore recruited descendants who were employed, in order to examine the challenges and difficulties they had faced in entering and participating on the labour market. However, the respondents turned out to be a select group of people; most of them were highly educated and employed in positions corresponding to their credentials. While they had indeed faced difficulties on the labour market, they had also encountered opportunities and developed strategies, and were equipped with specific valuable resources. As they continued talking about these aspects, I realized that this was the actual topic of the dissertation: immigrants’ descendants’ own perceptions of influences on their occupational aspirations and attainments.

This and other changes of direction presented in this chapter have essentially been propelled by using a strategy of abduction (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), allowing me to continuously shift between earlier knowledge and the empirical data. In this chapter, I present my methodological choices, including the research design, interview procedure, sampling process, and analytic strategy. In relation to these choices, I also discuss issues concerning trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

### Methodological choices and reflections

The aim of this dissertation was to study influences on the occupational aspirations and attainments of employed descendants of non-European, non-Western immigrants in Sweden, from their own perspectives. To fulfil this aim, I used a *qualitative approach* of semi-structured interviews. The choice of methodology was made in light of ontological reflections related to the concept of perceptions. Perceptions, as well as choices, behaviour, and actions, are formed in a context of opportunities and constraints, and developed from ongoing interactions with people and structures (cf. Sania Ali et al., 2018; Evans, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Schmid, 1981). In this sense, I agree with Schütz (1967), who argued that the social world should be analysed as a construct of the meaning that individuals put into social situations and phenomena. Related to this is Bourdieu’s (1986) argument that perceptions affect our social actions, which both

constitute and are constituted by the social world. These notions imply an interaction between the inner and outer world, and may be extended to the research process. The study of perceptions must relate to the structures, contexts, and situations in which they are formed.

I entered the research process with knowledge gained from reading earlier studies, and interpreted this knowledge in the light of respondents' perceptions, and then vice versa — interpreting *their* perceptions in the light of earlier knowledge. This knowledge-seeking process is commonly referred to as an *abductive approach*, meaning that researchers begin the investigation with what is already known in the field and then work their way towards a more elaborated explanation (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This entails ongoing interactions between empirical observations and readings of the existing literature. In seeking to fulfil the research aim, I alternated between previous knowledge in the field and the empirical findings emerging from the data (cf. Rambaree & Faxelid, 2013). This abductive approach is particularly useful when conducting studies in less-explored research areas in which general knowledge has not yet been deduced (Aliseda, 2006). Since the literature on the descendants of immigrants participating on the labour market in Sweden is relatively scarce, little is known about influences on their occupational aspirations and attainments. An abductive approach, where previous knowledge is integrated with empirical data to deepen a theoretical understanding of the research questions, has enabled a more contextual analysis of the data material.

## **The interview situation and data material**

Between September 2015 and January 2016, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-one respondents (nine male, twelve female), all of whom were born in Sweden with both parents born in a non-European, non-Western country. The interviews were approximately 30–90 minutes long, and were audio-recorded and transcribed into written text.

In June 2016, four complementary interviews were carried out with four of the original respondents (one female, three male), because some prominent topics had appeared in subsequent interviews that had not been covered in the interviews with these four respondents. These topics revolved around perceptions of work/family arrangements and perceptions of interactions with public officials. Since virtually all respondents, except for these four, had discussed these topics during the interviews, I decided to perform complementary interviews with them to elicit their views on the subjects in question.

Before conducting the interviews, an interview guide was created with a focus on themes considered relevant in the light of earlier research. Although I made sure that relevant themes were covered, I also asked open-ended questions to capture the respondents' perceptions and experiences of both expected and

unexpected areas of interest. The themes in the interview guide and the subjects that were covered in the four complementary interviews are given below.

*First interview round (n=21)*

Family and social background

Social networks

Perceptions of having a job and applying for jobs

Job-related expectations and aspirations

*Second interview round (n=4)*

Perceptions of work/family arrangements

Perceptions of interactions with public officials

The interviews began with a wide-ranging open question: “Could you tell me about your upbringing, and your life today?” This question generated broad and informative descriptions of conditions and contexts related to the respondents’ upbringing and life situation. Empirical themes and subthemes crystallized during the analysis of data (Trost, 2005). As mentioned earlier, some prominent topics emerged during the interviews, resulting in two additional interview themes: the relationship between work, family, and children; and the role of public officials.

Seven of the initial interviews were performed in person, one was carried out through Skype, and thirteen were performed over the telephone, all according to the respondents’ choices. Three of the complementary interviews were performed in person, and one over the telephone. Although telephone interviewing is a common method for collecting survey data, it is not as frequently used in qualitative studies (Novick, 2008). Qualitative scholars have raised doubts concerning digital interviewing, and argued that it might hinder a trustful relationship between the interviewer and respondent (Fontana & Frey, 2008; Shuy, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Others (e.g. Iacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016) argue that it is beneficial for many reasons, and through technological advances offers a similar environment to face-to-face interviews.

My experience of using these various interviewing techniques is that they facilitate the recruitment of respondents, increase the chances of obtaining a varied sample, and are both cost- and time-effective. Digital interviewing is also an environment-friendly alternative when the respondent lives some distance from the researcher. This interviewing technique enabled me to interview individuals over a wide geographical spread during a short period of time, and the flexibility increased respondents’ motivation for taking part in the study.

Many respondents could not attend a face-to-face interview, and were not familiar with Skype, but were available over the telephone. The drawback of telephone interviews is that they exclude observations of facial expressions and body language, although there is no actual evidence that this puts the quality of

data at risk (cf. Novick, 2008). I sought to make up for this, however, by explaining the interview questions in detail when it became apparent that the respondents had misunderstood something, and by asking for detailed explanations when I was unsure of something they had said. It is also worth asking whether this is any different from face-to-face-interviews, where visual cues can be misread, and researchers continuously ask for explanations and pose follow-up questions.

It should be noted that after comparing the face-to-face-interviews with the telephone interviews, I perceived the telephone respondents as having been just as comfortable and confident as the in-person respondents. Other qualitative researchers have reported the same outcome from telephone interviews. According to a review by Novick (2008), some of the reasons for this are that respondents feel anonymous and experience less social pressure with telephone interviews. Contrary to expectations, qualitative researchers who have performed telephone interviews report the data to be rich and vivid (e.g. Chapple, 1999; Sweet, 2002; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). This was also my experience, and I found no differences in the quality of data when comparing the telephone material with the in-person material.

The interviews were all conducted in Swedish, since this is the language that I, like most of my respondents, am most fluent in. Transcription of the recorded interviews to written text was therefore also carried out in Swedish. Interview extracts chosen to exemplify the results in the articles were translated from Swedish to English with the help of a language editing agency.

## **Respondents and sampling process**

I began my search for respondents by placing advertisements in social media. However, I soon discovered that it was hard to obtain a varied sample through this sampling methodology, and so in order to reach a broader audience I placed an advertisement in a Swedish newspaper, Metro, which has a readership of approximately 1.2 million individuals in mid- and southern Sweden. In the advertisement, I sought respondents who were born in Sweden, who had non-European, non-Western immigrant parents, who were aged between 25 and 35, and who were employed and had been so for at least six months.

The sampling methodology had a purposeful approach (Palinkas et al., 2015), meaning that I recruited respondents according to my research aim. I chose to recruit respondents aged 25–35 to increase the chances of getting respondents who had been participating in the labour market for some time. All respondents were employed and had been so for at least six months; most of them had at least three years of work experience. I did not interview unemployed individuals, because the influences which lead to labour market exclusion were not the focus of the dissertation. As is always the case with recruitment strategies in which it is

left to respondents to register their interest to participate in a study, there is a risk of a self-selection bias. Here, there was the risk of attracting individuals who were already interested in issues revolving around labour market entry and participation.

The two advertising methods provided respondents from northern, mid-, and southern Sweden, including individuals from small, medium-sized, and larger cities. The respondents were from Borås (n=1), Borlänge (n=4), Falun (n=2), Gothenburg (n=1), Malmö (n=1), Norrköping (n=2), Sandviken (n=1), Stockholm (n=5), Sollentuna (n=1), Södertälje (n=1), Uppsala (n=1), and Umeå (n=1). Of the twenty-three individuals who registered their interest to participate in the study, two were excluded as they did not meet the selection criteria: one was not born in Sweden and the other was unemployed. The remaining twenty-one all qualified for the study and were selected for participation.

The respondents were all born in Sweden with parents from non-European, non-Western countries. These countries happened to be predominantly Middle Eastern, which is not surprising considering that many descendants of immigrants from non-European and non-Western countries who are now aged 25–35 have parents who came to Sweden from the Middle East during the 1980s due to various wars and conflicts in the area. The 1980s has been described as “the decade of the asylum seekers” by the Swedish Migration Agency (2019). People who migrated to Sweden during this time period were mainly from the Middle East, including Lebanon, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

Table 2 gives an overview of their parents’ birth countries, though it should be noted that the respondents’ ethnic origin did not always match their parents’ birth country. Many refugees who come to Sweden from Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq are ethnic Kurds or Assyrians/Syrians, and many from Lebanon are Palestinians or Assyrians/Syrians. In fact, all of the respondents whose parents had migrated from Turkey were ethnic Assyrians/Syrians or Kurds. This reflects the fact that these ethnicities dominate the group of Turkish migrants in Sweden (cf. Westin, 2003). However, it was not my ambition to compare ethnic groups in terms of labour market participation, but rather to obtain a relational and contextual understanding of the respondents’ perceptions and experiences.

The Middle Eastern immigrants who came to Sweden in the 1980s are a heterogeneous group in terms of social background; some have university degrees, while others have no education at all (Schröder, 2010). This was also reflected among the parents of my respondents, as demonstrated by Table 2. The parents of the respondents came to Sweden just before the financial recession of the 1990s, which made labour market integration difficult for many immigrants. During this time period, many native-born Swedes with educational diplomas were also unemployed and looking for jobs, but the risk of unemployment was twice as large for immigrants in comparison to the native-born (Arai & Vilhelmsson, 2004). These labour market difficulties, and many other aspects of immigrant parents’ social background, are reflected in the labour market

situation of descendants of immigrants (Ekberg, 2012), who grew up with parents who themselves had faced unemployment and labour market struggles. Thus, social conditions, family values related to work, and parents' educational and occupational background were all of interest during the research process.

The respondents' ages, educational levels, and current job positions are given in Table 1, and their parents' birth countries, educational levels, and current job positions are given in Table 2. In order to protect the anonymity of the respondents, I have designated them as IP (interviewed person) and a chronological number (1, 2, 3, 4...) based on the date of the interview. Because one of the interviews was later removed from the material when it was discovered that the respondent was not born in Sweden and hence did not meet the selection criteria, IP6 is missing from the table below and the identifiers include IP22 even though the data material consisted of only twenty-one interviews.

**Table 1.** Overview of respondents

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Level of education*</b>	<b>Current job position</b>
<b><i>Female respondents</i></b>			
<i>IP1</i>	25	University	Social worker
<i>IP2</i>	25	Vocational	Pharmaceutical technician
<i>IP3</i>	26	University	Career coach at a private employment agency
<i>IP4</i>	25	University	Social service worker
<i>IP8</i>	25	University	Psychologist
<i>IP9</i>	26	University	Medical laboratory scientist
<i>IP12</i>	35	University	Manager at a wood-processing company
<i>IP14</i>	33	University	Safety service engineer
<i>IP15</i>	31	University	Assistant nurse
<i>IP18</i>	34	University	Pharmaceutical manager
<i>IP21</i>	31	Vocational	Preschool cook
<i>IP22</i>	28	University	Manager at a residential-care company
<b><i>Male respondents</i></b>			
<i>IP5</i>	32	University	Teacher at municipality adult education
<i>IP7</i>	25	University	Compliance specialist at a private bank
<i>IP10</i>	27	University	Upper secondary school teacher
<i>IP11</i>	26	Vocational	Owner of a car-rental agency
<i>IP13</i>	26	University	Financial controller
<i>IP16</i>	32	University	Employment officer
<i>IP17</i>	26	University	Social worker at a residential care home

IP19	25	Upper secondary	Café owner
IP20	25	University	Purchasing analyst at a private company

\* Level of education ranged from elementary school to university degree. "Upper secondary" designates a diploma obtained in upper secondary school ("gymnasieskola" in Swedish). "Vocational" refers to a vocational degree obtained at a vocational university or a diploma obtained through a vocational programme in upper secondary school.

**Table 2.** Overview of parents' background

	Parental birth country	Level of education*		Current job situation	
		Mother	Father	Mother	Father
<b>Female respondents</b>					
IP1	Turkey	None	None	Unemployed	Unemployed
IP2	Iraq	Elementary	(Deceased)	Unemployed	(Deceased)
IP3	Syria	Elementary	Elementary	Unemployed	Unemployed
IP4	Turkey	None	None	Unemployed	Unemployed
IP8	Iraq	University	None	Unemployed	Unemployed
IP9	Syria	Vocational	Vocational	Employed	Employed
IP12	Turkey, Syria	Elementary	None	Employed	Self-employed
IP14	Turkey	University	University	Employed	Unemployed
IP15	Pakistan	None	Vocational	Employed	Employed
IP18	Turkey	None	None	Employed	Self-employed
IP21	Iraq, Syria	None	None	Employed	Employed
IP22	Palestine	University	University	Professional	Unemployed
<b>Male respondents</b>					
IP5	Syria, Lebanon	None	None	Unemployed	Employed
IP7	Turkey	None	None	Unemployed	Employed
IP10	Palestine	University	Upper Secondary	Employed	Employed
IP11	Turkey	University	University	Employed	Employed
IP13	Turkey, Syria	None	None	Unemployed	Self-employed
IP16	Turkey	None	Vocational	Unemployed	Employed
IP17	Lebanon	University	(Absent)**	Employed	(Absent)**
IP19	Turkey	None	None	Unemployed	Self-employed

IP20	Lebanon, Syria	Upper secondary	None	Unemployed	Employed
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\* Level of education ranged from elementary school to university degree, obtained by parents either in the home country or in Sweden. An entry of “None” means that the participant reported no school attendance for that parent at all. “Upper secondary” designates a diploma obtained in upper secondary school (“gymnasieskola” in Swedish), either in Sweden or in the home country. “Vocational” refers to a vocational degree obtained at a vocational university.

\*\* An entry of “Absent” means that the participant reported their parent as being non-custodial and/or absent from their life.

## The role of the researcher

The ways in which interviewers present themselves to respondents are important for the impression made and the progression of the interview (Fontana & Frey, 2008). When recruiting respondents for the study, I most likely came across as a representative of academia, implying both advantages and disadvantages. On a positive note, it fostered a trustful interviewing environment because respondents knew exactly how, where, and by whom the study would be carried out, and were assured of the ultimate responsibilities of the university if they experienced problems with participating. On the other hand, this way of presenting myself may have increased the risk of predominantly attracting individuals with a university degree. I did not select respondents based on their education, but the majority of the individuals who expressed an interest happened to be university graduates (n=17). Of the remainder, three had vocational training and one had completed secondary education (see Table 1 for overview). This mainly provided me with the opportunity of studying individuals with university diplomas. Still, the variation in parents’ educational and occupational background allowed me to gain many interesting empirical insights, for example in relation to exceeding parents’ socioeconomic status.

Another aspect that should be addressed is that I, like my respondents, have a background in the Middle East. I came to Sweden at four years old from Northern Kurdistan, and so am what scholars refer to as a “1.5 generation immigrant” (e.g. Aparicio, 2007). This may have affected the interview process. Although I, unlike my respondents, was born outside Sweden, I am familiar with many aspects of their social surroundings and contexts. Indeed, it became evident during the interviews that they *expected* me to understand certain things, as they sometimes started or ended an explanation with comments like “I’m sure you’ve experienced this too”, or “I guess you know how our Middle Eastern parents can be”. Such comments had me pondering how I affected the outcome of the interviews. A university professor once told me that to truly let the stories of the respondents come forward, a qualitative interviewer must be completely detached from their respondents. However, over the years, I have learned that not only is this impossible, but taking a balanced stance might be a better way of reaching an

authentic understanding of respondents' realities. During the interviewing process, I benefitted from insights into the social context of my respondents and my familiarity with many of the conditions, situations, and contexts they described. Many discoveries were made possible because I could pick up on unspoken additional layers of meaning and ask follow-up questions accordingly.

As pointed out by Fontana and Frey (2008), understanding the language and culture of the respondents may be an advantage during the research process. Considering this, my Middle Eastern background has influenced the research process in several ways. While my main experience is that it has benefitted the interview and analytic process, it has also required a certain amount of reflexivity. This was facilitated by the assistance of three supervisors during the research process; two of native descent and the other with a Middle Eastern background. We discussed the interview guide together, assessed the transcripts jointly, and continuously tested our interpretations and conclusions with each other, thus minimizing the impact of personal and subjective preconceptions.

## **Coding and analytic approach**

The themes and subthemes on which the articles are based were empirically generated in the sense that they were constructed from the empirical data. However, the questions asked during the interviews were the product of a dialogue between the aim and research questions, the body of knowledge obtained before collecting data, and the theoretical framework of the study. The study thus had an abductive thematic approach, meaning that during the analytical process I continuously moved back and forth between my pre-understanding of the research problem and the empirics (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Rambaree & Faxelid, 2013).

I began the research process by reading the vast body of literature on the labour market entry and participation of immigrants' descendants both in Sweden and in other countries. I was guided by the insights gained from earlier research when forming themes for the interview guide, while aiming to remain open-minded during the interviews to allow the stories of my respondents to come forward. As expected, the respondents brought up topics that I had not considered before conducting the interviews. For example, based on earlier research, I had expected that peers would be important non-family influences but was surprised to find that public officials were more frequently brought up as important. Due to new discoveries, I specifically searched for earlier research on the topics emerging from the data to compare with existing studies in the field. I then carried out the complementary interviews mentioned earlier in this chapter. This abductive approach enabled me to make ongoing interpretations of an existing body of knowledge in relation to the empirical findings, and vice versa, and to construct themes and subthemes accordingly (Alvesson & Sköldbberg,

2010). The interview data were fairly rich and detailed. Altogether, the transcripts comprised 274 pages including 160 923 words, with an average of 7 663 words per interview (including the complementary interviews).

The coding process was initiated after all the interviews were transcribed. The material was coded using version 7.5.4 of the ATLAS.ti computer software package for qualitative data (see Rambaree & Faxelid, 2013). I began the analytic process with a text scan, searching for *meaning units*; that is, text segments that were meaningful in relation to the research questions (Malterud, 2001). I asked what occupational aspirations the respondents described, in the past and now, and how they perceived opportunities and barriers to fulfil such aspirations. I also asked how influences on occupational aspirations and attainments were perceived, focusing on the role of social actors, situations, and circumstances in forming and fulfilling aspirations. While this initial reading generated broad and uncategorized text segments, it also led to a more focused data set in relation to the research aim. During the coding process, the memo function in ATLAS.ti was used to write analytical notes. These notes could then be gathered under each code to form an overview. While doing this, a range of codes emerged and were kept in a codebook, including the frequency, meaning, and relationship between codes (Silverman, 2015; Creswell, 2007). A systematic coding of the data and the “network view” function in ATLAS.ti. led to a clearer view of the connections between codes (Friese, 2014).

## **Author contribution statement**

During the different stages of the research process, I have been supervised by Nader Ahmadi, Eva Wikström, and Stefan Sjöberg. The four articles on which the dissertation is based were co-authored with these three supervisors. While their supervision of the research process has gradually decreased over time, all four authors made significant contributions to the articles. Below are author contribution statements, clarifying the work that each author contributed.

### **Article I**

**Aslan, P.** Conception and design of work, planning and collection of data, analysis and thematization of data, drafting the work, critical revision, finalization and submission of the manuscript. First author.

**Ahmadi, N.** Conception and design of work, planning of data collection, analysis and thematization of data in less extent than the author above. Critical revision. Second author.

**Sjöberg, S.** Conception and design of work. Planning of data collection. Analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the authors above). Critical revision. Third author.

**Wikström, E.** Conception and design of work. Planning of data collection. Analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the authors above). Critical revision. Fourth author.

## **Article II**

**Aslan, P.** Conception and design of work, planning and collection of data, analysis and thematization of data, drafting the work, critical revision, finalization and submission of the manuscript. First author.

**Sjöberg, S.** Conception and design of work, planning of data collection, analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the author above). Critical revision. Second author.

**Wikström, E.** Conception and design of work. Planning of data collection. Analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the authors above). Critical revision. Third author.

**Ahmadi, N.** Conception and design of work. Planning of data collection. Analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the authors above). Critical revision. Fourth author.

## **Article III**

**Aslan, P.** Conception and design of work, planning and collection of data, analysis and thematization of data, drafting the work, critical revision, finalization and submission of the manuscript. First author.

**Ahmadi, N.** Conception and design of work, planning of data collection, analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the author above). Critical revision. Second author.

**Wikström, E.** Conception and design of work. Planning of data collection. Analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the authors above). Critical revision. Third author.

**Sjöberg, S.** Conception and design of work. Planning of data collection. Analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the authors above). Critical revision. Fourth author.

## **Article IV**

**Aslan, P.** Conception and design of work, planning and collection of data, analysis and thematization of data, drafting the work, critical revision, finalization and submission of the manuscript. First author.

**Wikström, E.** Conception and design of work, planning of data collection, analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the author above). Critical revision. Second author.

**Ahmadi, N.** Conception and design of work. Planning of data collection. Analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the authors above). Critical revision. Third author.

**Sjöberg, S.** Conception and design of work. Planning of data collection. Analysis and thematization of data (in less extent than the authors above). Critical revision. Fourth author.

## **Trustworthiness**

Standards around rigorousness in social research are essentially based on the epistemological and ontological traditions that the different research methods have grown out of (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Qualitative research, which evolved from an interpretative-humanistic approach, focuses on eliciting profound knowledge of individuals' subjective perceptions and lived experiences (Bernard, 2013). This means that the criteria of reliability, validity, and generalizability, which are concerned with evaluating the quality of objectivity and measurement (Creswell, 2003), are not entirely suitable for qualitative research (Lietz, Langer & Furman, 2006). These concepts are either reworked by scholars to fit qualitative research designs, or replaced by other more applicable concepts (Bryman, 2016). In this dissertation, alternative criteria for trustworthiness have been applied, as discussed and developed by various qualitative researchers (see e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Patton, 2015; Silverman, 2015; Bryman, 2016).

A key concept here is *credibility*, dealing with whether a presentation of the investigated phenomenon corresponds with reality (Shenton, 2004); that is, whether the data collection, analysis, and results represent what is intended to be studied. One way of increasing the credibility of a study is to have several researchers examine and analyse the data (Bryman, 2016). In this regard, I benefitted from joint assessments, evaluations, and discussions with three supervisors during the entire research process. As argued by Shenton (2004, p. 67), such debriefing sessions broaden a researcher's perspective by offering views on alternative approaches and identifying possible flaws, and may "help the researcher to recognise his or her own biases and preferences". Moreover, being affiliated with two academic institutions<sup>1</sup> gave me the opportunity of subjecting the dissertation to several forms of *peer scrutiny* during the research process, thus further strengthening the credibility of the study.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), an efficient way of making sure that the presented data correspond with reality is to have a dialogue and perform *member checks* with respondents after the interview. Member checks involve

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<sup>1</sup> My PhD studies were performed in collaboration between the Department of Social Work at Umeå University and the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Gävle, where I have also had a teaching position.

reaching out to respondents to confirm that their viewpoints have been accurately understood and ensure that the findings are based on the respondents' perceptions and experiences rather than the researchers' preferences (Shenton, 2004; Patton, 2015). With respect to this, I had a continuous contact and ongoing dialogue with the respondents during the entire research process, from the interview date to the process of analysis and writing articles. During this time, I frequently tested my interpretations of the data, the empirical themes, and conclusions with the respondents. Since virtually all respondents were personally interested in the outcome of the study, they were also very inclined to keep in touch, which increased the opportunity of performing these member checks. However, to avoid a possible "internalization" of my interpretations influencing the respondents' answers (see Krefting, 1991, p. 219), such member checks were not initiated until after all data material was collected (including the complementary interviews).

With respect to credibility, I also considered the implications of the retrospective parts of the interviews. The data I have are recollections of encounters, situations, and circumstances in the respondents' lives, some of which occurred as children or adolescents and others which took place more recently. There is a possibility that certain memories had been suppressed, or remembered at an adult age differently than experienced as a child. In light of the research aim, however, I conclude that the risk of memory loss does not compromise the credibility of the findings. If credibility deals with how well the findings correspond with reality (Merriam, 1998), a relevant question is that of what reality is claimed to be studied. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the reason for focusing on perceptions is that perceptions affect actions, choices, and strategies on the labour market (cf. Emirbayer & Williams, 2005; Keskiner & Crul, 2017). The respondents' recollections at an adult age correspond to the research aim of this study, as they revealed what the respondents carried with them from past events and consequently the influences of such events on their aspirations and attainments.

Another aspect that I considered was the provision of detailed descriptions of the respondents, the data collection, and the analytic procedure (Patton, 1990; 2015; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The aim of this was to give the reader enough information to decide whether the conclusions are fair in relation to the context that surrounds them and whether the results are comparable/applicable to other similar situations. Considering this, Silverman (2000) points out that it is important to also relate the findings to an existing body of research.

Although a computer software package for qualitative data was used here, the qualitative researcher is always the main instrument of collecting, organizing, and analysing the data (Patton, 1990). To enable evaluation of the researcher's role in relation to the empirical data, I have followed the advice of Maykut and Morehouse (1994), arguing that one should include any type of information that might be relevant for the outcome of the study, and have therefore offered my

own viewpoints and considerations regarding this in the section “The role of the researcher” earlier in this chapter.

## **Ethical considerations**

Throughout the phases of conducting research, social scientists have moral obligations not only to the respondents of the study, but also to the group(s) that these respondents represent (Berg & Lune, 2012). Delving into human lives by taking respondents’ time and asking them to reveal personal and sensitive information implies ethical responsibilities (Creswell, 2007), which I have considered throughout the research process. Most scholars would agree that all researchers are responsible for avoiding inflicting harm on human beings while conducting research. Still, most ethical errors occur not due to non-awareness, but due to negligence or a lack of sufficient planning (Berg & Lune, 2012). As Kvale (2007) argues, ethical concerns go beyond the actual interview situation and are relevant during all stages of the research process, including the broader social and political effects of the knowledge produced. In this section, I discuss the ethical aspects that were taken into consideration during the research process.

During the entire research process, I have adhered to the Law Concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (Sfs 2003:460). Before starting to collect data, I was granted ethical approval from the regional ethics review board (registration number 2015/025). However, as argued by Berg and Lune (2012), ethical issues in social research go beyond legal aspects, considering that unexpected issues may emerge during the research process. As Kvale (2007) has noted, a consideration of ethical issues in social research requires having a macro-ethical perspective. Producing and presenting the results of studying descendants of immigrants’ perceptions of labour market participation includes social and political aspects. Traditional and social media contain longstanding public debates on social inclusion and exclusion of individuals with a migrant background, and presenting data dealing with these aspects may influence public opinion, with implications for the group(s) represented. In light of this, I have strived to present and discuss the research findings in a fair and contextualized way. The respondents’ perceptions have been presented in relation to relevant social, political, and historical aspects in order to avoid distorting and/or minimizing their lived realities.

Colnerud (2013) argues that social scientists must achieve a balance between consideration of ethical issues and the quality of data. Similarly, the Swedish Research Council (2017) notes that social researchers should balance the criterion of *protecting human beings from harm* with the criterion of *conducting important research*. While it is important to avoid inflicting harm upon

individuals, “trivial” forms of harm should not hinder a researcher from conducting important research.

Pondering over these issues, I concluded that there was no reason to suspect that this study would cause serious harm to the individuals involved in it. Nevertheless, I touched upon sensitive aspects during the interviews, concerning inclusion and exclusion, dealing with bicultural dilemmas, family background, and social contacts. Demonstrating an awareness of the sensitive character of certain subjects may increase respondents’ sense of security in discussing these subjects during the interviews. From this point of view, my Middle Eastern background may be considered an asset as well as a disadvantage. My familiarity with many of the situations, circumstances, and contexts that the respondents described meant that I was aware of the sensitivity of certain aspects and could act accordingly during the interviews. Based on some of the comments from interviewees, they expected me to be understanding of certain aspects. Nevertheless, I also considered the possibility that the interviewees might hesitate to speak about certain issues with me if my ethnic heritage meant that they perceived me as “too close” to their social environment. While it was important for me that they were aware of my professional responsibilities in terms of, for instance, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntariness, I also wanted to create a friendly and laidback interviewing environment.

I sought to manage the trust that respondents showed me as ethically as possible, and assured them of this before the data collection. One way of doing this was to follow the ethical principles of the Swedish Research Council (2017). I sent an informed consent letter to the respondents before conducting the interviews, including detailed information about the research project. This gave the respondents an opportunity to consider possible implications of their participation, to reflect on the information, and to contact me with questions. The consent letter contained information on the study as well as the ethical responsibilities of the researchers involved, including the voluntary nature of participation. The letter made respondents aware that they could withdraw from participation at any stage of the research process, which was also orally communicated to them before and some time after the interviews took place. During the entire research process, the respondents expressed interest and confidence in the research project, confirming their decision to participate.

Ensuring the anonymity of the respondents was an ongoing process. The respondents were informed that their personal identity would be concealed in written and oral presentations of the research. Information that could potentially reveal their true identity was modified or eliminated during the process of coding and writing articles. The consent letter also contained information on the utilization of data. The respondents were informed of planned and potential usage of the data in terms of, for example, conference presentations and/or journal publications.

## V. Results: summary of articles

### Article I

*What works? Family influences on occupational aspirations among descendants of Middle Eastern immigrants on the Swedish labour market*

This article built on earlier research focusing on how family members and ethnic communities influence the incorporation of immigrants' descendants into the education system and on the labour market (e.g. Hofferth & Moon, 2016; Taylor & Krahn, 2013; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Bankston & Zhou, 1996; Keskiner, 2015). The aim of the article was to examine family influences on occupational aspirations among employed descendants of Middle Eastern immigrants, from the perspective of our respondents. The article had two research questions: 1) How do perceptions of parents' migration biographies influence the occupational aspirations of descendants of Middle Eastern immigrants? and 2) How do family members influence the occupational aspirations of descendants of Middle Eastern immigrants?

The results were based on four empirical themes: 1) parents as role models, 2) parental engagement and support, 3) active transmission of cultural capital by siblings, and 4) influences of collectivist values in the ethnic community. The first theme, *parents as role models*, dealt with individuals who considered their parents' labour market integration to be successful, in light of the sacrifices and losses they had endured after migration. They shared a common perception that their parents had managed to obtain favourable labour market positions, despite the challenges and difficulties they had faced. Thus, the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital was propelled by interpretations of parents' migration biographies, including aspects of struggle and achievement.

The second theme, *parental engagement and support*, was based on respondents who considered their parents as disadvantaged on the labour market, but who themselves had received substantial encouragement and support from their parents. Here, parents' transmission of the high values placed on education and occupational attainment drove the respondents' accumulation of cultural capital.

The third theme, *active transmission of cultural capital by siblings*, showed that siblings could become important transferors of cultural capital when parents lacked the ability to offer their children substantial support in education and at the labour market.

The fourth and final theme of the article, *influences of collectivist values in the ethnic community*, demonstrated how parents' high expectations of their

children were formed in ethnic communities where the respondents' occupational attainments were a source of pride for the parents.

These processes propelled parents' high expectations, encouragement, and support for their children, which positively influenced the respondents' occupational aspirations.

The main conclusion of the article was that the respondents' accumulation of cultural capital was induced by a strong drive and ambition deriving from their perceptions of their parents' migration biographies and aspects of collectivism in the ethnic community.

## **Article II**

### *Door openers? Public officials as supportive actors in the labour market participation of descendants of immigrants in Sweden*

Although familial support and influences are important for motivating descendants of immigrants into forming occupational aspirations, immigrant parents do not always have the tools to help their children fulfil those aspirations. In light of this, public officials are important institutional actors and may compensate for the lack of knowledge and practical support in immigrant families.

This article built on earlier research focusing on institutional actors as providers of social capital for individuals at risk of marginalization (e.g. Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Woolley & Bowen, 2007; Conchas, 2006; Lareau, 2003). The aim of the article was to examine how employed descendants of immigrants in Sweden perceived that interactions with public officials had benefitted their occupational aspirations and attainments.

Using a theoretical framework of social capital, we focused on the characteristics of these interactions and the resources that accrued from them. The results demonstrated three main influences of public officials on the respondents' occupational aspirations and attainments: 1) connectedness, 2) supporting personal goals and focusing on possibilities, and 3) mediation of knowledge and information.

The first theme, *connectedness*, described how public officials who demonstrated a caring approach toward their clients could contribute to the occupational aspirations and attainments of immigrants' descendants. The results implied that a sense of connectedness in the relationship allowed a resource transaction to take place. This was illustrated by how the public officials were able to coordinate, advise, and motivate the descendants of immigrants in ways that positively influenced the latter's occupational aspirations and attainments in the long run.

The second theme, *supporting personal goals and focusing on possibilities*, showed how important it was for public officials to start from their clients' personal definitions of meaningful goals, and to focus on the possibilities of achieving those goals. This type of support contributed to strengthening the self-belief of these descendants of immigrants, increasing their efforts to achieve various occupational goals.

The third and final theme, *mediation of knowledge and information*, showed that public officials who shared substantial information and knowledge with immigrants' descendants in relation to labour market entry and participation increased these descendants' opportunities for forming and fulfilling various occupational aspirations.

These influences were interpreted as crucial forms of social capital that could be transmitted by institutional agents in positions of power. Following a discussion of the implications of institutional frameworks for public officials' possibilities for transmitting this type of support to descendants of immigrants today, we concluded that the principle of activating clients in a welfare state context ought to be interpreted in a holistic sense, where clients' living conditions and personal definitions are considered. Public institutions might thus function in empowering ways for individuals belonging to marginalized groups in society.

### **Article III**

#### *Choice from non-choice? Occupational pathways and strategies of immigrants' descendants in Sweden*

This article explored how employed descendants of immigrants in Sweden understood labour market conditions, and how such conditions influenced their occupational pathways and strategies. The concept of habitus was used to analyse how the descendants of immigrants understood and approached the labour market in relation to structural opportunities and obstacles. One important aspect of how habitus was employed in the article was the reflexive behaviour and action of individuals who found themselves in unfamiliar situations.

The results were presented in the form of three themes: 1) being in the "right" field, 2) learning along the way, and 3) employing skills that are valuable in relation to a field.

The first theme, *being in the "right" field*, dealt with respondents who had ended up in labour market branches where their personal backgrounds were perceived as valuable by employers. These were respondents working in branches where their ethnic and migrant backgrounds were considered assets in working with either an international or a migrant client base. Some of these respondents had ended up in these branches by chance and learned how to make use of their "fortunate" personal backgrounds afterwards. Others had made active choices to

be there because they had known about a demand for “cultural competence” in these branches. We analysed these occupational pathways in relation to the respondents’ perceptions of obstacles in other labour market branches, for example in terms of discrimination.

The second theme, *learning along the way*, focused on respondents who had dealt with hurdles in entering and participating on the labour market. These respondents were in highly competitive branches, where many of them perceived their particular gender and/or ethnic background as a “burden”. In order to succeed in finding jobs and obtaining career advancement, these respondents employed an alternative strategy of learning while doing, indicating a trial-and-error approach. These respondents distinguished themselves as being persistent and flexible on the labour market. We interpreted this strategy as being consistent with what Bourdieu (2008) discusses in relation to the transformation of the habitus when a person seeks to cross boundaries between social strata.

The third and final theme in the article, *employing skills that are valuable in relation to a field*, concentrated on those respondents who made active efforts to use skills that were considered valuable in the eyes of recruiters. These were respondents who showed a great deal of flexibility. While they considered it generally difficult to enter the labour market, they compensated for such difficulties by changing direction or entering a different labour market branch. This type of re-orientation occurred after discovering that their particular skill set was more valuable in a different field from the one they had first chosen to pursue. We analysed this strategy of our respondents as active efforts to match their personal backgrounds with objective opportunities and constraints.

While the approaches and strategies of our respondents may also be applicable to people of native-born heritage who find themselves in a demanding and challenging labour market, the article shows how descendants of immigrants must relate to several disadvantages at once. They are subjected to the labour market demands and conditions that affect young majority Swedes, but their understandings of labour market conditions are also particularly affected by their immigrant heritage. The article highlights, on the one hand, how such labour market conditions exert influence on the ways in which descendants of immigrants orient themselves on the labour market, and on the other hand, the high level of active agency they exercise in overcoming challenges and constraint.

## **Article IV**

*“Kids” in between? Views on work, gender and family arrangements among descendants of immigrants in Sweden*

The aim of this article was to explore perceptions of labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals among employed men and

women of migrant descent in Sweden. We started from a framework of viewing cultural conceptions as being produced, employed, and deployed differently according to social background, gender, and people's subjective life conditions. The results revealed that men and women of migrant descent perceived labour market participation in distinct, gendered ways, and that these perceptions were influenced by the Swedish social and political context as well as their immigrant heritage.

Four themes were presented in the article: 1) work, motherhood, and female independence, 2) provision for the family and engagement as fathers, 3) intergenerational changes in work and family arrangements, and 4) parental encouragement of gender-equal family arrangements.

The first theme, *work, motherhood, and female independence*, dealt with the ways in which the female respondents viewed labour market participation in relation to gender norms and ideals of motherhood. We showed how they essentially viewed labour market participation as important for emancipating purposes. They saw participation in paid work as a way to increase their personal levels of agency in relation to a current/future male partner. However, they also expressed concern over having to combine employment and career advancements with raising children, entailing various attempts to adapt their career ambitions to becoming/being mothers. The men in our study, on the other hand, saw labour market participation in more instrumental ways.

The second theme, *provision for the family and engagement as fathers*, revealed that the male respondents saw labour market participation as a way to provide for a current or future family. In contrast to the women, they considered labour market entry and career advancements as a prerequisite for having children, rather than being concerned about combining the two. Nevertheless, the men also stressed engaged parenthood as something to strive for, and several of the men had made active efforts to work less and be more engaged in housework and parenting. Both the men and the women in the study related these perceptions of labour market participation, gender norms, and parenting ideals to the Swedish social and political context. They also related these to their immigrant heritage, and more specifically to gender-biased value systems employed by their parents and other relatives from the immigrant generation.

The third theme, *intergenerational changes in work and family arrangements*, showed how the respondents assessed their own opportunities for practicing gender-equal household arrangements as better than their parents because they were born and raised in Sweden. They were influenced by their parents' gendered family arrangements, but in a way that led them to diverge from these rather than reproduce them. In the article, we demonstrated how the respondents challenged and reinterpreted the cultural practices of their families of origin in ways that supported their own employment of gender-equal work-family arrangements.

In the fourth and final theme, *parental encouragement of gender-equal family arrangements*, we showed how the respondents perceived an encouragement from their parents in making such reinterpretations of cultural conceptions of work, family, and gender. We related this parental support to the concept of immigrant bargain, where parents expect better opportunities for their children to achieve educational and occupational attainments after migration. Such expectations also imply intergenerational changes in terms of gender norms and work-family arrangements.

Our results thus suggested that cultural conceptions of work, gender, and family are dynamic and, among other things, influenced by interactions between social origin, the social and political context, people's perceptions of their living conditions, and gender. In the light of our results, we discussed in the article how migration may change gender-unequal attitudes and practices in immigrant families, and thus speed up the process of intergenerational change, if the social and political context in the host country encourages and facilitates such changes.

## VI. Discussion

The overarching aim of this dissertation was to study influences on the occupational aspirations and attainments of employed descendants of non-European, non-Western immigrants in Sweden, from their own perspectives. The respondents were “advantaged” in the sense that a majority had a university diploma, they were all employed, and they worked in jobs that matched their credentials and degrees. However, their pathways into the labour market and up to the positions they desired also related in many ways to challenges. The four articles included in this dissertation present various influences on these descendants’ occupational aspirations and attainments, from sources such as family members, ethnic communities, public officials, and labour market conditions. What do these results tell us about entering and participating on the labour market as a descendant of immigrants in Sweden today? The present chapter provides an extended analysis and overarching discussion of the results, and how these may contribute to an increased understanding of the labour market participation of descendants of immigrants in Sweden. Based on this discussion, I also put forward some suggestions for further research. The chapter ends with a discussion of how these results may be relevant to the discipline and profession of social work.

### **Migration-specific capital and its implications**

The important influence of the family of origin on the occupational aspirations and attainments of immigrants’ descendants is one of the main findings of this dissertation. As shown in Article I, parents’ migration biographies are the basis by which descendants of immigrants differentiate between themselves and their parents, paving the way for intergenerational change. Through my findings, I argue that these descendants are not passive in relation to the cultural practices they observe among parents and relatives from the immigrant generation; rather, they actively interpret such practices in ways that prepare for change. Thus, I draw a connection between the influence of family members and the individual agency of immigrants’ descendants.

Moreover, from their own perspectives, intergenerational changes are encouraged and supported by their parents, who exhibit an “immigrant optimism” for their children in the host country (cf. Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016). When people migrate from what they perceive as restrictive social and political landscapes to more enabling ones, they tend to be more optimistic with regard to opportunities in the host country (Louie, 2012). Parents’ optimism, along with their support and encouragement, positively influenced the occupational aspirations and attainments of the respondents in this study. In this dissertation, these parental influences are conceptualised as *migration-specific capital*; that

is, important symbolic resources deriving from parents' migration biographies, propelling the accumulation of cultural capital among descendants of immigrants.

The impact of family members on their educational and occupational attainments has been underlined earlier in the field of migration and ethnic studies (e.g. Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). This dissertation shows that the relations between descendants of immigrants and their parents, including the amount of parental support and encouragement the descendants receive, are important for the motivation required to exceed their parents' socioeconomic status. Many scholars have shown how immigrant parents, regardless of social background, have high expectations for their children to reach educational and occupational attainments (Hofferth & Moon, 2016; Taylor & Krahn, 2013; Louie, 2012). However, high parental expectations may become a negative pressure, if descendants of immigrants lack the tools necessary to fulfil these expectations. The respondents in this dissertation were fortunate since they had substantial forms of support, not only from their parents, but also from siblings and public officials. In light of this, I argue that a vital form of influence on descendants' aspirations and attainments is that of converting their parents' migration biographies into an inner drive and source of resilience, and of having a wide array of resources to draw on while doing so.

Second, Article I demonstrates that the ways in which descendants of immigrants perceive their parents' migration biographies are affected by the extent to which they have seen their parents' endeavours in the new country pay off and transform into social and economic success. For some of them, migration-specific capital comes in the form of motivation from seeing their parents succeed in obtaining educational degrees and occupational positions despite facing migration-related difficulties in the new country.

For some other respondents, migration-specific capital is derived from a desire to make up for their parents' social and economic exclusion, propelled by the "immigrant bargain" (cf. Smith, 2002) and parents' expectations that their sacrifices would be compensated for by children's successes.

Thus, the occupational aspirations of the descendants of immigrants in this study are intrinsically linked to parents' migration biographies. Parents' perceptions and experiences of how the window of opportunity changes in the context of migration are important for how their children take on the social world. In this sense, the aspirations of descendants of immigrants are "constituted in the course of collective history" and "acquired in the course of individual history", as articulated by Bourdieu (1986, p. 467).

The reason why I conceptualize these forms of influences as migration-specific capital is that they derive from the immigrant experience; the process of migrating from one country to another can bring about certain perceptions and expectations among immigrant parents which, in turn, exerts influence on their children. Bourdieu (1977b, p. 83) sees such subjective perceptions and

expectations as parts of the habitus; that is, as “lasting, transposable dispositions” derived from a person’s embodiment of past experiences. As Wacquant (2016, p. 66) states, these dispositions are durable, but not static, and may change in specific contexts; they can be “eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces, as demonstrated by situations of migration and specialized training”. Accordingly, the results presented in this dissertation highlight how forces of migration may change perceptions and influence social and cultural practices.

These results contradict scholarly and public discourses that depict immigrants’ culture as something that is simply transported from their countries of origin to the host country. Erel (2010) refers to these depictions as “rucksack approaches” which lack an understanding of the dynamic role of cultural practices, including interactions between structure, culture, and individual agency (cf. Lamont, 1992). Taking the overall results of this dissertation into account, I conclude that individual, familial, and cultural practices can be transformed through the process of migration, and that this process is different depending on social background, socioeconomic status, gender, and generation.

In line with Vertovec (2007), I argue that one must observe diversity within diversity, and acknowledge that people of migrant origin can be affected by migration in different ways depending on factors such as social origin, class background, gender, and generation. From this viewpoint, descendants of immigrants in Sweden are influenced by the possibilities and constraints provided by their specific positions: as immigrants’ descendants, as men or women, as children of parents with unique and varied immigrant experiences and living conditions, and as people born and raised in a Swedish social and political context (cf. Nadim, 2014).

The results reported in Article IV suggest that migration might also pave the way for intergenerational change in terms of gender norms and work/family arrangements. In this sense, migration may facilitate and accelerate certain processes of change (Spierings, 2015), which may have also taken place in the home country but perhaps in a different manner or at a slower pace. Both men and women of migrant descent in this study expressed strong support for gender equality. While they did not seem to differ in this respect from their peers of native-born origin (Edlund & Öun, 2016), what distinguished these descendants of immigrants was that they continuously made comparisons and distinctions between their parents’ countries of origin and the Swedish social and political context.

These comparisons partly derived from parental influences; in light of the social and economic conditions of the host country, they described how their parents placed a new emphasis on occupational attainments for both sons and daughters. This is an aspect which is seldom discussed in scholarly and public discourses; usually, emphasis is put on intergenerational tensions between immigrants and their descendants in terms of gender and cultural practice. Here,

I suggest that immigrant parents may in fact endorse intergenerational change in terms of gender and work/family arrangements, if it means that their children “make it” in school and on the labour market. This is not to deny the existence of intergenerational conflict in immigrant families (e.g. Somerville & Robinson, 2016). While such conflicts inevitably exist, the excessive focus on these (cf. Nadim, 2014) risks invoking a one-dimensional, static, and overly “culturalist” view of generational issues in immigrant families.

Being “in the middle” (cf. Katz, 2014) may also serve descendants of immigrants by giving them access to a wider spectrum of contexts in assessing their own life conditions and possibilities. Regardless of social background, the descendants of immigrants in this study saw their own possibilities to succeed in the host country as larger than those of their parents, who they perceived as more vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. Seeing oneself as different from one’s parents — as a member of a completely different group — may be important for breaking the cycle of reproducing the parents’ socioeconomic status, since it entails possibilities of taking a different path. Bourdieu (e.g. 1977; 2008) starts from the concept of habitus in explaining the reproduction of socioeconomic position, including its repertoire of perception, thought, and behaviour. In this dissertation, I have analysed how this repertoire may develop when migration is involved. For people who grow up with immigrant parents, a process of both relating to and differentiating themselves from their parents may provide enough motivation and courage to allow them to envision a different life scenario for themselves – and if they are provided with the right tools, they might be able to fulfil such visions. An important aspect of this is that although the descendants of immigrants in this study belonged to a group which is generally disadvantaged in comparison to the majority population, they viewed themselves as advantaged in comparison to their immigrant parents, who they thought faced more challenging circumstances as newcomers to Sweden.

Migration-specific capital might contribute to a strong inner drive and ambition that could help descendants of immigrants overcome structural disadvantages and challenges. A positive self-assessment, encouragement from parents, and a strong desire to make up for parents’ exclusion can create an urge among descendants of immigrants to fulfil their aspirations despite facing obstacles on the way. The immigrants’ descendants studied here were not passive in the face of the disadvantages they came across. Rather, they took the role of active agents who could change the order of things by making certain decisions or by behaving in certain ways. Such a drive may be one of the characteristics distinguishing the “advantaged” descendants of immigrants from those who are socially and economically excluded, despite similar socioeconomic backgrounds (cf. Crul et al., 2017).

However, it is important to note that a strong inner drive may not be enough if there is a lack of social and institutional support in society along with an increase in hostile attitudes toward immigrants and their descendants. The

individual and familial resources presented and discussed in this section ought to be understood in relation to the way they interact with the institutional and structural aspects. In the section “Important forms of institutional support” in this chapter, the role of an enabling society is highlighted and discussed. Thus, I put emphasis on the interaction between, on the one hand, individual, familial, and group resources, and on the other hand, institutional and structural opportunities.

## **Collectivism as an engine of accumulating cultural capital**

In Article I, I highlight some positive influences from collectivist value systems. The prevalence of collectivist values may spur the occupational aspirations of descendants of immigrants, since their parents see children’s educational and occupational attainments as a source of pride for the entire family. In the article, the concept of collectivism refers to the high degree of interdependence between descendants of immigrants and their family members, and their inclination to attend to their parents’ expectations in forming and fulfilling their goals (cf. Hofstede, 1980). From a Bourdieusian perspective, collectivist family values may thus be seen as a symbolic resource that drives the accumulation of cultural capital. Being closely tied to their family members and embedded in their ethnic communities positively influenced the descendants of immigrants in this study to accumulate the resources needed to accomplish their occupational goals.

Although the collectivism–individualism dichotomy is becoming more blurred in an increasingly internationalized world (Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007), there are still substantial differences across countries with regard to the prevalence of individualist and collectivist value systems. A well-developed and robust welfare state, like the one that developed in Sweden, means that people have a structural and institutional social safety net. According to Hofstede (1980), people in such countries are more individualistic than people in countries with weaker welfare states, where they are more obliged to rely on each other for support. Families who migrate from countries where collectivist value systems are more widespread, such as Middle Eastern countries (Ayçiçeği-Dinn & Caldwell-Harris, 2011), also tend to adhere to more collectivist values after migration, which is underlined by the findings presented in this dissertation.

Collectivist values in immigrant families have earlier been studied with regard to the intergenerational tensions they may cause between immigrants and their descendants (Merz et al., 2009). Growing up as a descendant of immigrants often involves struggle, and this is particularly the case if there are contrasting social and cultural demands to deal with (cf. Portes & Zhou, 1993). However, in line with earlier research (e.g. Zhou & Bankston, 1994), this dissertation shows that collectivist value systems may also increase chances of socioeconomic mobility for descendants of immigrants. Collectivism may influence the accumulation of

cultural capital, considering the *motivation* it provides to form and accomplish occupational goals despite experiencing difficulties and challenges. As indicated by Bourdieu (1984), motivation is formed in the social milieu and is an important component of the embodied dispositions on which people's everyday actions and practices are based.

Moreover, staying incorporated in an ethnic community based on solidarity, mutual support, and interdependence may provide descendants of immigrants with better chances of forming and fulfilling occupational aspirations and attainments than they would have had if they had become estranged from their respective communities. This may particularly be the case if the incorporation of immigrants' descendants into Western societies is aggravated by the potential existence of hostility towards their ethnic group from the majority population. Portes and Zhou (1993, p. 75), who discuss this aspect with respect to the descendants of immigrants in the USA, maintain that "...growing up American oscillates between smooth acceptance and traumatic confrontation depending on the characteristics that immigrants and their children bring along and the social context that receives them." In Sweden, descendants of non-Western immigrants, and those originating from Middle Eastern countries in particular, are increasingly subjected to negative attitudes from the native-born population (see e.g. Ahmadi, Palm & Ahmadi, 2016). This is also observable in recruitment processes, where people with Middle Eastern-sounding names are less frequently called in for job interviews (e.g. Carlsson, 2010; Carlsson & Rooth, 2007). Thus, achievement-oriented collectivist features in immigrant families and ethnic communities can be seen as protective factors for descendants of immigrants.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that a high degree of collectivism in immigrant families may constrain descendants of immigrants and hinder rather than facilitate their occupational aspirations and attainments (Rumbaut, 1977). The findings presented in this dissertation underline the importance of the high value placed on educational and occupational attainments in the ethnic community. The descendants of immigrants studied here were embedded in ethnic communities in which the educational and occupational attainments of a family member increased the social status of the entire family, and in which there were high levels of group solidarity. Such strong orientations toward educational and occupational attainments may turn collectivist features into engines of mobility rather than causing constraints and intergenerational tension.

## **New forms of intergenerational mobility**

Earlier in this chapter I described how the respondents in this study perceived that their parents' migration to a more enabling social and political context formed an "immigrant optimism" among the parents. From the respondents' perspective, their parents had higher aspirations for them due to being in a new

country (cf. Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016). This form of immigrant optimism contributed to the occupational aspirations of these descendants of immigrants. A similar type of parental optimism occurred among working-class parents with high hopes and expectations of intergenerational social mobility for their children during the realization of the so-called “people’s home” in Sweden. The “people’s home” was a political vision that took form during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and included the aim to structure a nation offering all citizens equal possibilities. This idea was based on the Swedish Social Democratic Party’s aim to level out social and class differences in the country (Carlsson & Hatti, 2016), and led to the introduction of a number of reforms. Some of these reforms were general and given to people irrespective of income, and others were specifically aimed at low-income families (Schall, 2016). The implementation of these policies led to the building up of a decommodified and universally inclusive welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990), committed to full employment and a wide array of social rights for all Swedish citizens. Relevant policies included free education at all levels, free public health care, a public insurance system covering all citizens, active labour market measures for full employment, and publicly financed and subsidized childcare.

Faced with this new social and political landscape, many working-class citizens in Sweden perceived a new world of opportunities unfolding in front of them, similar to the one described by descendants of immigrants in this dissertation when speaking about their parents’ migration to Sweden. Through my findings, I argue that the ways in which structural and institutional mechanisms condition occupational aspirations and attainments of descendants of immigrants resemble, but are also distinct from, the experiences of the Swedish working class (cf. Lindgren, 2010). Like the descendants of immigrants in this study, many Swedish youth with a working-class background who entered higher education and moved into prestigious positions on the labour market felt an obligation to “lift the family up socially”, as Ambjörnsson (2013, p. 11) puts it in his autobiography. Åström (1999) has shown how the proximate and blatant relationship between the past and the present in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Sweden made intergenerational progressions among majority Swedes quite obvious. Intergenerational changes can be facilitated and propelled by a sudden change of social and political context, which is also the case for many immigrant families today.

However, the situation of descendants of immigrants is also different from that of the working-class Swedes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since the social and political context in Sweden has changed, the opportunities and constraints faced by today’s descendants of immigrants are quite different. Political efforts to balance out social and class differences have more or less evaporated, and processes of labour market discrimination, social exclusion, and segregation are increasingly visible in Sweden (see e.g. Schierup & Ålund, 2011). Moreover, the conditions for those who enter and participate on the labour market have deteriorated,

particularly for young people of migrant descent (cf. Schröder, 2015). A prospective discussion of the labour market entrance and participation of future descendants of immigrants requires taking into account this changing context and these deteriorating labour market conditions. Against this background, I will discuss some important aspects of the Swedish welfare state and some relevant labour market conditions in the two following sections.

## **Important forms of institutional support**

In the first two sections of this chapter, I discussed familial values and resources that contributed to the occupational aspirations and attainments of descendants of immigrants. In addition to these values and resources on the individual, familial, and community level, there are also structural conditions and objective opportunities that help to shape people's perceptions of possible courses of action (cf. Sania Ali et al., 2018). The ways in which individuals subjectively assess their life opportunities can be better understood when placed in relation to a social and political context. This section reviews some relevant aspects of the Swedish welfare state and the labour market that, based on the results presented in this dissertation, may be considered important for the occupational aspirations and attainments of immigrants' descendants in Sweden. It also contains a prospective discussion of how a transformation of public institutions in Sweden may affect the possibilities of descendants of immigrants to be provided with vital forms of institutional support.

Article II demonstrates that the descendants of immigrants in this study perceive practical and substantial forms of support from public officials as having contributed to their occupational aspirations and attainments. The article highlights the important role of public officials who demonstrated connectedness with the experiences of the descendants of immigrants, believed in and supported their personal goals, and transmitted substantial information and knowledge about education and the labour market. The type of support that they had received from public officials was adapted to their life conditions, subjective experiences, and life goals. The interactions they had with public officials not only helped them form and accomplish their occupational goals, but also provided them with motivation, increased self-belief, and a sense of entitlement to their goals. In the article, these resources are conceptualized as forms of social capital produced via the institutional support of public officials.

However, the extent to which public officials can provide their clients with social capital may be conditioned by the institutional settings in which they work (Lin, 2001). Swedish public institutions, long viewed as exceptional with regard to multiculturalism, egalitarianism, and welfare, have gradually transformed toward more liberal and individualized models (Sjöberg et al., 2018; Reisel et al., 2012; Schierup & Ålund, 2011). This transformation mirrors the development of

neo-liberal ideology in a broader international context, comprising cutbacks of the public sector, market liberalization, privatization, and individualization (Deacon, 2007; Yeates, 2014). The movement towards *New Public Management* (NPM) in Swedish public institutions entails an increased standardization of work methods and work processes, and more focus on measurable results (Thylefors, 2016). This development is transforming various forms of public administration (Berg, Barry, & Chandler, 2008), putting pressure on public officials to be productive in a market economy sense, and shifting the professional role from maintaining supportive relations with clients to putting individual responsibility on those same clients.

These changes in the Swedish welfare context and the development towards NPM in Swedish public institutions might create work conditions that limit public officials' possibilities of providing their clients with the kind of support that the descendants of immigrants in this dissertation highlighted as important. For example, the descendants of immigrants perceived a sense of connectedness with public officials who toned down their authoritarian stance; this is counteracted by the more disciplining and controlling approach of Swedish public institutions today, underlined in earlier research (Tham, 2018; Wikström & Ahnlund, 2018; Thunman, 2016). There is an important distinction between "gatekeeping" and "empowering" public officials that needs to be considered here. While the former's primary role is to control the client, the latter attempts to assist the client by providing key forms of support, enabling a transmission of social capital (cf. Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Article II highlights the important influence of *teachers, employment officers, and social workers* on the occupational aspirations and attainments of immigrants' descendants. However, all of these professions have been subject to institutional and political changes that impact their work conditions. An example can be seen in the way that teachers' possibilities of providing their students with quality support are being increasingly challenged by the transformation of the Swedish school system. Education in Sweden has undergone many reforms and major restructuring over the last couple of decades, and now faces the effects of shrinking resources, decentralization, privatization of schools, and performance measurements of teachers' work (Righard, Johansson & Salonen, 2015; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2018; Werne, 2018). Among other things, these changes have increased the administrative burden of teachers while decreasing their professional autonomy (Lundström, 2018; Samuelsson, Brismark & Löfgren, 2016). In relation to these changes, it is possible to distinguish increased levels of stress, moral distress, and a lowered motivation among teachers (Thunman, 2016; Lundström, 2018). This may imply difficulties for school personnel to find time to establish supportive relations with students, which in turn can have negative outcomes for the students who lack vital forms of support elsewhere, as many descendants of immigrants do.

Similar challenges face social workers at social service departments in Sweden, which have also been subject to cutbacks, transformation, and new managerial practices in the last couple of decades. These new practices include cost efficiency and increased monitoring (Berg, Barry & Chandler, 2008; Sallnäs & Wiklund, 2018), and affect the work conditions of social workers. Compared to conditions a decade ago, Swedish social workers of today have less time to engage directly with clients and are less inclined to give clients advice and support (Tham, 2018).

Moreover, labour market policies have gone from viewing unemployment as caused by a lack of employment to seeing it as a lack of “employability” (Bengtsson & Berglund, 2012; Johansson & Hornemann Møller, 2009). Before the 1980s and 1990s, concepts such as “empowerment” and “activation” meant that citizens were offered human capital-strengthening measures and help finding jobs according to their aspirations (Bengtsson & Berglund, 2012). These concepts have now shifted towards demands for clients to show diligence and take increasing individual responsibility (Adams, 2008). The transformation of the Swedish welfare state is further underpinned by the introduction of workfare reforms which have played a decisive role in determining how unemployed people are met and responded to (Kananen, 2012). Swedish labour market programs are now characterized by more controlling and disciplining mechanisms involving higher eligibility requirements, lower levels of benefit, and more sanctions (Bengtsson & Berglund, 2012).

Many descendants of immigrants who are entering the labour market in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have parents who are socially and economic disadvantaged (see e.g. Lemaître, 2007). In comparison to their majority peers, these descendants of immigrants are generally less able to rely on material and practical resources in the family and among relatives and friends to help them get ahead on the labour market. The social and institutional support provided by public officials, conceptualized as social capital in this dissertation, is a vital form of resource for these descendants, as also underlined in earlier studies (e.g. Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Rezai, 2017). This entails a support that acknowledges descendants of immigrants as involved subjects, and not just passive recipients of pre-defined institutional measures (cf. Olofsson, 2018). The respondents in this study were fortunate enough to have come across supportive and empowering public officials. However, institutional support needs to be systematically incorporated in public administration in order for it to neutralize individual and structural disadvantage. Public officials can then become providers of social capital on a general, rather than random, basis. Against this background, it is important for the social work discipline and profession to defend and re-enact a welfare model that gives public officials time, incentives, and tools to offer quality support to vulnerable groups of individuals.

## **Approaching an exclusivist and conditionalized labour market**

Article III demonstrates that orientations towards labour market entry and participation among descendants of immigrants are influenced by labour market conditions. The article presents three themes describing how descendants of immigrants understand and are influenced by labour market conditions: being in the “right” field, learning along the way, and employing skills that are valuable in relation to a field. The results display an interaction between social and institutional structures and their individual biographies, including aspects of gender, ethnicity, and social origin.

In light of these findings, I argue that even the “advantaged” descendants of immigrants, who have successfully completed higher education and been rewarded with a degree, may encounter labour market conditions that limit their choices and obstruct their advancement. The descendants of immigrants in this dissertation perceived the labour market as an “ethnified” and gendered place in which they were generally disadvantaged, but one which they had learned how to approach and adapt to. While they were welcomed into certain branches, they had to struggle to get into others. Their labour market entrance related to the ways in which their gender and ethnic background were valued (or de-valued) in different labour market fields.

Workers with an immigrant background are often expected to be naturally equipped with so-called cultural competence (cf. Gruber, 2016), and are often sought for in jobs involving immigrant clients or internationalized work tasks (e.g. Hedberg & Petterson, 2011). Thus, as shown in this dissertation, descendants of immigrants may feel inclined to pursue an ethnically profiled career in order to avoid the general disadvantages that they face on the labour market. One can see their approaches to labour market entry and participation as a reflection of structural inequalities, such as discrimination (cf. Volery, 2007; Boyd, 2000). Such approaches and strategies can also be reviewed in relation to the changing conditions generally facing young people in Sweden today (see e.g. Olofsson, 2014; Schröder, 2015; Olofsson & Wikström, 2018). As discussed in chapter II of this dissertation, descendants of immigrants are facing ethnic- or immigrant-specific challenges, but they are also entering a labour market which is characterised by generally deteriorating conditions. This “double disadvantage” creates a higher risk of labour market exclusion more generally, but also impacts those who are included in the labour market, as the respondents of this study were. As highlighted in article III, it may lead them to develop adaptive approaches and strategies to enter and participate on the labour market. This might facilitate the labour market entrance of descendants of immigrants, but it also means that they are oriented towards certain labour market segments or towards ethnically profiled work tasks.

From a more critical viewpoint, there is a possibility that these processes lead to a form of ethnic stratification and of strengthening alienating processes among immigrants and their descendants. However, this aspect has not been in focus in this dissertation, and remains a question for further research.

## **Summary of results, conclusion and suggestions for further research**

This dissertation describes influences on the occupational aspirations and attainments of non-Western, non-European immigrants' descendants, from their own perspective. The research questions were the following: 1) How do employed descendants of immigrants perceive the influence of family members on their occupational aspirations?, 2) How do employed descendants of immigrants perceive that interactions with public officials have benefitted their occupational aspirations and attainments?, 3) How do descendants of immigrants understand labour market conditions, and how do these conditions influence their occupational pathways and strategies?, and 4) How do employed descendants of immigrants perceive labour market participation in relation to gender norms and parenting ideals? The answers to these research questions can be summarized as follows:

- By driving the accumulation of cultural capital, parents' migration biographies are an important influence on the occupational aspirations of descendants of immigrants. These migration biographies are interpreted by descendants of immigrants in ways that motivate and inspire them to form and take actions to fulfil their occupational aspirations. Siblings (especially older ones) may function as active transferrers of cultural capital by providing substantial forms of information, knowledge, and practical support. From the respondents' perspectives, collectivist features in their ethnic communities propel their parents' support of them, since children's educational and occupational attainments become a source of pride and social status for the entire family.
- By providing important forms of social capital, public officials contribute to the occupational aspirations and attainments of descendants of immigrants. From the respondents' perspective, public officials manage to transmit social capital by demonstrating connectedness with their clients' experiences and focusing on these clients' personally meaningful goals. Public officials are also perceived as important transferrers of information and knowledge that contribute to descendants' occupational aspirations and attainments.

- The respondents understand labour market conditions as generally constraining, but also see opportunities to use their immigrant background and gender as assets in entering and participating on the labour market. Their approaches and strategies to fulfil their occupational aspirations demonstrate how external conditions steer and constrain their actions, but also reveal a high degree of active agency among the descendants of immigrants.
- The respondents perceive labour market participation in gendered ways. While the women see it as a way to become independent and emancipated, men view it as a way to provide for the family. Moreover, they consider themselves as dedicated to gender equality, while also expressing gender-biased views on work and family arrangements. Both male and female descendants of immigrants stress the importance of participating in paid work and obtaining career mobility while also being engaged parents. The women, however, express more concerns with regard to combining these aspects. Their perceptions of labour market participation, gender norms, and parenting ideals were influenced by their own parents and by their assessments of the Swedish social and political context.

What is it, then, that may distinguish those who manage to fulfil their occupational aspirations and secure gainful employment? In this regard, the results presented in this dissertation highlight the importance of a combination and interaction between individual, familial, institutional, and structural influences. The respondents in this dissertation were marked by individual characteristics that worked to their advantage. Many of them showed a great deal of persistence, creativity, and flexibility, including an ability to make use of fortunate events that came their way and employing alternative strategies to get ahead, which Bourdieu (2008) conceptualises as important for overcoming objective constraints. These findings are underpinned by earlier studies reporting compensatory behaviour among descendants of immigrants who anticipate labour market disadvantage (Konyali, 2017; Urban, 2012; Zhou, 2004).

However, the respondents in this study had also enjoyed crucial forms of familial and institutional support. They had been encouraged, supported, and pushed by their parents; they had been provided with practical help from their siblings; and they had been guided, motivated, and given substantial information and knowledge by public officials.

Overall, the results of this dissertation offer an explanation in which the interaction between structure and agency is of pivotal importance. Such an interaction makes visible the ontological relation between objective opportunities

and constraints and individual perceptions and actions. Thus, I suggest that future research examining influences on the labour market entry and participation of immigrants' descendants in Sweden needs to consider the two-way relationship between structure and individual life conditions and agency; or, as Mills (1959, p. 6) puts it, "...to grasp history and biography, and the relations between the two within society". The implications of a changing welfare state context for the possibilities that descendants of immigrant have to receive substantial support were not directly in focus in this study, and so remain a relevant question for future researchers. Another focal point, which has been discussed in this study but may be further examined, is the relation between the social and political context and intergenerational change in immigrant families.

### **Relevance for the discipline and profession of social work**

The modern discipline and profession of social work must deal with the issue of social work in ethnically diverse contexts. In the light of increased international migration and the growing share of clients with an immigrant background in Sweden, there have been several recent discussions about social work with ethnic minorities (see e.g. Ahmadi & Lönnback, 2005). Concepts such as intercultural social work, cross-cultural social work, and culturally competent social work have flourished in the discipline and profession of social work. In all these concepts, *culture* seems to have a significant meaning. However, some scholars have pointed out a lack of clarity in these concepts, and criticised their diffuse and static implementation in the social work profession (cf. Righard & Wikström, 2019; Gruber, 2015; Pérez, 2009). Based on the results presented in this dissertation, I argue that it is relevant for both discipline and profession to develop and employ an increased knowledge about the use of culture among people of migrant origin. However, this understanding of culture must relate to individuals' subjective positions in societal opportunity structures. Here, I have shown that several aspects, such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and intergenerational change, interact and simultaneously influence the occupational aspirations and attainments of descendants of immigrants, from their own perspectives. Accordingly, social work in ethnically diverse contexts could benefit from considering the multifaceted and varied ways in which people's everyday practices are understood and shaped. When working with ethnic minorities, social work that tends to over-rely on cultural explanations risks veiling the influence of structural inequalities related to factors such as labour market entry and participation (Williams & Soydan, 2005).

Since descendants of immigrants, and especially those of non-Western origin, are generally at higher risk of unemployment and social exclusion compared to their majority peers (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2017; OECD, 2016; Statistics Sweden, 2010), many of them come into contact with social workers and other

representatives of public institutions. Helping individuals at risk of exclusion to overcome structural hindrances to attainment corresponds to the idea of social work as a profession that supports social and economic equity (Bowles, Hopps, & Clayton, 2016). Labour market participation of immigrants' descendants is an important step towards increasing general social cohesion within a society, since workplace diversity is associated with increased tolerance of immigrants and interethnic friend formation (Kokkonen et al., 2015). It also complements one of the main principles of the International Federation of Social Workers (2004): that of promoting social justice.

The historical roots of social work are infused with efforts to help those in need and to better people's living conditions (Soydan, 2012). However, there are various ways of "helping", and the definition of help per se may differ depending on outlook. In this dissertation, the support that contributed to the occupational aspirations and attainments of immigrants' descendants was of an empowering and emancipating, rather than controlling, kind. The descendants of immigrants had been offered active, substantial, and practical help in forming and reaching their occupational goals. One major aspect of the support they received from public officials was that it started from their own definitions of meaningful goals. This reinforces the argument that effective social work means involving the client as part of the solution, rather than as a passive recipient of pre-defined initiatives (Pérez, 2009).

The results presented in this dissertation also underscore the importance of applying a long-term perspective in increasing the labour market inclusion of descendants of immigrants. The respondents described a combination of influences that contributed to their occupational aspirations and attainments, occurring in their childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood and coming from a variety of sources including the family, ethnic community, and public institutions. These varied and long-term influences emphasise the need to work pre-emptively and to consider a holistic perspective in developing work methods to increase the labour market inclusion of descendants of immigrants.

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# Appendix

Interview guide

## Intervjutesman

### a. Familje- och social bakgrund

Kan du berätta lite om din uppväxt och hur ditt liv ser ut idag?

Vilka personer skulle du säga är viktiga för dig?

Kan du berätta lite om dina föräldrar? (vad sysslade de med i hemlandet, varför kom de till Sverige, utbildning i hemlandet och/eller i Sverige, arbete i hemlandet och/eller i Sverige?)

Hur skulle du beskriva din familj? (syskon, synen på arbete och utbildning i hemmet).

### b. Socialt nätverk

Berätta om ditt umgänge– hur skulle du beskriva det? (nära umgänge eller endast bekanta, vilken typ av relation, aktiviteter tillsammans)

Vad sysslar dina kompisar med? (arbete, utbildning).

### c. Upplevelser av att söka och ha ett arbete

Hur skulle du beskriva din syn på arbete? Vad betyder det för dig?

Hur skulle du beskriva din inställning till att lyckas få ett arbete?

Hur förväntade du dig att det skulle vara att söka jobb? Tycker du att verkligheten motsvarade dina förväntningar?

Berätta om ditt första jobb...

Berätta om ditt nuvarande jobb... (arbetsuppgifter, kollegor, arbetsplats)

Trivs du?

Hur sökte/fick du jobbet?

### d. Yrkesrelaterade förväntningar och aspirationer

Berätta lite om yrkesrelaterade aspirationer/planer som du haft/har

Hur ser du på dina möjligheter att realisera sådana aspirationer/planer?

Finns konkreta planer på att realisera detta? Delmål?

Vad lägger du i betydelsen att ha ett jobb? (pengar, status, självförverkligande, meningsfullhet, social kontakt?)

Har arbetet någon särskild betydelse för förverkligande? För din personlighet, självbild?

Om nej, finns något annat (t.ex. fritid eller familjeliv) i tillvaron där självförverkligande uppnås?

### **Finns någonting annat du vill ta upp?**

#### **Kompletterande intervjufrågor**

##### **a) Arbete, hem och familj**

Hur tänker du kring att ha barn, familj och samtidigt arbeta - nu, eller i framtiden?

Vad tror du har påverkat dina tankar, beteende och handlingar i detta? Hur?

Berätta lite om hur du tror att dina föräldrar/syskon tänker kring att balansera arbete, hem och familj? Hur tänker de? Hur har du gjort?

Varför tror du att de gjort på det sättet?

Hur har de påverkat dig, tror du?

##### **b) Myndighetsrepresentanter**

Vilken betydelse har representanter/personal i olika organisationer, t ex skola, arbetsförmedling, socialtjänst eller liknande, haft för dig när det gäller att komma in på arbetsmarknaden?

Hur tror du att dessa representanter påverkat dina jobbrelaterade drömmar och aspirationer?

Hur tror du att de påverkat dina möjligheter att realisera dina aspirationer?

Vilka aspekter av relationer till dessa representanter skulle du säga varit viktiga influenser för dina yrkesrelaterade aspirationer och -prestationer?