

# LIVING THE POLICY DISCOURSES OF EMPLOYABILITY

A discourse analysis of Finnish Migration strategy (2013) and experiences of international graduates of Master programmes at the University of Jyväskylä

Emilia Kärkkäinen

University of Jyväskylä

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and International Cooperation

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Supervisor: Tiina Kontinen

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**ABSTRACT**

This study appears shortly before the Finnish institutes of higher education introduce tuition fees on international students from non-EU/EEA countries. This might entail changes in the attractiveness of Finland among the affected group of international students. Besides the ‘cost of investment’ of studying, the prospects of finding employment post-graduation influence the choice of destination country. Simultaneously, countries want to attract the brightest minds in the global competition on high-skilled labor. But how ‘employable’ are the international students graduating in Finland?

This thesis looks into this question first, through analysis of a policy paper, and second, on graduates’ experiences, focusing on the international graduates of Master programmes at the University of Jyväskylä. The main aim of the study is to find out, first, through what kinds of discourses the policy paper by the Finnish Ministry of the Interior, “Future of Migration 2020 Strategy” (2013), portrays the envisaged employability of migrants, and second, how international graduates perceive their employability in (Central) Finland. The notion of employability is approached through theoretical ideas concerning human and social capital. Both the policy paper and the interviews that were conducted with the non-EU/EEA graduates are analyzed according to the critical discourse analysis, enabling research of the interplay of structures, i.e. the migration policies drafted in the strategy, and action, i.e. the perceptions and experiences of the interviewees.

As a result, five diverse discourses were identified in the policy paper: competitiveness of the economy, integration, development, border control, and diversity. The analysis of the interviews revealed mainly overlapping discourses, but also the discourses of networking and Finnish language. The findings suggest that the key to the employability of international graduates is the social capital embedded in networks, and the human capital comprised of Finnish language skills. Despite the global competition on the high-skilled labor, human and social capital tailored for the *local* labor market is required.

Key words: graduate employability, international students, migration policies, Finnish labor market, human and social capital, critical discourse analysis

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Emilia Kärkkäinen

Ohjaaja: Tiina Kontinen

Yhteiskuntapolitiikan Pro Gradu, Kansainvälisen kehitysyhteistyön maisteriohjelma

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## **ABSTRAKTI**

Tämän pro gradun julkaisu sijoittuu ajankohtaan juuri ennen kuin suomalaiset korkeakoulut lanseeraavat lukukausimaksun EU:n ulkopuolisille opiskelijoille. Lukukausimaksujen käyttöönotto puolestaan vaikuttanee Suomen houkuttavuuteen ulkomaisten opiskelijoiden keskuudessa. Opintojen kohdemaan valinta tosin tuskin muotoutuu pelkästään kustannusten pohjalta, vaan kansainvälisen opiskelijan työllistymismahdollisuudet opintojen päätyttyä ovat myös merkittävässä roolissa. Toisaalta valtiot kilpailevat keskenään houkuttaakseen korkeasti koulutettua työvoimaa. Millaiset siis ovat kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden työllistymisnäkökulmat Suomessa?

Kyseinen pro gradu vastaa tähän kysymykseen sekä maahanmuuttopoliittista asiakirjaa että vastavalmistuneiden, Jyväskylän yliopiston kansainvälisten maisteriohjelmien alumnien kokemuksia tutkien. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, millaisten diskurssien kautta sisäministeriön ‘Maahanmuuton tulevaisuus 2020’-asiakirja (2013) kuvaa maahanmuuttajien työllistyvyyttä. Toinen tutkimuskysymys puolestaan pureutuu kansainvälisten alumnien kokemuksiin omasta työllistyvyydestään. Työllistyvyyden (employability) käsitettä lähestytään inhimillisen ja sosiaalisen pääoman teorioiden kautta. Sekä asiakirjan että kansainvälisten alumnien haastattelujen jäsentämiseen hyödynnetään diskurssianalyysia, joka mahdollistaa rakenteiden, eli maahanmuuttopolitiikan, ja käytännön, eli haastateltavien kokemusten, välisen vertailun.

Maahanmuuttopoliittisesta asiakirjasta paljastuivat seuraavat viisi diskurssia: talouden kilpailukyky, integraatio, kehitysyhteistyö, rajavalvonta sekä monimuotoisuus. Haastattelumateriaalissa havaitut diskurssit olivat pitkälti päällekkäisiä asiakirjan diskurssien kanssa, mutta näiden lisäksi painottuivat verkostoituminen ja suomen kielen taidot. Tutkimuksen pohjalta voisi olettaa kansainvälisten alumnien työllistyvyyden pohjautuvan verkostojen sosiaaliseen pääomaan sekä kielitaidon luomaan inhimilliseen pääomaan. Paikallisten työmarkkinoiden edellyttämä inhimillinen ja sosiaalinen pääoma siis nousevat merkittävään rooliin työllistyvyyttä määriteltäessä.

Asiasanat: korkeasti koulutettujen työllistyvyys, maahanmuuttopolitiikka, kansainväliset opiskelijat, suomalaiset työmarkkinat, inhimillinen ja sosiaalinen pääoma

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# 1. INTRODUCTION & JUSTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC

## 1.1. Introduction

The topic of this thesis is the employability of international graduates, originating from non-EU/EEA countries, having finished a Master programme at the University of Jyväskylä and stayed in Central Finland after their graduation. The aim of the study is first, to find out in what ways does the Finnish migration policy portray employability of migrants, and second, to investigate the perceptions of international Master graduates of the University of Jyväskylä about the preconditions and possibilities of becoming employed in Finland while they are pondering on their options – whether to stay and (keep on trying to find) work in Finland, return to their country of origin or move to a third country. Hence, I am interested in employment and migration policies affecting study-based migrants turning into labor migrants. The policy-focused point of view is relevant, because policies can be used pro or contra certain groups, determined by the current political agendas.

Therefore, this thesis looks into the connection between the chosen migration policy document and the experiences of the migrants, i.e. international graduates, concerning their employability. The idea is to explore whether the policy paper and the migrants share the same ideas of what aspects of migration policies should be developed and how. The policy paper under scrutiny is the “Government Resolution on the Future of Migration 2020 Strategy” policy by the Finnish Ministry of the Interior (2013) which was chosen due to its emphasis on the labor market integration of high-skilled migrants. The perceptions of the migrants, on their part, are investigated through ten semi-structured interviews covering the same topics as the analysis of the policy paper. The group of interviewees consists of recent graduates of international Master programmes at the University of Jyväskylä. All interviewees are from countries with a lower income level than that of Finland, as well as third country nationals (TCN), i.e. non-EU/EEA citizens, in order to also include the challenges caused by visa and work permit issues in the study. Furthermore, compared to the free movement of EU citizens, migrants possessing a non-EU/EEA citizenship are

more dependent on the current migration and employment policies, making them an even more interesting target group for a policy-based thesis.

## **1.2. Justification of the topic**

According to a recent study by CIMO (Centre for International Mobility), the majority of international graduates remain in Finland, and 51% of them are employed one year after the graduation (CIMO 2016a). In a European Union-wide comparison, both of these proportions are rather large. The study conducted by CIMO (2016a) also looked into the differences in employability of graduates of different professional fields: it seems that graduates of the social and health care sector as well as technology tend to find work more easily than e.g. graduates of business administration. Furthermore, the graduates of a Bachelor programme of a university of applied sciences were the most successful in finding employment, whereas the graduates of a Master programme of a university were struggling the most, which might be caused by the international orientation of several Master programmes, i.e. not preparing their graduates for the Finnish labor markets (ibid). However, according to another study by CIMO (2017), Finnish companies are interested in ‘international talents’, but need more support in recognizing and utilizing these talents. The supportive role of the institutes of higher education is assumed to be central here, e.g. in terms of connecting companies with graduates for traineeships. Considering the interest of the local companies on one hand, but the struggles of international Master graduates in finding employment in Finland on the other hand, this seems to be a topic worth looking into. Furthermore, the acknowledged need for support from the universities is also included in this thesis, as the perceptions of the interviewees on the support they received from the University of Jyväskylä are mapped in the analysis. This aspect is also of interest to the Student Life project of the University of Jyväskylä, which is supporting students e.g. in the transition to employment, and will thus have a role in this thesis, too. On this note I would like to thank the Student Life project for their support given for this Master thesis<sup>1</sup>.

Despite possible struggles in finding work, the amount of international students in Finland

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<sup>1</sup> I received a Master’s Thesis grant from the Student Life project of the University of Jyväskylä, which aims at creating optimal conditions for successful studies and fostering the wellbeing of the students. One of the focuses of the Student Life project is the employability and the development of the career skills of the students, supported by counseling and guidance by the university and its partners. (<https://www.jyu.fi/studentlife/studentlife/en/>).

has been on a steady rise in the recent years, reaching levels above the OECD average, and even 75% of these international students residing in Finland originate from non-EU/EEA countries. However, according to the latest statistics, there has been a remarkable drop in the amount of applications for the intake for the next academic year (2017-2018), which might be explained by the shortly introduced tuition fees for third country nationals (CIMO 2016b). The future impact of the tuition fees is thus an interesting point, and is included in the interview analysis, as the ‘cost of investment’ of studying in Finland is discussed. Logically, this cost of investment is usually compared with the prospects of employability. In the discourse of migration policies, the mobility of higher education is usually defined as a “key national resource in producing advanced knowledge in fields considered to be strategically important for national economic survival and prosperity” (Li 2016, 196). This discourse on international talents as the cornerstone of the Finnish, globally competitive, knowledge-based economy is also omnipresent in the analyzed policy paper, but there obviously is a contradiction between this discourse and the introduction of tuition fees for the third country nationals. This contradiction is one of the key discourses for this thesis. However, as Li acknowledges (2016, 198), “higher education institutions may regard international students as a valuable source of income as their government funding support is reduced. Governments may welcome the considerable money – in tuition fees and other expenditure – that international students contribute to the national economy, but they may also hope that suitably qualified international students will opt to stay on and enhance the pool of highly skilled human capital in the host country.” Several, and partly colliding, interests hence come into play here.

The importance of the mobility of higher education is thus already a part of the (labor) migration discourse, and the mobility of university students is widely believed to be linked to the mobility of highly-skilled workers in a plethora of ways, which has also been acknowledged in the field of migration research. However, according to Li (2016, 195), research on international students’ career-related progress and achievements is scant, and there is a “severe lack of attention to their experiences of transition to employment”. The focus of the thesis on the graduate employability is thus justified – although Li also notes that because of its complexity, graduate employability should rather be discussed in an international scope instead of a narrow national focus (ibid). Nevertheless, for the scope of a Master thesis, a national or even a regional focus seems more reasonable when



considering the available resources. Despite the national focus, the international context is also included in the thesis in the form of differences between the perceptions of the interviewees concerning either their own employability or that of EU/EEA citizens with free mobility and access to the labor market.

### **1.3. The role of the European Union in labor migration policies**

Thanks to the principle of free movement within the European Union, the EU/EEA nationals are able to move freely from one member state to another. For third country nationals (TCN) the situation is very different though, as this freedom of movement does not apply to them, and the general terms of the residence permit may vary between member states. The European Union cannot impose unitary legislation fully encompassing the conditions of migration of TCN on all the member states, as summarized by Boswell and Geddes (2011, 93-94): “- - the EU has very limited competence to introduce legislation in the area of labor immigration from outside the EEA. Despite a formal mandate provided by the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), and various initiatives to develop a common approach, EU states have been reluctant to cede sovereignty or even significantly reduce differences in approach to the admission of foreign workers. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be appropriate.” Most EU states thus have their own set of legislation in this matter, and the flexibility or strictness of this legislation is likely to significantly influence the choice of destination country of international students - especially of those wishing to stay and work there after their graduation.

Most attempts of the EU to draft a mutual approach to labor migration have hence been in vain. However, there is one notable exception, namely the Council Directive of December 2004 (EU, 2004) aiming at unifying the conditions of admission of third country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service, or for the purposes of scientific research (Boswell & Geddes 2011, 95). However, the same directive entitles the member states to restrict the access of international students to the labor market (EU 2004, Chapter IV, Article 17). It seems that the residence of the TCN within the European Union is less controversial when it comes to studying here, but as soon as they want to exercise economic activities even during their studies, not to mention

after graduation – hence become labor migrants – the situation becomes more complicated. This aspect is of special interest for this study regarding graduates from non-EU/EEA countries.

#### **1.4. The position of migrants on the European labor markets**

Despite the differences in labor migration between the EU member states, the respective research does recognize some general characteristics e.g. in terms of the (mis)match of qualifications of migrants and the jobs they have. Drawing on the European Social Survey for 2002-2009, Aleksynska and Tritah (2013, 229) argue that “immigrants are more likely to be both under- and overeducated than the native born for the jobs that they perform”. Boswell and Geddes (2011) argue that the majority of labor migrants within the EU work in lower-skilled forms of employment – without, however, taking stance on whether these lower-skilled jobs match the educational level of the migrants or not. Within labor migration research, higher-skilled migrants are generally defined as “those with tertiary (usually university) education or with equivalent professional or vocational skills” (Boswell & Geddes 2011, 77). However, it often is useful to define ‘high-skilled’ in local terms, based on local labor market needs and workings, rather than on universal terms, as Li notes (2016, 199). Nevertheless, Boswell and Geddes (2011) also mention the increasing emphasis of (some) EU member states on *attracting* higher-skilled migrants. According to CIMO (2017), this emphasis applies to Finland too, especially since Finnish small- and medium-sized companies are increasingly seeking for opportunities to internationalize. For this purpose, hiring people with knowledge of Finland *and* their country of origin seems reasonable, also since it has been argued that foreign labor tends to boost productivity and growth, and high-skilled migrants can even *create* jobs through their innovativeness (Boswell & Geddes 2011, 83). The innovation brought about by high-skilled migrants is a widely recognized phenomenon, for example discussed in the work of the social capital theorist James Coleman (1988).

Despite the expressed need for foreign professionals, the usual consensus within the labor migration research does comprise of the assumption that most labor migrants are likely to be overeducated. For instance, Li (2016, 203) refers to research on this topic conducted by

Fotovatian (2014), Guo (2013) and Liu-Farrer (2011), as she argues that highly educated/skilled “struggle to integrate their knowledge and abilities in the post-immigration contexts, and find themselves either unemployed or involved in ‘survival jobs’ or ‘transnational jobs’ which are well below their expectations and skills levels”. The ‘other end’, i.e. the argument of Aleksynska and Tritah (2013) concerning the undereducation of some labor migrants, mainly applies to migrants who bring a rare, country of origin-based skill with them; e.g. an Indian migrant working as a chef in an Indian restaurant without a formal vocational education for this profession. This particular group is not so relevant in terms of this thesis focusing on international graduates, i.e. high-skilled migrants, but is nevertheless interesting. Skills and knowledge regarding the country of origin, the specific expertise, of high-skilled migrants surely plays a role too when it comes to their employability; both in terms of lower- and higher-skilled labor. A company based in Finnish Lapland will be glad to hire a Chinese person in order to provide Chinese tourists with a better customer service, but in this case, the labor migrant is probably more likely to be over- than undereducated for their job.

### **1.5. Policies affecting the ‘mismatch’ of skills and employment of the labor migrants**

A relevant question is what might cause the mismatch of migrants’ skills and employment. According to Aleksynska and Tritah (2013, 229), this mismatch happens due to the selection and sorting of labor migrants across countries: “Notably, origin countries’ quality of human capital, by affecting selection, mostly matters for undereducation of immigrants. Overeducation is determined to a greater extent by destination country economic conditions and labor market institutions.” Overeducation, the more relevant aspect for this thesis, might be curbed by policies improving eligibility or by those aimed at anti-discrimination, as these policies tend to attract a wider range of high-skilled migrants (ibid). On the other hand, policies and practices of anti-discrimination are also expected to reduce overeducation among the labor migrants *already residing* in the country, as they logically then have a higher likelihood of landing in a higher-skilled position. This two-sided policy dilemma illustrates well the difficulties faced by the drafters of labor

migration policies: how to enhance the integration of the already existing labor migrants without creating strong ‘pull factors’ attracting numerous new ones, which would be likely to stir discontent among the majority of the population.

However, those migration policies of destination countries that improve labor market access generally tend to positively affect overall matching. Moreover, specific supportive measures of labor market integration allow reducing the overeducation of high-skilled migrants and simultaneously offer a chance for the lower-skilled to ‘level up’ in terms of adult education programs. Besides policies, there of course are other factors affecting the matching as well: the overall degree of unemployment, the position of trade unions, the extent of irregular labor, income level and income inequality measures, quality of education, measures of labor market flexibility, and the extent of the informal sector (Aleksynska and Tritah 2013, 235). Furthermore, Ghignoni and Verashchagina (2014, 670) argue that “countries which invest more in innovation and technologies should be able to make better use of the educated labour force”. Innovation and new technologies bring about a shift in labor demand which favors the high-skilled professionals and thus reduces overeducation (Ghignoni & Verashchagina 2014, 681). However, as was discussed in the context of high-skilled migrants in the European labor markets, it has also been argued that *the high-skilled* boost the labor market through their innovativeness (Coleman 1988; Boswell & Geddes 2011). High-skilled labor and countries investing in innovation and technologies thus seem to foster each other reciprocally in the quest for matching the occupation with the education.

When it comes to the (mis)match of labor migrants’ skills and available employment, there is a vigorous debate on the capability of successful matching in the regulated labor markets with strong welfare systems versus in the more ‘flexible’ labor markets. Regulated labor markets often entail a widespread presence of trade unions, which Aleksynska and Tritah (2013, 241) argue to increase the relative risk of overeducation of migrants because “higher presence of trade unions is usually associated with higher labor market rigidity and higher separation costs”. However, they do not elaborate this statement – why should a more robust protection of the labor force lead to overeducation of migrants? Because the employers tend to screen the qualifications of the employees more carefully as they know, it will be difficult to fire anyone in case the skills do not really match with the task after all,

and an applicant with e.g. a rather unknown degree from abroad is thus a risk?

## **1.6. Insufficient transferability of skills - a cause for overeducation?**

The lack of will or ability of the employers to screen the quality of foreign diplomas is an actual cause of overeducation – if the employers are not sure about the level and content of the degree, they are prone to choosing someone with education levels higher than actually needed for the job (Aleksynska & Tritah 2013, 230). In the case of this thesis, this should not be an impediment for the interviewees though, as they all have a degree from a Finnish university. However, as e.g. Baert et.al. (2013, 123) argue, overeducation is a common problem of recent graduates in the beginning of their career, regardless of having a migrant background or not. In the case of recent graduates with a migrant background, there are also other possible barriers to finding matching employment, though, such as language skills: according to the research conducted by Aleksynska and Tritah (2013, 233), “correct matches are also more frequent for immigrants speaking an official language of their residence country at home and for those originating from countries sharing a common language with their destination country”, which surely impedes the matching of the skills and jobs regarding the most international graduates based in Finland. Nonetheless, Aleksynska and Tritah argue that the level of affluence of the country of origin – ‘developing’ versus ‘developed’ – does not significantly affect the matching, which contradicts with the research of Martikainen et al (2013) stating that the economic status of the country of origin does affect the perceived value of the skills of the emigrants. However, Aleksynska and Tritah (2013, 239-240) also note the following: “Compared to immigrants from other Western European and North American countries (the omitted group), it is African and MENA (Middle Eastern and North African) immigrants that have the higher likelihood of being overeducated. There are no significant differences between European and American immigrants and immigrants from other regions of the world.” In the Finnish case, these differences based on the regions of origin seem to be somewhat different though: according to a recent study by CIMO (2016a), there barely are any differences in the employability of Africans, Europeans and North Americans residing in Finland, whereas Asians and Latin Americans tend to face more hardship in finding work

after their graduation. However, as the interview data of this thesis comprises of ten third country nationals only, originating from a plethora of countries, generalisations on this note cannot be met.

In general, migrants' overeducation in relation to the available high- and semi-high skill requiring jobs is argued to reflect the "less than perfect skill transferability" of theirs (Aleksynska & Tritah 2013, 231). Furthermore, Aleksynska and Tritah emphasize the meaning of country-specific human capital, i.e. knowledge and work experience on the labor market of that exact country, preferably rounded up by skills in the native language. This is in line with the assumption of Gary Becker (1964), according to which the personal and cultural preferences are essential in enhancing one's human capital. Hence even years of work experience in another country might have little significance, as the acquired human capital might not be transferable enough. This of course poses a challenge to the target group of the thesis, being high-skilled but most of them lacking previous work experience in Finland. Moreover, as Baert et al. (2013, 123-124) argue, accepting lower-skilled employment in the beginning of the career, hence being overeducated, does not always count as the first step of a 'career ladder', but can rather lead to a 'career trap', where high-skilled professionals are trapped in jobs that mismatch their education level. The ideal solution for the international graduates would thus comprise of having their skills adequately recognized in the destination country, and of finding high-skilled employment immediately after their graduation. To conclude, the concept of insufficient transferability of skills also challenges the concept of cosmopolitan human capital, according to which the globalized labor markets require labor with skills than can be utilized in multiple countries. It seems that the optimal skillsets lie in the intersection of country-specific and cosmopolitan human capital.

## **1.7. Human and social capital as means for analyzing employability**

In line with the above-mentioned arguments, I suggest that the concepts of human capital and social capital should be further explored when it comes to the analysis of employability of international graduates in Finland. Employability, i.e. the "ability to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment, and

to be able to move around within the labor market” (Working Group on Employability 2009, 1), lends itself as a well-rooted policy concept when researching the structures behind the labor market position of a certain group. The rather individualistic, neoliberally oriented understanding of employability as a “set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations” (Knight & Yorke 2003, 5), portrays a similar ideology with the individualistically oriented theories of human capital (Schultz 1971), according to which e.g. language skills and education of an individual serve as denominators of employability, thus neglecting the role of the socio-economic factors. According to these theories, human capital and the subsequent employability should be internationally transferable, forming some sort of cosmopolitan human capital (Kok-Yee, Mei & Soon 2011), which would turn the international graduates into the winners of the labor market. These neoliberal theories of ‘self-made’ professionals in the global labor markets echo the same ideology as the analyzed policy paper (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013), similarly emphasizing the role of high-skilled migrants in curbing the Finnish economy, and thus suit the analysis of the policy paper.

However, this neoliberal ideology will be challenged throughout this study. When defining employability, Tomlinson and Holmes (2016) emphasize the influence of social classes, power imbalances, privileged populations and status-ranked occupations, as well as the role of gender and ethnicity as denominators of employability. As migrants tend to struggle more than natives when seeking for adequate employment (e.g. Kraal 2009; Aleksynska & Tritah, 2013), this view seems more logical than the individual-based one of Knight and Yorke (2003). In terms of human capital, Becker (1964) also emphasizes the importance of country-specific human capital, which is in line with the employability research by Li (2016), according to whom international graduates need to address skill gaps in *local* labor markets in order to succeed. These theories will be utilized especially in the analysis of the experiences of the international graduates.

In addition to ‘local’ human capital, international graduates can be argued to require social capital in order to enhance their employability. To succeed, international graduates need information on the labor market, and this information inheres in social relations (Coleman 1988, 104). However, the main role of theories on social capital in this thesis lies on the

impact of networks on the employability of international graduates, drawing mainly on the work of Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2002). Furthermore, I will look into the interplay of human and social capital, which I argue to complement each other as denominators of employability. As defined by Nahapiet (2011, 79): “If human capital is about the value of people's individual abilities, social capital is about the value of social connections and relationships.” As the high-skilled international graduates can be argued to possess human capital, maybe they are lacking on social capital in their quest for employability in Finland.

## **1.8. Research questions**

To approach the phenomenon of employability of international graduates, the purpose of the thesis is to examine through what kinds of discourses it is discussed in Finnish policy, and in the experiences of those being affected by the policy. The overall objective is to examine how the policy and experiences correspond to each other.

This thesis answers the following specific research questions:

- 1) Through what kinds of discourses the policy paper “Future of Migration Strategy 2020” portrays employability of high-skilled migrants in Finland?
- 2) Through what kinds of discourses graduates of the International Master Programmes describe their experiences on employability in Finnish labor market?

The first research question aims at finding out, what kinds of discourses are embedded in policies related to the employability of international graduates in Finland. The second research question approaches the topic, the employability of this high-skilled group of migrants, from another position: through the perceptions of the target group of the analyzed policies. As discussed in the chapter on the justification of the topic, research on the perceptions on employability of international graduates has been scarce, and this is the main new contribution of this study.



## **1.9. Structure of the thesis**

In the following theory chapter, the concepts relevant for this thesis, namely those of employability as well as human and social capital, will be introduced and discussed. After having introduced and justified the theoretical framework of the thesis, the methodology of this study will be discussed. Both the policy paper and the interview data will be analyzed through critical discourse analysis (CDA), hence the CDA as a research method will be described, as well as its suitability for the analysis of the data will be reflected upon. The justification of the research method will be followed first by a brief introduction of the chosen policy paper, and then by the justification of qualitative interviews as a means of examining the perceptions of the international graduates.

After the methodological choices and the introduction of the research data, the bipartite analysis of the data will follow. The discourse analysis of the policy paper will be contemplated by the discourse analysis of the qualitative interviews, and these two data sets will be compared. To conclude, the interplay between the analyzed policies and experiences will be discussed in detail, and some policy recommendations will be given based on the results of the study.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL AS CONCEPTS TO APPROACH EMPLOYABILITY**

In this chapter, I will define my understanding of the term ‘employability’, which is a common concept in policy papers in the fields of e.g. employment, migration and integration policies. These fields of policy form the ‘backbone’ for my thesis concerning the labor market integration of high-skilled migrants, and therefore, the use of a concept favored by these fields, i.e. employability, is justified. Concerning employment, migration and integration policies, employability in the sense of migrants finding work, is often argued to be the main indicator of successful integration (Boswell & Geddes 2011). This validates the notion of employability being something worth striving for.

In order to find out, what fosters employability, I will utilize concepts of human and social capital. For decades, the concept of human capital has been perceived as a common denominator for education level, work experience and other skills, such as proficiency in foreign languages, of an individual – all of these factors affecting the employability of this person. The major idea behind human capital theory is that the amount and extent of these skills correlate directly with the position of the individual in the labor market, which makes the human capital theory interesting for this thesis. However, in order to understand the functions of a society more profoundly, one should not only focus on the individual. The concept of social capital hence embraces the community/network level of employability. Social capital can be argued to lie in the relationships between the individuals or groups, thus being somewhat less tangible a concept than that of human capital. Moreover, I am interested in the interplay between human and social capital, and how they can complement each other in the creation of employability.

## **2.1. Employability: a policy-based concept defining the labor market position**

The term ‘employability’ has various definitions, which can, however, be roughly divided into two subcategories: the ones with an individualistic orientation, and the ones emphasizing the influence of the surrounding society. Renowned researchers of employability, Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke (2003, 5), define employability as follows: “a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations”. Their understanding of employability displays a rather neoliberal definition of human capital as a stairway to success; as if one’s “achievements, understandings and personal attributes” were only an outcome of individual talent, regardless of the society one lives in. However fond of their emphasis on the individual Knight and Yorke are, they do nevertheless acknowledge the complexity behind skill-building, as “there is no certainty that the possession of a range of desirable characteristics will convert employability into employment: there are too many extraneous socio-economic variables for that” (ibid). Hence, the employability of a person does not only depend on their individual characteristics, but also on the circumstances around them.

Exactly these socio-economic variables are the backbone of the employability theory of Michael Tomlinson and Leonard Holmes (2016), who emphasize the influence of social classes, power imbalances, privileged populations and status-ranked occupations, as well as the role of gender and ethnicity as denominators of employability. Tomlinson and Holmes (2016) argue that these factors are stronger and more culturally persuasive and controlling than the personal determination and ability to achieve and overcome. This aspect of socio-economic variables as denominators of employability seems relevant for the topic of the thesis, since migrants tend to face difficulties when trying to find employment that corresponds with their education (e.g. Aleksynska & Tritah 2013). Furthermore, besides these ‘external’ factors affecting employability as listed by Tomlinson and Holmes, Zhen Li (2016) brings the question of generic employability skills into the debate. Li (2016), a renowned researcher of graduate employability, doubts whether globally applicable, generic employability skills even exist. According to her research (ibid), international higher education graduates often are highly skilled but not

necessarily in ways that address *local* skill gaps – yet another external denominator of employability, namely the needs of the local labor market, and the subsequent requirement to adapt one’s skillset accordingly in order to successfully find employment. To conclude, it is possible to draw a connection between the discussion on internal and external factors defining employability, and the human and social capital theories — “employability captures the enduring interaction between individuals’ agency on one hand and social structure on the other” (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016, 6), exactly as the human capital theory emphasizes the individual and the social capital theory the social structure.

Besides this debate on ‘individual versus the society’, there are also more ‘neutral’ definitions of employability. The Working Group on Employability of the so-called Bologna Process, an initiative of the European Union aiming at a higher comparability of the standards and quality of the (European) higher education qualifications, defines it as follows: “[Employability refers to] the ability to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labor market” (Working Group on Employability 2009, 1). This definition seems to grasp the main dimensions of becoming and remaining employed, and suits the topic of the thesis also by having its roots in the development of internationalization of the higher education - a growing trend, as increasing numbers of students apply for a degree program abroad (e.g. CIMO 2016b; Li 2016). Logically, the two first dimensions, hence the ability to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, are the most relevant ones in terms of recent graduates of a university, i.e. the interviewees of the thesis. However, the aspect of ‘lifelong learning’ and the supposedly subsequent success in maintaining employment and being able to move around within the labor market, is present not only in the Bologna Process working group report but also in the interview data, e.g. as the interviewees are longing after the first entry-level job in Finland and simultaneously perceive it as a pathway to professional self-development, such as developing their skills in the Finnish language, which would then enable them to acquire higher or more varied positions in the labor market, according to their perception. This aspiration for an entry-level job is, however, questioned by the notion of Baert et al. (2013, 123-124), according to whom accepting lower-skilled employment in the beginning of the career, does not always count as the first step of a ‘career ladder’, but can rather lead to a ‘career trap’, where high-skilled professionals are trapped in jobs that mismatch their education level.

The concept of employability has strong connection to both interviews, and to the analyzed policy paper. As Tomlinson and Holmes argue (2016, 3), “graduate employability has a strong political dimension as growing emphasis is placed on policies which can enhance the economic value of graduates and the degree-level qualifications they hold. As the political narrative continues to present higher education as a catalyst for economic growth and central to nation states’ skills formation strategies, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been placed under scrutiny over what they do to maximize graduates’ economic potential upon leaving university.” Subsequently, universities are even ranked based on the employability rate of their students. This ‘commodification’ of the higher education, i.e. universities producing labor to meet the purposes of the businesses, has been criticized as one more bastion of neoliberalism (Li 2016, 196). This discourse is omnipresent also in the analyzed policy paper, as higher education and ‘global talents’ produced by it are perceived as ‘drivers of the economy’. However, despite the (economic) value of international graduates being increasingly acknowledged, the responsibility for employability “increasingly rests on individual’s shoulders and has become a lifelong challenge beyond the point of leaving formal education”, as the increasingly competitive, global labor market also entails precariousness and uncertainty to employees (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016, 5). Precarious careers can thus be seen as the downside of the free movement of international graduates on the global labor markets.

## **2.2. Human capital: Knowledge and skills leading to the employability of an individual**

Similarly to the theories on commodification of education and the economic value of international graduates, theories on human capital can also be argued to contain a neoliberal flavor. The neoclassical, economy-oriented school defines human capital as the stock of knowledge and skills that enable people to perform work that creates economic value. The field of human capital theory started developing around the middle of the twentieth century, first through the contributions of Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker (Nahapiet 2011, 76). In his book introducing the concept of investment in human capital, Theodore Schultz (1971, 36) defines migration of individuals and families in order to

adjust to changing job opportunities as a “human investment improving human capabilities”– simultaneously summarizing his understanding of the core idea of human capital, i.e. attempts of an individual at acquiring new capabilities or developing the already existing ones. This type of striving can have large-scale implications on the whole society, for example through investment in education: “The rise in the investment in education has led to the otherwise unexplained rise in earnings, as workers have thus invested in their human capital” (Schultz 1971, 39). Besides education, work experience and language skills are defined as very common markers of human capital. However, it is arguable that the value of these markers of human capital can fluctuate throughout the time – for instance, a university diploma used to have more prestige and nearly guarantee a rather well-paid job, whereas nowadays this definitely is not the case anymore. This current ‘rupture’ of the prestige of higher education is omnipresent in the graduate employability research of e.g. Tomlinson and Holmes (2016), according to whom the mass higher education has led to an inflation of a higher education degree as a marker of human capital as well as a ‘guarantee’ of employability.

Concerning the above-mentioned concept of migration as an investment in human capital, Schultz remarks that “young people can expect a higher return on their investment in migration than older people” (1971, 30). The act of relatively young people moving abroad to study, hoping also to pursue a career abroad, should thus simultaneously commit a major investment in their human capital. This investment entails the careful summarizing of the ‘total cost’ of migration, so e.g. the study fees shortly imposed on non-EU/EEA students willing to study in Finland will contribute to the total cost of their investment, and it remains to be seen, whether they still perceive studying in Finland as a profitable investment. However, migration itself cannot be argued to provide an individual with a sufficient amount of human capital, but is rather *a means* to having access to sources of factors which pile up one one’s stocks of human capital. By this I mean e.g. the assumption according to which a university degree from a specific country would have more prestige than a similar degree pursued in another country, perhaps in the country of origin of the migrant (Martikainen et.al. 2013).

Unlike Schultz, another renowned human capital theorist, Gary Becker (1964), defines human capital as a product of a certain personal and cultural background of an individual.

According to Becker, these personal and cultural factors are more important than economic reasons regarding the choice of education and training, and thus education should rather be perceived as a ‘consumption good’, instead of an investment (Becker 1964). Taking into account the personal preferences as well as those entailed in the culture seems reasonable, as the skillsets required in different environments surely vary, and one can hardly name some ‘universal human capital’, having the same value all around the globe or even within one country. To a certain Finnish employer, a (previous) degree from a non-Finnish university and language skills in e.g. Russian might be of great interest, if the company is planning to enter the Russian markets for instance, whereas for another employer, these very same components of human capital might be totally irrelevant.

A significantly more recent theorist of human capital, James Heckman, shares Schultz’s understanding of the acquisition of skills at a young age as an investment for the future. Heckman, however, places his emphasis on the work experience and the influence of the work place instead of education in terms of fostering human capital. Drawing on Heckman’s work (2000), Ng Kok-Yee et.al. (2011) discuss in their article “Global Culture Capital and Cosmopolitan Human Capital: The Effects of Global Mindset and Organizational Routines on Cultural Intelligence and International Experience” the growing influence of a firm’s human capital in achieving and maintaining its competitive advantage in today’s global and knowledge-intensive economy. The authors argue that in order to succeed, firms require ‘cosmopolitan human capital’, by which they refer to “the experience and skills that individuals possess that enable them to work effectively in many different cultures”, e.g. proficiency in several languages and skills in intercultural communication (Kok-Yee et.al. 2011, 97). This concept of cosmopolitan human capital seems interesting in relation to the labor market integration of international graduates, i.e. persons, who most likely possess a various skillset acquired through a degree at a foreign university, surrounded by students and teachers from several cultures. The question is, whether the companies in Central Finland recognize the potential, the rather unique human capital of this group – the answer to the question will be examined in the analyses of this thesis.

### **2.3. Social capital: Norm-based communities and multifunctional networks fostering employability**

One of the pioneers of social capital theory is Pierre Bourdieu (1986), who distinguished between several forms of capital present in our societies. However, his main emphasis was on economic and cultural capital, leaving social capital on a remote third place. Tom Schuller, Stephen Baron and John Field (2000, 5) have defined Bourdieu's view in a following way: "social capital is not reducible to economic or cultural capital, nor is it independent of them, acting as a multiplier for the other two forms, while being created and maintained by the conversion of economic and cultural capital in the 'unceasing effort of sociability'". This 'unceasing effort of sociability' can be understood as the act of social interaction, where social capital is being created and maintained in a manner omnipresent in that society. The more recent theorists of social capital can be roughly divided into two groups: those with their emphasis on networks, and those focusing on social capital in communities. The latter one "highlights the importance of shared norms and values for fostering and enabling social exchange and cooperation—and the consequences for communities when these are lacking" (Nahapiet 2011, 80). For instance, Finnish managers might doubt on the adaptability of foreign graduates into the Finnish working culture, hence doubt they would be lacking on the required form of social capital in the community formed by the place of employment. Also Bourdieu's concept of social capital seems to fall into this norm-emphasizing, community-based category. Nevertheless, his rather vague definition of the concept social capital and its subordinated 'ranking' compared to the other forms of capital led to the choice of focusing on other social capital theorists in the framework for this thesis.

Another important proponent of social capital theory, James Coleman (1988), also draws on the norms of the society. For Coleman, the concept of closure of the social structure ensures the stability of the norms as well as enhances trustworthiness within a community. The trustworthiness of social structures allows the proliferation of obligations and expectations, which again is not possible without closure of the social structure. Furthermore, a concept linked to trustworthiness, reputation, cannot arise in an open structure (Coleman 1988, 108). Hence according to Coleman, the closure of the social structure is required for the effective functioning of the social capital, which is formed



through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action, but the question brought about by the word ‘closure’ is, who is excluded from this social structure? When it comes to the labor market, is the closed social structure formed only by natives who already are familiar with the norms? However, very *strict* norms within the structure “can reduce innovativeness in an area, not only deviant actions that harm others but also deviant actions that can benefit everyone” (Coleman 1988, 105), which surely is a positive argument for hiring international graduates who might ‘think outside of the box’. According to a recent study by CIMO (2017), Finnish companies tend to recognize this innovativeness that international graduates bring about, but the companies would need more support in finding suitable international talents.

Besides norms, Coleman discusses the role of trustworthiness and reputation ensured through the closure of the social structure. A further social capital theorist, Francis Fukuyama, also emphasizes the role of trust in building up and fostering social capital. Trust and trustworthiness, according to him, are of both intrinsic and instrumental value (Fukuyama 2000). In the case of migrants as labor force, the latter one of Fukuyama’s concepts, hence *reputation* for trustworthiness could be argued to have a great influence on their employability. Stereotypes of the working manner of certain ethnicities may form their reputation in terms of trustworthiness and thus define, whether they fill the norms of being included in the social structure or not. In case someone is trying to enter a closed social structure, information on the functioning of the community is essential. Coleman argues the following (1988, 104): “An important form of social capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations. Information is important in providing a basis for action. One means by which information can be acquired is by use of social relations that are maintained for other purpose.” In terms of the international graduates, contacts among the native population seem to be crucial for the acquisition of information on the labor market. However, acquisition of information is costly, which is described by the concept of reciprocity costs within the social capital theory. Reciprocity costs refer to the debts in the form of future services induced by the request for help from a contact (Flap & Boxman 2001, 161). Numerous academic articles on labor migration suggest that migrants are often in a vulnerable position on the labor market and thus prone to dependency on the (few) contacts they have (ibid.). Subsequently, employers stand a chance of taking advantage of the reciprocity costs in an unbalanced manner, if the migrants depend on the

job they are offered.

The amount of reciprocity costs corresponds with the amount of social capital one possesses, as “individuals in social structures with high levels of obligations outstanding at any time have more social capital on which they can draw” (Coleman 1988, 103). Hence the lower the degree of *dependency* on one’s contacts and the information and services they provide, the more social capital – unless it is mutual dependency, where the reciprocity costs are equal. Furthermore, Coleman lists factors affecting the needs that persons have for help “in the existence of other sources of aid (such as government welfare services), in the degree of affluence (which reduces aid needed from others), in cultural differences in the tendency to lend aid and ask for aid, in the closure of social networks, in the logistics of social contacts, and other factors” (ibid). Both Coleman and another social capital theorist, Nan Lin (2001), have shown interest on the so-called weak ties, i.e. contacts other than family or closest friends, in pursuing and maintaining social capital. The weak ties have been argued to be more fruitful in terms of job search, as these contacts tend to deliver information on previously unknown job openings more efficiently than strong ties, i.e. friends and family (ibid). Subsequently, the further emphasis of Lin’s research lies on the influence of networks on *occupational mobility*.

The social capital theorists focusing on networks, most renowned of them being Nan Lin (2001), examine primarily the consequences of network structure and the configuration of social ties for the access and mobilization of resources. Putting this into the context of the thesis, a relevant denominator of the social capital of the interviewees in terms of their employability could be the structure and expandability of their network – e.g. if they also know Finnish students or Finnish locals working in their field, or if their contacts are formed by future professionals of their field only, or expand to other fields too. Lin (2001, 17-18) defines social capital as “investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions”. This process can furthermore be divided in three sub-processes, namely “1) investment in social capital, 2) access to and mobilization of social capital, and 3) returns of social capital”. (ibid.) In the scope of this thesis, these sub-processes could refer to 1) networking during the studies, e.g. by being an active member of student organizations, 2) mobilizing this acquired social capital by e.g. searching for the first entry-

level job through the contact gained at the university, and 3) succeeding in finding a job through a contact. In accordance with Lin, Robert Putnam (2002) also uses the notion of social capital when referring to the “market value” of social networks entailing private or “internal” returns: for instance, many of us find our jobs because of whom we know as much as what we know. According to Putnam (2002, 7-8) “some economic sociologists have even calculated the “cash value” of a person’s Rolodex or address book, in the sense that one’s income is determined by the range of his or her social connections, perhaps even more than by educational credentials. In that sense, social capital may rival human capital as a factor in individual productivity.”

In her article “Good Networks and Good Jobs: The Value of Social Capital to Employers and Employees”, Bonnie H. Erickson (2001) also defines network variety, i.e. the number of different kinds of people that someone knows, as an important indicator of social capital. Furthermore, she argues that in terms of employability, the effects of human capital have been overestimated, whereas those of social capital have been either underestimated or interpreted in too narrow a sense (Erickson 2001, 127-129). By a narrow sense, she refers to another statement of hers (Erickson 2001, 128): “Attention has been limited to hiring *through* networks, not hiring *for* networks. Yet results below show that employers prefer to hire people with a greater social capital for many upper-level jobs, and that employees with greater social capital get better jobs whether they were hired through personal contacts or not”. In terms of this thesis, this is relevant as the country of origin of an international graduate seems to affect their position in the labor market - more precisely, the prestige of networks available through a graduate originating from a more affluent country with large markets seems to encourage hiring these graduates over the ones from less affluent countries. On the other hand, in her statement Erickson refers to upper-level jobs (ibid.), whereas a recent university graduate might in any case be more likely to search for, and acquire, an entry-level job, so it is somewhat questionable whether Erickson’s statement can be applied to the cases of the interviewees of this study. However, Erickson does not define the concept of upper-level jobs more precisely, so basically any job that requires a degree from a university *could* be considered “upper-level”.

Some theorists of social capital question the relevance of social capital in the early stage of one's career, since it takes time to build an extensive network. "Finally, later on in someone's occupational career – when an individual has built up a network and earned a certain degree of labor experience – the interaction between human and social capital seems to become more important" (Flap & Boxman 2001, 178). Does this mean that human capital would have a greater significance for the employability of a recent graduate? After all, several social capital theorists argue that human capital is 'not enough' in order to find even an entry-level job, but contacts are also required. Perhaps the above-mentioned statement by Flap and Boxman (2001, 178) boils down to the assumption that at a later point in one's professional career, the steps on the 'career ladder' can be more precisely calculated, as one has built up both human and social capital - compared to the starting point of the career, where the networks mainly serve in finding just *any* job in the wished sector, or even any job at all.

#### **2.4. The multifaceted interplay between Human and Social Capital: Rivalry or Complementation?**

For the purposes of this study, it is important to understand the relationship between the concepts of human and social capital. In the Oxford Handbook of Human Capital, Janine Nahapiet (2011, 79) defines the difference between human and social capital as follows: "If human capital is about the value of people's individual abilities, social capital is about the value of social connections and relationships." According to her, neither of the two concepts has a clear-cut definition, but concerning social capital, the differences of definitions are even greater than those of human capital. Furthermore, there is still dispute even over the suitability of the term 'capital', when it comes to defining either the capabilities of an individual (human capital) or interpersonal relations (social capital) – in terms of the latter, the consensus is even weaker. How can we 'commodify' networks and social relations? Despite the lack of consensus on the term 'social capital', several theorists agree that as a phenomenon it does resemble some forms of capital, such as being a durable asset offering benefits on individual and collective level. On the other hand, unlike financial capital, human and social capital require maintenance – e.g. language skills, a

form of human capital, or interpersonal relations as a location and source of social capital, cannot maintain their level without an effort. (Nahapiet 2011, 80-81.) Schultz (1971, 43) argued this already in the first decades of the blossoming of the human capital theory: “Human capital deteriorates when it is idle because unemployment impairs the skills that workers have acquired. Losses in earnings can be cushioned by appropriate payments, but these do not keep idleness from taking its toll from human capital”. This surely applies to international graduates as well: months or even years of unemployment take their toll, and the cost of investment of having studied abroad rises.

According to Coleman (1988), who extensively discussed the interplay of human and social capital, these two forms of capital function in most cases complementarily, instead of rivalry. Furthermore, Coleman (1988, 98) argues that all the forms of capital are productive, “making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible”. Similar to physical capital and human capital, social capital is “not completely fungible but may be specific to certain activities. A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others” (ibid.). For instance, using one’s family-based social capital by getting hired in a company led by one’s parents does bring success in the form of having a job, but this very same social capital probably will not be useful in terms of gaining the respect of the new colleagues. The same characteristic of the capitals can be applied to human capital, too: for some jobs in Finland, one is required to speak Finnish *and* Swedish, but then again there are jobs where the skills in one or another of those languages are irrelevant. This fluctuation of human capital is aligned with the already discussed statement of Becker (1964) emphasizing the importance of personal and cultural preferences in fostering human capital.

Despite these similarities, according to Coleman, there are also factors separating human and social capital from each other, regarding the debate on the suitability of the term ‘capital’: “For example, unlike physical capital and much human capital, social capital is a public good: the actor or actors who generate social capital often capture only a small part of its benefits” (Coleman 1988, 95). Social capital, like human capital to some extent according to Schultz (1971), can also be enriched by use, e.g. maintaining a close relationship to a former study colleague may lead to a job offer, or at least to acquiring new

contacts through the relationship by sharing each other's networks. After all, this is essential about social capital – it lies in the relationships. As Coleman (1988, 100) puts it: “If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the relations among persons”.

It is exactly this argued lack of tangibility of social capital that turns it into a rather challenging research concept. However, the suitability of the network-based theories on social capital for examining migrants' position on the labor market seems solid, as these theories have been utilized within labor market research for decades. Furthermore, the possible explanations behind the employability of a person are equally intangible – the interviewees of the thesis are high-skilled, their levels of human capital are high, but still there is ‘something’ lacking. The concept of social capital thus appears to be a useful tool in finding out, what this ‘something’ could be composed of.

In conclusion, for the aim of studying employability, in this study the focus will be on the networks of the interviewees, drawing mainly on the work of social capital theorists Putnam (2002) and Coleman (1988). In terms of human capital, the country-specific understanding of required skillsets, as suggested by Becker (1964), is emphasized, in contradiction to the discourse on ‘global labor markets’ induced by the policy paper.

### **3. METHODOLOGY: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS AN OVERALL METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.1. Critical discourse analysis**

When designing this research and the subsequent research questions, the first choice was met between a quantitative or qualitative research, or a mixture of those. As my main interest was in examining in-depth individual experiences and perceptions, qualitative research was a rather natural choice. Next I was pondering between discourse analysis and content analysis as a method for analyzing both the policy paper and the interviews, or maybe writing a discourse analysis of the policy paper, and a content analysis of the interviews. Within content analysis, it would have been reasonable to combine the quantitative and qualitative: on a quantitative note, I could have e.g. counted, how many times the word ‘integration’ comes up in the policy paper, and then drawn conclusions in a qualitative manner. However, as my data set consists of one policy paper only, and the ten interviews that were conducted are also quite limited in numbers, quantitative analysis did not seem very relevant – especially with regard to my research questions, which are clearly qualitatively oriented. Nevertheless, the division of the data into categories, as is typical of content analysis (Lewis-Beck 2004, 889-890), also did not seem very different from the identification of discourses at first glance, so a qualitative content analysis was still an option. When looking into the different forms of content analysis, e.g. thematic and referential content analyses, the quantitative part of the analysis did seem quite indispensable for the coding process, i.e. the data analysis technique of content analyses (ibid.). Discourse analysis, in turn, resembled an opportunity to grasp the manifold roles of the language choices, similar to the content analysis, but without the quantitative part, which would not have fit my research questions.

The overall methodological approach of my thesis is thus the critical discourse analysis as defined by Norman Fairclough (2011; 2017). My research is guided by an ontological position, i.e. interest in the perceived realities of individuals dependent on their roles, values and backgrounds, for which there can be no right or wrong answers. When

analyzing these perceptions of the reality, I draw on the three major features of discourses, as listed in the ‘SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods’: construction, function and variability (Lewis-Beck (ed.) 2004, 265). Concerning construction, there are two senses: discourses themselves are constructed, i.e. result of available resources, and at the same time constructive, hence offering certain versions of the world that are distinct from other versions, i.e. they are constructing the reality of an individual. Discourses are also functional: things are said or written in a certain context, and perform actions such as evaluating, criticizing or defending, in that context. Furthermore, the versions of the world, the discourses, are variable according to the context, meaning that people should not be expected to be consistent. (ibid.) This emphasis on the context is simultaneously a weak *and* a strong point of the critical discourse analysis, or even of qualitative research methods in general: on one hand, it can be a source of verification bias, meaning that we expect certain kind of results and interpret the data according to those expectations, searching for affirmation on our hypotheses on the context (Flyvbjerg 2001). On the other hand, this focus on the context enables us to reflect on the data in a flexible manner and within a limited scope, without the pressure of seeking for ‘universal’ answers. The three features of discourses (Lewis-Beck (ed.) 2004, 265); construction, function and variability, seem to be useful in examining the perceptions that are of interest for this research, and suit the chosen ontological position, e.g. by not seeking for ‘ultimate truths’ but rather for the individual versions of the ‘truth’, depending on the context. Among several forms of discourse analysis, the critical discourse analysis by Fairclough was chosen because of its emphasis on the role of the language choices reflecting power relations in discourses, as language is such an important tool in policy-drafting.

The critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Fairclough sees “language as one element of social events and social practices that is dialectically related to other elements (including social institutions and aspects of the material world). Its objective is to show relationships between language and other elements of social events and practices.” (Fairclough 2011, 214) The CDA has its roots in linguistics but is a rather interdisciplinary method. Furthermore, due to following characteristics it can be viewed at as a branch of social science: “(a) it seeks to illuminate nonobvious connections between language and other elements of social life; (b) it focuses on how language figures in the constitution and reproduction of social relations of power, domination, and exploitation; and (c) it takes a



specifically language focus on social emancipation and the enhancement of social justice” (ibid). Simultaneously, this critical stance justifies its label as ‘critical’ discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis also draws on the theorizations of hegemony by e.g. Gramsci, and is “committed to enhancing the capacity of research on the social transformations of the contemporary world (globalization, neoliberalism, new capitalism) to address how language figures in processes of social transformation” (Fairclough 2011, 215). As globalization and neoliberalism are noticeable factors behind the analyzed policy paper, and relations of power are recognizable in the interview data, this approach of CDA seems to suit this thesis also on an ‘ideological’ note. Moreover, Fairclough and Pierre Bourdieu share the view on neoliberal ideology shaping the concept of globalization which ties the CDA and part of the theoretical framework of the thesis together, as Bourdieu’s notion of social capital is included in the framework.

Critical discourse analysis sees discourse as a socially constructive entity, in which language contributes to change in other social elements and thus constitutes, reproduces and changes ideologies and social practices (Fairclough 2011, 214). Focusing on social practices enables combining the perspective of structure and the perspective of action, whereby a social practice is defined as a “relatively permanent way of acting socially which is defined by its position within a structured network of practices, and a domain of social action and interaction which both reproduces structures and has the potential to transform them” (Fairclough 2017, 122). The aspect of combining structure and action serves well in terms of this thesis, as the data analysis comprises of two interrelated parts: the analysis of a policy paper (structure) and the analysis of interviews with individuals affected by these policies and thus acting within the limits set by them (action). The analyzed policy paper represents the ‘structure’ by reflecting the political decisions made by the governing parties, as policies are the outcome of political negotiations. Hence, the political agendas and overall societal atmosphere toward migration, i.e. structure, define the policies which again define the actions of the migrants. Furthermore, there is an analogy between the interplay of structure and action described above, and the following notion of Tomlinson and Holmes (2016, 6): “Employability captures the enduring interaction between individuals’ agency on one hand and social structure on the other”. Due to this analogy, the critical discourse analysis should be a suitable method for researching representations of employability in policies that, in turn, affect the

action/agency of an individual.

In general, discourse analysis is perceived as a flexible method in analyzing policies, being capable of capturing the whole process of policy presentation (Marston 2004, 1). In this case, the whole process can be understood as a full range of actions, starting when drafting the migration policies and the respective policy paper analyzed in the first part of the data analysis, and reaching all the way to the ‘reality’ as perceived by the labor migrants affected by the policies and estimating them during the interviews. Concerning the discourses of policies, especially examining, what or who has been *excluded* can reveal a lot about the policy-making process and the aims of the policies, since these ‘frontiers’ of inclusion and exclusion show “how the exclusion is integral to the [policy-making] system itself” (Simon (ed) 2005, 155). Hence it is not sufficient to analyze, how policies are presented, but one should also pay attention to what has been excluded.

Within the critical discourse analysis, the process of policy presentation is perceived as an end product of ‘semiosis’ - a combination of all forms of meaning making, including language. The CDA views social life as interconnected networks of social practices of diverse sorts, e.g. economic, political or cultural, and all of these practices have a semiotic element (Fairclough 2017, 122). The emphasis on interconnected networks of social practices seems to go hand in hand with the theoretical framework chosen for this thesis, as the most important theoretical background is formed by the social capital theory, looking into the importance of networks and communities shaped by certain norms, i.e. by social practices. The CDA does, however, also recognize nuances within the networks and communities, moving towards a more individual, agent-like level. According to Fairclough, semiosis figures in the ‘performances’ of particular positions within social practices: “The identities of people who operate in positions in a practice are only partly specified by the practice itself. People who differ in social class, in gender, in nationality, in ethnic or cultural membership, and in life experience, produce different ‘performances’ of a particular position.” (Fairclough 2017, 123) Applied to this thesis, despite the common denominators, there is no one certain ‘way’ to be an international graduate, as it is not a homogenous mass but individuals with various experiences, skills, goals, and so on, hence they are individual agents with their own subsequent ‘performances’ in their search of success on the labor market.

As already briefly mentioned, critical discourse analysis has been utilized in the research on the interplay of neoliberalism and globalization. This is relevant for the thesis as well, as the importance of ‘internationalization of labor due to the globalization of markets’ is emphasized both in the public discourse and in the policy paper. This kind of discourse on globalization tends to be colored by rather neoliberal tones, giving truisms on how ‘we ought to’ act in order to foster the current societal order, which is imposed as something non-changeable. This is where the choice of language can play a major role and thus unconsciously affect people’s perceptions. Fairclough (2017, 130) defines this practice as ‘managing perceptions’, a key feature of policy-making. Subsequently, by carefully looking into the language of a policy paper, one can discover what kind of power relations are conveyed and maintained through this official use of language. However, one *ought not* to forget the subjectivity of discourse analysis as a method – as we are individuals with different ‘performances’, someone else might interpret the very same discourses in a completely different way, which can be seen as a flaw of the method.

As a discourse analyst, I am aware of the influence my personal values and beliefs may have on the analysis - for example, I might view some policies, that according to my values are too restrictive, more critically or with a different emphasis than a researcher, whose values are more compatible with those embedded in the policies. Values are an integral part of research in social sciences, as they constantly impact the researcher *and* the participants of the research, consciously and unconsciously (Flyvbjerg 2001). Besides values, having *ex ante* presumptions on the topic surely affects the research process as well. Having tutored international students of the University of Jyväskylä during several semesters, I can argue to have acquired background information on their employability prior to the thesis writing process. On one hand, this link between my commitment to tutoring and the topic of the thesis has motivated me throughout the process. On the other hand, those subjective, everyday life perceptions of the topic I had already prior to this study, probably have affected my way of conducting the discourse analyses of both the policy paper and the interviews.

As the objective of the thesis is to compare the policies with the perceptions of their target group, analyzing both data sets with the same method, i.e. critical discourse analysis, seems justified. To increase the validity of the research by means of triangulation, two

different data sources were chosen, i.e. the policy paper and the interviews within the target group of the policies. Concerning triangulation, however, the importance of rather integrating than adding up different methods should be taken into account (Iosifides 2011, 229). Using the discourse analysis of the policy paper as a background for the interviews and later analyzing the interview data through the same method should count as integrating in this sense. However, whenever comparing ‘rhetoric and practice’, i.e. the policy paper and the experiences of the affected ones, one should keep in mind that it is quite common for politicians and civil servants to rely on ‘tough’ rhetoric when addressing public concerns while simultaneously introducing more allowing policies (Boswell & Geddes 2011, 81). Despite utilizing the same method for both data sets, the two sorts of data hence should not be analyzed through ‘the same lenses’.

### **3.2. Research material: Policy document and qualitative interviews**

#### **Policy document**

The “Future of Migration 2020 Strategy” was drafted by politicians, public officials, researchers, representatives of working life, civil society organizations and a narrow group of Finnish citizens and was published in the form of a Government Resolution in spring 2013. The main focus of the policy paper is on migration flows to Finland and the significance of mobility to a society with a rapidly aging population. Furthermore, the strategy examines questions concerning mobility and integration and aligns the development and aims of the Finnish migration policy. Further emphasis was put on the openness and diversity of the society and on the importance of “everyone finding their own place” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 3). The action plan based on the strategy was launched in March 2014 and has been described as one of the core undertakings of the respective government [of 2011-2014].

When we look at the structure of the policy paper, it has been divided into four following sections: Migration today, Towards the 2020’s, Migration policy principles and Strategy implementation and monitoring. The first chapter, migration today, goes through some general statistics on migration, its different forms and impacts and the integration of

migrants in Finland. The second chapter focuses on the aims of the migration policy in the 2020's, which are divided into greater mobility, change of dependency ratio and greater diversity in society. The third chapter, migration policy principles, seems to form the core of the whole policy paper. It consists of three sub-chapters: principle 1: Finland is an open and safe country, principle 2: Everyone can find a role to play, and principle 3: Diversity is part of everyday life. These principles are partly linked to the aims listed in the second chapter, but are described more in detail in this third chapter, accompanied with suggestions for action and policy change. Throughout the policy paper, the importance of increasing the employment rate of existing as well as arriving migrants is highlighted.

The fourth chapter concludes the policy paper briefly by calling for commitment from different actors of society and cooperation between different forums, such as Government Integration Programme and Strategy for Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland. Furthermore, the importance of sufficient budgeting is emphasized, alongside with the required monitoring and reporting undertaken by the Ministry of the Interior. Last but not least, the action plan based on this policy paper is mentioned, including the timetable for the implementation. Some policy changes indicated in the action plan have already been actualized, such as the visa lengthening of non-EU citizens, who since 2015 are allowed to stay in Finland for 12 months after their graduation in order to search for a job, instead of the previous time limitation of 6 months (Study in Finland 2015). This change is supposed to increase their likelihood of becoming employed in Finland.

This document was chosen because of its emphasis on the topics being of interest for this thesis: migration and employment. By now, 2017, the policy paper is already some years old, and this is of relevance because some policy measures mentioned in it, e.g. the extension of the visa for non-EU graduates, have already taken place and could thus be referred to during the interviews, that were conducted in early 2016. Of course policies change and take new directions, but analyzing a policy paper from a few years back gives a better chance to look into its actual effects than a freshly drafted document.

## Qualitative interviews

Besides the policy paper analysis, the perceptions of individuals affected by these policies are mapped through qualitative interviews. In the field of migration research, qualitative interviews are a widely utilized method that enables the integration of the “causal powers of structures and cultural forms with those of social agents and focus on how their interplay results in a certain migration-related phenomena” (Iosifides 2011, 234), as is intended in this thesis when examining the relation between structures, i.e. policies, and social agents, i.e. migrants. As a method, qualitative interviews “lend themselves most naturally to the study of individual lived experience. In fact, when one wants to know how an individual experiences some phenomenon, interviewing has a certain primacy among the different methods” (Brinkmann 2013, 47). My main interest is to find out, what kind of experiences and perceptions the international graduates have concerning their opportunities in the Finnish labor markets, hence qualitative interviews represent a valid method for answering my research questions.

These perceptions presented in the interviews and the interpretations of the interviewees of the reality around them are important because it can be assumed that those very same perceptions inform their actions (Czarniawska 2004, 49). In line with the interplay of structure and action, which is of interest within critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2017, 122), I am interested exactly in these *actions* of the interviewees, and in what relation they are to the *structure* portrayed by the policy paper. According to Brinkmann (2013, 49-50), especially research questions aiming at discovering how something is done, i.e. actions, or experienced, can favorably be studied using qualitative interviewing. In this thesis, interviews are seen rather as a form of data generation than data collection, and the subsequent interview data is perceived as “presenting one of many possible representations of the world” (Seale (ed) 2004, 181). On this note, however, one should not forget about the impact that *values* have not only on the researcher, but also on the answers of the participants of the research: as values continuously affect us consciously and unconsciously, the interviewees might answer the questions rather based on their values; what they consider as the ‘right answer’, instead of their ‘real’ perceptions (Flyvbjerg 2001). This might be the case especially concerning timid topics, such as the interviewees’ perceptions on other migrants or refugees, as their answers would reveal not only their

values but also their moral reflection on wider thematics concerning the society. Nevertheless, as I am approaching my data from an ontological perspective, being interested in these individual perceptions of the interviewees, it is not so relevant to seek after some sort of ‘truth’, but rather reflect upon the reasons behind their answers in that specific context, and what those answers might reveal on their individual realities.

Within qualitative interviewing, there are different ways of researching the perceptions and experiences of the interviewees. As the interest of this research lies in personal perceptions and experiences of the interviewees, hence approaching them from an ontological point of view, open-ended and flexible questions are more suitable for finding out about their representations of the social reality in question, compared to standardized interviews which probably could not trigger the interviewees to describe their perceptions and experiences to the same extent (Seale (ed) 2004, 182). On the other hand, open interviews would be even too flexible as a method, as the focus of the thesis is on one sector of an interviewee’s life - on her life as a migrant in terms of employment. The hence chosen method, semi-structured qualitative interviews, enable the interviewees to give insight on their experiences and perceptions rather freely, but yet simultaneously ‘sticking to the topic’ and not letting the discussion flow completely uncontrolled. Interviews were based to an interview guide (see Appendix). However, while conducting the interviews, there was no certain order of questions, but merely certain set of topics covered in the order defined by the natural flow of the conversation. Compared to e.g. standardized interviews, the ‘natural flow of the conversation’ poses some challenges on the interviewer concerning the validity and ethics of the interviews: if the discussion proceeds smoothly and in a relaxed atmosphere, the interviewee might e.g. ask the interviewer for her opinion on the topic, or ask, what the other interviewees have said about it. These kinds of interventions of the interviewee require ‘careful passivity’ from the interviewer, as defined by Czarniawska (2004).

A further challenge was brought about by the feelings of frustration indicated by several interviewees – despite understanding the reasons behind these emotions, the interviewer should remain neutral. The frustration associated with my interview questions also made me reflect on the ethical aspects of the study; whether it was justified to bring about negative emotions for the sake of creating research data, in spite of having the consent of

the interviewees to voluntarily participate in the study. Some interviewees seemed to, however, appreciate the chance to share their experiences, including frustration, and were positively surprised by my interest in their perceptions. There were also individual differences between the interviewees concerning the scope of the data they ‘offered’, though: some responded the questions very briefly, whereas others showed strong emotions and shared very detailed experiences.

The main data for the thesis thus consists of 10 semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted in January-March 2016 with interviewees from Chile, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. Four interviewees have graduated from studies in Information and Mobile Technologies, two in Sports Psychology, two in Music, Mind and Technology, and the rest have academic backgrounds as various as Intercultural Communication and Physics. The interviewees were found through personal contacts among international students and via emailing lists of the university. As the aim was to find non-EU graduates still residing in Finland, and preferably in Jyväskylä region, the target group did not seem to be very large, so there was no chance for ‘choosing’ the interviewees – thus e.g. the gender composition of the interviewees is quite unbalanced, only three of them being female. Nevertheless, finding interviewees that have stayed in Jyväskylä region was surprisingly successful, as eight of them still resided there, and the ninth one was planning to return to Jyväskylä. The only interviewee who was not residing in Central Finland anymore was working in Helsinki at the time. Four of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and the remaining six on Skype. As a medium for conducting research, Skype surely offers flexibility, but not the same feeling of proximity as face-to-face interviews, during which it felt easier to build trust between the interviewee and me as a researcher. However, since I was already living in Vienna, Austria, when conducting most of the interviews, I had to resort to Skype. The participants that were interviewed via Skype did not share any negative feedback on it as a medium, though, when being asked about this matter at the end of the interview.

In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, they will be referred to on a general level, based either on the geographical region they originate from (e.g. “Middle-Eastern interviewee”), or on the subject they were majoring in (e.g. “the IT graduates”). As the University of Jyväskylä is rather small, referring to the interviewees by their gender,



country of origin or study program would simply reveal too much information about them, hence endangering their anonymity. In the beginning of each of the interviews, the interviewees were ensured that their anonymity will be protected, and that no one else will have access to the interview data apart from me. Furthermore, I explained the purpose and aim of my study, and how their answers will be analyzed. The interviewees gave their consent for using the interview data for the purposes of this study, as well as allowed contacting them in case further information was needed.

### **3.3. Analysis of the research material**

Having pondered on the theoretical framework of the thesis, I chose the policy paper (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013) for the reasons discussed above. Despite having carefully familiarized myself with the concepts of human and social capital prior to the analyses, my goal during the analyses was to discover ‘freely’, in what ways human and social capital are embedded in both the policy paper and interviews, instead of carefully defining these concepts in advance and then utilizing this definition for the analyses. My approach to the data was thus inductive. Following the characteristics of the critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2011, 214-215), I constantly paid attention on the representation of power, hegemony and social justice while analyzing both data sets. Furthermore, I was looking into the interaction between the neoliberal ideology, especially present in the policy paper, and its link to theories on human and social capital, when creating the discourses.

In the policy paper, I have discovered five different discourses by means of the critical discourse analysis: 1) discourse on the competitiveness of the economy, 2) integration, 3) development, 4) border control, and 5) diversity discourse. However, the discourses are somewhat intertwined and each includes aspects from each other. It was a conscious choice to keep the amount of analyzed discourses quite limited, confining it only to the most relevant ones, as I thought it would be easier to go more in-depth in the analysis then. When analyzing the discourses, the emphasis might have been on the aspects of the policy paper that I wanted to criticize, as my premises toward the policy paper were critical from the beginning on.

For the analysis of the interviews, first, the ten interviews were transcribed. Then I started mapping themes that were mentioned frequently by the interviewees, and organized this data into discourses. In total, there were six major discourses embedded in the interview data – only partly the same discourses as in the policy paper. As I noticed that the policy paper analysis and the interview data do not always go ‘hand in hand’ with regard to the discourses, I decided to create the discourses of the interview data independent of the policy paper analysis. The five discourses discovered in the interview data are: discourse on 1) global competition over skilled labor, 2) networking, 3) Finnish language, 4) border/migration control, 5) diversity, and 6) development. However, as I had already analyzed the policy paper prior to the analysis of the interviews, the policy analysis had a constant impact on my interpretation of the interview data. Subsequently, I was comparing the data sets already while analyzing the interviews. The interplay between structure, i.e. policies, and action, i.e. experiences of the interviewees, as described by Fairclough (2017, 122), was present throughout the analysis of the interviews. The final comparison between the discourses of the policy paper and the interviews was, nevertheless, conducted after having finished both analyses in order to have an overall understanding of the data. The comparison led to a few policy recommendations for enhancing the employability of international graduates based on my research data.

## 4. DISCOURSES IN THE POLICY PAPER

In this chapter, I will describe the five identified discourses in the ‘Future of Migration 2020 Strategy’ policy paper of the Finnish Ministry of the Interior (2013).

### Discourse on the competitiveness of the economy

The discourse of competitiveness of the economy portrays migrants as means to enhance the potentialities of Finland in this global competition over skilled labor. In a globalized world, migration obviously becomes more and more common, as the mobility of people in general increases. This has also been recognized when drafting the first principle of the policy paper: “Living and working in different countries broadens people’s experiences and skills. Migrants to Finland bring with them innovative ideas and new ways of doing things. Mobility creates international networks that can be utilised in many different ways.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 13) Thus migrants should be seen as an asset to the country, not as a threat or expense. However, this hype only concerns a certain type of migrants: young, highly educated, professional. This classification of a welcome migrant is introduced already in the preface by Päivi Räsänen, the Finnish Minister of Interior at the time: “Finland needs skilled workers” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior, 11). These are the kind of migrants seen as valuable: “- - there will be an increase in competition between countries for skilled and innovative workers. Competition for workers will increase globally as countries compete to attract value-adding activities. To succeed in this competition, Finland must be able to attract skilled labour effectively.” (ibid.) Regardless of the neoliberally oriented unfairness of this point of view, the international students graduating in Finland and willing to build their careers here should thus be more than welcome. Their human and social capital should suffice: high education pursued in the same exact country and hence appreciated, expertise, membership in different networks, fresh ideas. How come half of the international graduates remaining in Finland still are unemployed one year after having finished their program?

“The unemployment rate among migrants in Finland is three times higher than in the majority population. The risk of unemployment is also greater among migrants than in the rest of the population. The employment rate nevertheless rises with time residing in Finland, and in the longer term it corresponds with that of the majority population” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 8). However, the future prospects of a migrant seem to be rosier: “The age groups retiring from the labour market in the coming years will be considerably larger than the age groups entering working life. The situation will be most critical in the social and health care sector. There will be more and more citizens requiring these services at the same time as the age groups of young people are shrinking. - - Migration will help to answer to the dependency ratio problem.” (ibid.) In other words, the often-discussed-in-the-media lack of labor mainly concerns the health care sector: “The need for this will be particularly acute in sectors with the greatest labour shortage.” (ibid.) However, research on ageing populations and labor migration shows that an “increase in immigration will at best delay the process of ageing populations by a few generations” because once they are integrated, migrants tend to adopt similar fertility patterns to those of nationals, i.e. having only 1-2 children per family (Boswell & Geddes 2011, 80). An increase in immigration might thus serve as a mid-term solution to the problem of ageing population, but this should probably not be the main factor when drafting migration policies.

In general, the ‘need’ for migration is usually carefully defined; not just any migrants are welcome or even able to come. Besides the already mentioned social and health care sector workers, only “experts and entrepreneurs” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 13) are explicitly mentioned in the document, without further specification of their fields of expertise or business. Somewhat surprisingly, even information technology professionals are not included in the paper, despite the common perception of their high demand on the labor markets. Next, the integration of the foreign graduates to the Finnish labor market is emphasized, and subsequent policy measures, such as increasing the tuition of Finnish and/or Swedish and offering more opportunities for internships, are introduced. However, right after the discussion on the integration of foreign graduates, the next subchapter is focused on border safety and illegal migration, which does not seem very logical. Is this the intended connotation – that in case foreign graduates cannot find employment, they pose a threat to security and become ‘illegal migrants’?

Logically, the worry of arising markets of cheap labor can be reasonable, if migrants cannot integrate to the Finnish society and find a proper job. In the research on labor migration, the arise of (irregular) cheap labor is less likely in countries with a high minimum wage and generous employment benefits which should apply for Finland as well. In countries where the labor markets are more 'flexible', there is also more scope for migrants to accept lower salaries and thus undercut natives. However, even in countries with a stable employment system, employers might obviously take advantage of irregular migrants, as they are a very vulnerable group prone to taking up any opportunity to make a living (Boswell & Geddes 2011, 86). This topic was taken into account in the policy paper, too: "Internationalisation of the labour market can give rise to negative consequences, such as discrimination against foreign workers, illegal working and work performed in the shadow economy. The proper functioning of the labour market requires that such aspects are dealt with more effectively." (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 15) Illegal working and shadow economy are relevant especially in the case of non-EU citizens who were not granted a further visa or work permit but yet wish to stay. "Some foreigners will wish to remain completely outside the official systems, for instance to avoid having to leave Finland. Such persons are at very high risk of social exclusion and exploitation. Fundamental and human rights apply equally to such persons, even where their presence in Finland is unlawful under the Aliens Act." (ibid.) To solve some of the problems caused by visa regulations, more flexibility in terms of requirements for obtaining a visa or work permit is suggested, and already implemented (Study in Finland 2015).

However, despite discussing the principles of equality and human rights in the policy paper, they do not seem to align the main motive for changing migration policies. The discourse on international competition over skilled labor in the globalized world and the consequent restrictions on who is welcome as a migrant seem to put the major emphasis on economy and markets, even when risking the social well-being. This is the tone in multiple parts of the policy paper, including the preface by Räsänen, where she states that "migration issues are given full and proper consideration in Finland's public policy -- in the coming years we tackle issues concerning the country's economy, competitiveness and dependency ratio" (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 3). She also calls for "a more active and forward-looking migration policy" (ibid.), which can be understood in a plethora of ways - in this context, however, it seems to refer to a more competition-

oriented policy, where migrants are mainly seen either benefiting the society (or economy) or not. The presence of the neoliberal agenda of markets valued over other aspects of the society is inevitable. Following the principles of human capital, the exchange value of a migrant defines, how welcome he or she is.

Considering the competitiveness-oriented tone of the policy paper, it is rather surprising to see, how little attention one high-qualified group of migrants, international graduates, receive. In the *only* section discussing international graduates, their number and importance is expressed, though: “The number of foreign students has grown substantially since 2000 - - and this growth is expected to continue in the future. Once they graduate, international degree students represent an important resource for the Finnish labour market. Sufficient skills in Finnish and/or Swedish will be a key requirement for success in the labour market.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 14) However, this is a very scant notion on their importance, considering the emphasis of the policy paper on the knowledge-based economy and competitiveness of Finland. In the research on graduate employability, these terms are usually combined with international graduates, and in some countries – mainly in the English-speaking ones – the role of the university as the ‘main source’ of competitiveness is explicit: “As part of the discourse on a globally competitive ‘knowledge-based economy’, higher education is seen as a key national resource in producing advanced knowledge in fields considered to be strategically important for national economic survival and prosperity. One of the major functions of universities in this competition is to recruit and retain ‘the best and the brightest’ students from across the world.” (Li 2016, 196) In this sense, the Finnish universities might not bear the same burden of having the principal task of curbing the economy, yet, but we seem to be heading that way, too. The decision of substituting non-EU citizens to study fees is a hint to that direction: university is an investment, and functioning profit-oriented. Surely universities are struggling under the diminishing public funding, hence the issue of funding comes down to political decision and subsequent policies: who and what is funded?

Besides the ‘brightest minds’ curbing the Finnish economy, migrants in general are seen as an asset for some sort of country branding: “A good reputation also enhances Finland’s competitiveness. Those who have visited or lived here will spread the word about Finland to the world. So far, little attention has been given to this image of Finland from a

migration perspective.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 13) True, the reputation of a country is strongly affected by the people having visited it, not to mention those having lived there. However, the latest decisions concerning migrants, e.g. the study fees, obviously are very contradictory to these aspirations. In 2013, the ‘political climate’ might have been different from the current one, where the ‘anti-migration spirit’ is surely not spreading a positive image of Finland.

## Integration discourse

The importance of proper, multi-faceted integration of the migrants is emphasized throughout the paper, but especially in the second principle named “Everyone can find a role to play”. The need for a change in integration policies is described as following: “As migration increases, the structure of the resources for integration will need to be reviewed. Where there are insufficient resources, these are currently supplemented on a project-by-project basis, which can have a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of the measures and on establishing the relevant expertise. The standard and availability of services for migrants and the skills of the staff involved are the keys to successful progress in integrating migrants. A core task of the new Centre of Expertise in Migrant Integration, which is to be set up in 2014, is to support the skills of local bodies engaged in integration work while networking very strongly with all existing entities.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 20) Thus the integration policies were/are too fractured and focused on short-term results, even though the real evidence of integration can only be evaluated after a longer time span. Not only need the migrants become integrated in the Finnish society, but there is also need for integrating the different policies and institutions working on their integration. Extensive bureaucracy and ill-corresponding policies only hinder the integration process. However, the ‘sad reality’ behind policies is that they obviously depend on the current political power relations, and as governments change, so do policies. Hence it is challenging to draft policies for a long(er) time span, even though it is exactly the long-term scope that should be guiding the policy drafting process, in order to avoid fractured, overlapping and partly contradictory policies.

Why is the integration of migrants to the Finnish society so important? A plethora of quite obvious reasons are given, even though the first aim is to “avoid the mistakes made in other countries” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 6). According to the policy paper, Finland has such a short history of migration that we should look up the procedures actualized in other, more experienced (European) countries in terms of migration, especially in terms of negative outcomes. In those “other countries” we can see how wrong integration can go and what kind of horrible effects the social exclusion of migrants may have, so in other words, we need to do better (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 12). The successful integration process starts “through work, education and training, children’s daycare, free-time activities, civil society and everyday interaction” (ibid, 18). This everyday interaction, the responsibility of everyone, was already mentioned in the preface of the policy paper by the Minister of the Interior, Päivi Räsänen. She called for individual participation in the integration process of migrants by everyone because “success [of integration] will depend not only on the actions of the society but also on each of us individually” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 3). No matter how safe the society, how tempting the labor markets, but if the migrants and their families do not feel welcome in the Finnish society, they will not want to stay. Räsänen uses sonorous language in her integration discourse: “Migrant communities must be included in the process of building our shared future” (ibid.). The challenges of integration to the Finnish society exist, too: “internationalization and migration have been seen as a threat to national culture. However, not all migration is viewed with equal caution. Traditionally, views towards work-related migration have been the most positive. The views expressed on migration and migrants have also varied according to the respondent’s sex, age, education and place of residence, for example.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 9) Here, the tone is surprisingly neutral, considering the topic being xenophobia. Furthermore, does the notion of work-related migration refer to those who already have a job before entering Finland?

If this kind of interaction between migrants and original population can be fostered, it would open up a plethora of opportunities for gathering social capital - not only for migrants seeking for crucial contacts and networks in order to enter the labor markets, but also for the original population. When thinking in economic terms, which seems to be the agenda of the policy paper, networking with the countries of origin of migrants *via* migrants might turn out to be a very fruitful opportunity to a Finnish company aspiring for



internationalization, for example. This concept within the social capital theory, ‘*hiring for the networks*’ has been discussed in the theoretical framework (Erickson 2001, 127-129) of the thesis. Furthermore, the concept of cosmopolitan human capital (Kok-Yee et.al. 2011, 97) applies here, too – in the increasingly global markets, employees with cross-cultural understanding and various language skills are needed so that the economy can flourish.

It can be argued that in order to be able to be “part of our shared future”, the human capital of the migrants needs to be taken into account increasingly. In the subchapter titled “Migrants can make use of their skills”, the employability of the migrants is again highlighted (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 18-19). Components of human capital are emphasized: in addition to having sufficient skills in Finnish or Swedish and personal networks of contacts, recognition of the professional skills and education of the migrant is also elementary in order to enter the labor market. What comes to language skills, an increase in tuition of Finnish and Swedish is necessary, provided before as well as during employment. This should be the case also concerning international students in English-speaking programs: according to the policy paper, some studies of Finnish should be requirement for obtaining a degree. At least at the University of Jyväskylä, Finnish courses already are an obligatory part of some of the international Master’s degrees, in some of them not. Anyhow, language courses usually are not enough as such, but according to many international students, communicating with native speakers in Finnish would be required to really immerse in the language and culture. Unfortunately, communication between international and native students might be very limited. This is a pity not only in terms of language skills but also in a further sense concerning the accumulation of social capital: personal networks of contacts are crucial for entering labor markets. Furthermore, as discussed in terms of theory of social capital, in order to improve their position in the labor market, contacts to the original population tend to be the most useful to the migrants as the original population can transfer information on the courses of action as well as open positions in the labor markets most efficiently (Martikainen 2013, 235). Lastly, the importance of increasing the recognition of education and vocational competence obtained abroad by the migrants is mentioned, but it is not so relevant for this thesis, as the interviewees will have acquired their higher education in Finland, hence their human capital accumulation in terms of education should not face any problems.

The utilization of the human capital of migrants in the society requires further developing of the availability and use of migration statistics and research data, so we have accurate and timely information on how to help them integrate better. This is the case also in terms of public services that need to be integrated, as stated in the first paragraph. “Migrants are increasingly users of various public services, and so the expertise to take into account migrants and their needs must be further developed.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 16) This sounds legit, but is however kind of a paradox when we are looking at this policy paper itself. According to the preface by Päivi Räsänen (ibid, 3), this “Future of Migration 2020 Strategy” was carefully prepared by “politicians, public officials, civil society organizations, and representatives of working life” - I believe the migrants themselves are missing in this list. I wonder if any *migrants* were actually asked, what should be improved and how, for example in terms of furthering their integration into the Finnish society. Also in the description of the policy preparation process on the web page of the Ministry of the Interior it says that the strategy was drafted by Ministry officials, supported by statistics and previous research on these topics (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2017). This raises the question, for whom these policies are actually drafted - and why the expertise of the target group was not utilized, despite its importance being emphasized in the policy paper. It is possible, though, that some of the civil society organizations heard for the strategy were migrant-led but if so, it would have been necessary to mention this at least at some point of the strategy when boasting about the importance of integration and about utilizing the expertise of the migrants themselves.

In addition to the drafting of the policy paper, one should not neglect the significance of citizenship when integrating to the society. Especially the relatively newly arrived migrants and their needs are very easy to ignore as they are not Finnish citizens and thus not part of the polity - as they cannot vote in the parliamentary elections, politicians do not seem to feel much responsibility for their well-being. I believe this is an important aspect, considering the latest results of parliamentary elections after which the government was formed by parties mainly taking migration into account by wanting to delimit it. Looking at the bright side of the 2015 elections, also the two first members of the Finnish parliament with a refugee-background became elected, which might give a glimpse of hope considering the representation of diversity in the parliament. Nevertheless, the inclusion or exclusion of migrants and their needs in the Finnish polity is an essential

issue in relation to integration, but it has not received lots of attention when drafting this policy paper. The representation of migrants in the polity is only mentioned once, as the importance of migrants being able to exercise democratic rights is acknowledged, followed by the notion that the “voting turnout of migrants in local elections has so far been low, however, and the number of local councillors with a migrant background is small” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 18). To tackle this deficiency, no *concrete* measures are introduced: “Opportunities for migrants to participate must be supported through special measures, and information on these must be provided more actively and through more channels.” (ibid.) What are these special measures? As no concrete measures are introduced, the whole topic might as well be excluded - now this passage merely gives the impression of having been included in the policy paper only for the sake of being able to argue that it was “taken into account”. Furthermore, the whole passage on democratic rights and participation focuses on *municipal* elections only, completely excluding the aspect of increasing the representation of Finnish citizens with a migrant background in the parliament. To a large amount of migrants, the municipal elections surely are the only elections in which they are entitled to vote (Vaalit.fi 2017), but this does not excuse the exclusion of policies aiming at the inclusion of persons with a migrant background in the Finnish polity on a larger scale. How about the persons with a migrant background who are Finnish citizens, i.e. entitled to a passive and active suffrage in the parliamentary elections - should the increase of their representation in the parliament not be supported and fostered, as the proportion of migrants in the overall population rises? This point has been excluded from the policy paper. Perhaps the Finnish citizens with a migrant background were considered rather as ‘Finns’ than ‘migrants’ when drafting the policy paper, which of course is justified, but then again, if Finland had e.g. its first members of parliament with a refugee background only in 2015, and the discrimination that people with a migrant background face on various fields of everyday life in Finland is acknowledged in the policy paper, how can this deficiency of representation in the polity be excluded? If we strive for ‘integration’ and ‘diversity’, this should encompass every stratum of the society.

Not only are migrants excluded in some aspects, but even on some occasions, when they are included, they are still referred to as some sort of a ‘tool’. Throughout the policy paper, the emphasis is on the gains that Finland receives from (certain type of) migration. Those few sentences on integration being a two-way path, and on the importance of making the

migrant feel like home in Finland, are the only outings in the policy paper, where the benefit of the migrants themselves is in the focus. Otherwise the focus tends to lie on the benefits that migration can bring to *us*, hence migrants are never included in this ‘we’, but they are portrayed as an extern group that may curb *our* economy. Paradoxically, this is the tone even when discussing integration. Furthermore, the (dis)integration of migrants is associated with risks and threats: “possible conflicts between different cultures, religions and values could weaken the internal cohesiveness of society and exacerbate inequality in society - - the risk of growing inequality will be considerably reduced if migrants and their children can find a role for themselves in Finnish society and feel that they are significant members of society” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 12). This passage gives the impression that migrants alone are responsible for either integrating or not, even though earlier the definition of integration was formulated as a ‘two-way path’. Subsequently, the conflicts caused by non-integrated migrants are their ‘fault’ only, whereas ‘we’ as the receiving society had no role to play? Furthermore, the connection between disintegration and inequality in the society has a rather dubious connotation here – usually *policies* cause inequality, not a certain group of people such as migrants. How about the role of policies, so that ‘the migrants’ can even fill these requirements for integration?

## Development discourse

Despite the flaws in integrating the migrants into drafting this policy paper as well as to the polity, their skills are acknowledged in the case of future policies - especially in terms of the very controversial topic of migration and development. The integration of migrants need not be limited to the level of personal life and employment, but their expertise and skill sets can be utilized also on governmental level, when combining migration, development and foreign policies. “To support development in poor countries of origin, cooperation is needed at international level not only between authorities but also involving civil society, researchers and the private sector. Migrant communities often also have the desire and expertise to participate in development work in their country of origin.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 16) Furthermore, “Finland’s migration policy must support the long-term achievement of development goals”, referring to “an improvement in

conditions in developing countries so that international migration decisions are made through choice and not necessity” (ibid.). The youth from developing countries studying and wishing to stay in Finland probably has had a rather free choice of migrating internationally, and surely should also have the freedom to stay and work in Finland if they want to and become employed. However, I am not so sure how well it goes hand in hand with our development policies to facilitate the arrival and stay of educated, highly skilled youth from developing countries in Finland, instead of utilizing their human capital for the development of their countries of origin that need those skilled youth. When we enhance the mobility and freedom of choice of this youth by facilitating their arrival and especially stay here, we probably simultaneously enhance ‘brain drain’ in their countries of origin.

The discourse on migration and development in the policy paper seems to follow the optimistic neoclassical theories of migration, building on the assumption that labor naturally follows capital and that is the ideal situation, regardless of the inequality embedded in the idea (Castles et. al. 2014, 29-31). Leaning on the neoclassical view on migration, the strategy does not by any means critically review the ethics of the attempt to attract high-skilled labor to Finland - only the effect on the Finnish labor markets is emphasized and the possibility of us thus contributing to a ‘brain drain’ in developing countries or countries of lower income is completely ignored. The strategy seems to focus on the idea of ‘brain gain’ instead, and this optimistic view on the connection between migration and development can be deemed to follow the common development paradigm of the recent decade (de Haas 2012, 8). According to de Haas, the very same paradigm fosters the common mantra of labor migration and remittances as the most successful form of ‘self-help development’. It is curious how financial remittances are not mentioned at all in the development discourse of the strategy, despite their notable importance in terms of migration. Finland might not be such a traditional country of migration as the USA or Germany for instance, hosting loads of migrants sending remittances back home, but it is an important issue anyway, if we want to bring in the topic of migration as a source of development.

However, despite the optimistic neoliberal paradigm of the strategy, the possible development-related benefits of circular migration, where the migrants could supposedly contribute to the development of their countries of origin after having accumulated more

human and social capital in Finland, are not discussed much in the strategy, not even to camouflage our selfish endeavours of benefiting from the high-skilled foreign labor ourselves - quite the opposite actually, as it is directly expressed how migrants are supposed to contribute to the “development of the *Finnish* society” instead. Subsequently one could argue that the above discussed short mention about improving conditions in the countries of origin seems to mainly serve the purpose of an empty phrase that ‘should’ be there in order to decorate the policy language - the needs of the Finnish economy and our success in the competition on skilled labor slur over these kind of aspirations by far. After all, Räsänen emphasizes already in the preface of the strategy, how “competition for workers will increase globally as countries compete to attract value-adding activities” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 3). It is exactly these ‘value-adding activities’ that the global political economy wants to place in the affluent countries, meanwhile the poorer countries are locked in their position as a supplier of (cheap) labor, instead of having a chance of pursuing those value-adding activities themselves. Can we really talk about this kind of patterns of action and ‘development’ in the same context?

On the other hand, the same, above discussed sentence; “an improvement in conditions in developing countries so that international migration decisions are made through choice and not necessity” (Finnish Ministry of Interior 2013, 16), can be argued to merely reflect the recent anti-immigration atmosphere in politics. If we look at the common parole of some political parties for instance, they tend to emphasize the importance of helping developing countries locally so people would not even ‘need’ to migrate at all. Sadly it is somewhat questionable in some cases, to what extent the living circumstances outside Finland really are of interest, and to what extent the main point is only to cut down on immigration. Considering the recent political unwillingness of some parties to recognize Finland’s responsibility in terms of global social justice, e.g. what comes to funding official development assistance, talks about ‘improving conditions in developing countries’ can hardly stand for anything else than a neatly formulated attempt to limit immigration. These are prime examples of a neoliberal political agenda behind policies, managing perceptions through language choices (Fairclough 2017, 130). How can we define e.g. the ‘need to migrate’? There can be a plethora of answers depending on the values and beliefs, and the subsequent political stance, of a person, and this is why such expressions boil down to empty words that can be interpreted in the way the public wants to.

In terms of development, the gender aspect is also relevant. Finland tends to celebrate itself as a ‘flagship of gender equality’, which on many levels probably is a rather justified claim on the international scale considering women’s position in the society. Nevertheless, in the strategy, gender issues are seen worthy half a page (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 20). Maybe gender equality is something we take for granted to such an extent that we do not even recognize its importance in drafting policies, although we should since “including a gender perspective in policy formulation and program design can contribute to them being gender-neutral rather than gender-blind” (Caro 2015). Furthermore, that half a page of the strategy seems to approach gender from a biased point of view, sadly common in migration studies, where male migrants are seen as ‘breadwinners’ and women as ‘followers’, which leads to migration policies according to which the needs of female migrants are mainly regarded as family-related, even in cases where women have migrated for studies or work (Castles et al 2014, 61-62). This bias is replicated also in the illustration of the policy paper: throughout the policy paper, there are five pictures of women, and in *three* of them, the pictured women are taking care of children. In the whole policy paper, there is only one picture of a *man* with a child. Surely the few issues mentioned in the gender-related part of the strategy, such as providing female migrants who are staying at home with their children with some extra support for integration, are also very important, but some attention should definitely be paid to female migrants’ position in the labor markets, too, for example in terms of double discrimination based on gender and having a migrant background. As Kraal argues, “native men have the best employment opportunities while migrant and minority women are the most disadvantaged in many EU member states” (Kraal 2009: 11-12). However, in the strategy this disparity is acknowledged by *one* sentence only: “The unemployment rate among women migrants is higher than among their male counterparts.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 20) How about the reasons behind it, not to mention policies aiming at changing this inequality?

## Border control discourse

As already mentioned on several occasions, the aspect of border control and security keeps on popping up in the policy paper – often in contexts, where one might not expect it, e.g. when discussing integration. A very important aim seems to be to keep on guarding the gates of ‘fortress Europe’, only letting in carefully selected high-skilled migrants with a ‘suitable’ citizenship - the rest of migrants have been turned into a question of security policy instead of migration policy. The current xenophobic paradigms thus tend to take over an increasing amount of policy areas. The policy paper was written before the refugee influx that started in 2015, but the following claim is, and was questionable already back then: “Finland will continue to provide a high standard of protection that safeguards equal rights and benefits for all those in need of protection.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 15) Do we, especially for *all* those in need of protection, which is quite a bold statement? Throughout Europe, the public discussion has evolved around ‘participating sufficiently in sharing the burden’ of incoming refugees, ‘burden’ referring to actual human beings. The dispute between the EU member states can be argued to have led to an incapability of action in this case. As acknowledged in the policy paper, “Finland’s national policy and legislation on migration are affected especially by the EU’s asylum and migration policies, and Finland is an active participant in the formulation of these policies” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 10). The latter part of the sentence is probably aimed at the ones who accuse the EU of ‘deciding over *us*’, as if the EU was some sort of a faceless entity. At the same time, the first part of the sentence ‘lays the blame’ on the EU and portrays Finland merely as a passive object of the decisions taking place ‘in the EU’. These two contradictory roles of Finland, the active and the passive, in facing the EU-level policies can probably be conveniently resorted to depending on the issue.

In terms of refugees and controlling other migration flows, cooperation between different institutions, states and the EU bodies is emphasized in the strategy. The relatively low amount of irregular migrants in Finland is acknowledged, however our importance in safeguarding the external border of the EU is highlighted more. Topics such as human trafficking and irregular labor are mentioned and international cooperation in combating these issues is called for. In terms of illegal entries, the border control paradigm momentarily changes into a human-rights-safeguarding one: “Under international



agreements, the human rights of persons unlawfully present in Finland or present in Finland without a residence permit must be guaranteed, and the observance of these rights must be examined and monitored.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 15)

Nevertheless, only a couple of rows lower, the emphasis shifts back on “supporting the return back to the home country” and similar rhetoric can be found as in case of development policies - supporting the conditions in the countries of origin. Thus there does not seem to be any clear policy line in terms of border control and human rights, but the paradigm alters according to a more specific topic.

## **Diversity discourse**

“Diversity is part of everyday life”, states the third principle of the strategy. To achieve this we need to work hard, is also admitted, as the anti-migration sentiments have a relatively stable stand in the politics, media and elsewhere in the society. The policy paper refers to a survey by the Finnish Business and Policy Forum indicating a softening of attitudes toward migration since 2000, but yet “more than half of the Finns questioned felt that Finnish culture should be protected from the effects of internationalisation” and “only about one in three would be willing to make it easier for foreigners to migrate to Finland” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 9). Furthermore, “discrimination and racism are part of everyday life for migrants” (ibid). Harsh sentences, yet quite well descriptive of the needed change not only in policies but also in values and consequently attitudes of the original population. However, the whole policy paper tends to focus on migrants only and merely calls for “active participation in the integration process” by everyone; without mentioning much, how. “Active measures must be taken to create a positive climate of opinion” (ibid, 22) as a statement surely has a point, but no action embedded in it. There are large areas in Finland, where migrants, or people with a foreign background in general, are almost non-existent. People, in this case the original population, tend to be hostile to and afraid of the unknown, in this case the alien group of ‘migrants’. Thus more interaction between different groups is elementary in order to have a diverse society. According to the policy paper, “the front runners in this change will be today’s children and young people, who are growing up in a more internationally oriented Finland. They will ensure that in the

2020s, diversity will not be a separate issue but part of everyday life”. (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 12) This is probably true, but interaction between older groups of population is still needed, too. Furthermore, should we, and especially the discriminated migrants living in Finland, really wait until the 2020s, before we will start demanding for a diverse, tolerant society?

The integration of migrants could be a key to accepting the diversity of the society. This integration can be fostered via employment, as discussed in previous chapters, or via migrants’ participation in the civil society, for example. However, not only are the integration and diversity discourses intertwined, but also that on the competitiveness of the Finnish economy. Again, in terms of diversity, the competitiveness aspect is emphasized: “migrant’s skills, competence and innovative ideas will make an important contribution to Finland’s development and international competitiveness” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 12). Nevertheless, if migrants cannot enter the labor markets due to discrimination, these benefits will stay out of reach. “In working life, for example, foreign workers may suffer discrimination on various grounds during the recruitment process, in the workplace and at the end of the employment period. Discrimination must be tackled effectively, for instance by implementing the discrimination monitoring system and raising awareness of anti-discrimination legislation.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 21) Such discrimination on top of racism surely does not deliver an image of a diverse society, where everyone can find their place, yet, but at least these problems are acknowledged and admitted. A few concrete plans of action to tackle discrimination, in the working life context merely, are introduced: in addition to monitoring systems and raising awareness, employers and other working life actors should be engaged in diversity management training. After all, discrimination faced when trying to enter the labor markets is the main reason, why the human capital of the migrants sometimes is not enough. The inequality fostered by discriminative practices also brings a risk of conflicts between different cultures, religions and values along. “The risk of growing inequality will be considerably reduced if migrants and their children can find a role for themselves in Finnish society and feel that they are significant members of society” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 12), hence if they manage to integrate into the (hopefully) more diverse society.

Last but not least, the public discussion should support the efforts for a more diverse society. “The tone of the migration debate affects the general climate of opinion. Opinion formers, politicians and public authorities in particular have a responsibility to provide accurate information. They must be aware of the fact that they influence people’s impressions of migration. They are also in critical positions when it comes to commenting on, condemning and preventing hate speech and hate crimes.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 22) In this sector, there obviously is lots of developing to do, as populist statements on migration are fostered by the media; especially lately, before and after the parliamentary elections of 2015. Thus the media also should bear some responsibility, which might be hard to reach as they will mainly want to publish content that sells well, hence those populist statements are very welcome. On the other hand, we do live in a democracy, so all opinions are and should be welcome, as long as they are not clearly racist and discriminative. As we know, the ‘freedom of speech’ as a concept has been shamelessly utilized by some populist politicians as some kind of quasi-justification for their openly racist comments. Nevertheless, the policy paper calls for a “wide-ranging and appropriate discussion of migration, and views critical of migration policy must be welcomed. Different views should be embraced and those of migrants themselves must be sought.” (ibid) Once again: integration of the migrants themselves, also in the public discussion on their own position in the society. Maybe it is possible to reach this goal also in the next policy paper?

## Chapter conclusion

“Aims are the starting point of policy, and the frame within which policy is set. What the policy was supposed to do is usually the main test for evaluating whether it has worked.” (Spicker 2006, 57) Briefly categorized, the main aims of this policy paper seemed to be attracting skilled, educated labor to Finland, facilitating their employability and thus fostering the competitiveness of the Finnish economy. Of course other values were emphasized too, such as diversity of society and integration of migrants on multiple levels, but the underlying expected outcomes behind these values, too, seemed to be more prompt employment and economy. It is possible, though, that this is *my* subjective interpretation of

the document, guided by my own values and beliefs. However, based on this interpretation and discourse analysis, the Finnish migration policy should be mainly pro international students willing to work in Finland. In the following chapter we will see, whether the interviewees share any of the points for improvement introduced in the policy paper or mention completely different factors defining their employability - after all, migrants were not really asked to participate in drafting these policies.

## 5. DISCOURSES IN THE GRADUATES' INTERVIEWS

In this chapter I describe the results of the analysis of the interviews, and the six identified discourses.

### **Discourse on global competition over skilled labor**

In this discourse, I will analyze, whether the interviewed international graduates perceive themselves as desired high-skilled labor that is being competed over internationally. According to the 'Future of Migration 2020' policy paper (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 13), "living and working in different countries broadens people's experiences and skills. Migrants to Finland bring with them innovative ideas and new ways of doing things. Mobility creates international networks that can be utilised in many different ways. - - there will be an increase in competition between countries for skilled and innovative workers. Competition for workers will increase globally as countries compete to attract value-adding activities. To succeed in this competition, Finland must be able to attract skilled labour effectively." Hence, attracting skilled labor from abroad is supposed to be something that Finland is striving for. The concept of 'cosmopolitan human capital' suits this context of global competition on skilled, innovative workers who possess the experience and skills that enable them to work effectively in many different cultures, e.g. proficiency in several languages (Kok-Yee et.al. 2011, 97). It surely can be argued that international graduates possess this sort of craved human capital, having studied and worked in one or several foreign countries and being able to speak several languages. Furthermore, innovation brought about by diverse networks is a yet another concept within the social capital theory. As Coleman (1988, 105) argues, "effective norms in an area can reduce innovativeness in an area, not only deviant actions that harm others but also deviant actions that can benefit everyone". Sociologists tend to argue that a society needs its norms in order to function, but 'shaking up' these norms by influences from the 'outside' may nevertheless curb innovation. This is one positive argument for hiring the 'skilled and innovative' workers with a foreign background, as mentioned in the policy paper.

Also according to the interviewees, Finland does seem to attract skilled labor who would be motivated to stay and work, but the problem seems to lie in retaining these people. Several interviewees mention factors for a strong motivation to come and study in Finland, such as experiencing the Nordic lifestyle, a safe and peaceful society, a good education system, renowned professionals in certain branches, and so on. One interviewee had an especially strong image of Finland prior to his arrival:

*“When I found this master program, I felt like it was destiny, like Finland was saying ‘welcome, we want your talent’. We will give you free education, cheap housing, a good life. I had to wait two years for the next intake and started learning about the Finnish culture, reading books and everything, and I just fell in love with Finland even though I had never been there.”*

But now, some years later, after having finished a Master programme at the University of Jyväskylä and having continued into a PhD at the same university, struggles in finding a job and the continuous uncertainty of finding sufficient funding for the research project have taken their toll. The interviewee is pondering on his decision, whether to stay in Jyväskylä or accept a fully funded PhD position in Norway:

*“If I go there, choose Norway and they pay me well and everything and in Finland not, I will feel like Finland didn’t want me after all, like Finland didn’t even try to retain me.”*

However, the Finnish society should not take the willingness of international students to stay in Finland for granted. The global competition on high-skilled labor is a two-way street, hence if Finland does not ‘give’, it will not ‘get’ either, as argued by another interviewee:

*“I think what comes to very talented people, eventually they will find a job in Finland, but there’s a waiting period and you have to wait and keep applying. But for those talented people, they know they are wanted in other places, so they don’t wanna wait and waste their time. So I think this is what Finland doesn’t have, so if these people find a job in say US or Canada right away and with a good salary, they will leave, because they feel like Finland doesn’t regard me as a valuable employee, they don’t recognize my skills here.”*

Furthermore, the interviewee criticizes the Finnish labor market due to its limited focus on few branches, where there are opportunities for international talents:

*“Not everyone wants to become a nurse, and unless Finland has something else to offer, people will leave. It is hard, the environment is not so easy. The foreigners who wanna stay here, they need to be prepared for a long-term unemployment and waiting for at least 6 months to find a job, and people shouldn’t panic in the beginning – things don’t happen so quickly in Finland.”*

Besides nursing, information technology is usually considered as a strong branch in Finland, in which internationals can become employed easily, even regardless of their Finnish language skills. This perception popped up repeatedly also during the interviews, however only implied by graduates of *other* faculties than IT. Nevertheless, according to the actual information technology graduates I interviewed, the very common assumption of IT students always finding a job, even if they do not speak Finnish, can be questioned. For example, one of the interviewees applied for more than 200 positions and got an answer from two. Another interviewee, originating from the Middle East such as the above-mentioned one, describes the issue as follows:

*“And another thing was my husband, who had been working in IT area and he also had experience. I knew that Finland was a big name in IT, so I thought okay even if things don’t work for me, my husband will for sure find a good job in IT and work. He applied for some places and they brought an excuse of language which was very funny because mainly you work in English. So the excuse of language was surprising, and for some jobs they told him he was overqualified, for some underqualified. Only thing that remained for us, was advertisement delivery. They were just the only people that employed internationals.”*

Eventually the husband, an experienced IT professional, found a full-time job at a restaurant in Jyväskylä, which is a prime example of overeducation. Surely one might need just *any* job to make the ends meet, and perhaps having any work experience from a Finnish company is beneficial for the job search, having thus gathered local human capital (Becker 1964). It is nonetheless questionable, whether a job in a restaurant could serve as the first step of the career ladder of an IT professional, or rather lead to a ‘career trap’ in a job that mismatches the education level (Baert et al. 2013, 123-124). This seems to be a

common problem, as among those interviewees who were graduates of IT, everyone had been struggling in finding a job corresponding with their degree. Previous experience in the industry, a special skillset, or an internship taken in Finland were mentioned as factors leading into (finally) finding a job, after dozens or even hundreds of sent applications. One IT graduate describes his experiences as follows:

*I got my first job as a research assistant through first volunteering for the project, and then applying as soon as there was an open position. - - I started looking for a new job early as I knew that my contract as research assistant was a fixed-term one, but it was really hard to find a job. I sent around 50 applications around Finland. I was using these university mailing lists to look for jobs, and was also searching for interesting companies and checking if they had any job openings, but actually got my current job because a friend of mine was working in the company. Of course it's always better if you know someone from inside the company who recommends you. That's how me and many friends of mine got a job."*

Despite the working language of IT companies often being English, the lack of Finnish skills was perceived as an obstacle by all four of the IT graduates.

*"I am studying management of IT, and in this position you obviously communicate more. But even in programming jobs you might still need Finnish, to communicate with the colleagues, or for example the documentation might be in Finnish, or the customers you communicate with might not speak English that well. So the main priority of the companies is to hire Finnish-speaking people. - - Everyone tells you this, 'if you can't speak Finnish, you won't find a job' – career services, or simply everyone, everywhere."*

According to one of the assumptions in human capital theory (Martikainen et.al. 2013, 230-232), a degree obtained in the exact country, in this case a degree finished at a Finnish university, is usually more appreciated than a degree from another country – even though this assumption might only apply to the global North, since in the global South, degrees pursued in more affluent countries can be argued to have an expanding impact on the perceived human capital. Nevertheless, the lack of will or ability of the employers to screen the quality of foreign diplomas is an actual cause of overeducation – if the employers are not sure about the level and content of the degree, they are prone to choosing someone with education levels higher than actually needed for the job



(Aleksynska & Tritah 2013, 230). This might be one factor explaining, why the IT degree pursued in the Middle East by the husband of one of the interviewees apparently was not adequately appreciated by Finnish employers. Furthermore, according to this assumption of the human capital theory, the country of origin of the immigrant searching for employment might have a significant influence on his employability - or rather the position of the country of origin in the international economy determines the human capital of an individual. A person originating from a relatively wealthy country is more capable of pursuing adequate human capital before becoming a migrant, and more easily able to transfer this capital to the destination country, whereas a migrant from a country of lower level of income might not have the same preconditions. (Martikainen et.al. 2013, 230-232.) This point might partly explain, why the interviewed IT professionals in question, originating from Pakistan, Ukraine and Turkey, have been struggling on the Finnish labor markets despite having a degree from a Finnish university.

According to the experiences of the four interviewed IT graduates, a degree obtained at a Finnish university is hence not enough to be employed. To enhance one's employability, one interviewee emphasized that one should have at least some adequate experience in the Finnish labor market already prior to graduation and the subsequent job search process. In his case, an internship taken at a Finnish IT company in the summer between the first and second study year was perceived crucial for his employability, because according to his perception, Finnish companies want to hire people who already know, how the working life in Finland functions.

*"I think the companies mostly look for people who have experience in Finland, they aren't looking for someone new here, not like international or non-Finnish - - people who are studying here but do not have experience - - it's not preferable for them [the companies]."*

*"I can give you a concrete example: I only worked in two companies so far and in both companies they only had 4-5 foreigners, and they are really big companies. Most of the employees there are Finnish, you can't really see so many foreigners working, even in Helsinki. That's one thing that is not so encouraging that they don't prefer to hire someone who's not Finnish."*

As discussed in the theoretical framework for this thesis, this perceived doubt of the managers on the adaptability of foreign graduates into the Finnish working culture can be

interpreted as questioning, whether the foreign graduates lack on the required form of social capital in the community formed by the place of employment. This fear is in line with the stream of social capital theory emphasizing communities, highlighting “the importance of shared norms and values for fostering and enabling social exchange and cooperation—and the consequences for communities when these are lacking” (Nahapiet 2011, 80). As a counterargument one could claim that the norms and values of a work community could be adopted while working there, but for some employers, recruiting someone who perhaps will not ‘fit in’ still seems to be too stark a risk.

There are also exceptions to these perceptions of prejudice in terms of origin of the employee, mentioned by the interviewees: the academia, in this case the University of Jyväskylä to be more precise, is perceived as an institution striving for becoming more international. This factor was mentioned by interviewees with very various academic backgrounds. In general, the chances for an academic career in Finland for non-EU graduates were perceived as fairly equal with those of EU nationals or Finnish students. However, several interviewees mentioned that most networking events and advertisements for internships or jobs in academia were in Finnish and thus felt exclusive, as if non-Finns were not equally welcome to participate or to apply. Some interviewees also mentioned an inequality of opportunities between international students or graduates. Especially one interviewee referred several times to her experiences of native English speakers being preferred against other students and her thus not having the same opportunities as those fellow students, who simply had English as their mother tongue. As a reason for this she perceives the networking aspect: for academia and businesses alike, the large markets of English-speaking countries are more tempting than those of smaller and less affluent countries, such as her country of origin in the Middle East, so forging connections to the students and graduates from those countries with the most appealing markets is preferred.

Hiring not only *through* but also *for* the networks, as described above, is a concept discussed by e.g. Erickson (2001, 128), as she argues that employers prefer hiring employees with the most precious social capital, i.e. with the most useful contacts that can benefit the employer. As emphasized in the policy paper, too, “mobility creates international networks that can be utilised in many different ways” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 13). However, those networks seem to have an implicit hierarchy. This

becomes illustrated also in cases, in which the strong or growing economy of the country of origin of the migrant is one of the keys to his employability: the Chinese interviewee had had several jobs in Finland in tasks where the local companies wanted to utilize his expertise on China. Thus, the country of origin can form a sort of sub-hierarchy also among non-EU citizens trying to enter the labor market.

## Networking discourse

Networking in general was mentioned by most of the interviewees as the main factor affecting their employability. According to some social capital theorists, especially connections to the local population are vital for the employability of foreigners, as the local population can transfer information on the courses of action as well as open positions in the labor markets more efficiently than fellow foreigners (Martikainen 2013, 235). The functioning of the labor market can be very different compared to the country of origin, and hence even graduates with years of work experience gained back home are often struggling when trying to find a job in Finland, as described by the following interviewee:

*“In places like Finland, who accept huge amounts of international students, people are not familiar with the system here. It’s just a personal responsibility to search for something, but some rules are hidden and you don’t find out about those things. They [foreigners] don’t know how to communicate, where to go, what are the rules.”*

This situation described by the interviewee resembles the closure of a social structure defined by Coleman (1988, 108), according to whom a closed structure ensures the stability of the norms as well as enhances trustworthiness within a community. The trustworthiness of social structures allows the proliferation of obligations and expectations, which again is not possible without closure of the social structure. Furthermore, a concept linked to trustworthiness, reputation, cannot arise in an open structure. Besides Coleman, also Fukuyama (2000) has emphasized the importance of trust and trustworthiness as components of social capital. As the interviewee put it, some norms are hidden and one needs to be an ‘insider’ to de-code them, which is difficult for an international graduate. To this matter, Coleman argues the following (1988, 104): “An important form of social

capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations. Information is important in providing a basis for action. One means by which information can be acquired is by use of social relations that are maintained for other purpose.” Connections to the local population would hence be vital in giving this sort of implicit information on labor markets.

In terms of the lacking information on the functioning of the Finnish labor market, cultural differences in ways of networking were also mentioned. According to an interviewee from the Middle East, in Finland one should go and introduce herself *in a selling manner* to get a job, whereas in her country of origin that would be very rude as you are supposed to wait until you are introduced by someone. This ‘selling manner’ is a perception that was repetitiously present in the interviews – several interviewees seemed to perceive networking as rather business-oriented behavior where you are trying to get a job in a company, which is a very narrow definition of the concept. Drawing on Coleman (1988, 103), e.g. the following aspects determine the need for help when an individual wishes to function in a social structure: “- - the degree of affluence (which reduces aid needed from others), in cultural differences in the tendency to lend aid and ask for aid, [and] in the closure of social networks”. The way of closure of social networks surely varies from culture to another, which also explains different forms of networking – what kind of behavior can lead to becoming an ‘insider’? Furthermore, as some kind of a combination of the degree of affluence and the tendency to ask for aid, one could also argue that the degree of *independency* in interaction with others is a cultural difference, and a relevant factor for the success in professional networking in Finland. Finnish universities tend to expect independency from students, and not surprisingly, several interviewees referred to the perceived lack of support by the university – networking opportunities for international students are limited, and career-related guidance adapted to their needs is perceived almost nonexistent:

*“One problem with the [networking] events at the University of Jyväskylä is that they usually are in Finnish, which makes networking pretty difficult for foreign students. Sometimes in these events they also present internship opportunities for IT students, but it’s all in Finnish”.*

When being asked, whether her PhD supervisor or some other university staff has been helpful in terms of networking, since events are not so fruitful for international students:

*“Not really, usually they just want to you graduate as fast as possible (laughs). Like, finish your degree first and then you can think about finding a job.”*

The lack of networking opportunities during studies has been experienced as a significant negative factor affecting employability, as demonstrated by an interviewee:

*“During this entrepreneurship training I’m doing now, I’ve gained so much and met so many people that I really regret not doing this during studies. I really didn’t have anything. It was like it’s one of the things they tell you, you have to go out there and meet people. It’s ridiculous, there are many companies in my field who started at the faculty, and I had never heard of them, like Firstbeat, who was started by a Liikunta [sports faculty] student but I never knew about it until a friend started working in the company. So you never hear about those things and people. I don’t know why, I think had I known about them while studying, I would have already then approached those companies maybe in terms of master thesis or utilizing their equipment or offered them my help. When I finally met them they told me ‘yeah you can help us, if you want to, you can write a paper and use our devices and maybe we can arrange something’, but at the time I had already graduated and had no interest in it.”*

In terms of networking, one interesting aspect is that several interviewees emphasize the support from other foreigners – there is a certain bipolar setting ‘us foreigners versus Finns’. This contradicts with the above-mentioned assumption of social capital theory arguing that connections to the local population are most vital for the employability of migrants (Coleman 1988; Martikainen et.al. 2013). This sort of polarization between ‘us and them’ culminates into a genuinely confused interviewee asking me, why I would want to write my thesis about the employability of international students, as I am a Finn myself – since ‘Finns usually are not interested in our situation’. Especially an interviewee working as a research assistant at the university refers several times to foreigners helping each other ‘to make it’ in Finland. According to her, all the useful connections she has had in terms of her professional life, have been foreigners too:

*“The employers that I’ve had here, they are all foreigners, so they know how hard it can be, and because they know that foreign people can often be*

*even more willing to get the job because they have to, and they can't receive any [social] benefits."*

According to her perception, her Finnish classmates would find jobs very easily, whereas the few international students who stayed in Finland have been struggling hard. Several interviewees also shared the perception of young Finnish people 'not needing to try very hard' but rather relying on the social support system. Such a polarization seems worrying because it could hardly benefit anyone – even if internationals supporting each other is of course a notable form of support as well, and not somehow inferior to having contacts to local population and enhancing one's employability through them. After all, there are social capital theorists emphasizing the mutual support between members of a group of migrants – often this tends to refer to a group of migrants originating from the same country or culture, but in the case researched in this thesis, international graduates seem to form such a group relying on mutual support when trying to succeed in building a life in Finland. This factor of mutual support between a certain group of migrants in the context of employment has been excluded from the policy paper, even though it deeply affects the employability of the group in question.

Besides the mutual support between migrants, some interviewees did have beneficial social relations to Finns, too. One interviewee described his experiences of a job in tourism, where his initial task was to work as a guide, above all for the East Asian tourists. However, as he had built a trustful relationship to his employer, he managed to get access to a plethora of different tasks in the region, both for this precise employer and for others within the employer's network. These tasks included e.g. simple accounting duties, hence offering an opportunity to gain higher-skilled working experience in Finland. According to the interviewee, the downside of this opportunity was, that the employer transmitting these contacts was also (partly implicitly) requiring him to work extra hours and help with any kind of duties, and the interviewee complied. Within the social capital theory, the concept of reciprocity costs describes this phenomenon. Reciprocity costs refer to the debts in the form of future services induced by the request for help from a contact (Flap & Boxman 2001, 161). As numerous academic articles on labor migration as well as the perceptions of interviewees remark on this notion, migrants are often in a vulnerable position on the labor market and thus prone to dependency on the (few) contacts they have (ibid.). Subsequently,

employers stand a chance of taking advantage of the reciprocity costs in an unbalanced manner, if the migrants depend on the job they offer.

## Finnish language discourse

According to the interviews, one of the most significant reasons for the struggle in finding a job is the lack of skills in Finnish language. Every interviewee had taken at least one Finnish class during their studies, but the level of Finnish skills among the interviewees ranged from knowing only the very basics to being able to communicate fluently in everyday life matters. None of the interviewees has a working life proficiency in Finnish according to their own estimation. The degree to which they perceive this as a problem however varies significantly from interviewee to another. In general, skills in the main language spoken in the country are usually seen as a prerequisite for finding a high-skilled job in the post-industrial labor markets (Martikainen et.al. 2013, 231). The need for providing migrants with sufficient skills in Finnish is also recognized in the policy paper, e.g. by suggesting more extensive tuition of Finnish during the studies as well as in working life (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 18-19). In the case of most of the interviewees, finishing at least one Finnish class already was a prerequisite for obtaining their degree. Generally, the need for learning Finnish was to various extents also recognized by the interviewees, and several of them regretted not having taken more classes during their studies. The most common explanation for neglecting Finnish classes was the lack of time, or not yet having planned staying in Finland after graduation and hence not having perceived learning Finnish as a main priority during studies. Furthermore, the difficultness of the language was a demotivating factor – learning Finnish often feels like a *mission impossible*, as one interviewee put it.

However, the requirement for skills in Finnish can also be perceived as a discriminative factor - especially in the IT sector in duties where the working language usually is English.

*“I think that mostly the CVs were filtered - if you write that you can speak Finnish, they want you, and if you don't, they don't want you for an interview. - - One company in Jyväskylä, I applied there and my skillset was perfect for them and I sent them an email. They replied that they have international clients but they need Finnish to communicate with clients and*

*so that's why they can't hire me."*

In these cases, it is obviously quite impossible to know, whether the lack of skills in Finnish truly is the reason behind not inviting a foreign applicant to an interview. Nevertheless, the language requirements often evoke frustration, as an interviewee puts it: *"Right now they require you to speak Finnish even for the cleaning jobs, which is so absurd."* Most of the interviewees see the lack of skills in Finnish mainly as a delimiting factor for their employment opportunities, e.g. the public sector being out of the question as an employer. However, as a fresh entrepreneur, an interviewee has also faced problematic situations due to very limited skills in Finnish:

*"I presented my idea to a person in Yritystehdas [a project supporting start-ups] and they suggested to me that I should present my idea to municipalities, to Laukaa and Muurame, and gave me emails and phone numbers of two guys. I called one of them, but he couldn't speak any English. So I was like – I hung up, what else could I do. - - Maybe the guy didn't know that this guy wasn't able to speak English. And some trainings, some entrepreneur societies had some events or lectures and those were in Finnish, so it would've been useful if I could understand."*

Even though all the interviewees shared the perception of learning Finnish as a very important factor affecting their employability, there were clear differences in attitudes. Some were criticizing the language courses offered at the university, some naming the lack of practice as a hindering factor – learning the language would require practicing regularly, preferably with native speakers, but many international students do not have Finnish contacts, or are struggling to find someone who would 'have the patience to speak slowly and in easy Finnish'. In addition to enhancing employability and facilitating everyday life, skills in Finnish were also perceived as something culturally enriching:

*"Learning Finnish definitely is important, because you know – when you learn a language, you don't only learn the language but you learn the way of thinking of a group of people, you learn a culture. - - unlike in most countries of the world, here you can take as many language courses for free at the university as you wish, so the tools are there."*



Some interviewees had the perception of it being ‘too late’ to learn Finnish now, as they had not acquired sufficient skills for entering the labor market during their studies. There was frustration concerning the feeling of not even getting a chance to become employed and *then* learning the language on a higher level:

*“A friend got a job in Denmark and there they have this program for the employees where they work mainly in English but at the same time they take courses to learn Danish, organized by the company. I think that’s really good, but Finland is different.”*

This kind of workplace-based acquisition of language skills was also mentioned in the policy paper as a labor policy measure that requires further attention: “There should be an increase in the teaching of Finnish and/or Swedish and other education and training organised as part of labour policy, and in the effectiveness of this education and training. The opportunities to study Finnish and/or Swedish while in employment must also be developed further. Employers should be encouraged to support Finnish or Swedish studies for migrant workers during their employment.” (Finnish Ministry of Interior 2013, 18) Hence in this case, planned policy measures could be argued to correspond with the needs of the target population – not only expecting universities to ‘do the job’ and offer Finnish courses but further supporting the post-graduation acquisition of Finnish skills.

On the other hand, in comparison to these arguments of the interviewees that rather push the responsibility for language learning on external factors, such as on lack of available courses, several interviewees were emphasizing the significant role of independent work on language skills, and the importance of showing a strong motivation to learn Finnish also when it comes to encounters with potential employers:

*“If the boss asks you if you speak Finnish, we foreigners often say ‘no, or just a little’, but instead you can say ‘I’m learning it, I have the motivation for it, and I’m actually interested in companies working in Finnish so I can practice more’.”*

Nevertheless, the same interviewee expressed a following point as if in order to keep the ‘language question’ in its measures and not letting it become the main denominator of employability of international graduates:

*“But I think, at the end of the day, it’s not Finnish that gets you the job, but Finnish is a bonus. So your expertise is the thing that gets you the job, but language can help you in the position. Language is a tool to help you to express your expertise – and of course there are some jobs like sales, based on speeches, but I think for most people, you have to be excellent in what you do, and if the company sees that, they hire you.”*

To conclude, besides networking the language skills in Finnish were perceived as a main factor for employability of international students. It also seemed to be a very timid topic evoking strong emotions, and some interviewees seemed to feel a certain need for defending their insufficient (or as insufficient perceived) Finnish skills. From the point of view of migration policies, supporting the acquisition of Finnish skills of the international students and graduates would be quite an easy and ‘straight-forward’ integration measure to fulfill, so this definitely is a point where improvements could take place even on a rather short time span – if only the political will is there.

### **Border/migration control discourse**

Briefly summarized, efficient border control was tightly connected to topics related to refugees and illegal migration in the policy paper – even though the document was drafted in 2013, long before the current so-called refugee crisis. As refugees have been such an omnipresent topic lately, the issue kept coming up throughout the interviews, even though none of the questions was clearly related to refugees. The overall attitude toward refugees was by no means negative, but the recent change in the public opinion concerning any sort of migration has been noticed by some interviewees.

*“I feel like Finland is like a peaceful place to live, apart from some racist acts, but mainly it’s peaceful. And when you compare with other places, you see that Finnish people, they might be a bit cold and not always so friendly, but at the same time they are very peaceful and don’t make you problems. Now everywhere in Europe it’s a difficult situation because of this rush of immigrants from other places, like these asylum seekers, now it’s like a big problem everywhere, but before that, I didn’t really see any negative reactions from people.”*

As mentioned, the attitude toward refugees was positive, but some interviewees had a clear need for distinguishing between different groups of migrants, and for sort of distancing themselves from the ‘new migrants’. Some interviewees seemed to have the mindset of belonging to a completely different group of people than e.g. refugees, especially when it comes to labor market integration:

*“In my case it’s pretty easy, I have my knowledge and skills and I just do my job, but the challenge in Europe now is integrating the refugees. In the case of refugees it’s more complex, because there are so few jobs available if you have little skills and knowledge.”*

The discourse of distinction between ‘us’, the high-educated, versus ‘them’, the refugees - perceived in this case as a homogenous, throughout modestly skilled group causing a burden to the labor market, was surprisingly strong considering the background of the interviewees: they also originate from less affluent, non-Western countries. Hence one could assume they would have a more commensurate perception of the heterogeneity of the skill sets of the new arrivals, instead of shrinking their existence to the category of the ‘low-skilled refugees’. Perhaps this sharp categorizing by the interviewees is a reaction to the perceptions of the majority and mass media, according to which everyone with a migrant background, reaching from the international students to a newly arrived refugee, falls into the category of a plain ‘migrant’, often entailing negative connotations such as the will to take advantage of ‘our’ welfare system. This would explain the will of the international graduates to distinguish themselves from refugees in order to be perceived more positively within the society.

The growing immigration to Finland has also evoked concern on tightening migration policies:

*“If the migration policies in Finland start tightening, I don’t see a purpose in staying and struggling with them because I think the policies here are very strict, and I understand the reasons behind it very well, but what I don’t understand is that the regulation is the same for everybody – me, who has been working here and been quite determined and motivated. I’ve been working, paying my taxes, I’m educated, I’m here to work and not for the social benefits, but I still go under the same regulations [as new migrants], so if they tighten the policies because of the migration situation globally, or for any other reason, I’m gonna go under the same regulations, which will make my life much harder.”*

When asked to elaborate, what she means by understanding the reasons behind the tightening migration policies:

*As far as I know, because of the examples of some other countries like Sweden, who opened their borders and just welcomed everybody, they now have a lot of people who are not working and who are just living on the social benefits of the country. So, I think something similar started happening in Finland so maybe they decided to take actions, I don't know. Refugees are something else, they're another thing. - - So, I'm not sure if it's connected to a certain nationality or a group, but maybe they started tightening the policies because they wanted more qualified immigrants."*

The polarization to 'us foreigners versus Finns' was widely present in this discourse, as several interviewees brought up the issue of social security benefits as a reason behind xenophobia and even racism among Finns – or to be more precise, the fear of 'losing' the social security system Finland now has. One interviewee even had the perception that Finns assume foreigners to take advantage of the social system, and due to this negative image of foreigners, are not so willing to hire them either:

*"Finnish people might be afraid that foreigners are taking something away from them, such as jobs. This happens everywhere though. But the thing is, in Finland especially the younger people are so used to the welfare state taking care of them, and they are afraid of losing this. So it's the younger people who are more scared of migration. - - It's a fact that there are foreigners coming to Finland just to abuse the welfare system, just like some lazy Finnish people. My friend has showed me a Spanish group on Facebook, asking how can I get to Finland and get the money. - - and this certainly affects the market, and whom employers prefer to hire."*

Perhaps as a counteract to having the perception of being accused of trying to take advantage of the Finnish system, and being accused of this solely on grounds of being a foreigner, many interviewees seemed to want to emphasize how hard internationals are trying to succeed in Finland, which again lead into a polarization between foreigners and Finns:

*"When I talk with my Finnish friends, they just want a safe career, they don't want the stress of being an entrepreneur. It's a lot of international people at the university who wanna become entrepreneurs and recently a few people asked me about it, and never a Finnish person asked me about my experiences. So that was the feeling, I think internationals are more*

*willing to take those risks and face the possible breakdown.”*

Besides xenophobic attitudes (sometimes from ‘both sides’ as the citations above hint), imposing tuition fees on non-EU/EEA students serves as a further example of changes in migration policies. Contradictory to the supposed willingness to attract high-skilled labor, several interviewees have perceived the launching of tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students as a sign for them not being so welcome in Finland anymore:

*“These new study fees imposed on people who come from outside the EU, it shows that the society and the government are going through anti-immigration, they don’t want foreigners in their country. Maybe people are afraid of losing facilities if the population grows, some other people come and use these facilities that they have.”*

Furthermore, in terms of migration policies, the issue of residence permits came up in most of the interviews, as all the interviewees originate from non-EU countries. In this case there was quite a lot of variation between experiences of the interviewees – a few were in the opinion that coming from outside the EU has not had a significant influence on their employability or broader chances in the Finnish society. However, most of the interviewees did perceive their situation as inferior to that of EU citizens, e.g. some employers have preferred hiring EU citizens, as it requires less bureaucracy. The inequality of integration facilities and services has also been acknowledged by some interviewees, e.g. concerning the ‘integration courses’ which generally are not available for non-EU/EEA students residing in Finland. In general, the options available for a non-EU/EEA citizen willing to stay in Finland after graduation clearly are more limited than those for EU citizens which may sometimes lead to a feeling of being in a dead-end of options:

*“That’s the difference between EU people and us, they can just come here and stay for six months and try and get to those schools [integration courses] and their adaptation is much easier. I didn’t have that option because I came here and had to study and graduate in two years, and after that I either had to find a job or start a company to be able to stay. And if you start a company, you are not eligible to go to those courses. So, altogether, I can either get starttiraha [grant for new businesses] or those courses for migrants. But since I chose the one for entrepreneur - - for me it was impossible because if I wanted to stay here, I needed a good reason to stay, and it was to become an entrepreneur. And if you find a job, you*

*cannot go to those courses. If you want to start a company, you need to show that you have enough means to stay in Finland for one year, and to show that, I needed starttiraha. And if you get starttiraha, they say clearly you cannot get any other form of support.”*

Furthermore, the stress caused by not knowing, whether the residence permit will be renewed or not, was perceived as a hindering factor against integration:

*“Every year I have to go through the same procedure with the residence permit, and every time your mind is drifting away from the things you actually should do. And it’s also like you’re risking something – now I’ve risked one year from my life and it makes me think, all this work and contacts I have will be wasted if they don’t renew my residence permit – or of course not completely wasted, but I won’t have the same chances. Like after one year, when I started all this [entrepreneurship], I didn’t know anyone or anybody, and now I know the founders and runners of the ten biggest start-ups in Jyväskylä. But it took me time to get to know those people, and now it’s on my mind, it puts more pressure on you for sure [not getting a further residence permit].”*

When it comes to becoming an entrepreneur, another interviewee reflected upon his experiences as a non-EU citizen willing to start his own business:

*“Me and a friend of mine wanted to open up a company in Finland, and you need to pick a status for the company, like ‘ry’ or ‘oy’ and so on. And we were told you need to be an EU citizen to be able to start an ‘oy’. I think that’s very discouraging. And the thing is, they have all those forms in English, but the English one doesn’t have the power, so what you can do, you can fill in the Finnish one by comparing it to the English one. So I hope there could be more flexibility in this. - - If you wanna fill in the English one, they won’t process it. That’s what they said, the English one doesn’t have legal power, only the Finnish and Swedish ones do. It’s a little bit stupid. Of course there are legal concerns behind it, foreigners could just come and open up a company and it would have to do with money-laundering or something, so I understand that, but still.”*

Hence despite recognizing reasons behind some regulations does not remove the (often justified) feeling of unfairness. The inferior chances of staying in, and integrating to Finland, compared to those of EU nationals, seemed often to produce a perception of a hierarchy of nationalities, ranked into an order of ‘welcomeness’.

## Diversity discourse

Diversity, especially in working life, was aspired both in the interviews as well as in the policy paper, yet not fulfilled according to either of the data sets. In the policy paper, discrimination while entering the labor markets as well as taking place in the work places was acknowledged as a common problem in the Finnish society: “In working life, for example, foreign workers may suffer discrimination on various grounds during the recruitment process, in the workplace and at the end of the employment period. Discrimination must be tackled effectively, for instance by implementing the discrimination monitoring system and raising awareness of anti-discrimination legislation.” (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 21) An interviewee was pondering on possible reasons for the non-willingness of Finnish employers to hire foreigners, as perceived by him:

*“I don’t know, maybe Finns aren’t comfortable with many foreigners around, they just wanna have their own working culture and not anyone else, or are comfortable only when working with people from the same culture - being brought up this way, so maybe working with different cultures is not so easy.”*

However, in this case too, the network discourse was intertwined, as another interviewee argued that according to his perception, Finns do not generally avoid hiring foreigners, as long as the foreign employee was recommended by someone e.g. already working in the company:

*“Sometimes I think bosses worry about these things, like loyalty and everything, if they hire someone foreign, like train a new person but you can’t know how the person is, but if someone gives a reference then you know it’s a person you can trust. So it’ll be easier. I think it’s very likely for Finns to employ foreigners, if the job doesn’t require too much Finnish, but I think they have their concerns too, like if you hire someone from a foreign country, you are not sure how to handle certain situations.”*

This notion of trust is also one of the concepts relevant to the theories on social capital. Especially Francis Fukuyama (2000) emphasizes the role of trust and trustworthiness in building up and fostering social capital. In the case of migrants as labor force, the latter one

of Fukuyama's concepts, hence *reputation* for trustworthiness could be argued to have a great influence on their employability. Stereotypes of the working manner of other ethnicities are quite widely spread after all – ‘Estonians are hard-working, but Russians cannot be trusted’, to name but one. Obviously not every employer has such racist perceptions, at least *consciously*, but these stereotypes tend to be so deep-rooted in a society that they might affect our thinking without us realizing it.

Even though academia was generally seen as a rather international institution, there were experiences of discrimination taking place at the university, too:

*“Some of those professors weren't very welcoming and I felt like there's a difference between their behavior between people from my region for example, from Middle-East, and between people coming from English-speaking countries. I was really irritated by that because I didn't want to come here and see these things. But anyway, even now I can still see in our department that there's a certain respect to people from English-speaking countries, it's like a really big thing. I know my country is in the Middle-East and is a big name with terrorism and stuff like that, but people shouldn't believe everything, this is media and not the normal people. You should talk more with people to understand more about it, but I really felt it [prejudice] here – not necessary from Finnish people, but also from my international classmates and from my non-Finnish professors. It was really irritating and hurting me.”*

The negative influence of the media, fueling prejudice against migrants especially from non-Western countries, was also acknowledged in the policy paper (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 22). Sadly, the polarization of the society caused by the media does not seem to reduce, but quite the opposite.

A further aspect linked to the diversity perspective, gender, has been ignored in the policy paper, but was not a significant topic in the interviews either. In terms of research on labor markets, “native men have the best employment opportunities while migrant and minority women are the most disadvantaged in many EU member states” (Kraal 2009, 11-12). However, in the policy paper this disparity is acknowledged by *one* sentence only (Finnish Ministry of the Interior 2013, 20); “the unemployment rate among women migrants is higher than among their male counterparts”, whereas none of the interviewees mentioned the gender aspect, not even the three female interviewees. Hence they seem not have consciously experienced discrimination on various bases, i.e. being a woman *and* a



foreigner, or at least did not bring it up during the interview.

## Development discourse

The relation between migration and development was taken into account in the policy paper, but did not really come up during the interviews – possibly because of the interview questions not curbing the interviewees into reflecting on the development aspect. Even the relation between Finland or the European Union and the less affluent countries of origin was only mentioned by one interviewee, as she was describing the sanctions imposed by the EU on her country of origin and their negative effects on her own life in Finland. Some interviewees also described the worsening economic conditions back home, especially in terms of labor markets, which encouraged them to stay in Finland and try even harder, because going back to the country of origin was often not really an option.

Concerning reflection on whether to return back to the country of origin, one interviewee mentioned the attempts of his country of origin to shift from brain drain to brain gain by trying to persuade the high-skilled emigrants to return, which definitely does count as development discourse:

*“China has actually been working on this for years, because earlier it was like people used to go and study abroad and never came back, but now China has these incentives, when you return after a master’s [degree] abroad, you can e.g. buy your first car tax-free and you can have a lot of other benefits if you return. For PhD returnees there’s even more, like if you return and work at a university, you can get a package. Sometimes, especially if you’re really good, you can get a lot.”*

However, these reflections were based on a personal situation, involving no specific reflection on developmental disparities between the country of origin and Finland. None of the interviews involved reflection on e.g. returning and then utilizing the acquired human capital for the development of the country of origin – perhaps the countries of origin of the interviewees are affluent enough to leave such reflections excluded.

## Chapter conclusion

Despite having very different countries of origin, work and study backgrounds, and personalities, there were some common denominators repeating in every interview: the importance of networks and skills in Finnish, feelings of injustice and lack of support (although to a very various extent depending on the interviewee), and a strong motivation to show one's skills and 'get a chance'. Especially the great importance of networks demonstrates how human capital, i.e. an academic degree, in many cases also supported by professional experience, is not enough to become employed, but this human capital needs to be turned into social capital.

In many cases, the researched policies drafted in 2013 seemed to go quite well hand in hand with the needs expressed by the interviewees, but the more recent changes in migration policies clearly cause lots of worries on the interviewees' future status and their chances on integration in the future. Despite their strong motivation and mostly very optimistic attitudes, the uncertainty about future prospects – which obviously concerns Finnish graduates too – underlies their every attempt on trying to 'make it' in Finland. As one interviewee sighed:

*“In a way, it's always difficult to be a migrant.”*

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I will discuss the results of my two research questions, and further, combine and compare the discourses found in the policy paper and the interviews. All of the discourses could be paired up, even though some of them were discovered clearly more strongly in one of the data sets but not in the other one, namely the discourse on the Finnish language of the interviews, as well as the development discourse, being more present in the policy paper. Based on the comparison of the analyses, some of the existing policies will be evaluated, and some initial policy suggestions aiming at enhancing the employability of the international graduates will be given, drawing on their perceptions.

### **Global competition over skilled labor – or local talents preferred?**

This discourse is based on the somewhat neoliberal idea of a global labor market, where ‘global talents’ move freely from a country to another and contribute to the economy of the country with their innovativeness and special skillsets. In the policy paper, the need to attract the brightest minds to Finland in order to save the Finnish economy was one of the most frequent themes of the whole document. Throughout the policy paper, the focus was on the benefits for the Finnish society, especially for the economy, that could be gained by attracting global talents. However, the concrete measures to reach this aim were not so omnipresent. The idea of global competition over skilled labor was definitely present in the interviews as well – nevertheless, the international graduates surely did not have the perception of being craved after in Finland, but rather the opposite. Most of them were disappointed – they had had big hopes when starting their studies in Finland, and by the time of graduation, that hope was mostly replaced by a desperate or insulted feeling of not being wanted or appreciated in the Finnish labor market. These perceptions of the interviewees contradict the theories on human capital by Schultz (1971), according to whom both education, and migration, especially at a young age, serve as profitable investments in one’s human capital, leading to employment. According to the perceptions of the international graduates, most of Finnish employers are reluctant to hire non-Finnish employees due to various (assumed) reasons, and the interviewees were thus struggling to

find even low-skilled employment. One of those reasons could be the perceived lack of trustworthiness - some of the interviewees had the perception that Finnish employers would not trust their work ethics or their capability of adapting to the Finnish working culture. As trust and trustworthiness are important components of social capital (Coleman 1988; Fukuyama 2000), the deficiencies in the employability of the interviewees might thus be caused rather by lacking social capital than insufficient human capital. However, their human capital might not be internationally transferable.

Contradictory to the theory of cosmopolitan human capital (Kok-Yee et.al. 2011), which is also present in the policy paper, i.e. the assumption that there is some sort of a globally appreciated skillset which enables high-skilled migrants to move from one country to another, the interviewees did not seem to perceive themselves as ‘cosmopolitan talents’, but were very focused on assessing the needs of the Finnish labor market, or even more locally, the labor market in Central Finland. Hence the interviewees seemed to be more reliant on the idea of ‘local human capital’ (Becker 1964). According to the theory on social capital by Coleman (1988), besides suitable human capital, individuals require information that inheres in social relations, i.e. in order to succeed, the interviewees need information on the labor market in Central Finland. Interestingly, the interviewees kept on emphasizing the role of the university in delivering information on the local labor market and helping to integrate in it – although the action taken by the university in this matter was constantly criticized and assessed to be insufficient. Also in the research on graduate employability, the increasing role of the institutes of higher education as a link between graduating students and businesses looking for talented employees is emphasized (Tomlinson & Holmes 2016). Nevertheless, in the policy paper, universities are barely mentioned as to having such an important role in the acquisition of employability. In the policy paper, their role is merely limited to offering language courses and helping to find internships, which obviously is a very narrow scope. To conclude, the discourse on global competition over skilled labor is very present in both data sets, but the discourses are very different, and, to some matter, even contradict each other.

## Networks as a gateway to integration

In this overview, I will combine the integration discourse of the policy paper with the networking discourse of the interviews, as these discourses share a plethora of similarities. Furthermore, the discourse on Finnish language, very present in the interviews, will be discussed here too, as the networking and Finnish language discourses of the interviews can be argued to form the counterpart to the integration discourse of the policy paper.

The competitiveness of the economy, curbed by the global talents, is present in these discourses, too. The concept within social capital theory, hiring for the networks (Erickson 2001, 127-129), has a strong foothold in both the policy paper and the interviews. According to the policy paper, the benefits of those wide networks that high-skilled migrants bring about can entail major benefits for the Finnish economy. Similarly, some interviewees mentioned the aspect of either university staff or their previous employers being interested in the networks they had in their countries of origin. In some cases, this interest had a negative taste, as e.g. one interviewee felt that her networks in the Middle East were not appreciated equally with those of students originating from the Anglo-Saxon countries. In general, with regard to networking, both policy paper and the interviewees put a great emphasis on it, but one form of networking is excluded from the policy paper: the networks between groups of migrants. On several occasions, the interviewees refer to internationals helping out each other, and thus having a firm network based on mutual benefit. The influence of this sort of networks should hence be included in the policy paper too, instead of the bilateral focus on the relations between Finns and 'the migrants' as one homogenous group. As networks and the inherent contacts can be considered the core of social capital (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2002), the interviewees seem to perceive social capital as a crucial factor for their employability to a greater extent than the policy paper. This notion contradicts the assumption by Flap and Boxman (2001, 178), according to which social capital has an equal importance with human capital only later on in one's occupational career, *after* having built up a professional network. According to the perceptions of the interviewees, however, social capital in the form of networks is crucial already to the *entry* to the labor market.

Besides networks, language skills in Finnish are supposed to be a key to integration. Language skills are one of the ‘classical’ denominators of human capital, so improving one’s language skills should stock up on human capital (Schultz 1971). In the interview data, the importance of learning Finnish and the impediments caused by insufficient knowledge in the language were such frequent topics, that they turned into a separate discourse. Of course the necessity of learning Finnish was acknowledged in the policy paper, too, but the insufficiency of the skills as a discriminative factor, sparking a feeling of exclusion, as perceived by most of the interviewees, was not really included in the policy paper. Furthermore, the focus of the policy paper in terms of language skills lies on formal tuition of Finnish, whereas the interviewees were also longing after Finnish-speaking contacts to practise with. As acknowledged in the policy paper as well, not knowing Finnish definitely seems to be a prerequisite for finding employment in Finland – according to the interviews, this is the case even in the IT sector, which has the reputation of having solely English as the working language. Sometimes the prerequisite of knowing Finnish caused frustration, especially when the required level was not perceived appropriate; ‘you need fluent Finnish even for the cleaning jobs’. In some cases, the requirement of knowing Finnish was thus perceived rather as a scapegoat for not wanting to hire a foreigner.

Besides the labor market integration, language skills in the native language of a country surely have an influence on the overall integration of a migrant. Interestingly, the word ‘integration’ was not mentioned barely in any of the interviews, whereas in the policy paper, it is one of the key words. In the policy paper, integration is defined as a ‘two-way street’, requiring effort from both sides, but when it comes to more concrete suggestions on how to actually integrate to the Finnish society, the responsibility seems to lie on migrants’ shoulders, and the language of the document relies on ‘us Finns and *the migrants*’, once more portrayed as a homogenous mass. Furthermore, it is not even clear, whether any migrants were asked for their expertise when drafting the policy paper. The interviewees, on the other hand, seemed to feel part of the Finnish society to differing extents, although none of them explicitly mentioned the topic of integration. Many of them seemed to go through feelings of frustration and non-belongingness, and also showed a strong polarization between ‘us foreigners and the Finns’. Hence some stronger integration measures are required before meeting the aim of the policy paper of ‘everyone finding their

role to play' in the Finnish society.

## **Diversity – a trendy word or an actual goal?**

Thematically partly on the same note with the integration discourse, the discourse on diversity was also very present in both the policy paper and the interviews – sadly in a rather negative way. Both the policy paper and the interviewees acknowledge discrimination as a somewhat common phenomenon in Finland, especially in the context of the labor market. To counteract this, the policy paper names some measures, such as increasing anti-discrimination monitoring on workplaces. According to the perception of the interviewees, the employers are scared of the possible cultural differences and those thus making the international graduate thus not 'fit in' in the work community. Some also assume the employers would have doubts on the working morale of foreigners. Hence in this discourse the lack of trust and trustworthiness as components of social capital (Fukuyama 2000) is very omnipresent. According to a common perception of the interviewees, contacts are essential here, too: if one knows someone from the company, e.g. has a friend or study colleague working there, and can hence be recommended, the chances of finding a job improve immensely. This replicates the three sub-processes of investment in social capital, as described by Lin (2001, 17-18): "1) investment in social capital, 2) access to and mobilization of social capital, and 3) returns of social capital". In this case, an international graduate has 1) built networks during studies or spare time, 2) utilizes these contacts during the job search, and 3) becomes employed e.g. due to a recommendation of a contact. Becoming recommended also diminishes the deficiencies caused by the possible lack of trust by the employer. Otherwise, if a migrant is lacking adequate contacts, 'Finns want to hire Finns', as an interviewee put it.

Also the negative portrait of migrants dispersed in the media is present in the policy paper as well as in the interviews. The policy paper confines to demanding the media to carry their responsibility and to report on migration issues according to unbiased standards – which probably will not happen. The interviewees recognize a change in the overall attitudes in the past couple of years, as according to some of them, the media presentation of migrants has become increasingly negative since the beginning of the 'refugee crisis' in

2015. Before that, as one of them argued, racist commentaries were very rare, but now racism and xenophobia are taking on in Finland. In general, striving toward diversity in the society seemed to be just empty words to most of the interviewees – however, as some of them noted, there is a certain anti-migration atmosphere everywhere in Europe now, so they ‘cannot blame Finland for it’. One of them noted that despite the rise of xenophobia, Finland still probably is one of the safest countries also for migrants.

### **Migration, an issue of security policy?**

In the policy paper, the issue of border security keeps on popping up in contexts, where it is merely confusing, such as right after having introduced measures to facilitate the integration of international graduates to the Finnish labor markets. The dangers of ‘illegal migrants’ and shadow economy, i.e. working without a permit, are carefully discussed in the policy paper, whereas most of the interviewees did not mention this topic at all. None of them also expressed that kind of ‘desperateness’ of being willing to take up any job just to be able to stay in Finland – although there of course is no guarantee for none of them having this kind of a situation only because they did not mention it. Only one of the interviewees shared an experience concerning an employer slightly trying to abuse the laboriousness of the interviewee, i.e. a situation, where the employer, according to the perception of the interviewee, knew, that the international student in question simply needed to have a job and thus would not complain about the conditions. This corresponds with the theory of reciprocity costs within the social capital theory, according to which migrants tend to depend on the (few) contacts they have. Reciprocity costs refer to the debts in the form of future services induced by the request for help from a contact (Flap & Boxman 2001, 161), i.e. having being offered a job, a migrant in a vulnerable position might suffer from a feeling of ‘debt’ which brings about unbalanced obligations toward the employer.

Many of the interviewees seemed to have a strong need for distinguishing themselves from the ‘newly arrived’, in this case from the asylum seekers who have arrived in the past couple of years. Whereas migrants in general are often portrayed as a homogenous mass, in the perceptions of some of the interviewees, asylum seekers were also a faceless mass of



low-qualified persons that the Finnish society does not want to welcome. None of the interviewees expressed any negative sentiment toward refugees, but at the same time, some wanted to make a clear difference between themselves, ‘having lived in Finland for years and being high-skilled’, and between the newcomers. These interviewees thus perceived their own, local human capital as something exclusive that the newly arrived surely would not possess. The policy paper does not include much reflection on the integration of refugees per se, but refugees are only discussed in the context of border security and ‘Finland taking up its share of the responsibility’. The migration policies introduced in the policy paper are thus not very differentiated for various target groups, but the idea seems to be that ‘one size fits everyone’ – or maybe the exclusion of labor market policies targeted explicitly at other than the high-skilled ones is just one more way of communicating, what kind of migrants are welcome?

The interviewees have perceived a tightening of migration policies and some of them expressed their concern on this matter. Some of them expressed mainly frustration – they have studied and worked in Finland, learnt the language as well as they could, and yet the tightening of policies will probably affect them, too, similarly as it affects the newcomers. However, some interviewees did not seem to worry about changes in policies that much, even when being asked about them. Their perception was the following: if the policies start tightening and their quality of life in Finland lowers significantly, they will simply leave and search for employment in another country. Interestingly, in this context, the interviewees seemed to trust the value of their *cosmopolitan* human capital, enabling them to move from one labor market to another, even though they otherwise tended to emphasize the importance of *local* human capital. Furthermore, the perceptions of the interviewees regarding their position as non-EU/EEA citizens showed a clear variation as well: some were in the opinion their position is not any weaker than that of EU nationals, whereas others were expressing negative sentiments due to the visa regulation. This was seen as a problem mainly because having a visa for a year or two and not being sure about the possibility of lengthening hindered them from making longer-term plans. As discussed on several notes, this is an issue also recognized in the policy paper, and the longer visas for international graduates have already been implemented. However, some interviewees argued that employers would still prefer hiring EU nationals, as this involves less bureaucracy. Concerning their position as non-EU/EEA citizens, the interviewees still were

able to study in Finland without tuition fees. The overall attitude with regard to tuition fees was absolutely negative, and the introduction of the fees was perceived as a ‘one more sign of anti-migration sentiment in Finland’.

## **Development – can it be fostered by studying in Finland?**

Development and migration is an important discourse of the policy paper, where it is approached from a rather neoliberal angle of focusing on the benefits of the Finnish economy. According to the policy paper, Finland needs to support less affluent countries and utilize the expertise of its migrant communities in this process. At the same time, the importance of Finland attracting the ‘brightest minds’ to increase the competitiveness of the Finnish economy, overrides other issues in this discourse. However, the interviewees do not refer to the issue of development and migration much – maybe their countries of origin are affluent enough, or they, as job seekers, do not have the means to support their families via remittances for instances, but rather depend financially on their families back home. Two interviewees gave insight on the development of their countries of origin: one from China described the attempts of China to counteract its brain drain and attract the high-skilled Chinese back home, whereas one interviewee from Iran shared her perceptions on the long-term hardship caused by sanctions imposed against her country of origin. Some others also reflected upon their lack of will to return home because of the poor economic situation in the home countries, especially due to the rising unemployment. Subsequently, they seemed to worry about perhaps wasting their human capital when returning to the countries of origin.

Despite the economic aspects of development and migration not being discussed in the interviews to the same extent as in the policy paper, the countries of origin seemed to have other influence on the situation of the interviewees. Some of them shared their perceptions on situations where they had felt their country of origin was held inferior to some other, typically ‘Western’, countries. This sort of situations and negative stereotypes logically cause frustration and fear of discrimination. In spite of having sort of pride of the own country of origin, most of the interviewees were not planning to return ‘home’, but wanted to stay in Finland instead, regardless of the impediments. Thus one could argue: here they

are, the motivated, high-skilled migrants that the policy paper was longing after.

## Relevant policies to enhance the employability of international graduates

The arguably most important factor defining the employability of the international graduates is the knowledge of the Finnish language. This is strongly acknowledged both by the policy paper and the interviewees. According to both data sources, there should be more tuition of Finnish already during the studies, although the policy paper goes one step further by suggesting that part of the *studies* even in international study programs should be taught in Finnish or Swedish. However, it is questionable how realistic it would be for the international students to try and attend tuition in Finnish on an academic level, considering them having freshly arrived in Finland for the study program and thus most likely encountering a language they have never heard a word of before. As some interviewees mentioned, it also puts a lot of pressure on them to try and learn Finnish besides their actual studies, especially since most non-EU/EEA students have a restricted timeframe for finishing up their studies – for example, the student visa might be granted for a maximum of two years only, or living in Finland is so expensive that they simply cannot afford to study for longer than two years, and thus need to focus on their studies instead of Finnish classes. However, the perceptions of interviewees on the supply of Finnish courses during their studies showed some variation: some were in the opinion, ‘all the tools were already there’, whereas others criticized the tuition in the Finnish classes at the university or argued that they did not learn anything ‘useful’ there. Some interviewees were also longing after Finnish courses offered by companies, in the sense of ‘getting a chance to work’ and then improving their skills in Finnish while already working. This type of language tuition as a policy measure was also included in the policy paper, but for the most parts of the document, the international graduates were expected to already have a good command of Finnish prior to being employed – as a prerequisite for their employability. In case it really is an aim of the polity to facilitate the employability of international graduates, as is argued in the policy paper, companies could e.g. offer subsidized Finnish courses, supported by public funding. Or companies interested in internationalization of their business could offer trainee programs specifically tailored for

international graduates, those programs hence offering Finnish courses specialized on the vocabulary of the sector at hand.

Besides skills in Finnish, internships were acknowledged as a key to employability both in the policy paper and the interviews. Also in the study on the employment of international graduates in Finland conducted by CIMO (2016a), practical trainings being a mandatory part of most study programs of universities of applied sciences was recognized as a major factor behind the higher employability of graduates of universities of applied sciences versus those of universities in Finland. According to another study by CIMO (2017), small and medium-sized Finnish companies are interested in finding international talents to complement the skillsets of their staff, but those companies tend to struggle in finding suitable international graduates. At the same time, the interviewees described how hard it was to find even an internship, not to mention employment, in Finnish companies. According to them, in the most career fairs they visited, companies tended to give the impression of being interested in Finnish students only, as all their promotion material as well as placement offers were in Finnish. Furthermore, the always-so-omnipresent requirement of having fluent skills in Finnish was perceived as an impediment for finding even an internship placement. A further impediment might be caused by the characteristics of the local labor market in central Finland: in Jyväskylä, international companies or companies striving at internationalization tend to be quite scarce, which delimits the opportunities of international graduates to utilize their cultural and linguistic capital in Central Finland. On the other hand, some interviewees had been searching for work in other parts of Finland too, including the Helsinki region, and they had faced difficulties in finding employment there as well. Without networks in other towns, it is hard to find the internship or job offers that match one's profile.

Concerning networks, the policy paper emphasizes the integration of migrants to the Finnish society. According to the policy paper, 'everyone has their role to play' in welcoming migrants to the Finnish society and thus helping them to find contacts among the major population. Nevertheless, no concrete measures are introduced in order to facilitate this arguably essential networking process. Among the interviewees, the difficulty of building networks among Finns is frequently recognized as an impediment for their employability. The lack of connections between international graduates and Finns has

in some cases resulted to a quite strong polarization between ‘us and them’, leading to a mindset where ‘we internationals help each other out, as we all know how hard it is here’, perceiving the majority of the population as a distant group not willing to support the international students or graduates. Some interviewees mentioned the role of the university in fostering networking among the Finnish and international students. To the defense of the University of Jyväskylä, there already are quite a few events in English, welcoming all students to get together, so a lot depends also on the activity of each (international) student, when it comes to networking. However, the career-related events could be developed into a more international student-friendly direction by increasing the amount of content available in English, and making the companies that are participating in e.g. career fairs aware of the presence of the international students, and the opportunities they could bring about in the companies. Hence the universities could take on a role of a mediator of information and connections between international students and companies. One possible measure for supporting this role could be a mentoring program, where experienced professionals from local companies would ‘mentor’ the international students close to their graduation period by giving insider tips for the job search process and helping the internationals to widen their networks. This kind of a program would lead to a mutual benefit, as everyone’s networks would expand, and the companies could discover new talents to curb their own success. Subsequently, the companies might be willing to contribute financially to such a program, which could be managed by the university in order to fully utilize its potential as a mediator between international students/graduates and companies.

Regardless of how well the international graduates speak Finnish, or what kind of networking opportunities they have, the legal preconditions for employment need to be sufficient, too. As mentioned by one of the interviewees, the extra pressure caused by the time limit of the residence permit amounts to one more impediment in the job search process. While trying to find work or establish a business and using up all the available energy for that, one also has the pressure of not knowing, whether one is even entitled to stay in the country, unless the success of finding a job or managing a business comes early enough. Luckily, as a policy measure attacking this problem, non-EU/EEA graduates now have a 12-month-period for finding work after their graduation, which is a notable improvement compared to the previous time limit of 6 months. This is of great relevance, as it could be argued that many *Finnish* graduates struggle to find work within 6 months

after their graduation, not to mention the struggles that international graduates face. By lengthening the residence permit of the high-qualified non-EU/EAA citizens, the internationalization of the Finnish companies and the argued subsequent rise of the competitiveness of the Finnish economy can be supported. An example of a counterproductive policy will probably be served by introducing the tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students – if the tuition is not free of charge anymore, Finland and Finnish universities need to be able to offer something of added value that will attract the ‘brightest minds’ to come and study in Finland.

### **Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research**

There were limitations concerning the data selected in terms of the policy paper and the interviews, as well as methodology. The policy paper stems from the second last government of Finland, so since it was drafted, major political changes have taken place. Even though it could be argued that a time span of a couple of years between policy drafting and evaluating its impact is reasonable, does a change of government (or in this case, two changes) diminish the validity of the policy evaluation. Perhaps some other policy paper would have resulted to a very different analysis, including and excluding other discourses. Furthermore, the critical discourse analysis is a *subjective* research method, as is typical of qualitative methods, since the researcher discovers, defines and describes the discourses. Some other researcher might have found other discourses in the policy paper or in the interviews – or at least would have named them differently and/or perhaps divided the data differently between discourses. The approach to the data chosen by the research surely plays a role too: when analyzing the policy paper, I might have been more critically oriented than when analyzing the outings of the interviewees. There obviously are also individual differences between researchers in analyzing an interviewee’s tone or choice of words, which has implications on the analysis.

With regard to the interviews, the relatively low quantity of them, ten, delimits the validity of the findings, especially in terms of any type of generalizations. Taking into account the design of this study and its qualitative nature, generalizations obviously were not aimed at, but nevertheless, with a higher number of interviews it might have been possible to draw

conclusions based on the frequency of a certain discourse or some other outcome. Furthermore, as it was not possible to choose interviewees but it was rather necessary to conduct interviews with anyone matching the key requirements, not much profiling of the interviewees can be done. As the quantity of the interviews was low and there was no possibility of choosing the interviewees, the gender balance was not fulfilled. Having three female interviewees out of ten resulted to a rather initial inclusion of the gender aspect of employability in the study. As the gender does influence the employability, and being female *and* a migrant tends to lead to double discrimination (Kraal 2009), the little attention contributed to the gender aspect clearly is a flaw of the study. Concerning the further denominators of the interviewees, maybe it would have been more fruitful for the analysis to have students of a certain field of studies only, or a comparison between two, such as between the perceptions of employability of IT professionals and sports scientists. This kind of a comparison might have revealed new aspects, reaching beyond the common assumption of 'IT graduates always finding a job easily' versus the common claim that students of e.g. sports, human and social sciences have themselves to blame for choosing a study branch that 'the labor market does not need'. After all, the flawless employability of the IT graduates was also questioned in this study. Concerning the fields of study and 'easy employability', the renowned health care sector was not included in the study at all, as graduates of Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences were not included, and the university of Jyväskylä does not have a medical faculty. The graduates of health care sector would have been an interesting target group for the interviews in order to find out, whether their own perceptions of their employability match the research conducted e.g. by CIMO (2016a), according to which they are the most likely to find employment in Finland after having graduated. In this case, one could e.g. compare the employability of health care graduates with alternative countries of origin, as the origin tends to influence the employability of a migrant.

Concerning the countries of origin of the interviewees, there was no opportunity to choose a set of countries or regions, as there was no choosing process of the interviewees. The only requirement that could be resorted to was the origin in a non EU/EEA country, but otherwise the set of countries is very various, comprising of countries in Europe, Asia, Middle East and South America. Despite most, if not all, of the countries of origin of the interviewees being less affluent than Finland, the development discourse was surprisingly

scant in the interviews - partly due to a limited share of this topic in the interview questions, which was a deficiency caused by me as a researcher. Perhaps their countries of origin were also affluent enough to reduce the relevance of the development discourse, which was more omnipresent in the policy paper. Furthermore, as the group of interviewees consisted of recent graduates, most of which did *not* have a job yet, it is understandable that e.g. remittances were not mentioned in the interviews. Anyhow, a different composition of interviewees might have revealed more on the interesting interplay between migration and development.

With regard to the overall theme of employability of international graduates, it would be interesting to widen the scope of research to the international level by comparing perceptions of graduates in a set of countries, which obviously is not possible within a Master thesis. However, because of the complexity of graduate employability, an international comparison should give more in-depth insight on the factors shaping employability (Li 2016). When resorting to the national or even regional level, as in this study, comparing the interviews from 2016 to the perception of the graduates two or three years later might reveal aspects of the political changes that have taken place meanwhile – most notably, the introduction of the tuition fees for students from non-EU/EEA countries starting in autumn 2017 will surely have an impact on the perceptions of the future graduates.



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## Appendix 1: Interview questions

### BEFORE STUDYING IN FINLAND

Basic Info: Country of origin, since when in Finland, what program graduated from and when

Could you tell me about your previous study and working experience, prior to studying in Jyväskylä?

### STUDIES IN JYVÄSKYLÄ

Could you tell me why you chose to study in Finland/ specifically in Jyväskylä?

If you look back at your studies, were you planning to stay in Finland after graduation a) in the beginning of the studies here; b) during the studies?

During your studies, did you participate on career-related courses offered by career services or some other body at the university? Why?

If yes, what is/was your opinion on those courses? How could they have been improved? What kind of support would have been useful for you?

### FINNISH LANGUAGE

Did you attend Finnish language classes during your studies? Voluntarily or as an obligatory part of your degree? How would you describe your skills in Finnish?

According to your perception, what has been the role of knowing or not knowing Finnish in your entry to the Finnish society? Or working life?

### APPLYING FOR A JOB

Have you applied for jobs here? How did you find your current job?

Could you describe your experiences in Finland, when you have been applying for a job?

According to your experience and perceptions, what have been the main factors affecting your employment?

What kind of experiences do you have as a non-EU citizen applying for a job?

In terms of networking, what kind of experiences do you have? How about networking with Finnish students/colleagues?

## FUTURE

What are your professional goals for the next five years, or even further? Are you planning to stay in Finland?

What are the most important factors shaping your decision on where to live?

What would make you stay / leave?