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Laure Sandoz

Mobilities of the Highly Skilled towards Switzerland

The Role of Intermediaries in Defining "Wanted Immigrants"

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Isn't it a characteristic of our time that all humans, in a way, have become migrants and minorities?
Maalouf, A. (1998). Les Identités meurtrières. Paris: Grasset.

Today, it is still human beings that are coming, not "asylum seekers", "refugees", "third-country nationals" or "highly skilled migrants".
Hruschka, C. (2016). Das individuelle Potenzial von Asylsuchenden wahrnehmen. In Migrationsland Schweiz, C. Abbt and J. Rochel (eds.), 119–133. Baden: Hier und Jetzt.

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1
Introduction

Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?
Mawuna Remarque Koutonin, The Guardian, 13 March 2015

Story 1: Rashmi's dream was to become a doctor. On the day of her university entrance exam in Sri Lanka, the school was bombed and she had to run for her life. Although she later started university, she had to stop after 6 months because of the war. When one of her uncles obtained a British student visa for her, she migrated alone. Because she had nobody to support her economically, and because she wanted to send money to her family back in Sri Lanka, Rashmi started to work full-time in a travel agency, first as a cashier, then as a travel assistant and finally as a marketing assistant. After 8 years in England, she decided to continue her studies. She subsequently moved to Switzerland because she wanted to learn a new language and discover a new culture. She also knew someone in the country: a Swiss man of Sri Lankan origin whom she eventually married. After her arrival, she applied for asylum but her application was rejected. In the meantime, she started studying tourism, marketing and management. At the same time, she worked part-time in a restaurant until she received a scholarship. During this period, Rashmi volunteered for several projects about cross-cultural communication and integration. She also acted in two plays about migration. At the time of the interview, Rashmi had just finished her master's degree and was looking for a job in Switzerland.

L. Sandoz, *Mobilities of the Highly Skilled towards Switzerland*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21122-6_1

Story 2: Franck grew up in the German-speaking part of Belgium. His father was the CEO of a big retail company, his mother a housewife. He studied economics and computer science in the Netherlands before starting a PhD in economics. Supported by one of his professors, he worked for a few years as a self-employed consultant for companies in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom before finding a job in Germany and later in France. He found commuting between France and Germany (where his wife was living) tiring and did not like his new job very much, so Franck started to look for other opportunities. After applying for various positions, he was offered a good job in the human resources department of a chemical company in Basel. Soon after starting his new job, the company offered Franck a role with more responsibilities, which involved managing an international team and spending 60% of his time travelling. Although he considered this project to be an unexpected opportunity to reach a senior-level management position quickly, his busy schedule and frequent travelling generated tensions within his marriage. The last time I talked to him, he had just resigned from the job for a position with a Dutch company, which had contacted him directly to offer him an attractive position.

These are the kind of stories that you hear when you start asking highly educated foreigners in Switzerland about their lives. You encounter all kinds of situations: from the unemployed trailing spouse to the successful entrepreneur; from the former student struggling to renew his residence permit to the hyper-mobile businessman; from the stateless man trying to live with the person he loves to the cross-border worker; from the undeclared woman living with friends to the newly naturalised Swiss citizen. These stories demonstrate the porosity of borders in our world: some people cross them so often that they do not notice them anymore, while others have difficulty moving from one Swiss canton to another. These stories show the importance of individual situations – a single encounter, discovery, or decision can play a crucial role in the migration process. These stories illustrate the complex relationship between individuals' goals and the social contexts in which they are embedded, which may be more or less supportive or beneficial.

Highly skilled migration has become a widely researched topic over the past two decades (Parsons, Rojon, Samanani, & Wettach, 2014; Shachar, 2006; Sontag, 2018b; Triadafilopoulos, 2013). Yet, few researchers have adopted a critical perspective to approach the category of "highly skilled migrants", despite the fact that it raises important issues regarding the subjective value of knowledge and the unequal distribution of power between social groups (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018a, 2018b; Sandoz, 2018). At a time when academics, policymakers, and corporate actors increasingly regard highly skilled migrants from the perspective of their potential benefits for the host societies, I argue that this category is far from obvious and raises many further avenues of inquiry. This book represents an attempt to problematise skill valuation processes in the context of selective immigration policies in

Switzerland. I will show that, beyond consideration of professional qualifications, the ways decision makers perceive migrants within specific social, economic, and political contexts are crucial for constructing them as skilled or unskilled, wanted or unwanted, welcome or unwelcome.

I conducted the research in Switzerland, a country which attracts exceptionally high numbers of highly educated individuals (Haug & Müller-Jentsch, 2008). Today, more than half of all adults immigrating to Switzerland have completed tertiary education (nccr – on the move, 2017).[1] In comparison, this proportion is around 40% in France (Brutel, 2014) and 44% in Germany (Seibert & Wapler, 2012). Moreover, Switzerland is one of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries with the highest share of immigrants per capita (about 25%). Only Australia has a similar rate, while countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Austria, the United States, and Germany are lagging behind (Haug & Müller-Jentsch, 2008).

I started this project by searching for information about highly educated migrants in Switzerland in order to understand how they are perceived and how they present themselves. Do they form groups or communities? I soon realised that the word "expat", as used in the Swiss context, answered my initial research questions to some extent. Although this term was once used to refer to people with highly paid jobs immigrating for professional reasons and for short durations, it has evolved into an overarching term for a much broader category of foreigners living in Switzerland. Nowadays, "expat" is generally used to characterise migrants who can communicate in English[2] and whose social position differs from other immigrants because of their ethnicity and economic, cultural, or social capital (Pavic, 2015).

Following this discovery, I found an intriguing online advertisement for an "Expat Expo" where English-speaking visitors could obtain information from exhibitors about various service providers in their region, including banks, insurance companies, schools, health professionals, social clubs, sports organisations, coaching services, employment services, janitorial services, car rental agencies, relocation agencies, real estate agencies, shops, and churches. I visited the Expat Expo on a Sunday morning in Basel in the company of another doctoral researcher who had recently arrived in Switzerland and thought that she might find interesting information. However, she left disappointed because most of the proposed services were too high-end for her needs.

This experience ignited new questions: Who can access such services? Some are free, or require just a small yearly contribution, while others are very expensive. Who can afford them, and how do they influence the migration experience?

Visiting the Expat Expo, it became clear to me that migration is not only an individual experience; for some, it is a business that relies on the mobilisation of individuals with particular resources. I define mobilisation here as both "the action of making something movable or capable of movement" and "the action of organising

[1] Tertiary education in Switzerland includes universities, "Hochschulen", and postgraduate professional training.

[2] The four official Swiss languages are French, (Swiss) German, Italian, and Romansh.

and encouraging a group of people to take collective action in pursuit of a particular objective" (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2017). From there, I asked myself: How do institutions target and attract the people from whom they expect an economic benefit? How does access to certain services and networks influence an individual's social position in a new environment?

Since beginning my research, I have felt that the term "highly skilled" is problematic because it evaluates an individual's competence based on subjective norms that arise from specific cultural environments. Furthermore, in my understanding, "highly skilled" is broader than "highly educated": if the latter term can be defined based on one's level of formal education to include all people with a tertiary education, the former is less clear because it often involves economic and political considerations about the social desirability of individuals in specific situations. This is particularly the case in the context of selective immigration policies, as I will discuss.

Hence, I reoriented my research to focus on the interactions between migrants to Switzerland and the institutions that organise their recruitment, selection, and settlement. Based on the literature, I call these institutions "migration intermediaries" in order to emphasise their important mediating role in mobility processes. By observing interactions between the migrants and those who organise their mobility, I aim to analyse the ways the actors involved in these institutions attribute norms and values to different groups. Moreover, this way of proceeding allows me to delve into issues regarding the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants by looking at the rights, privileges, and resources which individuals can – or cannot – access during migration. This research approach thus transforms the problematic notion of "highly skilled" into an interesting emic category, which leads to my central research question:

How do migration intermediaries contribute to structuring the mobility of highly educated individuals, and how do the practices of these intermediaries construct distinctive categories of "highly skilled migrants"?

My analysis draws on an ethnographic study conducted in the French-speaking Lemanic region and the German-speaking northwestern region of Switzerland between 2014 and 2018. This study focuses on the interactions and power relations between regional stakeholders involved in encouraging and facilitating the settlement of certain migrants whom they perceive as valuable. In my research, I identify two main groups of migration intermediaries: public sector actors and private sector actors.

The book is organised into six chapters. The introductory chapter presents my theoretical approach with regard to the literature on highly skilled migration and methodology. In the second chapter, I analyse the role of the Swiss state as an intermediary between immigrants and employers. I address the issue of admission by looking at how cantonal administrations select immigrants who are perceived as valuable enough to receive authorisation to stay and work in the country. In the third chapter, I analyse different initiatives by Swiss cantons to attract, welcome, and

retain certain categories of newcomers and to brand specific places as attractive. In the fourth chapter, I turn to the role of the private sector in managing the mobility of workers. I examine interactions between service providers, companies, and workers in order to shed light on the mechanisms that enable companies to access a flexible workforce. In the fifth chapter, I discuss the interplay between institutional practices and individual experiences to identify specific "migration channels" through which immigrants obtain access to the Swiss territory and labour market. This analysis enables me to delve deeper into the construction of "highly skilled migrants" by showing, in the concluding chapter, how such channels participate in the process of categorising immigrants into distinctive groups that are associated with specific norms, values, and privileges.

1.1 Reflections on Highly Skilled Migration

When I started this research, two issues were being hotly debated in Switzerland – asylum politics and bilateral relations with the European Union (EU). After dominating the political agenda by focusing on Muslims, foreign criminals, and the asylum system, the largest political party in the Swiss parliament – the Swiss People's Party (Mazzoleni, 2015) – started to challenge the principle of the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU.[3] In February 2014, 50.33% of Swiss voters approved a popular initiative for more restrictive migration policies in Switzerland.[4] This created a climate of uncertainty in the years that followed, raising questions about how the initiative would be implemented and whether it would be compatible with maintaining bilateral agreements with the EU.

This tense situation assists in comprehending why, in December 2013, the Swiss Federal Council announced the allocation of 17.2 million Swiss francs (approximately 15 million euros) over 4 years to the newly founded National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) addressing migration and mobility in Switzerland: at that moment, this topic was clearly of strategic importance for both government

[3] Switzerland is not part of the European Union but has signed a series of agreements with both the EU and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states guaranteeing the free movement of goods, services, and people between signatory states. After 2002, measures regulating EU citizens in Switzerland were gradually removed. In 2014, regulatory measures only applied to Bulgaria and Romania, and Croatia had not yet benefitted from the agreement. The free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU applied to citizens of all other EU and EFTA member states.

[4] In Switzerland, any member of the Swiss electorate can request a partial revision of the Federal Constitution by launching a popular initiative. In order for the initiative to be put to a popular vote, it needs to be supported by the signatures of 100,000 eligible voters within 18 months. The initiative then needs to be approved by a majority of the electorate and of the cantons ("double majority") during a popular vote. Once all these conditions are fulfilled, the Federal Constitution is modified according to the initiative and the Parliament draws up legislation for implementing the amended constitutional article or articles.

actors and academics.[5] Less clear, however, was what the government expected from the researchers hired for this project, in terms of contributions to political issues. Although our academic freedom appeared to be guaranteed, the visibility of the project encouraged us to be particularly aware of the impact that our research might have. I was also concerned about the implication of the NCCR: Would it reinforce the idea that migration itself is a problem that needs to be studied in order to be solved?

My studies in anthropology and migration trained me to criticise approaches that take for granted the existence of discrete boundaries between groups. Inspired by the work of Barth (1969) and Brubaker (2004), my interest lies in the processes that bring categories into being and enable social boundaries to be reproduced or transgressed in the interactions of everyday life. I therefore tend to be wary of dichotomies such as "migrant vs. native" or "highly skilled vs. low skilled". Their normative dimensions – linked to the fact that these notions entail ideas about what is good or bad, normal or abnormal, problematic or unproblematic, familiar or alien – make me feel uncomfortable. I do not want to use them as scientific categories but rather to ask how they became such important organising concepts. I also feel uncomfortable with the "migration" label attached to my research field, which in my view puts too much emphasis on migrants as "others" to be researched because of their difference from a seemingly unproblematic and almost invisible category of natives. In that sense, I support the idea that research on migration should be "de-migranticised" (Bojadžijev & Römhild, 2014; Dahinden, 2016), while research on society should give more importance to mobility-related phenomena (Cresswell, 2006a; Soderstrom, Ruedin, Randeria, D'Amato, & Panese, 2013; Urry, 2007).

With this book, I offer some solutions in response to this call. The next sections summarise my main reflections. I start by discussing migration in reference to the literature and presenting my position on certain problematic issues. I then analyse the concept of "highly skilled migrant" and introduce my research approach, which builds on previous work examining migration intermediaries, migration industries, and migration infrastructures.

1.1.1 Who Are the Migrants?

Social and cultural anthropology has a long history of studying migration. Even if the "sedentarist bias" (Malkki, 1995) of the functionalist era prevented most researchers from taking into account processes of mobility and social change,

[5] NCCRs are large-scale projects financed by the Swiss government for 4–12 years to promote cutting-edge research in areas of strategic importance for Switzerland. The NCCR in which I worked aimed to "enhance the understanding of contemporary migration patterns and to establish an innovative and competitive field of research on migration and mobility in Switzerland" (see: https://nccr-onthemove.ch/). In its first phase, which ran from 2014 to 2018, the project included approximately 70 researchers from various disciplines in the social sciences (sociology, law, economics, psychology, geography, anthropology, demography) affiliated with eight Swiss universities.

authors such as Brettel (2008) and Glick Schiller (2003) remind us that since the 1960s, an important body of literature on migration has been produced within the social sciences, and in particular, anthropology.

Preliminary studies in the 1960s focused mainly on processes of urbanisation and the subsequent cultural changes experienced by rural "peasants" or "tribe-men" in cities (Brettel, 2008, p. 114). In the 1970s, new fields of research started to emerge, with studies conducted both in the migrants' original and receiving locations. Concepts such as "network" and "kinship" allowed for detailed ethnographies on the social ties maintained or constructed during migration, thus opening the way for new approaches to complex societies and colonial relationships (Glick Schiller, 2003). However, in most of the literature produced during this period, migration remained conceptualised as a linear process from a home country towards a homogenous host society that would gradually assimilate newcomers (Darieva, 2007).

The 1990s saw the emergence of transnationalism as a central approach to the study of migration. According to Glick Schiller (2003, p. 103; see also Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1998, 1999; Mato, 1997):

> Transnational processes can be defined as political, economic, social, and cultural processes that extend beyond the borders of a particular state and include actors that are not states but are shaped by the policies and institutional practices of particular states. These processes are much broader than migration and include flows of goods, information, and political influence.

This new way of conceptualising space led researchers to draw their attention to the experience of people "participating simultaneously in social relations that embed them in more than one nation-state", also referred to as "transmigrants" (Glick Schiller, 2003, p. 105).

Criticism of "methodological nationalism" in the social sciences constituted a basis for this new approach to migration, encouraging researchers to look beyond political borders in order to take into account both the diversity within a given society and the connections between locations situated in different nation-states (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). In addition, a cornerstone of transnationalism is the willingness to consider migrants as active agents able to reshape spatial relationships through transnational practices. This perspective can be understood as a reaction to historical-structuralist approaches, which were dominant in the previous period and focused on macro-level processes such as the influence of global markets and capitalist developments on mobility (Brettel, 2008).

In fact, the transnational approach constitutes an expression of a broader transformation in the social sciences that occurred during the 1990s and 2000s and is characterised by an increased focus on mobility. The "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller & Urry, 2006), also called the "mobility turn" (Urry, 2007), denounces a "sedentarist" bias in academic research (Cresswell, 2002) and calls for better consideration of the role of movement in social processes. By reconciling the fields of transport, migration, and social research, this approach proposes that movement be looked at as something constitutive of the social world in order to extend understandings of mobility to all social phenomena (Soderstrom et al., 2013).

By focusing on the social importance of mobility, many researchers started to question the ways migration and other forms of movement are defined and discussed (e.g. Dahinden, 2016; Favell, 2008). They realised that even if migration often refers to "the movement of individuals or groups in a geographical and social space" (Strasser, 2009, p. 17, my translation), this definition is problematic because movement in a geographical and social space does not always mean migration, so agreeing on a common, satisfactory definition is difficult. The plurality of terms used to describe movement, as well as the social values associated with these words, contribute to the ambiguity of "migration". Movement can, for instance, be categorised as related to tourism, business, or education depending on the duration of the stay and the intentions of the individual. In addition, certain forms of movement – those that do not cross any important social, cultural, or political boundaries, for example – remain unnamed. Hence, the notion of "migration", as well as other terms referring to specific forms of displacement, contain assumptions about the social value of movement and, by extension, of the people who perform these moves. Because "mobility involves both material practice and meaning" (Cresswell, 2006b, p. 735), the categories used to describe movement are never neutral. Instead, they arise from social, cultural, and historical constructions that influence the ways we perceive, evaluate, and name the act of moving in different contexts.

These observations made researchers aware that definitions of migration cannot be dissociated from the historical construction of nation-states and the representation of citizens as sedentary subjects that differ from migrants on the basis of the rights and privileges granted by the state (Dahinden, 2016; Fassin, 2011). According to Favell (2008, p. 273):

> One of the key historical ways that the state has constituted its powers over society has been to classify movement as migration, and thereby invent a fixed immobile territorial population that can call itself a nation.

This quote highlights the fact that calling certain people migrants categorises them according to a logic that is largely rooted in a state-imposed political division that presents non-citizens as exceptions to be surveyed and disciplined. This raises the question of whether social scientists should adopt these politically defined conventions when referring to their research subjects.

Defining migrants from a theoretical perspective is problematic because issues associated with a sovereign state's assertion of power often do not leave space for alternative interpretations. Favell (2008, p. 272) makes the problem obvious with a simple example:

> There is a deep truth for the Mexicans in California who complain, when accused of illegality, that they did not cross any borders; the borders crossed them. What makes the "illegal migrant" different is that a nation-state has decided to name the movement that way – as a way to asserting its own sovereign existence.

This raises important questions: How can researchers acknowledge the authority of states to regulate migration without legitimising and taking for granted this power in their work? How can examining the notion of migration open new social

perspectives without confining research to a narrow framework of political definitions? Given the normative dimension of the term, is it ethical to call someone a migrant?

I address these issues by questioning how social and political categories are produced, who produces them, and what interests lie behind different categorisation modes. Instead of selecting specific groups of people defined a priori as migrants, I use notions of "migrant" and "migration" as *categories of practice*, or categories of everyday social experiences that require critical analysis (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). This strategy enables a direct focus on the power structures behind the everyday processes of categorisation and on the concrete implications of imposing these definitions on individuals.

However, in many instances, "migrant" – or "immigrant", referring to an individual moving *towards* something – is the most precise term to describe people who experience the process of crossing a political border, and for whom this process has concrete implications. I therefore use it where transformation through a national border crossing is salient, keeping in mind that this process takes place within the historical and political context of nation-states.

I propose two definitions of the problematic notions of *foreigner* and *immigrant* in order to clarify their use in this book:

Foreigner refers to a nation-state logic, or a legal regime organised around the idea of citizenship. The category of foreigner suggests a particular relationship between an individual and a state with its associated rights and obligations. From the perspective of the Swiss state, this applies to all persons without Swiss nationality. I use the term *foreigner* when pointing to this specific legal regime and its implications for a person's experience.

(Im)migrant also refers to a nation-state logic but without including the specific nationality of the person involved. One can be a foreigner without necessarily being an immigrant, or an immigrant without necessarily being a foreigner. Contrary to the word *foreigner*, this notion does not correspond to a legal definition. Yet it traditionally refers to a linear movement from one country to the next, with detachment from the first country leading to assimilation in the new country. Even though this representation is insufficient to understand the broad range of mobility experiences, it remains an important model that influences the way many individuals perceive themselves and others. I use this notion in order to emphasise a mode of representation where the fact of crossing a national border is perceived as abnormal and is associated with further representations and expectations.

Where these terms are not appropriate, I use *mobility* to describe forms of movement that do not directly refer to national border crossings. However, I am aware that in the current political context the term *mobility* is loaded with values. The European construction, as well as broader globalisation processes, have contributed to defining mobility as a positive process that contrasts with the rather negatively loaded notion of migration. Some authors have criticised the fact that academic research on mobility tends to reproduce neoliberal ideologies and idealise mobile

subjects (e.g. Salazar, 2016). In order to avoid this bias, my research does not assume an a priori positive value for the term, but rather attempts to qualify the ways individuals perceive and experience mobility.

1.1.2 Who Are the Highly Skilled?

A main objective of my research project is to delve into the construction of migrant categories in Switzerland and discuss the ambiguous category of "highly skilled migrant". I thus spent a significant amount of time questioning this notion.

My first investigations revealed that highly skilled migration is a relatively new category. In their very useful text on the conceptualisation of this term, Parsons and his colleagues (2014, p. 4) note:

> Prior to 1988, not a single mention of "High-Skilled Migration" was made across the entire literary repository of Google, while the frequency of the term increased in the same written sources by over 30 times between 1990 and 2007.

In 2019, searching for this term on Google Scholar revealed 2360 results (3680 for "highly skilled migration"), showing that the notion had become a major topic in academia. Another research with the Google tool *Ngram Viewer* highlights a similar trend (Fig. 1.1).

Important policy changes in several industrialised countries after the 1960s could help to explain the recent surge in popularity of this category, as new approaches to migration management started to emerge. On the one hand, these approaches aimed to encourage "the best and the brightest" to settle in certain countries and, on the

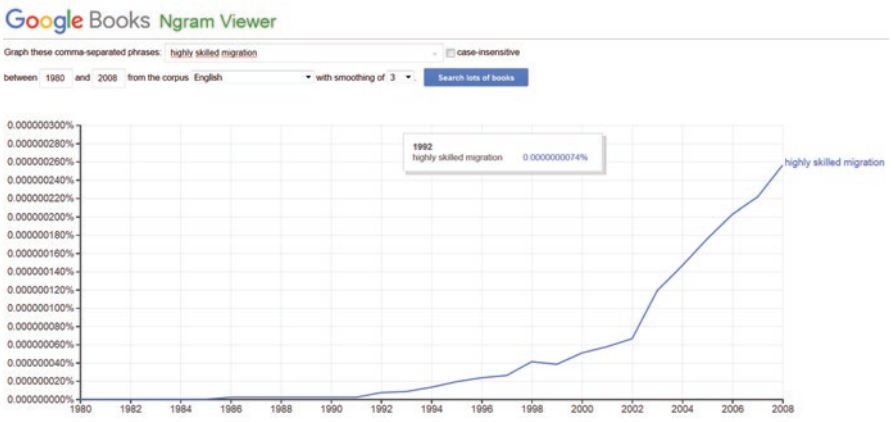

Fig. 1.1 Occurrences of the term "highly skilled migration" in Google text corpora in English, 1980–2008. (Source: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=highly+skilled+migration&year_start=1980&year_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Chighly%20skilled%20migration%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2Chighly%20skilled%20migration%3B%2Cc0 (researched by the author on 22 March 2019))

other hand, to prevent unwanted categories of people to immigrate (De Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli, 2016; Parsons et al., 2014). Canada established the first points-based system for managing immigration in 1967. This scheme attributed points to candidates for immigration based on predefined criteria – skills and education played a prominent role – and those with a sufficient number of points could be admitted to the country. Australia adopted a similar approach in 1973 by developing its own point system, followed by New Zealand in 1991. Each system assigned particular importance to education. Skills-based immigration programmes then spread to the US and Europe, where several countries decided to adopt a more proactive approach to migration management (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b), thus entering what Shachar (2006) called a "race for talent".

After the 1980s, a growing number of researchers started to analyse these policy changes. In particular, a large body of literature in political science and economics emphasised the positive impacts of skilled migration on receiving countries (Iredale, 2001; Millar & Salt, 2007; OECD, 2002; Triadafilopoulos, 2013). The authors often emphasised the importance of skilled labour for economies increasingly driven by technological advancement and knowledge. In this context, attracting skilled foreigners appeared crucial in order to fill the so-called "skill gap", namely, the idea that local workforces in many industrialised countries have insufficient skills to answer employers' needs (Shachar, 2006). Many researchers and decision makers also viewed high-earning foreigners as potential taxpayers who could help compensate public deficits resulting from population ageing. Finally, mobility was presented as a central feature of a globalised economy, since cooperation and competition between companies required flexible policies for the exchange of staff (Hercog, 2008, 2014, 2017).

However, researchers regarded these attempts by rich countries to attract skilled workers with caution, and there is a large body of literature on "brain drain" criticising this policy trend (Hercog, 2017). This term was first used in the 1960s to describe the immigration of British scientists to the United States. From the beginning, the debate involved criticising the US for attempting to attract the most brilliant individuals from other countries. It then broadened into a more general discussion on the positive and negative effects of skilled migration from poor to rich countries (Dumitru, 2009; Findlay & Cranston, 2015). The debate thus connected migration to issues of development, North–South relationships and global inequalities (Beine, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2001; Docquier, Lohest, & Marfouk, 2005; Raghuram, 2009). Most authors highlighted that the emigration of skilled individuals represents a loss for the countries that invested in their education. In contradiction to this view, some authors also showed how remittances and return migration can have a positive impact on a country's economic development (Boeri, Brücker, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2012). Johnson and Regets (1998) developed the concept of "brain circulation" to describe the circular migration of skilled workers across countries and to argue that this form of migration can benefit both origin and destination countries.

These approaches focus on the economic impacts of skilled migration on nations and rely mainly upon macro- and meso-level methodologies such as statistics and policy analyses. Social scientists focusing on actors' experiences and strategies

started to engage with highly skilled migration at a later stage (Klein, 2016). Early examples of such approaches are Ulf Hannerz on cosmopolitanism (1990), Erik Cohen's anthropological enquiry into the literature about expatriate communities (1977), and Jonathan Beaverstock's extensive work on mobile managers and expatriates in the financial and business sectors (Beaverstock, 1990, 1991, 1996, 2002; Beaverstock & Smith, 1996). Anne-Catherine Wagner (1998) wrote a detailed ethnography on the life of expatriate managers and their families in Paris, analysing the way new models of mobility challenge older structures of power and social distinction. Moosmüller (1997) studied German and American employees posted to Japan by focusing on cultural interactions. In all of these cases, the research focused on individuals from industrialised countries who moved to another industrialised country – either alone or with family – for reasons related to work.

The topic of highly skilled migration gained more relevance among social scientists working with actor-centred methodologies during the 1990s and 2000s. So far, this field of migration research had mainly focused on "minorities" with relatively low social status. Interests in ethnicity and inequality had driven most researchers to study the strategies developed by underprivileged actors in order to resist various forms of exclusion (Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2006). This situation led several authors to criticise the fact that migrants were too often represented in the literature as ethnic units that challenge nation-states, thus maintaining a static conceptualisation of culture where migrants appear as problematic "others" (Dahinden, 2016). The "mobility turn" in social sciences encouraged researchers to focus on ways of life that imply frequent travel and communication across space (Cresswell, 2006b; Sontag, 2018b; Urry, 2007). In that context, highly skilled migrants became a form of archetypal "mobile subject" in academic discourses.

Favell et al. (2006) identify a series of assumptions in the literature about highly skilled migration, arguing that this category often appears as a point of reference against whom to contrast less privileged migrants in the social science literature. For instance, they show that highly skilled migrants are usually referred to as "elites" and are contrasted with a lower class of ethnically distinct individuals who are commonly subjected to discrimination and exploitation in industrialised countries. If low-skill migrants are supposed to be the target of strong state controls, the highly skilled are regarded as "wanted migrants" whose mobility is encouraged and facilitated by different state and private actors. Moreover, while migration scholars highlight the difficulties experienced by less privileged migrants regarding professional and social integration, they often view the skills of migrant professionals as easily transportable from one context to another, thus allowing them to fill job vacancies without trouble.

In another text, Kunz (2016) analyses the usage of the terms "highly skilled migrants" and "expatriates". Even if the definitions for each term are unstable and can include a wider or smaller range of people depending on the usage (see also Fechter, 2007), she notes that these categories often appear as synonymous in the scientific literature. She shows how the two terms oppose a third category of immigrants, from which expatriates and highly skilled migrants distinguish themselves because of social markers such as race, class, nationality, occupation, or profession

(see also Lundström, 2014). Kunz thus argues that highly skilled migrants are usually constructed in opposition to both other migrants and local populations as a category associated with specific status, privilege, and power.

Regarding representations of the lifestyles of highly skilled migrants – which in this case is used as a synonym for expatriate – Van Bochove and Engbersen (2013) show that many researchers describe this category of people as true "cosmopolitans" who feel "comfortable in many places" (Kanter, 1995, pp. 22–23) and "for whom openness to new experiences is a vocation" (Hannerz, 1990, p. 243). Yet they also notice that skilled and mobile individuals are often referred to as people who enjoy an "homogeneous lifestyle" in "gated communities" (Castells, 1996, p. 447) and whose social contacts are mostly associated with work (Beaverstock, 2005; Fechter, 2007). In these representations, the authors underline a tension between images of openness and fluidity, captured by the term "cosmopolitan", and images of closure and friction, captured by the term "expat bubbles".

Finally, many authors question the legitimacy of skill-selective migration policies, arguing that although such policies are often perceived as less problematic than other selection tools because of their merit-based approach, they nonetheless lead states to discriminate between migrants according to criteria such as race (Tannock, 2011), cultural closeness (Yeung, 2016) and social desirability (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b; Simon-Kumar, 2015). In addition, opposition between "highly skilled" and "low skilled" migrants raise important issues concerning the value given to different forms of knowledge in a world in which power is unequally distributed across places and social groups (Wagner, 2007). The gendered bias of skill-selective policies and the disadvantages they entail for women have also been highlighted by several researchers (Boucher, 2007; Kofman, 2014; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005).

The "highly skilled migration" label brings together many studies that often have little to do with one another. While some authors analyse the social mechanisms specific to some economically valued professions (e.g. the mobility of medical doctors, IT specialists, or engineers), others focus on the cultural capital of immigrants and the impact of "creative people" on the places they move to (for a review, see Findlay & Cranston, 2015). Many authors also refer to individuals' social positioning to characterise highly skilled migrants, for instance in research on expatriates (Kunz, 2016), trailing partners (Raghuram, 2004; Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015; Willis & Yeoh, 2000), and the emergence of a "transnational capitalist class" or "global elite" (e.g. Sklair, 1998). Definitions based on social capital often involve a racial dimension, which a few authors criticise (Cranston, 2017; Tannock, 2011). The mobility of students is sometimes labelled as highly skilled migration (e.g. Hawthorne, 2008), as well as the experience of academically educated individuals who do not manage to use their skills after migration (see literature on de-skilling, e.g. Guhlich, 2017; Klein, 2016; Riaño, 2003, 2011; Weiss, 2005, 2006). In these last cases, the focus lies on the "potential" of people to be recognised as highly skilled and the analyses underscores the context-dependent nature of both skills and social status.

In sum, this overview of highly skilled migrants in the scientific literature shows that the construction of this category arises from specific policy changes in many

industrialised countries, which led to new definitions of "wanted migrants" who are targeted by various domestic legal regimes. Moreover, the vast literature on brain drain not only associated the mobility of highly skilled individuals with global power inequalities between nations, but also attempted to calculate the economic impact of highly skilled migration for both sending and receiving countries. Finally, this category has been used by researchers to capture a specific constellation of power relations among migrants, with highly skilled migrants often representing the higher end of the range in terms of status, privilege, and power. While some authors refer to a rather fantasised image of "mobile elites", others use the relationship between skills, migration, and status to investigate the impact of legal structures and social dynamics on individuals' positioning within local and global spaces. Such studies are particularly interesting because they draw attention to the contextual nature of skills and enable one to grasp the changing relations of power.

1.1.3 How to Evaluate Skills?

If the term "migrant" is problematic in many respects, the notion of "high skills" raises equally important issues regarding the value given to different forms of knowledge, which are themselves connected to issues of the geographical and social distribution of power. While several researchers have denounced the discriminatory nature of policies aimed at highly skilled migrants (Tannock, 2011), others have highlighted the gendered dimension of skills valuation (Jungwirth & Wolffram, 2017; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005).

Borrowing from the OECD, Iredale (2001, p. 8) proposes a definition of "highly skilled workers", which corresponds to the definition of highly skilled migrants used by many researchers:

> Highly skilled workers are normally defined as having a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-SOPEMI, 1997), it includes highly skilled specialists, independent executives and senior managers, specialised technicians or tradespersons, investors, business persons, "key-workers" and sub-contract workers.

According to this definition, a person can be categorised as highly skilled on the basis of having studied in a specific type of institution or having a level of experience equivalent to those promoted in such institutions. The definition also provides a list of professional fields in which highly skilled people can be found, namely the technology and business sectors.

Such a definition raises important questions about the value of different forms of knowledge. As academics we should be aware that universities do not have a monopoly in providing knowledge. Their importance is socially, geographically, and historically situated. This form of learning developed in a specific medieval Christian context (Hermansen, 2016) before imposing itself globally as the dominant pedagogical model. However, access is limited, especially in locations where it remains the privilege of social elites. Moreover, a university-based definition of

skills does not take into account other forms of knowledge that are practised and valued in various places. The notion of skills as dependent on a university degree is culturally and socially marked, since it favours people who have a particular social background or who live in places where this model of education is both valued and available. It is therefore strongly connected to issues of the geographical and social distribution of power. I find it particularly striking that few authors raise this point in relation to the conceptualisation of highly skilled migrants (an exception can be found in Tannock, 2011). Although Iredale's definition includes people with "an extensive/equivalent experience" (2001, p. 8) to university degrees, this expansion raises new questions: Who decides which experiences are extensive enough, or equivalent to a university degree? How should people whose qualifications are not recognised be considered, for instance because they moved to a country with a different educational system? Because the notion of "high skills" is loaded with values, it is difficult to use without reproducing social hierarchies and stereotypes.

Considering this notion from a gender perspective highlights the issue of social hierarchies and stereotypes particularly well. Several researchers note that the occupations most often regarded as highly skilled are typically male-dominated (Boucher, 2007; Kofman, 2014; Phillips & Taylor, 1980; Steinberg, 1990). Kofman and Raghuram (2005, p. 150) argue:

> The ascription of technological innovation as the driving force of globalisation and the new knowledge economy and society (Castells, 1996) has often led to the highly skilled being defined as those qualified in scientific and technological professions (OECD, 2002) while the skills required in educational and caring jobs, such as teaching and nursing, are considered to be inherent in their femininity and often collapsed into it, so that these jobs are primarily conceptualised as women's jobs and therefore semi-skilled rather than skilled (Hardill & MacDonald, 2000). As such, the notion of skill is not gender neutral and the kinds of work which women do are often defined prima facie as less skilled.

Many studies acknowledge the tendency to regard the skills demanded in male-dominated activities as learnt skills while viewing the skills necessary for female-dominated activities as natural talents (Daune-Richard, 2003; Jenson, 1991). This social construction of skills and qualifications associated with femininity also results in their devaluation in the labour market.

Hence, the notion of "high skills" is not neutral in terms of gender, class, or ethnicity, and implies assumptions about skills that favour privileged social positions within the globalised world order, in particular men from rich Western countries.

Based on this argument, I identify a need for a more general discussion on the conceptualisation of skills based on empirical data. I observe that few studies have so far critically analysed the notion of highly skilled migration: some authors focus on the difficulty of finding a common definition (Boucher & Cerna, 2014; Parsons et al., 2014); others discuss the prejudices associated with conceptualisations of skills in terms of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality (Kofman, 2014; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Kunz, 2016; Tannock, 2011); others criticise the lack of an empirical foundation for common representations of highly skilled migrants (Favell et al., 2006). Much work remains to be done to fill the theoretical gaps around highly skilled migration and gain a better understanding of its inherent social and cultural biases.

In my research, I regard the notion of highly skilled as a process of internal and external categorisation rather than as an intrinsic package of skills that an individual needs to possess in order to fit a fixed definition of "highly skilled". This process happens at different levels: the political level (who is granted what kind of access to a particular country?), the economic level (who is hired, and how much are they paid?), or the social level (how do people evaluate each other in everyday interactions?). According to this perspective, whether or not a person is recognised as highly skilled in different circumstances depends not so much on their skills as on their social status, which relies on the intersection of a broad array of elements. This perspective also implies that my understanding of "highly skilled migrants" is dynamic and situational: I do not view it as a scientific category that could be defined once and for all, but as a category of practice that opens the door to the emic perspective of the actors involved.

1.1.4 Who Are the Migration Intermediaries?

My approach does not take categories for granted but rather looks at how they are constructed. In the case of the category "migrant", I observe that state-regulated border regimes play a central role in defining who is allowed to move where and how. Moreover, the category "highly skilled migrant" indicates that profit-oriented actors (e.g. companies) may also influence migration and mobility pathways. Van den Broek, Harvey, and Groutsis (2016, p. 525) observe that:

> Accumulated, but fragmented, evidence suggests that fundamental transformation in the governance structures surrounding the migration industry broadly – and in migration intermediaries specifically – has led to a greater commercialisation, and to decentralisation of services that are not just facilitating greater migration flows, but also attracting and mediating migration pathways in more interventionist, however less transparent, ways.

These authors argue that a shift from a government-initiated approach to a network governance approach to migration has been occurring on a global scale since the 1980s (Groutsis, Van den Broek, & Harvey, 2015). The multiplication of agents that monitor mobility has created new inequities for people on the move in terms of access to information and a greater dependence on intermediaries from the private sector. At the same time, intermediaries have come to play a crucial role in matching people with jobs and providing resources for organising their moves. As Agunias (2009, p. 2) notes:

> Intermediaries are key actors that facilitate, and sometimes drive, migration within and across borders. By providing information and extending critical services in many stages of migration and in places of origin, transit and destination, legitimate intermediaries build migrants' capabilities and expand their range of choice.

These observations need to be situated within a broader field of research that focuses on the interactions between mobile individuals and the agents that create the social conditions of their mobility. In the early 1990s, Findlay, Garrick, and Li developed

the concept of a "migration channel" to describe the role of intermediary actors in international migration (Findlay, 1990; Findlay & Garrick, 1990; Findlay & Li, 1998). More specifically, they distinguished between three main forms of international labour mobility: people who individually move within the labour markets of multinational companies, people who are moved by their company to foreign countries tasks, and people who move within the frame of a recruitment agency. Iredale (2001) later added two more channels to this list: mobility in the context of small recruitment agents or ethnic networks, and recruitment through other mechanisms such as the Internet.

More recently, several authors have noticed the multiplication of intermediaries in migration processes, and have focused their research on the "institutions, networks and people that move migrants from one point to another" (Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018; Goss & Lindquist, 1995; see also Groutsis et al., 2015; Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012, p. 9). Their work not only focuses on actors from the private sector, but also on the practices of governments that monitor and support the mobility of individuals perceived as valuable while preventing others from moving. In this context, several authors highlight the tendency of government to outsource economic promotion and migration control to non-state actors (Groutsis et al., 2015; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2018), arguing that the resulting "migration infrastructure" (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) not only connects migrants with places and jobs, but is also involved in selecting them, motivating them to move, and monitoring them before, during, and after migration (Van den Broek et al., 2016). For this reason, research into migration intermediaries, infrastructure, and channels takes as a starting point that "we cannot understand how migrants move unless we examine how they are moved by others" (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p. 131).

This approach complements older studies on the role of social networks in migration processes. Many authors have highlighted the impact of kinship ties and ethnic communities on supporting migration and mediating access to resources in destination countries (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1974; Massey et al., 1998; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008). More recent work on commercial intermediaries and migration industries expands this perspective by stressing the influential role of profit-oriented actors in migration trajectories (Beaverstock, Faulconbridge, & Hall, 2010; Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2013; Cranston et al., 2018; Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, Hall, & Hewitson, 2009; Findlay, McCollum, Shubin, Apsite, & Krisjane, 2013; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013; Ravasi et al., 2015). This literature shows that personal contacts are not the only resource available to people on the move; access to professional services can strongly impact a migration experience and provide important support for adjusting to a new environment. Furthermore, research on migration industries points to a commodification of migration processes both within and outside state-based legal structures (Menz, 2013; Salt & Stein, 1997). Commercial intermediaries can thus play a central role in circumventing restrictive immigration policies (Betts, 2013; Cranston et al., 2018; Groutsis et al., 2015).

These studies examine the central role of certain actors in providing resources to migrants and invite a reconsideration of migration and mobility as phenomena that involve not only individuals, but also infrastructures. The work of anthropologists such as Xiang Biao and Johan Lindquist – who developed the concept of migration infrastructure – is particularly interesting because it enables an actor-centred perspective on the large variety of individuals involved in migration processes. In this sense, focusing on migration intermediaries does not necessarily mean leaving behind the experiential dimension of social phenomena. For instance, one ethnographic study conducted by Xiang (2007) analysed the role of staffing agencies in encouraging and organising the mobility of IT specialists between India and Australia. His work describes in detail how such agencies have developed an infrastructure that enables companies to access a cheap and flexible workforce in the field of IT. It also shows that the development of intermediary agencies not only enables an increasing number of Indian workers to find jobs abroad, but also creates new forms of precariousness and dependencies between intermediaries and workers. The study analyses a "world system of body shopping" (Xiang, 2007, p. 100) through the perspectives of the various actors involved.

Although I am interested in the social mechanisms that structure different migration and mobility situations, my research follows a similar actor-centred approach. Unlike many studies, I define as actors not only the migrants themselves, but also the people and institutions that have stakes in their mobility. This enables a better understanding of the logic, constraints, and power relations associated with the mobility of individuals. My focus thus lies on the strategies of various intermediaries from the public and private sectors to select, attract, and retain mobile individuals who represent value to them. In particular, I ask how these "migration intermediaries" influence which resources are available to different groups of people by defining and dividing immigrants according to constructed social categories that correlate with specific status and privileges.

1.1.5 Why Study Highly Skilled Migrants in Switzerland?

As a small country with few natural resources, the economic development of Switzerland has largely been built on immigration and internationalisation (Mach, David, & Bühlmann, 2011). Today, Switzerland is a rich country with a gross domestic product (GDP) that ranked third of all OECD countries in 2016 (OECD, 2018). Approximately 10,000 multinational companies are operating within the national territory and the number of international firms per capita is more than three times higher than in the US (SwissHoldings, 2016). Moreover, since the end of the nineteenth century, Switzerland has clearly become an immigration country (Fig. 1.2). In 1914, the foreign population of Geneva was 40.4%; by 2015 this had risen to 49%, while the average for Switzerland was 24.6% (Leimgruber, 2016). This proportion is among the highest in the world (Nguyen, 2016), with the majority of

Fig. 1.2 Proportion of foreigners in the resident population of Switzerland, 1860–2010. (Source: Own diagram based on Swiss Federal Council, 2012, p. 11, with data from RFP, PETRA, ESPOP, STATPOP, OFS)

recent immigrants having completed a tertiary education (university degree or equivalent postgraduate professional training) (Fig. 1.3).

Switzerland's exceptional attraction to foreigners can be attributed to various factors, including relatively high salaries, generous tax policies, and low unemployment rates, as well as its geographic location, political situation, safe and stable environment, dynamic and international economic outreach, and high concentration of multinationals (Müller-Jentsch, 2008b). A gradual decrease in the industrial sector and the development of a knowledge-based economy also helps to explain the high levels of education among recent immigrants (Swiss Federal Council, 2012). In addition, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Swiss immigration policies have consisted of a dual system that prioritises immigration from the EU and of highly qualified individuals from third countries. While EU citizens benefit from agreements regarding the free movement of persons, citizens from the rest of the world – the so-called "third-countries" in Swiss policy – are strictly selected based on their perceived economic value (Fig. 1.3).

These elements make Switzerland a particularly interesting location for studying highly skilled migration. Nevertheless, it is striking that this topic remains relatively under-researched. This lack of scholarly interest highlights the fact that issues related to highly skilled migration are rarely discussed in public debates. As I will show in the next chapters, highly skilled migrants tend to be perceived as unproblematic migrants (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b; Yeung, 2016) and conflictual discussions about migration in Switzerland in the past decades have rather revolved around "less privileged" categories of migrants such as refugees, criminals, low-paid workers, and socially disadvantaged individuals.

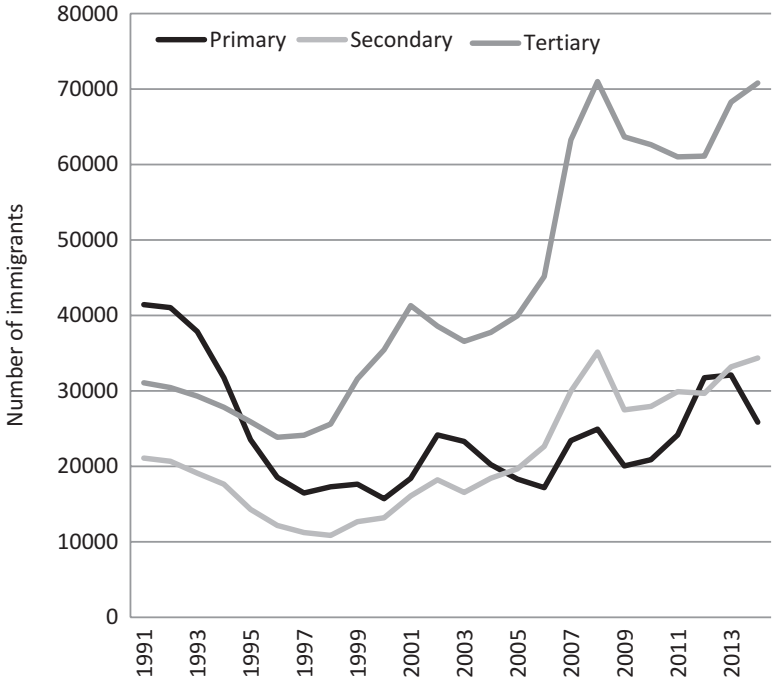

Fig. 1.3 Education level upon immigration to Switzerland, 1991–2014. (Source: Own diagram based on estimates by Prof. Philippe Warner with data from the Swiss Structural Survey for the years 2010–2014)

Nonetheless, research provides important insights into the topic of highly skilled migration in Switzerland. Existing studies indicate a strong increase in the number of highly educated people moving to Switzerland since the mid-1990s, the majority of whom come from neighbouring European countries (Germany, Italy, and France) (Müller-Jentsch, 2008a). Most of these migrants live in urban centres (in particular, Zurich, Geneva, Basel) and work in service-oriented sectors (Pecoraro, 2005). Although more men than women had a tertiary education among the people arriving before 2010, there have been equal proportions of highly educated male and female immigrants since 2011 (nccr – on the move, 2017).

Statistics show that the share of immigrants with tertiary education is currently higher than 80% for certain nationalities – in particular for people from English-speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and India – but is lower than 30% for immigrants from other countries, such as Turkey and Portugal (nccr – on the move, 2017). Moreover, certain nationalities are overrepresented in management positions in comparison to Swiss nationals, in particular Dutch, British, American, German, French, and Austrian nationals (Jey Aratnam, 2012). The sociologist Ganga Jey Aratnam (2012, p. 153) uses the term "sandwich position" to describe the fact that migrant workers in Switzerland are overrepresented in both higher and lower paid positions, whereas Swiss nationals tend to occupy middle positions.

In general, existing research shows great diversity among people who could be labelled "highly skilled migrants" in Switzerland. Although most come for work-related reasons, some also migrate as spouses, students, or refugees (Cangià, 2017; Lombard, 2017; nccr – on the move, 2017; Sontag, 2018a; Tissot, 2018). The majority of these leave the country after a few years but some stay longer and actively engage in their new place of residence (nccr – on the move, 2017; Wiener & Grossmann, 2011). Some experience extremely mobile transnational lives (Sontag, 2018b) while others organise their daily activities around a few geographically close locations (Berthoud, 2012). Most declare that they are satisfied with their decision to move to Switzerland (nccr – on the move, 2017) but some experience difficulties accessing the job market (Berthoud, 2015; Riaño, 2015; Riaño, Limacher, Aschwanden, Hirsig, & Wastl-Walter, 2015) and adjusting socially to their new environment (Ravasi et al., 2015; Salamin & Davoine, 2015; Schneider-Sliwa, 2013; Wiener & Grossmann, 2011).

Despite the diversity of migrants' situations, academic research on the mobility of the "highly skilled" in Switzerland tends to restrict its representations of migrants. In economistic and neoliberal approaches, highly skilled migrants are active agents who can decide without any constraints where and how to move, and are perceived as valuable subjects to be attracted through legal and economic incentives. In sociological and left-oriented approaches, research focuses on the experiences of highly skilled migrants whose qualifications are not valued, and who are often presented as victims of a system that fails to use their full potential. Yet, these approaches do not take into account the important "migration infrastructure" (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) and the diversity of actors that make Switzerland an attractive location for certain groups of highly educated migrants, while excluding others.

My research attempts to transcend these representations by offering a more comprehensive analysis of "highly skilled migrants" in Switzerland, arguing that it is necessary to study not only the migrants, the state, or the economic actors, but also the relation between those who move and those who organise their mobility. Highly skilled migrants are neither free-movers nor helpless victims, but it is clear that some have more options than others, and it is important to understand why this is the case. Analysing the role of migration intermediaries contributes to an understanding of not only the intentions of migrants but also their relative positions and, perhaps even more importantly, why they are treated as migrants (or highly skilled migrants, expats, refugees) in the first place. Thus, a focus on the different actors involved in migration processes can enable a more critical reflection on the reasons and methodologies for our research.

1.2 Methods for Grasping the Diversity of Mobility Pathways

My research is inspired by the overall framework of critical ethnography. The main objective of this approach is to make visible the power structures involved in the discourses and practices of everyday life. As a researcher, I consider that my role is

to problematise notions and situations that may be taken for granted. In this way, I expose the ways that social hierarchies are (re)produced by subtly advantaging certain people and disadvantaging others. In the words of Pierre Bourdieu (2002, p. 58): "Research is perhaps the art of creating fruitful difficulties for oneself and for others. Where things were simple we make problems appear."[6]

My approach is mainly ethnographic and combines different methods and data sources (interviews, observations, documents, survey, statistics) to enlarge an understanding of specific situations and contrast them with personal experiences (Flick, 2006). I use a multi-sited approach in order to grasp the relationships between events and actors situated in different locations (Marcus, 1998). I am aware that my knowledge is partial and connected to my position in the world, my way of interacting with others, my values, and my areas of interests. For this reason, my research is an active confrontation of different perspectives on one topic. In this section, I present my research design and reflect on the various collaborations that contributed to this project. I then introduce my main research locations and conclude by detailing my methods of data collection and analysis.

1.2.1 Research Design

I conducted this research between October 2014 and March 2018, mainly in the French-speaking Lemanic region and the German-speaking northwestern region of Switzerland. As part of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research on Migration and Mobility (nccr – on the move), I worked in close collaboration with two other researchers, Dr. Metka Hercog and Dr. Katrin Sontag. We wanted to question the category "highly skilled migrant" by analysing how different actors understand this notion and translate it into practice. We also wanted to understand the "resource environment" (Levitt, Lloyd, Mueller, & Viterna, 2015) of highly educated individuals in Switzerland – meaning that we wanted to analyse the role of institutions in structuring opportunities and obstacles for migrants, as well as migrants' ability to influence and reshape society.

In order to answer our questions, Dr. Hercog and I developed several sub-projects that combined our research interests. The first sub-project focused on the selection practices of the state administrations in charge of granting residence permits to non-European immigrants wanting to take up employment in Switzerland; the second focused on place-branding and the economic promotion strategies of state administrations and other organisations in two specific locations in Switzerland; the third focused on the job search processes of highly educated individuals who attempt to become economically active in Switzerland. By analysing specific situations, we wanted to understand how different actors negotiate definitions of highly skilled migrants in their daily practice. Our focus was on the construction of migrant cate-

[6] The original text reads: "La recherche, c'est peut-être l'art de se créer des difficultés fécondes – et d'en créer aux autres. Là où il y avait des choses simples, on fait apparaître des problèmes". All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

gories in Switzerland through policy design and implementation in political, economic, and social contexts.

Our methodology was mainly qualitative and inductive. We conducted interviews with key figures structuring the mobility of people in different Swiss cities and regions in order to observe processes of definition and evaluation, as well as the negotiation of skills in relation to immigration in Switzerland. Our findings were complemented by the analysis of policy documents, websites, and statistical figures on the mobility of people towards Switzerland. In so doing, we wanted to acquire a broader understanding of the institutional context regulating the selection, admission, employment, and support of immigrants arriving and staying in Switzerland. We also relied on participant observations and biographical interviews to provide a detailed analysis of the daily interactions through which identities are negotiated and future prospects are imagined and shaped. This closer look at individual stories provided information about how institutional practices are experienced and challenged by individuals. Dr. Hercog and I collaborated closely on each of these subprojects: we conducted some observations together, exchanged information obtained from interviews, and jointly analysed part of the data.

In 2016, the nccr – on the move offered the possibility of financing for an additional sub-project. At this point, public attention was fixed on the Syrian crisis and the millions of people risking their lives in the attempt to reach Europe. After German president Angela Merkel's controversial decision to open the borders to refugees in 2015, the integration of these newcomers into Germany became a central issue. Interestingly, many of the refugees who came to Europe were educated but experienced difficulties getting their diplomas recognised. "Highly skilled refugees" thus emerged as a new topic of interest in public discourse and academic research. In this context, we decided to collaborate with Dr. Katrin Sontag on an additional topic that complemented our research framework on conceptualisations of highly skilled migrants. Dr. Sontag studied university programmes at Basel (Switzerland), Freiburg (Germany) and Mulhouse (France) that support refugees seeking access to higher education. By comparing the situations in these countries, she was able to highlight the impact of different social, political, legal, and economic contexts on individual migrant trajectories. Her research was an interesting addition to my own project examining the role of institutional agents in mobility.

The nccr – on the move also supported a representative survey of recent immigrants from selected countries in Switzerland. This survey resulted from a collaboration between several research projects and was coordinated by Dr. Ilka Steiner from the University of Geneva. The objective was to complement existing surveys by offering an overview of the migration history of recent arrivals to Switzerland with a focus on highly educated individuals. My colleagues and I contributed to this project by proposing two modules of questions that specifically addressed our research interests. The collected data provided a representative overview of relocation support received by recent immigrants within the scope of the survey.

Parallel to these collaborations, I conducted additional interviews and observations to better understand the role of migration intermediaries. My fieldwork concentrated on institutions identified as interesting because of their specific focus on highly educated foreigners. Even though their goals, activities, and target groups

varied, they all contributed to my understanding of how highly skilled migrants are constructed and perceived in Switzerland. These intermediaries included recruiting companies, human resources departments, temporary staffing agencies, consulting companies, relocation agencies, administrative bodies that regulate the labour market, integration offices, organisations for economic promotion, organisations supporting job searches, "expat" organisations, a chamber of commerce, a support organisation for multinational employees and their families, a marketing event for "expats", and a meeting place for English-speaking foreigners. For each of these institutions, I combined different methods – interviews, observations, document analyses – in order to confront discourses and practices and to increase my understanding of their activities. I also engaged in exchanges on my research process by asking some interviewees to review my texts and by discussing my hypotheses with them.

During the first 2 years of this research project I personally experienced a specific form of mobility. My partner's job as a consultant for a global company involved high flexibility, frequent travel, and long hours spent working on short-term projects at clients' workplaces, generally in Switzerland but occasionally abroad. As the company financed accommodations when he worked away from home, I was able to join him on several occasions. I experienced life in business hotels, participated in evening dinners and other activities with his colleagues, and attended parties organised by the company. In this way, I met people with very mobile lifestyles, and could observe how large multinational companies manage their employees' mobility. I recorded my observations and ideas in a field diary and subsequently discussed them with my partner and some of his colleagues in order to get feedback and to confront my hypotheses with their personal experiences.

This experience motivated me to think further about the collaborative dimension of my research. Given the political relevance of the topic, it was important for me to share my results and engage in public debates. Moreover, many of my respondents were interested in discussing my research content, interpretations, and theories, leading me to contemplate how to expand my research collaborations. The concept of "para-ethnography" developed by Douglas Holmes and George Marcus offered a theoretical framework to further reflect on participatory approaches.

1.2.2 Para-Ethnographic Experiments[7]

The collective dimension of research in social sciences is rarely acknowledged. Despite the spread of participatory methodologies (Riaño, 2016), and although academic projects tend to be increasingly collaborative, social sciences researchers

[7] This section benefitted from conversations I had with colleagues during the preparation of the following article on para-ethnography: Oberlé, H., Sandoz, L., & Sontag, K. (2017). Mobilität – der Weg zum Erfolg? Eine öffentliche Veranstaltung der Wissenschaftsvermittlung als paraethnografisches Experiment. SAVk, 113(1), 75–88.

generally appear to be singular thinkers. Academic competition encourages researchers to insist on the originality of their work, which often hides the cooperative nature of research processes, and the importance of the discussion, exchange, and confrontation of ideas.

During my research, I became involved in various academic networks from which I largely benefitted. I would therefore like to highlight that my project was not a solitary process comprising merely the definition of a research question, the selection of a field, data collection, coding, and analysis. In addition to classical methodological prescriptions, the act of communicating my research constituted one of my main analytical tools. Selecting the relevant information, framing it in a concise and understandable way, connecting it with references, and discussing critical issues with others enabled me to gradually develop my understanding of the social processes at hand and to adjust my methods, hypotheses, and analyses. It also contributed to my emotional wellbeing by keeping me active and motivated. Being part of a network and actively engaging with others was central to the success of my project. Although this dimension is rarely acknowledged in the literature on methodology, I think that it is crucial to the development of innovative ideas.

I would like to emphasise that in parallel to these academic connections, I had productive exchanges with people from my research field. In many instances during this project, the boundaries between academia and fieldwork, as well as between my different roles as a researcher, a friend, and a family member, became unclear and tenuous. Since academia is a very international environment, most of my colleagues have personally experienced some of the situations that I studied and could be categorised as "highly skilled migrants". This was also the case with several of my friends and family members. Moreover, I previously mentioned that my partner's job became one of my research fields, and this situation led to a very rewarding collaboration between us. Finally, several of the people I interviewed had a similar education to mine and did not hesitate to share their analysis with me in a sometimes very academic way. In some instances, they worked for institutions at which I might be interested to apply in the future, which also contributed to the blurring of boundaries.

The concept of para-ethnography opens interesting avenues for reflection to analyse this situation. Holmes and Marcus introduce it in the following way (2005, p. 250):

> When we deal with contemporary institutions under the sign of the global symptom, as we have termed it, we presume that we are dealing with counterparts rather than "others" – who differ from us in many ways but who also share broadly the same world of representation with us, and the same curiosity and predicament about constituting the social in our affinities. At base, then, the postulation of the para-ethnographic is a somewhat veiled, maybe even hesitant, overture to partnership or collaboration with our counterparts found in the field.

The aim of this approach is to broaden reflection processes through the creation of exchange spaces between people with different perspectives and positions. It encourages researchers to actively use and reflect on the participative dimension of

interactions during fieldwork. For this purpose, Holmes and Marcus propose a methodology that they call "para-site" (2008, pp. 97, 100):

> [A para-site event is] a space for a kind of conceptual work that is not derivable from theory, academic literatures, or interviews … [It blurs] the boundaries between the field site and the academic conference or seminar room.

The objective of para-site events is to create the conditions for a dialogue between the researcher and the research partners that goes beyond a simple process of data collection. It starts from the recognition that research partners are self-reflective beings who also analyse the world around them and who can share questions and concerns with the researcher. Such an approach is not new in anthropology, however, Holmes and Marcus focus on cases where research partners have a similar background to the researcher, whether due to education or professional position. These situations can constitute both a challenge and an opportunity: research partners can understand and criticise the research process, the concepts used by the researcher, and the ways concrete life situations are translated into theoretical observations; they can sometimes also describe their personal experiences in an analytical and self-reflective way that follows the codes of scientific presentation.

I do not mean that people with different backgrounds are not able to form their own opinions on a research design or to share important insights with the researcher. However, in comparison with other studies that I have conducted, for instance with farmers in Bolivia or with Turkish women in precarious situations in Berlin, the fact that my research partners sometimes started to discuss my methodology, concepts, and questions was new for me. I thus find it important to reflect on the specificities of these exchanges.

I think that the way my research partners sometimes started to discuss my theoretical and methodological approach relied partly on how we perceived each other's social position. In many cases, my respondents were well-established male professionals who had already completed their academic education. In comparison, my position as a young female researcher at the beginning of her career put me in a lower social position. Furthermore, the fact that I was conducting research in fields close to me, where I might have a professional stake in the future, meant that I was more directly affected by these power relations than, for instance, during my project in Bolivia. Because of these asymmetrical power relations, my research partners probably felt more justified in challenging me than in situations where my social position as a researcher was better established, and I was maybe also more inclined to accept their critical comments under these circumstances.

I find an interesting tension here. On the one hand, Holmes and Marcus encouraged me to see these interactions as potentially rewarding partnerships during which research partners can think together with the researcher and participate in the theory-building process. On the other hand, several authors call attention to the risk for researchers to be instrumentalised and patronised in such situations, or to overestimate the contribution of socially powerful informants (e.g. Fitz & Halpin, 1995; Lowell, 1998; Ostrander, 1993; Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 2002).

I observe both points of view. On the one hand, it is true that I sometimes felt intimidated by the interviewees, in particular those in senior positions in the state administration. On the other hand, I think that my exchanges and discussions with the people concerned with my project helped to develop the critical yet empathetic attitude that I consider to be the basis of the anthropological approach. In my view, my role as a researcher is to show the complexity of social situations, and a good analysis is one that enables the people involved to recognise themselves without feeling judged and to expand their understanding of the constraints and power relations that structure their actions. The best way to attain this is, I argue, to open a dialogue with the research partners. Of course, I am also part of the situations that I observe, which is why I need to reflect on my position throughout the research process. Talking with others to test my hypotheses and ideas is a valuable method to challenge my assumptions

However, I think that Holmes and Marcus's approach does not sufficiently address the issue of the power relations at hand during interactions between the researcher and the research partners. Ultimately, the person writing the analysis remains the researcher, and it is their role to maintain a certain authority in preserving their research independence.

Although I opened various collaborative spaces with my research partners, I also needed moments alone in order to critically reflect. It was important to clearly assert my autonomy and scientific freedom in order to preserve my research from my interviewees' particular interests. On one occasion, for instance, a research partner did not agree with a part of my analysis. We subsequently had an interesting exchange which helped me to understand her perspective. I realised that I had been too radical in my formulations, so I adapted the text in order to show better the multifaceted nature of the situation. At a certain point, however, I decided not to adapt the text to further align with her views, since this meant omitting other perspectives that I wanted to include. This example illustrates the limitations of such collaborations and the importance for the researcher to set boundaries between their work and the research partners' expectations.

The research based on my partner's job constitutes another example where I had to negotiate the collaboration carefully. I was aware that this project could generate tension between us if my research approach and analyses conflicted with his own work. In addition, involving me in his professional activity constituted a risk for him, because he had contractually signed a strict non-disclosure agreement and his managers were very serious about confidentiality. At the same time, it was a wonderful opportunity for me to approach a research field that would otherwise have remained closed.

Several elements contributed to making this collaboration not only possible but also rewarding. Firstly, before beginning we agreed that he would read the final text in order to make sure that the information I disclosed could not violate the terms of his contract or harm him or his colleagues. Our mutual trust paved the way to open exchanges. Secondly, I tried to avoid putting constraints on his professional activity. In a later discussion, he said that he had not felt the need to make any effort to cooperate with me during the research process. This was mainly because this collabora-

tion did not change our habits too much, since we live together. This favourable situation countered one of the main limitations of the para-ethnographical approach, which is that deep exchanges require time, engagement, and an adequate setting (on this topic, see the discussion in: Oberlé, Sandoz, & Sontag, 2017). Thirdly, collaborating with my partner opened many doors, but I also tried to work independently, without relying too much on him. I developed my own network among his colleagues, which enabled me to diversify my sources of information and access. Finally, my partner enjoyed reflecting on his job, and I am convinced that our exchanges helped him to manage some of the constraints associated with his professional activity.

In fact, I think that this collaboration closely corresponds to Holmes and Marcus's concept of para-ethnography: not only did I learn about my partner's job, but he also became involved in mine. For instance, we co-organised a presentation as part of a seminar where he introduced his job and I presented an anthropological text on consulting (Skovgaard Smith, 2013), which he later used in a debate with some colleagues. In this way, our experiences were mutually enriching. Rather than remaining merely an informant, my partner became a research partner with whom I could reflect on the situations that we observed. By discussing our experiences, we challenged each other's assumptions and expanded our understanding of the social phenomena at hand.

If active research collaborations can constitute a risk for researchers, my experience shows that they can also be rewarding. Nevertheless, power relations should not be underestimated, and it is important that researchers actively reflect on them. Moreover, researchers need to clearly negotiate collaborations. To do so, they must establish a framework that affords them enough freedom to compare perspectives and develop their own analyses in order to protect their research from private interests. This necessitates clear communication and a willingness from both sides to play by the set rules. I am convinced that the additional effort is worthwhile in order to enable researchers to challenge their assumptions, expand their reflections, and enable their research partners to both participate in and benefit from the process.

1.2.3 Research Locations

Switzerland is an interesting country for studying highly skilled migration, in particular because of the exceptional share of highly educated immigrants it attracts each year and the social, cultural, political, and economic importance of this topic for the country (Müller-Jentsch, 2008a; nccr – on the move, 2017). I am, however, aware that presenting my research as a project *on* Switzerland is problematic, because it limits the perspective to a national level and tends to essentialise the phenomena under study. If my research is situated *in* Switzerland, it is neither representative of the whole country nor are my analyses valid for this single country. In fact, my project focuses on specific situations that transcend political constructions of space, even though they are also influenced by them. I argue that the state should

neither be neglected nor essentialised as the unique unit of analysis. For this reason, I adopt a multi-sited and multi-scalar perspective in terms of which I understand space as a social product that results from the interaction between material elements, human actions, and meaning (Riaño, 2017).

Like many other researchers of my generation, I have read Wimmer and Glick Schiller's text on methodological nationalism and I acknowledge its relevance. Defined as "the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 301), methodological nationalism describes the tendency of many social scientists to reproduce without question a construction of space based on nation-states. Wimmer and Glick Schiller argue that this tendency is problematic because it prevents researchers from looking beyond political borders and taking into account both the diversity within a given country and the connections between locations in different countries.

It is thus important to acknowledge that my research is neither limited to the borders of the Swiss state, nor does it encompass Switzerland as a whole; it will always be limited to specific regions, organisations, and people that are situated in Switzerland but are the result of a multitude of interactions happening on various scales. Switzerland itself is a multidimensional construction that cannot be reduced to its borders. It is a combination of institutions, practices, norms, infrastructures, imaginaries, and people, whose specific organisation contributes to structuring various aspects of everyday life, including mobility. As Favell says (2008, p. 271):

> Instead of telling a story about how foreign objects (migrants) fit into or challenge the given (nation-state) narrative and institutional structures by which we recognise the world, we might instead look at how the very process by which collectivities manage movers by naming and counting them, and thereby distinguishing them from nonmovers or residents, is the fundamental way in which the territorial nation-state society constitutes itself in the first place.

My approach is constructivist in the sense that I do not take the existence of the Swiss nation/state/society for granted. I rather try to question it by studying specific forms of organisation and mobility management. Moreover, my research does not focus only on the Swiss state. I also consider actors such as companies, private service providers, and migrant networks in order to understand their role in the mobility of some individuals. In most cases, the scope of activity of these actors extends beyond the political borders of the Swiss state. Yet the political processes that construct these borders also structure their actions to a certain extent. Even in cases where the spaces involved are transnational, the state cannot simply be dismissed because the power and value that we attribute to this social construct has an effect on the world and contributes to shaping it in return. It thus makes sense to analyse how different actors interact with each other, and how they spatially define their spheres of activity.

My approach is multi-sited in the sense that it focuses on specific situations and locations that are not directly connected with one another, but whose assemblage offers complementary perspectives on my research topic. This could be summarised as "follow the people" and "follow the stories" (Marcus, 1998): "follow the people"

means looking at the connections between actors and institutions in relation to my research questions; "follow the stories" means understanding how social situations are co-constructed by various actors that have stakes in the mobility of highly educated people.

For instance, during my fieldwork on admission policies and practices in Vaud, I contacted a specialised lawyer who recommended that I talk with the cantonal administration in charge of approving work-permit requests for non-European workers. In parallel, I interviewed an economic promotion agent who regularly collaborates with this department to obtain work permits to support the establishment of foreign companies in the canton. I also met immigration specialists within companies, and participated in information events about admission issues for human resources staff. Finally, I interviewed migrants who had experienced the procedure in order to understand their perspective on this process. In this case, my research field was defined both by the administrative borders of the canton and by the network of relations between the cantonal administration and other actors in relation to a specific normative process.

In comparison, during my research on mobility within companies I started by following a single person – my partner – on business trips. The research field was defined by this person's professional connections, which were situated in various places and countries. I then expanded this research by interviewing other people involved in the mobility of professionals (relocation agents and professional recruiters, in particular). Although these people were not directly connected, talking with them enabled me to understand better the logic of corporate mobility management and to contrast my partner's specific case with other forms of professional mobility.

Although my research spaces include various scales (local, regional, national, transnational, international), most of my fieldwork is situated within two specific areas, which I chose in part for practical reasons (language, prior knowledge, distance from home) and in part because of their relevance in relation to my topic. Both the German-speaking Basel area and the French-speaking Lake Geneva area are economically strongly dependent on international companies that attract significant numbers of highly qualified workers to the region.

The Lake Geneva area is part of the "Health Valley", a nickname referring to the region's dominance in the fields of medical technology and biotechnology. The development of Health Valley is connected to the BioAlps Life Sciences Cluster, a promotional platform created in 2001 with the support of the cantons of Bern, Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Geneva, Wallis, and Jura, as well as the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and research institutions in the region. This area is host to the headquarters of various multinational companies (e.g. Nestlé, Philip Morris, Medtronic, British American Tobacco, Chiquita, Edwards Lifesciences, Nissan), renowned higher education and research institutions, international organisations, and financial companies. Similarly, Basel is an important centre for the pharmaceutical and chemical industry. Companies such as Novartis and Roche – headquartered in Basel, with an annual revenue of about 50 billion dollars in 2016 and more than 100,000 employees globally – constitute central sources of wealth for both the region and the country (Fortune, 2016).

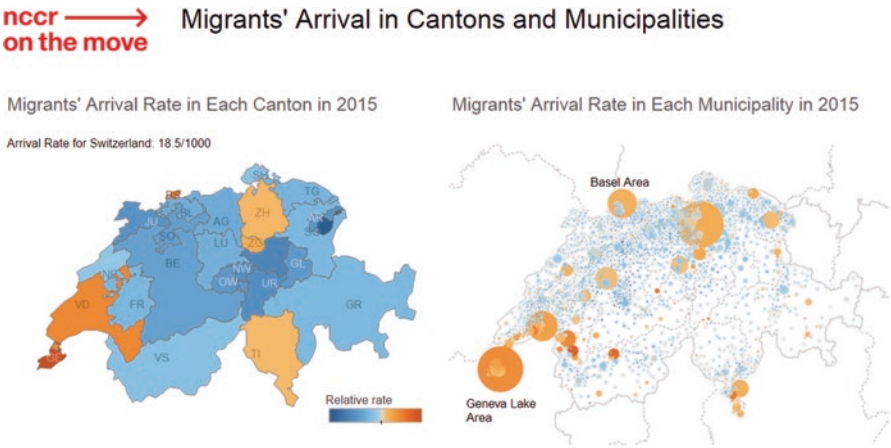

Fig. 1.4 Migrants' arrivals in cantons and municipalities, 2015. (Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Indicators, https://indicators.nccr-onthemove.ch/where-in-switzerland-do-newcomers-settle/ (last consulted on 8 March 2019))

One consequence of this economic vigour is that the proportion of foreigners among the resident population in the two main cantons under scrutiny is significantly higher than the Swiss average: 33.6% in Vaud and 35.2% in Basel (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2016).[8] A dense network of institutions and services has developed in both areas around the mobility and needs of the so-called "expats" (Fig. 1.4).

Part of my research was to enquire about resources for newcomers in these regions, which enabled me to connect my observations and develop a more global understanding of the social phenomena at hand. In addition, one region is French-speaking while the other is German-speaking, offering interesting comparisons between linguistic areas which, to a certain extent, are exposed to different cultural influences and can differ in addressing political issues. Connections and contrasts between specific social and cultural contexts thus form the core of my analysis.

In Vaud, I used the chamber of commerce as a point of departure because this institution is a main service provider for the region's international entities and their employees. Interviews with people who specialise in supporting new employees and their families and who regularly collaborate with other institutions involved in economic promotion and corporate mobility management in the canton enabled me to better grasp the web of relationships and resources available to this category of newcomers. Participating in some of the events organised by the chamber of commerce, I met people who combine frequent mobility with high social, cultural, and economic capital, and discussed their specific challenges with them.

[8] The Swiss average was 24.6% in 2015.

In parallel, I contributed to the organisation of an informational event targeted at Tigrinya-speaking migrants, for which I collaborated with the integration office in Vaud, the Swiss Secretariat for Migration, and a non-profit association partly made up of Eritrean refugees. This offered me the opportunity to observe integration specialists' attitudes and practices directed at less privileged categories of immigrants: refugees, asylum seekers, and illegalised foreigners. I also met people who experienced special difficulties transferring their cultural capital due to nationality and migratory status. Contrasting these situations with those observed at the chamber of commerce was interesting because I wanted to understand how social actors construct "highly skilled migrants" in relation to other categories of immigrants.

In Basel, my fieldwork focused on "expat" networks and political processes around the issue of highly skilled migration. The hotel stays and evening activities with my partners' colleagues constituted an interesting case study of short-term business travellers. I participated in several "expat" activities such as Language Cafés (events at which non-German-speaking people meet to practice the language and socialise) and Swiss-German classes. Despite being Swiss I was a newcomer to Basel, and my German proficiency was limited (my native language is French), which legitimised my presence at these events and enabled me to personally experience their benefits in terms of access to contacts, information, and competences.

In terms of the political processes around the issue of highly skilled migration, I first participated in a welcome event for newcomers in Basel which was organised by the cantonal authorities. This event clearly belonged to the place-branding strategy of the canton, so I wanted to understand who created it, and why. My investigation yielded information about conferences organised in Basel in the early 2000s around the issue of "expat integration". One conference particularly intrigued me, so I decided to interview its main organisers, two women of North American origin involved in the creation of several of the "expat" organisations with which I had been in contact. The combination of these interviews, my observations within "expat" organisations, my encounters with cantonal authorities, and my analyses of the canton's integration and economic promotion strategy indicated how the category "expat" has been constructed at a local level, and how it has led to the development of policies and practices that target this specific category of immigrants.

In some instances, I conducted interviews and observations outside of Vaud and Basel. For example, during my field research on the practices of firms that attract highly qualified workers, I interviewed relocation and recruitment specialists active in various locations in Switzerland. In my attempt to understand how definitions of skills and access to resources structure labour market access, I participated in informational workshops and training sessions with human resources specialists and job coaches about job search strategies, self-marketing, and professional networking. Since the social phenomena that interested me in these cases extended beyond local political processes, it made little sense to limit myself within cantonal borders.

Finally, my colleagues and I actively created field research situations. The nccr – on the move provided significant economic and symbolic capital to organise events, for instance, a "stakeholders meeting" in Bern that enabled us to meet and discuss our research plans with people whom we considered to be important actors in our

project. I contributed to the organisation of a conference about migration and mobility in the Basel area, at which I presented some of my research results to an audience of researchers, relocation specialists, immigrants, and local authorities (Oberlé et al., 2017). An "expert roundtable" on "expat" mobility organised in Lenzburg offered a similar setting to present and discuss my results with colleagues and research partners. These events not only enabled me to observe interactions between representatives of various institutions, exchange ideas about my research, and test opinions on matters of interest, but also increased my legitimacy as a competent research partner. Therefore, my involvement in these events facilitated my access to fieldwork.

1.2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

My epistemological approach is qualitative, constructivist, and interpretative. I do not aim to achieve representative measurements that would enable the generalisation of my findings to all migrants. I am, rather, interested in the meaning that different social actors give to the realities they experience. My goal is to understand how these meanings influence their opinions and practices and shape their realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In the following section I provide information about my data collection and analysis methods. I start with a presentation of recorded interviews and observations and finish with a description of the secondary sources, namely documents and surveys.

Recorded Interviews

My interviewees included individuals who work for institutions that have a stake in attracting, selecting, or retaining immigrants in Switzerland and highly educated individuals who moved to Switzerland under the auspices of such institutions (Table 1.1). As previously mentioned, I divided the research into complementary sub-projects and actively collaborated with my colleagues Dr. Metka Hercog and Dr. Katrin Sontag (Tables 1.2 and 1.3). I followed a theoretical sampling approach, which involved constant iterations between data collection, data analysis, and reading the relevant literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each interview raised new questions, which I answered by researching more information and interviewing new people. I stopped when I reached theoretical saturation – or at least a satisfactory level of understanding of the situations under study.

I accessed my interviewees through various means. In the case of institutions, I used the Internet and other media to identify relevant stakeholders and collect information in parallel with the interviews. I also used the snowball sampling technique (Atkinson & Flint, 2004), which helped me to access more people and to understand my interviewees' relational networks better. Participating in public events enabled me to get in touch with potential interviewees, exchange preliminary information,

Table 1.1 Recorded interviews conducted by the author

Interview date	Interviewee characteristics	Interview topics
25.10.2014	US couple (man/woman), naturalised Swiss; founders of the "Expat Expo"	Migration biography and migration industries
		Focus: Chaps. 3, 4, and 5
29.1.2015	Swiss man; former professional recruiter; trained in sociology	Experience as a professional recruiter
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4
5.2.2015	Swiss man; former professional recruiter; trained in chemistry	Experience as a professional recruiter
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4
18.2.2015	German man; human resources specialist in the chemical industry planning to relocate to Basel for professional reasons	Migration biography; reasons for and organisation of relocation to Basel; experience in human resources
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 4, and 5
27.2.2015	Swiss woman; head of a municipal department in charge of city marketing in Vaud	City marketing strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
27.2.2015	Two Swiss women working for a support organisation for multinational company employees and their families in Vaud (project initiated by a chamber of commerce and a cantonal organisation for economic promotion)	Aims and activities of the organisation; collaboration with other institutions
		Focus: Chaps. 3, 4, and 5
20.3.2015	Swiss woman; legal consultant and migration specialist in Vaud (founded a legal advice bureau)	Migration policies for highly skilled individuals in Switzerland
		Focus: Chap. 2
11.4.2015	Swiss man; human resources manager at a bank in Vaud	Experience as a human resources manager
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4
6.5.2015	Swiss man; head of a cantonal department in charge of labour market control in Vaud	Selection of non-EU/EFTA nationals requesting work authorisation
		Focus: Chap. 2
27.5.2015	Swiss man; head of an organisation in charge of economic promotion at the cantonal level in Vaud	Practices of economic promotion and collaboration with other institutions
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 3
29.9.2015	German man; human resources specialist in the chemical industry who had recently relocated to Basel for professional reasons	Second interview: experience with relocation; experience with job
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 4, and 5
1.10.2015	US woman, naturalised Swiss; communication coach specialising in integration in Basel	Migration biography and experience as a coach
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued)

Interview date	Interviewee characteristics	Interview topics
6.10.2015	Brazilian man; engineer currently working in Switzerland	Migration biography and experience with the administrative procedure of requesting work authorisation
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 5
18.11.2015	US woman; head of a relocation agency in Basel	Migration biography and experience as a relocation specialist
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 4, and 5
2.12.2015	Swiss woman; head of a relocation agency in Zug	Migration biography and experience as a relocation specialist
		Focus: Chap. 4
13.12.2015	German man; professional recruiter trained in history and anthropology	Migration biography and experience as a professional recruiter
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 4, and 5
21.12.2015	Swiss woman; head of a municipal programme supporting highly educated foreigners' job searches in Bern	Aims and activities of the programme; collaboration with other institutions
		Focus: Chap. 5
17.4.2016	Colombian couple (man/woman) who relocated to Vaud for professional and family reasons	Migration experience; job search experience in Switzerland; strategies deployed
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 3, 4, and 5
17.4.2016	Greek woman; medical doctor who relocated to Basel for family reasons	Migration experience; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chaps. 3, 4, and 5
19.4.2016	British man; head of an organisation supporting highly educated foreigners' job searches in Basel (sponsored by multinational companies)	Migration experience; aims and activities of the organisation; collaboration with other institutions; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chaps. 4 and 5

Table 1.2 Recorded interview conducted by Dr. Katrin Sontag

Interview date	Interviewee characteristics	Interview topic
27.1.2017	Iranian man; engineer who fled his country and sought asylum in Switzerland	Migration biography; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chap. 5

Table 1.3 Recorded interviews conducted by Dr. Metka Hercog

Interview date	Interviewee characteristics	Interview topics
13.5.2015	Swiss woman; coordinator of a cantonal programme that promotes migrants' political engagement in Basel	Aims and activities of the programme
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
28.5.2015	Swiss woman; head of a cantonal department in charge of labour market control in Basel	Selection of non-EU/EFTA nationals requesting work authorisation
		Focus: Chap. 2
17.3.2016	Brazilian woman; communication specialist active in organisations that promote migrants' civic participation	Migration biography; reasons for engagement; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chap. 5
18.3.2016	Italian man; engineer who relocated to Switzerland for family reasons	Migration biography; job search experience in Switzerland
		Focus: Chap. 5
30.5.2016	Eritrean man; legal scholar who fled his country and relocated to Switzerland for family reasons	Migration biography; job search experience in Switzerland; experience with the administrative procedure of requesting a residence permit
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 5
14.4.2016	Sri Lankan woman; business and marketing specialist who fled her country and relocated to Switzerland for study and family reasons	Migration biography; job search experience in Switzerland; reasons for engagement in various organisations
		Focus: Chap. 5

and decide whether to meet them again. Finally, I relied heavily on my personal network in Switzerland to access interviewees. I often had email or phone exchanges before and after the interviews, which I took into account in the analysis.

My interviews were semi-directed, with a relatively free and informal structure. I developed the interview guides based on my research interests and on preliminary information found online or during fieldwork. In several instances, representatives of institutions asked to see the interview guide in advance. I always ensured that my interviewees understood the research framework and agreed with the proposed disclosure conditions.

The analysis was mainly inductive and involved a coding process inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I regarded my interviews as narratives situated within and shaped by a specific context. Beyond what was said, I reflected on how and why it was said, and what remained unsaid (Charmaz, 2014). I also adopted a collaborative approach drawing on Holmes and Marcus's para-ethnography (2008). In several instances, I asked interviewees to review texts based on their experiences, in particular the portraits. Although the amount of time invested in these exchanges varied, the feedback from interviewees deepened my analysis and helped to render the information more precise.

Examples of interview guides

Interview with a Person Who Followed Her Spouse to Switzerland and Searched for a Job in the Country

Goal of the interview: To understand the strategies used to access the Swiss labour market and the impact of the institutional context on the individual experience.

Background:

- Place of birth; social background; early experiences with mobility; education; work experience; family situation

Migration history:

- Places where the person lived before Switzerland; reasons for the different sojourns; main activities during the different sojourns; personal evaluation of the different experiences

Relocation to Switzerland:

- Reasons for moving to Switzerland; previous knowledge about Switzerland; research about Switzerland
- Expectations/disappointments
- Contacts in Switzerland
- Support for the relocation (sources: websites, institutions, individuals …; types: permits, insurance, taxes, housing, language, children, partner, financial support …)
- Legal status in Switzerland (impact of the legal status on other aspects of daily life; changes of the legal status …)
- Experiences with the administration; support and obstacles from the state

Access to the labour market:

- Career history
- Professional contacts in Switzerland before moving
- Use of intermediaries (headhunters; employment agency; non-profit organisations; state-run organisation; trainings; specific networks …)
- Obstacles to accessing the labour market (legal limitations; impact of the family situation; recognition of qualifications; forms of discrimination …)
- Opportunities/support for accessing the labour market (key persons; key moments; key decisions …)

(continued)

- Strategies for accessing the labour market
- Other strategies (volunteer work; start business; start a family; get involved in politics; new studies; move elsewhere …)
- Expectations/disappointments

Impact of policies:

- Experiences with the application procedure for residence and work permits
- Support obtained during the process of settlement
- Main obstacles to fulfilling goals since migration to Switzerland
- New opportunities available since migration to Switzerland
- Most important forms of support available since migration to Switzerland
- Opinion about possible policy changes that would improve the situation of people in the same situation (If you were active in politics, what would you change?)

Future plans:

- What are your plans for the future? How long do you expect to stay here? Do you have intentions to return to your home country? Elsewhere? Why?

Interview with the Employee of an Economic Promotion Agency
Goal of the interview: To understand what the institution does, its objectives, its target audience, and how it collaborates with other institutions.

- Tell me more about yourself: How did you come to work for this institution? What are your main tasks and responsibilities?
- Tell me more about the institution: origins, employees, functions, objectives, activities …
- Tell me about the companies you support: How do you get in touch with them? How many do you support per year? What do they generally expect from you?
- Do you have specific objectives in terms of the kind of company or activity sector you support?
- What are your main economic promotion tools?
- Why do companies decide to come to your canton?
- What kind of evolution have you observed in the way economic promotion is organised in your canton?

(continued)

- What impact do political decisions have on your work?
- What are the other economic promotion institutions in the region? How do you collaborate with them?
- What are the main institutions that you collaborate with? How is the collaboration organised?
- How do you support people who come as part of a company relocation? Do you have specific measures to attract highly educated people to the canton?
- Have you experienced difficulties bringing in certain people (for instance regarding access to residence permits)? Is this a concern for companies?
- What kind of relationship do you have with the labour market office in the canton and with the Swiss secretariat for migration?
- Do you think that the current political orientation responds to the economic needs of the cantons? Is it possible for you to influence this?
- What do you think of the initiative "against mass migration"? Does it affect your work?

Observations

I conducted three main types of observations: at public events; at events where I played an active role as a presenter and/or organiser (e.g. roundtables, conferences, informational events); and during informal situations (Table 1.4). In each case, I recorded information in a field diary, differentiating between descriptions, methodological notes, and analytical considerations (Beaud & Weber, 2010). This enabled me to observe practices and interactions, and gave me the opportunity to conduct informal interviews and discuss my research with a variety of people.

Most of the events did not pose any problems regarding access. Some cases required special permission based on my researcher status, but I did not encounter any objections. Other events and situations were only accessible to me because of my personal involvement in the organisation or network, for instance, through my partner. However, I was initially refused permission to conduct observations during recruitment processes at a consulting company, and subsequently decided to focus my research on more accessible locations.

I never hid the fact that I was conducting research, but I was not always able to communicate my research objectives and framework during observation. However, I always maintained the anonymity of participants and never disclosed any potentially harmful information.

The analysis situated my observations within a broader context by connecting them with other sources. For instance, triangulating my ethnographic observations with other data from my fieldwork (interviews, documents, statistics) helped me to grasp the different perspectives of the actors involved and to compare discourses

Table 1.4 List of observations conducted by the author

Observation date	Type of observation	Research interests
12.2.2014	Informational workshop about careers in consulting	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
25.11.2014	Visit to the "Expat Expo" in Basel	Migration industries
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 3, 4, and 5
18.12.2014	Christmas party at a consulting company	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
10.2.2015	Welcome event for new residents in Basel organised by the canton	Place-branding strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
11.2.2015	Roundtable on the consequences of the initiative "against mass migration" organised by the University of Neuchâtel	Swiss immigration policy
		Focus: Chap. 2
26.2.2015	Welcome Day for international employees and their families at a chamber of commerce	Place-branding strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
9.3.2015	Workshop on job market perspectives at a consulting company	Consulting; selection of workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
21.3.2015	Collaboration with the organisation Metsai – Zukunft: organisation of an information event for Tigrinya-speaking people in Switzerland, in collaboration with the Swiss Secretariat for Migration and the integration office in Vaud (active participation of the author in the organisation)	Support institutions; integration strategies; labour market access
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
11–12.4.2015	Workshop on job search strategies for university students with a human resources specialist (organised by a private foundation)	Labour market access; selection of workers; definition of skills
		Focus: Chaps. 4 and 5
22.4.2015	Meeting at the integration division of the Swiss Secretariat for Migration to discuss the organisation of an information workshop in Vaud for Tigrinya-speaking people	Role of the federal administration; integration strategies
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
23.4.2015	Workshop on "Successful Self-Marketing" for graduate students at the University of Basel	Labour market access; selection of workers; definition of skills
		Focus: Chaps. 4 and 5
7.5.2015	Roundtable on border management with a lawyer specialising in admission processes at the University of Neuchâtel	Swiss immigration policy
		Focus: Chap. 2
4.6.2015	Informational event organised by a chamber of commerce in Vaud on the consequences of the initiative "against mass migration" for companies (target group: human resources staff)	Swiss immigration policy; admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers; mobility management within companies
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 3
12.6.2015	Workshop on Switzerland's European policy with representatives of the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (organised by the nccr – on the move)	Swiss immigration policy
		Focus: Chap. 2

(continued)

Table 1.4 (continued)

Observation date	Type of observation	Research interests
9.7.2015	Training with a lawyer specialising in work permits (organised by the nccr – on the move)	Swiss immigration policy; admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers
		Focus: Chap. 2
13.9.2015	Nccr – on the move stakeholders meeting on integration with representatives of state administrations, NGOs, companies and research institutions (active participation of the author in the organisation)	Swiss immigration policy; support institutions; integration strategies
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 3
18.9.2015	Informational workshop about careers in consulting	Consulting; selection of workers by companies; definition of skills
		Focus: Chap. 4
6.11.2015	Workshop on work permits with a lawyer (organised by the nccr – on the move)	Swiss immigration policy; admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers
		Focus: Chap. 2
6.11.2015	Workshop: "What Is Consulting?" (organised by the author and her partner as part of an informal seminar)	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
13.11.2015	Event on migration and borders with researchers, activists, and artists (organised by a graduate student association with the active participation of the author)	Swiss immigration policy; support institutions
		Focus: Chap. 2
10.12.2015	Christmas party at a consulting company	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
16.12.2015	Welcome event for new residents in Neuchâtel, organised by the canton	Place-branding and integration strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
3.2015–8.2016	Accommodation in business hotels in Basel about three times a week and evening activities with employees of a multinational consulting company (e.g. dinner, sport, informal meetings etc.)	Consulting; mobile workers; mobility management within companies
		Focus: Chaps. 2, 3, and 4
1–6.2016	Swiss German classes at an "expat" organisation in Basel	Support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
21.1.2016	Conference on asylum with representatives of the federal administration and NGOs, organised by the UNHCR and the Swiss Refugee Council	Swiss immigration policy; support institutions
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 5
25.1.2016	Language Café for foreigners living in Basel organised by an "expat" organisation	Support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
26.1.2016	Informational session for refugees interested in studying at the University of Basel organised by a student association	Support institutions
		Focus: Chap. 5

(continued)

Table 1.4 (continued)

Observation date	Type of observation	Research interests
22.2.2016	Meeting to discuss programmes for refugees interested in studying at universities with the representatives of various organisations that promote the participation of refugees in higher education (organised by the author and colleagues from the University of Basel)	Support institutions
		Focus: Chap. 5
26.2.2016	Event on the Swiss job market for trailing spouses organised by an "expat" organisation and the University of Basel	Labour market access; support institutions
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
17.3.2016	Webcast on Swiss immigration and mobility management organised by a consulting company (target group: human resources staff)	Consulting; mobile workers; mobility management within companies
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4
6.4.2016	Language Café at an "expat" organisation in Basel	Support institutions; mobile people; labour market access
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
13.4.2016	Meeting with the representative of an "expat" organisation as part of the organisation of a conference on mobility in Basel (organised by the author and colleagues from the University of Basel)	Support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chap. 3
14.4.2016	Workshop on job search strategies for trailing spouses organised by a chamber of commerce in Vaud	Labour market access; support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
14.6.2016	Roundtable on migration at the University of Basel, with a presentation by the mayor of Basel	Place-branding strategies; integration strategies
		Focus: Chap. 3
31.6.2016	Summer party at a consulting company	Consulting; mobile workers
		Focus: Chap. 4
20.9.2016	Meeting with representatives of Basel's integration office, an "expat" organisation, and the University of Basel's welcome centre to organise a conference on mobility in the Basel area (organised by the author and colleagues from the University of Basel)	Place-branding and integration strategies; support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
27.9.2016	Conference on mobility in the Basel area with representatives of Basel's integration office, an "expat" organisation, and the University of Basel's welcome centre (organised by the author and colleagues from the University of Basel)	Place-branding and integration strategies; support institutions; mobile people
		Focus: Chaps. 3 and 5
26.10.2016	Roundtable on business travellers organised by a consulting company (target group: human resources staff)	Consulting; mobile workers; mobility management within companies
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 4

(continued)

Table 1.4 (continued)

Observation date	Type of observation	Research interests
2.11.2016	Conference of the Federal Commission for Migration on work and migration	Swiss immigration policy; labour market access
		Focus: Chaps. 2 and 5
30.10.2017	Expert roundtable on relocation support and the mobility of workers with representatives of state administrations, NGOs, companies, and research institutions (organised by the nccr – on the move with the active participation of the author)	Mobility management within companies; place-branding and integration strategies; mobile workers
		Focus: Chaps. 3, 4, and 5
21.11.2018	Expert discussion on Swiss admission policies and implementation practices with researchers and representatives of federal and cantonal offices (organised by the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies)	Swiss immigration policy; admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers
		Focus: Chap. 2

with practices. Observing interactions between people in different roles and positions better enabled me to situate their status and constraints, and the power structures in which they were embedded. Moreover, I actively reflected on my own position and role in order to take into account how I co-shaped the observed situations with the actors involved. Thus, my focus was on understanding how meaning is co-constructed by different actors in specific places and times (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Documents

The analysis of relevant documents provided complementary information about my research fields and the actors involved. Legal texts on immigration to Switzerland helped me to understand the normative context regulating admission in relation to the construction of a dual regime of unwanted "migration" and desirable "mobility". A lecture on Swiss migration law by Professor Minh Son Nguyen at the University of Neuchâtel guided this analysis. I also consulted official reports of the federal and cantonal administrations to analyse the rationale behind immigration, integration, and economic promotion policies.

Throughout the project, I collected media articles relevant to my topic. This database provided interesting insights into how the mobility of the highly skilled is perceived and debated in Switzerland. I also consulted public statistics on immigration to Switzerland published by the Swiss Secretariat for Migration, the Federal Statistical Office, and cantonal administrations in order to situate better the scope of my ethnographic observations. The nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Indicators, which are based on aggregated public statistics, constituted another

important source of information.[9] Finally, I conducted online research about the interviewees and their affiliations. Institutional websites, Linkedin profiles, and other online platforms provided useful data on actors' histories and connections. This research enabled me to identify stakeholders and gather information about their public profiles.

The analysis focused on identifying emic definitions (Pike, 1954) of concepts such as "highly skilled migrant", "low skilled migrant", "expat", and "economic interest" in order to understand the political and cultural logic and the power structures that these terms reflect. The analysed documents are quoted throughout the text and referenced in the bibliography.

Survey

The main objective of the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey is to provide new data on recent migration to Switzerland. The preparatory work started in 2015 in collaboration with my research team and other colleagues from the nccr – on the move. The survey was conducted in 2016, successfully reaching 5800 people from German, French, Italian, English, Spanish, and Portuguese-speaking countries who had arrived in Switzerland during the past 10 years. They were contacted via a register provided by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office based on the following criteria:

Residents who:

1. Immigrated after June 2006 to Switzerland (max. 10 years of residence)
2. Are foreign-born
3. Hold one of the selected nationalities[10]
4. Hold a residence permit (B), settlement permit (C), short-term permit (L), or are diplomats/international civil servants
5. Were 18 years or over at the time of immigration,
6. Were between 24 and 64 years at the time of the survey.

Respondents provided information about their migration trajectory before arriving in Switzerland, the composition of their family, their labour market participation and integration, and their level of satisfaction with life in Switzerland. Most of the questions were taken from other surveys in order to allow for national and international comparisons. The methodology followed a mixed-mode approach, which

[9] See the website of the nccr – on the move: http://nccr-onthemove.ch/knowledge-transfer/migration-mobility-indicators/ (last consulted on 14 November 2017).

[10] The nationalities were selected based on the languages mentioned above. They account for 63% of the total foreign resident population and include the following countries: Germany, Austria, France, Italy, United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, North America, Canada, India, Benin, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Saint Helena, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe. Citizens from the Balkans and Turkey make up almost 20% of the remaining 37%.

combined an online questionnaire with telephone interviews. The nccr – on the move mandated a private institute to carry out the data collection process.

I received the data during the latter stage of the research process (March 2017). I was thus not able to fully include them in my project. Nevertheless, one of my chapters specifically focuses on questions from the survey about the relocation support received by recent immigrants to Switzerland. The statistical analysis nicely complements my project by enabling me to better understand the significance and generalisation potential of my ethnographic data.

More information about the methods used for analysing data from this survey is available in Chap. 5. A detailed description of the survey methodology is also available in the Migration-Mobility Survey report written by Steiner (2017).

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Chapter 2
Selecting Foreigners for the Labour Market

In migration law, I tell you, if we had precise criteria, we would have an easy job!

Lawyer specialising in Swiss immigration law, personal communication, 20 March 2015 (The original text reads: "En droit des migrations, je ne vous dis pas, si on avait des critères précis, on ferait un métier facile!" All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.)

Switzerland is characterised by a high demand for foreign labour, a liberalised labour market, and a system which allows the free movement of persons within the European Union (EU) and countries that are part of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). On the other hand, the legal framework that regulates the entry, stay, and naturalisation of non-EU and non-EFTA citizens is one of the most restrictive in Europe (Cerna, 2013; MIPEX, 2015; Niederberger, 2004), which means that close to 25% of people in Switzerland have no political rights due to their foreign status.

This contrast between an open labour market that relies to a large extent on a foreign workforce and a restrictive immigration policy towards non-EU and non-EFTA citizens generates tensions between actors with different priorities and interests. From a state perspective, it raises a number of normative questions about the way immigration should be managed: What should be the role of foreigners in

This section is partly based on two previous articles by the author: Hercog, M., & Sandoz, L. (2018). Selecting the Highly Skilled: Norms and practices in the Swiss admission regime for non-EU immigrants. Migration Letters, 15(4), 503–515; Sandoz, L. (2016). The Symbolic Value of Quotas in the Swiss Immigration System. Highlights, e-magazine of the nccr – on the move 1(2016), 40–45, downloadable at https://nccr-onthemove.ch/highlights-1/highlights-1-5/. The field research and part of the analysis were conducted in collaboration with Metka Hercog.

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Swiss society? Who should be allowed to enter, stay, and participate in the country? To what extent should the state intervene in this process? More generally, these questions go to the very heart of the organisation of the state, since they refer to the ways decision makers define the kind of society that they want, as well as which people are allowed to live and participate in it (Wedel, Shore, Feldman, & Lathrop, 2005). The discussion also addresses the issue of solidarity, since the question "who should be admitted?" connects with the issue of who will benefit the larger group and who profits from it (Wright, 2016).

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was intrigued by the distinction between "highly skilled" and "low skilled" migrants that was often present in political discourses and societal debates, with a clear normative evaluation that "highly skilled" migrants are desirable while "low skilled" migrants are not. I observed that qualification level was a main criterion used by state authorities to select candidates for labour immigration, yet I could find no definition of these terms in Swiss policy documents.

For this reason, I decided – together with my colleague Metka Hercog – to start this research by analysing how immigrants are granted admission to Switzerland and how authorities define and determine their desirability. We wanted to evaluate which criteria matter most to state authorities in the context of an admission policy officially focusing on qualification level as a main criterion, and to understand how these authorities conceptualise "highly skilled migrants" through migration discourses and policy implementation.

We chose to analyse documents issued by the Swiss administration in order to understand how different categories of migrants are constructed by the state.[1] Because cantonal authorities have strong discretionary powers in admitting non-EU and non-EFTA workers to Switzerland, we also decided to analyse policy implementation in the cantons of Basel and Vaud, where large numbers of foreigners are hired each year in proportion to the resident population. We conducted interviews with actors involved in the admission procedure at the cantonal level and participated in several official events related to immigration in these cantons in order to contrast discourses and practices.[2]

[1] These documents include the Foreign Nationals Act (FNA), which has regulated the admission and stay of non-EU and non-EFTA nationals since 2005, a set of guidelines for the interpretation of the Foreign Nationals Act (State Secretariat for Migration, 2015a), an explanatory document on the Foreign Nationals Act (Swiss Federal Council, 2002), a report on the free movement of persons (Swiss Federal Council, 2012), and a series of statistics on immigration issued by the state administration between 2013 and 2015.

[2] Semi-structured interviews of 1–2 h were conducted in Basel and Vaud with (a) two managers in the cantonal labour market departments; (b) a legal consultant, about her experiences supporting applications for permits; (c) three former recruiters, about their practices for selecting potential candidates for employment; (d) two employees of a chamber of commerce, about coordinating public and private institutions at the cantonal level; (e) a manager in a private institution for economic promotion, about collaborations between institutions dealing with immigration and economic promotion; (f) a human resources manager, about his practice of hiring non-EU/non-EFTA workers; and (g) a relocation agent, about the way she supports her clients in obtaining work and residence permits.

Our research shows that the immigrant selection process conducted by state authorities in Switzerland is organised around an ambiguous notion of "economic interest" which is central to enabling the admission of immigrants perceived as more profitable while legitimising the exclusion of others. The candidate's qualification level is supposed to enable a fair selection based on merit, however, in practice qualification plays a marginal role in the selection criteria. More important is the way the authorities in charge of selection interpret the political, economic, and social context of the admission request. The admission process also fulfils non-economic objectives, such as providing the impression of state control over immigration, and of state protection of local populations by rhetorically constructing "highly skilled migrants" as culturally close and unthreatening.

I start this chapter by presenting the main rules that regulate immigration to Switzerland, as well as the logic behind these rules. I then describe the admission process for non-EU and non-EFTA workers and explain in more detail the role of the cantonal authorities' discretionary power in this process. Finally, I analyse various possibilities for employers to overcome the administrative barriers associated with national regulations on immigration and the role of cantonal administrations.

The main research question for this chapter is:

How is the category of "highly skilled migrants" conceptualised and instrumentalised in Switzerland through policy objectives and implementation?

2.1 Swiss Admission Rules

For an anthropologist, analysing policies is interesting because it informs the ways various problems are constructed, and solutions legitimised. Hence, the central anthropological question guiding policy analysis is not "What is policy?" but "What do people do in the name of policy?" According to the anthropologist Janine Wedel and her co-authors, policies can be conceived as "myths" in the sense that they constitute "charters of action" that "[convey] assumptions, values, and meanings about how to live" (Wedel et al., 2005, p. 35). The analysis of policy definition and implementation in relation to the selection of immigrants thus enables a better understanding of how policy makers set the boundary between wanted and unwanted categories of foreigners.

Although Switzerland is mentioned in several studies that evaluate and compare the effectiveness of immigration policies in attracting "highly skilled migrants" (Beine, Docquier, & Özden, 2011; Ortega & Peri, 2013; Sheldon, 2001), it does not have a clear "highly skilled" immigration policy and there is no official definition of the term "highly skilled migrant" in Swiss law. Nevertheless, the admission policy for non-EU and non-EFTA workers does target a category of people that corresponds to a certain extent to the imaginaries usually associated with "highly skilled migrants", since the law clearly states that "short stay and residence permits for

work purposes may only be granted to managers, specialists and other qualified workers" (art. 23, Foreign Nationals Act of 2005, FNA). Moreover, the dual categorisation of foreigners as either "highly skilled" or "low skilled" immigrants in Swiss policy discourses legitimises practices of inclusion and exclusion at both the local and national levels.

2.1.1 Historical Background

Since the creation of the Swiss federal state in 1848, the development of immigration policy has involved tensions between economic demands for access to foreign labour and popular demands for immigration control (Piguet, 2006). Immigration has always been a controversial issue in Switzerland, and immigration policy should be understood as a political attempt to find an equilibrium between contradictory objectives.

The conceptualisation of the current legislation on the admission of non-EU and non-EFTA citizens into Switzerland – the Foreign Nationals Act of 2005 (FNA) – began in 1992, when a parliamentary motion asked the executive government to revise the Law on the Stay and Establishment of Foreigners of 1931 in order to "better face the problems … resulting from vast migrations of population" (Simmen, 1992).[3] The development of the new immigration policy constituted a rupture from the previous model: since the mid-nineteenth century immigrants had been selected on the basis of their ability to take up jobs that Swiss citizens did not want to do, yet the new legislation established a selection system based on nationality (EU vs. non-EU) and qualifications ("highly skilled" vs. "low skilled").

The focus on qualifications represented a shift in official definitions of the national "economic interest". In fact, the new immigration policy was designed to favour internationalised economic sectors in need of highly specialised workers. In this context, the national "economic interest" came to be defined according to a foreigner's ability to answer the needs of the knowledge-intensive economic sectors – rather than according to their ability to provide cheap, flexible, and non-specialised labour, as had previously been the case. At the same time, the new policy needed to reassure the electorate that adequate control over immigration could be maintained. Insisting on the need for specialised workers thus also involved constructing "highly skilled migrants" as a socially, culturally, and economically unthreatening group in policy discourses.

[3] "Le Conseil fédéral est chargé de présenter aux Chambres, dans un proche délai, un projet de loi qui constituera la base permettant de mieux faire face aux problèmes que posent à la Suisse, comme à d'autres Etats, les vastes migrations de population."

A Transforming Context

Several reasons explain the policy shift towards a focus on highly qualified workers. The international political and economic context of the 1990s was the first incentive. The process of European integration, the quickening pace of globalisation, and the emergence of international economic regulatory bodies[4] created new pressures on the Swiss economy to compete at an international level. During this period, many politicians expressed a sense of urgency about the need to comply with new international regulations and enable the liberalisation of exchanges (Afonso, 2004; Mach, David, & Bühlmann, 2011). At the same time, an important part of the Swiss population did not feel ready for these changes. This division between governing actors and general population became particularly apparent in 1992, when Swiss voters refused to join the European Economic Area (EEA) in a historical popular vote (Piguet, 2009). This decision forced the government to find alternatives to direct EU membership while remaining involved in European construction.

In parallel to this political transformation, important changes were happening in the Swiss business sector. Many firms started to internationalise their activities, which contributed to the dissolution of solidarity networks among Swiss economic elites and the redefinition of power relationships at a national level (Mach et al., 2011). Until 1991, labour migration to Switzerland was partly regulated by a quota system, which mostly satisfied the domestic economic sectors that relied on immigration (hotels, restaurants, agriculture, construction) because foreign workers were limited in their ability to change jobs and therefore dependent on their employers. This system also contributed to keeping salaries low in these sectors (Afonso, 2004; Dhima, 1991). However, firms representing the internationalised part of the Swiss economy generally favoured a more liberal immigration policy that would increase their attractiveness and competitiveness in the international labour market. The changing national and international context of the 1990s constituted an incentive for these economic sectors to become more involved in lobbying activities and to challenge the relative solidarity that had prevailed until then between national business elites (Afonso, 2004, 2007).[5]

Important ideological changes during the 1980s and 1990s regarding governing actors' perception of the role of Swiss immigration policy supported these lobbying activities. In their analysis of the power relations involved in the development of the new immigration policy, the political scientists Afonso (2007) and Mach (2003) stress the important role played by experts in this reform. According to these authors, an epistemic community of Swiss free-market economists was formed during the 1980s and 1990s, which actively advocated for reforms in several domains, including

[4] Such as the European Economic Area (EEA), the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the foundation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

[5] The main economic associations representing the internationalised sectors were Vorort and the Swiss Employers' Association (Union Patronale Suisse/Schweizerische Arbeitgeberverband) whereas the domestic market was represented mainly by the Swiss small business association (USAM/SGV).

immigration. These economists were influenced by international debates on highly skilled migration, arguing that immigrants should be selected based on potential economic value and thus advocating for skill-selective immigration policies (see for instance: Leutwiler & Schmidheiny, 1991; Schwarz, 1989; Sheldon, 2001; Straubhaar & Fischer, 1994). They also heavily criticised the government's choices regarding immigration by arguing that the active recruitment of unskilled workers during the past decades resulted in a negative impact on the Swiss economy. Several authors of these critiques actively involved themselves in public debates and lobbying activities by proposing policy reforms based on neoliberal principles. The creation of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) in 1999 – which employed several influential economists of this period – also contributed to disseminating their ideas within the state apparatus (Afonso, 2007).

Lastly, these legal revisions took place at a time of economic slowdown during which the unemployment rate of foreigners in Switzerland increased significantly (Piguet, 2009). This situation contributed to emergent discourses on the "integration problem" of foreigners and the subsequent negative impact on the welfare system (Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006). In this context, both nationalist parties and supporters of neoliberal ideas presented the low skilled immigrants who had come to Switzerland as workers in the past as economic burdens and potential social problems (Piguet, 2009). Transformations at the national and international levels led to new constraints that generated an impression of loss of control among part of the population and governing actors: the project of establishing the free movement of persons within the EU engendered fears of a massive influx of foreigners; the progressive strengthening of foreigners' residential rights raised new questions regarding integration and access to social benefits[6]; developments in international law reinforced individual rights to protection against racial discrimination, "non-refoulement", and undue expulsion[7]; and finally, the reasons for migration (and the origin countries of immigrants) to Switzerland diversified, leading to an increase in the proportion of persons immigrating for family, humanitarian, and education-related reasons (Piguet, 2009).

These changes provided nationalist parties with fertile ground for advocating against immigrants in favour of better protections for local workers. On the other hand, most governing actors were convinced that the immigration policy was no longer suitable for the international context and that reform was a way to regain control, or at least to project the impression of control.

[6] Between the 1980s and 1990s, several important labour-supplying countries negotiated with the Swiss government to obtain facilitated access to long-term residence permits for their citizens living in Switzerland. For instance, between 1982 and 1983, the period for transforming an annual residence permit into a long-term residence permit was reduced from 10 to 5 years for Italian residents. Moreover, the period for obtaining a family reunion permit was reduced from 15 to 12 months. The same conditions were extended to Spanish residents in 1989 and to Portuguese residents in 1990.

[7] Switzerland ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1994 and the European Convention on Human Rights in 1988. The principle of "non-refoulement" is defined in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Cultural Proximity and Qualifications

A first step in immigration policy revision took place in 1991 with the "three-circle" policy, which preceded the current Foreign Nationals Act. Proposed by a commission composed of representatives of the Federal Office for Industry, Trade, and Work and the Swiss Federal Aliens Office, the objective was to propose a rapprochement with the EU that would be acceptable to the general population (Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006). In fact, this policy paved the way for the gradual removal of restrictions on mobility between Switzerland and the EU while creating new barriers for citizens of the rest of the world.

The policy defined three priority levels for recruiting foreign workers based on the idea that some nationalities would be easier to integrate – owing to supposed cultural similarities – while others would pose problems. Citizens of the European Economic Community took precedence, followed by countries with "a cultural milieu with living conditions close to ours" such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Swiss Federal Council, 1991).[8] The third circle included all remaining countries, from which only the most qualified workers could be recruited in exceptional cases (Swiss Federal Council, 1991). By appealing to an idea of "cultural proximity" with the first and second circle, and emphasising the importance of qualifications in the case of the third circle, the policy introduced the criteria of "qualifications" and "cultural proximity" as a means to define the desirability of certain immigrants (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b; Riaño, 2003).

With this policy reform, qualifications became an official selection criterion in the Swiss admission system. This development is directly linked to the previously mentioned transformations during the 1980s and 1990s, which contributed to reconfiguring existing power relationships and led to a shift in immigration policy with regard to economic interest. Hence, economic interest in policy discourses came to refer not necessarily to the particular interests of local firms but rather to the position of the Swiss economy within a competitive international environment (Afonso, 2007; Amarelle & Nguyen, 2010; Piguet, 2006). At the same time, the new focus on the qualification level of immigrants addressed segments of the population who feared competition from less qualified workers or considered them to be potential economic burdens on the national welfare system.

Cultural proximity, in contrast, is associated with older debates in Switzerland. The German notion of *Überfremdung* – translated as "foreign infiltration" or "foreign takeover"[9] – summarises an idea discussed since the early twentieth century, according to which a certain balance between Swiss and foreigners would be neces-

[8] The report speaks of countries with "un milieu culturel présentant des conditions de vie proches des nôtres".

[9] The concept of "*Überfremdung*" is difficult to translate in other languages and neither of the proposed translations fully manages to grasp its meaning. It refers primarily to a feeling of overwhelming and harmful foreign influence on various aspects of society (culture, language, politics etc.).

sary to protect local cultural values from foreign takeover. In the first half of the twentieth century, discussions about *Überfremdung* focused on Jews emigrating from Eastern Europe, who were perceived as particularly difficult to integrate. In 1931, the term was codified into Swiss law: "The decision-making authorities have to take into account the spiritual and economic interests of the country, as well as the degree of *Überfremdung*."[10]

Interestingly, during the years that followed the adoption of the three-circle policy, references to cultural proximity and *Überfremdung* progressively disappeared from policy documents, whereas the notion of qualifications became an increasingly important selection criterion. While some institutions – such as the newly created Federal Commission against Racism – criticised the three-circle policy for being unduly discriminatory (Piguet, 2009), other professional associations (in the fields of informatics, industry, and services) strongly advocated for more opportunities to hire professionals from the third circle (Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006). In fact, the notion of cultural proximity became politically incorrect, whereas the notion of qualifications appeared as a satisfactory compromise between the demands of the fast-growing economic sectors and the fears of those asking for more control over immigration. In addition, the notion of qualifications – because it was based on merit rather than cultural values – appeared as more neutral and less discriminatory than the notion of cultural proximity, yet it still enabled the selection of immigrants based on cultural capital. In her analysis of Swiss integration policy, the anthropologist Shirley Yeung (2016) shows how "culture" was gradually replaced by "skills" in policy documents while continuing to influence representations of immigrants. In this process, highly skilled migrants were rhetorically constructed as culturally close, while low skilled migrants were presented as culturally distant and therefore riskier from a social and cultural perspective. Hence, this discursive shift constituted a legitimation strategy for the new policy by indirectly addressing the fear of *Überfremdung* expressed by some segments of the Swiss population.

EU versus Third Countries

In 1998, a "two-circle" policy distinguishing between EU and non-EU member states replaced the three-circle policy, thus officially removing the distinction between "culturally close" and "culturally distant" countries. This same year, the government established an expert commission composed of representatives of the state administration and migration specialists from universities. Interestingly, the

[10] Translated from "Bundesgesetz über Aufenthalt und Niederlassung der Ausländer" (ANAG), 26 March 1931, Art. 16: "Die Bewilligungsbehörden haben bei ihren Entscheidungen die geistigen und wirtschaftlichen Interessen sowie den Grad der Überfremdung des Landes zu berücksichtigen."

expert commission proposed to implement a point system for non-EU workers inspired by Canada and Australia (Piguet, 2009). This system would have given preference to predefined criteria such as education, professional experience, language skills, and age – associating points with each criterion – and would have granted automatic admission to candidates with a sufficient number of points.

Parliament eventually rejected this proposition. In their report on the legal project, the Federal Council explained that a point system, even though it enabled a more objective and uniform practice, would have lacked flexibility because the existence of an automatic right to admission based on a given number of points would have reduced the authorities' capacity to review special cases and changing economic situations (Swiss Federal Council, 2002, pp. 3486–3487). Moreover, it would not have met one of the main objectives of the Federal Council, namely, "the reduction in the growth of the foreign resident population" (Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police, 1997).[11]

The finalised bill entered into force in 2008 after a long process of negotiation followed by a referendum. It provided authorities with significant discretionary power in the application of the law according to local and national priorities. Furthermore, it limited admission to "qualified workers from third countries who are absolutely needed"[12] (Swiss Federal Council, 2002, p. 3473 and 3485, my translation) by stipulating that "the admission [of third-country nationals] must serve the long-term economic interests of the country". In this context, "third countries" referred to all non-EU and non-EFTA countries.

Even though political preferences reoriented towards a focus on highly skilled migration, this legal project shows that policy makers favoured a *selective* admission system over an *attractive* one by providing local administrations with tools for excluding even the most qualified workers (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b). The bill also provided a legal framework for a dual admission system that granted EU and EFTA citizens with almost unrestricted access to the Swiss territory and labour market, whereas the admission of citizens from the rest of the world was limited to exceptional cases.

[11] "Au cours de sa séance spéciale, le Conseil fédéral a constaté que les conclusions et propositions de la commission, commentées par le Département fédéral de justice et police, correspondent fondamentalement aux objectifs que le Conseil fédéral s'est fixés pour la présente législature dans le domaine de la migration. Ces objectifs englobent notamment un renforcement de l'intégration des étrangers et des étrangères établis durablement dans notre pays, une amélioration qualitative de la circulation des personnes avec l'UE, l'admission de réfugiés et de personnes ayant besoin de protection au sens de notre politique humanitaire des réfugiés ainsi que la réduction de l'accroissement de la population étrangère résidante."

[12] "L'admission des ressortissants d'Etats tiers est limitée aux travailleurs qualifiés qui sont indispensables".

Main Legal Norms Regulating the Admission of Foreigners in Switzerland

There are currently three main legal channels for foreigners to enter and stay in Switzerland. The Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons of 1999 allows EU and EFTA citizens to enter and reside in the country. The other two tracks are the asylum system, based on the Swiss Asylum Act of 1998, and the admission system, based on the Swiss Foreign Nationals Act of 2005 (FNA). In the third case, admission must be justified by a specific reason, such as an employment prospect, education, retirement, medical treatment, or a serious humanitarian reason that does not fall into the asylum track. In all these tracks, it is possible for admitted foreigners to have their closest family members join them. Reunified family members can be authorised to work, but the qualifications of reunified family members are not a criterion for admission.

With regard to admitting workers from countries that do not belong to the European Union (EU) or European Free Trade Association (EFTA) – the so-called "third countries" – Switzerland is a typical receiving country with a demand-driven system. The basic principle is that only "qualified workers from third countries who are absolutely needed" can be granted access to the Swiss labour market (Swiss Federal Council, 2002, p. 3473). This restrictive admission system contrasts with the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, which applies to citizens of EU/EFTA member states.

In fact, qualifications only play a role for non-EU and non-EFTA nationals who base their permit request on a clear intention to work in the country. In that case, several admission criteria apply: admission must be in the interest of the economy as a whole (art. 18a FNA); it must be supported by an employer willing to hire the candidate (art. 18b FNA); it must be the case that no one else could be found in the Swiss labour market or within the EU to do the job (art. 21 FNA); the salary and employment conditions must be standard for the location, profession, and sector (art. 22 FNA); the candidate must be either a "manager", "specialist", or "other qualified worker"; there must be a chance of lasting integration (art. 23 FNA); and suitable accommodation must be available (art. 24 FNA).

This demand-based system is further restricted by a system of quotas that limits the annual number of all non-EU and non-EFTA workers who reside in the country for more than 4 months (art. 20 FNA). In terms of this system, the national government determines the maximum number of available permits in advance, and quotas are assigned to the cantons according to their size and economic activity. An additional reserve of permits is available to cantons on demand, but their distribution is subject to approval by the federal administration (Sandoz, 2016b).

The restrictive admission system for non-EU and non-EFTA nationals contrasts with the open policy for EU and EFTA citizens based on free movement: non-EU/EFTA citizens can almost exclusively enter Switzerland as

(continued)

asylum seekers, reunified family members, or as "absolutely needed" qualified workers. Yet policy documents do not define terms such as "qualifications" or "economic interests" in detail, thus leaving an important margin of interpretation to the persons in charge of applying the law. Moreover, the law is implemented at the cantonal level, which means that each of the 26 Swiss cantons has an office in charge of selecting foreign workers. Hence, cantonal administrations possess significant discretionary power in the admission of non-EU/EFTA workers.

2.1.2 Legal Definitions

In order to delve deeper into the objectives of Swiss immigration policy, I focus specifically on the admission process for workers from non-EU and non-EFTA countries. This is the only category of foreigners selected by Swiss authorities on a case-by-case basis according to their qualifications and economic interest to Switzerland. Analysing this process enables a better understanding of how local authorities define economic interests and offers an interesting case study of the way international discussions on highly skilled migrants materialise in a specific context.

The Swiss admission system for non-EU and non-EFTA workers is based on relatively broad legal concepts, and their interpretation largely relies on the cantonal authorities in charge of applying them. According to the Swiss Foreign Nationals Act (FNA):

> The admission of gainfully employed foreign nationals is allowed in the interest of the economy as a whole; the chances of lasting integration in the Swiss employment market as well as in the social environment are crucial. (Art. 3 FNA)

Although the notions of economic interests and integration are supposed to be central selection criteria, they are not clearly defined in Swiss law. For this reason, the FNA is complemented by a set of regularly updated guidelines issued by the State Secretariat for Migration that aims to unify cantonal practices by providing definitions and explanations of immigration law. These guidelines are binding for the administration, but they are not legal documents. Hence, they constitute an intermediary level between law and practice.

I will take a closer look at the definitions of economic interests and integration in both the FNA and the guidelines to understand better who can be admitted under the current system. As we will see, both of these notions implicitly refer to the qualification criterion, as well as to a dual construction of foreigners as either highly skilled or low skilled. However, this dual construction is not sufficient to understand how authorities select foreigners. According to policy definitions of economic interests, foreigners not only need to be qualified and able to integrate in order to be admitted, but also (and more importantly) they need to fill a gap that no one else is able to fill. This shifts the focus of attention from personal characteristics to the specific position

in the labour market for which foreigners are selected. For this reason, I argue that the term "highly skilled migrant" is not sufficient to grasp the complexity of the analysed situation. I thus suggest the term "wanted immigrants" be used in order to emphasise the importance of representation and context during the admission process.

The administrative guidelines define economic interests in the following way:

> Third-country nationals are admitted in the Swiss labour market if their admission serves the economic interests of the country (art. 18 and 19 FNA). When evaluating the case, the situation of the labour market, the sustainable economic evolution, and the foreigner's ability to integrate must be particularly taken into account. The purpose is neither to maintain an infrastructure with a low skilled workforce which agrees to work for low salaries, nor to support particular interests within the economy. Moreover, recently arrived foreigners in our country must not compete with Swiss workers in an undesirable way and, because of their readiness to accept poorer salaries and working conditions, cause a salary- and social dumping.[13] (State Secretariat for Migration, 2015a, p. 90)

In addition to economic interests, the notion of "preponderant economic interest" appears in the guidelines. This particularly applies to non-EU and non-EFTA foreigners who studied in Switzerland and wish to work in the country after finishing their degree:

> A gainful activity is of preponderant economic interest when there is a recognised need for workforce in the labour market in an activity sector that corresponds to the education, and when the orientation is highly specialised and matches the vacant position. Moreover, the occupation of the position immediately creates new jobs or generates new mandates for the Swiss economy.[14] (State Secretariat for Migration, 2015a, p. 102)

These definitions reflect a specific understanding of the role of foreigners within the national economy. Thanks to very specific skills and qualifications, foreigners from non-EU and non-EFTA countries are expected to create new jobs and wealth by occupying economic niches. The first definition also refers to the previously mentioned shift in the focus of immigration policy: foreigners are no longer perceived as an interchangeable workforce taking jobs that Swiss workers *do not want*. On the contrary, they need unique skills in order to take jobs that Swiss workers *cannot do*. Furthermore, the authorities in charge of the selection need to consider the more general economic and labour market situation. This points to the contextual dimension of the admission process, as well as to the relatively significant discretionary power of authorities.

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[13] "Les ressortissants d'Etats tiers sont admis sur le marché du travail suisse si leur admission sert les intérêts économiques du pays (art. 18 et 19 LEtr). Lors de l'appréciation du cas, il convient de tenir compte en particulier de la situation sur le marché du travail, de l'évolution économique durable et de la capacité de l'étranger concerné de s'intégrer. Il ne s'agit pas de maintenir une infrastructure avec une main-d'œuvre peu qualifiée disposée à travailler pour de bas salaires, ni de soutenir des intérêts particuliers. Par ailleurs, les étrangers nouvellement entrés dans notre pays ne doivent pas faire concurrence aux travailleurs en Suisse en provoquant, par leur disposition à accepter de moins bonnes conditions de rémunération et de travail, un dumping salarial et social."

[14] "Une activité lucrative revêt un intérêt économique prépondérant lorsqu'il existe sur le marché du travail un besoin avéré de main d'œuvre dans le secteur d'activité correspondant à la formation et que l'orientation suivie est hautement spécialisée et en adéquation avec le poste à pourvoir. De même, l'occupation du poste permet de créer immédiatement de nouveaux emplois ou de générer de nouveaux mandats pour l'économie suisse."

Besides contributing to the economic interests of the country, foreigners are expected to integrate. Specific criteria exist in Swiss law for defining integration, but in general it is stated that:

> Foreigners contribute to their own integration in particular by respecting general juridical order and democratic principles, by learning a national language, and by manifesting their will to participate in economic life and acquire education.[15] (State Secretariat for Migration, 2015a, p. 78)

In addition, according to Article 23, paragraph 2 of the Foreign Nationals Act:

> The professional qualifications of applicants and their professional and social adaptability, language skills, and age must also indicate that there is a prospect of lasting integration in the Swiss job market and the social environment. (Art. 23 FNA)

This implies a connection between qualifications and integration which supports Yeung's argument that a discourse on skills has progressively replaced the discourse on cultural proximity, after the demise of the three-circle policy (Yeung, 2016). The fact that the following list of foreigners is exempt from the integration requirement follows a similar logic:

(a) Investors and entrepreneurs who maintain existing jobs or create new jobs;
(b) Recognised persons from the world of science, culture, and sport;
(c) Persons with special professional knowledge or skills, provided there is a need for their admission;
(d) Persons who are part of an executive transfer between internationally active companies;
(e) Persons whose activity in Switzerland is indispensable for economically significant international business relationships. (Art. 23 FNA)

These exceptions suggest a specific understanding of the role of the aforementioned foreigner categories in Switzerland, which is connected to the notion of economic interests and used to legitimise special treatment. This special treatment is consistent with a representation of integration as transactional: foreigners who are admitted into Switzerland are accorded a benefit by the Swiss state and society, and should give something in return. The state can therefore demand their integration. The phrase "*fördern und fordern* [encourage and demand]", which guides integration measures in Switzerland, illustrates this view (Piñeiro, Bopp, & Kreis, 2009). However, foreigners with the specific skills and resources mentioned above are constructed as "contributors" who can repay their "debt" to the state and to society in other ways than by integrating.

Moreover, in several policy documents I found the assumption that qualified workers have less difficulty integrating than their low-skill counterparts. For instance, the website of the Swiss Secretariat for Migration states that:

[15] "Les étrangers contribuent à leur intégration notamment en respectant l'ordre juridique et les principes démocratiques, en apprenant une langue nationale et en manifestant leur volonté de participer à la vie économique et d'acquérir une formation."

> By decree of the Federal Council, workers from all other states – third states, as they are referred to – are admitted in limited numbers to the labour market in Switzerland, if they are well qualified. Experience has shown that this category of workers has a better chance of professional and social integration than less qualified persons. (State Secretariat for Migration, 2015b)

Another document issued by the federal government states that:

> Highly qualified workers generally have more competences and also more resources to organise themselves.[16] (Swiss Federal Council, 2012, p. 32)

These elements indicate a specific representation of "wanted immigrants". In terms of the admission system, priority is given to foreigners who: (a) do not compete with local workers; (b) contribute to economic development; (c) adapt easily to their new environment; and (d) do not rely on the social security system. In official discourses of the state administration, "highly qualified immigrants" are constructed as corresponding to these criteria. Moreover, the integration requirement occupies a secondary position compared to economic interests. This is because the foreigners who correspond to an economic interest are constructed as "culturally close" and therefore more likely to integrate.

2.1.3 The Symbolic Value of the Swiss Quota System

The primary objective of the admission policy for non-EU and non-EFTA workers is not to *attract* highly skilled workers but rather to *select*, as strictly as possible, foreigners who are desirable from an economic perspective. The main tool that enables this selection is the quota system for non-EU and non-EFTA workers, which is more than a governing mechanism: it is also a political signal to the electorate, and indicates power relations between governing actors.

The admission of foreigners is regulated on both the cantonal and federal levels by a quota system that limits the annual number of all non-EU/EFTA workers who reside in Switzerland for more than 4 months (Art. 20 FNA). At the beginning of each year, the Swiss Federal Council publishes the maximum number of permits that can be allocated to these categories of foreigners. The numbers differ for residence (B) and short-term (L) permits. For instance, in 2015, a maximum of 4000 short-term permits (L) and 2500 residence permits (B) were allocated to non-EU/EFTA workers.[17]

A further distinction exists between cantonal and federal quotas for non-EU/EFTA workers: each canton is allocated a certain number of permits based on its size and needs, but a reserve of permits is also kept at the federal level for cantons

[16] "Les immigrés hautement qualifiés ont en règle générale plus de compétences et aussi plus de ressources pour s'organiser eux-mêmes."

[17] See the VZAE appendixes 1 and 2: https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/20070993/index.html (last consulted on 10 January 2019).

that have exhausted their quotas. Cantonal authorities that apply for additional permits from this reserve need to justify their request to federal authorities, which then make a decision on a case-by-case basis. The federal quota consists of 2000 L permits and 1250 B permits, meaning that the total number of permits for non-EU and non-EFTA workers is cut in half between the cantonal and federal level.

In official immigration statistics, labour migration accounted for 47% of the 150,459 entries into Switzerland in 2015 (State Secretariat for Migration, 2016). Of these, only 4.1% (6140 persons) belonged to the category of non-EU/EFTA workers subject to quotas. The majority of immigrants (67%) entered the country through the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons. These numbers contrast with the impression of control generated by the quota system and Swiss immigration law, which states that "the admission of gainfully employed foreign nationals is allowed in the interests of the economy as a whole" (Art. 3 FNA). In practice, bilateral agreements and international treaties limit the extent to which the Swiss state can control immigration.

This situation exemplifies one of the paradoxes of migration management: on the one hand, an important dimension of sovereignty necessitates the state's ability to control the admission and residence of foreigners in a given territory. On the other hand, performing this task is becoming increasingly difficult in a context in which immigration is largely driven by the economy (Piguet, 2006). Moreover, the development of supranational regulations, such as the free movement of persons within the EU and EFTA, and the enforcement of human rights, further restricts the power of states to control the entry and residence of foreigners. For these reasons, the Swiss government has extremely limited possibilities for reducing immigration without inhibiting its economic dynamism, internal cohesion, bilateral relations, or moral legitimacy. This situation explains why such an important share of state control mechanisms regarding immigration policy focuses on a small group of non-EUand non-EFTA nationals applying for work permits: they are among the few immigrants over whom the state administration has full control to either grant or refuse admission (Piguet, 2009).

In order to illustrate this idea, I propose taking a closer look at the implementation of the quota system for non-EU/EFTA workers using the cantons of Vaud and Basel-City as examples.[18] As we have seen, the quota system regulating the number of workers allowed to enter Switzerland each year is divided into a cantonal quota and a federal quota. For instance, in 2015, the canton of Vaud was allocated 158 short-term permits and 98 residence permits. These numbers are relatively high compared to other Swiss cantons: Vaud closely follows Zurich and Bern in terms of quota numbers, and Basel-City has the ninth largest quota (out of 26 cantons) even though it is the fifteenth most populous canton. Internationalised economic activity in both cantons can help to explain this favourable distribution (Table 2.1).

[18] Basel-City is 1 of 26 Swiss cantons. Politically, it forms a half-canton together with the half-canton of Basel-Land. This means that each half-canton only sends one representative instead of two to the Council of State (one of the two chambers of the Swiss Federal Assembly). I write "Basel-City" instead of "Basel" when I want to refer to this canton specifically.

Table 2.1 Cantonal quotas for non-EU and non-EFTA workers and population size by canton in 2015[a]

Swiss canton	Max. number of short-term permits (L)	Max. number of residence permits (B)	Permanent resident population (in thousands)[b]
Zurich	403	252	1466.4
Bern	252	157	1017.5
Vaud	158	98	773.4
Aargau	136	85	653.7
St. Gallen	121	76	499.1
Geneva	133	83	484.7
Lucerne	88	55	398.8
Ticino	91	57	351.9
Valais	65	40	335.7
Fribourg	52	32	307.5
Basel-Land	63	39	283.2
Thurgau	52	32	267.4
Solothurn	59	37	266.4
Graubünden	51	32	196.6
Basel-City	84	52	191.8
Neuchâtel	45	28	178.1
Schwyz	28	18	154.1
Zug	36	23	122.1
Schaffhausen	19	12	79.8
Jura	17	11	72.8
Appenzell Ausserrhoden	11	7	54.5
Nidwalden	9	6	42.4
Glarus	9	6	40
Obwalden	7	5	37.1
Uri	8	5	36
Appenzell Innerrhoden	3	2	16
Total	**2000**	**1250**	**8327.1**

[a]See "Ordonnance relative à l'admission, au séjour et à l'exercice d'une activité lucrative" (OASA), Appendices 1 and 2: https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/20070993/index.html (last consulted on 8 January 2018)

[b]See the website of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office: http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/01/02/blank/key/raeumliche_verteilung/kantone__gemeinden.html (last consulted on 8 January 2018)

These numbers become more interesting when one knows that, in 2015, Basel-City had already exhausted its cantonal quota of permits in March. Similarly, in Vaud, the cantonal office in charge of admitting non-EU and non-EFTA workers grants on average 500–600 residence permits per year – more than five times higher than the cantonal quota. This means that in both Vaud and Basel-City, the cantonal quota covers only a small part of their permit requests while the federal quota covers the main share.

It is legitimate to ask why such a notable difference exists between the officially allocated numbers and the actually granted permits, especially since the number of permits actually granted each year appears to be relatively stable according to the cantonal administrators. It appears that the number of permits officially allocated to each canton is not only based on practical needs: if cantons such as Basel-City or Vaud regularly receive four to six times the number of permits than is allocated to them based on the cantonal quotas, then other reasons must explain why cantonal quotas are set so low. I propose three interpretations of this phenomenon.

Firstly, keeping the official permit quota numbers low is a way to avoid potential criticism of unequal permit distribution between cantons. In a context where admission numbers are restricted, cantons compete for permits. In that sense, the quotas officially allocated to the cantons and the actual distribution of the federal quota reflect two different logics. The cantonal quota is mainly symbolic and represents fair distribution among the cantons. Resorting to the federal quota in the case of a shortage follows a more pragmatic approach based on the actual demands of the cantons. This example illustrates the importance of considering the specific organisation of the Swiss federal state when analysing the implementation of the immigration policy: federal and cantonal priorities may differ, and the current system is thus the result of a compromise.

Secondly, the interplay between the relatively low cantonal quotas and the federal quota reserve serves as a tool for the federal administration to better control cantonal permit-issuing practices and to ensure a degree of flexibility in the case of unexpected changes. Therefore, the distinction between cantonal and federal quotas constitutes a compromise between recognising cantonal specificities and retaining the federal government's authority to enforce its priorities with regard to economic and migration policies. Again, this points to differing priorities within the state administrations and highlights one of the tools used by the federal government to restrict cantonal authorities' discretionary power.

Finally, quotas signal political intentions to the general population. This symbolic function of quotas became particularly apparent in November 2014, shortly after the acceptance of the populist initiative "against mass migration" (Uebersax, 2015), when the Swiss Federal Council decided to reduce the maximum number of permits available for non-EU and non-EFTA workers and service providers from EU/EFTA countries in 2015 by 3250 permits.[19] This decision was not required from a legal perspective since no legislative change had been introduced based on the initiative. However, the reduction of quotas clearly was the government's response

[19] The total number of quotas available in 2014 was 12,000, compared to 8750 in 2015.

to a popular demand for more immigration control. In practice, however, the quota reduction did not lead to a clear decrease in admitted workers.[20] In fact, the reduced quota of residence permits for non-EU and non-EFTA workers in 2015 was exhausted before the end of the year. This issue was resolved by resorting to quotas carried over from the previous year. The same situation happened again in 2016, and again the Federal Council agreed to release additional quotas.[21] Thus, parallel to the political decision to reduce quotas, administrative solutions were found to satisfy employers' actual needs for permits.[22]

This case study shows that quota numbers chiefly serve as signals of the government's power. By providing an impression of measurability and control, quotas strengthen the public's perception that their government is fully in charge of migration management. However, this control concerns only a small proportion of immigrants to Switzerland and, even in this case, the apparently rigid system does not function without ad hoc adjustments to meet practical needs.

A closer look at the function of Switzerland's direct democracy helps to understand this apparent contradiction: migration has been a hot political topic throughout the past century, and finding compromises between tendencies toward social closure and other priorities such as local economic needs, ethical values, and diplomatic relations has always been a central issue for the federal government. In this context, the system of direct democracy constitutes a kind of sword of Damocles for the government, since it enables dissatisfied citizens to launch and vote for populist initiatives that may challenge the political strategies in place.[23]

Such a situation occurred in February 2014, for instance, when 50.3% of voters requested the reintroduction of quotas for all categories of foreigners through an

[20] Statistics of the State Secretariat for Migration indicate that, in 2014, 5827 workers were admitted through the quota system and 68,953 were admitted independently of the quota system. In 2015, these numbers were 6140 and 64,843 respectively. See https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/publiservice/statistik/auslaenderstatistik/monitor.html (last consulted on 8 January 2018).

[21] This is indicated in two footnotes on page 13 of the 2015 SEM report on immigration statistics (State Secretariat for Migration, 2016) and on page 14 of the 2016 SEM report (State Secretariat for Migration, 2017): "Sollicitation intégrale des contingents; la Confédération a couvert la demande excédant le nombre d'unités disponibles (2500) avec des contingents de la réserve de l'année précédente. [Complete exhaustion of the quotas; the Confederation has covered the demand that exceeds the maximum number with quotas from the previous year's reserve.]" If quotas from previous years were used to cover the needs in 2015, I do not understand how the same process could apply in 2016 since there were no remaining quotas from the previous year, and I could not find any documents explaining this decision. I wrote to the Swiss Secretariat for Migration to ask for an explanation, but never received a reply. I interpret this opacity and lack of information about ad hoc adjustments as another indication that the function of the quota system is primarily to communicate an impression of control.

[22] In 2017, the official quota maximum was increased to 9750.

[23] Anyone with a right to vote in Switzerland can launch a popular initiative to modify the federal constitution. The initiative committee needs to gather 100,000 signatures within 18 months in order for the initiative to be submitted to a popular vote. The government can propose a counter-project to the initiative. In that case, the voters can accept both the initiative and the counter-project, but they need to indicate which one they prefer in a subsidiary question. An initiative is adopted when it obtains a majority of votes from both the people and the cantons. (see https://www.admin.ch/ch/e/pore/index3.html, last consulted on 6 September 2016).

initiative "against mass migration" (Uebersax, 2015). This vote put the Swiss government in a delicate position, in particular with regard to the EU. Introducing quotas for Europeans would have been difficult in terms of their compatibility with the principle of the free movement of persons, which underlies several other agreements between Switzerland and the EU. Hence, the Swiss government was left with little choice but to find a compromise that would both satisfy a sufficient number of voters and protect the economic and political interests at stake. The solution which was finally adopted – the legal introduction of a safeguard clause and a "light" system of national preference that could be activated in the case of a sudden increase in immigration, or rising unemployment in certain professional sectors – constituted such a compromise, even though its compatibility with both the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons and the new constitutional article approved during the vote against mass migration was questionable (Boillet, 2016). This example illustrates the importance of public communication around migration issues, as well as the need for consensus in the Swiss political system.

The analysis of the quota system also highlights the power relations between governing actors. The Swiss federal state is a multitude of complex components that do not necessarily share objectives, and decision makers must therefore constantly negotiate between various political trends and interest groups. This delicate balancing act involves internal dynamics as well as specific positions within a wider international and globalised context.

The case study on quotas underscores the tensions between cantonal and federal administrations. Switzerland is a federal state with 26 regional cantons, each of which possesses relative autonomy. Regarding the admission process for non-EU and non-EFTA workers, some cantons are known for being more restrictive while others are known for being less so. In addition, the economy of some cantons largely depends on companies that employ significant numbers of specialists from outside the EU. This is the case, for instance, with the agribusiness company Nestlé, which has its headquarters in the canton of Vaud, and the pharmaceutical companies Novartis and Roche, with headquarters in the canton of Basel-City. Cantonal authorities generally consider it important to facilitate access to residence permits for these companies' employees in order to maintain good relations and encourage them to stay in the canton. For this reason, cantonal authorities develop strategies to circumvent the restrictive admission rules defined by the federal government.

2.2 The Admission Process in Practice

If policies can be conceived as "myths" (Wedel et al., 2005, p. 35), then the study of their implementation is central to understanding how these myths are translated into practice. The anthropologists Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (2001) speak in this case of rituals that produce meaning. Policy implementation does not rely on the mechanical application of law but always involves an interpretation process (Bourdieu, 1999; Spire, 2008). Analysing the organisational setting in which policy is implemented, as well as the pressures that authorities in charge of policy

implementation have to contend with in practice, helps to understand this interpretation process (Fuglerud, 2004).

I have discussed the central role that the notion of economic interests plays in policy documents. We will now see that this term is used as a main legitimation tool by the authorities that apply the law. Interestingly, the interviewed cantonal authorities tend to take this notion for granted – as if it were in itself sufficient to legitimise their decisions without the need for further explanation. However, a more detailed analysis shows that interpretations of economic interests are complex and can comprise many dimensions, such as the protection of residents against competition by newcomers, demonstrations of state power and sovereignty, the promotion of local labour markets, or the search for balance between competing priorities, which includes, inter alia, the selection of "socially desirable migrants". Each of these dimensions contribute to defining which kinds of foreigners can be admitted under the current system.

The Swiss admission process for non-EU and non-EFTA workers involves the three following main steps: It officially starts when an employer submits a permit request. Employers play a central role as sponsors, and they are the main intermediary between the candidates for admission and the cantonal authorities that issue the permits: in fact, cantonal authorities do not need to have direct contact with the candidates for admission during the admission process since their main interlocutor is the employer. The authorities' decision is thus based on information given by the employer, and the field research shows that information exchange and negotiations between the cantonal authorities and the employers play a crucial role in the process.

When applying for permits for non-EU/EFTA workers, employers prepare a dossier to convince cantonal authorities of the economic interests of their application. In the dossier, employers must show the following: (a) why the company needs this specific employee (cover letter, plan for a business-creation project etc.); (b) steps undertaken to search for eligible applicants within Switzerland and the EU (job advertisements, contracts with staffing agencies etc.); (c) what employment conditions have been offered (employment contract); and (d) the potential employee's qualifications (CV, diplomas, certificates). This dossier is submitted either to the municipality where the company has its seat or directly to the canton.[24]

In the second phase of the process, cantonal authorities in charge of the labour market are supposed to check the admission criteria: (a) Is the admission in the interests of the economy as a whole (Art. 18a FNA)? (b) Are permits still available (Art. 20 FNA)? (c) Could no one else be found in Switzerland or the EU (Art. 21 FNA)? (d) Are the salary and employment conditions standard for the location, profession, and sector (Art. 22 FNA)? (e) Is the candidate qualified (Art. 23 FNA)? (f) Is there a chance of lasting integration (Art. 23 FNA)? (g) Is there suitable accommodation available for the candidate (Art. 24 FNA)? In practice, the authorities in charge of the labour market only check the five first criteria. The last two are

[24] This description of the admission process is based on observations in Vaud and Basel-City. Some steps in the process may be different in other cantons, even though the primary legal requirements are the same for all of Switzerland.

left to the cantonal authorities in charge of migration and population and they usually do not factor into the admission decision.

Once an admission request has been approved by the cantonal authorities, the admission process can enter the third phase. The application is sent to the State Secretariat for Migration, who can veto the canton's decision or ask for additional information. After approval at the federal level, the candidate is allowed to enter the country and start working. The entire process usually takes between 1 week and 3 months (Table 2.2).

2.2.1 The Authorities' Discretionary Power

The interviews with cantonal authorities in charge of labour market control in Vaud and Basel-City, as well as with a lawyer specialising in admission processes in Vaud, highlight several aspects of the admission process that are not visible in policy documents. Firstly, they confirm the central importance of the authorities' discretionary power in evaluating an application's economic interests. The interviewee from the labour-market office in Vaud explains:

> I think that we are lucky to have a rather open and flexible law …. insofar as there is no right, strictly speaking, to obtain a residence permit, we can make exceptions in order to deliver. There is an important discretionary power left to the authorities. And this discretionary power … gives us flexibility to adapt to economic fluctuations, to the evolution of needs or technologies, to the settlement of companies here, and to the major tendencies of the economy …. The purpose of the law is to support the economy. Economic development: that's the general interest.[25] (Personal communication, 6 May 2015)

In order for an admission to represent an economic interest, the applicant's qualifications must match the job description. According to the same interviewee:

> The notion of personal qualification is basically pretty mixed. It's the initial training – which often, in principle, is a university education – together with one or more professional experiences that determine a particular profile …. Then, the set of circumstances is taken into account: what does the company need? … There are other things that can potentially come into play. The law is formulated quite broadly.[26] (Personal communication, 6 May 2015)

[25] "Je pense qu'on a la chance d'avoir une loi qui est assez ouverte et assez souple …. Dans la mesure où il n'y a pas de droit à proprement parler d'obtenir un titre de séjour, c'est toujours par exception qu'on délivre. Il y a un pouvoir d'appréciation important qui est laissé à l'autorité. Et ce pouvoir d'appréciation … permet aussi de s'adapter à certaines fluctuations économiques et à l'évolution des besoins ou des technologies, de l'implantation de certaines entreprises ici, aux grandes tendances de l'économie. … Le but de la loi c'est quand même de soutenir l'économie. Le développement économique: c'est ça l'intérêt général finalement."

[26] "La notion de la qualification personnelle, c'est au fond un élément assez mixte. C'est la formation initiale – qui souvent, en principe, est une formation universitaire – additionnée d'une ou de plusieurs expériences professionnelles qui déterminent un profil particulier. … Après, c'est l'ensemble des circonstances qui rentrent en compte: quel est le besoin de l'entreprise? … Il y a d'autres éléments qui peuvent potentiellement entrer en ligne de compte. La loi est formulée de manière assez large."

Table 2.2 Admission processes for labour migration based on case studies in the cantons of Vaud and Basel-City

	European citizens (EU-25 and EFTA[a])	Non-EU and non-EFTA nationals
1	The foreigner and the employer agree on a job contract. The foreigner does not need any authorisation to enter and stay in Switzerland for up to 3 months	The foreigner and the employer agree on a job contract. The foreigner needs a visa to enter Switzerland
2	The foreigner starts working in Switzerland	The employer applies for a permit in the municipality where the company has its seat or directly to the cantonal office in charge of the labour market. The foreigner applies for an entry visa at an embassy
3	The foreigner registers in his or her municipality of residence and receives a residence permit (the permit can only be refused for reasons of public order, security, or health)	Municipal authorities in charge of population control send the application to the cantonal office in charge of the labour market (this step is bypassed in some cantons)
4		Cantonal authorities in charge of the labour market evaluate the request and situation, and make a decision based on: (a) economic interests; (b) the availability of permits; (c) priority for domestic and EU/EFTA workers; (d) appropriate salary and employment conditions; (e) personal qualifications; and (f) suitable accommodation
5		Cantonal authorities in charge of immigration can oppose a positive decision by the labour market unit for reasons other than labour market or economic considerations
6		The employer is informed about the cantonal decision
7		If the cantonal decision is positive, the application is sent to the federal authorities in charge of workforce and immigration. Federal authorities double-check the request and may veto the cantonal decision
8		The cantonal office for the labour market is notified about the federal decision. If this decision is positive, information about the foreigner is forwarded to the cantonal office in charge of immigration and an entry visa is issued
9		The foreigner can enter Switzerland and start working. They must register in their municipality of residence in order to receive a permit

[a]Croatia, as the newest EU member state, is not yet included in the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons in 2017, meaning that Croatian nationals are subject to the Foreign Nationals Act. However, there are special quotas (50 one-year B permits and 450 short-term L permits) for Croatian workers

This confirms that qualifications per se are not important. According to a lawyer specialising in admission issues, it is more important to prove "that only three persons in the world have these qualifications" and that "[the employer] could not find anyone else" (personal communication, 20 March 2015). The authority's discretionary power consists in determining whether a real need exists for the employer, and whether the candidate for admission is the person best suited to meet this need. Moreover, the admission must bring a benefit that goes beyond the employer's personal interests. For instance, if hiring a specific person is viewed as beneficial for both the company and the preservation of jobs in Switzerland, it fits the definition of economic interests. In contrast, a request may be rejected if the benefits are minor or limited to the company. During this decision process, the ability of the employer to convince the authorities (e.g. of the economic benefit that this person might yield, or the jobs they might create) is central. As we will see later, some employers invest considerable resources in producing applications.

The other criteria are also evaluated on the basis of documents provided by the employer. In general, the cantonal authorities need to evaluate whether the employer has made an adequate effort to search for eligible applicants in Switzerland or the EU, and whether they are offering the same employment conditions that would be offered to a Swiss citizen. In terms of evaluating salaries, specific resources exist which vary from canton to canton. For instance, the Federal Statistical Office has developed an online tool based on population data, which indicates average salaries in Switzerland according to several criteria (location, economic sector, professional group, and position).[27] Some cantons have refined this tool by financing extra data collection for their canton, which they use to decide whether a salary is standard for the location, profession, and sector. These controls aim to ensure that the employer does not hire a non-EU/EFTA national for dishonest reasons, such as facilitating the admission of a personal acquaintance, or trying to hire an employee at a lower salary and less favourable working conditions than the standard. The fight against abuses of the system thus plays an important role in the admission process.

Finally, the admissions criteria do not have equal weight in the decision-making process. While economic interests play a central role, the notion of integration, as defined in the law, is hardly considered because it is intertwined with representations of a candidate's social status, economic resources, and cultural capital. According to an interviewee from Basel-City's labour-market office:

> For the highly qualified, the salaries and working conditions are very good. I think that there is no danger that they won't find an apartment or have other problems …. So integration for these people is not so dramatic. … It is often the case that these English-speaking people keep to themselves. … That's of course not ideal. But in the end, this is not within my field of activity.[28] (Personal communication with Metka Hercog, 28 May 2015)

[27] The "Salarium" is available under this link: https://www.gate.bfs.admin.ch/salarium/public/index.html#/start (last consulted on 8 January 2018).

[28] "Die Hochqualifizierten, also die Lohn- und Arbeitsbedingungen sind ja auch sehr gut für diese Leute. Das ist jetzt glaube ich nicht die Gefahr, dass die jetzt keine Wohnung finden oder sonst Probleme haben. … Also Integration für diese Personen ist nicht so dramatisch. … Das ist halt oft so, dass diese Englischsprechenden halt unter sich bleiben. … Das ist sicher nicht ideal. Aber das ist schlussendlich nicht mein Tätigkeitsbereich."

This observation is consistent with the argument that integration is often perceived as less important for highly skilled migrants for reasons related to representations of social contribution and cultural proximity. In addition, each of the criteria tend to be checked with more or less scrutiny depending on the authorities' perceptions of the application's economic interests. According to the lawyer who specialises in admission processes:

> The employer must have done some research to prove that they could not find someone else. But at the same time, if the person is really qualified to do something very specific, it is clear that one or two job postings are sufficient. The less the person is qualified, the more [the authorities] will demand.[29] (Personal communication, 20 March 2015)

This further highlights the significant discretionary power of the authorities. In this context, the broad but central concept of economic interests can be used either in favour of or against a given candidate depending on how the person responsible for the decision interprets the situation. Since there is no right to admission for non-EU/EFTA workers, candidates have limited possibilities to appeal an administrative decision. In this regard, vague definitions form an integral part of Swiss immigration policy, acting as tools that enable authorities to easily reject unwanted candidates and to select those regarded as most useful according to immediate needs.

2.2.2 The Practical Meanings of "Economic Interests"

The analysis of discourses and practices related to the admission policy underscores at least three dimensions of "economic interests" in the context of the admission process for non-EU and non-EFTA workers. Firstly, the authorities responsible for selection evaluate characteristics associated with both the candidate's employment conditions and the employer's economic situation, showing that the implementation of economic interests is connected to political objectives to promote local interests, protect the local labour market, and fight abuses of the system. Cantonal authorities must ensure that selected candidates will advantage the canton and that their employment conditions will not endanger local workers by causing social or salary dumping. However, the selection process of workers concerns only 5% of all immigrants entering Switzerland. In this sense, the stated objective of the admission policy to protect the local labour market constitutes first and foremost a political message that state authorities will safeguard the interests of the local population.

[29] "Pour l'employeur, c'est d'avoir fait les recherches, de prouver qu'ils n'ont trouvé personne d'autre. Mais en même temps, si c'est vraiment quelqu'un de très qualifié, quelque chose de très pointu, c'est clair qu'il suffit d'avoir mis une ou deux annonces, d'avoir fait quelques recherches, voilà. Après, moins c'est qualifié, plus ils seront exigents au niveau des recherches."

Secondly, the notion of economic interests as practised in Switzerland is balanced by a restrictive understanding of admission rules, which is conceptualised in the quota system: cantonal authorities must remain selective when dealing with admission requests, even in cantons with a relatively open attitude towards immigration. Nevertheless, the broad definition of legal terms allows them to adapt easily to political and economic changes within the cantons. This combination of flexible cantonal practices and restrictive federal rules reconciles different priorities at the federal and cantonal levels.

Thirdly, admitting non-EU/EFTA nationals based on economic interests results in the unequal treatment of Swiss/EU nationals compared to workers from the rest of the world. In 2007, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination officially recognised this inequality as legitimate based on interstate treaties; however, legitimate inequality changes over time. For instance, maintaining a "cultural balance" between Swiss citizens and foreigners was an explicit goal of the Ordinance on the Restriction of the Number of Foreigners (SR 823.21), which governed the admission process and quota system until 2007. Although speaking of cultural balance is now considered discriminatory, several elements of the earlier models are still present in the Foreign Nationals Act. The cap on permit quotas remains a relevant element of restriction. At the same time, several bilateral agreements with countries in the former "second circle" still put certain citizens in a favourable position compared to other non-EU/EFTA nationals. Remnants of the previous system suggest that the selection of "socially desirable migrants" and the need for protection against a hypothetical "foreign takeover" remain valid objectives of the admission policy. For these reasons, the emphasis on qualifications in discourses on admission, together with the assumption that wealthy and educated immigrants integrate more easily, indicates that the preference for qualified immigrants in Switzerland is not simply a rational economic choice but also results from an evaluation of the (un)desirability of certain categories of immigrants from a cultural perspective (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b; Yeung, 2016). Beyond promoting national economic interests, migration policies related to admission inherently perform "the dirty work of inequity and exclusion" (Dauvergne, 2009, p. 333).

2.2.3 Strategies of Employers for Overcoming Administrative Barriers

The Swiss admission system for non-EU and non-EFTA workers, while apparently strict and restrictive, does offer some flexibility to those with the right connections and knowledge to work with and around the policy. Interestingly, strategies to circumvent the admission system are not perceived as problematic by the relevant authorities as long as they are justified by an economic interest. During my field

research, I was surprised by the fact that the interviewed cantonal authorities talked very openly about strategies for overcoming administrative barriers. Their intermediary role between employers and the federal administration contributes to explaining this openness.

To develop this aspect further, I conducted interviews with various people who have experienced the admission process for non-EU and non-EFTA workers in Basel or Vaud, either because they were themselves candidates for admission or because they supported an admission request. These people included professional recruiters, human resources managers, chamber of commerce employees, relocation agents, a manager at a private institution for economic promotion, and academically trained non-EU/EFTA nationals who immigrated to Switzerland for various reasons. I also attended various informational events about admission processes and international mobility for human resources staff.

My field research shows that cantonal authorities in charge of labour markets do not only control admissions; part of their job is to inform companies about the process and to support their applications. In Vaud and Basel-City, cantonal authorities try to accommodate companies in different ways depending on their specific economic interests. For instance, they often inform and advise employers about admission requirements so that their applications meet the State Secretariat for Migration's expectations. They also negotiate for additional quotas from the federal reserve, particularly when specific projects require significant numbers of permits that exceed the cantonal quota. When they cannot approve a permit request, cantonal authorities sometimes propose alternative solutions, for instance by offering short-term permits instead of long-term permits. Finally, cantonal authorities collaborate with institutions for the purpose of economic promotion in order to facilitate the establishment of new businesses. We will see in the next chapter that the canton of Vaud finances an organisation that offers free services to companies, including support for work permit applications. Cantonal authorities in charge of the labour market thus try to maintain good relations with companies by helping them to find satisfying compromises between their employment needs and the constraints of the immigration policies. In the words of an employee from the labour market office in Vaud:

> The labour market office is part of the Department for the Economy, so we are also here to support companies in Vaud and to offer them services. If we cannot meet their wishes exactly in terms of permits, we try to propose intermediary solutions or other pathways to meet their needs.[30] (Personal communication, 6 May 2015)

On the other hand, the interviews and observations suggest that the experiences of admission processes differ greatly between employers. During the field research,

[30] "Ici c'est le département de l'économie, au service de l'emploi, donc on est là aussi pour soutenir les entreprises vaudoises et leur offrir un service. Donc si on n'arrive pas à répondre exactement à leurs vœux en termes de permis, on essaie de leur proposer des solutions intermédiaires ou de leur proposer un autre cheminement pour répondre à leurs besoins."

all the interviewees who were questioned about this issue admitted that large employers have an advantage when hiring non-EU/EFTA workers. While multinationals employ internal teams and external consultants for handling recruitment and immigration processes, employers in smaller companies are often less aware of admission rules and practices. When presenting convincing arguments to governing authorities is the key to obtaining the necessary permits, companies with more resources and expertise to invest in admission processes and lobbying activities have a clear advantage. Moreover, cantonal authorities have priorities in terms of the firms that they wish to satisfy: in Vaud and Basel, some economic sectors have been politically defined as priority development areas, meaning that companies active in these sectors take precedence. According to several interviewees, large employers with more negotiating power also tend to be privileged: an employee of the office in charge of the labour market in Basel-City explained that it is important to them "that the big companies stay here, and that they can provide their services, and that they also obtain the workforce they want" (personal communication to Metka Hercog, 28 May 2015). Following this logic, in 2013 the cantons of Basel-City and Basel-Land opened an office on the Novartis campus specifically dedicated to processing permit applications for their employees (Scherrer, 2013). They justified this special treatment by arguing that Novartis hires a significant number of foreigners each year and is among the canton's most important employers.

Besides the preferences of cantonal authorities, the admission system relies to a certain extent on the inventiveness of the private sector (Groutsis, Van den Broek, & Harvey, 2015). For instance, one employee of the labour market office in Basel-City admits that "The quota system is a kind of science in itself. Who is subject to quotas, who is not? … I don't even know all these tricks" (Personal communication to Metka Hercog, 28 May 2015).[31] This employee refers to the many "special cases" present in the law and detailed in the administrative guidelines regarding the Foreign Nationals Act (State Secretariat for Migration, 2015a). Indeed, it is another specificity of the Swiss admission system that there are many exceptions to the general rules, for instance, for academics, non-EU/EFTA nationals who completed their studies in Switzerland, interns, and intra-company transferees, among others. There are also exceptions for specific professional sectors such as the health, tourism, artistic, and sports sectors. These exceptions can enable some candidates to avoid the quota system or the priority principle for Swiss and EU workers.

Because of the complexity of the system, experts who can navigate and take advantage of its intricacies are of particular value to companies in need of foreign workers. For instance, several job announcements for consultants and lawyers specialising in immigration were posted online shortly after the 2014 vote on the initiative "against mass migration", indicating that companies were recruiting in this field in anticipation of tougher admission processes. In the same vein, an interviewee

[31] "Also es ist, dass mit den Kontingenten ist so ein bisschen eine Wissenschaft für sich. Eben, welche sind kontingentiert, welche nicht? … Die kenne ich eben auch nicht alle, diese Tricks."

from Basel-City's labour market office mentioned that most big companies use the services of external consulting firms specialising in immigration issues. These specialists, who are experts in cantonal and federal admission requirements, can prepare clear, complete, and convincing applications, or negotiate with the authorities on behalf of an employer. However, these services can be prohibitively expensive, and are therefore not available to all employers.[32]

Examples of job announcements for immigration specialists in Switzerland[33]

Wir suchen Sie als Consultant (w/m) Immigration in Zürich

Aufgaben, die Sie voranbringen:

- Eine vielseitige, anspruchsvolle Tätigkeit mit fachübergreifenden Fragestellungen in einem lebhaften, internationalen Umfeld.
- **Erstellung zahlreicher Gesuche um Arbeits- und Aufenthaltsbewilligungen**
- **Tägliche Zusammenarbeit mit Personalabteilungen, Steuerspezialisten, Expatriates und Behörden bei nationalen und internationalen Fragestellungen.**
- Weltweite Kontakte.
- Mitarbeit an grossen und kleineren Mandaten in allen Projektphasen.

Ihr Profil, um gemeinsam etwas zu bewegen:

- Bachelor in Rechtswissenschaft oder kaufmännische Ausbildung mit Erfahrung im Ausländerrecht
- Ein Muss: Interesse am Thema Immigration, ein Plus: **Erste praktische Erfahrung im Ausländerrecht, namentlich beim Einholen von Arbeitsbewilligungen (Global Mobility Programme multinationaler Unternehmen).**
- Erfolgsgaranten, die Sie bei uns weiterbringen: Sie sind ein Organisationstalent und arbeiten gerne im Team, sind selbständig, sehr flexibel, belastbar, engagiert und zuverlässig. Als internationales Unternehmen setzten wir gute bis sehr gute Deutsch- und Englischkenntnisse voraus.

[32] The daily rate for this kind of consultancy is between 2000 and 4000 Swiss francs (1760 and 3520 euros).

[33] A colleague sent me the first job announcement in April 2015 from the website of the hiring company. I found the two other job announcements in September 2017 on the website OptionCarriere (https://www.optioncarriere.ch/emploi-immigration.html) with the keywords "immigration" and "Suisse". The first and third announcements are from global consulting and audit companies while the second is from a relocation company.

Jurist/Rechtsanwalt (m/w) Immigration Law mit Managementfunktionen
Unser Immigration Team braucht Verstärkung:

Aufgaben, die Sie begeistern

- Sie beraten unsere nationale und internationale Kundschaft in allen Belangen des Ausländerrechts und zeichnen verantwortlich für Grosskunden oder spezifische Kundengruppen.
- Sie haben Freude an der Zusammenarbeit mit den Ämtern und pflegen und bauen diese stetig weiter aus.
- Sie sind die primäre Anlaufstelle für ausgewählte „Global Immigration Partners", für die wir in der Schweiz tätig sind.
- Sie kommunizieren Gesetzesänderungen und sind eine aktive Fachunterstützung für unser Verkaufsteam.
- Durchführen von Compliance Tests und Implementierung der notwendigen Prozesse bei Kunden.
- Als Sprach- und Kommunikationstalent schätzen Sie es sehr, im In- und Ausland Fachreferate zu halten, Konferenzen zu besuchen, Fachartikel zu schreiben und Schulungen bei Kunden durchzuführen.
- Im Bereich Ansiedlungsmanagement sind Sie auch aktiv bei Firmengründungen und im Steuer- und Sozialversicherungsrecht involviert.

Fähigkeiten, die Sie mitbringen

- Guter juristischer Universitätsabschluss
- Mindestens 3 Jahre erfolgreiche Berufserfahrung in ähnlicher Position **(ein Muss)**.
- Auslanderfahrungen wären wünschenswert.
- Sie sind eine gewinnende Natur mit ausgeprägter Kundenorientierung.
- Sie sind eine integre und vertrauenswürdige Persönlichkeit mit Sinn für effiziente, pragmatische und lösungsorientierte Arbeitsweise.
- Wichtig sind uns Ihre exzellenten Sprachkenntnisse vornehmlich in Deutsch und Englisch in Wort und Schrift (bilingual von Vorteil). Jede weitere Sprache wie zum Beispiel Französisch oder Italienisch schätzen wir sehr.
- Sie haben die Fähigkeit, sich mündlich und schriftlich strukturiert, knapp und prägnant auszudrücken, sind kreativ und haben Freude im Umgang mit Menschen.
- Sie schätzen es, in einem unkomplizierten und entscheidungsfreudigen, dynamischen Team zu arbeiten.
- Einsatzbereitschaft, ausgeprägtes Qualitätsbewusstsein und schnelle Auffassungsgabe, analytisches Denkvermögen, präzises Arbeiten, Flexibilität, Belastbarkeit, Loyalität, Durchsetzungsvermögen, selbständige Arbeitsweise, Zuverlässigkeit und Verantwortungsbewusstsein sind weitere Eigenschaften, die Sie auszeichnen.

SPEZIALIST/IN ARBEITS– UND AUFENTHALTSBEWILLIGUNGEN
IHRE AUFGABEN

- Sie beraten unsere nationalen und internationalen Kunden im Bereich Schweizer Arbeits- und Aufenthaltsbewilligungen und wickeln sämtliche administrativen Aufgaben in Ihrem Zuständigkeitsbereich eigenverantwortlich ab
- Sie nehmen regelmässig an internen und externen Fachvorträgen, Messen und Veranstaltungen teil, erweitern Ihr professionelles Netzwerk und vertreten unsere Dienstleistungen
- Sie erstellen Offerten und führen Präsentationen, Schulungen sowie Workshops durch
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- Sie unterstützen die Weiterentwicklung des Bereichs Immigration Services im internationalen XXX Netzwerk

IHR PROFIL

- Sie bringen mehrjährige Erfahrung im Bereich Global Mobility, insbesondere im Spezialgebiet Schweizer Arbeits- und Aufenthaltsbewilligungen mit
- Sie kennen die Anforderungen und Erwartungen an Ihre Beraterrolle aus beruflicher Praxis und zeichnen sich aus durch eine selbstständige, genaue sowie zuverlässige Arbeitsweise
- Aufgrund Ihrer Fachkompetenz, hohen Flexibilität und Organisationsstärke meistern Sie sowohl komplexe Aufgabenstellungen im Tagesgeschäft als auch parallellaufende Projekte jederzeit qualitätsbewusst, effizient und fristgerecht
- Stilsichere mündliche und schriftliche Ausdrucksfähigkeit in Deutsch und Englisch setzen wir voraus; weitere Sprachkenntnisse sind ein Plus

Besides the consultants and lawyers that specialise in immigration, relocation agencies are another important type of intermediary. Large employers sometimes mandate external service providers that specialise in relocation issues to organise their (future) employees' mobility (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015). The negotiated relocation packages can cover many aspects of daily life and cost between a few thousand and several tens of thousands of Swiss francs, depending on the position of the employee and the importance of their skills for the company. Residence permits are usually included in these relocation packages. In that case, the relocation agency either takes charge of the admission request itself or collaborates with another agency, as shown in this interview excerpt with a relocation specialist in Basel:

> Relocation specialist: I always tell my clients, if they want to set up a business here: Do it in Basel-City, because it's much easier than anywhere else …. [The cantonal administration] just need good reasons, why these people have to come. You have to follow all the rules …. There is a portal for advertising jobs for third-country people. We do all of that.
> Interviewer: So you do it for the company?
> Relocation specialist: I work with a lawyer and we do it together …we collect all the information and all the normal stuff and if there is a special reason why we have to do something differently, [the lawyer] explains why.
> Interviewer: Do you have examples of situations where it didn't work?
> Relocation specialist: Never. (Personal communication, 18 November 2015)

Interviews with people who struggled to obtain a permit mitigate the confident view of this relocation specialist about the accessibility of residence permits in Basel-City. Nevertheless, the involvement of external service providers points to the importance of knowing the subtleties of the admission process.

In addition, perseverance and personal contact with the administration are important, as shown in this interview with a human resources manager in the banking sector:

> When you try to recruit someone, it's practice, you come to understand the intricacies of the system. But, in the case of the Brazilian we brought in, it was an easy situation but I can tell you that it took three to four months …. It works, but I had to push a lot, phone a lot. I had friends here, friends there: What's happening? Give me information, what can we do? It's laborious.[34] (Personal communication, 11 April 2015)

These elements highlight the importance for admission candidates to be sponsored by employers with both the willingness and the resources to undertake the admission process. Hence, the field research suggests that even if the candidate's qualifications do play a role in determining the outcome of an admission request, more significant is the negotiating power of the employer sponsoring the request – which depends to a large extent on the authorities' perception of this employer's importance – as well as their ability to mobilise knowledge about the process, either internally or externally. The development of a "migration industry" (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013) composed of lawyers, consultants, and relocation specialists who facilitate admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers in Switzerland, indicates that both employers and service providers understand the importance of expertise and contacts in this process and have adapted their practices accordingly. Their knowledge and networks enable them to reach their objectives. These findings are reminiscent of Alexis Spire's research on the practices of tax authorities in France (2012), which shows that personal contacts, the mobilisation of knowledge about relevant laws, and the use of specialists for dealing with authorities enables wealthier taxpayers to obtain more favourable treatment than taxpayers

[34] "Quand tu cherches à recruter quelqu'un, c'est par la pratique, tu comprends les arcanes. Mais dans le cas du brésilien qu'on avait fait venir, c'était une situation simple, mais je peux te dire que ça a pris 3–4 mois … et puis la procédure elle est … si tu veux il n'y a personne qui lead. Il n'y a pas quelqu'un dans la procédure qui vérifie que le dossier circule. Ça fonctionne, mais j'ai dû beaucoup pousser, beaucoup téléphoner. J'avais des copains ici, des copains là: où est-ce que ça en est? Donne-moi l'information, qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire? Donc c'est laborieux!"

with fewer resources. In contrast to taxpayers, however, candidates for admission are dependent on their employer for obtaining a permit. What matters most is not the relation between the *candidate* and the administration, but rather the relation between the *employer* and the administration. While some employers are well equipped for managing the admission requirements, others lack the experience, resources, or motivation for engaging in such processes. Therefore, the position of a candidate's employer within the system can result in very different experiences of access to the Swiss labour market and territory.

2.2.4 *Portrait: Administrative Obstacles for a Brazilian Engineer*[35]

Case studies can offer a glimpse into how admission processes are experienced by candidates. The following story is about a young Brazilian man – Luca[36] – who sought to transform his legal status from student to worker. Since January 2011, non-EU and non-EFTA graduates of Swiss higher education institutions are entitled to stay in Switzerland for 6 months after graduation and may obtain a longer-term residence permit if they find employment that represents "an overriding scientific or economic interest" for the country (Art. 21 § 3 FNA). In that case, the admission process is similar to the one for non-EU/EFTA workers, except that the employer sponsoring the work permit does not need to prove that an eligible Swiss/EU/EFTA candidate couldn't be found. This exception simplifies the process for both the employer and the administration. Nevertheless, despite this privileged position with respect to legal admission norms, Luca encountered many difficulties.

Luca is in his 30s and had been living in Switzerland for 4 years when I met him. We were introduced through a mutual friend who knew about my research interests. Luca told me that he had always wanted to live abroad, although he had never left South America before visiting France on a study trip. He grew up in an upper-middle-class family. Since kindergarten, he had received a bilingual Portuguese/English education. His parents worked in sales and owned several shops in Brazil. Although this provided them with a comfortable lifestyle, it did not enable them to fully support their son during his stays abroad, meaning that Luca was partly dependent on scholarships and paid jobs to realise his travel dreams.

When he started his university studies in material engineering in Brazil, Luca wanted to study in Europe for one or two semesters and subsequently obtained a scholarship from his school to go to France. This experience gave him the opportunity to discover other European countries during weekends and holidays, including Switzerland. He was also accepted for an internship at a French company, gaining his first work experience abroad.

[35] This interview was conducted by Laure Sandoz in October 2015. An earlier version of this portrait was published in French in *terra cognita* n 29 (Sandoz, 2016a).

[36] Research participants' names have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

Eager to experience living in another country again, Luca applied for and was accepted to a master's degree programme at a Swiss university. He chose Switzerland because of the high quality of education and the low tuition fees. In addition, he already knew some French and thought that it would be easier for him to move to a region where he spoke the language. The fact that his parents had sufficient resources enabled him to easily obtain a student visa for Switzerland once he had been accepted at a university.

During his 2 years of study in Switzerland, Luca held several part-time jobs at the university in order to support himself. His financial situation was complicated during his 2nd year when his father became ill and had to leave his job. Nevertheless, Luca managed to graduate as an engineer. He then sought employment and was offered a 3-month contract at a Swiss company. Unfortunately, the human resources manager cancelled the offer when he realised that Luca did not have a valid work permit.

At this point Luca returned to Brazil, where he continued looking for positions in Europe. Soon afterwards, he was contacted by a Swiss company where he had applied for an internship during his studies. This time, he was more careful about communicating his residence status and did not tell them that he was not in Switzerland. He simply sent a copy of his still-valid student residence permit without further information. He was subsequently invited to an interview and managed to travel in time to be there in person. At the end of the interview, he was offered a position which he accepted.

Luca immediately contacted the human resources department of his employer to help solve the administrative issues related to his foreigner status, but soon realised that they did not know how to hire a non-EU/EFTA citizen. The company advised that he send his student permit to the municipality where its headquarters were located, thinking that it could be renewed there. After waiting a few weeks, however, they realised that this process was incorrect: the permit application should have been sent to the cantonal authorities in charge of the labour market.

More time went by and Luca decided to go back to Brazil to spend Christmas with his family. On arrival, he received disappointing news: his request had been accepted, but the permit he received was valid only for 1 year. Under these circumstances, the company did not wish to hire him because they needed someone for a longer period. Nevertheless, a human resources employee promised to enquire whether the permit could be renewed after a year.

By mid-January, Luca had received no news either from his potential employer or the canton. Nonetheless, he decided to go back to Switzerland with a return visa which was valid for 21 days. He spent this time at a friend's and was finally forced to leave the country. While in transit in London, waiting for his flight to Brazil, he checked his emails and discovered that the company had finally agreed to hire him because they had received confirmation from the canton that renewing his permit after 1 year would not be difficult. Luca cancelled his flight to Brazil and immediately travelled back to Switzerland.

Luca still had to obtain his permit. An employee of the municipality informed him that he first needed to apply for a new visa because his 21-day visa was no

longer valid, but the kind of visa he needed could only be delivered in his country of origin. Fortunately, Luca managed to negotiate an exception: instead of going back to Brazil, he was allowed to pick up the visa in Paris.

Back in Switzerland, Luca discovered that he also needed to find an apartment in the canton that had approved his permit request, as the permit was tied to the canton and forced him to live there. He had not expected this new constraint but had no other choice than to conform. After a few days of research, he found an apartment to rent. He considered himself lucky, because obtaining a lease without a permit is not easy in Switzerland: landlords usually prefer tenants with long-term authorisation. Luca went back to the municipality and finally received his permit. After 4 months of administrative setbacks, he could start working.

During the interview, Luca explained that he was satisfied with his work but still felt trapped by his legal situation. Since the beginning of his contract, his first work permit had been renewed, but only for another year. Although he could reasonably expect to obtain a longer-term permit at the next renewal, the fact that his situation depended so much on the goodwill of cantonal authorities worried him. Moreover, the economic situation of his company was tense, and Luca knew that if he lost his job, he would lose his permit as well. He wished to stay in Switzerland, especially since he had fallen in love with a person living in the same town. He described his situation as follows:

> Sometimes you become more obedient. Sometimes you come to agree more with the bosses. It's not my personality, but sometimes you do it because you are afraid. You do what they want, the boss, or the company, because if you lose your job, it's over …. It's very stressful. (Personal communication, 6 October 2015)

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Although Luca experienced the admission process as difficult and stressful, his case shows that he could count on several strengths that helped him deal with the obstacles he encountered.

Firstly, Luca found an employer who agreed to sponsor his request, which is a necessary condition for applying for a work permit. Luca's previous experiences, as well as those of other interviewees, show that employers are often reluctant to engage in administrative processes that necessitate commitment and time without any guarantee of success. In addition, the human resources employee in charge of his case took a proactive approach, persisting on his behalf even after the initial setbacks. This shows again that the employer's support is of crucial importance. Secondly, Luca studied engineering at a renowned Swiss university. This places him in a special legal category with facilitated access to a permit. Moreover, an official shortage of engineers has been identified in Switzerland (Arquint, Reber, & Bauer, 2011), which made it easier for him to find a position corresponding to his field of expertise. The combination of these elements contributed to making his case stronger and the authorities were easily convinced of the overriding economic interests of the request. Thirdly, Luca had the necessary resources and flexibility to adapt to the changing situation: even though he is not rich, he had enough money to travel

between Switzerland and Brazil and he was able to react quickly when the municipality asked him to find an apartment or to get a visa in Paris. His proficiency in the local language and his social skills also contributed to facilitating these actions.

Despite its strengths, Luca's case took several unexpected turns. This is partly due to the employer's lack of experience with the admission process, which points again to the importance of systemic knowledge. The initial procedural mistake caused unnecessary delays. Then the employer refused to hire Luca, because he had received a short-term permit instead of a long-term one. Only once the employer was reassured that the short-term permit could be renewed did he reconsider his decision. The employer did not know that granting potentially renewable short-term permits is common practice because the quota for short-term permits is larger than the quota for long-term permits. Finally, obtaining the permit after the decision had been taken was more complicated than expected. Here again, the fact that Luca did not know about the restrictions associated with his permit meant that he could not anticipate them – for instance, by searching for an apartment in advance. In addition, the employer did not offer any relocation support services. Luca thus experienced the situation as very stressful and constraining.

This case also illustrates Luca's limited control over the procedure. During the main decision process, the employer was in charge of communicating with the canton and Luca had few opportunities to participate. Only once the permit request had been approved could he meet the municipal employees in charge of checking the last administrative requirements before issuing the permit. This absence of contact between the selecting authorities and the candidates highlights once again the central importance of the employer in the process. This observation supports the argument that the candidate's qualifications are not an important selection criterion per se; more significant is the candidate's ability to convince the employer of their value, as well as the authorities' perception that the employer's needs must be met.

Finally, this case draws attention to Luca's dependence on his job. Because the permit was tied to the position and depended on a decision by the responsible canton, Luca was constrained in both his spatial and professional mobility; if he decided to change his job or residence, he would have to go through the whole process again with no guarantee of success. This situation has serious economic and psychological consequences, since it restricts career development opportunities and creates stress as well as planning difficulties. It is also reminiscent of the old Swiss immigration system: although the policy focus has changed from non-specialised workers to highly qualified workers, some mechanisms still contribute to keeping foreigners dependent and insecure.

2.3 Highly Skilled or Highly Wanted Migrants?

This examination of the norms and practices in the Swiss admission process for non-EU and non-EFTA workers highlights various tensions in how immigration policies are designed and implemented over time. The historical overview shows

that the current policy consists of a compromise between different interests and perceptions of immigration: it was designed in a time of globalisation when participation in international processes was perceived as crucial by many decision makers in Switzerland. At the same time, governing actors had to comply with a popular demand for more immigration control, as well as with the refusal to become part of the EU. Hence, they had to find alternatives to achieve their internationalisation objectives. Bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU/EFTA countries were the result of one compromise, while another was to limit immigration from the rest of the world to a strict minimum.

Opening the borders of Switzerland to EU/EFTA nationals also meant closing them to others. Yet international firms based in Switzerland demanded that they be able to hire specialists globally, and many decision makers were sensitive to the idea that the country needed to be attractive to highly skilled migrants. Hence, several exceptions were introduced into law that granted "most needed" foreigners access the Swiss labour market. Moreover, Switzerland had to respect international regulations, meaning that access to the territory had to remain open to some extent for family reunification and humanitarian cases. Finally, other interests and constraints contributed to further expanding the range of people with access to the Swiss territory (e.g. students, researchers, renters, investors, people falling within the scope of bilateral treaties). The Swiss immigration policy can thus be seen as an attempt to reconcile opposing tendencies towards openness and closure (Piguet, 2009). This tension is visible in the broad formulation of the law, which offers flexibility to adapt to changing situations. The important discretionary power granted to cantonal authorities also contributes to creating a balance between federal and cantonal priorities. At the same time, the policy needs to convey an impression of control in order to reassure voters in favour of more restrictive immigration.

In this context, there is no right of admission for non-EU/EFTA workers. Indeed, in a restrictive immigration system such as Switzerland's, the main issue for policy makers is not so much defining clearly who can be admitted into the country on the basis of personal characteristics, but rather providing legal means for the authorities in charge of the admission process to exclude people they consider unnecessary. Broad and vague definitions of economic interests form an integral part of Swiss immigration policy, since they can be used either in favour of or against a given candidate, depending on how the person responsible for the decision interprets the situation. In a similar vein, the "indispensability" of candidates is evaluated in direct relation to concrete situations. For this reason, the skills of a given person are not valued in and of themselves, but are rather weighted in relation to a specific context. Given the competing political agendas of various interest groups, this system appears restrictive by stressing the importance of selection and the low annual quota for each canton; however, it also appeases economic interests with flexible cantonal practices that involve using federal reserve quotas or proposing alternative solutions to interested employers.

Candidates for admission have limited opportunities to influence the decision process. Interactions happen mainly between the employers and the cantonal authorities in charge of the selection, which makes candidates dependent on the

ability and willingness of their sponsor to support the admission request. Furthermore, in the absence of clear admission criteria, candidates have no guarantee regarding the procedure's outcome, and are left in a state of uncertainty until the final decision. In this sense, even if the cantonal authorities in charge of the labour market in some cantons like to present themselves as service providers, their services chiefly concern the businesses that contribute to the canton's economy, not the foreigners themselves.

This analysis, although specific in many regards to the Swiss case, contributes to enlightening dynamics of migration policy that transcend the borders of Switzerland. As already discussed in the introduction, globalisation has not created a borderless world, but it has encouraged governments to become more aware of who they want to attract and who they want to keep out (Mau, Gülzau, Laube, & Zaun, 2015; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2018). A main challenge has been to develop strategies to promote economic dynamism while maintaining sovereignty over borders. Meeting the demands of internationalised economic actors while responding to populist calls for more immigration control has become a challenge in many industrialised countries. One response to this issue has been to implement highly skilled migration policies because these selection tools tend to be less controversial than other immigration policies. Moreover, most researchers, politicians, and decision makers seem to consider that selecting immigrants based on their potential economic interest for the host country is legitimate and unproblematic.

Nevertheless, the absence of controversy about this specific type of policy contributes to the production and reproduction of power structures that advantage certain actors and exclude others. It participates in shaping a world in which "migrants" and "natives" are treated differently because the former are expected to meet the needs of the latter in order to obtain the right to coexist. This view grants considerable power to certain actors for selecting potential migrants and influencing local demographic structures. Furthermore, the insistence on economic interests overshadows other important dynamics at hand in immigration policies and competes in some instances with objectives of social justice, cohesion, and basic human rights.

As the analysis shows, it is difficult to rigidly define who highly skilled migrants are. While a distinction between "highly skilled" and "low skilled" clearly exists in Swiss policy discourses on immigration, the actual differences in how qualifications are valued are not obvious, and these categories do not really help to form an understanding of how authorities in charge of admission processes select foreigners. On the one hand, the category "highly skilled migrant" serves to legitimise a fair admission process based on merit and to provide reassurances of the profitable and unthreatening nature of immigrants. On the other hand, the actual selection depends more on the admission context than on the candidate's personal characteristics and skills.

This problem of definition is not limited to the Swiss case. In most countries, skills are only one of many dimensions that are taken into account during the admission process (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018a). As other authors have shown, age, nationality, gender, and social background all influence selection (Kofman, 2014; Kulu-Glasgow, Schans, & Smit, 2018; Tannock, 2011). Moreover, governments are

increasingly implementing demand-based migration policies that define immediate employability as the decisive selection criterion (Van den Broek, Harvey, & Groutsis, 2016). Even Canada, which is famous for its points-based supply-driven immigration system, is currently shifting to an approach that aims to address short-term regional labor market shortages (Ferrer, Picot, & Riddell, 2014).

Hence, the term "highly skilled migrant" does not seem appropriate for describing the analysed situations. The skill level of the candidate is not the decisive criterion; more important is how they are perceived by decision makers and how they fit into the specific context for which they are selected. This observation, although based on the Swiss case, is valid to varying degrees in other countries as well. I propose the term "wanted immigrant" instead of "highly skilled migrant" to better highlight this contextual dimension.

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Chapter 3
Creating Attractive Places

> *I think that everything that is financed by the state must not necessarily be completely transparent. … If there was complete transparency, cantons would spend a lot of time justifying their choices and our cantonal colleagues would have very little time to carry out their other tasks.*
>
> Philippe Monnier (2015). Promotion économique de la Suisse occidentale: Radiographie sans complaisance. Genève: Slatkine. (The original text reads: "Je pense que tout ce qui est financé par l'Etat ne doit pas forcément être complètement transparent. … S'il y avait une transparence complète, les cantons passeraient beaucoup de temps à justifier leurs choix et nos collègues cantonaux auraient très peu de temps pour accomplir leurs autres tâches." All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.)

Having analysed the practices of cantonal authorities in selecting foreigners who are considered "wanted", this chapter focuses on place-branding strategies that are developed by the state administration to actively attract and retain those from whom an economic benefit is expected. In addition to continuing the discussion on the conceptualisations of highly skilled migrants in Switzerland, this chapter provides an analysis of the way different levels of state administrations collaborate with private sector institutions. It also raises the question of the frontier between the public and private sectors, as well as the role of the state in a context that situates economic interests as central.

With the modernisation of international mobility, marketing strategies are increasingly being utilised by nations, cities, and regions to attract capital and to compete in the globalising world. In accordance with this trend, the concept of place branding gained popularity towards the end of the 1990s. According to Simon

This field research was conducted in collaboration with Metka Hercog. Laure Sandoz and Metka Hercog presented their preliminary results during the annual conference of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) on 23 June 2015 in Zagreb, Croatia. This section is partly based on that presentation.

L. Sandoz, *Mobilities of the Highly Skilled towards Switzerland*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21122-6_3

Anholt, one of the main theorists of this notion: "Branding is the process of designing, planning and communicating the name and the identity, in order to build or manage the reputation" (Anholt, 2007, p. 4).

The debates around place branding display many similarities to the debates on highly skilled migration: both deal with the issue of attracting and retaining people perceived as valuable. On the one hand, many researchers who study highly skilled migration are concerned with how national and local policies influence the behaviour of skilled immigrants (Boeri, Brücker, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2012; Boucher & Cerna, 2014; Docquier, Lohest, & Marfouk, 2006; Shachar, 2006), while on the other hand, researchers who study place branding highlight the ways different actors contribute to creating attractive places for potential immigrants (Anholt, 2007, 2008; Gold & Ward, 1994; Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993; Lucarelli & Per-Olof, 2011). However, little research has analysed the connections between these two trends, and place branding has rarely been studied from the angle of migration (Glick Schiller & Çaglar, 2009).

This chapter is divided in two parts. The first analyses strategies developed by organisations working under the mandate of the state at different administrative levels to promote the economic development of their region. The second focuses on integration services developed by state and non-state institutions in order to make their locality attractive for current residents. The main objectives are to observe how policy makers in Switzerland brand their city or region as attractive and to analyse who they define as their target group. The analysis is based on both interviews and observations in the cantons of Vaud and Basel-City with representatives of institutions that work to attract or retain "valuable" citizens. The main research question for this chapter is:

How do major cities in Switzerland develop strategies to attract and retain "wanted" immigrants?

3.1 Attracting Companies Through Economic Promotion

During the nineteenth century, the development of tourism in Switzerland triggered important investments in the construction of a positive image of the nation as a leisure destination (Bertron, 2016; Tissot, 2004). Romantic ideals about the Swiss countryside, in particular the Swiss Alps, were popularised by the British bourgeoisie and aristocrats. Switzerland represented a mandatory stop during one's Grand Tour across Europe (Humair, Tissot, & Lapointe Guigoz, 2011). By the end of the nineteenth century, various actors for which the promotion of a Swiss "brand" represented a valid economic strategy reappropriated and further developed these imaginaries. In her doctoral thesis, Caroline Bertron (2016) shows how private boarding schools in the Lake Geneva area promoted the Swiss Alps as an ideal educational location where natural settings met cosmopolitanism, quality, and security. Laurent Tissot (2004) argues that the excellent reputation of the Swiss brand

emerged from a combination of circumstances: investments in tourism and transportation infrastructure during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the creation of tourism offices during the same period, contributed to the institutionalisation of place branding. In addition, private and state-sponsored publications such as travel brochures, postcards, posters, and guidebooks participated in the diffusion of an advertising iconography. Finally, the official foundation of the Swiss state in 1848 provided political support for the promotion of a national identity.

Nowadays, various actors continue to invest considerable time and resources into influencing Switzerland's image, both generally and for specific locations within the country. These "place sellers" (Kotler et al., 1993) can be economic development agencies, tourism promotion agencies, cultural and sports institutions, companies, economic associations, and public administrations. Place sellers adopt two main types of marketing strategy: external (targets customers outside the location by generating a positive image to attract new people and economic relationships) and internal (targets customers already present in order to maintain or improve satisfaction and to encourage them to stay in or maintain a relationship with the location) (Ancarani, 2001, p. 10). Place sellers may also focus on different target groups depending on their objectives, such as short-term visitors (e.g. tourists, students, temporary workers), long-term residents (e.g. investors, highly skilled workers, companies), specific groups (e.g. wealthy people, entrepreneurs, highly skilled workers), or the general population.

In this section, I focus on strategies developed by cantonal administrations to attract long-term residents and examine collaborations between administrative levels (federal, cantonal, municipal) as well as between cantonal administrations and actors from the private sector. In so doing, I draw attention to the intermediary role of economic promotion agencies mandated by cantonal authorities to attract foreign companies. My research shows that these agencies not only communicate the canton's (or region's) brand abroad, but also facilitate negotiations between companies interested in relocating to Switzerland and the administrations in the targeted locations.

3.1.1 Place-Branding in the "Greater Geneva Bern Area"

My first research task was to find state-mandated institutions whose aim is to convince specific categories of people to move to a selected location. I was influenced by the broader literature on highly skilled migration, which presents the attraction of "talents" and other "creative people" as a central issue for national and local governments (e.g. Florida, 2005; OECD, 2008; Shachar, 2006). I was, however, surprised to find no such practices directed at individuals in the cantons under study, with the exception of tourism offices and other institutions focusing on short-term visitors. An employee of the city of Lausanne's marketing unit (in the canton of Vaud) explained to me that attracting long-term residents was not an issue: the

economic dynamism of the region was already drawing people in and the local authorities did not consider it a priority to further support this process. Their focus rather consisted in encouraging current residents to form deeper attachments to the location through various offers targeted at the general population. Interviewees from a chamber of commerce and a cantonal labour market office confirmed that Switzerland is already very attractive to immigrants, owing to its stable economy and high quality of life. This means that public institutions do not have a direct interest in attracting long-term residents, in particular within the context of rising anti-immigration movements. In fact, it could even be politically risky to actively work to attract new people when the general political orientation leans towards limiting immigration.

However, other institutions actively convince targeted companies to move to specific regions in Switzerland. Although these practices are not part of official immigration policy, they influence the composition of migration flows by offering incentives for certain employees within the companies to relocate. I observed that people who work for institutions for economic promotion tend to perceive the mobility of individuals as an incidental consequence of the mobility of companies, and thus do not explicitly define targeted groups of "wanted" immigrants. Yet the types of companies they identify, attract, and support during relocation contributes to structuring the demographics of the locations concerned, and influences the mobility of individuals. For this reason, I propose taking a closer look at the practices of these institutions.

There are many economic promotion agencies in Switzerland. At the federal level, Switzerland Global Enterprise is a non-profit organisation mandated by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) to promote Switzerland as an attractive business location. With an annual budget of approximately 45 million Swiss francs (39 million euros), its tasks involve supporting the international business ventures of companies from Switzerland and Liechtenstein, promoting imports from selected countries to Switzerland, and encouraging investment in Switzerland. The Swiss Business Hubs represent the organisation abroad. These are present in 21 countries,[1] usually at a Swiss embassy or consulate, and serve as contact points for approaching interested investors and communicating a positive image of Switzerland (Switzerland Global Enterprise, 2017) (Fig. 3.1).

In addition, five regional economic promotion agencies oversee the branding of specific areas, most notably the Greater Geneva Bern area (GGBa) – which is financed by the cantons of Bern, Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Geneva, and Wallis – and the Greater Zurich area (GZa) – which brings together the cantons of Glarus, Graubünden, Solothurn, Schwyz, Uri, Zug, and Zurich, as well as more than 20 companies based in this region. These promotion agencies provide free services to companies interested in investing in their region and actively communicate their region's strengths. The larger regional promotion agencies also use prospectors to contact potential investors directly.

[1] USA, Canada, Brazil, Spain, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Poland, Russia, the Gulf States, South Africa, India, Singapore, China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Mexico, and Turkey.

Fig. 3.1 The business hubs of Switzerland Global Enterprise. (Source: Switzerland Global Enterprise: https://www.s-ge.com/en/swiss-business-hubs (last accessed 11 March 2019))

Apart from these larger-scale organisations there are many local economic promotion agencies that work at the cantonal, municipal, or intermunicipal level. I take as an example the canton of Vaud to illustrate how these institutions coordinate their activities. This case study shows how economic promotion activities derive from the broader political and economic context, and how they contribute to positioning a specific region internationally. A closer look at the discourses of economic promotion agents demonstrates how they perceive their mission, as well as how they consider the relationship between immigration and economic development. Finally, the analysis further develops the question of "wanted immigrants" by discussing who exactly economic promotion agencies target, and how these practices may have direct or indirect consequences on immigration flows.

In Vaud, the Développement Economique Vaudois (DEV) performs the role of the canton's economic promotion agency. Founded in the mid-1990s, this non-profit organisation operates under the mandate of the cantonal Department for the Economy. Its main mission is to promote the settlement of foreign companies in the canton. Its services are free of charge and financed by the canton and its members, which include all of Vaud's municipalities and approximately 250 corporations that operate in the canton. The DEV employs eight people in Switzerland and two international representatives based in Turkey and Japan. An analysis of their Linkedin profiles indicates that the DEV employees based in Switzerland have strong roots in Vaud – where they have all lived for many years – and extensive experience living and working abroad. Three of the four directors completed technical training at a regional university and worked in management positions at companies based in Vaud. The fourth director has less management experience, but she studied at both a private business school and a local university. Moreover, she did not grow up in Switzerland, unlike her other colleagues. This overview illustrates that the DEV employs people with good local networks, a knowledge of the regional business environment, and international experience.

During my field research I interviewed one of the DEV directors, who explained that this cantonal promotion agency originated from a political decision to attract people from abroad at a time of economic slowdown:

> During the 1990s, the cantonal situation was bad …. in general, it was a period of crisis. … And what happened? The canton that initiated the economic promotion was Neuchâtel … they set up the concept of economic promotion by saying: … we need to attract people from abroad … And how do you attract people? You need to facilitate things at the fiscal level …. So certain criteria were taken into account to define the "Bonny areas" that were eligible for a tax break at the federal level …. It was a driving force for reviving the economy. And seeing that, the canton of Vaud – which was in a bad position too – said: we also need an economic promotion tool to attract people. So contacts were made and then the DEV was created by a cantonal minister.[2] (Personal communication, 27 May 2015)

"Bonny areas" were introduced by federal decree in 1995 to support development in certain areas by giving federal tax breaks to companies generating notable economic value in these regions (Swiss Federal Council, 2004).[3] This was replaced in 2008 by another policy for regional development that was less generous on the fiscal level (Swiss Federal Council, 2016).

In reference to the connection between fiscal policies and the emergence of economic promotion practices, the interviewee added:

> We were talking about the famous Bonny decree … if you add in cantonal and municipal exemptions, companies in certain regions got a 100% tax break … There were some areas on the coast [of Lake Geneva] that could benefit from these implementations … Then it all disappeared, so the attractiveness for company headquarters declined… we have observed an evolution over the past few years, with companies arriving that are smaller but much more qualified on a technological level. So we see a change: from headquarters with full administrations … to engineering companies with technological skills that are attracted by the ecosystem we offer.[4] (Personal communication, 27 Mai 2015)

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[2] "D'une part, en effet, dans les années 90, la situation du canton était mauvaise …. Et de façon générale, c'était période de crise aussi. … Le canton qui a initié au départ la promotion économique, c'était Neuchâtel. … Ils ont mis en place ce concept de promotion économique en disant: … il faut attirer du monde d'ailleurs … Et comment on attire les gens? Il faut leur faire des facilités au niveau fiscal …. Voilà, il y a des critères qui ont été pris en comptes pour définir des 'zones Bonny' qui étaient éligibles pour une exonération fiscale au niveau de l'impôt fédéral direct …. Ça a été un élément moteur pour redynamiser. Et en voyant ça, le canton de Vaud qui était aussi dans une mauvaise situation s'est dit: il faut qu'on se dote aussi d'un outil de promotion économique pour attirer du monde. Donc des contacts ont été établis, ensuite il y a eu mise-en-place en parallèle du DEV par un conseiller d'Etat."

[3] French: Arrêté fédéral; German: Bundesbeschluss.

[4] "On parlait du fameux arrêté Bonny … Donc si vous additionniez encore les exonérations cantonales et communales, vous pouviez exonérer à 100% les entreprises dans certaines régions … sur la côte il y avait des zones qui pouvaient bénéficier de ces déploiements … Tout ça a disparu ensuite, donc l'attractivité pour les sièges a baissé. Alors on voit une évolution et depuis quelques années on a de plus petites structures qui arrivent ici mais qui sont beaucoup plus qualifiées au niveau technologique. Donc on voit le changement. On passe de quartiers généraux, avec toute l'administration … à des sociétés plutôt d'ingénierie, plus de compétences technologiques qui viennent attirées par l'écosystème qu'on peut offrir."

At the beginning of the economic promotion scheme, these tax incentives played an important part in attracting multinational companies to Vaud. After the policy reform in 2008, fiscal aspects ceased to be the main incentive but a very specific environment started to develop around a few institutions, such as the polytechnic school in Lausanne (EPFL) and several internationally renowned research institutes in the fields of medical device development and biotechnologies. The strong concentration of scientific resources in the region helped the DEV to convince similar types of companies to settle there.

Currently, the DEV has three main directives. The first is to serve as a point of contact for companies interested in the canton. DEV employees not only provide tailored information in response to specific requests, but also accompany company representatives during site visits. They also arrange meetings with potential regional partners, including representatives of relevant organisations (universities, research institutions, hospitals) and private service providers (tax advisors, real estate agents, professional recruiters), as well authorities from the canton's public administrations (department of finance, labour market office, municipal authorities or promotion agencies). The main objective of these visits is to establish a trusting relationship with the interested representatives in order to convince them that the canton is willing to support the company's relocation. In this case, the DEV clearly plays the role of an intermediary by facilitating contact and negotiations between foreign companies and local institutions.

The second directive of the DEV is to assist newly arrived corporations with hiring employees in the region. The DEV collaborates with specialised recruitment agencies to help companies find a local workforce. They also support the preparation of admission requests in cases where a company wants to bring existing employees from abroad. As one DEV employee mentions:

> We accompany them during all the steps to obtain work permits … We have very close ties with the labour market office here, which is in the Department of Economics … so that when we make a request, we can be assured of obtaining it.[5] (Personal communication, 27 May 2015)

In this case, the promotion agency negotiates the acquisition of permits for the interested company directly with the cantonal labour market office. The privileged relationship between these institutions does not mean that a promotion agency can obtain permits for anyone; they still need to justify the request based on the criteria mentioned earlier (economic interests, qualifications, priority for local workers etc.) and meet the requirements controlled at the federal level. Nevertheless, DEV employees are able to prepare convincing dossiers because they know what the authorities expect and can discuss certain cases in advance with the cantonal departments in charge of approving applications. They can also dissuade a company from attempting to bring in a specific employee if they think that the admission request is unlikely to succeed. According to the DEV interviewee, because of this preliminary

[5] "On va les accompagner dans toutes les démarches afin d'obtenir des permis de travail, c'est aussi chez nous. On a des liens très étroits avec le service de l'emploi ici, qui est dans le département de l'économie, de manière à ce que quand on fait une demande, on soit assuré de l'obtention."

selection, expertise, and privileged access to authorities, the promotion agency's admission requests have never been rejected. This confirms the important role of intermediaries in this process.

The DEV's third directive is to target specific markets and sectors for development. In this case, the collaboration with the promotion agency in charge of branding the Greater Geneva Bern area (GGBa) contributes to structuring these activities. At the time of its creation in 2010, representatives of the six cantons sponsoring the GGBa decided to concentrate their prospecting activities on eight countries: The United States (identified as a priority); France, Germany, and Italy (neighbouring countries); and Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the most important emerging markets at that time). The GGBa employs around ten people to develop business networks in these countries and to contact companies potentially interested in relocating. Their task is to promote the GGBa without favouring any of the six member cantons: for example, Vaud cannot prospect independently in the same places as the GGBa in order to avoid competition with the other cantons. For this reason, Vaud's representatives chose Japan and Turkey for their own sector-specific recruitment and development activities. Based on market research and analysis, the sectors they chose to focus on included the life sciences, information technologies, micro-technologies, and international sport. Currently, the DEV employs one prospector in Istanbul and one in Tokyo, who promote the canton of Vaud and identify potential settlement projects in those countries.

The connection between the DEV and a company interested in the canton can happen in different ways. A company might contact the promotion agency directly, or a DEV prospector could manage to arouse a company's interest in Vaud. Generally, however, the connection is established through other institutions. For this reason, DEV employees also nurture relationships with management consultants, fiscal analysts, and lawyers specialising in global mobility issues. For instance, the "Big Four" professional services companies[6] sometimes refer contacts to the DEV. In economic promotion parlance, these institutions are called "multipliers".

The GGBa and Swiss Global Enterprise (SGE) are the other main sources of contacts. Because Swiss cantons compete to attract business, the GGBa and the SGE are not allowed to influence a company's choice of canton. For instance, the GGBa is supposed to brand the Greater Geneva Bern area in general and to provide information on a specific canton only upon request. Once a relocation project becomes more concrete, the GGBa asks the company to choose two or three cantons for an assessment visit, which is then organised by local promotion agencies in the selected cantons. For its part, the SGE conveys a list of companies interested in relocating to Switzerland to all 26 cantons and five regional promotion agencies every year. In his polemical work on the GGBa, Philippe Monnier (2015) explains that this process creates coordination difficulties for local economic promotion agencies and dilutes their influence, because each is in competition with at least 30 other institutions interested in approaching the potential clients.

[6] Deloitte, Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC), Ernst & Young (EY), and Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG).

The DEV thus operates at the intersection of several institutions. Its role is to provide a bridge between foreign companies and Vaud's administration and labour market. Its status as a non-profit organisation also enables it to network with corporate actors more freely than it could if it were part of the cantonal administration. In the words of one of its employees, the DEV is "the armoured arm of the [cantonal] Department for the Economy for attracting foreign companies".[7] It supports the settlement of approximately 35–40 companies per year (Cantonal Service for Economic Promotion, 2015).

3.1.2 Targets of Economic Promotion

The field research on economic promotion practices indicates that the main external branding strategies aimed at attracting resources to Switzerland primarily focus on companies rather than on individuals. In fact, the number of jobs created locally is the main criterion presented in activity reports and other communication documents for evaluating and legitimising organisations such as the DEV or the GGBa. In this sense, economic promotion policy follows a similar logic to immigration policy: while companies are welcome, the number of employees that they bring from abroad should be kept as low as possible in order to benefit the local labour market. For this reason, economic promotion agencies are required to submit estimates of the number of jobs created locally in the case of each new settlement and these estimates are fundamental for justifying the attribution of public funds to these organisations.

The focus on specific countries and economic sectors contributes to defining profiles of privileged access to the Swiss labour market. These profiles include people from countries with an expanding economy oriented to the tertiary sector. While the United States and Switzerland's neighbouring countries appear to be first choice, economic promotion agencies increasingly expand their activities to include new key economic players, such as the BRIC countries. In this case, the selection of target countries officially follows a technocratic logic rather than an approach based on cultural prejudices. Nevertheless, discussions on the importance of attracting Chinese companies, for instance, which are in this case often presented as "culturally different", indicate that the question of desirability from a cultural perspective is not absent from economic promotion strategies. For instance, Monnier (2015, pp. 41–42) writes in "China: Opportunities or risks for the GGBa":

> With Chinese bosses, it is more personal and less rational. Getting to know the right person well (often the owner or the CEO) and winning their trust is essential, which necessarily takes time. Communication is almost always difficult because this "right person" rarely speaks a European language. For instance, even if they speak English, understanding the

[7] "… le bras armé du Département de l'économie pour attirer des entreprises étrangères."

> words they say does not guarantee that you understand what they really mean. The cultural gap is huge.[8]

This illustrates an ambivalence towards a country that has become a key economic player but that still appears as different, difficult to understand, and even frightening. One of the DEV directors also referred to cultural distance with China to explain why his organisation chose to focus their prospecting activities on Japan:

> Switzerland and Japan share a certain number of values at the level of the notion of work, of precision, of the respect of things. We have lot of commonalities with the Japanese, and this is not the case with China, for instance, which is very different.[9] (Personal communication, 27 May 2015)

The interviewee highlights common cultural values to legitimise the privileged relationship that his organisation is building with Japanese industries. When justifying the choice of Turkey as a target country, he also mentions this idea of proximity. In this case, the whole argument is interesting to read:

> It's interesting for Turkish societies to have a foothold in Europe. And the non-membership of Switzerland to the EU is considered an advantage by Turkish businesses … Switzerland is very favourable to companies, and Turkish companies appreciate that. In addition, there is a particular link in the background – the two treaties that were signed in the canton of Vaud and here in Lausanne … it still resonates in Turkey. So we grant [Turkey] a privileged link … We settled two companies here last year … To be Swiss reinforces their image. For some products, of course, you can imagine that "Swiss Made" is not the same as "Made in Turkey".[10] (Personal communication, 27 May 2015)

Here the interviewee emphasises three elements for justifying the DEV's special interest in Turkey: an expanding market directed at Europe, a long-lasting relationship between Turkey and the canton of Vaud, and the benefits of the Swiss brand. The interviewee presents the situation as if Vaud were doing Turkey a favour by enabling its companies to access the benefits associated with Switzerland. The favour is justified by a "privileged link" based on an old tradition of diplomatic exchanges that positions the canton in a supportive – and even paternalistic – role.

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[8] "Avec les patrons chinois, c'est plus personnel et moins rationnel. Il est essentiel d'arriver à bien connaître la bonne personne (souvent le propriétaire ou le CEO) et de gagner sa confiance, ce qui prend nécessairement du temps. La communication est presque toujours difficile car cette 'bonne personne' ne parle très rarement une langue européenne. Et même si elle parle par exemple l'anglais, ce n'est pas parce que vous comprenez tous les mots qu'elle prononce que vous comprenez véritablement ce qu'elle veut dire. Le fossé culturel est immense."

[9] "La Suisse et le Japon partagent un certain nombre de valeurs au niveau de la notion du travail, de la précision, du respect des choses. On a beaucoup de points communs avec les Japonais, ce qui n'est pas le cas avec la Chine, par exemple, c'est très différent."

[10] "C'est intéressant pour les sociétés Turques d'avoir un pied en Europe. Et le fait de la non-appartenance de la Suisse à l'UE est considéré comme un avantage par les sociétés turques … La Suisse est très favorable quand même aux entreprises au fond, donc les entreprises turques sont sensibles à ça. En plus il y a un lien un peu particulier qui est toujours en filigrane, c'est celui des deux traités qui ont été signés dans le canton de Vaud et ici à Lausanne … ça résonne encore en Turquie. On lui accorde un lien privilégié … On a installé ici deux entreprises l'année passée … D'être en Suisse, ça les renforce dans leur image. Pour certains produits, évidemment on peut imaginer que le 'Swiss Made', plutôt que le 'Made in Turkey', ce n'est pas la même chose."

In this sense, it could be argued that the relationship is presented as development aid. This construction blurs economic issues and suggests a power balance in favour of the canton. In the context of the interview, the rhetorical structure of the argument presents the choice of Turkey as obvious, while at the same time providing reassurances of the DEV's ability to deal with Turkish companies. Here again, these various elements suggest a tension between different interests and representations regarding new major economies: on the one hand, these markets have become inevitable from an economic perspective, while on the other hand, they often trigger criticism and suspicion. The field research does not enable an analysis of the way economic promotion agencies deal with this ambivalence in their daily practice, but further research on this topic would certainly be interesting for highlighting the role played by representations of cultural desirability in economic promotion schemes.

In terms of skills, companies with a technological orientation and growth potential are clearly preferred. In this case, the fact that Vaud already contains an important pool of workers trained in the fields of IT, life sciences, and micro-techniques serves as an argument for attracting companies. The key objective is to create employment in the canton, meaning that attracting skilled foreign workers is not perceived as desirable in itself.

Although economic promotion agencies focus mainly on *attracting* companies and *facilitating* their settlement, they are nonetheless part of a larger immigration system that aims to select people perceived as economically valuable and culturally close. On this point, it is interesting to note that the people I met during my field research generally had a positive image of work-driven immigration, which they regarded as an essential factor in economic prosperity. Nevertheless, their positions also enable them to discourage companies from bringing people into Switzerland who are "not absolutely needed" according to the standards of the State Secretariat for Migration. To justify this, employees usually say that Switzerland cannot welcome everybody, and that even if immigration is profitable, limits must be set. Economic promotion agents are thus involved in a larger process of migration governance which involves a complex network of actors and institutions that do not only belong to the state administration. These actors contribute to attracting people to Switzerland, but they do not work to challenge the current restrictive immigrant selection system which is based on economic interests.

3.2 Retaining "Wanted Immigrants"

Having discussed the practices that aim to attract certain companies to Switzerland, this section focuses on branding strategies directed at people who are already in the country. I start by comparing two events organised in the cantons of Vaud and Basel-City to welcome newcomers. These events constitute interesting case studies of the ways different institutions perceive mobile people and define who should be encouraged to stay in the long run. In both cases, the organisations involved speak of "integration" to describe the services they provide, but I will show that they use this

notion in a very specific way when it applies to "wanted immigrants" compared to other groups of foreigners. Then, I analyse the way local definitions of "wanted immigrants" are co-constructed by the migrants themselves. More specifically, I show how certain people become politically active in order to defend their right to be treated as "expats" (wanted/highly skilled) rather than as "migrants" (unwanted/socially disadvantaged) in a context of hostility towards immigrants. This case study highlights the complex construction of migrant categories by showing the variety of actors and processes involved. It also exposes some of the tensions related to the presence of well-educated – and often wealthy – foreigners in certain places.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I attended an event organised by the canton of Basel-City to welcome newcomers and provide information about administrative and practical issues. This particular event was conducted in English, but it is also presented in other languages. Each event is organised three times a year. The concept started in 2010 and was supplemented by a more social and festive element in 2013. All newly registered residents in Basel-City receive an invitation, including both Swiss and non-Swiss people who have recently moved to Basel, either from abroad or from another Swiss canton, and each event is publicly advertised on the website of the canton's administration. The invitation is thus theoretically open to everyone.

Copy of the invitation letter to the Basel Welcome Event

Basel, 15th January 2015

Welcome to Basel & Welcome on Board
Dear Sir/Madam

I am very pleased that you have recently moved to Basel and that you have chosen our city as your new home. Please allow me to invite you to an official welcome event for new residents at Basel City Hall.

Date **Tuesday, 10th February 2015, 19:00 h (in English)**
Place **Rathaus/Grossratssaal (City Hall/Great Council Chamber), Marktplatz 9**

During the first "**Welcome to Basel**" part of the event, you will be addressed by a member of the cantonal government, **President of the Governement**, at 19:00 h (admission from 18:45 h) in the City Hall. Experts in the field of administration will inform you about relevant subjects such as residence permits, social insurance, labour law, as well as the tax and education systems. Finally, our special **guest** will share her own experiences as a newcomer to Basel with you.

This is followed by the second "**Welcome on Board**" part of this get-together. You are invited to take part in a **boat ride including an aperitif** on the Rhine at **19:50 h** (departure at 20:00 sharp from the boat landing place). During the tour, you will have the opportunity to meet other newcomers and

(continued)

local people from Basel. You can also make use of extensive information about cultural and leisure acitivities as well as advisory services provided on the boat.

I am looking forward to seeing you there.

Yours sincerely

Head of Department of Presidential Affairs

Shortly before 7 pm on 10 February 2015, I entered the council chambers at the city hall, an ancient and beautifully decorated room. Each of the approximately 100 participants received a small pack of *leckerlies* (a local biscuit), a pen, and a file covering administrative issues and information on relevant institutions. I observed that most of the guests appeared to be Caucasian. Several of the men were wearing suits, as if they had come directly from work or had dressed formally for the occasion. When the head of the integration office asked the audience about their reasons for coming to Basel, I learnt that the majority had come for work, while about ten had come for family, and about five for studying. The same integration officer then asked the audience who intended to stay in Basel forever. When nobody raised a hand, she said: "We want to make you change your mind!"

After this welcoming statement, the president of the cantonal government emphasised in his speech the important role of labour migration in the city's economic development:

> Our economic region is one of the most dynamic in Switzerland, it is known for being innovative and for the international environment. Because of our position as a border city on the Rhine, employment has always played a unique role and has influenced the development of the city. People from many different countries have lived and worked here and shaped today's business location. (Welcome event in Basel, 10 February 2015)

Five short presentations followed during which the representatives of several cantonal departments addressed daily administrative issues such as immigration, labour and tax regulations, education and childcare infrastructure, and opportunities to attend integration and language courses. In addition, an English woman who had been living in Basel for 30 years talked about her experiences and gave the newcomers tips for adjusting to their new environment. She insisted on the importance of learning German and meeting "the locals". (On another occasion, the head of the canton's integration office described this person to me as a "super migrant", explaining that the event's organisers usually invited someone who corresponded to their idea of an exemplary case of integration in order to motivate the participants to imitate this model.)

After the official welcome was over, the participants left the council chamber and were directed to a waiting boat. Two musicians were playing at the entrance and we

were greeted by a young and smiling person who showed us to a room containing tables on which flyers and brochures about life in Basel were displayed. At each table a person was available to answer questions. We were offered wine, sodas, and enough appetisers to constitute a meal. During this time, the boat travelled across the city on the Rhine River before bringing us back to our departure point.

I joined a conversation between two couples of various origins (England, Poland, and Australia) who had just met. They explained that they had come to Basel to work. In the case of both couples, the men had found jobs and the women were currently unemployed. They seemed very happy to meet other people living in Basel and we exchanged contact details. After about an hour and a half, we disembarked. As we left, we were given a small gift bag containing delicacies and a discount voucher from the event's main sponsor.

Intrigued by this experience, I searched for a similar event in Lausanne, Vaud's capital city. While the welcome event in Basel had been easy to find online, I could find no such information on the Lausanne or Vaud websites. Later, a person in charge of the municipality's city marketing strategy told me that although there was a welcome event for Lausanne's new residents, in her opinion it was very formal and old-fashioned. For this reason, her department was currently trying to improve it. Since no welcome event existed at the cantonal level in Vaud, each municipality was in charge of organising a reception for their new residents, which created disparities between places.

Nevertheless, I found information online about another kind of welcome reception that piqued my curiosity. Organised by the canton's chamber of commerce, this event specifically targeted new employees of the region's international companies and their families. The event was advertised on the chamber of commerce website and through the organisers' contacts within the companies. I contacted the chamber of commerce to explain the aims of my research project and they invited me to participate as an observer.

This time, only 25 people were present. Most of them had recently arrived in Switzerland and seemed happy to meet other people in a similar situation. The event took place in a more intimate atmosphere than the event in Basel: tables were arranged in a square in a conference room to create a more appropriate space for discussion. The two organisers from the chamber of commerce welcomed each participant warmly on arrival and offered a cup of coffee to those who arrived early. The language of communication was English. The moderator asked us to introduce ourselves briefly, from which I learnt that the participants represented 13 nationalities and almost all had worked and lived previously in various countries. Most of them were working for the region's main multinationals such as Nestlé and Philip Morris.

The speeches included an overview of the canton's attractions by a representative of the tourism office, followed by an introduction by a cross-cultural coach on "how to assimilate into Switzerland without losing yourself" and a presentation by one of the organisers on daily life in Switzerland. The event lasted about an hour and a half and a lot of time was allowed for questions and the exchange of personal experiences. During the break we tasted local specialities and wine.

The next day I interviewed the main organisers and learnt that the organisation in charge of the event was an association founded in 2011 by the chamber of commerce of Vaud and the DEV (Développement Economique Vaudois, see previous section). This association was created to support the integration of companies and their employees after relocation to the canton. Although the association maintains close ties with the chamber of commerce, officially it is independent. It employs two people, one in charge of organising information and training for international companies, the other focused on support for new employees. The main sponsors of these welcome events are the canton of Vaud, a local bank, and one of the "Big Four" professional services companies.

3.2.1 Integration Services in Basel and Vaud

A comparison of these welcome events illustrates different ways of welcoming newcomers and promoting their settlement in specific locations. Although Basel-City opted for a more inclusive approach – inviting all new residents to a lavish reception – the choice of language, topics, and speakers at both events suggested a general focus on affluent people. Hence, although they share similar objectives – to welcome newcomers perceived as valuable, facilitate their transition through information and networking, and promote attachment to the location – different means are used to achieve them. I analyse these differences by situating each event in a larger institutional context.

One contrast concerns the division of tasks between institutions in the two cantons. In Basel-City the canton is in charge of the event, while a private institution takes over this task in Vaud. Moreover, the Basel-City integration office plays an important role in the organisation of the first event, while collaboration between the canton of Vaud and the private institution responsible for the second welcome event takes place through the economic promotion office, which plays a relatively indirect role.

The development of an integration policy in the two cantons happened at different times, which greatly influences present practices. Basel-City is a pioneer in this regard, since its integration policy dates back to 1999 and has inspired other locations in Switzerland and abroad (Wichmann & D'Amato, 2010). In addition, the policy in Basel-City was first debated at a time of growing awareness about city development and economic promotion (D'Amato & Suter, 2012). This explains why, in 2009, the integration office ceased to be part of the Department for Justice and Security and became part of the *Präsidialdepartement* under the section Canton and City Development.[11] In contrast, Vaud adopted an integration policy in 2007 (Hanselmann, 2013). Prior to this, non-governmental organisations and some municipalities carried out most of the integration measures. The integration office in Vaud is currently part of the Department for the Economy under the "Population"

[11] "Kantons- und Stadtentwicklung".

section and its mission is oriented more towards the prevention of racism.[12] These elements highlight different approaches to integration in the two cantons.

The welcome event in Basel is thus part of an institutional structure that closely connects integration to city development. An employee of the Basel-City integration office confirmed that attracting companies and making their employees want to live in Basel are two clear goals of the canton, or as he put it, "We have the task to make Basel as attractive as possible" (Panel discussion in Basel, 27 September 2016).[13]

The promotion of a welcoming culture through events such as the one described above aims to fulfil this task. Another objective of the canton is to prevent the development of subcultures, as the integration office's employee calls them: "We want that newcomers learn the German language so that they can have contact with the local population" (Panel discussion in Basel, 27 September 2016).[14] In order to fulfil that aim, the canton coordinates several integration opportunities in collaboration with other organisations in the region. For instance, free German courses financed by the canton are offered to all newcomers during their first year of residence. The canton's integration policy is based on the general principle of *fördern und fordern* [encourage and demand]; the canton facilitates foreigners' participation in local social and economic life but also expects compliance with integration requirements, and the welcome events communicate both the offers and the expectations regarding integration. As a coercive measure, the canton can impose "integration contracts" that put conditions on the extension of residence permits, for example, the obligation to acquire a certain proficiency in German, or participate in integration courses.

The objectives mentioned by the integration office employee – to make the location attractive and to promote integration – were visible at the welcome event that I attended in Basel. In addition to the hospitality statement, participants were repeatedly encouraged to engage in city life and "meet the locals". This combination of marketing objectives – communicated through a generally attractive setting – and sociocultural objectives – communicated through normative discourses about integration – suggests a tension between different positions regarding the integration of foreigners in the canton. This tension is even more apparent in other debates about integration in the canton. I briefly introduce two of these debates here in order to stress the role of welcome events in the integration and economic development policies of the canton.

In 2010, several right-wing parties presented three motions in favour of stricter integration rules, which led to intense discussion in the canton's parliament about the possibility of making integration contracts obligatory for all newly arrived foreigners. Opponents of this measure criticised the unfairness of such a broad implementation of integration contracts, as well as the risk that it represented for the

[12] The name of the integration policy is the Law on the Integration of Foreigners and Prevention of Racism (in French: Loi sur l'intégration des étrangers et la prévention du racisme).

[13] "Wir haben die Aufgabe, Basel möglichst attraktiv zu gestalten."

[14] "Wir wollen, dass Neuzugezogene die deutsche Sprache lernen, damit sie auch mit der Bevölkerung in Austausch kommen."

canton's economy, since "hundreds, if not thousands of qualified workers from science and research would be affected" (Basler Zeitung, 2010).[15] Sensitive to this argument, the motions' proponents suggested an exception for "immigrants with good language knowledge, good education as well as good professional and economic situation".[16] This exception was nicknamed the "pharma-clause" in reference to the pharmaceutical companies present in the canton that would mainly benefit from it, since they hire most of the specialised workers from abroad (Wichmann & D'Amato, 2010, p. 67). Eventually, the proposals for tougher integration rules were rejected, thus maintaining the status quo.

Four years later, the right-wing nationalist Swiss People's Party (SVP) came back with a cantonal initiative asking for a stricter integration policy. Obligatory integration contracts were once again proposed as a means to force foreigners to learn German and to control their adherence to Swiss rules and customs.[17] However, the SVP proposed an exception for "short-term stayers, students, and persons integrated in our economic system, e.g. the highly qualified and the employees of local businesses" (Swiss People's Party Basel, 2014).[18] In reaction to this initiative, the cantonal government submitted a counter-proposal, which was strongly endorsed by the socialist party. Supporters of the counter-proposal criticised the initiative for endangering the welcoming culture of the canton and for focusing on the potential deficits of foreigners rather than on their potential contributions. They suggested that the canton should be responsible for inviting all new residents to a welcome event in order to inform them of both their rights and their social obligations. In addition, the counter-proposal introduced a commitment on the part of the canton to offer free language courses to all foreigners during their first year of residence. The initiative to automatically impose integration contracts was eventually rejected, but the counter-proposal introduced the possibility for cantonal authorities to invite foreigners to personal integration meetings before deciding on the first extension of their residence permit, as well as the possibility of demanding participation in a language or integration course (Justice, 2014). The initiative and the counter-proposal were both submitted to a vote by the general population and the counter-proposal won with a large majority (Jäggi, 2014). In this way, both the organisation of welcome events and the possibility of making residence permit renewals condi-

[15] "Hunderte, wenn nicht Tausende hoch qualifizierter Arbeitskräfte aus Wissenschaft und Forschung betroffen wären."

[16] "Bei Zugewanderten mit guten Sprachkenntnissen, guter Ausbildung und beruflicher Stellung sowie in guten wirtschaftlichen Verhältnissen ein Ausnahmeregelung vorzusehen ist."

[17] The Swiss People's Party stated that "Zwingende Ziele der Integrationsvereinbarung müssen dabei das Erlernen der deutschen Sprache, die Integration in die hiesigen Verhältnisse sowie das Akzeptieren unserer Rechtsordnung sein [The binding objectives of integration contracts must be the learning of the German language, the integration in local relations (hiesigen Verhältnisse) and the acceptance of our legal order]" (Swiss People's Party Basel, 2014).

[18] "So sind bspw. Kurzaufenthalter, Studenten und in unser Wirtschaftssystem integrierte Personen, also z.B. Hochqualifizierte und Fachkräfte der hiesigen Unternehmungen, vom Abschluss einer Integrationsvereinbarung ausgenommen."

tional on integration training became part of cantonal law (art. 7a and 7b of the Law on the Integration of the Migration Population[19]).

This case highlights the importance of welcome events in the canton's integration strategy, as well as the relatively high degree of politicisation of this topic. While welcome events were initially designed as part of a city marketing strategy, the political discourse following the SVP's initiative on stricter rules of integration led to a reappropriation of these events by the initiators of a counter-proposal. This shift in focus helps to explain the tension between marketing objectives and integration objectives at the event I attended.

Although the canton's guiding principle of integration to "encourage and demand" is supposed to involve all foreigners, those with a high socioeconomic status seem to be more often exposed to the "encouraging" part of the policy. In their report on integration policies and practices in Basel, Wichmann and D'Amato (2010, pp. 64–67) note that cantonal authorities tended to consider learning German less important for anglophone foreigners, since English is an accepted lingua franca in Basel. In the same vein, their research revealed a general consensus that wealthy foreigners should be exempted from integration contracts. For instance, the exception to stricter integration rules for short-term visitors proposed by the SVP (Swiss People's Party Basel, 2014) reflects the idea that people who are not expected to stay should not be expected to integrate. Yet it also implicitly limits the definition of temporary visitors to highly qualified people who migrate to Basel for work-related reasons and leave when their contract ends.[20] Moreover, the political debates around Basel's integration policy shows interesting connections between integration and economic promotion: both right- and left-wing parties argued that authorities cannot be too demanding in terms of integration if they want to promote Switzerland internationally as an attractive location to work and live.

Nevertheless, Basel's administration also follows a principle of equal treatment: its integration offers should be open to all foreigners in order to avoid favouritism. For this reason, the welcome event in Basel is officially open to all newcomers regardless of their origin or social background, and the message is supposed to address a large and diverse audience. However, the persons who designed it had to take both political priorities and their perceptions of the needs – and value – of different foreigner categories into account in order to define their communication strategy. The event thus entails a tension between an officially inclusive approach and a set of messages implicitly addressed to different target groups. Even though the event communicates the normative idea that newcomers should "meet the locals" and "learn the language", the risk of being subjected to sanctions in the case of non-

[19] "Gesetz über die Integration der Migrationsbevölkerung (Integrationsgesetz)", Grosse Rat des Kantons Basel-Stadt, 18 April 2007. See http://www.gesetzessammlung.bs.ch/frontend/versions/3244/embedded_version_content

[20] The perception of highly qualified foreigners as short-term visitors is challenged by studies that show an increase in the average duration of stay for this category. For instance, Wiener and Grossmann (2011) estimate that 70% of highly qualified foreigners who come to Basel for work stay at least 3 years and 27% stay 10 years or more.

compliance does not exist for most participants. For the highly qualified workers and their families, the message about integration is nothing more than a political statement without consequences. However, it is important for the organisers to communicate it in order to show consistency with their political objectives and to avoid giving the impression that the event addresses only the most privileged categories of foreigner.

The welcome event at the Vaud chamber of commerce did not display the same ambivalence: the target group was better defined, and the event's framework was clearly business-oriented. In this case, the canton was only indirectly involved: even if it supported and collaborated with the organisers when initiating the event, the connection happened through the economic promotion office and not through the integration office. This underscores a clear economic reasoning behind the decision to offer special services to "international employees" and their families.

The incentive to establish an organisation specifically dedicated to the integration of this category in Vaud is linked to the decrease in the number of company headquarters settling in the region. We have already seen that policy reform concerning tax breaks resulted in changes in the kinds of companies that settle in the region. A general tendency to reduce relocation services and to favour local contracts has also been observed at an international level (Cartus, 2014; Le Temps, 2015). In Vaud, the replacement of multinationals' headquarters by smaller technological companies and the increase in local contracts has resulted in a decrease in workers arriving with relocation packages that include financing for services provided by a specialist organisation that operates under the mandate of the hiring company (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015). These services often include the specific needs of accompanying family members as well.

An employee of the DEV explained:

> There was a glory period for relocation companies … Now that it is calmer, some have closed down or scaled back … The framework conditions have changed, which slowed the arrival of headquarters … In general, [the relocation contract] is mostly for executives … I once had a phone call with [the director of the chamber of commerce in Vaud] who told me: We have new members coming to the chamber of commerce that you settled here but we don't have international competences … So we sat at a table together and created a group that delivers services that maybe were delivered by the relocations before.[21] (Personal communication, 27 Mai 2015)

The interviewee is referring to the association that organises welcome events for international employees at the Vaud chamber of commerce. According to him, this

[21] "Il y a eu une période de gloire pour les sociétés de relocation … Maintenant ça c'est beaucoup calmé, il y a des relocations qui ont mis la clé sous le paillasson, elles ont fermé, elles se sont réduites … C'est quand même les conditions cadre qui ont changé, qui ont freiné, on va dire, l'arrivée de quartiers généraux … En général, c'est surtout pour les cadres des entreprises … J'avais une fois eu un téléphone avec [la directrice de la Chambre vaudoise du commerce et de l'industrie, CVCI] qui me dit: Nous on a des nouveaux membres qui viennent à la CVCI, que vous avec installés, mais nous on n'a pas de compétences internationales à la CVCI … Alors on s'est mis autour de la table et on a créé un groupement … qui délivre des services qui peut-être justement, à l'époque, étaient livrés par les relocations."

association was created in order to compensate for the reduction in relocation services directly financed by companies: with the decrease in headquarters settling in the region, relocation companies received fewer contracts, but this does not mean that foreign workers stopped coming – the new arrivals were simply no longer managers at the headquarters of large companies, and, for this reason, received less corporate support for relocation. These lower-level employees searched for support elsewhere, including at the local chamber of commerce. This new dynamic encouraged the chamber of commerce to launch its own integration services, which induced a shift in responsibility from international companies to local organisations partially financed with public money.

The integration office was not involved in this process. This lack of involvement is partly due to its late establishment (after 2007), as well as to a generally less intense politicisation of integration. In addition, the integration office in Vaud defines its target population more explicitly than in Basel. According to one of the welcome event's organisers "We work a lot more for expats, for highly qualified people… the integration office, they don't have the same audience at all. They work with socially disadvantaged people" (Personal communication, 27 February 2015).[22] The interviewee also mentioned a project that is currently under way involving an information package that would provide newcomers with information about the canton. This project would involve the integration office, the economic promotion office, the tourism office, and the city of Lausanne. However, the question of the target audience makes collaboration difficult:

> We discussed with the SPECO [economic promotion office] who really wants the expats, or at least this kind of audience. I don't know if the integration office … maybe it's too different an audience, so we'll still need to keep two different platforms.[23] (Personal communication, 27 February 2015)

This division of work is interesting: while the integration office focuses on socially disadvantaged migrants, the economic promotion office focuses on highly qualified ones. Although the word "integration" is used to describe activities undertaken in both cases, economic arguments play a prevailing role when it comes to international employees. During the interview, one of the two organisers explained:

> We consider that the integration of people is connected to the integration of companies. There was a study about four years ago that looked at what made foreign employees stay and what made them leave, and in 72% of cases it was bad integration, especially when family members who followed didn't want to settle here.[24] (Personal communication, 27 February 2015)

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[22] "Nous on travaille quand même nettement plus pour des expats, des personnes très qualifiées. Et le bureau d'intégration, eux ce n'est quand même pas du tout le même public. Eux c'est plutôt les gens socialement défavorisés."

[23] "Là on discute avec le SPECO [Service de la promotion économique] qui eux veulent plus être sur la partie expats, ou en tous cas ce genre de public. Je ne sais pas si le Bureau d'intégration… peut-être que c'est quand même trop différent comme genre de public et qu'on va quand même devoir garder deux plateformes séparées."

[24] "On considère que l'intégration des personnes arrive en bout de chaîne de l'intégration d'une entreprise et en fait partie. Il y avait eu une étude il y a 4 ans à peu près qui regardait ce qui faisait

According to this person, the early termination of contracts has a negative impact on companies and should be avoided for this reason. In order to address this issue, the association organises monthly 2-h meetings specifically for the partners of international employees. The official goals of these events are to provide information, promote integration, and enable networking. They usually address topics related to language, job searches, and personal development, and always include an informal part during which participants can get to know each other. They are free of charge for the partners of the member companies' employees.

I noticed that the events organised at the chamber of commerce generally present integration as a set of useful information and small adjustments that participants are invited to make in order to enjoy their stay better. For instance, the presentation about life in Switzerland at the welcome event in Vaud included general information about the country's political and social organisation, followed by tips on how to park a car without being fined, how to recycle, how to register with the municipality, and so on. In the same vein, the presentation on "How to assimilate into Switzerland without losing yourself" started with a general discussion on the notion of cultural difference and concluded with recommendations such as "you don't meet cultures, you meet people", "forget about stereotypes", and "enjoy your time here". Integration was not presented as obligatory but rather as something "nice to have" that participants were invited to try for their own sake – and, implicitly, for the sake of their (or their partner's) company. In contrast, political objectives related to social cohesion and sociocultural values were absent. Furthermore, both the participants and the organisers discussed difficulties involved in meeting local people, which were expressed by some newcomers as a problem within Swiss society rather than a lack of engagement on their part.

In this sense, the discussion did not start from the assumption that the participants were in a situation of deficit and would have to catch up in order to adapt to their new environment, as it is often the case in state-oriented approaches to integration (Do Mar Castro Varela, 2008; Hess & Moser, 2009). The participants rather presented negative aspects of Swiss society, which some perceived as too "closed" and "rigid", as reasons for difficulties in adapting. This perspective contrasts with the common idea that foreigners are either entirely responsible for their own integration or that they need to be forced into integration. At the same time, it highlights a power balance in favour of wealthy and well-educated foreigners in comparison with other immigrants. While integration is often a precondition for the admission and stay of less privileged categories of immigrants (Scuzzarello, 2013), this case study shows that it can also become a retention strategy in the case of mobile workers perceived as particularly valuable. Although the integration and economic promotion strategies in Vaud and Basel present clear differences, I observe a similar construction in both two cantons whereby foreigners are divided between (wanted/highly skilled) "expats" and (unwanted/socially disadvantaged) "migrants", with the former being the target of economic promotion measures and the latter of (some-

rester les employés étrangers et ce qui les faisait partir, et dans 72% des cas c'était une mauvaise intégration, surtout quand il y avait de la famille qui suivait et qui ne voulait pas s'implanter ici."

times obligatory) integration measures. Integration thus becomes a way to select between "wanted immigrants", who are perceived as beneficial, and the "Others", who are perceived as a burden.

The boundary between these two groups is never explicit, but a number of characteristics contributes to its definition: in this context, the term "expat" usually refers to "wanted immigrants" with a social status that associates a relatively high level of education and material ease with other attributes corresponding to what Anne-Catherine Wagner refers to as "international capital" (see also Wagner, 1998, 2007; Wagner & Reau, 2015, p. 34):

> The international capital is constructed from all the social, cultural, linguistic, economic and symbolic resources associated with familiarity with several countries.[25]

The characteristics involved in the constitution of international capital include institutional resources (e.g. internationally recognised diplomas, passports and permits that enable travelling), symbolic resources (e.g. expertise, behaviours, and attitudes that facilitate adaptation to mobility) and material resources (e.g. economic goods that enable feeling "at home" in different places). However, the notion of capital does not refer to a simple set of characteristics. More important is the way these characteristics can be transformed into power in specific social contexts. On this point, the author says:

> If the fact of coming from another country, of knowing another language, of having relations abroad or of having a partner with a different nationality can be considered as indicators of an international capital for middle and upper classes, they are much more frequently perceived as stigma, as signs of insufficient integration in the host country or as indicators of a dominated position for lower classes. It is not the access to foreign experiences in itself that creates hierarchies between social groups, but the value attributed to these experiences. (Wagner, 2007, p. 102; Wagner & Reau, 2015, p. 37)

The characteristics associated with international capital depend on other forms of capital and interact with them. For instance, economic capital may enable a certain cosmopolitan way of life, which in turn may provide access to new economic resources. Linguistic capital may enable international experiences, and at the same time builds on them. Finally, the constitution of an international network depends on as much as it develops symbolic resources that may in turn transform into new forms of social and cultural capital.

The distinction between the categories of (wanted/highly skilled) "expat" and (unwanted/socially disadvantaged) "migrant" relies on this dynamic interaction between different forms of capital: the privileged position attributed to "expats" in this context is not a result of international experiences alone, since these can also be associated with a deficit that needs to be remediated through integration. Yet, the presence of other forms of capital enables the transformation of international experiences into something positive and valued.

[25] "Le capital international se construit à partir de l'ensemble des ressources sociales, culturelles, linguistiques, économiques et symboliques liées à la familiarité avec plusieurs pays."

In this process, the existence of hierarchies between resources associated with different national systems is important:

> The relations between nationalities present similarities with the relations between social classes within a country. Those who can assert the "international" value of their national attributes oppose those who rather tend to repress them in order to adapt to dominant norms.[26] (Wagner, 1998, p. 213)

The value of international capital relates to normative systems whereby some resources are de facto perceived as international, and others are confined to specific local contexts. The social value of languages largely depends on such normative systems. In Switzerland, "expats" are usually constructed as English-speaking people: English is not necessarily their first language, but they use it to communicate until they master another local language (German, French, Italian). This proficiency in English contributes to their social status since English is recognised as a resource in most contexts. In contrast, other languages are limited to small communities and can only become capital in very specific situations. Hierarchies also exist between the four official national languages (German, French, Italian, and Romansch), as well as between these languages and other languages spoken in the country: French, German, and Italian foreigners are often conceived as separate categories, even though they may be included in the "expat" category depending on the context.[27] The tension between High German and Swiss German dialects is interesting in this regard: although High German is generally valued on the labour market, native High German speakers sometimes face discrimination from native speakers of Swiss German dialects (Helbling, 2011). The value of languages thus depends to a certain extent on the organisation of the nation-state – which recognises certain languages as more legitimate than others – and on transnational dynamics, through which some languages (English and French, for example) transcend national borders.

Capital is always connected to a specific social field structured by power relations, which means that the analysis of the value of a language – and other characteristics – cannot be detached from the specific context in which it is negotiated (Bourdieu, 2002). The contextual dimension of capital contributes to explaining why "wanted immigrants" are so difficult to define (Pavic, 2015): their characteristics change through space and time and involve negotiations between various social actors, including the migrants themselves.

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[26] "Les relations entre les nationalités ne sont pas sans présenter des homologies avec les relations entre les classes sociales au sein d'un pays. Ceux qui peuvent faire valoir la valeur 'internationale' de leurs attributs nationaux s'opposent à ceux qui, au contraire, tendent à les refouler pour s'acculturer aux normes dominantes."

[27] Until the 1990s, Italians coming to Switzerland were mainly manual workers with low social status. However, since the entry into force of the free movement of persons with the EU, an increasing number of Italians living in Switzerland have been well-off from a socioeconomic perspective. This situation has contributed to changing stereotypes of Italians in Switzerland.

3.2.2 Negotiating Migrant Status

A US American interviewee living in Basel told me once:

> "Migrant" to me has a negative connotation in English. Maybe it doesn't in German and French but in English, it's negative, that's why I don't like it. It should be something positive, these people are bringing something positive to the countries they go to. (Personal communication, 18 November 2015)

Similarly, the organisation BaselConnect, which promotes the interests of "expats" in the Basel area, defines the word "expat" as follows:

> Expats usually have a tertiary education and/or special skills that are sought after in other countries. Expats in the Basel region include musicians, dancers, dental hygienists, and physicians as well as scientists and business managers. The overall perception of expats is that they have come here with something to contribute both in the workplace and the community. (BaselConnect, 2012, p. 2)

These quotes insist on the idea of "contribution", which their authors associate with "expat". Taken here as an alternative to "migrant", "expat" describes a category of mobile people whose "special skills" enables them to "contribute" at a local level. According to BaselConnect, their contribution derives from their cultural capital rather than from their economic capital (Bourdieu, 1979), which introduces a definition of "wanted immigrants" that is slightly different than the definitions of state authorities which were previously described. Both of these quotes come from people who describe themselves as expats. However, the term is not always associated with positive images in Switzerland and thus is subject to contestation and negotiation.

In December 2007, the president of the University of Zurich's student council suggested to a reporter from the *Tages-Anzeiger* – one of the most influential newspapers in German-speaking Switzerland – that the University of Zurich employed too many German professors (Helbling, 2011). The interview led to a heated controversy largely supported by the media (Imhof, 2008; Leimgruber, 2011). For instance, the *Blick* – a sensationalist Swiss-German journal – launched a series of articles entitled "How many Germans can Switzerland tolerate?" (Rüttimann, 2007),[28] which problematised the presence of an increasing number of German nationals in Switzerland by discussing topics such as stereotypes about Germans, competition for jobs, and communication difficulties between Germans and Swiss nationals. Most of the articles presumed the existence of radical differences between the Swiss and the Germans and underlined a fear of cultural takeover that was reminiscent of the discussions about *Überfremdung* during the previous century. In his analysis of the discussion about Germans in the media, the sociologist Kurt Imhof (2008) argues that this controversy led part of the Swiss population to realise for the first time that the socioeconomic status of immigrants had fundamentally changed.[29]

[28] "Wie viele Deutsche verträgt die Schweiz?" (Blick, 15 February 2007)

[29] Since 2002, Germans have become the second largest group of foreigners in Switzerland – after Italians and before Portuguese – with a large share occupying high-paid positions. In 2010, less

Many economic, intellectual, and state elites celebrated this change. For instance, in 2008 the liberal think tank Avenir Suisse[30] published a book, *Die Neue Zuwanderung: Die Schweiz zwischen Brain-Gain und Überfremdungsangst* (Müller-Jentsch, 2008),[31] which included contributions by professors at Swiss universities, members of the state administration, journalists, human resources managers, and corporate directors. The book argues that the "new immigration" in Switzerland is composed mainly of highly educated people from northern and western European countries. In general, the authors underline the benefits of this "new immigration" and deconstruct the fears associated with it. Largely distributed in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, the book can be seen as an attempt to communicate a positive view on immigration in reaction to ongoing debates and anxieties.

However, this positive view was not shared by everybody. Besides the hostility experienced by many Germans living in the German-speaking part of Switzerland (Helbling, 2011; Leimgruber, 2011), other discussions have emerged that concern the mobility of socioeconomically affluent individuals. In the Italian and French-speaking parts of the country, the debates have rather focused on *frontaliers* or cross-border commuters (Delaugerre, 2012).[32] In Geneva, the Mouvement Citoyen Genevois – a cantonal political party created in 2005 – mainly targets people who live in France and work in Geneva. The party's slogan is "Priority to the People from Geneva".[33] In the Italian-speaking part of the country, the Ticino League – a cantonal political party founded in 1991 –defends the idea that residents of Ticino should be given priority over immigrants, including those from Italy. In addition, it openly displays an anti-Islam and anti-EU agenda. The Ticino League became the second most important political party in Ticino after the 2007 elections and the Mouvement Citoyen Genevois became the second most important political party in Geneva in 2009.

The discussions about the *frontaliers* address the issue of competition between residents and non-residents. Contrary to the debates on "the Germans", the *front-*

than 18% of Italians and less than 5% of Portuguese in Switzerland were working in jobs for which an academic education was required, whereas more than 39% of Germans were working in such jobs (Jey Aratnam, 2012, p. 155).

[30] The Avenir Suisse is "an independent free-market Swiss think tank which promotes liberal and scientifically substantiated ideas in economics, politics and society at large". Its sponsors include many international companies based in Switzerland. See https://www.avenir-suisse.ch/en/our-donors/ (last consulted on 22 May 2017).

[31] "The New Immigration: Switzerland between Brain-Gain and Fear from Foreign Takeover".

[32] In 2011, 250,000 people were working in Switzerland with a "frontalier" permit, among whom 25% were working in the canton of Geneva (French-speaking), 21% in the canton of Tessin (Italian-speaking) and 21% in the two cantons of Basel-City and Basel-Land (German-speaking). In Geneva, the number of "frontaliers" doubled during the decade that followed the entry into force of the agreement on the free movement of persons (from 33,210 in 2001 to 61,700 in 2011). In 2010, 93% of the "frontaliers" in Geneva were French nationals who worked mainly in qualified but subordinate jobs of the services sector (Delaugerre, 2012).

[33] "Priorité aux Genevois".

aliers debate concerns middle and lower segments of the labour market. Salary dumping and access to jobs are among the most common topics, as shown in newspaper articles such as "Frontaliers, nos meilleurs ennemis"[34] (*L'Hebdo*, 31 August 2011), "Polémique à Genève sur l'engagement de frontaliers plutôt que de chômeurs"[35] (*RTS info*, 19 May 2016) and "Les Tessinois veulent mettre fin au dumping salarial"[36] (*Le Temps*, 25 September 2016). However, these debates can reach higher positions, as shown in an article published in the non-specialised daily newspaper of French-speaking Switzerland *Le Temps* (Dubas, 2016), which presents the stories of an engineer and a finance specialist who experience discrimination in Geneva because they live in France.

Another interesting discussion concerns the category "expats" (Schneider-Sliwa, 2013). The problematisation of expats in the media has mostly occurred through the most influential Swiss-German newspapers (*Tages-Anzeiger*, *Blick*, and *NZZ*) with headlines such as "Sommaruga sieht Integrationsproblem bei hochqualifizierten Ausländern"[37] (*Tages-Anzeiger*, 4 February 2012), "Die Elite ist nicht integriert"[38] (*Tages-Anzeiger*, 5 May 2012) and "Ein Ausländerproblem der etwas anderen Art"[39] (*NZZ*, 22 August 2012). The issue of "expats" in the media is sometimes discussed in relation to rising housing prices and gentrification, in particular in larger cities such as Zurich, Basel, Geneva, and – more recently – the coastal area of Lake Geneva, which includes part of the canton of Vaud. Linked to this issue, these discussions often assume the presence of "parallel societies" or "expat bubbles" in Swiss cities (Fournier, 2012; Schneider-Sliwa, 2013). The articles are often ambivalent and raise diverse issues: it is not always clear whether the alleged lack of integration of "expats" is problematic because parallel societies may endanger social cohesion, because the departure of unintegrated "expats" may have negative economic consequences, or because the "expats" themselves may suffer from isolation. The proposed solutions are also controversial: should integration be demanded in the case of "expats"? Is it legitimate to treat "expats" differently from other foreigners? Should the state invest resources to promote the integration of this privileged category of migrants? In these discussions, the representation of "expats" as beneficial from an economic perspective opposes their image as ungrateful guests who make little effort to adapt and contribute to their host society. Such representations reflect specific expectations regarding the role and position of foreigners in Switzerland (Yeung, 2016).

[34] "'Frontaliers', our best enemies".

[35] "Controversy in Geneva on the hiring of 'frontaliers' rather than unemployed persons".

[36] "Ticino wants to end salary dumping".

[37] "Sommaruga [federal minister of justice] sees an integration problem with highly qualified foreigners".

[38] "The elite is not integrated".

[39] "A foreigner problem of a different kind".

In this context, some individuals have actively positioned themselves as advocates of integration in relation to the "expat" issue. Ellen[40] is a woman from the US who settled in Switzerland in the 1980s and has become a notable spokesperson for immigrants in the Basel area. Besides participating in various institutional networks, she is present in the media and contributes to ongoing debates about the integration of "expats" in Switzerland.

3.2.3 Portrait: The Political Engagement of an American Woman

During my interview with Ellen at her home in October 2015, she explained that her studies in philosophy offered an opportunity to escape the small town in Connecticut where she grew up, and to distance herself from her blue-collar middle-class background. Thanks to a student job selling books door-to-door 80 h a week during the summer, she managed to realise her dream of travelling in Europe. After learning German for 4 months at a Goethe Institute, she went to the Swiss Alps and fell in love with the man who would later become her husband.

After completing her studies, Ellen found a marketing job in a multinational company in the US. However, she did not like this job and eventually decided to move to Basel to live with her Swiss boyfriend. She arrived in Switzerland in 1982. Because her tourist visa would only allow her to stay for 6 months, she enrolled at the University of Basel in order to regularise her legal status and to improve her German proficiency. Her goal was to become an English teacher, but her diploma from the US was not recognised, meaning that she had to start studying from the beginning again. Nevertheless, she managed to work as a private English teacher until she found a position in language training at a multinational company and eventually founded her own company.

This time was difficult for Ellen: despite her Swiss partner, her job, and her ability to speak Swiss German fluently, she still felt like an outsider and experienced serious depression. During her treatment she developed an interest in psychotherapy and decided to train herself in this field. She subsequently started offering free workshops on culture shock and specialised in communication training and coaching. Nowadays, she is well known in Basel as an expert on migration, integration, and intercultural issues. She has also become an important resource person for English-speaking newcomers. In her own words:

> I became known as someone to come to as a newcomer in Basel. Informally, people come to me who are not coaching clients. But also I have the coaching clients, and then I have all the participants to my culture shock workshops, plus all the participants to my courses. They are also mostly expats. So more and more people throughout the years. That means that I have a gigantic network. (Personal communication, 1 October 2015)

[40] Research participants' names have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

In the early 2000s, Ellen started to involve herself in advocacy. This enabled her to actively contribute to a cause that she considered meaningful:

> I really only felt integrated when I started being invited to participate in these official events around expats. Because to me, being integrated means feeling welcome and being able to contribute, and have that contribution recognised. That's my definition. (Personal communication, 1 October 2015)

The fact that she was invited to participate in official events related to immigration and integration is also connected to the political context of this period, when authorities realised that the "new immigrants" differed from the foreign workers of the previous periods. She explains:

> Expats weren't on the radar of government authorities at all in Basel until Stadtmarketing [the city marketing unit of Basel-City] began. And Stadtmarketing was interested in expats because they realised these people have a lot of money. (Personal communication, 1 October 2015)

She was first invited to participate in a discussion organised by the city marketing unit – which is part of the city development department – that involved representatives from one of Basel's main multinational companies as well as from the integration office. The goal was to discuss how to better provide information to newcomers and their families. A few years later, she was invited to a meeting with the head of the city development department and members of the Christoph Merian Stiftung, an influential foundation in Basel. In 2009, this foundation organised a round table entitled "Integration von 'Expats' in Basel: Mobilisierung der 'Expats' für soziale und kulturelle Belange".[41] The 47 participants included representatives from the business sector, the canton administration, the charity sector, and various migrant associations. According to Ellen, this was the first time that local authorities in Basel had organised an official event for "expats". Of course, she was invited.

These events illustrate the growing interest of local authorities in new categories of foreigners. Yet, this awareness would probably not have occurred in the same way without Ellen's active involvement. For instance, she strongly influenced a study on "the potential and challenges of the integration of expats in the Basel region" (Wiener & Grossmann, 2011) that the Christoph Merian Stiftung foundation organised as a follow-up to the round table, in collaboration with the canton, the two main pharmaceutical companies in the region, and a consulting company in charge of the research. Ellen describes her role:

> I was on the advisory board of the study, and we had huge debates about what expat means and what integration means. And I was the only person who was an expat fluent in Swiss German. And I really tried hard to make my voice heard. I had a very big influence on the study because I found all of the interviewees … they wouldn't have been able to do the focus group without me. 75 to 80% of the people who participated in the focus groups were people I found for them. (Personal communication, 1 October 2015)

Ellen thus contributed to framing the focus groups on which the study was based. However, she was not always able to contribute her views. One point of contention

[41] "The integration of 'expats' in Basel: Mobilisation of 'expats' for social and cultural interests".

remains the fact that the authors of the final report defined "expats" as "highly qualified and financially secured labour migrants and their family"[42] (Wiener & Grossmann, 2011, p. 5), whereas she wanted to include professionals that are specially qualified but not necessarily well paid, as well as people who have lost their financial security because of personal difficulties such as unemployment or divorce. If the issue of qualifications was not questioned, it was important for Ellen to communicate the fact that "expats" are not always in a privileged situation. Specifically, she wanted to draw attention to the specific integration challenges of "expats", as well as their potential for social participation, particularly accompanying partners who have difficulty finding employment after relocating. Her own experience, as well as the stories that she heard through her coaching activities, convinced her that the authorities should offer more chances for "expats" to participate locally. For this reason, she considered it essential to advocate politically for better recognition of "expat" contributions and needs:

> I think there was a real sense at that time among expats that they weren't being welcomed here at all; and I think the understanding among expats of what they were contributing, especially also financially, tax-wise, that they weren't getting any acknowledgement or services in particular for that. (Personal communication, 1 October 2015)

Ellen thus decided to organise a conference with two other women from the US and Canada to further discuss the "expat" issue. For this purpose, they founded BaselConnect, whose main objective was "promoting collaboration between expats and locals in the Basel region".[43] The first BaselConnect conference attracted 125 participants and featured workshops where discussions of relevant topics in small groups were followed by a round table with representatives of the canton's administration and businesses.[44] The official goal of the conference was to gather concrete proposals "to foster a better understanding of what expats need to become more integrated into Basel life" (BaselConnect, 2012, p. 9). Implicitly, it also aimed to pressure both the canton's administration and the main companies to implement these proposals. According to Ellen, the addition of a festive dimension to the Basel welcome event mentioned earlier was one concrete consequence of this conference.

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This case study shows how Ellen and others have contributed to constructing the category "expat" as a political issue. In a context of transforming immigration structures and growing political awareness of the economic potential of new immigrants,

[42] "Um die rasch wachsende Bevölkerungsgruppe der hoch qualifizierten, finanziell abgesicherten Arbeitsmigrantinnen und -migranten mit ihren Familienangehörigen zu umschreiben, hat sich in den letzten Jahren der Begriff 'Expats' durchgesetzt. Die vorliegende Studie übernimmt aus pragmatischen Gründen diese Definition, zumal sie auch von den Expats selbst so verwendet wird."

[43] See http://baselconnect.ch/ (last consulted 23 May 2017).

[44] The topics discussed included education, employment/entrepreneurship, internet solutions, volunteer opportunities, language learning, and access to information for newcomers.

some people have become advocates of "expat integration" by emphasising the benefits of highly educated newcomers and by highlighting some of the challenges they experience. In particular, they insisted on the idea of "contribution", arguing that if "expats" are welcomed and supported locally, they will integrate and contribute to their places of residence. Hence, they have appropriated the economic logic of state authorities in order to reframe discussions on "expat integration" by pointing to local structures as a main obstacle to social participation experienced by many newcomers. Moreover, they have expanded the definition of wanted immigrants by emphasising the importance of cultural capital over economic capital. Building on their experience, resources, and networks, they have made their demands heard and, in some cases, these demands have been met. Their activism has thus contributed to making local authorities aware of certain challenges experienced by newcomers.

However, using the term "expat" as a common denominator for people who supposedly share similar characteristics has certain implications. To the extent that it refers to a category of immigrants defined by cultural capital, presenting "expats" as contributors implicitly suggests that they – more than other immigrants – deserve to be welcomed and supported by the state. Although the objective of people who identify as "expats" is usually not to communicate a negative image of immigration, or to negate the legitimacy of other categories of foreigners to receive state support, insisting that they make a special contribution reinforces that some immigrants are more valuable in cultural and economic terms. The ambivalence between economic promotion policies and integration policies mentioned in the previous section, as well as the general opposition between highly skilled and low skilled immigrants observed in policy documents, draws attention to the implications of this dual mode of categorisation. Furthermore, in a context of relative hostility towards immigrants, the fact that some people prefer to identify as an "expat" can be understood as a strategy of self-preservation and social distinction. By emphasising the value of their cultural capital, these individuals construct a positive identity that legitimises their presence in the country and their demands to the state.

Hence, the term "expat" plays an important role in the process of defining "wanted immigrants" in Switzerland: on the one hand, it has enabled Ellen and other immigrants to raise political awareness of their challenges and to assert their social status in a relatively hostile environment; on the other hand, it has helped state authorities to make sense of regional societal changes regarding the characteristics of immigrants and to define target groups for place-branding activities. Although "expat" reproduces and reinforces the dichotomy between highly skilled/wanted and low skilled/unwanted migrants, it also involves many grey areas and contested spaces that further emphasise the complex and context-dependent nature of these categories.

3.3 A Neoliberal State?

This chapter focused on place-branding strategies that target foreign companies and mobile individuals perceived as valuable. We have seen how cantonal authorities in Vaud and Basel develop and support various kinds of services that facilitate the settlement of new businesses and their employees. Cantonal administrations play an intermediary role between companies and the federal government by defining local economic priorities and serving as a point of contact for companies. However, cantonal authorities also delegate part of these tasks to other intermediaries – such as economic promotion agencies – that present themselves as private organisations, even though their mandate and a significant part of their funding comes from the canton. This external status enables organisations to establish direct relations within the business sector and to negotiate with the canton's administration on behalf of companies, for instance with regard to residence permits and tax issues. In this context, companies that generate more revenue – and by extension their employees – often benefit from special treatment.

The analysis also shows that public administrations focus more on attracting companies and less on supporting the individuals who accompany them. The responsibility for the latter task tends to rest on the companies or on the individuals, who are perceived as having enough resources to support themselves. However, in both Basel and Vaud, local authorities have recently become involved in the organisation of welcome events and integration opportunities that target well-paid foreigners working for international companies – and their families – due to a recognition of the economic potential of such immigrants as well as a decrease in corporate relocation support for employees. In addition, individuals and organisations that use the term "expat" to mark the specificity of their contributions with respect to other immigrants have actively advocated for this recognition.

There are various ways to conclude theoretically on these observations. First, following Loïc Wacquant (2012), one could argue that the neoliberal state increasingly acts as an instrument in the service of markets by supporting the economic interests of powerful actors – in this case, multinational companies – that generate more revenue. Wacquant suggests that neoliberalism relies on "the reengineering and redeployment of the state as the core agency that sets the rules and fabricates the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to realising markets" (Wacquant, 2012, p. 66). The reorganisation of state structures does not imply the demise of the state. On the contrary, the state remains an active agent that adopts liberal practices at the top of the class structure and punitive paternalism at the bottom, which results in increased differentiation between social classes:

> [The state] is uplifting and "liberating" at the top, where it acts to leverage the resources and expand the life options of the holders of economic and cultural capital; but it is castigatory and restrictive at the bottom, when it comes to managing the populations destabilised by the deepening of inequality and the diffusion of work insecurity and ethnic anxiety. (Wacquant, 2012, p. 74)

Wacquant's description of a "Centaur-state" divided between liberalism and punitive paternalism could apply to the observed distinction between highly skilled "expats" and socially disadvantaged "migrants", with the former identified as contributors whose presence is encouraged in various ways and the latter expected to fulfil various requirements in order to be allowed to stay. The authorities' supportive attitude towards businesses might also reflect Wacquant's idea of a state actively working in favour of markets and economic capital.

Connected to this idea, James Ferguson (2010) argues that another characteristic of the neoliberal state is the adoption of market mechanisms within its own structures. According to this author, a central distinction between liberalism and neoliberalism is the fact that liberalism maintains a clear distinction between "state and market, public and private", while neoliberalism "puts governmental mechanisms developed in the private sphere to work within the state itself, so that even core functions of the state are either subcontracted out to private providers, or run … 'like a business'" (Ferguson, 2010, p. 172). A state that delegates some functions to external private providers corresponds to my observations regarding the way immigration, integration, and economic promotion activities are in fact undertaken by complex networks of actors with various objectives and institutional affiliations. This does not mean that the state is disappearing. On the contrary, the entanglement of the state with market structures might even reinforce the controlling power of the system, although it becomes unclear who the actors in power really are: Does the state work for the market or does the market work for the state when fulfilling tasks such as selecting immigrants, attracting businesses, and retaining residents? Does it even make sense to use words such as "state" or "market" in such a complex system?

The main problem with these analyses is that they do not sufficiently take into account the heterogeneity of the word "neoliberalism" (Collier, 2012; Kalb, 2012; Peck & Theodore, 2012) and tend to overestimate its explanatory power by connecting diverse phenomena with a single and abstract cause (Ferguson, 2010). In its stricter sense, neoliberalism refers to a political project that valorises private enterprise and deregulation and that can never be fully reached in practice (Harvey, 2005). Yet there exists no fixed definition of this word, which is often used in an abstract and negative way (Collier, 2012; Ferguson, 2010; Kalb, 2012; Peck & Theodore, 2012). Hence, neoliberalism hardly works as an explanatory concept. Moreover, it would be too much of a shortcut to simply call "neoliberal" a situation formed by so many levels, individuals, opinions, and (often contradictory) logic. Like other all-encompassing concepts such as culture or development, neoliberalism is an entry point that needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed in order to generate meaning.

Although Wacquant's and Ferguson's arguments offer interesting avenues for reflection, I propose setting aside the term neoliberalism for now in order to formulate my conclusions for this chapter in a different way. First, the analysis raises the issue of the role of the state in relation to the economy. It shows that economic arguments play a central role in legitimising decisions, such as who is allowed to enter the country, how corporate resettlement should be supported, and which services are

offered to various categories of residents. In this context, "economic interests" work as a central legitimising argument that is rarely questioned, or even defined.

However, local authorities' perceptions of economic interests include dimensions that go beyond benefitting corporate actors, including the creation of local jobs and the protection of residents. Even in cases where regional authorities offer generous taxation incentives to relocating businesses, they argue that it will create new employment opportunities for residents. In addition, the restrictive admission system encompasses sociocultural concerns, such as protecting residents against *Überfremdung* and outsider competition, as well as maintaining a balance between conflicting political priorities. One may or may not agree with these practices, but it is worth noting that in this case economic interests include ideas of public good and order that go beyond purely economic considerations. Similarly, the efforts of local authorities in Basel and Vaud to welcome newcomers and support their integration cannot be reduced to a strategy to please large businesses. Besides promoting the region's economic development, other central concerns include encouraging social cohesion and avoiding the development of parallel societies. Again, the debate does not exclusively involve economic arguments. For these reasons, it is too simplistic to say that the state works in the interests of the market only.

Second, the analysis highlights the local complexity of both the state and the market. Rather than using abstract terms, it makes visible the interactions between various individuals and institutions working with different priorities. This complexity is partly due to the organisation of the Swiss federal state, including the autonomy of cantons and municipalities as well as the system of direct democracy that enables special interest groups to influence political decisions. Moreover, the diversity of the economic sector implies that the economic interests of some companies do not necessarily meet those of the others. In this context, it is impossible to define the general interests of either the state or the market. Even if a shift has been observed in terms of state authorities' priorities, with policy decisions increasingly taking into account the interests of sectors with high added value compared to more traditional and less competitive economic sectors (Afonso, 2007; Amarelle & Nguyen, 2010), other decisions – such as the February 2014 popular vote on the initiative "against mass migration" – have clearly disadvantaged the firms that most rely on international exchange and competition. It is thus impossible to speak of the state and the market as single actors with unified goals and strategies. There is, rather, a complex network of relationships between federal and cantonal administrations, as well as between state and non-state institutions, within a context that is at the same time local, cantonal, national, international, transnational, and global.

At the same time, the case study on place-branding strategies confirms a phenomenon observed by other authors: People who have nothing to do with migration management come to be involved in place of – or under the mandate of – state actors (Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018; Groutsis, Van den Broek, & Harvey, 2015; Kunz, Lavenex, & Panizzon, 2011; Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012). For instance, economic promotion strategies deal indirectly with migration issues because they target a transnational field. The case study in Vaud showed how a private economic promotion agency operates under the mandate of a canton in order to

facilitate the mobility and settlement of certain people and companies, mitigating in this way the impact of restrictive national regulations and cumbersome bureaucratic processes. In the same way, many companies select potential immigrants, organise their mobility, and facilitate their integration, which explains the numerous collaborations between employers, business associations, and state authorities at different levels. In this context, distinctions between state/non-state and public/private are unclear. Yet, this blurring of boundaries does not necessarily mean that the state loses power. According to Rahel Kunz and her co-authors, "the pursuit of partnerships with non-state actors … is less a phenomenon of abandoning sovereignty than one of reasserting or redefining it by creatively extending authority to issue areas traditionally controlled by industry associations, employer unions or manpower agencies" (Kunz et al., 2011, p. 17). At the same time, delegating state-related tasks to the private sector contributes to depoliticising some issues by reframing them into technocratic questions to be solved outside the state sphere (Kunz et al., 2011, p. 18). Hence, the increasing participation of non-state actors in migration management is an important phenomenon that involves the restructuring of power dynamics in migration management processes.

A third element that emerges from the analysis is the importance of place in the process of increasing mobility and globalisation (Glick Schiller & Çaglar, 2009; Sassen, 2005; Van Riemsdijk, 2014). Basel and the Lake Geneva area have become important nodes in networks that transcend territorial borders. However, mobility is not evenly distributed within these places. While some individuals and institutions can easily relocate according to current priorities and prevailing circumstances, others do not have this luxury. As other authors have shown, different forms of access to mobility contribute to the transnationalisation of social inequalities (Beck, 2007; Weiss, 2005). Yet, researchers rarely acknowledge that state administrations are by definition bound to the places that they administer, although they have to contend with mobility.

Nation-states are built on an ideal of congruency between territory, citizenry, polity, culture, and belonging. This ideal, however, can never be met in practice and is subject to various forms of reinterpretation and negotiations of belonging (Brubaker, 2010). The research in Basel and Vaud presents interesting cases where non-Swiss citizens who may be temporary visitors are encouraged by state institutions and other organisations to develop an attachment to a location. These situations could be interpreted as economic strategies to attract and retain capital in specific regions, yet they might also reflect a transformation regarding perspectives on belonging and social participation.

Several authors have recently observed in various locations the development of policies and programmes that address issues of integration and social cohesion in ways that do not make a clear distinction between "foreigners" and "natives", but rather target a "place-based community" of local residents (Baudouï & Gianni, 2016; see also Collett & Petrovic, 2014; Gebhardt, 2014; Papademetriou, 2014). Although nation-states remain a central actor for defining the rights and conditions associated with citizenship, other types of relationships between individuals and state actors should not be overlooked. In this case, local administrations (cantonal,

municipal etc.) may have a different approach to national administrations in the regulation of residents. This leads back to the question of social participation which was raised by many "expat" organisations. In a context of free movement of persons with the EU, intense professional mobility, competitiveness, and locational attractiveness, citizenship and long-term residency become insufficient criteria to define who belongs to a place. From an administrative perspective, other questions may arise: Who is better positioned to participate? Who brings more benefits? How can social cohesion be maintained?

In answering these questions, my research shows that distinctions in terms of social status, educational level, and cultural values can in some cases be perceived as more important than distinctions based on citizenship. This reasoning explains local authorities' growing concern for individuals considered to be active, responsible, and able to contribute without depending on social welfare, even though they are neither citizens nor long-term residents. At the same time, values of democracy, equality, and solidarity prevent authorities from offering these individuals special treatment – at least, not in obvious ways. Collaborating with institutions from the private sector to ensure that the most resourceful newcomers feel welcomed and supported enables state administrations to avoid public scrutiny while undertaking a task that many authorities consider to be of public interest. In parallel, local administrations in charge of place development, marketing, integration, and social cohesion can offer services that increase the satisfaction of the general resident population while supporting social groups perceived as disadvantaged or problematic, without the risk of being accused of favouritism.

During my interviews with migration intermediaries, I was surprised that respondents were in general very open to talking to me about their strategies for selecting, attracting, and retaining both individuals and businesses. In my view, some of these practices were highly controversial, particularly when they involved personal contacts between public authorities and private institutions and direct support of certain companies, as in the case of the organisation for economic promotion in the canton of Vaud. However, I realised that for many state authorities and service providers, offering special treatment to privileged individuals and institutions did not contradict their idea of working towards the common good. On the contrary, they saw these privileges as necessary in order to maintain Switzerland's economic dynamism, which they linked directly to the general population's well-being.

Recognising this interpretation of economic interests is critical for understanding administrative decisions related to immigration, integration, and economic promotion in Switzerland. In addition, it relativises the idea of a purely neoliberal state working in the interests of the economy, since economic and social interests are associated in this logic. The nation-state organisation remains central to this understanding, because the population concerned with state protection and support is defined in reference to political borders. Interestingly though, the definition of citizens goes in many cases beyond a restricted group of Swiss nationals, and includes class in addition to nationality. This observation opens stimulating perspectives for further research on differentiated processes of inclusion and exclusion in a country composed of almost 25% foreigners.

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Chapter 4
Displacing Workers Between Companies

> *I think that if you want to pursue a good career it is important to be in the right spot, to have the right connections with the right people around you, which is something hard to find. So if you focus a little bit too much on the location you actually miss great opportunities. So that is my belief that mobility is essential nowadays.*
>
> German human resources manager working for a multinational company in Basel, personal communication, 29 September 2015.

This chapter focuses on the way private sector actors manage mobility and define "highly skilled migrants". I focus on recruitment and relocation processes, as well as on the role of certain intermediaries in flexibly allocating workers to projects. The definition of skills in this context involves more than just qualifications and knowledge. Considerations of a person's behaviour and background during evaluation processes lead to subtle forms of selection that involve not only what a person can do, but also how their characteristics are socially constructed, as well as the specific environment in which the evaluation takes place.

I develop this argument by analysing strategies that companies use to access skilled workers. In this case, intermediaries such as professional recruiters, headhunters, or relocation agents may help employers select, attract, and retain appropriate candidates. Another strategy involves outsourcing these tasks to an agency that will allocate short-term workers to projects according to immediate needs. This involves a different type of mobility, since the workers move from project to project instead of relocating on a long-term basis. I illustrate this last point with the example of a management consulting firm, which sells "experts" to clients via an extremely flexible mobility management infrastructure.

These cases complement the first part of this book by showing how, beyond policies and state-related practices, private sector actors play a central role in structuring certain forms of mobility and defining their conditions. Furthermore, by critically

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discussing the notions of "need" and "highly skilled workers", I challenge the idea that private sector actors simply obey market rules, and I draw attention to the social dimension of recruitment processes.

Political discussions of "highly skilled migrants" in Switzerland and elsewhere are often connected to ideas of need and shortage. In the case of the Swiss admission processes for non-EU/EFTA workers, for instance, the "highly skilled" are first and foremost constructed as those who can solve labour shortages by occupying crucial positions that nobody else can occupy. In this context, "highly skilled migrants" are defined not only based on their skills but based on their ability to meet a demand thanks to the rarity of their skills. In Switzerland, issues of need and shortage were particularly debated after the adoption of the initiative against mass migration in February 2014, when several political and economic actors grew concerned about the difficulties that new restrictions on immigration would create in some sectors (Swiss Radio and Television, 2015; Wurz, 2016). In this context, quantifying the national need for highly skilled workers and determining the extent to which the domestic workforce could meet this need became crucial.

However, the notion of "need", like that of "highly skilled migrant", is not straightforward (Findlay, McCollum, Shubin, Apsite, & Krisjane, 2013). From a logical perspective, the very idea of a measurable need for highly skilled migrants is problematic: if human capital generates productivity, job creation, and economic growth, as many authors argue (Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2009; Constant, 2014; Fairlie & Meyer, 2003; Lucas, 1988; Romer, 1986; Scherer, 1999; Straubhaar, 2002; Zaletel, 2006), then it is reasonable to assume that there will always be a need for highly skilled workers. Indeed, in a dynamic system based on constant economic growth, speaking of a fixed gap that needs to be filled is contradictory, since the gap expands as it fills up. The anthropologist Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan neatly challenges the idea of "need" with the following words:

> [T]here is nothing vaguer, more uncertain, more imprecise or more utterly unusable than the notion of "needs". … Which reader of these lines is capable of giving a clear answer when caught off-guard, and even after mature reflection, to the question: "What do you need?" And who would refrain from adjusting his answer according to his idea of the kind of "need" the questioner might be willing to satisfy? … This is an example of the "supply" producing the "demand". (Olivier de Sardan, 2005, p. 85)

In practice, the need for skilled workers depends on the norms and expectations associated with the activity sector (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010). Indeed, I see several options for addressing a shortage issue based on norms of feasibility, acceptability, and desirability. One option is to train local people with the needed skills, a second is to attract people from abroad who already have these skills, while a third is to reduce the use of qualified staff, either by automating certain tasks, developing less time-consuming practices, or increasing the workload of the staff already present. A fourth option is to lower standards and offer poorer quality services. These options show that demand is produced not only by supply, but also by the standards and regulations of a sector.

This leads me to the question of how the "need" for "highly skilled migrants" is constructed. During interviews with human resources employees and professional

recruiters, I was generally surprised by the quantity of resources that companies were willing to invest in order to attract certain workers described as particularly needed. The manager of a bank's human resources department told me:

> Sometimes you hire people who don't have the exact skillset. You know they will need two years to meet the expectations of the position, but at least they are here, you don't have trouble with the relocation, all the costs. But sometimes you need someone immediately, so you say: I can't wait two years. Yes, it's going to cost me 200,000 [Swiss] francs, but okay …[1] (Personal communication, 11 April 2015)

The quote reveals a dilemma at the core of most recruitment activities: should a firm fill a position with someone who is available but inexperienced – meaning that it would have to invest in training – or should the firm invest in finding a person who already has the right skills? Moreover, what do "skills" mean in this context? Does this refer to what a person can do, or does it also involve who a person is, or how they are perceived? I was surprised to discover that in many cases, finding the "right person" was presented as a better option than investing in professional development.

This example points to an issue directly connected to the topic of "highly skilled migration": in a country where more than half of recent immigrants have an academic degree and approximately as many university graduates immigrate to Switzerland as are educated in the country (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2016), is there a risk that adequate training of local people will be neglected and replaced by the – much cheaper – importation of workers from abroad (see Leimgruber, 2011, p. 273)?

Chris Wright (2016) raises a similar question when suggesting, in the case of England and Australia, a causal link between the liberalisation of labour market regulations, the relaxation of immigration policies, and a decrease in employers' motivation to invest in training their employees. Indeed, the possibility to import a workforce easily, as well as the weakening of ties between employers and employees – with employers offering more short-term contracts and employees changing employers more often – make attracting experienced workers more advantageous for companies than training employees who may leave the company after a short period (see also Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, Hall, & Hewitson, 2009; Finlay & Coverdill, 2000).

These observations suggest that the norms and practices that structure workers' mobility influence the supply of workers available to employers, which in turn influences employers' norms and practices in terms of labour recruitment and training. Or, maybe it is the other way around: employers' norms and practices of labour recruitment and training influence workers' mobility, which in turn influences the labour supply available to employers. Anyway, it is obvious that hiring processes

[1] The original text reads: "Des fois tu engages des gens qui n'ont pas tout à fait les compétences, tu sais qu'il leur faudra deux ans pour être à la hauteur d'un poste, mais au moins ils sont là, tu n'as pas toutes ces emmerdes de relocation, tu n'as pas tous ces frais. Mais des fois il te faut quelqu'un d'immédiatement opérationnel, donc tu dis: je ne peux pas attendre deux ans. Oui ça va me coûter 200,000 francs mais voilà…" All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

have undergone serious transformations since the end of the twentieth century. I argue that these transformations influence not only recruitment practices but also the norms that define employees' value. Recently, the notion of "talent" has gained central importance in the corporate field. This new focus is connected to the rising popularity of highly skilled migrants in the policy and academic spheres, and these debates influence each other. For instance, the consultancy firm McKinsey & Company coined the expression "war for talent" in 1997 to both describe and trigger transformations in recruitment practices among companies competing at an international level (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). They argued that attracting and retaining highly talented employees was a strategic business challenge and a key to success. This influential idea constituted a break from the model of career development based on internal promotion.

During my field research, I met and interviewed various actors involved in the process of selecting, attracting, and retaining workers in the context of companies. These included internal employees such as human resources managers, as well as external service providers such as professional recruiters, staffing agents, consultants, and relocation agents. I also interviewed people who had recently moved to Switzerland about their strategies for finding a job. During these encounters, I was surprised that certain aspects of job-seeking which seemed obvious to my interlocutors were doubtful to me. One was the idea that the labour market obeys clear economic rules with an offer and a demand that must match closely in order for people to find jobs. The other, which is connected to the first idea, was that people need to fit the requirements of a position exactly in order to be hired. A third one was the importance given to personality during the hiring process, which in my view contradicted the two other ideas.

In her analysis of the concept of "skill" in education and business in the United States, the anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli (2008) notes developments in the post-Fordist area of discourses, which present skills as "aspects of worker performance … that can be acquired and measured and that possess an inherent capacity to bring about desired outcomes, outcomes that can be measured in dollars" (p. 212). Beyond technical knowledge and manual or mechanical operations, she argues that skills are increasingly conceptualised as "technologies of self" (Foucault, 1988), which enable individuals to "rethink and transform one's self to best fit one's job" (Urciuoli, 2008, p. 215). Popularised through public education systems, as well as through business schools, workshops, and other training sponsored by employers, these discourses construct workers as "bundle[s] of skills" (p. 211) who are responsible for acquiring and developing those skills that will give them value in the labour market.

The conceptualisation of skills as acquirable and marketable products that are at the same time part of a worker's personal identity contributes to explaining the contradiction between a mechanistic representation of labour markets and a focus on personality during recruitment processes. According to this perspective, "finding the right person" involves more than merely finding someone with the right knowledge, since attitude, motivation, and other behavioural traits can also be perceived as skills. At the same time, the objectification of skills as measurable products reduces employment to a simple match between offer and demand. This representation is problematic, because

it hides the complexity of the social processes and power relations involved in the construction of labour markets. To give but one example, several researchers have shown the central importance of social capital and networks for accessing jobs (Granovetter, 1983; Lin, 1999; Montgomery, 1992).

Based on these observations, I decided to investigate strategies developed by companies to identify and recruit employees considered most needed. On the one hand, I was often confronted with the idea that "finding the right person" was a central issue of recruitment processes. This encouraged me to ask who the "right people" are in practice. On the other hand, private service providers are directly involved in the process of finding skilled and flexible workers for employers. This convinced me to further explore the role of these intermediaries for selecting, attracting, and retaining workers perceived as valuable to companies. My research question for this section therefore is:

How do private sector actors contribute to structuring the mobility of "highly skilled" individuals and how is the "need" for such individuals constructed?

4.1 International Headhunters and Relocation Agents

I observe that companies invest considerable resources in finding workers for specific positions. To do so, they often resort to intermediaries who help them access the "right person" and quickly get them to work by managing their mobility. In this context, the "right person" is often someone who is immediately available or someone who can be easily dismissed in case they do not fulfil an employer's expectations.

Few studies exist on commercial intermediaries that connect highly specialised professionals with jobs (Coe, Jones, & Ward, 2010; Groutsis, Van den Broek, & Harvey, 2015; Van den Broek, Harvey, & Groutsis, 2016). However, evidence suggests that such intermediaries are increasingly shaping workers' mobility (Van den Broek et al., 2016). For instance, Faulconbridge and his co-authors (2009) mention that the number of European offices of the 50 largest international firms specialising in executive search – or headhunting firms – grew from 50 to 871 between 1980 and 2006, with most of this growth taking place after 1990. Moreover, Coe and his co-authors (2010) show an increase of 111% globally and 192% in Switzerland in the number of people working through staffing agencies between 1997 and 2007. According to the American Staffing Association, about 20,000 staffing and recruiting companies currently exist in the US and the total sales of this industry in the country was 150 billion USD in 2016 (American Staffing Association, 2017).

The growing importance of commercial intermediaries specialising in recruiting and managing the mobility of highly specialised workers is due to several factors. First, the increasing focus of service and technological industries on research and development activities led to the emergence of economic sectors largely dependent on knowledge and expertise. This created a new demand for certain types of profes-

sions and skills which did not exist before. It also prompted the emergence of service industries specialising in providing such skills to other businesses (Faulconbridge et al., 2009).

Second, the development of influential service firms contributed to changing attitudes towards recruitment. As shown in the case of executive search services (Beaverstock, Faulconbridge, & Hall, 2010) and management consulting (McKenna, 2006), such industries have invested substantial resources in order to convince corporate clients of the value of employing external experts for various tasks. For instance, Beaverstock and his co-authors (2010) argue that executive search firms have profoundly transformed the way companies recruit their employees by "circulat[ing] the idea that headhunters [are] the way for clients to secure the best candidate for their executive vacancy in a highly competitive global labour market" (p. 831).

Third, the internationalisation of the economy and the increase in firms conducting similar activities created the need for companies to distinguish themselves from competitors (Mach, David, & Bühlmann, 2011). Attracting talented individuals became an intrinsic part of this race for success. On this point, Beaverstock and his co-authors (2010, p. 828) mention an "obsession with expertise" (828), which developed in various sectors of the "knowledge economy" and replaced to a certain extent concerns about certification and formal education. The journalist and writer Malcolm Gladwell (2002) coined the term "talent myth" by asking this question: "Are smart people overrated?" More precisely, he criticised McKinsey & Company's approach to talent by linking it to Enron's traumatic bankruptcy in 2001.[2] According to him:

> [The] "talent mind-set" is the new orthodoxy of American management. It is the intellectual justification for why such a high premium is placed on degrees from first-tier business schools, and why the compensation packages for top executives have become so lavish. In the modern corporation, the system is considered only as strong as its stars, and, in the past few years, this message has been preached by consultants and management gurus all over the world. (Gladwell, 2002)

According to Gladwell, the popular idea that smart people are the key to success and that intelligence is a fixed trait that enables the chosen few to outperform competitors encouraged firms like Enron to give enormous freedom, responsibilities, and resources to brilliant young and ambitious employees in order to challenge them and keep them engaged.

This last point indicates an interesting tension. On the one hand, I observe through my interviews a tendency for employers to search for experienced employ-

[2] Enron was one of the largest US companies, active mainly in the energy sector. Its bankruptcy on 2 December 2001 resulted in a scandal during which it appeared that unprofitable speculative operations in the electricity market had been disguised as profits through fraudulent accounting practices. The service firm Arthur Andersen, which was in charge of auditing Enron's account while at the same time offering consulting services, was found guilty of destroying documents during the investigation that followed. This scandal subsequently led to Andersen's bankruptcy and encouraged many service firms to legally separate consulting activities from auditing (see McKenna, 2006).

ees who fit the exact requirements of a position. On the other hand, my ethnographic field research among young consultants – which I will describe in more detail in the next section – hints at a perception of "talent" that corresponds with the "talent mind-set" described by Gladwell. It also reflects to a certain extent the importance that recruiters attribute to a candidate's personality. These perceptions of "skills", "talent", and "need" coexist in the labour market; they influence – and are influenced by – recruitment practices, which include the practices of commercial intermediaries that connect jobs with people.

In this context, commercial intermediaries not only facilitate the recruitment of workers and the mobility of skills, they also contribute to "attracting and mediating migration pathways" (Van den Broek et al., 2016, p. 4). The previous chapter mentioned the role played by lawyers and other admission process specialists in dealing with administrative issues. However, the cases presented only concerned candidates already selected by an employer. To the extent that having an employment contract is now a precondition for permit applications in many OECD countries, it is important to go a step further and observe how candidates get in contact with potential employers in order to obtain a contract. Even in cases where employment is not a precondition for admission, work remains an important driver of mobility. Currently, the majority of immigrants in Switzerland come for work-related reasons (nccr – on the move, 2017b). By informing people about job opportunities, motivating them to move, organising logistical and administrative issues related to their relocation, and facilitating their integration into new social and economic contexts, commercial intermediaries have become key players in professional mobility management issues.

My understanding of mobility in this chapter is not limited to international migration. If oppositions such as "migrant" versus "local" or "citizen" versus "foreigner" were important in the previous chapters to address issues such as admission and integration from the perspective of state authorities, the case of corporate mobility presents particularities that make political borders less relevant for understanding the processes at hand. Contrary to state authorities, mobility management from the perspective of corporate actors aims to reduce the importance of political borders in order to enable fluid exchanges of people, goods, and capital. Nevertheless, in the same way that political borders require extensive resources to be maintained, fluid mobility is a construction that necessitates infrastructure. This section is therefore less concerned with "migration" – understood as the crossing of international borders – and more with "mobility" – understood as a physical and geographical movement associated with meaning and power (Cresswell, 2006). In particular, I am interested in the way the mobility of certain people between, within, and across countries is encouraged and managed in the context of recruiting processes.

In this section, I focus on two types of service provider: professional recruiters (headhunters) and relocation agents. I show that they are more than neutral intermediaries between companies and workers; they are involved at various steps of the relocation process and their roles contribute to shaping mobility experiences. Furthermore, by facilitating the recruitment and displacement of workers, they contribute to shaping an international labour market based on talent attraction and competition.

4.1.1 Headhunters: Finding the Right Person

Finding the "right person" to fill an open long-term position is a crucial process for many companies, especially when it comes to jobs with higher degrees of responsibility and specialisation. During my field research, I observed that one of the main issues for many international companies based in Switzerland is not getting people to apply for positions, but rather encouraging applications from people whose skills correspond to employers' expectations and accurately selecting the person who best fits the position. The difficulty in selecting suitable candidates is often due to the large number of people from all over the world who answer job advertisements, while the difficulty in mobilising adequate candidates often arises from the high degree of internationalisation and specialisation of certain industries, as well as from the low Swiss unemployment rate,[3] which creates disconnections between locally available competencies and employers' requirements. In addition, the possibility for companies based in Switzerland to easily attract workers from abroad – due to generally high salaries and place attractiveness – enables employers to be more selective, which consequently increases the importance of the relationship between a candidate's skills and their suitability for the position (Acevedo, 2016).

In order to manage the process of attracting and selecting candidates, employers use several strategies. One is to use personal recommendations, in other words, the potential employee's social capital. For this reason, many companies offer rewards to employees who successfully sponsor a candidate for an open position. Participation in events (e.g. job fairs, information events, networking at tertiary education institutions, professional associations, business meetings) and pre-selection through social media (e.g. LinkedIn, Xing) enable employers to get in touch with and motivate potential employees. Moreover, employing workers on a temporary basis through short-term contracts, internships, or temporary staffing agencies can allow employers to test a candidate before offering them a longer-term contract. Another strategy is to use applicant tracking system (ATS) software that automatically filters applications based on predetermined criteria. This strategy saves time in the case of numerous applications, but the software's efficiency is limited, and candidates are increasingly aware of which keywords are necessary in order to pass the filtering process. A fifth strategy is to use the services of professional recruiters who will actively identify, motivate, and prepare suitable candidates on behalf of the hiring company. These recruiters can work as freelancers or be employed by large, sector-specialised agencies. Their business involves proposing suitable candidates to companies in exchange for a percentage of the candidate's yearly salary should they be hired (usually around 15–20%).

A former professional recruiter told me during an interview:

> Normally [the employers] receive lot of applications from unemployed people who don't have any qualifications but who need to apply because of the unemployment insurance. So it's a lot of work to sort out. Maybe they don't find the really qualified people, they aren't

[3] Around 3%, according to the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (2017).

> there, they haven't applied. But if the headhunter asks them, they agree. So usually [the headhunter has] the best ones. For [the employers], it's always interesting to receive someone from the competitors also, because if you have someone from the competitors, you have the knowledge. The competitor has less knowledge, you have more.[4] (Personal communication, 29 January 2015)

This hints at the reasons why an employer might use the services of a professional recruiter. First, the headhunter can actively search for candidates, rather than waiting for candidates to apply. In this way, they have more chances of finding someone with skills that fit because they will contact people who may not have heard of the open position or thought about applying. In addition, employers often use several headhunters at the same time in order to obtain a selection of interesting candidates, which could save time when choosing among numerous applications. A third aspect is directly related to the "war for talent". Indeed, a key part of headhunting is to convince candidates who are already employed to leave for another company. Headhunters thus partly rely on their ability to "steal" employees from competitors.

All the professional recruiters I met during my field work were highly educated people with limited professional experience in the fields for which they were recruiting. Among my interviewees, one worked as a headhunter while also studying at university and two others had chosen this career because they could not find a job immediately in the field for which they had studied. They told me that their colleagues were in similar situations. An interviewee who worked as a headhunter while studying sociology reflected on the marginal position of some headhunters:

> Really, there were some very special people, at the margin of criminality. But there were also normal people. Most of them are normal people with very ethical standards. But there is also … a lot of cocaine. People for whom it's only about money …[5] (Personal communication, 29 January 2015)

These observations suggest that the job of headhunter often constitutes a default option. As Finlay and Coverdill (2000) show, the profession is not particularly valued in terms of social status. Nevertheless, a few professionals capitalise on their networks by offering highly specialised recruiting services and have gained reputation and wealth through their successes, which may inspire beginners. Finally, many headhunting companies offer other services as well (e.g. recruiting, temporary staffing, consulting) and in this way distance themselves from the negative image often associated with headhunters.

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[4] "Normalement [les employeurs] reçoivent beaucoup de postulations de chômeurs qui n'ont pas du tout les qualifications mais qui doivent appliquer à cause de l'assurance chômage. Alors c'est beaucoup de boulot de trier. Peut-être ils ne trouvent pas les gens très bon, qualifiés, très en la matière, ils ne sont pas dedans, ils n'ont pas postulé. Mais si le chasseur de têtes leur demande, ils sont d'accord. Alors c'est toi [le chasseur de têtes] qui a les meilleurs normalement. Pour eux c'est toujours intéressant de recevoir quelqu'un de la concurrence aussi, parce que si tu as quelqu'un de la concurrence, tu as le savoir. Le concurrent a moins de savoir, toi tu as plus."

[5] "Il y avait vraiment des personnes très spéciales, à la limite de la criminalité. Mais il y a aussi des gens normaux. La plupart sont des personnes normales avec des standards d'éthique qui sont bien présents. Mais il y a aussi … beaucoup de cocaïne. Des gens pour qui c'est seulement l'argent…"

My field research was limited to the banking sector, the information and technology sector, the pharmaceutical sector, and the chemical sector. In addition, the interviews mainly addressed the recruitment of people with technical and managerial skills. In this sense, the role of headhunters in my study is limited to certain positions. Yet, I find it interesting that some employers explicitly link the notion of "highly skilled" to the question of availability. According to a human resources manager in a chemical company:

> I think that the definition of highly skilled depends basically on the skills that are on the local labour market …. So you might consider that the skills of a CEO are relatively low if you can easily find somebody like a CEO on your local labour market. (Personal communication, 18 February 2015)

This observation highlights why headhunters are often associated with ideas of competition and talent attraction. From an anthropological perspective, it is interesting to consider the parallel between the contemporary meaning of "headhunter" (as applied to recruitment strategies) and its original meaning (as applied to tribal wars and other forms of conflict). Symbolic similarities between these practices indicate that the choice of word is not meaningless. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss (1984, pp. 141–143), headhunting – like cannibalism – is a way to assimilate the "other" into oneself, which directly connects to definitions of identity and social otherness. In the case of the Amazonian Shuars (more commonly referred to as Jivaros), Anne-Christine Taylor (1985) explains that head reduction practices are a way for one social group to take part of another group's identity in order to enhance the fertility of their own group. In fact, headhunting practices in many parts of the world derive from the belief that taking the head of an enemy enables an individual or group to steal their soul or vital energy: it weakens the enemy while reinforcing the victor (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013; Poucet, 2007).

In contemporary headhunting practices, "talent" represents both a trophy (the new employee) and the possibility for companies to outperform competitors (or "win the war"). Moreover, the position of headhunters as intermediaries is interesting: as autonomous entities, they protect the companies who hire them from too obviously showing interest in specific employees, or from getting their hands dirty during the hiring process. However, this relationship also involves risks, because a headhunter's loyalty is limited: they could potentially go to a competitor and use contacts developed through a former client to steal employees. This ambivalent status – which has been analysed in detail by Finlay and Coverdill (2000) – contributes to the headhunters' dubious reputation.

I will now analyse the role of headhunters in influencing recruitment processes. I argue that as intermediaries, they play a central role in selecting candidates and defining skills. They also contribute to motivating and facilitating mobility. By assisting companies to increase their flexibility and efficiency, they have become key actors in the current international labour market.

Negotiating a Candidate's Value

Actively attracting candidates perceived as particularly valuable has costs. According to the human resources manager of a bank, the profitability of investing in such a process directly depends on the indispensability of the researched skills:

> HR manager: There are skills that are suddenly very valued by the market: with skills in IT software development, all of a sudden there's a link to the banking sector. There are only a few developers and we know almost all of them, so suddenly… you look close to you, then in France, then Italy… it's very pragmatic, it follows the market laws.
> Interviewer: Do you use [recruitment] agencies?
> HR manager: Yes, it's common. But it costs you. They take between 12 and 25% of the annual salary. For a position at 100,000 [Swiss francs] it costs 25,000 francs. So, if you can do it yourself, you do it yourself. But sometimes you don't have the capacity. You look for a guy like this, like that, with such skills, in this or that market. The guy lives in London because that's where things happen. But you can't take a plane to go to London for two weeks, so you send someone.[6] (Personal communication, 11 April 2015)

This quote shows how a candidate's value is calculated from a firm's perspective. Furthermore, the interviewee suggests that the negotiation of employment conditions depends on the power dynamic between a candidate and an employer:

> Interviewer: How do you evaluate whether it's worth the investment?
> HR manager: If it's someone who is on the commercial side of things, you know how much he costs, you know how much profit he can make, you can calculate, you can objectivise. It is not always easy to estimate. But if he's a super professional with very specialised skills, the only one in Europe who can do it, he sets his conditions. He sets the market conditions.[7] (Personal communication, 11 April 2015)

The more the employer needs the candidate, the more the candidate can insist on favourable employment conditions. If power is central to recruitment processes, I would like to emphasise that it cannot be dissociated from the representations each party has about their position in the negotiation. If a candidate is strongly needed by

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[6] "Directeur RH: Il y a des compétences qui sont tout d'un coup très valorisées par le marché: des compétences de développement informatique sur tel logiciel, il y a tout d'un coup un référent dans le domaine pour la banque. Alors là, il y a peu de développeurs, on les connait presque tous, donc tout d'un coup… tu regardes proche de chez toi, puis vers la France, vers l'Italie… Donc c'est très pragmatique, ça obéit aux lois du marché.

Interviewer: Tu passes par des agences?

Directeur RH: Oui, c'est quelque-chose de courant. Mais ça coûte. Ils prennent entre 12 et 25% du salaire annuel. Pour un poste à 100,000, ça coûte 25,000 frs. Alors si tu peux le faire toi-même, tu fais toi-même. Mais des fois tu n'as pas les compétences. Tu cherches un mec comme-ci, comme ça avec telles compétences, dans tel et tel marché. Le type il habite Londres parce que c'est là-bas que ça se passe. Moi je ne peux pas prendre l'avion pour aller pendant deux semaines à Londres, donc j'envoie quelqu'un."

[7] "Interviewer: Mais comment vas-tu évaluer si ça vaut la peine d'investir tout ça?

Manager RH: Si c'est quelqu'un qui est dans l'approche commerciale des choses, tu sais combien il coûte, tu sais combien il te rapporte, tu peux calculer, tu peux objectiver. Mais ce n'est pas toujours facile d'estimer. Mais si c'est un super prof qui a des compétences hyper pointues, c'est le seul dans toute l'Europe à pouvoir faire le truc, il fixe un peu ses conditions. Il fixe un peu les conditions du marché…"

an employer but is not aware of their perceived value, they might not negotiate the terms of their employment as confidently.[8] Hence, the power dynamic during the recruitment process can be difficult to assess for each party, and can also be manipulated in different ways.

The intermediation of a professional recruiter may thus, on the one hand, contribute to reinforcing a candidate's confidence in the value of their skills and, on the other hand, encourage the employer to pay more attention to a particular candidate, especially if past experiences with the headhunter have been positive. Simply being chosen by a reputable headhunter may represent a form of symbolic capital that improves both the candidate's self-confidence and their credibility for the employer. Moreover, headhunters have a direct interest in obtaining a good salary for their candidate, since their fee is proportional to this salary. To this end, many recruitment agencies help candidates prepare for job interviews, which can influence their ability to adequately negotiate favourable employment conditions. Finally, professional recruiters can actively contribute to enhancing the legitimacy and value of certain candidates, as shown in this quote from a former headhunter:

> It was interesting to receive applications that no one is considering, yet there is something there. And the person can apply everywhere, no one will ever interview him. But I can speak [to the employer], say: I have someone who knows this, who knows that, who does this, he is a little bit like this, like that … So [the employer] tells me: Good! And we talk. Then I say: but there is a little problem, he is unemployed, his mother had cancer, so for two years he didn't work, he took care of his mother … and then it goes better.[9] (Personal communication, 29 January 2015)

Headhunters thus not only identify "talents", they also construct them by coaching candidates and presenting them to employers in an appealing way. Of course, this may not always work, and employers exercise caution when interacting with recruitment agencies. Nevertheless, the fact that more companies are choosing to use external service providers for recruitment increases the role of headhunters as gatekeepers in the perceived "war for talent" (Beaverstock et al., 2010; Faulconbridge et al., 2009; Finlay & Coverdill, 2000). In this sense, the construction of the "right

[8] Evaluating the value of one's specific skills can be very challenging, because this value relies on a rapidly changing market, as well as on companies' specific situations. For instance, Xiang (2007) describes the difficulties that IT training institutes in India have to predict which skills will be in demand in the international labour market in the coming years, and to adapt accordingly. The World Economic Forum also reports that current technological disruptions are rendering many skills obsolete. This makes specialising in "needed" skills not only difficult, but also risky. The report also estimates that by 2020, "more than a third of the desired core skill sets of most occupations will be comprised of skills that are not yet considered crucial to the job today" (World Economic Forum, 2016).

[9] "Alors pour moi c'était intéressant des fois de recevoir des dossiers que personne ne regarde, mais il y a quelque-chose dedans. Et la personne, elle peut postuler partout, elle ne sera jamais vue. Mais moi je peux parler avant, dire: j'ai quelqu'un qui connait ça, qui sait ça, qui fait ça, il est un peu comme ça, comme ça… Alors ils me disent: ah bien! Et on parle. Puis je dis: mais il y a un petit problème, il est chômeur, sa mère avait le cancer, alors pendant deux années il n'a pas travaillé, il s'est occupé de sa mère… Et après ça va mieux."

person" partly depends on headhunters' search strategies,[10] as well as on the way they present candidates to employers.

Analysing Personality

In addition to the headhunters' strategies, I observe that the construction of the "right person" also relies on an evaluation of the candidates' personal characteristics beyond their qualifications and knowledge. On this point, my research clearly shows that recruitment processes not only evaluate what a person can do but also what kind of person they are. As Urciuoli puts it, this is the moment when "soft skills represent a blurring of lines between self and work" (2008, p. 215).

In interviews, professional recruiters emphasised the importance of a candidate's personality during the recruitment process, arguing that new employees must be able to fit within a company's culture. My interviewees did not consider this procedure discriminatory and further rationalised it with utilitarian arguments, as finding the "perfect match" who integrates easily into the company enables all parties – recruiters, candidates, employers – to profit from their investment. According to a professional recruiter:

> It could depend on the way of expressing oneself. Sometimes the people were very arrogant …. you could see in the way they talked that it would not work, depending on the client. We called it the "personal level". There were also people who did not necessarily totally correspond but who had an interesting personality, which we knew was sought after by a company in particular, so we would propose this person anyway, maybe even before another person with skills that would correspond better.[11] (Personal communication, 5 February 2015)

This resonates with Urciuoli's analysis of the notion of skill, and shows that recruiters look for more than a perfect match exclusively in terms of qualifications and knowledge. In the "skill discourses" that Urciuoli analyses – that is, "discourses that sell skills or skills-related products or that offer workers advice or exhortation about acquiring, assessing, and enhancing their own skills" (2008, p. 212) – any part of a person's self can be turned into a skill. Candidates are thus encouraged to perceive and express themselves as "bundles of skills", or combinations of "segmentable, testable, and rankable" products with value on the labour market (Urciuoli (2008, p. 212).

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[10] Faulconbridge and his co-authors (2009) have analysed in detail the characteristics that professional recruiters use to classify a potential candidate. Beyond skill sets, they highlight the importance of belonging to networks that enable contact with the headhunter (e.g. membership in relevant professional or alumni associations and participation in social events).

[11] "Ça pouvait tenir à la manière de s'exprimer. Ou des fois les personnes étaient très arrogantes … Il y avait des personnes, tu voyais dans la façon dont ils répondaient que ça n'allait pas passer, selon le client. On appelait ça le 'niveau perso'. Il y a aussi des personnes qui ne correspondent pas forcément totalement mais qui ont vraiment une personnalité intéressante qu'on sait qu'une entreprise en particulier recherche. Alors on la propose quand même, peut-être même plus qu'une autre personne qui a des compétences qui correspondraient mieux."

The problem with these discourses is that they naturalise skills. To the extent that individuals are supposed to be responsible for enhancing themselves, their labour market value becomes a measure of their hard work, motivation, and "natural" talent. The socially inherited dimension of skills – which Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus* (1979) – as well as the socially situated mechanisms that construct their value – the person's symbolic capital – disappear from the analysis. The power relations and social biases involved in the recruitment process are reframed into an objective evaluation by the recruiter of the products that the candidate can offer.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that social aspects play a central part in the construction of skills. For instance, a candidate's social and biographical background often works as a selection criterion. Faulconbridge and his co-authors (2009) note that geographical biographies (e.g. having studied and/or worked in specific locations such as the UK, the US, and other hotspots in the global economy) constitute important markers for recruiters to evaluate candidates. The value that recruiters attribute to places thus affects the selection of candidates based on their biographies, including their social and cultural origins.

I noticed significant variations in how value is assigned to different places. Although my observations chiefly concern multinational companies that recruit at an international level, the Swiss labour market also comprises many companies which are active locally. This creates different requirements in terms of the characteristics sought by employers. According to an interviewee who worked as a professional recruiter both in Switzerland and Germany:

> I worked in Switzerland, not only with candidates, but also with companies, and I really had the experience: so you ask the company … who they are searching for. And it's ok that they tell us: ok, listen, we are looking for someone with skills in Java developing; we are a very young company, so we are looking for someone who is also young, I mean between 20 and 35 … That's ok. But then they really tell you: if he doesn't speak Swiss German of the area of Bern, we wouldn't accept him. That's ridiculous and that's something I can't understand until today. … It's not everywhere the same. I mean, in Basel they are more open-minded. They are used to it in [big pharmaceutical companies] to work with … they are looking for English-speaking people, really fluent in English, more than I am, really like their mother tongue. So that was not the real problem in Basel. But if you go outside of Basel or Geneva, in central Switzerland, that was really … not what I would call open-minded. (Personal communication, 13 December 2012)

This suggests preferences for distinct forms of capital (*capital d'autochtonie*[12] versus international capital[13]) that automatically exclude certain people from certain jobs based on their biography: for example, someone who did not grow up in Bern has almost no chance of speaking the dialect of this region, while someone who has

[12] This term was first used by the sociologists Michel Bozon and Jean-Claude Chamboredon (1980) to describe "all the resources that belonging in localised relationship networks provides" (Renahy, 2010, p. 9).

[13] I refer here to the article by Anne-Catherine Wagner and Bertrand Reau (2015) on the notion of international capital.

never lived in an anglophone environment has little chance of developing proficiency in English. In each case, these preferences rely on socially loaded values that can create both inclusion and exclusion, depending on the interaction between an employer's expectations and a candidate's personal background.

I also observed that nationality plays an important role. On the one hand, headhunters usually focus on "international people" because their role is to facilitate access to candidates with specific profiles and it is important to be able to search as broadly as possible. Moreover, the professional recruiters I interviewed all agreed that it is easier to find interesting candidates outside Switzerland, in particular because proposing a (relatively high) Swiss salary is a motivating factor in itself. On the other hand, the importance accorded to nation-based admission rules for the selection of candidates differed between interviewees. While some professional recruiters told me that obtaining work permits for non-EU and non-EFTA nationals was not an issue as long as they focused on very specialised and highly qualified people, another recruiter said:

> After a while, I stopped looking outside of Europe. … We always looked at nationality. … If there was a country outside of Europe where we searched more, it was the United States. But it's true that it was complicated. Then, if it was the right person, it was possible. But it really had to be the perfect profile.[14] (Personal communication, 5 February 2015)

This points to the influence of the national admission system, which discriminates between EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals, but it also highlights a preference for US nationals that is not connected to admission rules, since the US belongs in the non-EU/EFTA category. The analysis of survey data in the next chapter will show that this preference for US candidates is not an isolated case. In fact, among non-EU/EFTA countries, the US represents the main highly qualified workforce provider to Switzerland (nccr – on the move, 2017a). The survey data also reveal a tendency among employers to actively support US employees' relocation to Switzerland by offering services such as financing moving costs, assisting with administrative issues, or helping to find accommodation.

Although this phenomenon could partially be explained by the fact that employers need fluent English speakers, I argue that it also reflects global dynamics of power that construct preferences for certain people based on social origin and trajectory. Beyond qualifications, recruiters use many other markers to evaluate a person's suitability for a given position. To illustrate this point with an example, the partner of one of my interviewees was refused a job because he was apparently too "exotic" and thus "wouldn't fit in", being Jewish, homosexual, and non-European (personal communication, 13 December 2015). In addition, I observed that companies that brand their diversity by emphasising the impressive range of nationalities that they employ can in fact be very homogeneous in terms of the employees'

[14] "Au bout d'un moment, j'ai arrêté de chercher en-dehors de l'Europe. … On regardait toujours la nationalité. … S'il y avait un pays en-dehors de l'Europe où on cherchait plus, c'était les Etats-Unis. Mais c'est vrai que c'était compliqué. Après, si c'était la bonne personne, c'était possible. Mais il fallait vraiment que ce soit le profil parfait."

socioeconomic backgrounds and education. In this sense, a recruiter's evaluation of a candidate's personality is far from objective, since it uses markers such as social origin, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, and so forth to define a person's ability to fit into a certain position.

Findlay and his co-authors (2013) nicely complement these findings by showing how recruitment agencies use body language and national stereotypes to identify "ideal migrant workers" for different professions. Although their research focuses on the recruitment of less skilled workers from Latvia to the UK, the dynamics they highlight reflect my own analysis in many ways. In particular, they argue that recruiters have to identify not only appropriate skills but also "motivated" workers. To do so, both candidates and recruiters engage in a mutually conditioning process, where they tend to reproduce stereotypes associated not only with the profession involved, but also with social categories such as nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, age, and class. In this way, they "reinforce dominant understandings of the attributes that constitute the good worker" (Findlay et al., 2013, p. 163).

To summarise, the value of candidates is connected to various factors that go beyond pure economic calculations. In this process, professional recruiters can play a central role by preselecting candidates according to the employer's perceived expectations, coaching them during the recruitment process, and presenting them to employers in a positive light. The intermediary position of headhunters also enables companies to inconspicuously poach employees from competitors, which contributes to enhancing the value of both headhunters and candidates. Finally, the evaluation of candidates not only relies on their qualifications, but also on their personal attributes and social competences. As with state-related admission processes, we see that the definition of a "good" candidate depends on the context in which this person is selected, presented, and evaluated.

4.1.2 Relocation Agents: Motivating People to Move

Besides using the services of professional recruiters to fill specific positions, the idea of a "war for talent" has encouraged many companies to develop strategies to promote their public image and become more attractive for workers (Berthon, Ewing, & Li, 2005; Harari, 1998).[15] In addition to investing in marketing and communication, many companies offer their employees special services in order to distinguish themselves from competitors. In this context, employment and relocation packages play an important role in motivating certain candidates to join a company (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015; Salamin & Davoine, 2015; Tissot, 2015, 2016). According to one headhunter interviewed:

[15] Reflecting this trend, rankings such as the "World's Most Attractive Employer" classify companies according to potential candidates' perceptions of their desirability as an employer (Barck, 2017; Harvey, Groutsis, & Van den Broek, 2017).

> Headhunter: Often, for the highly qualified, it's not only the salary that counts, it's the package, it's other things …
> Interviewer: Like the bonus?
> Headhunter: No, not only the bonus. The bonus too, but the fringe benefits.
> Interviewer: So, the compensation?
> Headhunter: The insurance, the cars, the computers, all this. There are many firms that invest a lot in employees because they need motivated people, highly qualified people, so they try to offer a very attractive environment. So, it's also the working hours, the train pass, the possibility of day care. That's also a problem for those who come from abroad: to find a job for the wife.[16] (Personal communication, 29 January 2015)

Offering special services to employees relocating to Switzerland became a trend in the 1990s. For instance, a woman who arrived in Basel as a trailing spouse during that time period found that almost no organised support existed for people moving to the region for work-related reasons. To address this problem, she founded a relocation services company to help newcomers find accommodation, and was quickly contacted by one of the region's pharmaceutical companies which was developing relocation services for employees and their families as part of a large restructuring project. She now works for several companies and has expanded her business to include a broad range of services: she may, among other things, call the future employees before their move to inform them about living conditions in Switzerland, organise a reconnoitring trip for them and their family prior to their relocation, find a school for their children, obtain the various authorisations that they need to live and work in Switzerland, manage their insurance, inform them about tax-related issues, and find accommodation for them.

Today, many agencies in Basel and elsewhere provide these kinds of services. They are made available to newcomers by the companies that hire large numbers of specialised workers from abroad, creating in this way a demand for such services. A survey conducted in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (Ravasi et al., 2015) revealed that the most common relocation services offered by multinational companies to their employees include support for moving costs, finding accommodation, administrative and tax issues, language courses, and insurance (in more than 70% of cases). Other common services include language courses for a trailing spouse, finding a school for their children, housing and education subsidies, and organising an exploratory trip to Switzerland prior to relocation (in more than 50% of cases). While some of these services are offered directly by the employing company, other are provided through intermediaries at external agencies.

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[16] "Chasseur de têtes: Souvent, pour les hautement qualifiés, ce n'est pas seulement le salaire qui compte, c'est le paquet, c'est d'autres trucs…

Moi: Le bonus ?

Chasseur de têtes: Non, pas seulement le bonus. Le bonus aussi, mais les fringe benefits.

Moi: Donc les compensations ?

Chasseur de têtes: Les assurances, les voitures, les ordinateurs, tout ça, il y a beaucoup de boites qui investissent beaucoup pour les employés, parce qu'ils sont tellement besoin de gens qui sont motivés, qui sont bien qualifiés, alors ils cherchent à offrir un environnement qui est très attractif pour eux. C'est aussi les heures de travail, c'est l'abonnement général, c'est la possibilité d'une crèche. Ça aussi c'est un problème, si quelqu'un vient d'ailleurs: trouver un boulot pour la femme."

Relocation packages may thus involve different stages of the relocation process. Before the relocation, the promise of a generous package, as well as positive information about the new environment, may help convince a promising candidate to accept a new position. During the relocation, support for moving costs and administrative issues may help alleviate some of the constraints associated with mobility. After the relocation, services such as spouse employment support and payment of language courses may facilitate adaptation to the new environment. These different services enable employers to construct mobility as a smooth process in order to attract and keep the employees they want most.

All the relocation agents I met were women who had experienced various relocations themselves and had decided to use this experience to create their own relocation companies after settling in Switzerland. They combined this job with other activities such as coaching, training, and voluntary engagement with the "expat" community. Hence, their professional activities included various tasks connected with their personal experiences and networks. They emphasised the flexible nature of their work, which they constantly adapt according to their clients' demands. However, one mentioned the differences between her activities and the more standardised services of relocation agencies that operate internationally (e.g. Cartus and Crown Relocations). She explained that these agencies represent unfair competition for smaller, local agencies like hers, whose business relies on local knowledge and tailor-made services. She observed a tendency for companies to increasingly collaborate with larger agencies, which is destroying her business. In this process, smaller relocation agencies become subcontractors of larger ones in order to organise the tasks that require specific knowledge of the local environment. However, the rates paid by these agencies are less profitable than if the employing company had contracted the local agency directly. These observations are confirmed by broader studies that stress the current tendency among multinational companies to reduce investments in relocation packages (Cartus, 2014; Davoine & Salamin, 2012).

While all the headhunters I interviewed were men, I observed that the relocation sector was female-dominated – at least in the cases of the small relocation agencies. This gendered dimension can be partly explained by the fact that the work of many relocation agents corresponds to roles traditionally attributed to women, such as the management of affairs related to housing and children. The survey data in the next chapter will show that, in the majority of cases, relocating employees are men while the following spouses are women, which means that relocation agents mainly deal with women in their daily practice. Moreover, my interviewees explained that they founded their companies after abandoning a previous career to follow their partner, or because they wanted the flexibility to manage their time according to their family duties. All these elements show that both the recruitment and relocation industries are structured in alignment with gendered norms and expectations that reproduce a division of roles between men and women.

Constructing Smooth Relocations and Status

When I asked a relocation specialist why companies mandate her services, she answered:

> I think for them [the employers] it's really making the transition as smooth as possible for the employee so that it doesn't fall back on his work … they just want efficiency and quick settling in. (Personal communication, 2 December 2015)

However, the role of relocation agents not only concerns organising the moves of employees, but also motivating and psychologically preparing them on behalf of the employer prior to the relocation:

> Part of our job has always been to speak to people before they sign the contract, show them what it could be like to live in Basel for them and spouse or partner and family and let them decide based on real facts and reality of seeing the place and potential ways they could live, and potential places and schools and parks and fitness-centres and let them decide if they want to move here or not, based on the offer of the company. (Personal communication, 18 November 2015)

Another important aspect relates to the idea of status, which derives from the value that employers attribute to their employees, as well as from the power dynamic between them. The anthropologist Shabih Zaidi, who conducted research on the international employees of a multinational company based in Basel, observed that workers who relocated from abroad often discussed and compared the different services that they had received as part of their employment packages (personal communication, 25 November 2015). These packages not only alleviate some of the stress associated with moving, but are also an indication of the value that an employee brings to the company. In the same vein, a human resources manager told me:

> If you want to be professional, you have to mandate an agency. But agencies are expensive! And then you give them the feeling to be expats, and in the head of expats it's: I want an expat contract and the school for the children, the private school. Three children cost 100,000 francs per year. So, if he has a rare skill, he wants 100,000 for the school, he wants the accommodation … it's a bit deterring for the employer. (Personal communication, 11 April 2015)

Access to relocation services and other compensation or benefits is central to understanding the power relations that exist between employees within a company. Notwithstanding the fact that, from the hiring companies' perspective, relocation services primarily serve the purpose of attracting employees by facilitating their move, only employees in the highest positions and with the most needed skills receive such support, even though performance and flexibility requirements increasingly affect all levels of the corporate hierarchy (Della Porta, Hänninen, Silvasti, & Siisiäinen, 2015; Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). In this sense, access to relocation services can give an indication of the perceived value of an employee within a company and thus contributes to social distinction processes among employees.

Retaining Valuable Employees by Taking Care of Their Families

Employers sometimes use relocation agents to retain valuable employees by making sure that their whole family adapts well to their new environment (Ravasi et al., 2015). Support for accompanying family members may be part of a relocation package, for instance to help them find a job or introduce them to local social networks (Salamin & Davoine, 2015). As mentioned in the previous section, the goal of such programmes is to prevent employees from suddenly leaving the company because their family is not satisfied with their new way of life. In this way, private matters become both a corporate concern and an economic issue.

I interviewed a woman with medical training who had resigned from her job to follow her husband to his new position in the pharmaceutical sector in Basel. As she explained to me:

> So, I had two persons who were responsible for me. And they were trying to help me and to give me information about groups in the city: what can I do as a non-working person, where can I find other expats, women who don't work …? So, I didn't know what to do the whole day. I was used to working, so this person was giving me a lot of information about groups. She was taking me to reunions. (Personal communication, 15 April 2016)

Her husband's employer had mandated a relocation agency to support the family with various practical aspects: finding an apartment, organising residence permits, and introducing them to the local social networks. The interviewee added:

> My husband started to work immediately and so I stayed: so now what? So, I had like an activity, going and meeting someone, talking to someone who connected me with others.

This shows that the role of relocation agencies goes beyond purely logistical aspects: employers also take emotional issues into account as part of an economic strategy to retain valuable employees. This dimension appears even more clearly in the example of a person working for a relocation agency who set up a "post-hiring programme" for an American company based in Zug: her role consists of organising coffee meetings for the employees' spouses and seeing to their needs. In this way, she can identify potential problems and try to solve them. During one of these meetings, for instance, she noticed a person who seemed to be suffering from depression and convinced her to see a doctor. She also supported another person who wanted to start a psychology practice. In her own words:

> If that lady didn't have that space to come and talk to me, she would probably have carried on until she'd be so frustrated, she'd have said to her husband: I'm going back. See? So we can intervene quite early if we notice something is not well with the spouses. … It's like picking out the ones that aren't doing well and kind of helping them. (Personal communication, 2 December 2015)

Like headhunters, relocation agents create differentiated possibilities for workers to move and settle in new places: while headhunters produce candidates and try to influence the value that employers attribute to them, relocation agents produce "expats" with access to special forms of support before, during, and after their move. Hence, they not only contribute to making the relocation of some employees easier, but also create incentives to move to and stay in certain locations. By actively

managing the mobility of workers and their companions, they play a central part in the corporate "war for talent".

4.1.3 Portrait: The Job Search Experiences of a Colombian Couple

To conclude this section, I would like to analyse the story of a Colombian couple currently living in Switzerland. It illustrates the case of a trailing spouse who received extensive support from his wife's employer – a company known for investing significant resources in its employees – to find a job locally. This story is unusual, as our survey data shows that only 7.5% of men relocated to Switzerland to accompany family, compared to 30% of women. Moreover, the support that this male trailing spouse received during his period of unemployment is exceptional in many regards.

This case is interesting precisely because it is unusual. First of all, it shows that some people are given access to extensive resources in terms of relocation services, and accordingly it constitutes a good point of comparison with the stories presented thus far. At the same time, it illustrates that even the best relocation support is sometimes not sufficient to achieve one's objectives, which calls into question the idea that this person is necessarily privileged. Finally, the gender dimension of the case is interesting, because it adds to the complexity of this situation and helps denaturalise gender hierarchies and stereotypes.

I first met José at an event organised by the association at the chamber of commerce in Vaud that offers free services to new employees of international companies and their families. Originally from Colombia, José had recently relocated to Switzerland from the US to follow his wife, who worked for a major multinational company. He was unemployed and actively looking for a job. I wanted to understand how relocated individuals deal with unemployment, and thus contacted him to ask for an interview. He invited me to his apartment and his wife Susana joined us to talk about their experiences.

José and Susana grew up in Colombia in upper-middle-class families. José's father worked as an economist and his mother as an executive assistant, whereas both of Susana's parents were civil engineers. They both received a high-level of education at international schools in Colombia, then completed their undergraduate degrees at the same private university in Bogota, which is where their relationship began. They first experienced living abroad in their early twenties: Susana spent a year studying in London, whereas José received a government-funded scholarship from the US and subsequently moved there to study economics. He then returned to Colombia to work in a local bank. During this time, Susana was employed by a major multinational company in Colombia. Her job involved short-term assignments abroad, which enabled her to develop an international network. She then moved to the US to complete a master's degree in engineering. José decided at this

point to resign from his job at the bank and to accompany her to the US. There he started an MBA in finance while working as a graduate assistant. They both stayed in the US after graduation and found jobs easily. However, after a year, they had to transform their working visas into more stable work authorisations. They subsequently applied for the H1B lottery system[17] and Susana obtained a permit. However, José's authorisation was denied and he was thus unable to work in the US.

José did not want to stay in the US without the right to work, so they decided to leave the country. Their first plan was to go back to Colombia, but a former colleague of Susana's informed her that the multinational company for which she had worked in Colombia was offering a position in Switzerland. Susana already knew the team because she had collaborated with them as part of a temporary assignment in Switzerland 5 years before. She thus applied and was given the job.

Before deciding whether to accept the new position, the couple researched the possibilities for José to obtain work in Switzerland. This point was crucial for them, since José wanted to stay economically active. The human resources department at Susana's future employer confirmed that José could obtain a work permit for accompanying family members that would not involve any of the limitations usually imposed on non-EU and non-EFTA nationals. The company also connected them with a relocation agency and a list of consultants that specialise in employment issues. José organised several Skype meetings with these consultants to obtain more information about the Swiss labour market. Reassured by these exchanges, he expected to find a suitable job within 6 months in Switzerland and was thus motivated to move.

After signing her employment contract, Susana waited a few months before receiving confirmation that the residence permit and work authorisations for Switzerland had been approved. She did not get involved in the administrative process since her future employer organised everything. As soon as this aspect was solved, Susana and José moved to Switzerland. The firm supported them in many ways: they financed the whole process; they arranged for a furnished apartment during the first 3 months following their arrival; they paid for a rental car during the 1st month; and they offered 40 h of language classes. In addition, José benefitted from a special package for new employees' accompanying spouses: he was invited to participate in weekly events at the company where he met other accompanying spouses and received information on topics related to job search, personal development, and issues of daily life in Switzerland. The company also offered him several thousand Swiss francs that he could use for any activity that would help him improve his chances of finding a job in Switzerland. José decided to invest this money in leadership classes at a business school, as well as in a personal coach who helped him apply for jobs.

Despite the various forms of support, it took José almost a year to find a job in Switzerland. He explains his difficulties by the fact that he arrived at a time when

[17] H1B visas are work authorisations for highly qualified foreign workers in the US. The lottery system consists of a randomised selection process through which part of these authorisations are allotted.

firms were scarcely recruiting in the financial sector. Moreover, his position as an outsider restricted the range of positions for which he could apply to companies that valued his international capital. The competition for such jobs was also fierce: he observed through his LinkedIn Premium account that he often had more than a hundred competitors from all over the world for a single position. In addition, José noted the importance of personal contacts for getting a job in his field. Hence, he actively tried to increase his network: he became more active on professional social media and regularly posted online articles related to his professional areas of interest. He sent his profile to various staffing agencies and participated in all kinds of social events in order to meet as many people as possible. He experienced these activities as a way not only to increase his chances of employment but also to keep himself busy and motivated. He said:

> Meeting people … that's very important because you start feeling like it's your problem. … But then when you are in this kind of meetings, you see people equally educated or more educated: PhDs with twelve years of experience … and they don't find a job. So, I start saying …: it's not you, it's the market. It's true. We don't find jobs, because there are no jobs available for us. (Personal communication, 17 April 2016)

Being unemployed was difficult for José, but he managed to keep his spirits up by regularly attending the meetings organised by Susana's employers and other get-togethers at the business school where he took leadership classes. He also met people through the language school financed by Susana's employer, the events at the chamber of commerce in Vaud, and the activities offered by several "expat" organisations in the region. These activities enabled him to meet other highly educated yet unemployed foreigners, as well as active professionals who could share tips and tricks.

Susana actively supported him by regularly accompanying him to these meetings and by researching useful information. She considered it part of her responsibility as his wife to help José through this process:

> For me it was also very important that even though [José] was going through this very difficult time, especially towards the end of last year … we had to keep the energy up. … So that was also part of the juggling process last year. … Because I had to, I want to do a good job and I want to still grow in the company and all that, while at the same time I was taking care of my family. (Personal communication, 17 April 2016)

She informed her colleagues and acquaintances that her husband was looking for employment in order to widen their job-seeking network. The couple also regularly invited people to their home so that José could practise speaking the local language. According to him: "Last year has been one of the busiest years I've had, socially speaking."

One day, José saw an opening on LinkedIn for a position corresponding to his profile at Susana's firm. He immediately applied and asked Susana to recommend him to the manager. This strategy worked: José was invited for a job interview and was subsequently hired. At the time of my interview with them, Susana and José were both working for the same company and Susana was pregnant. When asked about their plans, José said:

> We're going to wait a couple of years and see what happens. But so far, as long as we can have a job that we enjoy, a community that supports us, friends that you can be with and enough money to bring your parents from time to time to go on vacation, there's no reason to move. I mean Switzerland is a wonderful place to be. It's no doubt. That's a reason why a lot of people move here. … We're in a country with multinationals that if you are good and give hundred percent, hundred and ten percent and you work hard and you study and you understand things, you can keep moving with your career. (Personal communication, 17 April 2016)

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This story illustrates a situation in which two people with very similar backgrounds ended up in distinct situations after moving to Switzerland: while Susana migrated as a highly skilled professional recruited by a major multinational company, José arrived as an unemployed foreigner whose presence was legally tolerated only because of his wife's position. At the same time, the example shows that Susana's employer made efforts to ensure José's quick social and professional integration. Moreover, the couple could rely on numerous other resources to ease their transition and develop a local network. Nevertheless, both partners experienced José's period of unemployment as difficult.

In many regards, José's and Susana's relocation went smoothly. The fact that Susana moved to Switzerland for professional reasons greatly facilitated their transition through the active support of her employer. Their past experiences also contributed to easing their move. For instance, since they are both fluent in English they did not encounter any serious communication difficulties upon arrival. They also did not experience any difficulties having their US diplomas recognised. Finally, having lived abroad before, they knew to a certain extent how to adapt to a new place. For Susana, the transition was even easier: since she had worked for the company before, she was able to quickly integrate into her colleagues' team. All these elements constitute "international capital" which influenced their social positions and experiences after the relocation (Wagner & Reau, 2015).

Nevertheless, José and Susana's privileged position was offset by certain constraints that limited their range of possibilities. One of the main reasons they came to Switzerland was that José could not obtain a work permit in the US. As it was not conceivable for him to stay in the US without a job, they looked for opportunities elsewhere. The fact that Switzerland enables accompanying family members to work without further limitations played a central role in their decision to move. From a political perspective, the relatively generous family reunification policy for non-EU and non-EFTA workers in Switzerland is one of the few tools that aim to make the restrictive Swiss admission system more attractive for "wanted immigrants". We thus see that admission policies in both countries directly influenced this couple's choices.

It is also interesting to note that José was excluded from the US labour market but accepted as an accompanying family member in Switzerland. In contrast, Susana was admitted as a qualified worker in both systems. While pure luck was involved in the case of the US visa lottery system, Susana's international professional

experience and network made the difference in the second case. Despite very similar backgrounds, Susana's experience working for a multinational company and José's experience working at a local bank led to different outcomes. Although José's position was prestigious at a national level, it did not enable him to develop the same kind of international network as Susana did. Furthermore, José's contacts and experience in the US became professionally useless after he was refused the legal authorisation to work in the country. The fact that Susana's colleague suggested the job in Switzerland just at the right moment can be considered luck, yet also highlights the value of her international capital. Her previous work experience and professional network in the country made her the perfect candidate. In contrast, José knew nobody in Switzerland, and his outsider position further limited his professional opportunities, which made finding a job more difficult.

This case nicely illustrates how individuals can overcome disadvantages associated with certain aspects of their social positions thanks to other resources. In particular, I would like to emphasise the important roles played by the support of various institutional actors.

First, without the sponsorship of Susana's employer, the couple would have had almost no chance of obtaining work permits in Switzerland because of their Colombian nationality. The fact that Susana's employer is a big multinational with significant economic power and experience in procedures for hiring non-EU/EFTA nationals explains why the administrative process went so smoothly. Hence, Susana's employer was an essential element for enabling their move to Switzerland despite their status as non-EU/EFTA nationals.

Second, the various services offered by Susana's employer reduced many of the challenges usually associated with mobility and contributed to constructing their relocation as a smooth and easy process. Moreover, José and Susana had the opportunity to participate in several events targeted at qualified, economically secure, and internationally connected people. In this way, they easily developed a network of relationships within a social group of international people with whom they identified. The presence of organisations aimed at people with similar socioeconomic backgrounds in the region thus enabled them to quickly expand their connections and obtain access to local information and resources.

Finally, José's position as Susana's husband was crucial for shaping the institutional support that he received. In this context, it is interesting to develop the gendered dimension of this situation further. Even though José followed Susana to Switzerland, he played a decisive role in the migration decision, since Susana resigned from her job in the US because José was unable to work there and wanted to remain professionally active. In addition, Susana made it clear to her employer that José's ability to work was a condition for her acceptance of the position in Switzerland. This explains why the relocation support provided by Susana's employer focused so much on labour market access. In other interviews with women trailing spouses, I observed that relocation agents tended to prioritise social aspects over professional ones, for instance by introducing them to clubs and activities that mainly attract non-working women. For José, however, remaining without a job was never an option. His social position as a man and husband within a patriarchal

environment, together with Susana's position with regard to her new employer and her willingness to promote José's professional interests, thus contributed to framing his labour market integration as a crucial issue.

In the end, Susana's support made the difference, since José obtained his position through her network. However, the relocation support they received from various agents and institutions framed the positive experiences they now associate with their life in Switzerland by giving them access to numerous self-development and networking opportunities and increasing their sense of belonging in their new environment.

In conclusion, this case illustrates the important role played by employers and other professional services in attracting people to Switzerland and shaping the conditions of their stay. Beyond state-related policies and practices, private sector institutions are central to the process of attracting, selecting, and retaining immigrants. They act as gatekeepers and co-constructors of employees' value, and influence the experiences and choices of relocating individuals. As the example showed, the ways these intermediaries select individuals and the support they provide rely on contextual elements and social norms that interact with the characteristics and biography of the candidates involved. In this process, two individuals with similar backgrounds and profiles can end up in very different positions. For this reason, it is important to adopt a dynamic understanding of the construction of social categories.

4.2 Allocating Experts to Projects: The Case of Management Consultants

In my interviews, human resources specialists argued that finding the "right person" to fill an open position and (in some cases) supporting their relocation is expensive and represents a risk: if an employee is not as efficient as expected or decides to leave unexpectedly, the resources invested might be lost and the whole process might have to start again. In a context where needed skills change rapidly and where flexibility is seen as a key to efficiency, companies that aim to remain competitive might not always consider hiring people on a long-term basis to be the best strategy. Instead, they might opt for short-term contracts and outsource the costs of selecting, hiring, and moving.

Temporary staffing agencies and consulting agencies both offer this kind of solution. One of the main characteristics of these labour market intermediaries is their triangular relationship with clients: the agency sells the work of temporary employees to client companies, and is therefore responsible for the employment contract with the worker (Coe et al., 2010). For client companies, this has the advantage of enabling quick reactions if a worker with specific skills is needed on short notice, while reducing the costs and risks associated with hiring them directly. Compared to a direct employment relationship, workers employed through an intermediary can more easily be replaced if they do not meet the client firm's expectations, and the

contract between the agency and the client company can more easily be terminated once the client company no longer needs the worker (Coe, Johns, & Ward, 2009; Coe et al., 2010; Findlay et al., 2013; Kalleberg, 2000; McKenna, 2006).

Grouping temporary staffing agencies and consulting agencies in the same category might seem strange to some readers. Faulconbridge and his co-authors (2009, p. 801) suggest, for instance, that temporary staffing agencies work "at the 'bottom' unskilled end of the market", while consultancies tend to be associated with elite professions (Skovgaard Smith, 2013). However, my field research with both professional recruiters and management consultants reveals parallels between these activities. On the one hand, although temporary staffing does not normally concern the most senior positions, it would be wrong to restrict it to unskilled labour. For example, headhunters often work for agencies that simultaneously propose classical recruitment services, temporary staffing, and consulting. These agencies use their networks to connect workers with employers according to specific needs, but the employment relationship can take various forms, including a triangular relationship where the worker is employed permanently or temporarily by the recruitment agency. In the cases I observed, the workers temporarily staffed by recruitment agencies were usually highly educated and specialised in their fields.

On the other hand, my observations at a management consulting firm show that the work of consultants, especially at the beginning of their career, is not very different from that of temporarily staffed workers. While the managers' role is to find clients, the junior consultants are sent to work on projects at client firms where they undertake all kinds of activities. One of the main differences from other forms of temporary staffing is that these workers are usually part of a team of consultants and can count on the support of the manager who secured the contract in case of unforeseen problems. Their status – or the way they are perceived – within the firm can also be different, in particular if they work for a well-known consultancy. However, I argue that despite these differences, the logic of outsourcing costs, increasing flexibility, and obtaining needed skills for short-term contracts is very similar for both consulting and temporary staffing agencies.

In this section, I take as an example the case of a management consulting firm to show that professional mobility does not necessarily involve long-term relocation, but also – and increasingly – takes the form of short-term travel. Like recruitment and relocation agents, consultancies act as intermediaries between workers and employers. However, instead of facilitating the establishment of a long-term relationship between these actors, they foster a demand-based model in which workers are allocated to projects on a short-term basis only. This system involves a complex mobility management infrastructure that enables consultancies to offer flexibility and efficiency to their clients. Although specific to a professional sector that involves both migrant and non-migrant mobile workers, this case study contributes to the general discussion on highly skilled mobility in two main ways. First, it sheds light on the dynamics that are profoundly transforming the international business sector, in particular regarding how companies recruit workers, mobilise expertise, and define talent. Second, it builds on the experience of extremely mobile professionals

to argue that mobility and flexibility are increasingly becoming a standard part of working relationships.

This analysis builds on personal experience: for the past 3 years, my partner has worked as a management consultant at one of the world's largest consulting firms. The firm is a globally renowned professional services company that employs more than 200,000 people, and is also one of the main consultancies in Switzerland. I reflect here on both my personal relationship with this firm and the situation of other consultants whom I met through my partner at events organised within the framework of his company.

When my partner started this job, I realised that it would also have implications for my life: first of all, it became impossible to make long-term plans since his assignments were short-term and constantly changing; secondly, he constantly moved from client to client and was often away from home; and finally, his work was not only very demanding but the company also encouraged him to participate in informal events with colleagues during his free time. When I started my research, I decided to use this experience as a way to better understand how a multinational firm – whose business model relies on providing flexibility and expertise to clients – deals with mobility. My partner was later given an assignment in Basel – where I was working – which enabled me to participate in his professional life away from home. During that year, I lived with him in business hotels and accompanied him to many informal work-related events. This experience, as well as the many discussions I had with him and his colleagues, enabled me to better grasp what the life of an extremely mobile professional can be like, and to actively discuss our situated perspectives. I use these insights here to analyse the role of management consultants for providing expertise and flexibility to client firms.

Methodological Reflections About the Field Research

Although I have already discussed this experience in the methodological section, I would like to reflect further on my situated perspective during the field research on consulting.

Firstly, it is obvious that, like in any research, my position oriented and limited the kind of data that I could access. As an employee's partner, I was only allowed to participate in social events outside of the workplace (e.g. Christmas parties, after-work meetings, gatherings at employees' homes, birthday parties, dinners at restaurants, squash games), and my access to the field relied mainly on my partner's connections. My data on consulting were thus built on observations at these events, as well as on informal conversations with my partner and his colleagues, readings of the academic literature on this topic, and further materials such as the company's website, internal working

(continued)

documents, and digital tools that my partner showed me. Moreover, since my partner occupied a lower position in the company's professional hierarchy, I had more contact with beginner consultants than with managers and other executives.

Secondly, I think that my experience as an employee partner, my feelings during this period, and the way of life I adopted constitute important parts of this research. I realised that a consulting job is intense not only for the employees, but also for the people surrounding them. When my partner started his new job, I immediately felt myself to be in competition with his employer, because the long working hours, frequent travel, numerous after-work events, and new norms, values, and expectations imposed on him by the company forced us both to transform our daily lives. I experienced this situation negatively at first and making it a research subject helped me to deal with it. Instead of feeling excluded and foolish, I could take an active part in this experience and even benefit from it. Moreover, our situation greatly improved after he was posted with a client in Basel, where I was already working, since it enabled us to stay together in hotels sponsored by his employer. In addition to providing us with more time together, this experience introduced me to the "expat" life of consultants on assignments (I use the term "expat" here because that is the way my partner's colleagues informally referred to themselves during this time). Despite my peculiar position, I think that my presence among this group of consultants was accepted partly because many of them would have liked to spend more time with their partners as well.

My situated position thus made me particularly aware of the impact that a consulting position can have on a person's private life. Moreover, it enabled me to directly observe the daily organisation of work and mobility outside of official working hours. If confidentiality rules prevented me from analysing the content of my partner's assignments in details, my research highlights important aspects of a consultant's job by focusing on the connections between professional and private life. The analysis also reflects my critical questioning during this time about why consultants exist in the first place.

4.2.1 Constructing an Elite Status

Since its creation in the 1930s, management consulting has become a highly respected profession associated with expertise, knowledge, and success (McKenna, 2006; Skovgaard Smith, 2013). According to Christopher McKenna – the author of a detailed book on the history of management consulting – consultants have contributed to restructuring most of today's largest corporations and have also gained crucial influence among governments and non-profit organisations. By the end of the twentieth century, this profession had become the top career choice for business school graduates in Europe and America (2006, p. 4). The main advantages

associated with management consulting are potentially high salaries, elite status, and access to a competitive world that can lead to valuable corporate experience and rapid career advancement.

In Switzerland, the influence of management consulting started during the 1980s. Mach and his co-authors (Mach et al., 2011) write that revenues from consulting in Switzerland grew by 12 times over 20 years, reaching 1.2 billion Swiss francs in 2001. Similarly, the market shares of the largest consulting firms in Switzerland increased from 55% to 76% between 1986 and 2006. This evolution coincided with a process of intense internationalisation in the Swiss economy. While 15 of the 20 largest consulting firms were of Swiss origin in the mid-1980s, this trend was reversed by 2007 with only four Swiss consulting firms left, the rest being predominantly of US origin. American consulting firms, in particular McKinsey & Company, contributed to restructuring many Swiss companies, including Nestlé, Sandoz,[18] and UBS. These firms encouraged companies to adopt shareholder value principles by reducing staff and distributing profits to shareholders rather than investing them in the company (Mach et al., 2011, p. 94).

The success of the management consulting business model – which consists of selling external expertise for identifying organisational problems and proposing changes and solutions – has puzzled many authors (e.g. Armbrüster, 2004; Skovgaard Smith, 2013). The economist Robin Hanson (2012) summarises the issue with the following words:

> The puzzle is why firms pay huge sums to big-name consulting firms, when their advice comes from kids fresh out of college, who spend only a few months studying an industry they previously knew nothing about. How could such quick-made advice from ignorant recent grads be worth millions? Why don't firms just ask their own internal recent college grads?

Interestingly, leading consulting firms' approach to recruiting their employees strongly contrasts with the practices of other firms (Armbrüster, 2004). Rather than looking for experienced workers whose skills exactly fit the needs of a specific position, consulting firms prefer young graduates from top universities who can easily adapt to a variety of tasks. Of course, this choice follows an economic rationality – younger employees are less expensive than more senior and experienced ones – and also corresponds to the profession's requirements, as consultants constantly need to move from client to client and from task to task. However, this profile of multitasking consultants conflicts with the image of an expert whose value is built upon his or her experience, and it seems illogical that client companies would pay huge amounts of money for the advice of such young professionals. This paradox leads us to the question of the construction of consultants' value.

Most authors answer this question by pointing to the symbolic dimension of management consulting, which derives from both the prestige associated with leading consulting firms and the external position of consultants to client firms (Armbrüster, 2004; Hanson, 2012; McKenna, 2006; Skovgaard Smith, 2013). On

[18] Sandoz merged with Ciba-Geigy in 1996 to become Novartis. I must specify that, despite my name, I have no connection with this branch of the Sandoz family.

the one hand, prestige rests on various markers that signal elite status, such as highly selective recruitment practices (Armbrüster, 2004), the active promotion of professional norms and values (McKenna, 2006), the cultivation of a mystique about consultants' concrete activities (Skovgaard Smith, 2013), the presence of many (former) consultants in influential positions,[19] and the display of success markers such as visible corporate buildings and luxurious business events. On the other hand, external status enables consultants to act as "knowledge brokers" (McKenna, 2006, p. 16) who can transfer "solutions" and innovation from one firm to the other, while maintaining an impartial position. This contributes to enhancing their legitimacy for the client firm. Christopher McKenna insists on the liability dimension, arguing that consultants have become central actors for CEOs to legitimise their management decisions and protect themselves in case of legal action. Irene Skovgaard Smith uses anthropological theories about magic to explain the mechanisms of consultants' influence within companies. She argues that organisational members tend to attribute particular abilities to consultants due to the fact that they see them as both "extremely skilled" and "neutral" with regard to internal conflicts. This position enables consultants to take sides in favour of certain changes and to rally opponents to their opinion since their approach is perceived as rational and unbiased.

To explore the question of consultants' value further, I would like to analyse some of the strategies on which the "elite" status of consultants relies. In particular, I consider the question of recruitment to be central. Associated with this is a specific perception about the value of "talent" in businesses, which offers interesting insights into our discussion about skills and competition. To begin, I will tell the story of a young man who was hired as a consultant at one of the world's largest service firms.

4.2.2 Portrait: The Early Career of a Management Consultant

Marco[20] was 24 when he started working for a management consulting company. Swiss and Swedish by nationality, he grew up in a middle-class family in these two countries. His father was a self-employed translator, his mother a secondary school teacher. After graduating with excellent marks in bioengineering at a leading Swiss university, he worked for a year through an agency as a temporary worker in a life sciences company. He was then recommended for a business analyst position at a management consulting firm by a friend who was finishing his studies at the same university. This friend was doing an internship at this company after having been recruited at a job fair on the university campus. He forwarded Marco's CV to a manager who invited him to an interview. After this encounter, the manager enrolled him in the firm's official selection process.

[19] For instance, the renowned management consulting firm McKinsey & Company had produced more CEOs than General Electric (one of the world's largest corporations at that time) by 1999. Moreover, former consultants from McKinsey ran Morgan Stanley, American Express, IBM, Polaroid, and Delta Airlines, among others (Colvin, 1999; quoted in McKenna, 2006, p. 4).

[20] Research participants' names have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

As part of this selection process, Marco completed an online assessment which included a maths and English test, followed by a simulation where he had to work with an interactive mailbox. The simulation involved answering emails, delegating tasks, and taking quick decisions based on limited information. He was then invited for a one-day evaluation with several other candidates, where his ability to solve and present case studies both in a group and alone was evaluated by a team of senior consultants. His social skills and general behaviour were also evaluated through interviews. At the end of the day, a consultant informed him that he had succeeded and would soon receive an employment contract.

On his 1st day, Marco received a laptop, a backpack, and an account on the company's intranet. He then immediately started to work under the supervision of the manager who had first interviewed him. Although he was officially based in Geneva, he did not have a permanent work space there and almost always worked at clients' offices, at home, or while travelling. From the beginning, it was clear that Marco was not supposed to record the amount time he spent working, and that he was expected to be available outside official office hours. He was also constantly invited to after-work parties and other networking events. In the beginning, his manager mainly asked him to work on administrative tasks and PowerPoint presentations. She also gave him time to learn to use new software and to attend training offered by his employer. In fact, Marco received a checklist of tasks that he was expected to complete during his 1st year of employment. Interestingly, the checklist included meeting colleagues from other departments and attending social events in addition to tasks related directly to his consulting work.

During his 1st year, Marco worked for six clients based in the Lake Geneva region, alternating between them for periods ranging from 1 day to 3 months. His main assignment involved helping his manager develop projects for potential clients, but if this client was not paying them yet, he was regularly assigned to more profitable projects for short periods. Some of his tasks were very repetitive, others more challenging. Apart from his computer skills, he used little of the technical knowledge acquired during his studies although he did learn a lot about business, marketing, and communication. As time went by, he was given more responsibilities and possibilities to interact directly with clients.

At the end of his 1st year, Marco was evaluated based on both the amount of revenue that he had generated for the company and on reviews by his colleagues and superiors. In fact, all the employees at his hierarchical level were evaluated and ranked according to their performance. Those who "outperformed expectations" received a higher bonus than those who "reached expectations", and it was made clear to everyone that those who did not meet expectations should either improve quickly or find another job. In fact, Marco realised that a large number of people who had started around the same time as himself had already left the company. For his part, he was promoted from business analyst to consultant and his salary increased accordingly.

During his 2nd year of employment, Marco was assigned to a data management project in Northern Switzerland at the headquarters of a multinational company. This time he was not sent to temporarily fill a gap; he was "sold" to the client for his

technical skills as part of a team of eight employees from his company. In fact, the client firm was undergoing an important transformation and about 150–200 consultants from Marco's company, divided into several teams, had been hired to carry out various projects, with about 30 people coming from another branch based in England. Most of them – including Marco – lived in hotels during the week and travelled home for the weekend. Marco estimated that his team cost the client about 10,000 Swiss francs (8800 euros) per day. Interestingly, even though the project eventually ran for more than 2 years, the team always regarded it as temporary and the contracts with the client had to be renewed every 3 months, meaning that Marco was never certain for how long he would continue to work for this client.

Marco learnt a lot on the job and quickly took the technical lead in the project. In addition to his own team, he was in daily contact with a firm in India that was in charge of processing data for the client company. He also collaborated with a team in Argentina from one of the branches of the consulting company and with several teams belonging to the client company in the US, Ukraine, Brazil, and France among others. Even though he travelled less than other members of his team, his specific tasks led him to visit the client's European branches for business trips that usually lasted 2 or 3 days. He was also sent to the US to develop an interactive visualisation tool intended to improve the client's data management processes. His manager presented him to the client as having expertise in the necessary software because he had worked with it during a previous project; however, he had no experience of the IT tool involved and had to learn about it during the assignment. In fact, he considers himself lucky that no experienced user at the client firm supervised his work, because in his opinion he would not have been able to maintain his credibility as an expert.

When Marco decided to resign from this job to find something more stable, closer to home, and that better reflected his values, he had just been promoted to the position of senior consultant. He was still working on the same restructuring project, even though almost all of his team members had been replaced, especially those lower down in the hierarchy. Resigning was not difficult, since his superiors were used to constant change in their teams. They all reacted supportively, letting him know that he would be welcome to come back if he wanted to. Although finding a position that met his expectations was not as easy as he had thought, Marco was able to start an interesting new job 4 months after having resigned from the previous one. Today, he considers his experience as a consultant enriching, but he is also happy to have found more stability with his new job.

4.2.3 Recruiting Consultants

Marco's story illustrates several interesting aspects of management consultants' careers and their relationships with clients. I will focus on the recruitment process, which plays an important role in the construction of consulting firms' reputations. Associated with this process are the marketing and communication strategies that

consulting firms use to attract candidates, as well as the evaluation of consultants' work, which contributes to continual on-the-job selection.

Marco decided to apply for the position after his friend suggested recommending him. However, Marco already knew about this firm and about its competitors, because management consulting firms were in general very visible on his university campus. They regularly participated in job fairs, sponsored events, and offered special workshops to inform potential candidates about careers in consulting. In his study on the recruitment process of management consultants, Armbrüster (2004) notes that targeted marketing on the campuses of leading universities and business schools is a distinct strategy of management consulting firms. This practice enables them both to attract and select a large number of candidates who correspond with their definition of talent while also increasing their rejection rate, which is one of the figures used to legitimise the quality of their recruitment process to clients (Franck & Pudack, 2000). This tactic is one of the central tools that management consulting companies use to construct elite status.

According to Armbrüster and Schmolze (1999), nearly all top-tier consulting firms rely on case study interviews for selecting employees. Interestingly, this method contrasts strongly with the selection practices of other industries and service sectors that recruit university graduates. While the case study interview was first introduced by McKinsey & Company in the 1980s and was directly inspired by exercises at the Harvard Business School, other firms rely on more recent selection techniques developed by psychologists and human resources specialists. Moreover, in most consulting firms, managers with little training in staff recruitment supervise the selection of candidates, while many other firms delegate this task to specialists. In this context, Armbrüster reasonably asks how consulting firms manage to legitimise the quality of their recruitment processes if they use outdated methods and untrained assessors (Armbrüster, 2004, pp. 1249–1251).

Armbrüster calls attention to the signalling effect of such processes, as well as to the subjectification of consulting staff to a specific rationality model. On the one hand, the distinctive recruitment procedure of consulting companies distinguishes them from their clients by signalling their focus on specific skills, values, and success models. In particular, the Harvard Business School case studies symbolise elite business training, associated with quantitative analytical skills and data-driven objectivity. On the other hand, even though the recruitment process only partially tests the concrete competences that consultants actually need, it enables the selection of people who agree to master and display a specific type of behaviour. To quote Armbrüster, "Consulting firms hire those individuals who best correspond to the expected form of information processing and frameworks set by the interviewers" (p. 1261).

My research suggests that consulting firms rely to a large degree on universities and business schools for preselecting candidates. Excellent grades serve as an indicator of candidates' ability to learn, whereas parallel engagements signal a willingness to juggle multiple activities and assume responsibility for projects. At the same time, these criteria contribute to the social selection of candidates (Bourdieu, 1966).

The reputation of the schools in which candidates have studied is for instance central in signalling conformity to a specific and culturally situated model of excellence. Preparation for the case study interview also serves as an indicator of both the candidate's motivation and their readiness to conform to the firm's requirements. These various elements contribute to a selection of candidates based not only on skills, but also on social origin.

In fact, consulting firms' recruitment processes are subject to important investments, which also contribute to their notoriety. For instance, there are specific preparation booklets and online resources for graduates considering a career in consulting (e.g. Cheng, 2012; Consultingcase101, 2017; Cosentino, 2009). There are also clubs on university campuses whose explicit goal is to help their members enter a consulting firm (e.g. Wharton Consulting Club, EPFL Consulting Society, ETH and University of Basel Graduate Consulting Club). Even though Marco was able to enter the firm without much preparation, I met people who had trained for months for the interview. For many of them, consulting represented a dream job and a life objective. Consulting firms have thus managed to attain the status of an ideal profession within the social milieus that they target, and continue to invest considerable resources into attracting motivated candidates. These investments not only contribute to their reputation but also ensure the constant renewal of applicants.

A second interesting aspect is the fact that the selection process does not end with recruitment. On the contrary, Marco's experience shows that junior consultants are constantly evaluated, and the fact that so many of them resign during their 1st months of employment indicates a strict filtering process, which involves both self-selection and selection by the firm. This process relies to a large extent on employees' ability to handle the stress and uncertainties associated with long working hours, constant change, and high-performance requirements. It also depends on their ability to get assigned to projects and to generate revenue. For instance, Marco had to be paid by clients 80% of his working time in order to reach his performance assessment objectives. In this sense, Armbrüster's argument that the role of recruitment processes in consulting firms is more to signal excellence than to test actual competences seems accurate. Indeed, the actual selection of candidates happens largely before and after the official case study interview, through the evaluation of both educational achievement and on-the-job performance. Moreover, the fact that major consulting firms do not have difficulty attracting candidates means that they can afford to "wear down" their younger recruits by asking for as much work as possible until they resign and are replaced by new candidates. In this sense, the system relies on the constant selection and replacement of less efficient employees.

In a series of short videos used at Marco's company to train new employees, the firm's directors and partners define what makes a good consultant from their perspective. Interestingly, their main focus is on social skills and behavioural aspects, including curiosity, empathy, humour, and accountability. They also highlight the importance of getting out of one's comfort zone, experimenting, thinking outside the box, continually learning, and seizing opportunities. It is considered crucial that candidates are able to work in a team, take initiative, anticipate the needs and desires

of superiors, and develop a trusting relationship with clients. Furthermore, a good consultant should be flexible, passionate, and always aim for excellence. Technical skills and subject-specific knowledge are never mentioned in these videos. Consultants are not defined by their existing knowledge but by their ability to learn and adapt. The fact that they are smart is presented as obvious, due to their education and presence in the firm. In contrast, social competences are presented as a main marker of success.

Rather than subject-specific experts, consultants construct themselves as smart and talented people who can adapt and learn quickly. Because of the selectivity of this performance-oriented environment, remaining part of the firm becomes a proof of excellence and is regularly rewarded through bonuses and promotions. I noticed during my field research that many consultants tend to disparage expertise built on formal training. If elite education is necessary to enter the job, expertise is conceived as the product of concrete work. In terms of this logic, the value of an employee directly depends on their resilience to the harsh work conditions and on the revenue they generate through projects. However, this perspective also tends to naturalise socially inherited attributes by presenting them as markers of a person's hard work rather than as the result of a specific type of education and background.

Of course, if the representation of consultants as non-specialised "fast learners" is transmitted within the firm, it needs to be nuanced when communicated to clients. In most cases, managers sell "experts" to carry out specific projects. Marco's story shows that this purported expertise is sometimes tenuous, and it is probable that clients are – at least to some extent – aware that the young consultants working for them may not be as experienced as promised. Yet I argue that expertise and prestige are not the only reason for firms to employ consultants. Even though the elitist flair of consulting firms certainly contributes to their success, client firms are not as naïve as certain authors argue when it comes to symbolic aspects. My field research suggests that beyond legitimacy and knowledge, consultants also provide flexible work, and this characteristic is a central reason for firms to hire them.

4.2.4 Providing Flexible Labour

A manager in the banking sector explained to me that one of the reasons he employed consultants was to immediately have an operational team without spending money on hiring, since members of a consulting team can be easily replaced if they are not as efficient as expected or if the needs of the project change. Hence, even if consultants are more expensive than internal employees in terms of hourly wages, their cost can be compensated by savings in terms of time investment, social security costs, and efficiency.

This attitude is more reminiscent of temporary staffing agencies than elite consultancies specialising in strategy management. Nevertheless, my field research indicates that the work of consultants involves delivering not only strategy plans but also concrete implementation products. In this regard, the company that I investigated might differ from other firms strictly specialising in business evaluation and

planning, the epitome of which is McKinsey & Company. Nevertheless, my case study focused on one of the largest and fastest-growing consultancies in the world. Moreover, I noticed a broader tendency in large consultancies to diversify services. If the McKinsey model has influenced contemporary representations of management consulting, this model encompasses only a small part of the profession's current diversity. Coming back to Marco's example, his job was called management consulting because his managers negotiated directly with the executive management of client firms. In practice, however, his activities often consisted of delivering products that internal employees might just as well have delivered.

Companies thus employ consultants for all kinds of tasks. For instance, I heard one consultant complaining about having spent 6 h copy-pasting information from one file to another, and another laughing at having been briefly appointed to an interior decoration project. At a time when Swiss banks were trying to avoid penalties from the US government, many consultants were employed to check transactions with certain suspicious clients and to flag dubious activities for specialised lawyers. In these cases, firms were not paying for consultants' knowledge or expertise but for their ability to be immediately operational and subsequently easily dismissed.[21] Marco, for example, related an experience where he was suddenly told – in the middle of the work day – to collect his belongings and leave the building in which he had been working for weeks because the client had unexpectedly decided to cancel the project.

These observations highlight an interesting point: if consulting companies promote adaptation rather than specialisation, they simultaneously support the "finding the right person" logic in client companies by providing them with the skills they want at the time they want and for the duration they want. In this sense, consultancies assume the task of selecting, training, and moving workers in the place of client companies. Furthermore, they enable their clients to minimise the risks of hiring by offering easily replaceable workers. Hence, the value of consulting companies not only derives from their workers but also from their infrastructure, which enables them to meet demands quickly, mobilise operational workers, and offer guarantees of success in case of problems or unexpected changes. In the next section, I expand on the issue of mobility management in consulting companies because it plays a central role in their functionality and business success.

4.2.5 Managing Mobility Infrastructures

The flexibility of consultants relies on a series of elements (provided by client firms) that constitutes a "mobility infrastructure" (see Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) which enables consulting firms to constantly adapt to their clients' demands and move

[21] In these projects, banks hire consultants partly because of their external status – which may be necessary from a legal perspective – but also because of the project's size and a lack of available professional auditors. In several cases, the consulting firm had to "borrow" teams from other branches (e.g. from France and the UK) to meet the client's demand.

quickly from project to project. The example of Marco's firm highlights several important components of this infrastructure.

First, the multinational yet decentralised structure of the company enables the rapid mobilisation of people. Most branches in the company I studied are structured according to national territories (e.g. the French branch, the Argentinian branch) and enjoy considerable autonomy. Some branches are subdivided between two countries. This is the case in the Swiss division, which forms a branch together with another European country. Because of this particularity, employees from both divisions have regular occasions to meet, for instance during joint training. Foreign employees are often sent to work on projects in Switzerland and vice versa. This structure enables the company managers to access a large stock of workers and to mobilise them quickly according to the clients' demands. Marco's restructuring project is a perfect example: although 150–200 consultants were continuously present at the client's headquarters, the individuals changed according to the project's needs. Because the resources of the Swiss division were not sufficient, many consultants were sent from other countries to complement the teams. The company even hired independent consultants from abroad in some cases, or consultants from other companies when their own human resources were no longer sufficient. In addition, Marco's team regularly collaborated with branches of the company in countries where their client also had branches. In this way, they were able to negotiate in person with the managers at client headquarters while at the same time offering international implementation support through their colleagues based in other countries.

This mode of working necessitates an involvement with national immigration regulations. For instance, I met a consultant who was in charge of making sure that foreign consultants had the necessary authorisation for working in Switzerland on a specific project that involved international mobility. Although European consultants can enter the country freely, they still need authorisation to work as foreign service providers. However, they do not always need to deal with this administrative paperwork, in particular when they come for a few days only. Moreover, the distinction between business trips – which do not require a work permit – and short-term work – which does – is often unclear. At the same time, the owners of the company are concerned about their reputation, in particular because they also offer global mobility services and present the firm's employees as field experts. Therefore, when local immigration authorities increased their controls and imposed fines on people working without authorisation, the managers reacted quickly by demanding a list of foreign employees and appointing a consultant to check their status. However, this person was trained as an engineer and had no experience in migration issues, so was forced to learn on the job. This example illustrates the flexibility and impressive adaptive capacity of consulting firms, which often relies on last-minute bricolages and the employees' engagement.

Equipment and materials constitute other important elements. Digital technology such as laptops and smartphones ensure that consultants are constantly reachable, can work from almost anywhere, and can move quickly from one client to another. In Marco's firm, consultants use an online communication system to contact each

other. At the end of his 1st day of employment, Marco's manager contacted him in the evening to make sure that he was reachable through this system at home, which shows the importance of constant connectedness. This system also fulfils a social control function since it openly displays when and for how long each consultant is working daily. In the morning, Marco often checked to see at what time of the night his colleagues had gone offline. He also signalled his own assiduity through this system, for instance by connecting for a final time just before bed. Consultants can also access the company's intranet from their laptop or home computers, where a huge number of employee resources and relevant data are stored, enabling collective knowledge to be conserved and recycled within the firm. One consultant mentioned in this regard: "You rarely start from nothing in a project" (personal communication, 6 November 2015).

In addition to these tools, a relatively non-bureaucratic expense system enables the working costs of mobility to be kept to a minimum. In general, administrative tasks are simplified and are the responsibility of consultants. Together with their equipment, consultants also receive a credit card which they use for (usually first-class) transportation and accommodation. They can also use the loyalty point systems offered by many hotels and airlines to finance their personal holidays. Up to a certain limit, the company accepts these expenses without question. By experiencing some of these advantages, I observed in myself and others the fascination associated with this kind of "global nomad" lifestyle. In fact, comparing notes on different hotels and loyalty systems was a favourite topic of discussion among the younger consultants whom I met regularly and for whom these advantages were as new as they were for me. In addition, consultants receive per diems. This tax-exempt compensation can represent more than 10% of a consultant's salary and constitutes an interesting gain. Of course, in most cases expenses and compensations are included in the rates invoiced to clients. Consequently, the clients bear most of the monetary costs associated with mobility, but the consultants put in the time and effort of organising business trips, often outside of official working hours. In this sense, the company offers their employees a trade-off between a relatively luxurious yet often exhausting lifestyle.

Despite the employees' constant mobility, a clear hierarchical structure and performance tracking system enable cohesion and self-discipline to be maintained within the firm. The work is generally structured in the form of projects managed by the people who secured the contract with the client. Less experienced employees navigate between projects according to immediate needs. In addition to the various ranks that signal different levels of responsibility, junior consultants usually have a counsellor and sometimes a mentor. Even if they rarely meet in person, this ensures a certain stability and security since consultants always have support in case of doubt or a problem. Each employee is also part of a broader team of people with similar projects and activities, whom they meet regularly at social events. In this way, each employee is linked to others through clear hierarchical and work relations, and the firm invests considerable resources in organising internal networking events. Moreover, self-discipline is fostered through the constant evaluation of employees at all hierarchical levels and through the definition of clear objectives. In

particular, the quantitative evaluation of employees relies on an online internal management system that details projects and working hours. This system not only enables the firm to invoice clients according to the services provided but also to track the employees' profitability by indicating their costs and benefits with precision. Furthermore, the annual assessment process is an occasion for employees to receive feedback from both superiors and colleagues, who compare achievements and set new objectives. This process directly contributes to the transmission of norms, expectations, and values within the firm.

Besides this organisational structure, the internal staffing system ensures that consultants get paid as often as possible. In most cases, staffing happens through personal contacts. For this reason, knowing people within the company and making sure that one's work is noticed by superiors is extremely important. Sometimes, the people who secure a contract with a client ask for certain employees to be part of a project team. At other times, the company owners – who are generally responsible for several teams and projects at the same time – recommend people who made a good impression. While in the beginning employees are largely interchangeable, their challenge is to progressively distinguish themselves through their specific competences and expertise. This increases their chances of being appointed to interesting projects and their ability to negotiate working conditions – for instance, the possibility of working closer to home or being promoted more quickly. It also helps managers to select the people they need for certain projects. In addition to staffing through personal contacts, there are people in charge of matching available consultants with projects. They have access to information about employees' current working situations, ranks, and areas of expertise. Based on this, they can identify employees who are not currently working and assign them to projects, sometimes for a few hours only. In the case I studied, one person was in charge of staffing about 250 employees.

Ongoing training is also important for the firm to provide clients with adequately skilled workers, and an important part of this training happens on the job. By constantly moving from firm to firm, consultants get a good overview of which skills are relevant in the current job market and can try to acquire them through observation, collaboration, and online learning. In addition, managers regularly organise presentations on new tools that consultants can then propose to their clients. Finally, the firm sponsors a large number of internal and external training opportunities. While some are compulsory, others can be chosen freely by employees according to their interests and specialisation. In fact, I observed that the firm finances many expensive internationally recognised certifications – for instance in accounting and IT project management – and the possibility of attending such training is highly valued by employees, even if part of the studying usually happens in their free time.

Finally, the readiness of employees to accept the norms and lifestyle of consulting contributes to their mobility and flexibility. In general, profit overrides personal preferences, meaning that employees need to be ready to move to where the client pays most. Sometimes, these moves are more difficult to accept. For instance, several of the consultants I met in Basel came from Geneva, and they regularly com-

plained about the fact that after the majority of the Geneva team had been sent to Basel, a team from Paris was sent to Geneva because there were not enough employees. However, I never saw them express this discontent in front of their superiors. During my time with the Basel team, I noticed that although employees did not hesitate to display the proactive and motivated behaviour expected of them in front of their superiors, they were more critical in private. In this sense, resigning from the firm after a few months was a more common strategy than actively trying to change the firm's culture. The younger consultants I met generally perceived the job as a professional springboard – a time to define their aspirations more clearly, instead of a long-term career plan. Hence, they seemed to have accepted the idea that they were temporarily exchanging demanding work for money, status, and opportunities to learn.

4.2.6 The Mechanisms of Outsourcing

I have shown that success in consulting not only relies on employees' expertise and elite status, but is also related to the fact that clients seek to externalise some of their tasks. Even though consulting teams are expensive, the flexibility that they offer, as well as their ability to assign people to projects according to immediate needs, balances their costs. In this sense, the advantage of consultancies for client companies consists in their ability to mobilise efficient and skilled teams quickly and to take responsibility for the projects they are employed for.

Consulting companies sell the work of relatively young and inexperienced graduates at very high rates. By investing in training and mobility, they ensure that their employees acquire a variety of up-to-date skills, while maintaining an interesting balance between investment and costs. The economic model of consulting companies thus derives from several factors. First, although the salaries and promotion schemes are attractive for people at the beginning of their career, the fact that they hire mostly young people and manage to place them on projects is profitable for the firms. Second, although the monthly salary of consultants is high, the fact that most consultancies do not remunerate overtime hours and expect their employees to work more than 8 h a day means that the hourly salaries are in fact not so expensive for the firms. Third, although consultancies offer interesting training opportunities to their employees, the fact that most of the learning process happens on the job during projects remunerated by clients limits these investments. Finally, although consultancies need to organise and finance the mobility of their employees, the fact that they transfer part of this responsibility directly to them – by asking them to book their own hotels and transportation, for instance – also enables them to reduce costs.

In fact, I argue that the success of consulting is directly linked to the broader logic that I described at the beginning of this chapter: While many companies invest considerable resources in attracting people who they consider to be "right" for a given position, consulting firms offer young graduates the experience and training needed in order to access such positions. The trade-off between professional and

private life expected from employees has to be understood in this context. The consulting profession is attractive to graduates partly because most companies expect a higher level of qualifications and experience when hiring. Access to the labour market has in this way become more difficult for highly educated yet inexperienced workers, and consulting has become one of the most valid entry-level options for numerous ambitious graduates.

The success of consulting firms thus relies on their ability to remain attractive while requiring a lot from their employees in terms of flexibility and time. They balance the disadvantages of constant mobility with the advantages of ongoing learning and professional status. The structure of consulting work – which is based on constantly changing projects among clearly hierarchised teams – also enables this trade-off, because it minimises the importance of individuals, at least in the lower hierarchical positions. Losing employees after a few months or years was considered normal within Marco's firm and could even become an advantage when former employees become potential clients. Losing managers was wore problematic, because their personal and professional networks helped to secure new contracts. However, I noticed that many managers use a change of job as a way to advance their careers. When looking at the LinkedIn CVs of Marco's superiors, I observed that many had worked almost exclusively for the "Big Four" and that it was not uncommon to leave a company for a competitor and then return a few years later.

In this sense, the "war for talent" is actively practised by the main consulting companies, and poaching managers from direct competitors is a normal part of the system. Even if senior employees do not move between firms as often as others might, there is still a significant turnover among managers, directors, and partners, which is not necessarily negative since it enables the circulation and renewal of knowledge, expertise, and networks within the consulting sector.

Coming back to the question of externalisation, consulting firms take over the tasks of selecting, hiring, moving, and removing people for their clients. However, they also delegate the tasks of managing mobility – and the uncertainties associated with it – to their employees. In exchange, the employees gain access to salaries, training, experience, and professional status that they would probably not have received in other firms. Therefore, consulting firms gain smart, motivated, and flexible employees who they can sell at profitable rates to their clients, while the clients gain access to the skills they need, when they need them, and for the duration they need them. Of course, this system implies that workers with less experience have little other choice than to accept the trade-off between private and professional life if they want to access jobs that correspond to their ambitions. For their part, companies can continue to rely on mobility rather than training since consultancies – as well as other intermediaries – provide them with the flexible employees they need.

In this model, the frontiers between private and professional life become blurred. Differences between working and private time disappear, since even after leaving the office, employees can be called by their manager to finish a task, or they have to organise their next trip, or they are expected to attend an after-work party during which they will not only socialise but also extend their professional network. Being

a consultant's partner, I realised that this work environment did not correspond to my own expectations of family life. I also became more aware of the gendered dimension of consulting, which is tailored for people who either do not have family responsibilities or can delegate them to others.

Moreover, this work environment uses a definition of skills that goes beyond technical competences and knowledge. In fact, I think that this case study illustrates in an extreme way Urciuoli's (2008) observations on the notion of skills, since a consultant's personality, behaviour, social competences, and approach to tasks and clients are all crucial for their selection and evaluation. The value that is attributed to these behavioural traits relies on socially situated norms that lead to a strict selection of employees. Although consulting firms brand themselves as international and diverse, the way they select their employees, as well as the working environment they impose, restricts access to people with similar characteristics and values. In this context, class, gender, race, and age all contribute to structuring the social competences expected from the employees, as well as the representations of work and private life that they have to adopt in order to stay in consulting.

4.3 Mobility as the New Norm?

In this chapter, I highlighted the roles of several kinds of intermediaries that organise and enable the mobility of certain workers between firms, both within and across national borders. I questioned the idea that headhunters, recruitment agencies, and consultancies enable firms to access the "right" workers by analysing their other roles. My main objective was to show that the need for highly skilled migrants in companies results from a construction that directly involves these intermediaries, since their services influence how employers select, recruit, and retain workers.

First, I argued that headhunters not only connect workers with employers, but that they also contribute to constructing the kind of highly skilled workers that employers search for. In particular, the fact that headhunters poach candidates from competitors in the context of a perceived "war for talent" raises their value as intermediaries and constructs "good candidates" as already employed workers who can transfer specific working practices from one firm to the next.

Moreover, my research shows that professional recruiters influence the evaluation of their candidates by introducing them to employers in a favourable light and by preparing them for job interviews according to the firm's perceived expectations. The construction of a candidate's value thus also depends on the relationship between the employer and the headhunter, as well as on the strategies that the headhunter uses to introduce their candidates. Since recruitment agencies are increasingly used by companies in the current economic system, their role as "gatekeepers" (Faulconbridge et al., 2009) and co-constructors of "good candidates" (Findlay et al., 2013) should not be overlooked.

Finally, headhunters select candidates based on their perception of a firm's expectations. Because their profit depends on their candidates' success, they need to

minimise risks. For this reason, they evaluate candidates based on factors that often have nothing to do with qualifications and knowledge. Nationality, working situation, and subjective perceptions about a candidate's social characteristics play an important role. For instance, my research draws attention to the fact that headhunters often prefer to recruit candidates from neighbouring countries rather than Switzerland, because it is easier for them to attract workers who are employed in a country where the working conditions are less advantageous than Switzerland. At the same time, although some headhunters tend to reject non-EU/EFTA nationals because their admission to Switzerland might pose administrative difficulties, they may make exceptions for candidates whose nationality might constitute an added value. These observations highlight the impact of global power relations on labour market processes, as well as the importance of social characteristics in the definition of skills.

I then analysed another category of intermediaries involved in managing workers' mobility: relocation agencies, which may be involved at various stages of the mobility process. Relocation agents can motivate employees to accept new positions by informing them about local living conditions or calming fears about the personal impact of a relocation. Once a candidate has decided to move, agents can help mitigate the stress of relocation by negotiating with local authorities for work and residence permits, organising tax and insurance issues, and finding accommodation. After the move, relocation agents can facilitate economic and social integration in the local environment. This service particularly addresses the needs of accompanying partners, whose well-being is a source of concern for some companies to the extent that it can prevent economic losses associated with the early departure of employees.

By compensating some of the disadvantages associated with mobility and creating conditions in which mobility can become a socially valuable lifestyle, relocation agencies structure a particular labour mobility regime: they contribute to constructing mobility as an opportunity and a form of social promotion for workers and their families. Yet such services are not offered to all relocating workers, and my interviews show that those who receive support do not always experience relocation in a positive way. In addition, the current trend in multinational companies seems to be a reduction of investment in relocation support by replacing tailored services with fixed financial allocations, expatriation contracts with local contracts, and long-term stays with short-term business trips (Cartus, 2014; Davoine & Salamin, 2012; Le Temps, 2015). In this context, an employing company's approach to mobility, as well as the economic situation and definition of current needs, are often more important than a candidate's characteristics for determining the allocation of relocation support. Moreover, while corporate relocation support tends to be decreasing, the pressure on employees to be more mobile and flexible seems to be increasing.

In the second section, I analysed the role of a major consulting firm in providing expertise and labour to client companies. I argued that the success of such firms relies not only on their ability to provide expert knowledge but also on their ability to allocate workers flexibly to projects according to demand. In this sense, such service providers can be seen as an alternative to long-term employment: by assum-

ing the risks of recruitment and by offering a mobility infrastructure that enables the constant movement of workers from place to place, firm to firm, and project to project, consulting firms take over the role of both headhunters and relocation agencies. To do so, they need to attract motivated workers who accept an extremely mobile and flexible lifestyle. In compensation for demanding working conditions, they offer high salaries, rapid promotion pathways, elite status, and the possibility of learning from a variety of work situations and training opportunities. In a context where firms increasingly seek workers who are immediately effective, I argue that consulting firms propose a trade-off to young and ambitious workers by offering them the professional experience necessary to access prestigious positions while expecting complete engagement in the company in return, even if this means temporarily sacrificing their private lives.

These observations led me to several conclusions. First of all, both this chapter and the previous one highlighted that migration is not just an individual decision; it is strongly influenced by the strategies of governments and economic actors to attract, select, and retain those from whom they expect economic benefits. While governments focus on categories of socially acceptable immigrants, companies manage regimes of labour mobility that are partly independent from state immigration policies. Moving workers from place to place for increasingly shorter durations has become part of their function. At the same time, companies have an interest in retaining efficient employees and thus also set up integration strategies for them and their families. In these processes, governments remain important actors for defining the legal apparatus, spaces, and local conditions in which mobility and integration take place. Yet it is interesting to see that contrary to the recruitment of long-term foreign employees, the mobility of service workers and business travellers is generally absent from immigration statistics and is subject to different regulations (Sassen, 1995). Apart from work permits, the state exercises little control over this kind of mobility (Lavenex, 2007). Some people are thus able to avoid immigration regulations by becoming "mobile workers" instead of "immigrants". Migration intermediaries contribute to this transition by taking part of the responsibility for organising the moves of these workers.

I have shown how short-term labour mobility influences the norms and practices of recruitment processes within companies. I will further argue that short-term labour mobility influences not only the working conditions of highly qualified workers, but also the employment and migration opportunities for other categories of people. I borrow here Nina Glick Schiller and Noel Salazar's argument that the concept of "mobility regimes" enables the analysis of "the relationships between the privileged movements of some and the co-dependent but stigmatised and forbidden movement, migration and interconnection of the poor, powerless, exploited" (see also Franquesa, 2011; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 188).

The interconnection between different forms of mobility is nicely illustrated in the case of the hotels in which I stayed due to my experience accompanying my partner on short-term business trips. This category of hotels hosted mainly business travellers and consultants. Since their amenities included a reception, a bar, a restaurant, a gym, and a daily room-cleaning service, they employed a large staff of hotel

and restaurant professionals as well as more invisible workers such as electricians, plumbers, cleaners, kitchen workers, and so on. In fact, it was surprising to discover the number of hotels in the Basel area and the fact that they can be fully booked at certain times of the year.[22] Hence, business travel not only necessitates a mobility infrastructure within companies, but also transforms cities by creating a demand for a variety services intended to accommodate these travellers.

Although my research did not focus on this aspect, studies by other authors show that the hotel and restaurant sector in Switzerland employs significant numbers of immigrants. For instance, statistics from the Swiss Secretariat for Migration (SEM) indicate that a majority of EU/EFTA labour immigrants came to Switzerland to work in this sector in 2016 (State Secretariat for Migration, 2017). In this sense, the mobility of the highly skilled both generates and is made possible by a migration industry that employs significant numbers of people of different nationalities with different levels of skills and employment conditions (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013). Headhunters, relocation agents, administrative staff, and hotel employees all contribute to defining the conditions in which highly skilled mobility takes place. Moreover, my personal experience as a consultant's partner made me particularly aware of the fact that a highly mobile lifestyle forces workers to delegate part of their domestic tasks to others, commonly a spouse or other family member. This lifestyle thus fosters a clear division between professional and domestic tasks, which can contribute to reproducing stereotypical gender roles.

A third point concerns the issue of flexibility, and it is interesting to observe that the business model of all the intermediaries I mentioned in this chapter relies for a large part on this notion. Headhunters, relocation agents, and consultants need to be extremely flexible in order to respond to the demands of their clients. At the same time, their role primarily consists in reducing the costs associated with the mobility of their clients by connecting workers with jobs and by enabling smooth transitions from one position to the next. In this sense, client firms transfer some of the costs of mobility management to these intermediaries, which enables them to access workers that meet their immediate needs more easily. Yet this process also transforms the notion of "need". Intermediaries not only facilitate efficient matches between companies, jobs, and people, they also transform employers' expectations and practices by providing new options for hiring. This changes the norms of international corporate competition: access to flexible, highly skilled labour becomes a requirement, and a lack of access is redefined as a problem that needs an immediate solution. Hence, intermediaries not only respond to demand, but they also create it.

The last point that I would like to develop concerns the issue of flexibility at an individual level. The people working as intermediaries all insisted on the flexible nature of their jobs, either because they constantly need to move (in the case of consultants), or because they need to find candidates quickly and creatively who

[22] According to the Basel tourism office, the city and its surroundings include 9800 hotel rooms for a city of about 200,000 inhabitants. Finding a hotel during events such as Baselworld (an international watch and jewellery industry trade show) and Art Basel (an international art fair) is extremely difficult because the prices rise significantly, and rooms are booked months in advance.

correspond to an employing company's expectations (in the case of headhunters), or because they offer tailor-made services that need to be adapted to each new client and situation (in the case of relocation agents). Although these jobs can be very profitable, they also present many risks and necessitate the full commitment of the individuals concerned. Here I introduce the German concept of *Entgrenzung* as an interesting way to reflect further on this situation.

Entgrenzung interprets the transformations that have occurred in the labour market since the 1980s in Germany and other industrialised countries. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the transition from a communist to a capitalist system of labour encouraged many authors to reflect on the consequences of such transitions for workers (Jürgens & Voss, 2007). In short, Entgrenzung describes new forms of labour organisation that arise from the internationalisation of national economies and from a dissolution of borders within companies (Gottschall & Voss, 2005; Kratzer, 2003). These economic changes have created new requirements for employees, in particular with regard to the increasing importance of individual responsibility and flexibility in work processes. Some authors speak of a "subjectivisation of work" to describe situations in which employees are expected to adopt specific attitudes, values, and skills to suit corporate objectives and market logics (Jürgens & Voss, 2007). These transformations challenge the distinction between work and private life that was established during the industrial area through the definition of clear working and resting times. Entgrenzung thus implies the blurring of frontiers between work and private life and the increasing importance of economic processes in individuals' lives.

This concept shares many similarities with the *Cité par projets* developed by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (1999). Like Manuel Castells (1996), they argue that one of the main characteristics of our society is to be organised in networks. Those able to build on these networks to develop projects are considered successful and admired by their contemporaries. Valued characteristics include enthusiasm, flexibility, adaptability, autonomy, and employability. Yet, success in this system also involves detachment from material goods and from one's personality and values, since constant change from project to project forces a person to renounce both material and psychological stability.

Despite being careful not to overgeneralise these ideas about modern society, I think that they reflect to a certain extent the dynamics and value systems that I observed in different research fields. In particular, I find it interesting that some companies, while encouraging mobility, tend to outsource its costs directly to certain individuals. If being mobile and flexible can be a successful career strategy, as Boltanski and Chiapello suggest, it also risks becoming a *condition* of career success – a norm which may be difficult to avoid. For instance, one could argue that while 20 years ago companies needed to invest considerable resources in order to motivate candidates to expatriation, the idea that mobility and flexibility are intrinsic to a successful career has become so widespread that companies today have no trouble finding motivated workers who accept these conditions – despite the fact that they now receive less support and fewer advantages. In this way, mobility and flexibility are transformed from a voluntary, strategic decision into a prerequisite for

an increasing number of jobs. Of course, these observations concern mainly internationalised business sectors such as pharmaceuticals and IT, but I am sure that many of my academic colleagues will also recognise this trend in our field.

While some authors insist on the advantages of being mobile and consider mobility to be a form of capital (Dean, 2016; Kaufmann, Bergman, & Joye, 2004; Leivestad, 2016), I argue that both forced mobility and forced immobility can lead to difficult personal situations. In this sense, mobility and immobility are neither positive nor negative, but the freedom to choose one or the other constitutes a critical advantage. Hence, we should be careful not to fetishise these notions, but rather consider the range of opportunities that individuals have to reach their own aspirations.

To conclude, this chapter showed that besides state-related actors, private sector actors play an important role in structuring mobility towards, across, and within Switzerland. In a perceived "war for talent", various intermediaries have emerged to foster access to employment for mobile and flexible workers. By facilitating professional mobility, they transform perceptions of "needs" and "shortages" with respect to recruitment processes. Moreover, by connecting employees with employers, they create new expectations with regard to skills and qualifications. In this context, immediate efficiency has become a norm difficult to avoid. This situation complicates access to the labour market for people who do not correspond to employers' and intermediaries' preferences, and forces an acceptance of increasingly flexible working conditions.

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Chapter 5
Unequal Access to Support and Privileges

When we travel, we hold a physical document that tells us of our chosen destination. We hold a general wish and try to follow that path, but uncertain obstacles may meet us along the way. We cannot control the unexpected which continuously shapes our destination.

Chiharu Shiota, Accumulation: Searching for Destination, 2014–2016, *text accompanying a sculpture at Basel Art 2016*

This chapter focuses on the situation and experience of immigrants, and more specifically, on the support that they receive when they relocate to Switzerland. By analysing survey data and biographies, I examine the "resource environments" (Levitt, Lloyd, Mueller, & Viterna, 2015) that individuals moving under different circumstances have access to. In this way, I seek to further deconstruct the notion of "highly skilled migrants" by showing how different migration trajectories can lead to very different outcomes in terms of individuals' social positioning and opportunities, regardless of education level or professional experience.

Section 5.1 is based on a chapter written in collaboration with Fabian Santi for the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey book. See: Sandoz, L., Santi, F. (2019) Who Receives more Help? The Role of Employer Support in Migration Processes. In: Steiner I., Wanner P. (eds) Migrants and Expats: The Swiss Migration and Mobility Nexus. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. I wish to thank Fabian Santi for his support with the data analysis.

A modified version of Section 5.2 was published by Taylor and Francis on 24 July 2018. See: Sandoz, L. (2018). Understanding access to the labour market through migration channels. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (Published online: 24 Jul 2018), 1–20. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1502657. I also presented an earlier version in collaboration with Metka Hercog at the 24th World Congress of Political Science. See: Sandoz, L. (2016). Understanding Migration Policies from Migrants Perspective. 24th World Congress of Political Science, Poznán, 23–28 July 2016, http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/view/50601. The research design was developed in collaboration with Metka Hercog, who also conducted some of the interviews for this section. The analysis and writing were carried out entirely by the author.

L. Sandoz, *Mobilities of the Highly Skilled towards Switzerland*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21122-6_5

While several authors emphasise the importance of the interplay between individual stories and institutional structures in migration research (Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), few of them go so far as to compare various migration situations and institutional embeddedness. Most studies focus on one type of mobility (e.g. intra-company transfers, mobility through recruitment agencies, mobility through ethnic networks), thus limiting the possibilities to compare access to support between immigrants with different characteristics and migration reasons. Moreover, the research on migration intermediaries tends to focus either on high-level professionals moving within a company (Beaverstock, Faulconbridge, & Hall, 2010; Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, Hall, & Hewitson, 2009; Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015) or on immigrants moving under precarious conditions, sometimes on the margins of legality (Baird & Van Liempt, 2016; Salt & Stein, 1997). Other categories have received less attention, even though they constitute an important share of international migration flows. Finally, although an increasing number of refugees arriving in Europe tend to have a high level of education (Sandoz, 2016b), refugees are rarely the focus of studies on highly skilled migration, nor are "highly skilled migrants" the focus of studies on asylum (Sontag, 2018). Yet I argue that a comparison of contrasting cases enables a better understanding of the way migration situations structure different opportunities and obstacles for individuals. Such comparisons underscore the constructed nature of the categories used to describe immigrants because they show that these categories rely more on immigrants' institutional environments than on their individual characteristics.

Levitt et al. use the concept of "resource environment" to describe the social protection that mobile individuals can access based on their personal characteristics and support from both formal and informal institutions. According to these authors, people on the move rely on four main sources of support: support from states (which can include a person's country of origin and of residence, as well as supra-national institutions); support from profit-oriented actors (for instance employers and service agencies); support from third-sector actors (such as non-profit NGOs, associations, and networks); and support from individual social ties (relatives, friends etc.). Different individuals have access to different forms of support:

> An individual's resource environment would include all of the possible resources available to [the migrant] from the four potential sources of protection [the state, the market, the third sector, and individual social ties] based on his or her individual characteristics. These individual characteristics include his or her nation of origin, where he or she resides, the breadth and depth of his or her social networks, in addition to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, and education. (Levitt et al., 2015, p. 6)

One of the advantages of this concept is that it takes into account the complex relations between analytical levels (economic, legal, societal etc.) while maintaining an actor-centred perspective. It also highlights the important role played by institutions in individual trajectories. Finally, it enables a consideration of "how at least some individuals are embedded in transnational social fields, and how multiple state and non-state actors protect and provide for them" (p. 3). This concept thus brings

together several of the ideas developed so far and provides a framework for discussing the impact of intermediaries on immigrants' experiences and trajectories.

"Migration channel" is another interesting concept for analysing the interplay between intermediaries and immigrants. First developed by Allan Findlay (1990), who later explored specific case studies with co-authors (e.g. Findlay & Garrick, 1990; Findlay & Li, 1998; Findlay, McCollum, Shubin, Apsite, & Krisjane, 2013), this concept focuses on the role of private-sector actors in structuring migration opportunities for professionals in different labour markets. More recently, the term "migration channels" has been used extensively in the context of the so-called "migration crisis", as thousands of people try to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean, often dying on the way (Sandoz, 2016a). Various organisations, researchers, and activists have criticised the lack of protection for people who seek refuge in Europe, and have advocated for the creation of safe "migration channels" (Collett, Clewett, & Fratzke, 2016; European Commission, 2016; OHCHR, 2016). In this context, "channel" has come to refer to the legal pathways that regulate access to territories. The German term *Migrationskanal* also conveys the idea of migration opportunities structured by state policies (Panagiotidis, 2015; Parusel & Schneider, 2012). This concept thus reflects the impact that both private-sector actors and state policies and practices have on immigrants' trajectories.

In this chapter, I use the term migration channel in a broad sense to include all the different actors that Peggy Levitt and her co-authors mention in the construction of resource environments. I compare the situation of individuals moving under different circumstances in order to analyse the impact of these channels on their experiences. I define migration channels as mobility pathways structured by various actors (states, profit-oriented actors, third-sector actors, individual social ties) that provide access to specific resource environments. Of course, I am aware that each individual's mobility story is unique. However, I observe similarities in terms of the support that certain immigrants received from intermediaries, as well as the opportunities and obstacles they encountered. Speaking of migration channels thus enables further analysis of the role of intermediaries in the stories of the interviewees. My main question for this chapter is:

> How are support and privileges distributed among migrants, and how do they affect mobility experiences and trajectories?

5.1 A Statistical Approach to Relocation Support

The resource environment of immigrants relies to a large extent on the support that they can obtain from institutional actors and from their private social network (Levitt et al., 2015). Access to support, however, is unevenly distributed between groups. Among other variables, personal characteristics such as gender, nationality, race and class structure the way individuals are perceived by others, build their network, mobilise resources and develop strategies to solve their problems (Crenshaw, 1991).

I have already discussed in this book the idea that "immigrants" are typically represented as poor, ethnically marked low skilled people, while "expats" tend to be imagined as white, wealthy, highly skilled individuals who easily travel from one country to another according to their job (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Cranston, 2017; Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2006). I will now show that these stereotypical representations, although problematic in many respects, reflect nonetheless the global inequalities and power relations that currently structure migration processes.

This section uses data collected as part of the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey on recent immigrants from the main immigration countries in Switzerland to analyse differences in the way relocation support is distributed between immigrants. I build on the observation that relocation support not only facilitates adjustment to a new environment (Ravasi et al., 2015) but also motivates and enables a move (Groutsis, Van den Broek, & Harvey, 2015; Harvey, Groutsis, & Van den Broek, 2017; Van den Broek, Harvey, & Groutsis, 2016). Support is particularly important for the non-EU and non-EFTA nationals who want to migrate to Switzerland because the restrictive admission system limits access to residence permits for this category of people. Labour migrants from these countries can only be admitted if they are supported by an employer. In addition, candidates for family reunification need support from a family member with a right to stay in Switzerland (Amarelle & Nguyen, 2010). Analysing the role of support agents for recent migrants in Switzerland thus enables us to better understand how opportunities and obstacles to mobility and social inclusion are constructed.

I focus in particular on the support of employers because these actors have so far received little attention in migration research. Despite a huge body of literature on the impact of social ties on migration processes (Haug, 2008; Massey & España, 1987; Ryan, 2011), the important role of employers has so far been largely overlooked. Yet, Many countries, including Switzerland, currently use demand-driven systems and partly delegate the task of selecting migrants to employers (Chaloff & Lemaitre, 2009; Parsons, Rojon, Samanani, & Wettach, 2014). In these systems, the employers are responsible for applying for the admission of the candidates they want to hire, and they thus contribute to defining the "wanted" migrants who can obtain access to the national territory and labour market (Gelatt, 2017). Hence, examining the type of support that different groups of migrants receive from their employer is an interesting approach to assessing who obtains more-privileged access to migration in the context of a demand-driven system such as that of Switzerland. It indicates whom the employers are most willing to attract in spite of the administrative hurdles of the admission process. Furthermore, such an examination hints at who obtains smoother access to Swiss territory because the relocation support provided by employers also aims to facilitate transitions between places and to ease adjustment processes (Ravasi et al., 2015; Tissot, 2018).

The statistical analysis presented in this section shows that the employers who actively support the relocation of their (future) employees tend to prefer highly educated men from rich anglophone countries over highly educated women and

people from other countries. These findings highlight great differences in the kind of resource environment that immigrants can access depending on their personal characteristics. They add to the argument already developed in the previous chapter that, contrary to economistic discourses that conceive skills as marketable products (Urciuoli, 2008), representations of "highly skilled migrants" involve more than a simple evaluation of a person's competences. Beyond what a person can do, what a person is or looks like and the social, political and economic contexts in which this person moves influence the kind of resources and privileges that s/he can access. Moreover, the research stresses the central role of employers in structuring specific migration channels for some workers.

As already mentioned in the introductory part to this book, the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey was conducted during the autumn of 2016 and focused on people from German, French, Italian, English, Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries who arrived in Switzerland after June 2006. One of the main objectives of the survey was to include a sufficient number of highly educated immigrants to enable representative statistical analyses of their situation, while also enabling comparisons between and across education levels. Although the survey is not limited to highly educated people, it includes nationalities with a high share of immigrants with a tertiary-level diploma in order to ensure the presence of a sufficient number of respondents with a higher education among our data. All the respondents are foreign-born people who migrated to Switzerland as adults. The survey only includes holders of a resident permit (B), settlement permit (C), short-term permit (L), as well as diplomats and international civil servants. It excludes asylum seekers and temporarily admitted persons, mainly for practical reasons because the questionnaire was not adapted to their type of migration trajectory and life situation, and because this population was more difficult to reach. Nevertheless, I analyse the situation of people seeking protection in the second section of this chapter.[1]

Although supported by the ethnographic study, a quantitative analysis serves as the basis for the discussion in this section. To ensure the validity of my results I collaborated closely with a statistician, Fabian Santi, who coached me on methodological issues and created the tables that support my analysis. The survey is representative, meaning that it is weighted to represent the whole migrant population in Switzerland that is within the scope of the survey. The numbers and ratios presented are computed taking these weights into account. They thus represent the expected values based on the whole population within the scope of the survey.[2]

[1] A detailed description of the survey methodology and development is available in a report written by Ilka Steiner (2017).

[2] We applied chi-square tests of independence after re-weighting the data using normalised weights in order to confirm the relevance of the differences observed between groups. P-values are reported at the 5%, 1% or 0.1% level. Since the results of the statistical tests using this method are approximate, a conservative approach should be taken in evaluating the power of the statistical tests.

The analysis draws on two main sets of questions about forms and sources of support received by immigrants. Already existing surveys served as the basis for formulating the questions so as to enable comparisons. In the present case, several of the questions I used for this analysis are similar to those present in the survey conducted by Claudio Ravasi, Xavier Salamin and Eric Davoine about the relocation practices of multinational employees in Switzerland (Ravasi et al., 2015). The questions included:

When moving to Switzerland, did you receive any support in one of the following areas? (Multiple answers are possible)

- Allowance for or payment of moving costs
- Housing
- Dealing with administrative issues
- Allowance for or payment of language courses
- School/childcare
- Spouse/partner employment support
- Information about Switzerland
- Other support

From whom did you receive support? (Multiple answers are possible)

- Relatives in Switzerland
- Friends in Switzerland
- Business relations/colleagues in Switzerland
- Your employer
- A private institution (e.g. relocation agency)
- A public institution (e.g. federal, cantonal or communal administration)
- An online social media/website/blog
- Other[3]

The analysis enables me to discuss the impact of various actors on the relocation to Switzerland of recent immigrants. It complements the previous chapters by providing a broad and representative overview of the impact of market actors and personal contacts on relocation support, with a focus on the impact of employer support. Moreover, it helps situate my ethnographic data within a wider context. Based on the existing literature, on my ethnographic observations, and on a preliminary exploration of the survey data, I consider four main variables for analysing differences in terms of access to support between groups: education level, gender, nationality and professional sector. More specifically, I seek to understand which categories of people are better supported when they relocate to Switzerland. I start by describing the results of the analysis for each variable before discussing them in detail.

[3] The first question ("Did you receive any support in one of the following areas?") was asked to all the survey participants (5973 respondents). However, only the respondents who replied "yes" to at least one support category in the first question (60.1%) were asked the second question ("From whom did you receive support?"). Hence, we considered the 39.9% of filtered respondents as having replied "no" to the second question. Moreover, in the first question, the respondents had the choice between "yes", "no" and "not applicable" for each support category. A certain number of them chose "not applicable", in particular for the questions regarding school/childcare and spouse employment support. We assumed that they answered "not applicable" when they did not feel concerned by the question (e.g. because they had no children or partner) and we thus decided to recode these answers as "no".

5.1.1 *Important Variables*

Not all immigrants have access to relocation support when they come to Switzerland. In the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey, although a majority of the respondents declared that they had moved to Switzerland for professional reasons (61.6%), and more than half had obtained a job or a job offer in Switzerland before coming (52.2%), only a third reported support from an employer and nearly 40% reported no support at all. Table 5.1 shows that the employers nonetheless clearly constitute a major source of support for recent migrants in Switzerland. Respondents also relied on other actors to help organise a move, in particular personal contacts such as friends, relatives, and colleagues.

To understand better the effect of employers on relocation support, I compared people who had received support from an employer with people who had not. Table 5.2 shows that those who could rely on their employer had, in general, access to more services than those who relied on other sources of support, in particular with regard to financial support for organising their move, support for finding accommodation and dealing with administrative issues, allowances for language courses, and access to schooling or childcare. This first analysis shows that support from employers provides access to specific resources and services that are less available to immigrants who rely on other forms of support.

Table 5.1 General overview of the main sources of support received by immigrants to Switzerland, 2016

Did you receive any support in one of the following areas?	Percentage receiving support
Percentage declaring no support	39,9%
Information about Switzerland	39,6%
Dealing with administrative issues	31,6%
Housing	23,5%
Allowance for or payment of moving costs	17,6%
Spouse/partner employment support (among couples n=3957)	11,8%
School/childcare (among parents, n=3152)	11,5%
Allowance for or payment of language courses	10,8%
Other support	10,3%
From whom did you receive support?	**Percentage receiving support**
Your employer	32,3%
Friends in Switzerland	17,0%
Relatives in Switzerland	11,7%
Business relations/colleagues in Switzerland	11,6%
A public institution (e.g. federal, cantonal or communal admin.)	9,2%
An online social media/website/blog	7,6%
Other	5,4%
A private institution (e.g. relocation agency)	3,5%

Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author

Note: Few respondents mentioned private-sector institutions as a source of support. Support from relocation agencies and other private institutions, however, is often offered and financed by employers, so it is possible that some respondents who received such support mentioned their employer instead of an agency. Moreover, some employers use the services of external agents for various tasks (e.g. to obtain work authorisations from the state administration, to find an accommodation, to deal with insurance and tax issues), without the relocating employee necessarily knowing about it. Hence, it is difficult to quantify within the scope of this survey how much support really originated from private agencies

Table 5.2 Effect of employer support: comparison between immigrants who did and did not declare support from an employer, 2016

When moving to Switzerland, did you receive any support in one of the following areas?	Percent		P-value
Allowance for or payment of moving costs	47,9% 12,5%		<0.001 (X^2; N=3265)
Housing	53,0% 28,7%		<0.001 (X^2; N=3315)
Dealing with administrative issues	65,4% 41,5%		<0.001 (X^2; N=3440)
Allowance for or payment of language courses	29,8% 14,8%		<0.001 (X^2; N=2847)
School/childcare	20,6% 16,4%		<0.05 (X^2; N=2047)
Spouse/partner employment support	17,7% 26,0%		<0.001 (X^2; N=2474)
Information about Switzerland	68,9% 67,1%		- (X^2; N=3464)
Other support	23,5% 20,9%		- (X^2; N=2732)

Declaring support from their employer (can include other forms of support as well)

Declaring no support from their employer but received support from another source

Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author

Although these findings highlight the important role played by employers in providing relocation support, they also show that such support is not available to every immigrant. It is therefore important to understand whom this support prioritises and what other resources are available to people on the move.

A comparison between these findings and a study by Ravasi et al. (2015) – who focused exclusively on relocation services for employees offered by 12 multinational companies in the French-speaking part of Switzerland – suggests differences in terms of education level, professional sector, and types of companies. Support availability is indeed much higher in their study than in ours (financial support for moving costs was available to 94.1% of respondents in their study, against 17.6% in ours). This points to a significantly higher degree of relocation support in multinational companies, which encourages examining differences between specific professional sectors. Moreover, both my ethnographic observations and the literature in this field point to the effect of nationality and gender on selection processes within companies.

I thus propose analysing the differences in access to relocation support for various categories of immigrants according to education level, gender, nationality, and professional sector. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the potential effect of different variables in terms of descriptive statistical analyses. I then use a logistic regression model to test my hypothesis.

Table 5.3 Support received by immigrants from relatives and employers by level of education, 2016

What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed?	Percentage receiving support from relatives in Switzerland	Percentage receiving support from their employer
No formal educational qualification	36,5%	12,5%
Compulsory education	22,8%	11,8%
Higher secondary education not giving access to universities (or similar)	15,9%	16,0%
Vocational education and/or training	18,6%	18,9%
High school-leaving certificate giving access to universities (or similar)	13,5%	21,0%
Advanced technical and professional training	13,0%	28,1%
Bachelor or equivalent	10,1%	33,9%
Master or equivalent	5,9%	46,1%
PhD or equivalent	3,7%	52,8%

Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author

Education

The analysis of the impact of education level on access to relocation support depicts a clear trend. Table 5.3 shows that highly educated people are more often supported by their employer than less educated people, whereas less educated people receive more support from relatives in Switzerland.[4] These data indicate a stronger dependency of less educated immigrants on kinship networks, whereas highly educated people more often rely on professional networks. Further analysis shows that support from friends and colleagues, however, is evenly distributed between categories and indicates no clear correlation with education level.

Nonetheless, approximately 12% of respondents without any formal education or with only primary school education received some form of support from an employer. The majority of these are men from Portugal who work in the construction sector. This suggests a demand for non-specialised workers in some sectors as well as a willingness from employers to support their relocation.

Despite these few exceptions, the analysis clearly highlights the impact of education level on the type of support received. However, I will now demonstrate that this is not sufficient to explain all differences regarding the availability of mobility support. Gender and nationality in particular play a role that is partly independent of qualifications. Furthermore, the analysis based on professional sectors reveals differences that rely more on employers' recruitment practices than on the characteristics of relocating employees.

[4] For this section, given that I have to use the categories predefined by the survey, I chose to define highly educated people as people with either advanced technical and professional training or academic education. Less educated people are people with high school education, vocational training, or less.

Gender

Gender is without any doubt indispensable to the analysis of access to support from employers. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between differences that rely on structural factors and differences that rely on direct discrimination by employers.

Although many authors have noticed an increase in the number of female-led relocations and dual-career couples over the past decades (Brookfield, 2016; Crompton & Lyonette, 2006; Harvey, Napier, & Moeller, 2009; Salamin & Davoine, 2015), our survey data clearly show that the dominant model in Switzerland is that trailing spouses of relocating employees are usually women. Although both men and women reported professional reasons to be a main motivation for migrating to Switzerland, I observe that more men migrated for professional reasons (70.4% vs 50.4%), whereas more women migrated to accompany family (29.3% vs 7.5%). Moreover, 62.9% of men already had a job in Switzerland before migrating, compared to 38.5% of women.

Of course, this situation has implications for the type of support received by men and women. In fact, the data show that men received more support than women in all of the surveyed categories except for "spouse/partner employment support", "school/childcare", and "other forms of support". Women reported support from relatives in Switzerland more often than men (13.7% vs 10.2%), whereas men reported support from an employer more often than women (37% vs 26.4%).

These data clearly indicate the existence of structural gendered norms within heterosexual couples that prioritise the man's career. This points to the importance of the intersection between gender and relationship status for structuring access to relocation support. However, it says nothing about processes of direct discrimination by employers. In fact, the descriptive analysis shows no significant difference between single men and women reporting support from employers, suggesting an absence of gender-based discrimination in this regard (Table 5.4).

Nevertheless, the literature on gendered recruitment and skill valuation processes encourages further examination of potential discrimination towards women by employers. A recent study in Sweden showed that employers are reluctant to hire women who live a long distance from the workplace, whereas men in the same situ-

Table 5.4 Support received by immigrants from employers according to gender and relationship status, 2016

Did you receive support from your employer?	Yes		P-value
Married or in a relationship when coming to Switzerland	38,9% 23,7%		<0.001 (X^2; N=3973)
Not married or in a relationship when coming to Switzerland	33,5% 32,8%		- (X^2; N=1999)

Male
Female

Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author

ation encounter no such obstacles (Brandén, Bygren, & Gähler, 2018). In addition, many studies highlight the tendency of employers and other actors to evaluate skills differently depending upon whether they are stereotypically associated with men or women (Boucher, 2007; Daune-Richard, 2003; Jenson, 1991; Kofman, 2014; Phillips & Taylor, 1980; Steinberg, 1990).

I am thus particularly interested in observing the effect of gender on employers' relocation support in a regression model that controls for other important variables. I hypothesise a difference that is more strongly connected to the interaction between the relationship status and gender than with gender alone because a large part of the observed differences between men and women appears to rely on the interaction between relationship dynamics and structural gender norms. In light of the literature, however, I would not be surprised to observe differences that suggest more direct forms of discrimination towards women from employers.

Nationality

Opportunities to migrate, be recruited, and receive relocation support greatly vary amongst nationalities. One reason for this variation is the existence of national border regimes that discriminate between countries and regions. In Switzerland, the dual admission system that grants special rights to EU/EFTA citizens compared with citizens of the rest of the world contributes to structuring migration flows. On the one hand, people from non-EU and non-EFTA countries need special assistance from an employer if they want to come to Switzerland as labour migrants; on the other hand, this system encourages employers to prioritise recruitment from within EU/EFTA member states and only to attract specialists that they need the most from so-called third countries.

However, beyond immigration policies, the effect of social and economic processes on migrants of different nationalities must also be considered. The transferability of skills is never neutral because it reflects power relations at a global level that enable characteristics associated with certain regions and countries to be perceived as internationally more valuable than others (Sommer, 2016; Wagner & Reau, 2015). For instance, the privileged position of the English language in international environments reflects the leading economic and cultural influence of the United States (Wagner, 1998).

Consistent with this observation, the descriptive analysis of our survey data presented in Fig. 5.1 clearly shows that nationals from anglophone countries and Switzerland's neighbouring countries generally receive more support from employers than people from less economically powerful countries. This does not mean that the latter receive no support at all, but they tend to receive it more from kinship networks in Switzerland than from employers. At the same time, I observe that the recent emergence of certain developing countries as major global economic players and workforce providers in specific fields – for instance, science and information technologies in India (Hercog, 2014; Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 2017; Xiang, 2007) – has produced new groups of well-supported profes-

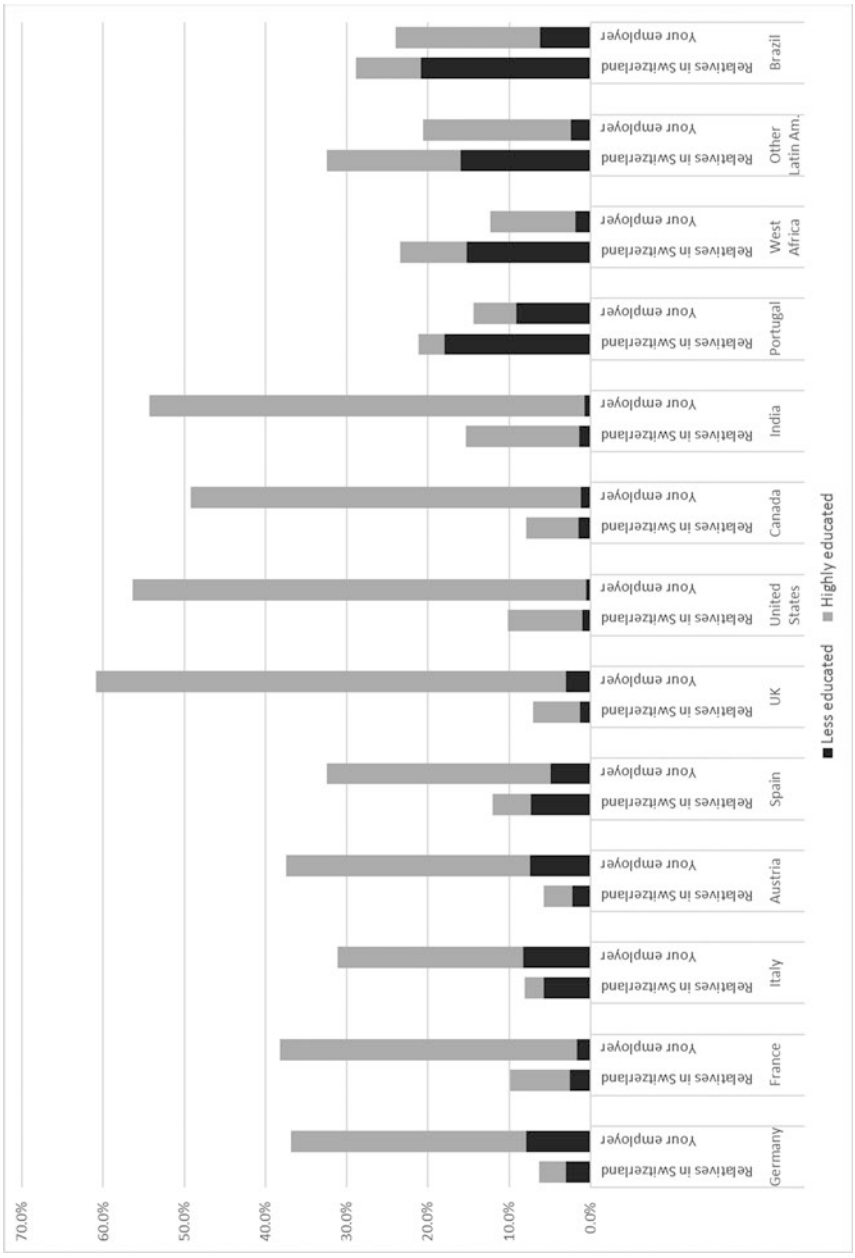

Fig. 5.1 Support received by immigrants from relatives and employers by level of education and nationality, 2016. (Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Figure designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author)

sionals moving to Switzerland. In this sense, the strict Swiss admission system for third-country nationals interacts with economic dynamics and global power relations to create new opportunities for supporting migrants of different nationalities.

The logistic regression model presented at the end of this section will go one step further and test the influence of nationality on access to support from employers while controlling for the effect of other important variables. Consistent with the previous discussion, I expect people from the United States and other anglophone countries to be particularly well supported by employers in comparison with people from less economically powerful regions such as West Africa and Latin America. However, I would also expect people from Switzerland's neighbouring countries to receive less relocation support than people from non-EU countries due to both geographical proximity and bilateral agreements regarding the free movement of persons within the region.

Professional Sector

A final aspect that must be considered when analysing access to relocation support concerns the recruitment practices of employers in specific professional sectors. As the migration researcher Robyn Iredale notes, "The type and level of regulatory mechanisms, the level of internationalisation and the relative influence of the market, the state and the profession, and the global labour market demand/supply situation are all very significant factors in explaining migration" (2001, p. 20). In particular, how economic actors define needs and shortages in certain sectors influences the amount of resources that they are willing to invest to attract workers (Findlay et al., 2013; Ruhs & Anderson, 2010). In addition, access to support relies on the companies' internal relocation policies, which often depend upon their degree of internationalisation and/or dependence on a foreign workforce (Iredale, 2001). I thus expect to observe differences between professional sectors that have more to do with internal management decisions and priorities than with clearly identifiable economic factors.

To illustrate these aspects, Fig. 5.2 suggests that some differences in support rely on specificities within professional sectors, although I also observe a relationship between the level of education and the support received from either employers or relatives in the various sectors. For instance, respondents working in information and communication reported less support from employers than those in the manufacturing, mining, and quarrying industries, although 84.1% of people in the former have a higher education against 74.3% in the latter. Moreover, further analysis highlights specific recruitment channels within some activity sectors. For instance, nearly one third of all Indians surveyed work in the "information and communication" sector and report very high degrees of support from their employer. I also noticed that a surprisingly high share of less educated immigrants from Portugal working in construction and agriculture reported support from an employer, which indicates that specific recruitment channels connect Switzerland and Portugal in these sectors.

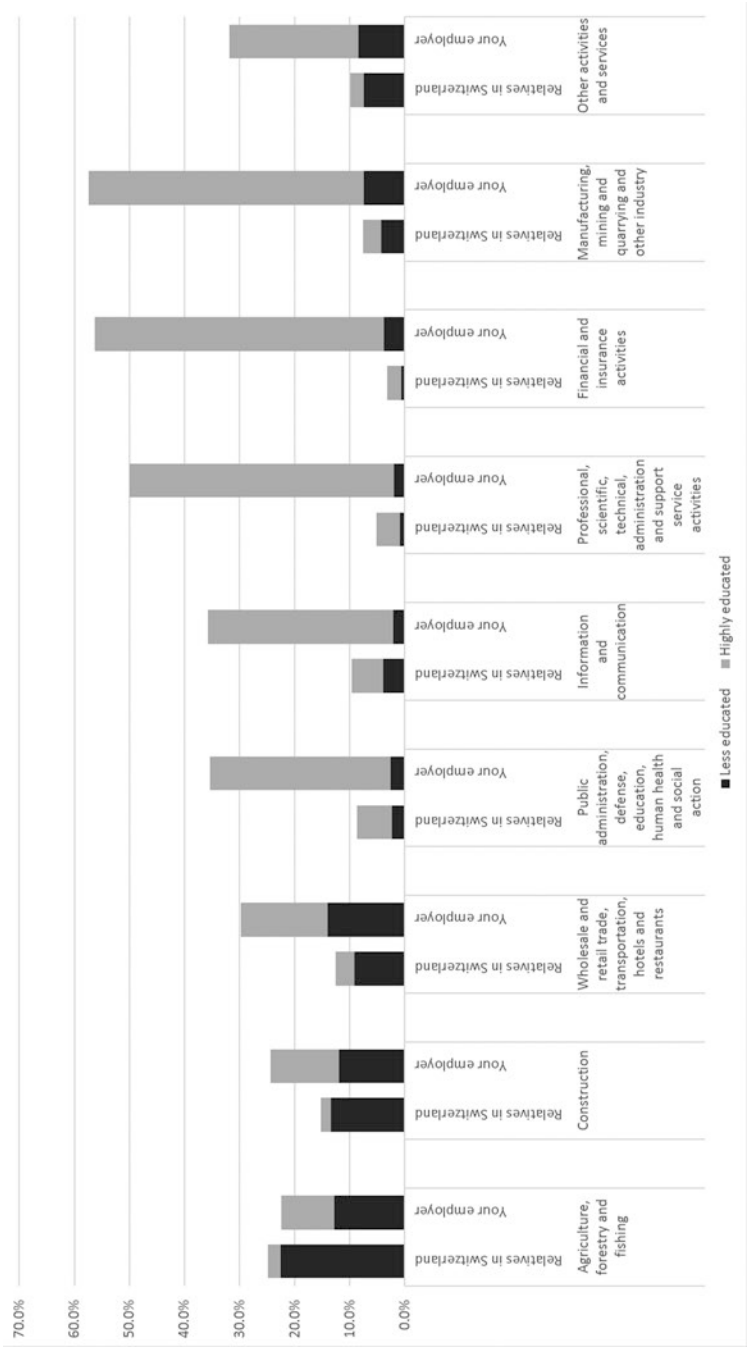

Fig. 5.2 Support received by immigrants from relatives and employers by professional sector and level of education, 2016. (Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Figure designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author)

The logistic regression model that follows will consider different variables to analyse the impact of various professional sectors on support from employers, including the employee's hierarchical position, level of responsibility, and type of occupation within a company. I will thus control inter alia for the effect of the occupational status in the model to observe whether differences in support between professional sectors persist and, if true, which sectors offer more support to employees.

5.1.2 The Preferences of Employers

A logistic regression model enables me to further discuss the role of employers' support on relocation to Switzerland. The dependent binary variable in the logistic regression is whether respondents received support from employers when moving to Switzerland. The independent variables are education level[5] (highly educated (reference category), less educated), gender (men (ref), women), relationship status (married or in a relationship when coming to Switzerland (ref), not married or in a relationship when coming to Switzerland), nationality,[6] and professional sector.[7] The control variables are possession of a job or a job offer in Switzerland before migration (or not), age,[8] presence of children (or not), and occupational status.[9]

To choose the categories of reference, I imagined a person who corresponds to a stereotype of an "expat" receiving particularly high degrees of support. I refer to the previously discussed critique about the construction of differences between "immigrants" and "expats" based on race, class, nationality, and gender, and examine to what extent employers reproduce these stereotypes when attributing relocation support. In light of the literature on discrimination and social inequalities, I expect the most "wanted" immigrants to be highly educated married men from anglophone

[5] I define highly educated people as people with either advanced technical and professional training or an academic education. Less educated people are people with a high school education, vocational training, or less.

[6] The nationality includes people from Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, India, Brazil, West Africa (Benin, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Saint Helena, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome, and Principe), and other Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Guyana).

[7] The professional sector includes the following categories: agriculture, forestry and fishing; construction; wholesale and retail trade, transportation, hotels and restaurants; public administration, defence, education, human health and social action; information and communication; professional, scientific, technical, administration, and support service activities; financial and insurance activities; manufacturing, mining and quarrying, and other industry; and other activities and services.

[8] The age is taken as 2018 minus the year of birth, as given in the survey, and as a whole number.

[9] Occupational status includes the following categories: self-employed workers; company owners; relatives employed in a family business; directors or board members and/or with managerial responsibility; people employed without managerial responsibility; people employed in a protected workshop (except support staff); apprentices; and PhD students.

countries working in socially valued sectors and occupying managerial responsibilities. I am particularly interested to observe how these parameters influence access to employers' support in a model that controls for all other variables.

The results of the logistic regression are presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Support received by immigrants from employers by education level, gender, relationship status, nationality, and professional sector, 2016

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Level of education (ref = highly educated)			
Less educated	−0.80***	0.09	0.45
Gender (ref = man)			
Woman	−0.43***	0.10	0.65
Relationship status (ref = in a relationship)			
Not in a relationship	−0.17+	0.10	0.84
*Interaction term (gender * relationship status)*	0.55***	0.15	1.73
Nationality (ref = US)			
Germany	−1.35***	0.32	0.26
France	−1.54***	0.32	0.21
Italy	−1.17***	0.32	0.31
Austria	−1.36***	0.36	0.26
Spain	−1.20***	0.35	0.30
Portugal	−1.83***	0.33	0.16
UK	−0.40	0.36	0.67
Canada	−0.74	0.48	0.48
India	−0.13	0.43	0.88
West Africa	−2.12***	0.53	0.12
Other Latin American Countries	−1.23**	0.40	0.29
Brazil	−1.21**	0.44	0.30
Other	−2.06***	0.52	0.13
Professional sector (ref = financial and insurance activities)			
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	−0.37	0.32	0.69
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying and other industry	0.27	0.17	1.32
Construction	−0.45**	0.18	0.64
Wholesale and retail trade, transportation, hotels and restaurants	−0.29+	0.17	0.75
Information and communication	−0.81***	0.19	0.45
Professional, scientific, technical, administration and support service activities	−0.19	0.17	0.82
Public administration, defence, education, human health and social action	−0.61***	0.16	0.55
Other activities and services	−0.38*	0.16	0.68

+ p < .1. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Model controlled for possession of a job or a job offer in Switzerland before migration, age, presence of children and occupational status. The accuracy of the model is 71.3%, for 4347 observations. The Nagelkerke R^2 is 0.259

Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author

The effect of the education level is, as expected, highly significant. With all other variables being equal, the probability of receiving support from an employer is approximately halved for less educated people compared with highly educated people. However, the model also shows that education level is by far not the only relevant variable to explain access to employers' support. In particular, the effect of most nationalities is higher than the effect of the education level, indicating that a low educated US American has, for instance, a higher probability of receiving support than a highly educated West African.

The effect of gender is significant and indicates a clear disadvantage for women concerning access to employers' support. According to the model, women have an approximately 35% lower probability of receiving support than men. However, this disadvantage is specific to women in relationships who relocate with a partner; men in relationships who relocate with a partner experience no significant disadvantage. Single women and men report similar levels of relocation support from employers. Hence, when all other variables are equal, women in relationships receive less support from employers than single women or men in general.

Nationality strongly affects access to employers' support. As expected, US nationals occupy a particularly favourable position because they receive more support than any other nationalities except for people from the United Kingdom, Canada, and India, for whom the results are not significantly different. The more disadvantaged nationalities with respect to employers' support are West African and Portuguese citizens, who appear to be six times less likely to receive support from employers compared to US Americans even if their qualifications, field, and occupational status are similar. It is interesting that the model does not clearly differentiate between EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals. As expected, people from Switzerland's neighbouring countries receive relatively little support, but this is also true for people from West Africa and Latin America. In contrast, English-speaking people from both EU/EFTA and third countries (except West Africans) have a clear advantage in accessing employers' support.

Differences between professional sectors are less pronounced than for the other variables. However, people working in the financial sector occupy a particularly favourable position for accessing employers' support. In contrast, people with state-related professions (public administration, defence, education, human health and social action) and jobs that necessitate specific local skills (information and communication) are approximately 50% less likely to be supported by their employer. The sectors that most notably rely on low qualified migrant workers (e.g., hotels, restaurants, and construction) also appear to invest less in relocation support.

5.1.3 The Mechanisms of Inequality

The statistical analysis presented above investigated the role of employers in providing support to immigrants. To the extent that relocation support is a tool that enables employers to attract economically profitable employees, observing which

categories of people receive more support gives us information about who has more power to negotiate advantageous relocation conditions and, in this sense, represents a more "wanted" category for profit-oriented actors.

One important finding is that employers grant less relocation support to women in relationships compared with men and single women. Traditional representations of gender roles thus interact with corporate systems and mobile ways of life, influencing the type of resources that certain individuals can access. This finding reinforces the argument introduced by Brandén et al. (2018) that employer recruitment choices contribute to the trailing spouse phenomenon by favouring the relocation of men over women. It adds to this argument by pointing to the crucial importance of the interaction between gender and relationship status and by suggesting the existence of a dynamic that specifically disadvantages partnered women.

These results encourage a closer look at the relationship between gender, work, and mobility. In the previous chapter, I described the type of extremely mobile and flexible lifestyle that some companies impose on employees. In this context, dual careers and family life can become very complicated to manage. Similarly, Florian Tissot (2016) concludes from his research that most highly mobile couples make a choice at some point between the career of one partner and the time they invest in their family. Reconciling both is nearly impossible, because equally investing in two careers in a context of high mobility necessitates time-consuming transnational arrangements that leave little time for family life. For this reason, many families choose to promote the career of one partner, generally the man. The intersection between international corporate practices, gender norms, and mobile lifestyles thus contributes to reproducing gendered divisions of domestic tasks.

Yet the findings of the logistic regression suggest that employers' preferences contribute to exacerbating this phenomenon. During my ethnographic research, I observed that employers tend to worry that a relocation will fail if a spouse is not satisfied with their new situation (Salamin & Hanappi, 2014). The human resources manager of a bank illustrates this situation:

> The man who works for us, if his wife is not happy, the children are a bit lost at school and everything, it's not going to work. So you know that if you want to keep them, you have to organise a complete relocation of the family with all the proper rules. It costs you an arm and a leg, you're not sure that it will succeed. (personal communication, 11 April 2015)

The interviewee explicitly refers to a situation in which the man leads and the woman follows. He mentions the difficulty of keeping a new employee if their partner remains unemployed. He also explains that the costs of moving both partners are particularly high and tacitly suggests that if employees leave shortly after relocation, the company loses their investment. In situations where the candidate for relocation is a woman and the trailing partner is a man, employers might be even more reluctant to invest in relocation because the risk that an unemployed male partner would be unhappy and want to leave are higher due to gender norms (Harvey & Wiese, 1998; Mancini-Vonlanthen, 2016).

This is problematic because employers who are reluctant to support partnered female employees also increase the risk that the relocation will fail. As other authors have shown, corporate support has a positive effect on accompanying partners' adjustment and well-being (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001; Mancini-Vonlanthen, 2016). By providing less support to accompanied women, employers create a self-fulfilling prophecy by lowering the probability of a successful relocation, compared with male-led relocations. This finding calls for more awareness about this phenomenon as well as for more research on couples in which the woman leads the relocation (Cangià, 2017; Punnett, Crocker, & Stevens, 1992).

Furthermore, the data clearly show that employers do not treat all nationalities similarly. This is not surprising, since the Swiss migration system creates different admission requirements for EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals. Nevertheless, the differences are only loosely connected to immigration regulations. For instance, although both North America and West Africa are considered "third regions" in Switzerland, the probability of receiving support from an employer is approximately eight times lower for West Africans than for US Americans, even when they have similar levels of education, work in similar professional sectors, and have similar occupational status. Furthermore, the fact that workers from West African and Latin American countries have on average a similar likelihood of receiving support from employers compared with most EU/EFTA nationals is surprising because the former category of people is supposed to be more strictly selected by employers than the latter in the current admission system. The absence of clear differences between these categories thus suggests a disadvantage for nationals from these regions because the support of an employer is much more crucial for them than for Europeans due to the restrictive dual immigration system.

Finally, the analysis points to the importance of considering differences between activity sectors. It shows that people with similar characteristics receive different forms of support depending upon their job. The resource environment of immigrants is thus connected to some extent to the field in which they work. Moreover, the survey analysis highlights a preference for certain nationalities in some fields. This finding is in line with my ethnographic research, which showed that the search methods, contacts, and preferences of professional recruitment agents directly influence the selection of employees in some sectors. Specific recruitment channels make professional migration more accessible for some categories of people than for others based on nationality, biography, professional background, and social characteristics rather than on skills.

To conclude, the analysis indicates the existence of migration channels structured by global economic relations, national admission systems, corporate practices, and social representations. If employers appear to be the central drivers in these channels, other forms of support should not be overlooked. In particular, personal networks can play an important supporting role. Furthermore, the analysis draws attention to the importance of interactions between state policies and employ-

ers' practices for structuring migration channels and defining more or less "wanted" categories of immigrants. This indicates the prevalent influence of political borders on individual choices, as well as the equally prevalent importance of business practices and representations. While globalisation has in no way created a "borderless world" (Ohmae, 1999), this analysis shows that the internationalisation of companies have created new possibilities for firms to recruit abroad, while those who are perceived as less valuable have more difficulty accessing corporate relocation support.

5.2 A Migration Channel Approach to Privileges

The previous section discussed the role of employers in providing support to some categories of migrants based on individual markers of difference such as level of education, nationality, gender, relationship status, and professional sector. This section follows a similar line of thought: it focuses on migration channels that are first defined by state policies but that also involve intermediaries from the private sector. In contrast to the previous section, however, I do not focus here on individual markers of difference. Rather, I add another layer of complexity to the analysis by investigating how different institutional contexts structure different opportunities and obstacles for individuals. I examine the resource environments associated with these institutional contexts and show how they construct categories of "highly skilled migrants" with access to different forms of support and privileges. I am aware that these institutional contexts interact with individual markers of difference, but I argue that it is fruitful to conceive them as specific units of analysis, which contribute to the construction of differences between individuals.

The analysis in this section builds on the stories of tertiary educated individuals who migrated for different reasons and sought employment after their move. Selecting my interviewees, however, raised conceptual issues during the research process, since I did not want to define "highly skilled migrants" a priori. I wanted to remain as open as possible to different situations in order to show the effect of resource environments on individual experiences. I eventually decided to focus on people in a relatively marginal situation upon arrival in Switzerland, namely, unemployed people who wanted to find a job. I thus intentionally selected borderline cases, that is, people who are highly educated, but who encounter difficulties being recognised as "highly skilled" and integrating into a new professional environment. I also selected people with different reasons for migrating in order to highlight the plurality of situations. I thought that analysing situations of potential rupture, conflict, or self-reassessment for the people involved would enable a better understanding of the limits of the notion of "highly skilled migrants", as well as the social mechanisms behind its construction.[10]

[10] I wish to thank my colleague Metka Hercog who contributed to the field research by conducting some of the interviews and who supported me during the definition of the research design. I also wish to thank my colleague Katrin Sontag for sharing one of her interviews with me.

The data analysis focused on correlating the support structures the interviewees had access to during their job searches with their personal situations and migration histories. Moreover, I tried to connect my interviewees' stories with the mechanisms already analysed in the previous chapters. This process led me to define and characterise four migration channels associated with different types of support structures and obstacles, which influence the kinds of opportunities that individuals can access after migrating to Switzerland: the family-oriented channel, the company-oriented channel, the study-oriented channel, and the protection-oriented channel (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 List of biographic interviews

Year of arrival	Age	Sex	Country of origin	Field of study	Occupation upon interview	Migration channels involved
2011	~30	M	Brazil	Engineering	R&D project manager	Study-oriented channel
2006	~40	M	Germany	History; anthropology	Professional recruiter	Study-oriented channel
2010	~30	M	Italy	European studies	Unemployed	Study-oriented channel
2014	~40	M	Colombia	Finance	Senior financial analyst	Company-oriented channel
2013	~40	F	Greece	Medicine	Medical affairs manager	Company-oriented channel
2014	~50	M	United Kingdom	Environmental sciences; business	Contractor through a temporary staffing agency	Company-oriented channel
1990	~50	F	United States	Architecture	Head of a relocation agency	Company-oriented channel
2006	~30	F	Brazil	Linguistics; media	Coordinator of a radio programme	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel
2013	~30	M	Italy	Engineering	Unemployed	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel
1982	~70	F	United States	Philosophy	Self-employed communication coach	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel
2014	~40	M	Eritrea	International law	Writer and editor in an NGO	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel; protection-oriented channel
2008	~30	F	Sri Lanka	Business; marketing; tourism	Unemployed	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel; protection-oriented channel
2015	~30	M	Iran	Engineering	Ongoing study	Protection-oriented channel; study-oriented channel

5.2.1 Channelling Privileges

Many studies in Switzerland and elsewhere focus on the reasons why substantial numbers of highly skilled migrants lose their qualifications and become unemployed after moving to a new country. The obstacles most often mentioned are a discrepancy between migrants' skills and local needs (Boswell, Stiller, & Straubhaar, 2004; Jey Aratnam, 2012; Massey et al., 1993), a lack of recognition for foreign qualifications (Andersson & Guo, 2009; OECD/EU, 2015), difficulties accessing information and support, especially when they do not speak the local language (Raghuram, 2004; Riaño, 2003, 2011), discrimination against specific social groups (Kofman, 2014; Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016), and legal situation, which often positions migrants unfavourably when attempting to access jobs and negotiate labour conditions (Berthoud, 2012; Lowell & Avato, 2014).

Many researchers have used an intersectional approach to analyse migrants' access to the labour market. They have focused on the interrelationship between gender, race, and class to understand social actors' positions in the labour market (Baghdadi & Riaño, 2014; Kofman, 2014; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Raghuram, 2004; Riaño, 2003, 2011). They have shown that, when brought together, different disadvantages intersect and create cumulative systems of marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1991). Eleonore Kofman, for instance, has analysed how European policies regarding highly skilled migrants construct and value skills, knowledge, and educational qualifications differently depending on the characteristics of the individuals involved. She demonstrates in particular that these systems reinforce inequalities between women and men in intersection with other markers of differences (Kofman, 2014). However, the authors working on intersectionality have also shown that disadvantages are contextual and can be compensated by other factors, meaning that even if general tendencies exist at the statistical level, automatic rules do not always apply at the individual level. Despite a limited range of opportunities, social actors can use their agency to find solutions and overcome obstacles.

While the research on intersectionality focuses mainly on how different disadvantages intersect, there is less research on how migrants access highly skilled jobs. An economist would probably argue that companies recruit foreign employees when the pool of local candidates is small or non-existent, thus creating an overrepresentation of foreigners in sectors with the highest labour demand. However, this explanation hides the complexity of social mechanisms by presenting access to privileged positions as automatic and unproblematic. Throughout this research, I have argued that the possibility for individuals to be rewarded if they are perceived as "valuable" not only depends on objective factors such as a neutral evaluation of their skills, but is also connected to the institutional context in which these individuals are embedded, the way their various individual features are perceived, and the interest that others have in supporting them. The previous section highlighted several of the variables that structure the ways employers recruit migrants and develop migration channels. This section looks more closely at the role of state policies in defining such channels and shaping resource environments for migrants. I start with

an approach inspired by the work on intersectionality, but then focus on different aspects. Rather than looking at individual social characteristics such as gender, race, and class, I address the role of external support structures in migrants' trajectories. This does not mean that I dismiss other factors as unimportant but rather that I have chosen to focus on other equally relevant elements.

I define and analyse four channels in this section: the family-oriented channel, the company-oriented channel, the study-oriented channel and the protection-oriented channel. Each channel represents a form of institutional embeddedness that is associated with a different resource environment, which describes the kinds of resources and support that individuals may have access to depending on their migration situation. This is a way to make sense of different social positions by focusing on the relationship between individual migration situations and the opportunities and constraints associated with these situations. This does not mean, however, that individuals are trapped in only one channel. Examples will show that individuals often move between channels to increase their options when their situation allows it.

I first present the four channels and then illustrate how they work on the individual level with a concrete example of someone who participates in multiple channels. I do not mean to suggest that these four channels are the only ones that exist. On the contrary, there are probably many more.[11] But based on the empirical analysis, these channels appear to be the most relevant for illustrating my argument.

5.2.2 The Family-Oriented Channel

In my data, the family-oriented channel applies to people who moved to Switzerland to join a spouse or partner already living in the country. Five interviewees experienced this situation: two men and three women from both European and non-European countries. To describe this channel, I combine data from their interviews with other information about the social environment in which they are embedded.

One of the main characteristics of this channel is that the people who use it are very heterogeneous in terms of nationality, social background, and resources. In the previous section, I showed that some nationalities have few possibilities to migrate to Switzerland with the support of an employer. Using the support of a partner might thus be their only option. Others, however, have more possibilities to organise their stay without depending on a partner. They may, for instance, find a job or register at a university in the country even if the main reason for migrating is to join their partner. This may lead to the person navigating between channels and combining the advantages and disadvantages associated with the different channels.

[11] One might think, for instance, of a channel for self-employed immigrants such as start-up founders (Sontag, 2016), or a channel for people who move for lifestyle reasons (Camenisch, 2015). Moreover, the mobility of short-term assignees, for instance as presented in the case of management consultants in the previous chapter, might also be included among possible migration channels. However, I focused in this part on unemployed people, meaning that I did not encounter this kind of situation in my data.

In my data, most of the interviewees combined their wish to live with their partner with other reasons to move to Switzerland, for instance studying, finding a job, discovering a new culture, and suchlike. Moreover, none of the interviewees were married when they arrived in Switzerland, meaning that they could not use family reunification. This did not create any serious problem for EU nationals, because of the free movement of persons system, but non-EU/EFTA nationals had to find another reason to obtain a right to stay in Switzerland. Depending on their personal situation, the interviewees variously registered at a university, applied for asylum, or looked for a job in order to secure their residence status. However, these strategies were not always successful in the long run and getting married eventually appeared to be the safest option in several cases.

The idea of marrying for a permit, however, appeared to be a sensitive topic for some of the interviewees. One explicitly refused to talk about this issue or to give details about her partner. Another one insisted on the fact that she only married once she felt ready for it, and not because it would solve her permit issue. Other interviewees, however, did not mention this issue at all because it was clear from their personal situation that they were not marrying out of self-interest.

These differences highlight another characteristic of the family-oriented channel: although the people who use it migrate with the support of a partner, this support may be perceived as more or less problematic depending on the person's situation and characteristics. Whereas some people fear being accused of abusing the family reunification system, others are beyond suspicion because of their nationality, social background, or personal history. The distinction between EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals is particularly important here, as well as the social, cultural, and economic capital, which structure the options that people may have to secure their status independently from their partner.

In addition to the perception of abuse of the system, the legal definition of family reunification may prove problematic for people with limited options. A partner's legal status within a family reunification framework is bound to the status of the first person living in the country, meaning that the residence authorisation of the joining partner may be abrogated in the case of a separation, or if the first person loses their right to stay in the country. This situation may create uncertainties, fears, and even exploitation if the relationship between the partners deteriorates. Therefore, even though securing one's status thanks to family reunification may give access to a safer residence status and better possibilities for accessing the labour market, it may also lead to new difficulties by binding the joining partner to the situation of the person they are reunifying with.

From an institutional point of view, I observe that the support available to joining partners is often limited. In this regard, I interviewed a person in charge of a new municipal project in Bern that aims to support highly qualified foreigners in their job searches. She explained:

> We have noticed that there is no support or little support for people who are well or highly qualified but also for people who are not associated with social services or insured by the unemployment fund through a regional employment office, independent of their qualifications. And that there is actually hardly anything for these people when they cannot get into

> an occupational field that corresponds to their qualifications because … all the programs are always somehow linked to being registered as unemployed or receiving support from social services. … And when we developed the project, we had people in mind who primarily come as part of family reunification.[12] (Personal communication, 21 December 2015)

In line with this observation, my data suggest that people who migrate to Switzerland through the family-oriented channel are first and foremost embedded in networks of relationships connected to their personal situation. Contrary to the people who move with the support of a company, individuals joining a person already present in the country cannot expect any support from their partner's employer. Moreover, the state may take over certain responsibilities only in exceptional and problematic cases.

Although a few programmes such as the one mentioned above have developed in the past few years, they remain rare. Their emergence derives from current debates in Switzerland about shortages of qualified workers and the need to employ the local workforce rather than recruiting from abroad, which are reframing the unemployment situation of long-term skilled migrants as a social problem that requires state intervention. In addition, debates about integration and immigration have created new obligations and responsibilities for both the state and migrants. In some cases this has led to stricter admission rules, for instance in Basel-City, where the extension of residence permits can be bound to an integration contract. Overall, however, so long as they are not identified as socially problematic by state authorities, migrants and their partners rely on their own resources, which vary from one person to another. The lack of state support is partly due to the political expectation that the partner already living in Switzerland is responsible for the joining person, which is illustrated by the fact that the legal status of a reunified family member is directly dependent on the legal status of the person with whom they are reunifying.

Yvonne Riaño, who has studied extensively the situation of highly educated women from South America married to Swiss men, highlights a similar dynamic (Baghdadi & Riaño, 2014; Riaño, 2003, 2011, 2015, 2016; Riaño, Limacher, Aschwanden, Hirsig, & Wastl-Walter, 2015). Upon arrival in Switzerland, these women often lack institutional support. They have no right to unemployment benefits if they have never worked in Switzerland, and they are excluded from most state-sponsored services if their partner earns enough to support them. Moreover, as in our survey, Riaño found that gender norms and family status strongly influence women's professional situations (Baghdadi & Riaño, 2014; Riaño, 2011). For instance, access to day care for couples with children often posed difficulties for her interviewees, because these structures tend to give priority to single women or

[12] The original text reads: "Wir haben festgestellt, dass es keine Unterstützung gibt oder kaum Unterstützung gibt für Personen die gut bis hochqualifiziert sind und aber auch unabhängig von der Qualifikation Personen, die weder beim Sozialdienst angehängt sind, noch beim RAV versichert sind bei der Arbeitslosenkasse. Und dass für die Personen, wenn sie hier den Einstieg in ein ihrer Qualifikation entsprechendes Tätigkeitsfeld nicht finden, eigentlich kaum etwas gibt, weil … alle Programme sind immer irgendwie gekoppelt an, man ist arbeitslos gemeldet oder man hat Unterstützung vom Sozialdienst. … Und wenn wir im Hinterkopf hatten, als wir das Projekt konzipiert haben, sind Personen die vor allem im Familiennachzug kommen." All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

women with economic difficulties (Riaño, 2011). Several of the interviewees also reported that, as married women and mothers, they were neither expected nor encouraged to work. In addition to other disadvantages – such as insufficient proficiency in the local language and difficulties having their foreign qualifications recognised – they lacked support from acquaintances to access professional opportunities. Riaño speaks of "marginalised elites" (Riaño, 2016), because these university-educated women from middle- to upper middle-class families, after having been professionally active and independent in Latin America, went through a process of dequalification in Switzerland and, in many cases, remained trapped in the domestic sphere despite their original intention to work.

If joining partners can expect little direct support from the state, and if nationality and gender certainly constitute disabling factors for non-EU/EFTA women, I observed nevertheless that the people using this channel can mobilise other resources. Someone with a partner already living in the country may have indirect access to local information, knowledge, and contacts, which may help them build a local social network. Furthermore, facilitated access to a stable residence permit through the partner may suppress or at least alleviate legal obstacles to the labour market. These elements may form the basis for long-term plans and be a motivation to acquire new forms of capital such as the local language, further qualifications, friends, professional networks, and so forth.

At the same time, the interviews revealed that partners and their social networks are not always the best-equipped people to inform and support newcomers, especially if they have not experienced a similar situation. For example, one interviewee explained that a few months after her arrival from the US, her partner recommended that she register with immigration officers. However, since her visa had expired the interviewee did not have any legal right to stay in the country, and she was immediately told to leave when she contacted the authorities. Until that moment, neither she nor her partner had fully considered the constraints associated with her status as a foreigner. She recalls that after this first experience, they faced several unexpected difficulties due to their lack of knowledge about administrative procedures. She regularised her situation by registering at a Swiss university, which enabled her to obtain a student permit, and then later by marrying her partner.

If accessing relevant information often proves difficult for newly arrived foreigners, the place of residence may influence the types of resources available in the environment: in some places – in particular cities – non-governmental organisations (NGOs), associations, and private networks enable newcomers to meet other people based on origin, language, social situation, or personal interests. I observed, for instance, that some of the "expat" organisations present in larger Swiss cities not only attract relocated employees and their families, but also joining partners who intend to settle in Switzerland, students, and sometimes refugees. In addition, some of the offerings developed at a local level to promote the integration of relocated employees and their families are available to other immigrants as well (e.g. language courses, counselling and integration workshops). In that sense, highly educated immigrants in the family-oriented channel may indirectly benefit from the interest of local authorities and profit-oriented actors in internationalised companies

and their employees. This may enable them to access relevant information and get useful contacts.

At the same time, a person's social background, as well as the languages they speak and, in some cases, their nationality, influence the kind of organisation that they may want to join. As part of my fieldwork in Basel, I attended Swiss-German language courses at a non-profit organisation officially open to anybody who can communicate in English, but that in practice mainly attracts middle- to upper-class non-working migrant women. These people meet regularly to exchange information, learn new languages, and do group activities such as reading, meditating, wine-tasting, knitting, attending cultural events, and visiting the city. However, I noticed that some interviewees were very critical of this organisation, describing it as "a British place where people can go to feel safe" (personal communication, 18 November 2015) or as a place where "people were very introverted" and where "I didn't find anyone to be attached to" (personal communication, 15 April 2016). Similarly, one interviewee described another organisation specifically targeting North American women as a place for "rich, gilded, caged women who have no idea about what it is to live here, who don't speak a word of German and just live in this ghetto of very wealthy expats" (personal communication, 1 October 2015). These remarks highlight the fact that access to this kind of organisation relies on the acceptance of certain cultural and class-specific norms and values, which, when they are not shared, may lead to feelings of exclusion or to the impression that one does not have anything in common with the rest of the group.

In this sense, the family-oriented channel provides access to resource environments that largely rely on personal characteristics and networks. Because family migrants are associated with their partner from the perspective of state authorities, institutionalised forms of support are limited to socially problematic situations. Hence, personal resources play a central role in shaping opportunities and constraints in this channel, but the state is present as a controlling actor that regulates immigrants' rights and status based in particular on nationality, family status, and social situation.

5.2.3 The Company-Oriented Channel

The company-oriented channel applies to people who have relocated to Switzerland with partners who are employed by a company in the country. In my data, the stories of four interviewees correspond to this situation, two men and two women from the EU and third countries. Moreover, I build on the data already analysed in the previous chapters about the selection, attraction, and retention practices of state-related and private-sector actors.

In the company-oriented channel, the employee and the partner relocate together, meaning that usually neither of them has a local network of relationships upon arrival. Nevertheless, the employee is immediately integrated into a professional network from which the unemployed person may indirectly benefit. In addition, the employed

partner guarantees in most cases a certain degree of financial security for the unemployed partner. Finally, the partners of the people who migrate through this channel have been recruited by a company through a process of social selection, which creates a certain homogeneity in terms of symbolic capital within this channel.

During the field research, I was in contact with several organisations that showed interest in supporting the partners of newly arrived employees and that have developed specialised services for that purpose. These organisations include the previously mentioned chamber of commerce in Vaud, which is supported by the cantonal department for economic promotion, several multinational companies, and service providers based in Switzerland, and an international network of companies and migrants whose aim is to connect unemployed partners with employers to foster access to jobs.[13]

Companies that employ immigrants are one of the main sources of support in this channel (Ravasi et al., 2015; Tissot, 2016), and we have shown that some employers invest considerable resources in attracting foreign employees to Switzerland. For example, relocation packages are among the tools that some companies use to improve their competitiveness. Services for partners and other family members are legitimised by the fact that adequate support may reduce the risk of an employee's unexpected departure due to their family's difficulty adjusting to the new environment (Ravasi et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, not all employees have access to the same advantages: while some companies that largely depend on a foreign skilled workforce use clear guidelines to define the support that relocated employees can receive based on their hierarchical and qualification level, other companies provide minimal support or negotiate relocation packages on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, the relocation packages promised before a move can prove to be less generous than expected, and some trailing spouses experience significant disappointment when they realise that finding a job in Switzerland is more difficult than expected. For instance, a British man who followed his wife at the age of 50 and who was still searching for a job when I met him nearly 3 years later spoke to me about his negative experience:

> If my wife is offered a job, and I was told that it will probably take me two years to find a job, we wouldn't have done it [to relocate to Switzerland]. But I was told a very good story: eight to twelve months [to find a job]. … Obviously they are interested: the business wants to keep their employees; the headhunter, the recruiter wants to keep the commission. There was less information about that. They said: "You find a job, no problem, we can help you" and things like that. (Personal communication, 19 April 2016)

The differences between promises and results, the inequalities in treatment between companies, as well as the general tendency among businesses to reduce the costs associated with relocation packages (Cartus, 2014) help to understand why other actors have developed services specifically targeting the unemployed partners of relocated employees. For instance, we have already seen in Chap. 3 how a chamber of commerce in Vaud initiated a project together with the cantonal authorities in

[13] See IDCN (International Dual Career Network): http://www.idcn.info/ (last consulted 29 January 2018).

charge of economic promotion and a group of multinational companies to support the integration of relocated employees' family members. Furthermore, the International Dual Career Network (IDCN) is a growing organisation of volunteers sponsored by corporate actors that aims to connect unemployed partners with employing companies in Switzerland and abroad. The president of one of IDCN's local branches in Switzerland, who is himself a job-searching trailing spouse, describes the aims of the organisation:

> It was founded on the principle that says that job-seeking corporates are becoming more and more normal. No one is coming to a job by himself anymore. They are coming with a partner or with a family. We searched a strategy and the principle is that the success of an international assignment is the success of someone coming to work for a company abroad, and it highly depends on how the plus one, the spouse integrates into the profession, into the society. When the person comes and doesn't integrate, the international assignment fails in 90% of times. And therefore companies invested a lot of money to get someone into that job, and they lose that investment. … It [what we do] is trying to protect the corporate and also protect the spouse. So that is the whole fundamental idea. (Personal communication, 19 April 2016)

We see here that the logic for supporting people who move through the company-oriented channel differs from that in the family-oriented channel: both spouses are seen as contributors and the risk that they may leave is perceived as an economic loss, so their well-being is given an economic value. In some cases, companies that employ a large number of foreigners may directly take over responsibility for supporting partners through relocation packages. They may also sponsor other institutions, such as the IDCN, to indirectly enhance the resources available to employees' families. This situation is favourable to the individuals interested in taking action to improve their situation, because it gives them the possibility to use an economic line of argumentation strategically to obtain support from corporate actors. In addition, state authorities at the local level may support specific projects, but it is striking that the department involved in the cases I observed was primarily concerned with economic promotion rather than immigration or integration. This suggests that both state authorities and corporate actors in the private sector perceive this category of immigrants as valuable actors who provide economic services to the places they go to. This perception has consequences since it enables them to be treated as "clients" to support (Wagner, 1998) rather than as "others" to control (Fassin, 2011), as can happen with the other channels.

5.2.4 The Study-Oriented Channel

The study-oriented channel primarily applies to immigrants who studied in Switzerland and then sought a job in the country. However, it also includes people who came to Switzerland for reasons other than education and subsequently enrolled in an institute of higher education because this increased their chances of being able to stay and work. In my data, eight interviewees went through this channel, five men and three women, all of whom except two were from non-EU/EFTA countries.

Affiliation with an institute of higher education may include several benefits for immigrants. Legally, it may give them a right to stay in the country because it is relatively easy to obtain a study or research permit. To apply for such a permit, a person must be admitted to or affiliated with an institute of higher education, and they must prove that they have sufficient resources to support themselves. This second requirement, however, may prove difficult since it implies having access to a certain degree of economic capital, usually through relatives, which contributes to social selection based on this criterion. At the same time, tuition fees in Switzerland are relatively low compared to other countries, in particular anglophone ones, and Swiss universities generally do not charge international student fees, which contributes to attracting foreign students. In fact, almost one third of all tertiary students in Switzerland are foreign nationals who obtained their secondary degrees abroad, representing the second highest share of international students among OECD countries (OECD, 2016; Riaño, Lombard, & Piguet, 2018).

Once the initial administrative obstacles have been overcome, an academic affiliation may provide time and space for recently arrived people to build a social network and acquire local competences and knowledge that may be useful when seeking employment. In addition, it may give them a Swiss diploma, which is an advantage compared to other immigrants whose foreign diplomas are not recognised or valued on the Swiss labour market. Finally, access to the services offered by many institutions of higher education, such as language classes, career and legal counselling, and alumni networks may help a person expand their resources.

In my data, few people came to Switzerland with the main intention to study. However, some chose this option after realising that it would provide new opportunities. This is obvious, for instance, in the case of a young Iranian man who came to Switzerland to seek asylum and is now taking classes at a Swiss university while waiting for a response from the migration authorities regarding his asylum application:

> The university is the best part of my life. Really, it's the best part of my living in Switzerland. … Some people care about us … and I see we are important for some people. … It gives me … energy. (Personal communication to Katrin Sontag, 27 January 2017)

Although he had not yet officially registered as a student at the time of the interview, he had submitted an application to start a new master's degree and was participating in a support programme initiated by students for refugees wishing to enter a Swiss university. According to him, being accepted at the university was "the last chance for me to get back my life, to start making my life".

In another interview, an Italian engineer who came to Switzerland to live with his girlfriend – a postdoctoral researcher at a Swiss university – eventually decided to expand his qualifications after realising that finding a job in his area of expertise would be much more difficult than expected:

> So the thing is that in Italy, probably, I am overqualified, and here I am underqualified. That's what I think. Because of the language. Because in Italy my international experiences are well seen … while here my international experiences are quite… relatively below average. … Now I do a course. Because here … the network is very much more important than in Italy. … I am now taking a course of sustainable energies to complete my profile, but also to try to build up a network. (Personal communication to Metka Hercog, 18 March 2016)

Although studying can provide a respite for developing one's professional profile, competences, and network, difficulties are likely to arise again upon graduation, in particular for non-EU/EFTA nationals whose residence permit is bound to their institutional affiliation. For a long time, non-EU/EFTA citizens had very limited opportunities to work in Switzerland after the end of their studies. Since 2011, a new policy allows non-EU/EFTA foreigners to stay in Switzerland for 6 months after graduation to search for a job. In addition, unlike other foreigners, former students are no longer subject to the precedence criterion, according to which "foreign nationals may be permitted to work only if it is proven that no suitable domestic employees or citizens of states with which an agreement on the free movement of workers has been concluded can be found for the job" (Swiss Federal Act on Foreign Nationals, art. 21.1). However, recent graduates may only be allowed to stay if they find a job that corresponds to their field of study and is perceived as being "of high academic or economic interest" (art 21.3).

EU nationals are not subject to these strict rules, but if they remain unemployed and Swiss authorities determine that they are no longer able to support themselves financially they will be asked to leave.[14] A delicate financial situation is therefore likely to affect whether both EU and non-EU students and researchers maintain the right to stay in Switzerland after they graduate or leave academia.

The end of an academic affiliation can therefore place migrants in a precarious position and force them to find a job quickly, which may be more or less difficult depending on their personal situation and field of study. In addition to the fact that some qualifications are more in demand on the labour market than others, my interviews suggest that the administrative procedure for acquiring a work permit represents an obstacle for non-EU/EFTA nationals because either the employer is unwilling to engage in the procedure, or the canton refuses the permit. The administrative setbacks described in the case study of Luca, a Brazilian engineer (see Chap. 2), illustrate these difficulties. In another interview, a local radio station offered a job to a Brazilian woman who had just completed a master's degree in communication, but the canton initially refused to grant her a work authorisation. The employer insisted and she was eventually given a short-term permit, but this was precarious because it required annual renewal. Even after 10 years of living in Switzerland, she could not access permanent residence status.

[14] As stipulated in the Free Movement of Persons Agreement of June 2002 between Switzerland and the European Union (FMPA), EU/EFTA citizens can freely stay in Switzerland up to 90 days, after which they need to apply for a residence permit. If they are unemployed and do not have any other legally valid reason to stay in Switzerland (e.g., family reunification or studies), they need to prove that they have health insurance and sufficient resources to support themselves (see annex I, art. 24 FMPA). Moreover, EU/EFTA nationals can only access unemployment benefits if their last employment was in Switzerland. The definition of "sufficient resources" varies between Swiss cantons, but it is usually around CHF 2000 (EUR 1760)/month. Unemployed EU/EFTA nationals who do not fulfil these requirements can in principle stay in Switzerland without a residence permit, but they are likely to experience various limitations due to the fact that they cannot officially register as residents. For instance, they may have trouble finding housing or receive regular letters from the municipality asking them to leave.

People who have migrated through the study-oriented channel thus occupy an ambiguous position. On the one hand, foreign students are officially presented as important to the "scientific, technical and economic development" (Political Institutions Committees, 2009) of Switzerland, as has been particularly acknowledged by the parliamentary initiative that led to the relaxation of admission rules for former students. On the other hand, the fear of abuse is very present in policy discourse, in this case the fear that foreigners may register as students for the sole purpose of circumventing the law, or that they may take the jobs of local residents after their graduation (Riaño et al., 2018). There seems to be an institutional tension between measures that seek to enhance higher education and measures that seek to control residence permits. This tension may lead to serious disappointment when people who were treated equally to other students realise at the end of their academic affiliation that there are barriers preventing them from accessing similar opportunities to their colleagues.

5.2.5 The Protection-Oriented Channel

The protection-oriented channel primarily applies to people who flee their country of origin and seek protection from the Swiss state. In my data, two people officially went through this process, one man and one woman from non-EU/EFTA countries. As we will see in the following portrait, a third interviewee navigates between this channel and others, although he has not officially submitted an asylum request in Switzerland. However, his conflictual relationship with his country of origin, as well as the fact that he is requesting family reunification with a person who is a recognised refugee in Switzerland, mean that he has to deal with some of the specificities of this channel.

The Swiss Secretariat for Migration is officially responsible for asylum request procedures and it first decides whether the state should consider the request. If so, the applicant is assigned to a canton and given an asylum-seeker permit. The Swiss Secretariat for Migration then undertakes a more detailed examination to determine whether to recognise the person's refugee status. If their status as a refugee is recognised, then the person receives a residence permit. If not, the person is either asked to leave the country or granted temporary admission. Temporary admission may only be granted if the Swiss authorities determine that "the enforcement of removal or expulsion is not possible, not permitted or not reasonable" (Swiss Federal Act on Foreign Nationals, art. 83). However, since the asylum process can take years between the first application and the final decision, some people manage in the meantime to expand their options and find other ways to stay even if their application is rejected.[15]

[15] According to a recent study, refugees who arrived in Switzerland between 1994 and 2004 waited on average 665 days to obtain an asylum decision, with a standard deviation of 478 days (Hainmueller, Hangartner, Lawrence, & Dufresne, 2017).

This channel is strongly structured by national and international laws. The Geneva Convention of 1951 defines states' obligations towards refugees, the Dublin regulation determines the responsibility of EU member states and affiliated members to examine asylum-seekers' applications, and a specific domestic policy regulates the asylum procedure in Switzerland.[16] In that sense, people who seek protection in Switzerland are the direct responsibility of the state unless they have already transited through another Dublin-affiliated country, in which case Switzerland can send them back to the first country of transit.[17] In addition, various NGOs that defend human rights and provide refugee protection are active in the asylum field, as well as some profit-oriented institutions operating under the mandate of the state. The strong position of the state in the protection-oriented channel produces many constraints for people using this path. While in the other channels, the general tendency over the past decades has been towards an extension of rights, the fight against abuses of the system has become a central objective with regard to asylum and this has legitimised numerous legal revisions towards more restrictive practices since the 1980s (Frei, Gordzielik, de Senarclens, Leyvraz, & Stünzi, 2014).

Several disadvantages are associated with the protection-oriented channel. First, individuals in search of protection in Switzerland usually have a limited local social network or locally valued skills and experience upon arrival. This situation, as well as the complexity and duration of the asylum procedure, contribute to making newly arrived individuals highly dependent on support from state institutions and NGOs.

In addition, the possibilities of employment during the asylum procedure are limited. Currently, people who are not yet recognised as refugees need authorisation from the canton to work. They can request this authorisation with the support of an employer 3 months after their registration, but people with a Swiss passport or a valid authorisation to stay in Switzerland take precedence. Employed asylum seekers also need to pay a special tax of 10% of their gross salary (Bretscher, 2016). Numerous studies have shown that these administrative constraints, added to the fact that employers are often unwilling to hire someone who may be forced to leave the country at any time, make it very difficult for people seeking asylum to find employment (Guggisberg & Egger, 2014; Kamm, Efionayi-Mäder, Neubauer, Wanner, & Zannol, 2003; Kobi, Gehrig, & Bäriswyl, 2012; Lindenmeyer, Von Glutz, Häusler, & Kehl, 2008; Piguet & Losa, 2002; Spadarotto, Bieberschulte, Walker, Morlok, & Oswald, 2014; UNHCR, 2014). This limited access to the labour market may have long-term consequences since the asylum procedure may last several years, during which the applicants remain stuck in a holding pattern with few

[16] See the Swiss Federal Government Asylum Act of 26 June 1998: https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19995092/index.html (last consulted 31 January 2018).

[17] See the Agreement of March 2008 between the European Community and the Swiss Confederation concerning the criteria and mechanisms for establishing which state is responsible for examining a request for asylum lodged with an EU member state or Switzerland: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/treaties-agreements/agreement/?id=2004082 (last consulted 1 February 2018).

resources to move forward with their lives. Moreover, employers often perceive long periods of unemployment unfavourably, which means that even if the person is eventually granted asylum, finding a job may remain difficult. At least one study in Switzerland has clearly shown that long asylum processes reduce a migrant's chances of successful labour market integration (Hainmueller et al., 2017).

Administrative constraints, however, constitute just one aspect of the obstacles that people in need of protection are likely to face after arriving in Switzerland. A recent study on the labour market integration of refugees and people temporarily admitted to Switzerland called attention to specific obstacles affecting this category of people (UNHCR, 2014). In particular, potential health problems due to trauma associated with a refugee's journey, as well as fear for family members and friends who remain in dangerous situations, may physically and cognitively affect their ability to fully embrace and adapt to new situations.

In addition, highly educated refugees may encounter particular difficulties in having their qualifications acknowledged and recognised (Sommer, 2016; Zoeteweij, 2016). This is because actors involved in assessing qualifications tend to view the education level of countries destabilised by conflict with suspicion and attribute a lower value to qualifications originating from refugee-producing countries. Additionally, asylum-seekers are sometimes unable to bring official documents attesting to their qualifications, and it can be particularly difficult (and sometimes impossible) to obtain copies of these documents. Moreover, their precarious financial situations often prevent validation of their existing skills through additional training, since such processes can be expensive.[18] In this context, the support structures offered to asylum seekers and recognised refugees are rarely appropriate for highly educated people (Sandoz, 2016b; Sontag, 2018). A UNHCR study shows, for instance, that its interviewees were systematically directed towards low-paid professional sectors such as cleaning, personal care, hotel, and restaurant services regardless of their personal wishes, qualifications, and previous work experience (UNHCR, 2014).

One final problem worth mentioning is that people who seek asylum in Switzerland are linked to a specific canton at least during the first few years following their registration and are, in principle, not allowed to live elsewhere in the country or move abroad. This means that, contrary to other migrants, their possibilities of mobility are much more limited if they do not find opportunities adapted to their situation in the place where they are registered.

All these constraints limit the possibilities for these individuals to gain autonomy. Without a job, they are dependent on social welfare. They may be forced to live in a centre for asylum seekers with very limited opportunities to develop their competences and meet local people. They may not know when their next interview

[18] In Switzerland, the exam that enables recognition of a foreign high school diploma costs about CHF 1000 (EUR 880) and additional preparatory courses for this exam are only offered in select cities (Sontag, 2018).

with the authorities will be, or whether they have a chance of being recognised as a refugee at all. This quote from the interview with the Iranian man trying to enrol at a Swiss university clearly illustrates this situation:

> For the moment, I can't decide and I can't have any idea for my life. Because every day my life will be changed. Because if the government wants to tell me, "now you have to sleep", I have to sleep; "now you have to stand up", I have to stand up; "now you have to go out of Switzerland", I have to go out of Switzerland. I don't have any [power to] decide, and idea for my life. (Personal communication to Katrin Sontag, 27 January 2017)

In her research on the possibilities for refugees to access higher education in Switzerland, Germany, and France, Katrin Sontag shows that the specific constraints that structure the protection-oriented channel hinder opportunities to transfer the social value of migrants' skills between countries. Inspired by a study on refugee youths in Hamburg, she uses the concept of "total space" to describe situations that are "to a very high degree characterised by the fact that structures determine actions" (Schroeder, 2003, p. 380, quoted in Sontag, 2018). In addition to official processes of diploma recognition, various regulations and practices limit asylum seekers' access to support, resources, and mobility. These factors contribute to maintaining a situation of scarcity and precariousness in which their skills become unimportant and disregarded. One man expressed his situation this way: "I was an engineer. But now, here I [look like] a [child] in Kindergarden" (personal communication with Katrin Sontag, 27 January 2017).

Interactions between institutional practices and regulations thus directly affect a person by categorising them as an asylum seeker or refugee even though a different set of institutional structures may have constructed the same person as a highly skilled professional in another channel (Table 5.7).

This overview shows how different migration channels structure various opportunities and obstacles for immigrants. Although this study focused on immigrants' job searches after their arrival in Switzerland, the influence of these channels on other dimensions of people's experiences before, during, and after mobility should not be overlooked. The fact that these channels reflect, to a certain extent, legal ways of entering Switzerland highlights the important role of state policies related to migration. At the same time, the analysis shows that other actors influence support structures, in particular individual networks in the family-oriented channel, employers in the company-oriented channel, educational institutions in the study-oriented channel, and state-related institutions in the protection-oriented channel. In combination, these various forms of support contribute to constructing different categories of immigrants, whose skills are valued and deployed differently depending on how they are perceived and which resources are available to them.

Although migration channels structure opportunities and obstacles, individuals also possess agency within these structures. In the next part, I introduce a case study that illustrates the impact of migration channels at an individual level and the role of agency in this model.

Table 5.7 Summary of the main characteristics of migration channels

Channels	Enabling factors	Disabling factors
Family-oriented	• Indirect access to a local social network • Indirect access to locally valued skills and experience • If recognised as a reunified family member: same permit as the partner and the possibility to work (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)	• Residence status dependent on partner (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals) • Limited access to support institutions • Foreign diploma • Limited locally valued skills and experience
Company-oriented	• Indirect access to a local professional network • Financial security • Access to support from institutions targeting trailing spouses • Potential support from the employer • If recognised as a reunified family member: same permit as the partner and the possibility to work (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)	• Residence status dependent on partner (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals) • Limited local social network • Foreign diploma • Limited locally valued skills and experience
Study-oriented	• Possibility to build a network during an academic affiliation • Possibility to acquire locally valued skills and experience during an academic affiliation • Local diploma • Facilitated access to a residence permit during an academic affiliation • Access to support associated with institutions of higher education	• Precarious residence status at the end of an academic affiliation (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals) • Precarious financial situation • Limited possibility to work
Protection-oriented	• Legal protection framework defining state responsibilities • Access to support from institutions targeting refugees • If recognised as refugee: stable residence status	• Limited local social network • Limited locally valued skills and experience • Foreign diploma • Precarious financial situation • Limited mobility • Rupture with origin country • Limited possibility to work while applying for refugee status • Institutional support not targeted at highly educated individuals • Risk of trauma and health problems • If not recognised as refugee: precarious residence status

5.2.6 *Portrait: The Struggles of an Eritrean Man Towards Family Reunification*

When Joseph[19] was a baby, his parents separated and his mother migrated to the US. Joseph grew up in Eritrea with his maternal grandmother, an elementary school teacher. He recalls growing up in a middle-class environment (by Eritrean standards) and learning many valuable life lessons from his grandmother, most of all a deep sense of justice.

Shortly after obtaining his undergraduate diploma, Joseph left Eritrea for the first time and went to South Africa to study human rights and international law, where he became politically active in a movement advocating for democratic reforms in Eritrea. He was consequently declared an enemy of the state and was not allowed to renew his passport, thus becoming stateless.

At that time, Joseph was completing his PhD. He was subsequently offered a postdoctoral fellowship at a European university and managed to obtain a passport from another African state. This enabled him to travel but, as he realised later, also deprived him of the right to seek asylum in Europe.

Joseph was then employed as a postdoctoral researcher in several European countries. He was also offered a position as an assistant professor in North America but could not take the job because the embassy refused his visa application.

He met his wife while he was travelling for a conference. She also came from Eritrea and had been recognised as a refugee in Switzerland. After being in a long-distance relationship for a while, they decided to live together. At the time, Joseph was happy with his job at a research institute in Norway and would have liked for her to join him, but because of her recently acquired refugee status she was not able to live outside Switzerland.

This convinced Joseph to move to Switzerland. His employer in Norway allowed him to work remotely for 6 months, which provided him with financial security during his first half-year in Switzerland. Joseph also contacted the Swiss embassy and was reassured that obtaining a residence permit would not be difficult in his situation.

This prediction was overly optimistic, however. He encountered his first obstacle when trying to get legally married so that he and his partner could apply for family reunification. This was problematic because a valid birth certificate is required to obtain a marriage licence in Switzerland. Given his political status, he could not apply for a new one in Eritrea, and therefore could not get married.

Joseph then looked for solutions to stay in Switzerland as a legal employee. He contacted several institutes of higher education but had a difficult time finding one that would support him through the administratively cumbersome admission procedure for non-EU/EFTA workers. He was finally offered an unpaid position as a visiting researcher at a Swiss university, which enabled him to obtain a residence permit and to connect with the local academic community. Nevertheless, this

[19] Research participants' names have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

solution was only temporary since he was not earning any income and his permit did not authorise him to work outside the university.

Joseph also continued to engage in political activism. He connected with new networks in Switzerland and was invited to participate in different projects as an expert. Through his wife, he also received advice about his legal situation from an organisation supporting refugees.

A year after his arrival, he was offered a fellowship by an NGO supporting his advocacy in Eritrea. Although this eased his tense financial situation, it did not solve his permit problem because he could not obtain authorisation to stay in Switzerland based on the fellowship.

In the meantime, Joseph and his wife had a baby. The birth of their child was not only a happy personal event, but also solved an administrative problem: because the birth dates of both parents were registered on the child's birth certificate, Joseph could finally obtain an official document attesting to his own birth. But his troubles were not over. After their marriage, his wife's application for family reunification was rejected.

At the time of our interview, Joseph and his wife were appealing this decision with the help of a lawyer who thought that the first verdict was a mistake. Joseph was very disappointed with the immigration authorities' attitude. He said:

> I think that if I don't get these papers, my family reunification, my best option is to immigrate to Canada or New Zealand or the United States. … If I don't get my family reunification permit in Switzerland, I don't have any other option because I don't want to remain stuck here. … I should take my wife. It is not going to be easy, by the way, it is not going to be easy. But me staying here without papers, I become useless! With all my experience, my academic qualifications, it is a nightmare! (Personal communication to Metka Hercog, 30 May 2016)

This example illustrates how an individual may navigate between several of the channels I described above. This case is interesting in the sense that it cannot be assigned one label: Joseph oscillates between the categories of refugee (which is not legally recognised), reunified family member (which is also not recognised), and researcher (which is hindered because of his legal status). This situation gives rise to many problems, but it also enables him to access resources and develop strategies. In this sense, Joseph's choices and decisions were partly framed by the institutional context in which he is embedded, but this does not mean that he has no agency. On the contrary, Joseph was very active in developing solutions and mobilising the resources at his disposal. These resources are obviously connected to his personal characteristics and social competences, but they are also associated with his migratory situation and how it is perceived by others.

Table 5.8 shows more clearly how Joseph was able to mobilise various resources: even though he could not be admitted as a refugee, his wife's status gave him access to the counselling services of an organisation targeting refugees and to a fellowship from an organisation willing to support his political activism. He also benefitted to some extent from his wife's contacts in the asylum field. Finally, his position as an academic gave him access to new networks and, perhaps most importantly, provided

Table 5.8 Summary of the main characteristics of migration channels adapted to the specific case study

Channels	Enabling factors	Disabling factors
Family-oriented	• Indirect access to a local social network • Indirect access to locally valued skills and experience • If recognised as a reunified family member: same permit as the partner and the possibility to work (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)	• Residence status dependent on partner (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals) • Limited access to support institutions • Foreign diploma • Limited locally valued skills and experience
Company-oriented	• Indirect access to a local professional network • Financial security • Access to support from institutions targeting trailing spouses • Potential support from the employer • If recognised as reunified a family member: same permit as the partner and the possibility to work (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)	• Residence status dependent on partner (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals) • Limited local social network • Foreign diploma • Limited locally valued skills and experience
Study-oriented	• Possibility to build a network during academic affiliation • Possibility to acquire locally valued skills and experience during an academic affiliation • Local diploma • Facilitated access to a residence permit during an academic affiliation • Access to support associated with institutions of higher education	• Precarious residence status at the end of an academic affiliation (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals) • Precarious financial situation • Limited possibility to work
Protection-oriented	• Legal protection framework defining state responsibilities • Access to support from institutions targeting refugees • If recognised as refugee: stable residence status	• Limited local social network • Limited locally valued skills and experience • Foreign diploma • Precarious financial situation • Limited mobility • Rupture with origin country • Limited possibility to work while applying for refugee status • Institutional support not targeted at highly educated individuals • Risk of trauma and health problems • If not recognised as refugee: precarious residence status

him with a period of respite during which he was allowed to stay in Switzerland and could investigate new options.

However, Joseph was also affected by many of the disabling factors associated with the channels in which he was embedded. Even though he was unable to apply for asylum and so could not fully use the protection-oriented channel, he represents some of the features associated with this channel. In particular, the brutal rupture with his country of origin as a result of his political activism meant that he could not seek support from his government, even for administrative matters such as a birth certificate. In addition, the fact that his wife is embedded in the protection-oriented channel indirectly affected him: her limited mobility was the main reason that he resigned from a qualified job in another country to come to Switzerland, even though his legal status and lack of connections affected his chances of employment upon arrival.

In this sense, Joseph's situation in Switzerland is closely linked to his wife's. Yet, by denying their applications for family reunification, the Swiss state refused to recognise this connection. To overcome this obstacle, Joseph was able to turn to the study-oriented channel due to his previous experience as an academic. Although this affiliation enabled him to meet new people and to become recognised as a scholar in Switzerland, it did not significantly ease his access to the labour market owing to the university's lack of funding and the rigid admission system that prevented him from working.

This analysis could be developed by examining other factors in Joseph's story. For instance, current political issues associated with his nationality certainly played a role, since several politicians have publicly criticised the open attitude of the Swiss administration towards Eritrean refugees in the past, and reforms are currently underway to tighten their access to Switzerland (Geiser, 2015; Reuters, 2017). Stereotypes and discrimination associated with Joseph's ethnicity could also explain some of his difficulties. At the same time, Joseph's social competences as an academic researcher with substantial international experience, his unusual biography, and his extensive network in advocacy groups helped him to mobilise resources that other people in a similar situation but with a different background would have had no chance of accessing. This shows how different migration channels are connected with specific enabling and disabling factors, though it is obvious that these factors intersect with other categories of difference such as gender, nationality, ethnicity, race, and class.

This section has shown that the possibilities of using one's skills after migration are not only connected to personal social features such as gender, race, or class but also to the conditions under which migration takes place. The kind of recognition and support that a person can receive after arriving in a new place greatly depends on the institutional environment and regulations that structure different migration channels. This does not mean, of course, that all people who migrate using a similar channel end up in exactly the same situation. Yet they are likely to face similar enabling and disabling factors, which may affect their personal trajectory more or

less strongly depending on the intersection between features related to their migration situation, the institutional context in which they are embedded, and their individual characteristics.

5.3 Brain Gain or Body Shopping?

This chapter focused on the situation and experience of different groups of people migrating to Switzerland. By comparing contrasting cases, I wanted to understand how access to support and privileges is structured, and who benefits more from them. I also wanted to question the notion of "highly skilled migrant" by showing that this status results from a construction of the way some institutional actors create specific migration conditions for people to whom they attribute particular economic and social value.

In the first section, I used statistical methods to investigate different forms of relocation support received by recent immigrants. I showed that while employers actively attract some people to Switzerland, different categories of immigrants have unequal access to the Swiss territory and labour market. The analysis revealed that, beyond qualifications, social categories such as nationality and gender structure access to migration channels and resource environments. Moreover, observing practices within personal relationships and professional sectors is important for understanding differences in access to relocation support.

A main finding of this analysis is that economic power relations between countries, gendered practices within heterosexual couples, and recruitment practices within professional sectors all interact with immigration policies to create systems of inclusion and exclusion that enable highly educated men from economically powerful countries to access significant corporate relocation support, whereas married women and non-EU/EFTA nationals from less powerful countries more often migrate as relatives with the support of personal social networks. If this finding corresponds to a stereotype of the "highly skilled migrant" as a white man from a rich country, it also shows that white men from rich countries are actively given more opportunities to *become* highly skilled migrants, whereas people with similar levels of qualification and experience but with a different gender or social background have fewer opportunities to migrate. In this sense, the very idea of "highly skilled migrant" is a construction that relies on power dynamics at a global level.

I then analysed migration channels used by highly educated people who migrate to Switzerland without sponsorship from an employer. I discussed the different enabling and disabling factors associated with these channels as well as the distribution of responsibilities between institutional actors for supporting immigrants in each channel. I showed that the way institutional actors construct immigrants in each channel differs, and these differences influence the services that are developed for each group.

In the family-oriented channel, people migrate to join a partner or relative living in Switzerland. Their resource environment on arrival very much depends on the family member's connections and social position. The role of the state is mainly to control admission conditions and to rectify situations perceived as socially problematic. However, the state provides little support to promote the social and economic integration of immigrants so long as their situation remains socially acceptable.

In contrast, in the company-oriented channel, the value of immigrants directly derives from employers that cause their relocation. Some companies invest considerable resources in supporting the mobility and settlement of new employees and their families. Furthermore, state administrations in charge of economic promotion have a particular interest in supporting people who are perceived as conveyers of wealth and economic development.

The study-oriented channel presents more ambiguities. On the one hand, relaxed admission requirements, as well as the supportive environment associated with state-funded institutes of higher education, create attractive conditions for immigrants to study in Switzerland. On the other hand, the fear of competition from foreign graduates and potential abuse of the system has motivated the development of restrictive admission conditions for non-EU/EFTA graduates in Switzerland. There is thus a contrast between a supportive environment during the institutional affiliation and a restrictive one immediately upon completion.

Finally, the protection-oriented channel is characterised by a resource environment structured around legal and political decisions that regulate the admission of asylum seekers to Switzerland. In this channel, the state determines whether a person has a rightful claim to asylum. Qualifications and skills have no significant value in this process. Moreover, the various restrictions and constraints involved in this channel make it particularly difficult for immigrants to build on their existing social and cultural capital.

These configurations of responsibilities and power entail different perceptions of immigrants: while some tend to be defined by their economic potential, others are more likely to be suspected of abusing the system. Such representations influence the forms of control and support present in each channel, thus affecting the opportunities available to immigrants. At the same time, immigrants are not passive agents. They actively develop strategies to adapt to the constraints imposed on them and to achieve their personal aspirations. They are not necessarily stuck in one channel only and they may try to expand their options by navigating between them. Nevertheless, they also depend on the range of opportunities available in their immediate resource environment, and the possibility to navigate between channels relies on their ability to mobilise these options effectively, whether alone or with the support of others.

These findings bring us back to the discussion of the notion of "highly skilled migrant". In the academic literature, a clear distinction is often made between high-skill and low-skill migrants. I tried to show, however, that skills are not all that matter. The deployment and acknowledgement of one's skills is not only linked to a person's characteristics but also to the social, economic, and political context in which they are embedded. Legal and political processes, economic dynamics and competition, societal debates, and power relations all influence representations of

migrants. These also shape interests, practices, and strategies that particularly affect certain individuals: sometimes they provide access to support and resources, while sometimes they trap migrants in Kafkaesque administrative systems. In that sense, the way we see migrants and differentiate between categories has consequences for the personal experiences and biographies of mobile individuals. Categories are not neutral because they can transform someone's life trajectory. For this reason, it is important to be aware of what we mean when we speak of "highly skilled migrants". Although this term is not a legal category in Switzerland, it has the power to define certain people as "wanted", "valuable", "socially desirable", and "culturally close" migrants, while others are defined as "unwanted".

At the beginning of this book, I discussed the idea that the definition of skill levels raises important questions regarding the value attributed to different forms of knowledge. In addition to issues related to the geographical and social distribution of power, I highlighted the discriminatory nature of skills-based policies, as well as the gendered dimension of skills valuation. I then showed through case studies that the value and support that various intermediaries grant to immigrants rely on factors other than qualifications and competences. Sometimes what matters most is the ability of a specific individual to convincingly fit within a specific economic context, other times the power and knowledge of a sponsor may make the difference, or people may have to be in the right place at the right moment with the right set of social characteristics and competences in order to succeed. Individual characteristics are important to the extent that they contribute to structuring access to supportive environments. Gender and nationality, for instance, not only interact with class, they also shape it by influencing the kind of channel that a person may use when migrating and the kind of support they may receive. In each of these cases, however, the social value of skills constitutes only one piece of the equation. Beyond individual characteristics, the way people are embedded in supportive or constraining environments that do or do not enable them to build upon their existing (social, cultural, economic etc.) capital is central to shaping their social status and life options. For this reason, it is important to investigate the way intermediaries involved in supporting and controlling mobility define and create opportunities for their target populations. Improving our understanding of the way migration regimes are structured necessitates a serious consideration of the role of actors who organise and shape the conditions of different categories of mobile people.

Overall, this chapter adds to the debate on highly skilled migration by calling for more nuanced approaches. In the work of Leslie Sklair (1998) and Saskia Sassen (2005), the "highly skilled" are described as a "transnational capitalist class" of cosmopolitan free-movers who transform national structures by positioning themselves as the new "global elite" (Favell et al., 2006). They lead "hyper-mobile international careers" (Hannerz, 1996), are socially and culturally disconnected from the places in which they live (Van Bochove & Engbersen, 2013), and "display highly mobile transnational elite existences and practices" (Beaverstock, 2002). My findings temper these rather extreme representations of highly skilled migrants. They show that reducing this category to a homogeneous elite class obscures the complexity of the social phenomena at stake and does not do justice to the stories of the

individuals involved. In line with other authors (Amit, 2007; Camenisch & Müller, 2017; Conradson & Latham, 2005; Scott, 2006), my work suggests that mobile ways of life are not exclusively available to elite groups but are increasingly becoming part of the experience of some middle class categories of people. Moreover, I show that border-crossing practices still present obstacles and constraints even for more privileged groups of people. In these situations, those who control outcomes are not so much the migrants as those who recruit them and define the conditions of their mobility.

In his book on the migration pathways of Indian IT specialists, Xiang Biao uses the term "global body shopping" to contrast with the more positive notion of "brain gain" and emphasise the fact that even highly skilled workers can be embedded in systems of labour distribution over which they have little control (Xiang, 2007). My research reaches similar conclusions and complements them with further findings. It shows that migration is a highly ambiguous process that can offer opportunities of upward social mobility, but that can also put people at risk: their qualifications may not be recognised, their legal status may exclude them from certain dimensions of social life, or they may feel isolated from their social networks. This creates situations of insecurity that make some migrants dependent on the decisions of more powerful, profit-oriented actors. These migrants have to market themselves as valuable in order to obtain and maintain the support of these actors. For this reason, migration is never solely an individual project but is also an industry in which various actors have invested stakes (Cranston et al., 2018; Groutsis et al., 2015). The business of migration involves major political issues concerning who is allowed to live and participate in a given society (Favell, 2008) and brings into play both state and non-state actors who define and select "wanted" or "good" migrants (Findlay et al., 2013; Hercog & Sandoz, 2018; Van Riemsdijk, Basford, & Burnham, 2015). Mobile individuals can in some cases benefit from these systems but have little control over them and, for this reason, depend on those who do.

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Chapter 6
Conclusion

> *It felt strange to be called privileged. Privilege was more like Kayode DaSilva, whose passport sagged with the weight of visa stamps, who went to London for summer and to Ikoyi Club to swim, who could casually get up and say "We're going to Frenchies for ice cream."*
> *"I've never been called privileged in my life!" Ifemelu said. "It feels good."*
>
> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013). Americanah. Lagos: Kachifo

We are coming to the end of this research journey, which examined the mobilities of "highly skilled migrants" towards Switzerland. My goal was to highlight the role of migration intermediaries in the construction of distinctive categories of immigrants with access to different forms of support and privileges. This has enabled the focus to shift from an approach that takes the category of highly skilled migrant for granted to one that regards contexts as crucial for structuring migrants' characteristics, trajectories, and experiences, and for informing the perception of mobile people as skilled or unskilled, wanted or unwanted, welcome or unwelcome. I have defended the argument that definitions of highly skilled migrants depend less on an objective evaluation of individual characteristics than on the way special interest groups value potential migrants.

Overall, the analysis underscored tensions at the heart of discussions about highly skilled migrants. Skill-based migration policies tend to be praised as contributing to a country's economic development and enabling the smooth liberalisation of national border regimes (Hercog, 2008; Hercog & Sandoz, 2018a; Tannock, 2011). In this type of migration system, highly skilled migrants are presented as good migrants to be attracted and welcomed, in contrast to low skilled migrants who need to be tolerated and controlled. However, my research shows that the definition of a migrant's value is complex and subjective, even from an economic perspective. Far from being meritocratic, the attraction, selection, and retention of migrants is a highly politicised process, which involves a variety of actors with competing interests.

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In order to provide a better understanding of the complexity and subjectivity of the term "highly skilled migrant", I included in my analysis actors who are usually invisible in migration discourses, although they are involved in the process of selecting, supporting, or employing migrants who represent value to them. I showed how some of these actors came to be involved in monitoring migration processes despite the fact that they have nothing to do with national border controls. I also examined mechanisms through which actors who belong to the state apparatus develop strategies to circumvent restrictive admission policies in the name of economic interests. My research thus contributes to the growing scientific field on migration industries and intermediaries by showing that migration governance relies on networks rather than on single institutions. In particular, the analysis of the Swiss case reveals that the state constitutes a mosaic of actors and institutions, which sometimes collaborate and sometimes oppose each other. Furthermore, a significant part of migration governance happens beyond the state's control or in areas in which the border between state and non-state actors is blurred.

I started my analysis by focusing on Swiss admission processes and the ways in which various policy objectives and practices influence the selection of labour immigrants. The dual admission system, which makes a clear distinction between EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA labour immigrants, constitutes a compromise between opposing political tendencies towards openness and closure. This communicates an impression of state control over immigration to the electorate while staying flexible enough to adapt to the needs of major economic actors. Moreover, this system relies on an ambiguous definition of highly skilled migrants as economically profitable, socially independent, and culturally close individuals. Cultural preference, although not currently explicitly mentioned in policy documents, remains a particularly important selection criterion that is legitimised through economic arguments, as well as through arguments about public good and social cohesion. In the second part of this chapter, I showed that the concrete implementation of Swiss admission policies involves complex interactions between state employees and a vast network of non-state institutions – employers, consultants, relocation agents, lawyers, economic promotion agencies – for which the mobility of highly educated workers is an economic driver. These actors facilitate access to residence and work permits for foreigners who are expected to generate profit. However, they can also force migrants into situations of dependency and immobility, as restrictive admission systems in Switzerland and elsewhere make them reliant on the administrative support of a sponsor. In practice, a migrant's successful admission is based on factors that have little to do with their actual skills and more to do with the type of support received from employers or experts in admission processes. Hence, the authorities' perception of the economic interests and legitimacy of a candidate's application for admission is crucial for defining their value in the Swiss labour market.

In the third chapter, I examined place-branding strategies in order to observe how local administrations and related actors define the valuable immigrants who they want to attract, but once again the categories are unclear. While cantonal administrations in charge of integration informally differentiate between "highly qualified expats" and "less privileged migrants" based on markers of difference such as class

and nationality, they do not want to show favouritism towards already privileged groups and tend to focus their activities on groups perceived as socially disadvantaged. Nevertheless, actors in charge of economic promotion develop strategies to foster regional development and create services that directly target the most profitable companies. In this way, some foreign employees benefit from special treatment due to their employer's status. In some instances, the cantonal administrations in charge of economic development also delegate the task of welcoming and settling "wanted immigrants" to private sector institutions. This enables local administrations to develop support services targeted at foreigners who they perceive as most valuable, while avoiding political controversies by blurring the borders between the public and private sectors. Some highly educated immigrants participate in these political processes by mobilising their cultural, social, and economic capital in order to advocate for more recognition from the state. Immigrants who define themselves as "expats" insist on their specificity with regard to other immigrants. Although their main goal is to raise awareness about the difficulties that they experience when moving to Switzerland, their claims also challenge classical perceptions of belonging, since they substitute nationality with economic contribution as a legitimate factor for defining state duties towards them. Moreover, they insist that their cultural capital defines their value and legitimacy to participate as local residents. These claims contribute to making more visible the needs of newcomers, but they also reproduce the idea of a normative distinction between more and less deserving immigrants.

The fourth chapter focused on mobility within the framework of internationalised companies. In this case, employers define "highly skilled migrants" based on their ability to fit into specific situations and to fulfil perceived needs. The selection, attraction, and retention of qualified workers rely on mobility infrastructure composed of intermediaries such as headhunters, relocation agents, consultants, and short-term labour providers. The main role of these intermediaries is to facilitate access for companies to workers who can be immediately efficient, thus reducing the need for employers to invest in training employees. Efficiency, however, means more than skills in this context, since it often implies an evaluation of a candidate's social background, lifestyle, values, and perceived cultural attributes. Beyond abilities or qualifications, a person's biographical background, life choices, origin, class, and gender all influence their chances of being selected by a recruiter and offered a job. In addition, the recent emergence and rapid growth of a migration industry specialised in the short-term staffing of skilled workers has contributed to creating new norms and constraints for employees. By facilitating mobility, these intermediaries have trivialised it. To illustrate this argument, I focused on management consultants, who have become major providers of expertise and highly skilled labour for short-term projects within multinational companies over the past decades. This case study showed that in some sectors, mobility has ceased to be a career choice and has instead become a condition for climbing the corporate ladder. Individuals rather than institutions have become responsible for assuming the difficulties associated with frequent mobility. Such constraints have created new challenges for reconciling work with private and family life, as well as new uncertainties and forms of precariousness, even among well-paid and socially valued professions.

I concluded my analysis by identifying obstacles and opportunities associated with different migration channels towards Switzerland. I used data from the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey to analyse the kinds of support that immigrants receive when relocating to Switzerland. I highlighted the central role of employers in attracting foreign workers and providing privileged access to Switzerland for some. The analysis revealed that the relocation practices of employers tend to favour certain nationalities, in particular workers from rich anglophone countries, while disadvantaging married women and citizens of non-EU/EFTA countries. I then qualitatively analysed the experiences of individuals moving through different migration channels which are structured by a combination of state policies and private initiatives. I considered enabling and disabling factors associated with the company-oriented channel, the family-oriented channel, the study-oriented channel, and the protection-oriented channel. I showed that the legal frameworks regulating each channel, as well as the support structures available to immigrants in these channels, create different resource environments associated with specific obstacles and opportunities. Being highly skilled means something very different depending on whether one comes to Switzerland as a refugee, an employee, a spouse, or a student. Yet, I also showed that individuals are not restricted to just one of these environments: given certain conditions, migrants have the agency to develop strategies in order to improve their situation, which sometimes involves navigating between channels to access new opportunities.

To conclude, I argue that the various forms of categorisation of highly skilled migrants analysed in this book involve two main mechanisms, which require further scrutiny:

1. Migration intermediaries construct the legitimacy of highly skilled migrants based on powerful economic narratives, which can overshadow issues related to social justice and discrimination.
2. Selection processes of highly skilled migrants withdraw certain practices from the public sphere and depoliticise them.

Regarding the first point, I observe a constant in the processes of defining highly skilled migrants: the various actors who select immigrants use economic narratives as a main legitimation factor for identifying "wanted" categories of immigrants to the exclusion of others. The prevalence of these economic narratives derives from the power of states to control access to national territory and from the nation-state logic according to which immigrants have to fulfil a need in order to be welcome and supported. Promoting the mobility of certain people makes sense only in a context in which the mobility of others is hindered. The very notion of highly skilled migrant arises from the fact that borders exist but are more porous for some categories of people. This logic suggests that some immigrants have more value than others and should therefore be granted more rights. From this perspective, the distinction between more and less desirable immigrants is either taken for granted or supported with economic arguments (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018b; Sandoz, 2018; Yeung, 2016).

These economic arguments are powerful because they legitimise exclusionary practices. In the case of non-EU and non-EFTA workers in particular, the populist fear of foreigners who take jobs from local workers or remain perpetually unemployed justifies a system in which the state partially delegates employment-related migration selection to employers. In these situations, my research revealed that ethnicity, class, age, nationality, and gender can easily become markers of lower economic profitability – and thus grounds for exclusion – especially when they are associated with fears of low productivity, for instance in the case of immigrants who have large families, or whose legal status leads to an excessive administrative workload, or because their cultural background is perceived as incompatible with local norms and values. In contrast, migrants who correspond with dominant representations of success, efficiency, and power have an advantage when negotiating conditions of relocation and employment, whether with the state authorities that approve their admission or with their future employers.

These findings are of course not new in the social sciences. Many authors have already highlighted prejudices that prevent some potential immigrants from accessing new territories and labour markets because of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and so forth (e.g. Kofman, 2014; Sandoz & Santi, 2019; Tannock, 2011; Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). More surprising, however, is the observation that the state employees and the corporate actors whom I interviewed rarely considered that excluding individuals for economic reasons could be problematic. Furthermore, offering advantages to those whom they considered more productive was seen as perfectly legitimate. The idea that these practices contribute to general economic interests was so strong that it was not only acceptable, but in some cases even necessary. The long-term social consequences of systematic exclusionary practices, their ethical dimensions, and the potential loss of diversity were not issues that my interlocutors seemed to reflect upon. More importantly, their legitimations eclipsed the fact that these practices contributed to reproducing systematic patterns of exclusion. In other words, they did not acknowledge that apparently rational economic arguments can be discriminatory from a structural perspective when they arise from and perpetuate systems in which opportunities for mobility are unequally distributed.

I have tried to complicate this discourse by underscoring the problematic nature of immigrant valuation processes with three main arguments which question the scope of these economic legitimations. First, I showed that the definition of value is always contextual, structured by the power dynamics within a specific social environment, and dependent on this environment to maintain itself. For this reason, skills are not valuable in and of themselves. Their worth arises from the ability of social actors to use and market them in specific situations. This means that a person may be considered highly skilled in one context and low skilled in another. In other words, the value of skills is relative to the structure of specific resource environments. Second, skills are embodied. They are not products that can be dissociated from the person who holds them. The way they are developed, deployed, and valued is intimately connected with individual biographies. Skills mature in interaction

with other social characteristics, meaning that the chance of being recognised as highly skilled is unequally distributed among social groups. Third, economic narratives can act as self-fulfilling prophecies. In other words, they can create the realities they describe. The fifth chapter on migration channels showed how certain immigrants who are viewed as sources of profit by corporate and state actors are offered various forms of support that enable them to make use of and develop their economic potential under favourable conditions. In contrast, other immigrants with similar qualifications and competences face obstacles because their personal characteristics – such as national origin, gender or marital status – position them in categories perceived as less valuable by these same actors. What differentiates "highly skilled migrants" from "low skilled migrants" is thus not so much their skills as the profit that other actors expect from them. From a social justice perspective, these findings are major reasons for considering that economic arguments alone are not sufficient to legitimise immigrant selection practices. Yet, they are rarely a theme of political debate. Although immigration is currently a trendy topic in Switzerland and elsewhere, the admission of "wanted" immigrants tends to remain an invisible process.

This brings me to my second point, which is that the selection process of highly skilled migrants involves mechanisms that withdraw certain practices from the public sphere and depoliticise them. In a nation-state system, governments control access to national territory by defining differentiated migration conditions for non-citizens. In a democratic system, however, governments must define these conditions based on criteria that the electorate consider legitimate. I have shown that the process of defining highly skilled migrants involves networks of actors from both the public and private sectors who select immigrants according to their specific needs and priorities. For example, in the employment-related admission of non-EU/EFTA nationals, state authorities partly delegate the recruitment of foreign workers to employers, who can then outsource the task to intermediaries such as headhunters and consultants. The logic that governs these processes is, as I have discussed, mainly economic, yet it can lead to the perpetuation of structural forms of discrimination, which violate the principle of equal opportunity. The problem here is accountability: no single actor can be clearly held responsible for the outcomes of the selection process. The multiplication of intermediaries and the administrative intricacies of each decision dilutes responsibility, and the fragmentation of the system eclipses moral questions. By posing as bureaucrats who simply validate the decisions of other economic actors, state authorities can discharge their liability regarding possible dysfunction within the system.

This phenomenon has several consequences. First, the application of immigration laws becomes the responsibility of people who know little about it. Consequently, many procedural mistakes occur, which can dramatically affect immigrants whose personal and financial stability depend on the outcomes. Second, knowledge of how the admission process functions becomes an unequally distributed tool of power. People with the right resources can strategically use this system to reach personal objectives, whereas people without the necessary capital have little chance of influ-

encing the process to their advantage. Third, labour immigrants who rely on this system for admission have limited opportunities to appeal in the case of unjust treatment. The invisibility of discretionary procedural power means that even if administrative decisions could be proved discriminatory, applicants for admission may never know the details of their own cases. In addition, their foreign status limits the possibility of appeal even in cases where their rejection is in clear violation of the laws. Whatever its outcomes, legal action against immigration authorities does not matter if a potential employer hires someone else in the meantime.

These observations call for the recognition that immigration policies based on demand, economic interests, and vague criteria favour relationships of dependence and control between the immigrants and those who support them. These schemes form part of a system in which immigrants are expected to remain profitable and flexible in order to meet the economic needs of the environment into which they are admitted. Moreover, these schemes have a disciplining function, in the sense that they restrict the agency of the immigrants and empower the actors who can profit from them. In the context of my research, this disciplining function mainly concerns non-EU and non-EFTA nationals, who constitute a minority of the migration flows towards Switzerland. Examples such as Brexit in the UK and the initiative "against mass migration" in Switzerland, however, remind us that the return of more restrictive migration policies within Europe might not be as unlikely as one may have thought in recent years.

In the beginning of this book, I discussed the fact that many authors researching highly skilled migrants view them as privileged elites who move easily between places and jobs. My findings in the Swiss context show that if such people exist, it is because other actors have an interest in supporting them. Highly skilled migrants are granted privileges because of their position within a system that constructs them as valuable, but they risk of losing these privileges as soon as they are no longer wanted. The privileges associated with certain skills are fragile because they constantly need to be earned, and ultimately depend less on the individuals who possess them than on those who evaluate them. In other words, the designation "highly skilled" is context-dependent and can therefore be lost or taken away.

"Highly skilled migrant" might thus not be the best term to describe a mobile person in a privileged position. Beyond skills, other elements need to be considered, such as forms of capital, nationality, legal status, gender, ethnicity, and class. Therefore, the most relevant questions to raise when analysing status and privilege in a migration context are not only "who is this person?" and "what can they do?" but also "how do they move?" and "with support from whom?" These questions enable us to situate individuals within institutional environments and to deconstruct static representations of skills and merit. They also highlight interactional dimensions of power by showing that privilege results less from hard work and/or talent than from decisions taken by various actors in specific social environments. Finally, the crucial importance of borders must be taken into account, as well as the strategies that some people develop in order to cross them. In a constantly mobile world, power lies not with those who move but with those who define the borders.

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