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# Imagined Embedding(s): Young People's Reasons for Moving to Norway

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**Abstract:** There has been a plethora of scholarly work which examines the motivational and lingering factors of youth mobilities but there has not been a sufficient number of scholarly articles that explain specifically why Norway is a destination for youth, with a few exceptions. This paper focuses on young people who move to Norway for employment reasons. Six interviews were chosen via a purposeful sampling from a sample of 15 interviewees, who moved to Norway. The interviews were transcribed and were analysed via thematic analysis. As a result of the thematic analysis, it is observed that imagined embedding(s), a theorisation to explain the motivations to choose a destination place, can be applied to these cases. I contribute to the literature by applying imagined embedding(s) to the motivations for moving abroad, in this case to Norway for young people in mobility. Since most of the work examines the embedding(s) during mobility, my focus will be on the period before mobility and the initial period of mobility. This research proves that the economic reasons for movement are almost always coupled with other more intrinsic and non-economic motives and imagination(s) of a place.

**Keywords:** youth mobility; employment; Norway; embedding; imagination

## 1. Introduction

There are plenty of subjective reasons to become spatially mobile and there are many ways in which these reasons are expressed by the young people in movement. The reasons of mobility that I highlight in this paper are specific to the case of incoming young people between the ages of 18 and 30 in Norway. This paper will answer the following research question(s): why do young Europeans prefer to come to Norway as a part of their mobility choices? What kind of imagined embedding(s) they have in their heads (subjectively) as motivations and reasons to move to Norway?

I have created the term imagined embeddings as a term that has been inspired by Cuzzocrea and Mandich's (2016) work as well as Ryan's (2018) work. Imagined embeddings are the imagined integration of the young mobile people before they move to a different country. In our case that would be Norway. The imagined part comes from the irrational part of movement whilst embedding (being inserted into a place as a result of the combination of one's own agency and structural constraints vs. enabling factors) would also be a synthesis of how one imagines and how one adapts to the real conditions at one place. Therefore, imagined integration and imagined settlement or stay would also constitute of elements of rationality such as a good labour market, nice place to live, landscape, nature and cultural diversity. In other words, in this paper, I illustrate how the young people focus on both imagined and rational qualities of a place which is a mixture of fact and fiction in the case of Norway.

Why am I focusing on the young people in my research? "Youth stage is characterized by a high degree of mobility". (Hall et al. 2015, p. 75). This is so also because youth is a transitory period in people's lives (in between childhood and adulthood) and especially the phase in which mobility is seen as a possibility and an opportunity. Mare et al. (1984, p. 239) point out that "youth is a time of transition among a number of market and nonmarket

activities that include work, schooling, military service, marriage, family formation, and experimentation with unconventional styles of life". Hence, youth is seen as this period where there are turning points in life although they might not be executed in an orderly fashion (ibid.). Since youth is of great importance when the central theme is to become mobile, age in this period is seen as the time to make such decisions. Furthermore, it is less common that older people move (Van Mol 2016; Sjaastad 1962).

Many seminal studies concentrate on fostering factors of mobility as well as drivers of mobility (Kmiotek-Meier et al. 2019; Herz et al. 2019; Cuzzocrea 2018; Cairns et al. 2013). Causes of migration, on the other hand, have been examined by many different authors (King et al. 2016; Glorius 2013; Jendrissek 2016; Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2014; Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). Salazar (2008, p. 22) focusses on the contextual factors affecting the mobilities of the young people. As Bygnes and Erdal (2017, p. 103) examine Spanish movements into Norway, their interviews with young adults demonstrate that there are pull and push factors on both sides combined with the biographies of the people involved: "the context of increasing precariousness in the Polish and Spanish labour markets became salient for the analysis, through the ways in which migrants' themselves talked about their futures". They suggest that the Norwegian context's importance lies specifically in the number of available jobs, relative job security, welfare provisions and possibility for intra-European migrants to settle down in Norway (ibid.). Therefore, the work conditions intertwined with biographic reasons seem to be prominent motives behind the decisions on mobility and migration (Brannen and Nilsen 2005, p. 414).

In her seminal work Frändberg (2008, p. 24) suggests "many of the mobility biographies that involve migration are characterized by repetitive and often highly regular travel patterns reflecting enduring social links between two or more places". Her ideas give the impression that neither mobility nor migration is bound to be one-off events, further blurring the distinction between temporariness of mobility and permanence of migration.

Against this backdrop, I would like to provide a brief definition of mobility and migration. When the theme is migration, the feeling of a place is more dependent on other factors such as building human capital as well as previous social and cultural capital (Kaufmann et al. 2004). When the theme is mobility, Salazar (2008, p. 153) says "As a concept, mobility captures the common impression that one's lifeworld is in flux, with not only people, but also cultures, objects, capital, businesses, services, diseases, media, images, information, and ideas circulating across (and even beyond) the planet". In the EU, there have been important works conceptualising migration and mobility (Morokvasic 2004; King 2009; Janoschka 2010). Finally, Cohen and Sirkeci (2011, p. 7) explain the differences between mobility and migration as such:

> "Mobility is a term that can be used cross-border to replace 'migration' and help us explain and understand cross-border human movements. The advantages that come with using 'mobility' are two-fold. First, 'mobility' accommodates human movement beyond the limited definition of 'migration', which is based on a twelve-month residence in a country that is foreign to the home country of the mover. Second, 'mobility' is a dynamic term that emphasizes the changing, floating, fluid nature of this phenomenon and captures the regular as well as irregular moves of people on the ground regardless of time and destination".

In this paper, I use the term "mobility" rather than migration as the young people with whom I interviewed are all EU citizens and they moved to Norway without any difficulties in regard to their visa application processes or other bureaucratic measures related to bordering practices. Despite the fact that Norway is not an EU member state it is a part of the Schengen Agreement. It is noteworthy to indicate that the challenges that migration implies—such as bureaucratic hurdles (to get a visa or residence permit) and legal status stratification amongst diverse migrants—do not apply to spatial mobility between the EU member states, where EU citizens have freedom of movement. However, there can be similarities between mobility and migration when it comes to motivations for mobility although, in EU terminology, mobility is the appropriate term for the EU citizens

whereas states might use the term migration rather than mobility either for political reasons (Van Ostaijen 2017) or statistical reasons (Norway, UK, Italy and many more).

In this paper, first I will provide a brief literature review on motivations for moving abroad in general and moving to Norway in particular. That theme will be followed by the history of use of the term "embeddedness", "differentiated embedding" (Ryan 2018), and finally, my theory "imagined embeddings". Hereby, I define imagined embeddings as such: "the imagined feeling of a place even before moving to the place; the imagined belonging, being and becoming (existentially) in the new place, hence, imagination of relating to a place as a motivation to move there". Later in the paper, I describe my methodology and analyse the results. Finally, I discuss the results shortly and finalise with the concluding remarks providing suggestions for possible future research agendas.

## 2. Taking a Step Back: From Differentiated Embedding(s) to Imagined Embedding(s)

The explanatory factors behind migration are elucidated in the form of major theories which used diverse explanations for understanding migration vs. mobility with an overall macro view (economic reasons, rationalism, higher salaries and so on). However, they have been criticised because they have ignored the micro- and meso-level motivations. Thus, individual perceptions, interpretations, preferences as well as mobility practices are generalised excluding the specific biographical stories.

Glorius (2013) has categorised various different reasons for migration: structuralist approaches, world systems theory (Wallerstein 1974; Sassen 1988), migration system theory (Kritz and Zlotnik 1992), network theory (Faist 1998), and cumulative causation (Massey 1990). In addition to these theories there are facilitators of migration, as the transnational approach (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992) also grasps. Whilst world systems theory and migration system theory are explanatory to understand the structural context, these theories might neglect the individual and biographical reasons for mobility that need to be examined in connection with contextualization of the individual preferences (Halfacree and Boyle 1993). Therefore, biography interlinks with history and society (Brannen and Nilsen 2005, p. 414). Furthermore, Cairns draws our attention to the individual reasons for mobility and he also associates the meso and macro perspectives together in order to provide a full-fledged perspective on mobility decisions (Cairns 2017, 2018).

With a holistic approach, it is possible to say that the youth mobilities are complex as they are influenced by cultures of mobility, institutional support that is available, access to mobility funds, mobility windows-temporality, rooms to manoeuvre vs. institutional penetration (Schlimbach et al. 2019, pp. 24–25). Considering all these macro, meso and micro levels of influence that affect the possibility of being mobile for the young people, it is absolutely crucial to characterise the relation between agency and structure in a balanced and accurate way.

A recent seminal work by Skrobanek and Vysotskaya (2022) also focusses on the contextual embeddedness and the links between structural constraints and the agency. They benefit from the definition of diverse dimensions of agency by Emirbayer and Mische (1998): imagination, habit and judgement. They argue that contextual factors influence these three dimensions diversely as not everyone is equal in manoeuvring and changing outcomes (p. 13). Focusing on one of these dimensions examined by Skrobanek and Vysotskaya (2022), imagination is a crucial part of agency in employment related intra-EU mobility. For instance, Cuzzocrea and Mandich (2016, p. 553) draw attention to imagined mobilities as a form of youth agency saying that "imagination and future are intertwined" as young people imagine the resources that are (or that may or may not be) available to them in the future mobilities they undertake. Hence, looking at the context and the agency, it is possible to analyse the imagined part of mobilities vs. constraints at a deeper level.

The constraints and the contexts are not devoid of uncertainties that young people face (Leccardi 2005; Skrobanek et al. 2019) or "multiple orientations towards future" (Woodman 2011, p. 126). The scholars also underline the difficulty in examining the interrelatedness of agency and structure in a concrete form (Skrobanek and Ardic 2016). In regard to

uncertainties and agency–structure relations, it is important to underline that Simon (2000) was talking about "bounded rationality" meaning that full rationality and rational choice cannot exist as there will always be uncertainties and there will always be those factors that we cannot calculate via equations. "The behaviours" and the decisions that we cannot calculate are influenced both by internal and external factors. "Consequently, rational behaviour in the real world is as much determined by the "inner environment" of people's minds, both their memory contents and their processes, as by the "outer environment" of the world on which they act, and which acts on them" (Simon 2000, p. 25). In this sense, the term "imagined embedding" aims to capture the rational and irrational within its entirety.

In this paper, I aim to bring forward the term imagined embedding(s) in order to explain motivations to move to Norway for employment reasons in such a way that "imagined" and "embedding" imply agentic action as well as the contextual circumstances that affect the agency directly or indirectly. For instance, Norway is an imagined place and an imagined context in the heads of the young people who decide to move there, and yet, their embedding (which is full of action and imagination) is also dependent on the external constraints and facilitating factors.

Mobility decisions as well as return are closely connected with the social, economic, cultural and political embedding(s). Looking at the resources of embeddedness and where this term comes from, it would be valuable to understand the context of embeddedness in relation with spatial mobility. Hess (2004) brings the transnational agenda to the scene and Ryan (2018) benefits from the multi-scalarity of Hess's work. To explain shortly, Hess (2004, p. 169) also worked on the temporal and spatial dimensions of migration, bringing forward Polanyi's book "The Great Transformation" (1944): "In Polanyi, it is not only the individual as an actor, or at least a person's social relationships with others, that form the substance of Polanyi's embeddedness concept. Neither are economic organizations or collective actors, like an enterprise, seen as actors that are embedded in something". Hess (2004) in his work focusses his attention on how the labour market and the economy in general are closely interrelated with the larger sociocultural patterns of the postmodern society. Last but not least, Hess gives credit to Granovetter's work (1975) by saying that the individual and the social forms of agency cannot be separated easily from each other.

Hess categorises embeddedness (2004, pp. 176–77) as "societal embeddedness, network embeddedness, territorial embeddedness" explaining how actor network theory (ANT) works. Hess's work is very important to show that the transnational networks are quite central in defining the limits and extensions of embeddedness. Hess says (p. 181) the concept of embeddedness has to be spatio-temporal "incorporating the formation and change of social structures in time and space". He offers the term "rhizome" saying that "rhizome provides a possibility to think through the categories of societal, network and territorial embeddedness that characterise socioeconomic activity and the related network structures" (p. 182).

Ryan (2018) in her work focusses on embedding rather than embeddedness underlining the human actions. "Embedding, can, therefore, be used as a means of explaining the process through which social actors connect to and interact with a multiplicity of social, economic and political structures through various social/relationships/social networks" (Ryan and Mulholland 2015, p. 6). Ryan and Mulholland (2015) view embedding as a dynamic process for the Polish migrants in the UK. Ryan (2018) develops in her work the idea of differentiated embedding on a couple of factors such as "place-specific opportunities, relational embedding, the dynamism of transnational ties, ambiguous embedding". She underlines that individual biography changes the *embedding* of a person in a place, feelings of attachment and the ideas about stay and return. Ryan (2018, p. 235) and Ryan and Mulholland (2015) present differentiated embedding as "a way of thinking about the nuanced details of migrants' experiences of engagement with the people and places that make up their social world, and in a way that may mitigate often fixed and narrow concepts such as integration". Rather than using the word integration, she explains the spatial and temporal dimensions of embedding via social and individual actions in the migrants' lives.

Her work benefits greatly from the historical theories on embeddedness (Polanyi and MacIver 1944; Granovetter 1985; Hess 2004). She criticises the use of embeddedness by Granovetter as a static term, implying that the agency side of being and belonging in a place is biographical (micro) as well as contextual (macro).

Whilst these works focus on "during mobility", in this paper, I explicate "before mobility" in terms of imagined "during mobilities". I borrow this term "embedding" from Ryan being inspired by her work and combine it with the motivations to move abroad: so, what happens before moving, rather than what happens after they move? And, accordingly, I provide examples of different imagination(s) of Norway and different embeddings, hence, imagined embeddings as motivations to move to Norway. Imagined embeddings are tightly related to the imagined conceptualisation of a place, and/or imagined feeling of a place. This kind of imagination can emanate from social networks, online research, childhood or adolescence memories or just a naïve interest in the country. The next section will focus on methodology and, later, I will explain what I mean by imagined embeddings via analysis.

### 3. Methodology: Fieldwork, Sampling and Analysis Methods

Table 1 in the context of our project, we conducted fifteen interviews in total: three of them were conducted in Norwegian and twelve of them were conducted in English. For all the interviews, I used the original MOVE interview guide with my colleagues but we also added spontaneous questions, as the interviews were semi-structured. In some cases, young employees from different European countries who are living in Norway used some Norwegian words to explain specific things, such as skatteetatten (the national tax office) or politi kontoret (police office). For instance, this fact demonstrated that some of them had encountered bureaucratic hurdles regarding the tax office). All interviews were conducted individually. They lasted from one to one and a half hours and were fully recorded. Thirteen were totally and two were partially transcribed and pseudonyms were used for each interviewee to respect secrecy and privacy of the interviewees.

**Table 1.** Interviews' dates between 2016 and 2018.

| Interview | Sex | Age | Country | In/Out | Employment | Mobility to |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| emNOy1 | Female | 27 | Iceland | Incoming | Health worker | Norway |
| emNOy2 | Female | 29 | Germany | Incoming | Information, library | Norway |
| emNOy3 | Female | 21 | Estonia | Incoming | Hotel worker | Norway |
| emNOy4 | Female | 23 | Sweden | Incoming | Receptionist | Norway |
| emNOy5 | Male | 28 | Norway | Outgoing | Advicer, international | Belgium |
| emNOy6 | Female | 24 | Norway | Outgoing | Advicer, international | Belgium |
| emNOy7 | Female | 26 | Norway | Outgoing | Media and communication | England |
| emNOy8 | Female | 28 | Spain | Incoming | Spanish teacher | Norway |
| emNOy9 | Female | 18 | Germany | Incoming | Aupair | Norway |
| emNOy10 | Male | 26 | France | Incoming | Working in an oil company | Norway |
| emNOy11 | Female | 26 | Poland | Incoming | Translator | Norway |
| emNOy12 | Female | 29 | Germany | Incoming | Historian | Norway |
| emNOy13 | Female | 19 | Austria | Incoming | Aupair | Norway |
| emNOy14 | Male | 26 | Spain | Incoming | Dancer/economist | Norway |
| emNOy15 | Female | 28 | Poland | Incoming | Human resources | Norway |

## 4. Sampling

The empirical research for Norway is based on interviews with fifteen young employees and four experts. The only criterion for the participants' selection was that they had to have a work contract in (at least) one European country. Interviewees were recruited via different sources we had access to in Norway—via our personal and professional networks, via direct contact with companies, hotels, and national institutions working with young employees, via support from our Høgskulen på vestlandet (HVL), and through snowballing. I started to collect our data in February 2016 and finished in January 2017. In this paper, I focus only on the incoming cases into Norway to understand their motivations for choosing this country in specific.

Five of our interviewees had partners they lived with; the others were single and living with their friends or in accommodation allocated by their employer. The interviewees represent different workforces. Two of them had seasonal work (such as in a hotel), two of them were working as au pairs, five of them were working in companies related to their education and background, and the rest (six of them) had temporary contracts in private companies. The interviewees' length of stay in Norway varied. The length of stay varied from three months up to one year. Many of the interviewees had had various kinds of mobility experience before, e.g., short or long holiday trips, student exchanges, internships in European or non-European countries or summer jobs in different seasonal occupations.

## 5. Analysis

I conducted thematic analysis when examining the cases using an inductive method (see Table 2). Half of the interviews have been analysed with the help of the software to create a code tree, which is representative and can show the general patterns of employment mobility in Norway. In the case of Norway, three codes were important as the result of thematic analysis: Norway and its authenticity, Norway being full of "plenty of work chances", Norway as a concept with its rich nature and culture. Our data indicate that the positive image of the destination country in comparison with young people's own countries or with other European countries has an impact on young people's decisions to choose a destination country and to move. Young people mentioned *Norwegian nature, lifestyle, socio-economic and sociocultural conditions, and opportunities amongst the reasons for their move to Norway*. Thus, they have a range of stereotypes or prejudices vis à vis the destination country and the sending country. As I finalise the codes, I illustrate how the young people had an image (stereotypes/prejudices) of a country before they moved there (past) and how this image changed and developed during their stay in the destination country (present as well as future).

**Table 2.** Coding and Analysis.

| Reasons and Facilitators | Sources of Information | Ideas | Imagination(s) | Facilitator Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family or other networks present in the country | Networks (via Facebook groups and google) | Earning more, the gaps in the labour market that needs to be filled, investment for the future | The children can see the world with a better salary and savings. Can prove I am independent to my family. Authentic qualities of Norway: embracing differences, feeling freer | Meso and micro |
| Cultural attraction | Previous visits with family to the country | Nature, landscape, memories from childhood | Norway as a concept: "comfortable place to live", peaceful and relaxing | Macro and meso |
| Employment | Saving(s), guaranteeing a secure job, networks | Independence from families, independence in general to prove oneself | Imagined deskilling; imagined struggle to learn the language; "plenty of jobs" | Macro and meso |

**Table 2.** *Cont.*

| Reasons and Facilitators | Sources of Information | Ideas | Imagination(s) | Facilitator Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Erasmus+ | Erasmus plus experience that informs one about the future job opportunities | Precarity that is replaced by long term plans and economic security | Imagined job market as "easy to find jobs" | Macro and meso |
| Au Pair | Temporary transitions and temporariness by default | Short term migration or mobility; idea of return is set from the beginning; first experience of living abroad | Natural attraction of the place; being attracted to a place for its geographic beauty besides job opportunities | Macro and meso |
| Mobility as a trend | Friends, universities, companies, individuals and firms connected via networks | Mobility as an experience that everyone should live at least once Mobility as a norm The necessity of mobility for educational excellence or for job purposes. | Youth and mobility are connected in contrast with the older age and settlement; spatial mobility imagined as a last chance for achieving excellence | Macro |

As seen above the coding has been made categorising the reasons to go to Norway, the resources of information, ideas about Norway and mobility vs. migration, and imagination(s) or imagined embedding(s) about the country. Finally, I classify them according to the macro, meso- and micro-level effects.

## 6. Findings

It is observed that the time perception has been examined both in migration and integration studies (Cwerner 2001), after the migration or mobility takes place. However, how the migrants imagine going and staying somewhere is not a theme sufficiently scrutinised by the scholars. Here, in the analysis, I touch upon intricacies of these sources of information about a country, the reasons for going to a place and their relation(s) with the imagined embedding(s). The findings are composed of four sections: 1. Imagined embeddings of independence: mobility for the future of the children. 2. Imagined embeddings of an adventure, mobility as an adventure and trying something new. 3. Imagined embeddings in nature: mobility as a result of distant memories and thoughts. 4. Imagined embeddings in the concept of Norway: "saying yes to everything".

### 6.1. Imagined Embedding(s) of Independence: Mobility for the Future of the Children

The families can act as supporters of mobility in two ways: accepting and supporting the mobility decision or, interestingly, by showing "concern" about this decision (Yang et al. 2018). The latter one, in other words the non-supportive reason can also be a driving factor for young people, who want to become mobile.

Hedda (age 27) from Iceland is an interesting example to the case where she moves in order to prove that she can do something "better" without her own family. Before she moved to Norway with her husband and children, she had two children, and it was a family decision to become mobile. Everyone (around them) thought that they would go to Norway to earn money, but she refused economic aspect as a reason and suggested that they wanted to have more spare time for their family and more money to put aside for children so that they could "see the world" in the future. As they arrived in Norway, they decided to have their third child. She mentioned a few times that her family background was a challenging one and they were not very supportive of them moving despite the fact that her husband's family was encouraging. Hence, she insinuated that she wanted to show her family that they (her husband, two children of hers and she) could do something independently and better than what they normally expected from her.

It is possible to observe in this case that she does not want to tell the story of her mobility as the economic reason being the end, but the means to a better future for the children. However, later on, she talks about the salaries. She imagined that they would buy an apartment and as they renovate and resell it, they can see this opportunity as an investment in Norway.

In addition to this background above, at the structural level, it is seen that there is a small migration corridor from Iceland to Norway as she says: "was getting hard for everybody to accept that we were moving and not just to . . . many people are moving to Norway the last . . . 10 years . . . many people from Iceland moving here . . . and it's because of the salary . . . ". She says:

> One day when I was going home from work after I got paid, I called my friend and say we have to go. It's not easy in my county, you can't do anything, it's so expensive and you can't save up money to buy a house or apartment. The salaries are not good. So excited one day, I called my boyfriend and told him that we had to move and he was like "Are you sure this time, it's better?" and I was like "Yes, now I know" (laugh) . . . and then we started to talk about it . . . it took us one month to decide "Ok, we have to go" and moved with two children to Norway.

As seen from the argument above, she criticises the working conditions in her country as the wages were not sufficient enough to cover living expenses and she and her boyfriend could not save money to buy an apartment. Therefore, she motivated her partner to move, and they decided in one month. Her words prove that working conditions are not so good in Iceland as in Norway (similar to work of Cieslik 2011). Furthermore, it is important not to neglect the fact that the movement is not totally for a material reason, it is not only economic embeddedness but proving her "independence" to her family (who were sceptic about their movement) and wanting her children "to see the world" with the means that they will have. These are a mixture of imagined and rational economic embedding(s) she had about Norway.

For some of the interviewees, Norway becomes an ideal place to live after they move. For Hedda, although at first sight, the reasons of mobility were economic, and she had had also previous networks such as a family friend that supported her in the destination country. After they move, she also considers the cultural reasons, which attract her to this country. Moreover, she also emphasizes her reasons to be away from Iceland: "I always liked to be away from Iceland". Later on, she explains the visual and cultural uniformity present in where she lives. Here below, she provides a cultural remark on Norway:

> Yeah maybe . . . (Excited) because I have always liked to be away from Iceland (laugh). I always like to/ I always think for example the clothes I wear when I am in Iceland, when we go from my country I feel like I can be whoever I want because Iceland is a small island . . . with 300.000 people and everybody looks the same, everybody has the same shoes, the same coat, the same hat, and if you don't look like everybody else, you are weird and then you go to different places and you think "woah, everybody here is weird", what I think (laugh) is that it's you. *But here there are so many people, so many personalities, and I think I like that because here (in Norway) . . . everybody embraces the difference in everybody, I feel freer here.*

Here, we notice a cultural conceptualization of Norway with more "authentic" qualities which is related to imagined embedding(s) about Norway as well as real qualities such as the economic ones (affordability and better salaries that would make it possible for her children to see the world). When she makes the comparison between Norway and Iceland, she seems to be quite satisfied with their decision to move. However, later on they decide to go back to Iceland selling the house, the plan that seems permanent in the beginning turns out to be temporary as time perceptions of the migrants are quite dynamic (Cwerner 2001). This is also because after a while the imagination is fulfilled and cultural

traits such as "raising the kids with their cousins, being closer to family" gains precedence. In this case, Ryan's (2018) theory on *differentiated embedding* can explain their decision to return: the feeling of belonging to a place, the time perceptions and plans of migrants that change throughout time spent in the host country are all relevant in her case (Erdal and Ezzati 2015). In short, it is also possible that, even when the imagination corresponds to the reality, the feeling of socioeconomic embedding might not preserve the idea of return, with dynamic changes in thoughts about the home and host country. However, in this paper, I do not deal with the question of return as it is beyond the scope of the main argument.

*6.2. Imagined Embedding(s) of an Adventure: Mobility as an Adventure and Trying Something New*

The second is an example of a supportive family: Marina (age 26) has always had an encouraging family. She came to Norway from Poland as her sister lived there. She says: "I came in April 2016. And how I decided, I decided to come, I knew that my sister was living here already. *I wanted to kind of live in an adventure, like experience something new* and I also wanted to learn a new language so it was easy to combine these three things by coming to a place by knowing someone or I had family. That is why Norway was an obvious destination for me". She emphasizes that she travelled a lot before so that she became more courageous for becoming mobile, having new experiences and meeting new people.

She has another sister who is the oldest, has a family and kids, "she [the other sister] is settled" in Marina's words. Marina was a translator in her home country but she "was not earning well enough". So, she thought about all these risks about traveling to a new country and the conditions she had to encounter. Accordingly, she considered the pros and cons. When the right time according to her perception and her sister's perception were present, she decided to move to Norway to live with her sister. She accepts that she might be deskilled as she used to be a translator back in her home country and she understands that she could not be able to do the same job in Norway but still she decided to move. Her family was not so keen for their second daughter to leave for abroad but in the end, they supported her:

> They were very supportive. I was surprised, because I didn't think they were going to be so enthusiastic of me leaving [ . . . ] They actually encouraged me, because of course I had a moment of doubt. I had a moment when I wasn't really sure if that was the right decision, and I thought maybe I should stick to translating and just stay in that field. To get more experience as a translator instead of just trying something entirely new, and risking that I would never come back working as a translator or lose my French if I don't use it. But they said "you should go and do what you want. This is your dream, and you're going to regret it later on". They were surprisingly supportive.

In this example, it is possible to see that the decision to be mobile, is not a very individualized decision. On the contrary, she assesses the situation thinking of her set of skills and which jobs she can apply for in Norway. Her family wants her to realize herself if she wants to move, and they support her "dreams". Therefore, every move, has a rational element (search, realisation of finding other jobs, having an adaptation period, linking with family or friend networks for instance) and an imagined part where she imagined for instance, that in the context of mobility, such as realising one's dreams by "try something new" and by having an "adventure" which are elements that require abstract thinking and facing uncertainty as a part of imagined embeddings.

*6.3. Imagined Embedding(s) in Nature: Mobility as a Result of Distant Memories and Thoughts*

In some cases, socioeconomic embeddedness, which can also be said to be in the realm of the *new economic sociology* that is based on the economic behaviour of individuals (and also firms) connected to each other with networks of ongoing social (interpersonal) relations (Hess 2004, p. 173) prevails. This would, therefore, demonstrate that the young mobile people are also dependent on the socioeconomic circumstances and the biographical

background. Consequently, as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue, agency acts in response to a problem, and it is "situationally embedded". As Hess (2004) underlines in his work, individual and social agency cannot be separated from each other easily. In this section, we see examples to this socioeconomic and network embeddedness and how imagined embedding(s) are connected with the context of the destination and the origin, still woven with the biographical elements (Brannen and Nilsen 2005).

Here is the case of Irina (age 21) from Estonia. She basically indicated that her family did not have the economic means to travel and support her becoming mobile when she was much younger. However, when she started to work and started to develop her own networks (her friends who worked abroad included), she received some help and information about Norway. In her case, the first restraints she faced when she was younger were socioeconomic conditions of her family:

> Because . . . it was a bit because my . . . childhood . . . I didn't get/ because we were like poor people and the/ we didn't have any food in the fridge and we couldn't travel anywhere so I even stayed in my hometown like all my life I wouldn't have even gone like somewhere else in Estonia of course because we didn't have enough money . . . and it was when I grew up that I see like everyone go like and Greece and like everywhere they travel that/ like . . . a holiday and I was jealous (excited) and I was thinking "When I grow up I am going by myself"

However, when she was a child, the only place they could visit was Norway and it left optimistic images in her mind. Since childhood though she imagined traveling more than her family did. Imagination based on spatial mobility motivated her future plans. It is seen in this example that the human beings have their biographies and their memories embedded in the social and historical context (Brannen and Nilsen 2005):

> Yes, actually when I was child, my only traveling was Norway and it was because my father . . . he, he travelled a lot, but because my parents were separated . . . he travelled like, alone and one time . . . I don't know . . . he was I think he got this trip really cheap, but . . . I was going with him and . . . I- we were in Northern Norway, but . . . but I really- because it was my only time traveling I remember these big mountains and this . . . when we were hiking and . . . I all the time really liked Norway . . . It was my early memories and I wanted to turn back . . .

Examining Irina's decisions and how she is narrating it, is easy to see that there are two elements that shall be considered in her decision to go to Norway: first, limited socioeconomic conditions, and second, the good impression of Norway as the only place they could visit at the time. Specifically, for Norway, the imagined embedding(s) also originate from distant memories that she wants to "return to". These recollections are not devoid of the landscape, hiking, mountains that are geographically characteristic of a place and makes the place what it is. She aims to align the past and the present in a temporal and spatial spectrum (Cwerner 2001).

The macro context such as the welfare state(s), mobility regimes and possibilities that are provided by the public and the private bodies as a part of the system that fosters the movement of young people are crucial elements to situate her biography and her decision to go to Norway. Although she tried diverse methods and applied for diverse institutions to receive support to go abroad, she did not receive the expected material or immaterial backing from them, as these institutions would tell her that she did not meet the requirements. Nonetheless, this experience of rejection was not de-motivating for her, as she was determined to go:

> . . . like I have an e-mail like they're coming like . . . extra students that like to travel . . . and I . . . once there was a project to France and then I was thinking "Oh, why not?" and I came . . . like I said that I am interested in this, but they didn't answer . . . they answered, but they said like "You didn't meet the requirements, sorry", but then I was thinking *"Oh, what the hell, I can go by myself" and now I just do it, but yeah, I had to try it.*

Resolute as she is, she gathers information from her friends who live in Norway, and she manages to move there. In the face of the difficulties and non-supportive institutions, which prove that there are still inequalities in access to mobilities based on the socioeconomic background of the people (Bilecen and Van Mol 2017; Samuk et al. 2019), she moves to Norway and finds a job. Despite the fact that these programmes (such as au pair, traineeships, volunteering schemes and more) are quite easy to apply for and are supportive of mobility opportunities, these programmes also pose some limitations, caused by temporality of the stay (Cwerner 2001; Urry 2007; King 2018; Cheung Judge et al. 2020).

Lena (age 19) for instance, came from Austria to Norway as an au pair. She says that the system of mobility was quite clear from the beginning: "First I had to find a company who does this, I did want to find a Norwegian family who said they wanted to, but through a company, because then you are secure. If there is something wrong you can go home or just move to another family. So, I found a German company". Lena basically chose to rely on a private company rather than contacting a family directly. She underlines that the time of mobility was right for her in that period of her life: "*Right now I don't have a job, a family or children of my own, suddenly you are too old. Some of my friends are in Costa Rica and in South Africa also using their chance*". The contagious nature of mobility (amongst friends at this age group which is between 18 and 29) also exposes itself when the mobility stories of young people are considered. Mobility has to be timely according to her; it is contrasted with "being settled" and being "older". Hereby, the frame fits more into the narrative that youth mobility is a common experience amongst her friends who are also young and so it is "natural" that a chance to move is taken when one is in the stage of youth within one's life course (Herz et al. 2019).

When Lena is asked about what she knew about Norway, she said she *imagined Norway* as such: "*I thought it was a beautiful landscape and I wanted to see the fjords"*. Although there is somehow an economic and experimental cause to move to Norway either for a longer or shorter term, it is also seen that the research participants pay attention to the beauty and the nature of the place which makes the (long or short-term) visit worthwhile.

These two opposite examples are interrelated with each other in a thought-provoking way. Both of these examples (one having difficulty to go to Norway, the other having an ease to go to Norway for a temporary job) demonstrates once more the importance of the socioeconomic context and embeddedness in their origin countries. Secondly, as illustrated above, the private or public institutions that support the mobility of young people are not developed equally in different parts of Europe (Schlimbach et al. 2019). As noted earlier, mobility is eased by the networks and acquaintances. Thirdly, a common point between them is the *imagined embedding(s) that they both have (one from memories, the other from research made prior to the job applications) that evokes a similar image: the beauty of a place besides the available job opportunities.*

### 6.4. Imagined Embedding(s) in the Concept of Norway: "Saying Yes to Everything"

The adversities that the young people who come to Norway face, are themes that they have researched before they move to Norway or they may have presumed them in advance, especially if they did not speak the language. Since this pre-movement research was accomplished via different channels (social media groups, search engines or friends), they are not surprised with the challenges they encounter, and they are not totally surprised by the distress or de-skillisation process they may have to endure before they find a secure and long-term job. *The imagined embedding might be quite different from the real embedding. The socioeconomic embedding can take more time and effort to realise but since it is temporary it can be handled.*

When Carlos (age 26, from Spain) moved to Norway he claimed that there was a period where he said, "yes" to all the jobs he could find. And he seemed to like living in Norway; he liked the "concept of Norway" even after having moved there. First of all, he explains why he particularly was attracted to Norway: "I don't know why. Everybody thinks it's great, that London is the best city in the world, but for me, I don't know why,

but I could not understand what was so amazing. Maybe if I go there, maybe I would think that I was so wrong, but *the concept I had form Norway*, a Scandinavian country, *was that it was a comfortable life to live"*. Then when he talks about all the jobs he tried in Norway, he confesses without repentance:

> When you get bored you don't know what to do and you want to give up. I think most I have been without a job, without having to do anything dancing or something, was like two weeks, so that was a really good thing. That I could keep myself busy and try stuff, and at some point, when I arrived here at first, *I had to say "yes" to everything. Or at least I wanted to say yes to everything.* Going out with people even if you don't know them, but if you want to, I always said yes. I said yes to meetings and practicing the language with strange people. To say yes to everything, to go to everything, to participate in everything where I could get friends or get to know people, to know things or where the cinema is. After this, it changed a bit with the tour guide, I knew where everything was.

Carlos frames Norway as a *comfortable place to live in*, a place where one would accept all the work conditions to integrate (in Ryan's -2018- terms it would be "embedding" rather than integration) and to learn the language. However, later on, during his mobility, as he learns the places, he becomes a tour guide. In this case, his feelings towards the place and the experience of living abroad are *situationally embedded* (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) and it is bound to bring him new perspectives and a new way to re-organise his memories. Furthermore, the circumstances and the current social conditions still create socioeconomic embeddedness. *His imagined embedding(s) of comfortable way to live does not exactly correspond to having many jobs and saying "yes" to everything, and yet, within his imagined embedding about coming to Norway, he was already aware of the fact that there would have been an adaptation period. His imagination of a comfortable place to live meant that he had to be quite flexible to adapt to the environment for a long while. This point proves that imagined embeddedness can be quite different from the real situation one has to encounter after mobility.*

Another example is Astrid (age 23) from Sweden. First, she came to Norway to work for a short period but then she met someone and decided to stay. She lives in a smaller town, in the fjords. She decided to work in a hotel. She says that employment was one of main reasons of dissatisfaction in her previous workplace and so she decided to change her job and find work abroad. She actually worked in Norway before (twice) and she was content with her previous work experience(s). *Hence, for the third time, her imagined embedding(s) were not devoid of lived experiences and reality.* Therefore, it was not hard for her to decide to come back to Norway for work. As is seen, in this example, the working conditions are quite important (Cieslik 2011; Assirelli et al. 2019). Furthermore, previous mobility perpetuates more mobility (Samuk et al. 2021). She describes the reasons of her motivation to move:

> Uhm, I was working for an insurance company that ahem, sorry, that handles with life insurance and pension insurance, and uh, my boss there uh, gave us a lot of different uhm, a lot of different . . . I'm not that good in English. Chores and assignments that we were incapable of doing ourselves, and it got to the point where I had to leave the job and be home for stress syndromes. So, I wanted to do something again, I started thinking about maybe going to Norway, because *my last visit here was so peaceful and relaxing.* So, *I looked at Google on the historical hotels, because I've only been working at historical hotels here in Norway and I really like it.*

Basically, these lines of the interview demonstrate three important themes about her mobility experience. First of all, as indicated above, she had some work-related problems in her origin country, which were related to stress, non-transparency and hierarchy. Secondly, in the past, she moved to Norway for work having had the experience of the Norwegian job market years ago. She remembers the country as "*peaceful and relaxing*" from her aforementioned experience. Third, she returned to Norway the third time, also because she probably did seasonal jobs but finally, and she seems to be more convinced of her life experience in Norway.

In the first case, Carlos was imagining Norway as *a comfortable place*. In the second case we see that the biography of Astrid allows her to imagine Norway as *peaceful and relaxing*. Their biographies are different as Carlos is a dancer and Astrid works mostly in private sector, and still, circumstances unite biography with the socioeconomic conditions are (Brannen and Nilsen 2005). However, as noted earlier, the imagination might not always fit the reality. In the former case, this dissonance is justified by Carlos (till he learns the language he will say yes to all jobs) and in the second case, there is no dissonance, Norway was as she remembered and anticipated. However, this does not mean that she would not have found a more relaxing job in her country if she had searched for it. She just chose to come to Norway for she enjoyed the work culture previously and that *her imagination and memories would not fail her.*

## 7. Discussion

In this paper I analysed the decisions to move to Norway by six research participants purposefully chosen out of fifteen interviews conducted in 2016 and 2017. Amongst our codes, I focussed on imagined embeddings emanating from diverse social, cultural and economic conditions that they learn, know, or imagine about.

As the crux of my theoretical approach, I benefited from embeddedness theories of Hess (2004) and in particular, Ryan's (2018) "differentiated embedding" as well as Cuzzocrea and Mandich's (2016) "imagined mobilities" as a starting and thinking point. One of the most important findings of this research is the fact that the young people who decide to come to Norway for employment reasons experience mobility in social and economic embeddedness considering the society they come from and the society they decide to live in as a destination of their choice. This forms the rational part of their mobility. However, there is also an imagined part where the real and the imaginary are combined with the memories and past experiences even. In this case, their motivations are "imagined" future belonging (embedding) into the society of that country that they are going to visit, which is Norway in their case. While mobility might be imagined as much easier and comfortable in the beginning, later on, other factors come to the fore which are new rationalities and circumstances that they possibly could not have imagined before. Hence, their agency is embedded in the circumstances and uncertainties (Simon 2000; Ryan 2018; Schlimbach et al. 2019; Skrobanek et al. 2019).

Within the life course, at a younger age, there is a certain tendency to be more flexible. For instance, except one, research participants are without families of their own, they move as singles and it is easy for them to adapt to the new circumstances in this period of their lives. Furthermore, all of them are under thirty years old. Mostly they are in their early to mid-twenties and this also has a positive effect on how they experience and see the environment and their embedding in the environment. They feel that the costs of a fresh start are not so high. They imagine that they need to know and experience rather than settle and be certain about their life choices. Under these circumstances, it is observed and confirmed that younger people without families are more mobile than the older ones, as also quoted by one of the interviewees above. This finding is also in line with the literature (Hall et al. 2015; Mare et al. 1984).

It is also important to remember that Norway might be a rich country compared to many others within the EU, and yet the people are moving to an economically more developed country not only with the idea of economic well-being in mind. The case of Norway demonstrates that the country exists with its meanings and embeddings within the thoughts and imaginations of the young people. Norway in its specificity, as seen in this paper, has these characteristics: is comfortable to live, has good nature, is open to novelties and new adventures, and helps gain independence (economically). Furthermore, "Norway as a concept" exists with all the qualities involved. Hence, I argue that the imagined embedding would be changing for each country/for each case, and the research regarding the specific imagination about a place before moving there, is not sufficiently researched by the scholars.

Whilst mobility in Norway embeds all the imagination of "Norway as a concept" with its "authentic qualities", "non-conforming society", "comfortable and relaxing" and mobility as "an adventure" or "something new", it is also observed that employment can be temporary, or can be based on many different and short-term contracts or it can lead to a permanent position whilst the cultural and social embedding is realised at a faster pace. The situation can be contrary as well, when one feels quite embedded in economic terms, the cultural and social embeddedness might not be at its place. In some of these conditions, employment is not adequate to keep these young people in Norway if they feel less social belonging. However, this theme is more related to their adaptation and acculturation and, finally, also return. Henceforth, as indicated above, the theme of return is beyond the scope of this paper.

## 8. Concluding Thoughts

In this paper, I examined young skilled people's decisions to move to Norway from other European countries. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were realised with the young people. I analysed the interviews according to the thematic analysis and as illustrated above, in this paper, I focussed on the imagined embeddings they had before coming to Norway. In the interviews, they clearly explain their motivations. Their stories of stay and return vary as they have all different mobility and migration paths, networks, and ideals. However, I managed to obtain a glimpse of the changing perception of time and space as they stay longer in Norway. In some cases, the imagined embeddings correspond to the reality and in some cases they do not. It is also possible that there is "mobility dissonance" (Bygnes 2021) when there is a discrepancy between what they want to achieve and what they find in the destination country.

Since their differentiated embeddings (Ryan 2018; Ryan and Mulholland 2015) were out of the scope of this paper, I did not concentrate on their embedding(s) and changes in their lives during the stay. I focussed on the motivations and decisions of young EU citizens who decided to move to Norway. How the motivations to move include an element of reality and an element of imagination was what I wanted to demonstrate with these cases. Full rationality, therefore, for moving somewhere is just a myth. In other words, rationality is bounded (Simon 2000). The research results confirm that the decision for employment mobility is not solely economic even though employment is one of the main aims of the young people who participated in this research.

The motivations to go to a place (in our case, Norway) involves many imaginative discourses (in this case they were related to these four elements: independence, adventure and novelty, nature and conceptualisation of a place) and "selves" which are not purely career oriented and rational. The decision to go abroad is also determined by the context of the home and host country but this decision is also under the influence of meso-level influencers such as friends, family, social media, professional and unprofessional networks. Movement can occur despite adverse institutions that do not support mobility as long as there are other meso-level support mechanisms. For instance, one of the interviewees was so determined to move that, despite negative experiences with mobility networks that could have helped her, she managed to move by herself. Yet, she received some help from her friends who were living abroad already. And last but not least, the individual's biography is combined with similar socioeconomic circumstances and embeddings, producing similar results such as deciding to stay or deciding to return (Brannen and Nilsen 2005). In migration research, therefore, what is important to understand is the "imagined embeddings" as motivations to move to a country with its complexity: which elements are imagined? Which elements are real? Young mobile people cannot answer these questions before they visit the country and experience the adaptation period and even find some stability ensuring their social and economic well-being. They will see if their motivations to move match the imagination they had or not after they move and after they spend a period abroad. Before they move, all imagined embeddings can have real and unreal elements inherently.

The paper aims to provide a snapshot of the imagined embeddings of the young people who move to Norway. Although its objective was to focus on the reasons to move to Norway, there has been a couple of limitations I shall underline in this research process. First of all, the gendered perspectives have not been considered as I did not use the whole sample to tell this narrative in order to be more precise and succinct in the analytical section. Second of all, I did not make differentiations between those who came from Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe to Norway as my sample is limited to 15 people and to generalise from this sample for the whole regions of Europe would have been impossible leading to methodological nationalism. Hence, I suggest that the future research can look at the imagined embedding(s) from different parts of Europe considering the context of migration and the gendered mobility decisions. The research in the future can also use quantitative methods with a big sample size or use mixed methods whilst increasing the number of interviews, still keeping the focus on the employment and biographical background.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of the Sociology Department at the University of Bergen.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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