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Struggling with capital: a Bourdieusian analysis of educational strategies among internationally mobile middle class families in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on empirical data regarding educational strategies among internationally mobile families in the Stockholm-Uppsala region, this study questions the notion of a global middle class. First, a quantitative analysis shows that immigrating middle class professionals and their children are few, having marginal impact on the demand for international education. Furthermore, they far from constitute a homogeneous class, instead comprising of fractions opting for different types of schools. A second, qualitative study on capital conversion among mobile families illustrates that even well-educated international movers face serious challenges converting their existing knowledge, skills and contacts into well-informed social, professional and educational strategies in their new context. This suggests the limitations of concepts such as international capital. It is argued that the GMC concept overshadows the fact that social groups within the middle classes have varying degrees of international mobility that constitutes just one dimension of what separates them from each other.

KEYWORDS

Global middle class;
international mobility;
international schools;
Bourdieu; capital conversion;
educational strategies

Globalisation, mobility and international education

With the acceleration of globalisation, international mobility has risen among upper middle and middle class professions. In a competitive, open and borderless world economy, specialised skills and resources are sourced globally (Mahroum, 2000). Cadres and technicians circulate among transnational companies (Peixoto, 2001), and national migration policies often seek to guarantee the availability of skilled labour from abroad (Mahroum, 2001), seeing this as a condition for economic growth (Raghuram & Kofman, 2002). However, the extent of this mobility is contested. Peterson and Puliga (2017) state that within Europe alone ‘open borders lure hundreds of thousands of career-minded individuals in skilled professions to relocate’ (p. 2), whilst Favell and Recchi’s (2009) analysis of EU statistics indicates that this mobility is modest in numerical terms. Despite discordance between these estimations, it is apparent that ‘global cities’, that occupy a particularly crucial role in the world economy, attract mobile middle class

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professionals from around the globe (Beaverstock, 2005; Sassen, 2011; Scott, 2006; Smith, 2002).

The surge of internationally mobile professionals has been conceptualised as the emergence of distinct transnational classes. Certain strands of globalisation theorists claim the existence of a small, elite 'transnational capitalist class', comprised primarily of corporate executives for whom national affiliations have been replaced by a sense of belonging to a global elite that drives global capitalism (e.g. Carroll, 2010; Castells, 2009; Dahrendorf, 2000; Robinson, 2004; Sklair, 2001). However, critics of this theory maintain that irrespective of the emergence of global capitalism, corporate elites continue to be produced nationally. As Hartmann (2018) notes, most empirical studies published in the last five years are sceptical of or simply reject the thesis of a transnational class (See also Embong, 2000).

Lower down the class hierarchy, some researchers argue we are seeing the rise of a 'global middle class' (Ball, 2009; Ball & Nikita, 2014), which differs from a 'local middle class' (Yemini, Maxwell, & Mizrachi, 2018). Their claim is not just that globalisation produces a growing resemblance between highly skilled middle classes around the world in terms of globally oriented life styles (Koo, 2016), but that the international mobility of parts of these middle classes make them into a social class of their own. Similar to the theory of a transnational capitalist class, this assertion has been empirically contested (Pohlmann, 2013).

A crucial dimension of globalisation is the expansion of international schools (e.g. Brown & Lauder, 2006; De Mejía, 2002; Keßler & Krüger, 2018; Resnik, 2012). This growth is often understood as connected to either factual migration (Ball & Nikita, 2014) or to aspired international mobility (Hayden, 2011). A frequently applied theoretical perspective to explain the rise in the popularity of these schools is borrowed from Bourdieusian sociology. It equates the desire for international education to a search for 'international', 'cosmopolitan' or 'global' symbolic capital, and to the formation of an international or cosmopolitan 'habitus' (e.g. Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016; Waters, 2007; Weenink, 2008). It is proposed that international capital, acquired in part through international educational institutions, constitutes an asset recognised in transnational arenas, which adds to, transforms and potentially replaces the symbolic capital linked to particular national spaces.

In this article, we seek to address some lacunas and shortcomings in the current research on international mobility and educational strategies among the highly skilled middle classes. We focus on analyses in which Bourdieusian sociology is a point of reference.

Some lacunas in the current research

To begin, the supposed existence of a *mobile* 'global middle class' is clearly in need of empirical evidence. The growing similarities in lifestyles among skilled professional groups around the globe does not necessarily mean that we are witnessing the rise of a particular global middle class defined by its own mobility, weakened national roots, and the substitution of nationally defined cultural resources with international ones.

Empirical research relevant for understanding the educational strategies among internationally mobile groups is chiefly qualitative in nature, focusing on cultural practices or constructions of identity within particular groups in specific settings (e.g. Cohen, 2004;

Favell, 2008; Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2006; Ong, 1999; Polson, 2011; Scott, 2006; Waters, 2007). Although these perspectives are often valuable, they seldom combine this qualitative approach with structural analyses that reveal patterns or relations, such as differences between categories of internationally mobile groups or these groups' positions regarding national social and educational hierarchies (e.g. Koh & Kenway, 2012). As practices, lived experiences and distinct identity constructions are not linked to the objectively existing assets that define particular positions in social space, there is a further tendency to universalise particular cases and the self-understandings of small sample groups of interviewees or individual educational institutions. (e.g. Erel, 2010; Koh, 2014; Ong, 1999; Yemini et al., 2018; Yemini & Maxwell, 2018).

Finally, the search for international education is commonly conceptualised as a distinct strategy among particular groups in their country of origin, who desire 'international capital' as an additive to their existing class privileges or as a means to surpass existing educational or social hierarchies (e.g. Aguiar & Nogueira, 2012; Holloway, O'Hara, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Koh, 2014; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016; Waters, 2007; Weenink, 2008). Less focus is placed on how mobile families, who have gained assets in other countries, relate to education in their new settings. Albeit with some exceptions (e.g. Erel, 2010; Ong, 1999; Scott, 2006), existing research rarely explores how a supposed 'international capital' is employed in strategies to manage potentially conflicting demands for the possession of specific symbolic assets in new national contexts. In association, there is a tendency towards an essentialist use of the interrelated concepts of habitus and capital. Far from being used as explorative tools, they often become conceptual boxes for simply categorising certain knowledge, skills, mind-sets and contacts as an assumed international habitus or capital with a generally recognised value (e.g. Gardner-McTaggart, 2016; Igarashi & Saito, 2014).

Our research object

In an effort to address some of the issues raised above, we combine two different empirical analyses. In a quantitative part, we focus on immigrating, internationally mobile groups in skilled professions in Sweden. We examine the size of this group and consider its potential impact on the supply of international education at compulsory level. To avoid perceiving internationally mobile groups as a homogenous 'global middle class', we analyse how the volume and composition of their capital assets relate to what kind of schools their children attend. In a second qualitative part, we employ the concepts of capital and habitus to illustrate how internationally mobile, middle class families struggle to convert their pre-acquired assets in the Swedish context, and how this permeates the education of their children.

The two sub-studies are not entirely congruent as they differ in terms of questions and target populations. However, they are complementary as they both employ the capital and habitus concepts to analyse mobile families' educational strategies, while simultaneously applying a relational perspective on mobile groups and the educational institutions they opt for.

Since general explanations of Bourdieu's sociology are easily found elsewhere, we will limit ourselves to clarifying how we apply some key concepts. We use 'symbolic capital' to refer to all kinds of assets such as language skills, knowledge, diplomas, taste, etc., that are

recognised and valued in a given social world (Bourdieu, 2000). Accumulated gradually throughout the life trajectory, symbolic capital exists – in analogy with physical matter – in different ‘states’, the most important of which is the ‘embodied’ one, habitus, i.e. dispositions and abilities incorporated in the person (Bourdieu, 1984). Keeping to Bourdieu’s vocabulary, there are various ‘species’ of capital, which have developed historically (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu, 2000). While ‘symbolic capital’ is the most general, ‘cultural capital’ designates dominant symbolic capital in modern nation states, defined and possessed above all by the dominating class. We define ‘international capital’ or equivalent concepts as symbolic assets primarily recognised in international or transnational arenas, even if, both historically and in contemporary society, they often blend with cultural capital.

International mobility raises the question of the convertibility (Bourdieu, 1984) of symbolic capital across national borders. We find it useful to emphasise that even though national cultural capital comprises assets common to national elites in various countries, it also includes substantial elements that are deemed national, such as language skills and informational capital related to the historical development of a specific country and its institutions. We also follow Bourdieu in considering species of capital related to economic or material resources, in short, economic capital, which is often decisive for educational strategies. Individuals, families, or social class fractions are then defined in relation to each other by their total volume, as well as composition, of capital. Finally, we point to the fruitfulness of connecting the analysis of the educational strategies of the internationally mobile groups to Bourdieu’s social field concept (Bourdieu, 2000). This denotes particular domains of human activity that have developed historically and gained a relative autonomy in relation to other fields of power and influence, imposing in their own area a specific, legitimate symbolic capital required by those who enter.

International schools in the Stockholm-Uppsala region

Internationally mobile middle class families entering Sweden encounter a western welfare state with a well-developed and comparatively egalitarian education system (Esping-Andersen, 2006) that, at compulsory school level, is characterised by a high degree of marketisation (Lundahl, 2011). With the exception of very few tuition-based schools, compulsory education is entirely publicly-funded. This funding is channelled through a voucher system; provided to all, the voucher can be used to choose a school freely. These are either municipal schools or so-called independent schools with private owners – most often large for-profit educational corporations but also non-profit organisations such as foundations (Wiborg, 2015). The potential market for internationally oriented schools in the Stockholm-Uppsala region is considerable. Stockholm ranked 11th in the 2018 Global Power City Index (MMF, 2018), possibly qualifying as a ‘world city’ in Sassen’s (2011) sense, and attracting skilled international migrants. The two cities of Stockholm and Uppsala form an integrated labour market with skilled professionals commuting in both directions.

Both cities are home to internationally orientated schools of which there are two different types. The first, which is small in number, follows a different curriculum from the Swedish one and uses another language of instruction. Such schools are authorised on the condition that they target families who do not permanently live in the country (Skolverket, 2011). The majority of these schools are private and tuition-based. In some

cases, they can also benefit from the voucher system as an additional funding source. However, the municipal schools that fall into this category, which are all IB schools, are not allowed to charge fees. In 2014, the end-year of our data on immigrated, mobile professionals, there were eight schools in the Stockholm-Uppsala region of this first type, among them IB, British, French and German schools.

The second type consists of both independent and municipal schools that employ the Swedish curriculum but offer bilingual streams, often but not necessarily alongside purely Swedish ones. This bilingual teaching is required by law to comprise at least 50% Swedish tuition and the schools cannot charge fees. Bilingual teaching of this type was formally authorised in a government regulation in 2011 (Skolverket, 2011), even though some schools had special authorisation to provide bilingual teaching earlier. This type of school has increased in number during the last decade. In 2014, the end year of our data, 30 out of the region's approximately 950 schools offered bilingual teaching. While most of these were oriented towards English, a number of them targeted other languages, such as Finnish and Estonian. Since enrolment statistics do not separate between bilingual and Swedish streams, the number of pupils cannot be calculated.

Research questions

Our study departs from the following research questions:

- What is the empirical support, in the Stockholm-Uppsala region, for the claim of a rising Global Middle Class (GMC) defined by its international mobility?
- Is the presence of immigrated, highly skilled middle class professionals with children an explanation for the expansion of compulsory schools with an international profile in the region?
- How do the volume and composition of capital among immigrating highly skilled middle class professionals translate into differences regarding the school enrolment of their children and how do these patterns compare to those of their Swedish, non-mobile equivalents?
- How do internationally mobile families in the middle and upper middle classes handle the challenge of conversion of their pre-acquired assets in their new context and how does this reflect in the educational strategies related to their children?

Method

Both our sub-studies focus on the Stockholm-Uppsala region, as this area is the centre of Sweden's highly internationalised economy (Gaillard, 2001). Furthermore, the choice of this region was motivated by its accessibility in terms of data collection, its large population, and its supply of schools of different types.

The quantitative analysis

We employed data from Statistics Sweden, the government agency responsible for collecting national statistical data, which comprised of all individuals over the age of 16

registered as living in the country. This permitted us to identify those who moved to the country between 2010 and 2014. 2010 marked the start of an expansion of skilled labour immigration following a government reform (Ministry of Justice, 2008) facilitating employers' cross-border labour recruitment. The data available to us from Statistics Sweden ended in 2014.

We classified these immigrating individuals by applying Bourdieu's capital concept. To do this, we used information on their professions, based on the official Swedish Standard Classification of Occupations (SSYK 96), that in turn relates to the international classification system ISCO-88. All individuals were identified as pertaining to one of 37 socio-professional groups with a particular capital volume and composition. We see our classification as more precise than those often applied in migration research (e.g. Mahroum, 2000) as it avoids a one-dimensional representation of social space. Further to this, it allows us to aggregate groups for particular analytic purposes while simultaneously keeping the option of returning to the original 37 groups when needed. As our target population pertained to the middle classes and above, just 18 of the 37 socio-professional groups were considered. (See Table 1.)

The professional position recorded for the year of immigration was used to ensure only individuals in highly skilled professions moving for work were included in our sample. As our population consisted of immigrants born abroad, information on their educational levels was often missing from the register data. This made their professional position the main, reliable criterion to use. However, among the roughly 60% for whom the educational level was known, we identified those holding PhD diplomas in order to analyse the impact of strong educational capital.

To address the size of different categories of highly skilled immigrants, we chose to first demarcate three aggregated categories, shown in Table 1. With reference to the discussion of a 'transnational capital class', we delimited a small group of top-executives, which in a Bourdieusian perspective would be defined by having positions in the field of economic power (Bourdieu, 2011). In order to separate this category from what we named the upper middle class, information on yearly salaries and capital incomes were additionally used to capture those who, in Sweden, reached a minimum level of 100.000 Euros on either measurement. This figure was chosen as to separate the top executives from the high earning upper middle class, while still keeping the group sufficiently large statistically.

As illustrated in Table 1, we also distinguished between the two categories of upper-middle and middle class individuals, the former understood as having a larger total *volume* of assets.

Table 1. Three categories of mobile individuals in highly skilled professions. Distribution of 18 (out of 37) socio-professional groups.

Top executives	CEOs, lawyers, senior executives in the private sector and economists in executive positions in the private sector with a <i>yearly salary or capital income</i> in Sweden of at least 100.000 Euros.
Upper middle class	CEOs, lawyers, senior executives in the private sector and economists in executive positions in the private sector having a <i>yearly salary or capital income</i> below 100.000 Euros; civil engineers, scientists with academic degrees; physicians, university researchers and lecturers; upper secondary teachers; high civil servants; art producers.
Middle class	Technicians, engineers with lower diploma; IT professionals without university diploma; middle civil servants; school teachers; cultural intermediaries; economists and managers in middle position.

Table 2. Cultural and economic fractions of the upper middle and middle classes. Distribution of 13 socio-professional groups.

Cultural fractions	Scientists; physicians; university researchers and lecturers; upper secondary teachers; cultural intermediaries; art producers.
Economic fractions	CEOs, lawyers, senior executives in the private sector, economists in executive positions; civil engineers; technicians in the private sector; middle economists in the private sector' IT professionals. (Top executives' in the first categorisation are not included.)

Table 3. Immigrated individuals and school-aged children among top executives, upper middle and middle classes, 2010–2014.

Social category	Individuals	Children in schools located in Sweden	Individual/child ratio
Top executives	196	167	0.9
Upper Middle Class	4182	766	0.2
Middle Class	3861	758	0.2
Total	8239	1692	

Let us briefly consider numbers. In each one of the two groups of middle class, around 500 individuals immigrated in 2010. This figure increased to almost 900 in 2012 and levelled out to around 1000 in 2013 and 2014. The number of immigrating top executives in the same period went from 21 in 2010–47 in 2014. During the whole considered 5-year period, 8239 foreign-born highly skilled individuals immigrated to the Stockholm-Uppsala region (cf. [Table 3](#) below).

In a second separate categorisation, shown in [Table 2](#), we considered the impact of the *composition* of capital by distinguishing between cultural and economic fractions of the upper middle and middle classes, excluding the top executives. The employed statistical categories function as very broad indicators of the social trajectory and capital assets of the classified individuals, and indirectly, of the habitus shaped by this trajectory.

In the next step, we identified the children of compulsory education age (7–15 years), belonging to the individuals in our target population, by using a database on family relations. Further to this, we were able to obtain information on these children's school enrolment (school name, type and location) from the register of all pupils in grades 1–9. We categorised schools into three types – 'international schools' using a non-Swedish curriculum, 'bilingual schools' following the Swedish curriculum but offering bilingual study streams, and 'Swedish schools' applying the Swedish curriculum and using Swedish as language of instruction. In keeping with our relational perspective, an attempt was also made to compare the numerically small categories of immigrating families to those of the equivalent social categories in the wider Swedish population.

The statistical data we employed for this analysis did not allow for identification of international migration among the Swedish-born middle class professionals in the region, meaning we limited our analysis to foreign-born immigrating, highly skilled professionals. However, aggregated statistics from 2016 on Swedish migration indicate that these mobile Swedish middle class groups are not substantially larger than the immigrating groups targeted in our quantitative analysis (Statistics Sweden, 2017).

The qualitative analysis

Our qualitative analysis focuses on mobile middle class families whose children attended Swedish schools with bilingual profiles. Our particular interest was to address how mobile middle class families managed the process of converting their pre-acquired symbolic capital in the Swedish context. Therefore, we deemed 'bilingual schools' to be an interesting site, likely to capture families interested in both 'international' and 'domestic' assets.

Our data comprises 29 semi-structured interviews with parents. Interviews were carried out in 2018 and were between one and two hours in length. Focusing on the family's trajectory, we explored habitus formation as well as the accumulation and convertibility of families' held capital, and how this influenced their educational strategies. The majority of the families attended schools with particularly international student populations. Most families included two foreign-born parents, similar in composition to the families predominantly studied in the quantitative analysis. However, eight included one Swedish and one foreign-born parent, and three families had two Swedish parents. All the interviewed families were identified as either middle or upper middle class employing the same criterion as within the quantitative analysis. This included IT-designers and corporate middle managers, to medical professionals and university lecturers, which gave us the opportunity to consider the significance of different compositions of capital when migrating families faced the Swedish context.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in their entirety. The analysis identified major themes in the interviewees' accounts as well as recurring 'ways of thinking', 'representations' in the Durkheimian sense (Durkheim, 1997). Gradually, a complex pattern of partially different ideas and stances emerged in relation to how individual interviewees positioned themselves, largely depending on the volume and nature of their assets. Instead of presenting just a few longer quotes from the interviews, which could not provide more than an illusion of subjective authenticity, we opted for illustrating analytical points in our text with short quotes built directly into our argument. These quotes were typical expressions of significant, recurring stances or ideas, the complexity and structure of which could not be given justice by just a few longer quotes.

The interviews were conducted within the framework of a wider study on Swedish families' educational strategies, in which approximately 160 similar interviews took place in the same region. This gave us the possibility to compare internationally mobile families to similar, non-mobile Swedish upper middle and middle class groups.

Patterns of school enrolment among highly skilled immigrant professionals

We begin by employing our quantitative data to address our first two research questions. If we include the top executives, the number of immigrating foreign-born individuals during the considered 5-year's period was 8,239 (Table 3), or roughly 0,7 percent of the adult population between 25 and 65 years of age in the Stockholm-Uppsala region. From our data, we cannot tell how many 'families' these highly skilled professionals comprised of, but we do know the number of school-aged children they had. These were 1691, corresponding to 0.5% of all school-aged children in the region, and equivalent to four medium sized schools.

As [Table 3](#) illustrates, the individual/child-ratio among the two middle-class groups was 0.2, meaning roughly only 1 in 5 had a school-aged child. Compared to the top executives, they were less likely to have established families and also considerably younger, with a mean age of 35 compared to 45. This is an interesting finding as it indicates that a substantial part of the internationally mobile middle class does not have children of school age and, therefore, those individuals do not represent potential clients for schools (cf. Favell, 2008).

Our findings do not support the claim by GMC theorists, that a rich country with a highly internationalised economy such as Sweden would host a middle 'class' characterised by its international mobility. In the relatively recent five-year period 2010–2014, the immigrated highly skilled professionals who registered to live in the Stockholm-Uppsala region, which constitutes the heart of Sweden's internationalised economy, amounted to a medium of 1648 individuals per year. If we assume that they were residents for at least a couple of years, they represented less than half a percent of the population in middle class professions in the region. Some GMC theorists (Ball & Nikita, 2014) further claim that the presence of a GMC constitutes a substantial demand for local international education. There is no support for this in our findings from the Stockholm-Uppsala region. Not only are the immigrating mobile middle class small in number, but also have surprisingly few children. Even if we assume that the group of Swedish-born middle class mobiles living in the region have more school-aged children than the immigrated ones, its estimated size indicates that this group is also far too small for being deemed a large client for international education.

From these figures, it can be suggested that while there has been an expansion of schools with international profiles in the recent decade, this demand does not come from internationally mobile groups. Rather, it is likely an effect of school avoidance strategies (Poupeau, François, & Couratier, 2007; van Zanten, 2009) produced by the marketisation of compulsory education. An illustrative example is the largest educational corporation with a bilingual international profile, the *Internationella Engelska Skolan*, which ran 14 schools in the Stockholm-Uppsala region during this period. In total, 12,795 children attended these schools, among which only 40 came from families we have identified as belonging to immigrating highly skilled groups. Instead, these schools predominantly attracted pupils from ordinary Swedish middle class families, a few of which may have had experience of international mobility.

Volume and composition of capital

Coming to our third research question, patterns of school enrolment bring to light the importance of both the volume and composition of capital among the immigrated groups. [Table 4](#) illustrates the patterns of school enrolment for our first three categories of highly skilled immigrants during the period in question. Schools are categorised into the three aforementioned types.

The top executives were the most distinctive group; 64% sent their children to five of the few truly international schools that exist in Stockholm. The schools most over-represented in this category were two schools with the highest annual tuition fees approximating 10 000 Euros, one a private IB school and the other a British school. While a further 15% of the children of top executives attended bilingual schools following the

Table 4. Attendance in three types of schools in Stockholm and Uppsala of children pertaining to three categories of skilled immigrants, 2010–2014. Percent of the category.

Immigrant category	International schools	Swedish schools with bilingual profile	Swedish schools without bilingual profile
Top executives $n = 167$	64	15	21
Upper middle class $n = 766$	16	24	62
Middle class $n = 758$	17	20	63

Swedish curriculum, the remaining 20% were distributed over 23 ordinary Swedish schools, most of which were located in particularly affluent neighbourhoods. The distinctive strategies of the top executives is not surprising considering that they or their employer were likely able to afford the tuition fees. Their choice of international schools may possibly be seen as an expression of what Andreotti, Le Gales, and Moreno Fuentes (2013) propose to be a ‘partial exit strategy’, permitting them to remain mobile while maintaining roots in their country of origin, i.e. without facing the challenges of another country’s education system.

Turning now to the upper middle and middle classes, patterns of school enrolment look surprisingly similar across the three types of institutions, in spite of their differences in capital volume. However, the rough classification of two categories of middle classes tends to obscure the workings of cultural as opposed to economic capital, i.e. differences between cultural and economic fractions. If we compare (Table 5) the schools attended by cultural fractions (from university teachers to art producers; see Table 2) to those of economic fractions (from CEOs to IT-professionals), notable differences appear. The cultural fractions largely sidestepped purely international schools (only 8% attended), opting instead for bilingual schools (28%) or entirely Swedish ones (64%). This contrasts to the economic fractions who had a preference for international schools (25%) over bilingual ones (19%).

However, as the interview data illuminate, these differences probably not only relate to families’ available economic resources but also connect to a certain distaste among culturally resourced groups about being immersed in an entirely international school dominated by economic fractions and their particular blend of ‘internationalism’. As our interview data suggest, the latter is perceived as pertaining to content, outlooks, tastes and values centred on the running of the globalised economy, giving less room for the priorities and orientations of families for whom cultural capital is essential. If we take PhD diploma holders as an example, they often solved the issue of the education of their children by enrolling them in academically ‘trustworthy’ municipal (25% of the group) or independent (9%) bilingual schools. Alternatively, they opted for renowned

Table 5. School attendance of children pertaining to skilled immigrants in cultural and economic fractions of the upper middle and middle classes, 2019–2014. Percent of the fraction.

Fraction	International schools	Swedish schools with bilingual profile	Swedish schools without bilingual profile
Cultural fractions $n = 404$	8	28	64
Economic fractions $n = 359$	25	19	56

international schools with low or no tuitions fees (9%), such as the German, French or municipal IB schools, or for purely Swedish schools (58%), entirely avoiding international schools with high tuition fees (0%).

The small size of the immigrating upper middle and middle class, as well as their particular situations with regard to Swedish language fluency, makes a meaningful quantitative comparison with their Swedish counterparts difficult. However, one comparison is worth mentioning as it relates to the valorisation of Swedish cultural capital. We identified the schools favoured by the cultural fractions (cf. [Table 2](#)) of the Swedish upper middle and middle classes, which often had a strong cultural profile; 21% of all school children pertaining to Swedish cultural fractions attended this type of school, in contrast to less than 9% of the children from the immigrating cultural fractions. One likely reason is a lack of informational capital among immigrating groups enabling them to know of these schools' existence and how to get into them.

A balancing act: symbolic capital in a national context

With these structural patterns in mind, we turn to the qualitative part of our study to explore the challenges of reconversion of capital in new national contexts. The majority of interviewees had begun particular professions in their country of origin, which at a later stage led to international mobility. However, for others, typically spouses, their previous professional experiences were not exportable into the Swedish context, a reason why some ended up working in bilingual schools. All the families attended a Swedish school with a bilingual profile, and a further characteristic they shared was that their future geographic locations were uncertain. Some had lived in numerous countries and perceived cross-border mobility as a normal part of life, whilst others were undertaking their first relocation. For many, Sweden was a new context and families held just superficial knowledge about the country's societal structures. Even some of the Swedish parents who had moved 'home' expressed that returning 'was like coming back to a new world' and for their children born abroad 'it wasn't coming home' at all.

Most of the families in our study had decided to stay in Sweden whilst their children finished school, placing their own wished mobility on hold until 'there is nothing left keeping me here in Sweden'. Although the aim was to provide children with stability during their schooling, the possibility of moving was still a reality and a regularly discussed topic in their homes. At the same time, this international disposition retained the option of staying on in Sweden. Therefore, parents attempted to endow their children with the tools to succeed both in Sweden, other national contexts, and in supposed international spheres. This meant that families employed strategies to acquire assets valuable in a range of possible trajectories for their children, both in national and international contexts. A true balancing act was at play, where families consciously evaluated their options to ensure they secured the right kinds of strategic investments. As they found their own varied assets to be of different values within their new context, they were forced to engage in strategies of conversion.

Language: assets and strategies

Linguistic capital was an asset that families consciously attempted to balance regarding their children's future trajectories. Having opted for bilingual English and Swedish

schools, as well as many of the families themselves being multilingual, language was a key asset under scrutiny. A commonality between the families was their competency in English, whilst their home languages varied. In their new national context, home languages that were neither English nor Swedish became almost useless outside the family network. Families evaluated their languages regarding career or educational possibilities, using this as justification for investments, or lack of them, in their children's mastery of their native language. As a result, minor languages were frequently demoted to narrow social and cultural uses, endowed to children as a way to 'speak to the grandparents' and access cultural understanding of their home countries. In fact, some families had strikingly low expectations for their child's mother tongue proficiency, just desiring they 'read at least, not write' or 'at least speak a little more fluently'. In these cases, families were not strategizing for their children to return to their home country, seeing no need for heavy investments in the language.

Swedish and English were the two main languages families attempted to ensure their children engaged with. Some families had picked up other languages during their stays in other countries; however, these were 'lost' due to being 'traded ... for Swedish'. For children with a Swedish born parent, the Swedish language was a part of their inherited assets. However, those who had lived outside of the country for numerous years had relatively lower proficiency, with the parents suggesting they 'lack some words' that other children 'would understand'. For these families, their children's entrance (or return) to the Swedish system was greeted with an immediate disadvantage, and parents were 'concerned that they would feel isolated and that they would struggle' due to their lack of relevant linguistic capital needed in an entirely Swedish speaking school. This was problematic for parents who needed to strategize for their children's educational paths in Sweden. In the majority of cases, they placed them directly into bilingual schools, avoiding this disadvantage and instead turning to focus their investments in a language within which they already had a head start, while keeping the door open to a 'bilingualism' composed of English and Swedish, which they considered 'a great thing'.

For the families with two non-Swedish parents, it was often clear that Swedish was not an original priority when it came to conscious investments for their children's future education and career trajectories. These non-Swedish parents had themselves accessed their employment positions without linguistic abilities in Swedish. Instead, English had facilitated their mobility in international job markets. They believed this English linguistic capital could be converted into social capital, through ease of communication, educational capital in the form of a renowned English or American degree, and economic capital through access to national and international job spheres. This contrasted with the perceptions of returning Swedish-born parents in high positions who acknowledged a need for advanced proficiency in Swedish for national careers and therefore made 'a conscious effort' to endow this skill to their children.

Although English had been advantageous for the careers of non-Swedish parents, their lack of Swedish resulted in shortcomings accessing social occasions in and outside of work. Swedish was deemed the tool for integration and procuring local social networks; however, learning the language to the level that allowed for more advanced uses seemed out of reach. Most had given up their weekly Swedish classes, excused by a lack of opportunities for practising their Swedish and their ability to survive in their international 'bubble'. Most parents hoped their children would not suffer the same language

limitations as they did themselves, seeing that 'it's very important for them, to be part of society here'.

As families became more rooted in Sweden, they grew more aware of the likelihood of their children following national educational trajectories, at least for upper-secondary school. This would possibly mean their children stepping out of international educational offers in favour of what was perceived as more subject specialised upper-secondary schools, joining the competition with the 'locals'. Without deprioritising English, these parents started perceiving their children's Swedish as having an academic purpose and considered it 'very important that their Swedish language is on a par with Swedes'. The parents themselves often lacked the linguistic capital to support them, often putting faith in the school's ability to provide mastery. They also attempted superficial strategies such as to 'try and get them to read, force them to read in Swedish and ... get them to watch Swedish TV'. Some families even contemplated moving schools, or regretted not having chosen a Swedish school from the outset.

For the families from non-Anglophone countries, English was considered a secure investment, not only for 'international' careers, but also in their home countries, as 'certain areas, certain fields and certain jobs ... are English based'. Even before some of these families had become mobile, they had started to provide their children with opportunities to learn English, opting for English speaking education at preschool level, watching English TV and films, and hiring native speakers to spend time with their children. These early investments, along with a firm belief in the power of the English language, were stronger among the interviewees who held limited general assets. This gave it a characteristic of an escape-route from hierarchies embedded in national contexts; families deemed their early investment in English as a tool for accessing other nations and improving their children's opportunities. Furthermore, investment in this 'internationally' valuable skill before mobility was a part of their lives suggests that a disposition towards mobility is apparent in many middle-class practices worldwide and not just reserved for physically mobile groups. This indicates that the division between a global middle class, separated from what is termed a local middle class (Yemini et al., 2018) is potentially misleading, as we will return to in our end discussion.

For those children who already had English as an asset, the families continued investing in this resource and ensured that their children attended educational institutions that valued it, else 'they would lose the language ... and it's such a waste'. The values and balancing acts that these mobile families exhibited regarding language can be compared to the non-mobile, Swedish upper middle class families targeted in the wider research project. Among the culturally resourceful Swedish families, typically physicians, university teachers, architects, high-level civil servants and cultural producers, English as a language of instruction was less commonly sought after. They saw no need for their children to attend international schools to learn advanced English, as 'they are extremely good at English anyhow'. These families commonly believed their children's development of nuanced, advanced written and spoken Swedish was one of the most crucial goals of school education, a part of the *Bildung* required by educated individuals and critical for professional careers.

Informational knowledge in a national context

The interviewed families pertained to the Swedish upper middle or middle class and were rich in information regarding their country of origin, the specificities of navigating its system, and accessing certain employment positions and good educational institutions. However, in their new Swedish context, non-Swedish families struggled to fully access the healthcare system and open bank accounts, let alone understand the wider national structures and hierarchies. The parents' own struggles in orienting themselves in a new environment were reflected in their strategies regarding the education of their children.

Typically, mobility originated in the employment of one of the parents, in most cases the father, whose previously national careers were linked to transnational fields. Accompanying spouses often did not work on arrival and some 'wanted to enter into the job market' or recreate their previous employment positions in this new Swedish context. However, they discovered their disadvantage in comparison to the options they had in their home countries where they 'knew the market', whilst Sweden 'didn't even have such a job'. These individuals lacked the specific knowledge needed to navigate and take up their desired positions. Furthermore, their success in entering comparable positions depended on whether they had the assets needed. For those who previously worked in typically nationally specific fields, such as teaching, this was a great struggle. They were unable to easily transfer their expertise, finding they lacked the knowledge intrinsic to the same field in Sweden.

To access similar positions or make use of previous educational qualifications, it was deemed necessary at times to take extra training or education to 'update my CV with something very Swedish' or to gain job specific knowledge such as understanding of 'the economic system and the loans and salaries'. These struggles illustrate the difficulties of mobility when only one spouse initially holds assets valuable within the country of destination. This was particularly sensed by unemployed mothers who held the main responsibility for their child's schooling.

When it came to education for their children, families often evidenced their limited knowledge of Swedish society through having only heard that 'there are schools which are better for science, there are schools which are better for economics' at the upper-secondary level. Few knew which schools these were, and parents lamented that they did not 'really understand ... the system in Sweden' and felt 'lost'. This contrasted to their far deeper understanding of their home country where they often believed they could even evaluate which school would 'fit' the child's 'personality'.

As families began to learn how to navigate Swedish society, they frequently despaired at the difficulties they encountered as mobile people in the system and deemed it flawed when they discovered their disadvantaged position. For the most part, entirely Swedish compulsory schools and differences between them were completely ignored; families had little knowledge or competencies for making relevant distinctions. A number of families had originally placed their children in typical Swedish schools due to either choice or lack of knowledge that there were international options. Often, these experiences were negative and children struggled to deal with their lack of familiarity with what was perceived as Swedish norms and behaviour, 'these rules that Swedish society has ... the unwritten rules' that 'you can't know ... if you haven't grown up here'.

International schools on the other hand were perceived as more 'open' and less 'homogenous'. The lack of common culture and behaviour meant there were lower demands on children to navigate the often-elusive nuanced behaviours of Swedish institutions and society to 'fit in'. A bilingual school with an international 'cosmopolitan' atmosphere allowed children to 'feel they belonged', and that being with other children 'who also struggle with the language' meant their children could be removed from the pressure of not being fully competent in Swedish and less informed about Swedish society than their peers.

Attempts to assimilate into Swedish 'culture' were made by parents for themselves but also to provide their children with Swedish cultural experiences. However, for many, even those with stronger Swedish linguistic capital, this proved to be a difficult enterprise, as the culture was 'a huge difference' to what they knew. Parents justified there was no need to attempt to provide a Swedish culture because 'as long as in school they have that environment'. In fact, schooling was a way for parents themselves to learn from their children ('many things we learn from her'), as the children were typically more immersed in everyday Swedish life than their parents.

Social networks

A commonality between all of the interview participants was their comparatively small social networks when entering or re-entering Sweden. The social acquaintances of this mobile group often comprised primarily of family connections in their country of origin, work-related contacts or friendships with other mobile families.

For the non-Swedish families, who had no true social contacts on arrival in Sweden, their employment (in 'international arenas', characterised by international recruitment and English as a working language) and their children's school were the typical environments from which they built their social relations. Compared to typical Swedish schools, international schools were deemed a successful platform for building relationships as 'everybody is ... looking for a new social life' and had a 'need to extend our circles'. Through enrolment at these schools, mobile families were able to place themselves in an environment with other 'highly educated' families that had 'moved to Sweden for work' and therefore were able to quickly gain a level of social network.

Families frequently felt that they shared more commonalities with other international movers as 'they seem to have a different attitude to the world', hinting at having acquired a 'cosmopolitan outlook' that non-mobiles lacked. However, while families did wish to make local connections, they were rarely able to enter truly local spaces and explained they 'hardly knew any Swedes'. In fact, some 'wished there were even more Swedish kids' in their school, and felt the lack of Swedish children was a negative aspect of the educational option. Families attempted to provide their children with the cultural assets to enter local social spaces that they themselves had difficulty accessing. This frequently took the form of enrolling their children in particular activities or camps, since they themselves were unable to provide Swedish social contacts.

Compared to the Swedish upper middle class, with its normally well-established networks built on a history rooted in educational institutions, years of professional life and intertwined with complex family relations, the internationally mobile families possessed social capital restrained by their own history. They 'didn't have this network and didn't

have anybody to ask' for advice about educational alternatives or the workings of the educational system. Other internationals were therefore often sources of information. The fact that many families followed the common international path, moving on from schools with international orientation to the International Baccalaureate programme was also related to the limited social resources of these internationals. They created their own value in the international trajectory, tending to avoid the competition for other educational programmes where national competition is fierce.

Discussion and conclusion

In spite of Stockholm being highly ranked as a 'Global Power City' (MMF, 2018), our findings give no support for the claim that the Stockholm-Uppsala region is witnessing the rise of a global middle class (GMC) defined by its international mobility. Insofar as numbers are a valid criterion of the existence of a social class, our empirical data show that the size of the immigrating, internationally mobile middle class groups is small. If we count *all* the approximately 8000 immigrated highly skilled professionals in the considered five-year period from 2010 to 2014, and compare with the size of the equivalent Swedish population in the region between 25 and 64 years old, they make up roughly 0,7%. This conforms to earlier estimates of the international circulation of highly skilled labour (Pohlmann, 2013).

As regards the impact of this factual international mobility on Swedish education, an important finding is that the immigrated highly skilled professionals commonly have few school-aged children, most likely because their mobility and relatively young age less easily piece with establishing families (cf. Favell, 2008). It can be concluded that actual international mobility – as different from an increasingly globalised lifestyle among national middle-classes in Europe or around the globe – is not a factor explaining the small but noticeable expansion of internationally oriented schools in Sweden. This increase is more likely an effect of school avoidance strategies (Poupeau et al., 2007; van Zanten, 2009) within the non-mobile Swedish middle class. Our analysis concurs with Hayden's (2011) conclusion regarding Australia, insofar as this expansion is driven by local families. However, our interview data suggests that the basis for the expansion of compulsory level schools with international profiles is primarily to be found in the 'ordinary' Swedish middle class not in the culturally more resourceful Swedish upper middle class.

GMC theorists may claim that the issue of size is not the crucial one, since the global circulation of highly skilled professionals is a function in global capitalism that cannot but create a global middle class separated from other classes (Yemini et al., 2018). A counter-argument to this is similar to the criticism of the previously mentioned theory of a transnational capitalist class (e.g. Sklair, 2001), namely that there is not necessarily a need for transnational classes to exist in order to make global capitalism work (Hartmann, 2016). In the same vein, it could be argued, that for middle class functions in the global economy, national highly skilled professionals, global communication technology and out-sourcing solutions may work as smoothly and be cheaper than sustaining an entire social class on the move. Further, as critics of the idea of a transnational executive class argue, in most countries highly skilled professional positions are areas well protected by

language barriers, culturally framed solidarity ties, and institutional closure (Hartmann, 2018; Pohlmann, 2013).

Our study has avoided exploring the mobile middle classes through a reductionist opposition between the 'global' and the 'local', such as that found in GMC inspired empirical studies. Even when such studies evoke Bourdieu's capital concept, they separate groups, fractions and classes primarily in terms of their *conceptions* of their own international mobility and search for international education, which are presented as a particular 'identity', 'belonging', or 'cosmopolitan' mind-set. Differences in terms of subjective constructions are used to justify claims of objective social divisions, putting aside a relational analysis of the capital assets that have been accumulated in the life trajectory and have shaped habitus and strategies (Maxwell & Yemini, 2019; Yemini & Maxwell, 2018). Consequently, international mobility becomes a property that overshadows the other properties held by individuals and groups. It can be concluded, that while the subjective dimension of international mobility certainly needs to be explored, it has to be incorporated into a structural analysis.

As our rather straightforward distinction between economic and cultural fractions of the immigrating middle classes in the Stockholm-Uppsala region reveals, there are in fact huge differences in the patterns of school enrolment, among the highly skilled mobile professionals, which do not primarily derive from their subjectively conceived attachments and futures. These differences lead back to the nature of the capital assets that different groups possess. Our interview-based study unveils that there is no such thing as a homogeneously operating 'international' or 'cosmopolitan' capital that mobile individuals and families can put to work in new national or even transnational settings. Instead, they have to address how the various, particular capital assets they hold are valorised in specific contexts.

Our interview and quantitative data suggest that international mobility at highly skilled levels typically passes through particular social fields, in Bourdieu's (2000) vocabulary – such as academia, banking, corporations, IT, or media – into which individuals normally have entered in their country of origin. These national fields are connected to transnational social fields in the same domain, which enable mobility and possible migration. This is a recurring pattern in the life trajectories of most of our interviewed highly skilled mobile professionals. This means that they have, rather early on in their careers, made investments – educational as well as others – in particular species of symbolic capital potentially recognised in certain social fields but not in others. In turn, this has shaped not only their skills and knowledge but also their beliefs and outlooks. When confronting new national settings or transnational spaces or fields, the capital assets resulting from this trajectory, not least in their embodied state as habitus, inform strategies and delimit their options. As Hartmann (2018) reminds us, for the overwhelming majority of highly skilled professionals, even the internationally mobile ones, this habitus formation has occurred in predominantly national settings, and, one should add, in specific social fields. It is the gradual accumulation of such assets, which explain why the educational strategies of immigrating cultural fractions, of a broadly defined middle class, differ from those among economic fractions. This is also the reason why our empirical data suggest that the dominant Swedish social groups, pertaining to the upper middle class, doubt the credibility of shortcuts at compulsory level through international schools. Instead, they prefer educational investments that secure the Swedish cultural capital

needed for reaching positions in national social fields that open the doors to both national and international arenas. As our interview study exemplifies, it is the inertia of habitus as embodied capital that makes cross-border capital conversions difficult to successfully manage.

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