

The Impacts of the Higher Education Experience on the Quality of Life

*A Norwegian-based study focusing on individuals with an
ethnic minority background*

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Abstract

In the last couple of years, considerable attention has been given to the integration of ethnic minority individuals in western societies. The Scandinavian region is no exception and renewed debates on the (modern) nature of the welfare state have led to intense political manoeuvring surrounding the opportunities provided to socially disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities.

In the Norwegian national context, the (broad) educational attainment (and performance) of ethnic minority groups living in the country is below national averages. Within the higher education sub-sector, students possessing a minority background are under-represented. Enrolment and graduation rates are below national averages, and, most seriously, dropout rates amongst minority pupils, across the sector, are extremely high.

Advocates of the ‘human capital theory’ have presented convincing evidence of the private and social returns of educational endeavours. Most importantly, higher education is seen as a critical ‘capital’ with regard to individuals’ social mobility and consequent levels of socio-economic well-being.

‘Quality of Life’ has emerged in recent years as a key policy-instrument used to measure and tackle socio-economic inequalities amongst inhabitants and the regions they inhabit. This theoretical perspective provides a ‘holistic’ notion of life and living beyond traditional econometric assessments used by some social scientists.

The analysis provided in this report brings together the (often) dissociated concepts of ‘quality of life’, ‘ethnic minorities’, and ‘higher education’. It is shown that quality of life outlooks amongst the minority individuals composing the study-sample differ slightly from individual to individual. The study also sheds light on the nature of the direct/indirect impacts of individuals’ higher education experiences on the different domains of their quality of life, where a positive contribution is revealed.

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Note: Needless to say, that any faults and/or mismanagements associated with this study are my own responsibility, alone.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The initial chapter of this study sheds light on its most important (research) elements. The research problem and consequent questions are presented. The levels of analysis, main variables, and theoretical frameworks are reflected upon. Further, the methodological approach used is shown, including discussion on validity aspects. The study's main concepts and definitions are clarified. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the study's core structure.

1.1 Background of the Study

Demographic Trends

At the beginning of 2005, 8% of Norway's 4.6 million inhabitants (or 365 000 people) were of foreign origin (SSB 2005a). Of these, 301 000 individuals were first generation immigrants (i.e. born abroad of two foreign-born parents) and 64 000 were born in Norway of two foreign-born parents ('second generation'). Overall, close to 200 different nationalities compose Norway's immigrant population. During 2004, the immigrant population grew by 4.9% compared to 0.6% for the Norwegian population as a whole. In the first two quarters of 2005, Norway's population (as a whole) increased by 14 900 individuals, compared to 12 200 in the first two quarters of 2004. Non-westerners accounted for 72% of all immigrants or the equivalent of 5.7% of Norway's population. In terms of geographical dispersion, immigrants (especially non-westerners) are concentrated around thirty main municipalities, mostly around the greater Oslo area. Within Oslo, immigrants represent 22% of all inhabitants (1 out of 5), followed by the municipalities of Drammen (17%), Lørenskog (14%), and Askim, Skedsmo and Båtsjord (12% each).

Overall, the largest immigrant communities in 2005 were composed of individuals originating from Pakistan (26 000), Sweden (23 000), Denmark (19 000), and Vietnam (17 000) (Utrop 2005b: 23). However, it has been suggested, if the definitions of an 'immigrant' (above) would be enlarged to include the category of 'other immigrant backgrounds' (i.e. individuals born abroad with at least one Norwegian-born parent and/or born in Norway of a foreign born parent), the largest immigrant groups living in Norway

would be composed of North Americans (31 000), Brits (31 000), and Germans (26 000), respectively (*ibid.*).

By the fall of 2004, 24% of the Norwegian population over the age of fifteen had completed some form of tertiary education, up from less than 13% by the mid 1980s (SSB 2005b). Regional educational profiles differ widely, with the counties of Hedmark, Oppland and Nordland having the lowest proportion of inhabitants with a tertiary education (18%) whereas Oslo and Akershus possess the highest proportions (38 and 29%, respectively). In the age sub-group 30 to 44 year olds, 30% of Norway's population had some form of tertiary education (short or long) by 2001 (SSB 2003b). This figure was 26.2% for the immigrant population as a whole. Considerable gaps per region of origin do exist amongst Norway's immigrant communities, with westerners having higher attainment rates than their non-western counterparts (39.3% versus 21.3, respectively). Interestingly, in the group 25-29 years old, tertiary participation rates amongst 'second generation' immigrants in 2001 surpassed the country's national average (*ibid.*).

With regards gender profiles (educational sector as a whole), women tend to have higher participation rates than men, but educational profiles vary by country of origin. Immigrants from the Philippines, Poland, Russia and India rank amongst the highly educated. Somalis, Pakistanis and Thais have lower levels of educational attainment, with many non-western women possessing little or no education. Overall, and for the higher education (HE) sector alone, of a total of 210 000 students enrolled during 2003 around 3.6% (or 7 500 students) possessed an immigrant/minority background (SSB 2003c).

According to some analysts, "the demarcation between a person from a language minority and an immigrant will depend on the purpose of the definition." (NIFU-STEP 2004a: 19). As such, language minorities include groups who have lived in Norway for a long time, as well as groups of more recent immigrants including political refugees. Language minorities also include adults who do not have Danish, Norwegian, Sámi or Swedish as their mother tongue, and who need extra language training. Hence, language minorities do not include national minorities like the Sámi, Kven, Skogfinn, etc. Since ethnic origin is not included in national statistics, comparisons between (native) minority and majority groups are rather limited. In the context of this study, the term 'immigrant' and/or 'ethnic minority' refers to individuals

who originate (or descend) from an ethnic background other than ethnic Norwegian, i.e., whose parents or grandparents were born outside the country. Furthermore, this study restricts its empirical analysis (interviews) to first-generation immigrants born outside Norway and whose ethnic background can be characterised as of non-western.

Critical Social Issues

Turning now to the most critical social issues facing language/ethnic minority groups, high unemployment rates are one of the main problems. Even though statistics reveal that levels of employment tend to increase with the length of stay in the country (SSB 2004b), unemployment rates amongst first generation immigrants reached 9.7% in 2003; almost three times the national average of 3.7%. Amongst those, the most affected ethnic groups included: Africans (17.8%), Asians (13%), South/Central Americans (11.2%), and Eastern Europeans (10.5%). As for Nordic and western immigrants, unemployment rates were just slightly above national averages (4.4%).

Amongst working families with children (1999), immigrant communities (particularly non-western) possessed low (average) after-tax incomes (NOK 325 000, annually) when compared to the rest of the country (NOK 470 000) (SSB 2001). This is especially the case for families originating from developing countries. A clear divide in terms of income levels exists between western and non-western immigrants. For example, after-tax income for families from Nordic and western European countries in 1999 was NOK 450 000 and NOK 463 000, respectively; NOK 500 000 in the case of families originated from North America and Oceania (*ibid.*).

Recent studies reveal that the levels of 'social integration' and 'quality of life' amongst immigrant populations are considerably below national averages. Amongst other things, immigrants of non-western origin are more likely to dropout from education; face discrimination while searching for a job; and, be under-paid in their first career years (NIFU-STEP 1997; 2003; Rogstad 2004). Regional differences between 'majority' and 'minority' groups with regard to schooling/integration in the labour market have also been detected (NIFU-STEP 2004b). Additionally, it has also been reported that ethnic minority individuals are more likely to suffer from psychological and emotional diseases (Uniforum 2004). Nonetheless, it is important to stress that major differences occur between the different

minority groups, as well as individuals within the same (ethnic) group (LS 2005; Rogstad 2004).

Recent surveys on the domestic (native Norwegian) attitudes towards 'immigrants' and 'immigration', reveal, amongst other things, that two-thirds of the population agree that immigrants make an important contribution in work-life; 70% of respondents indicate that immigrants enrich Norwegian cultural life; 58% would not object having a son/daughter marrying an immigrant; and, six out of seven stated that all immigrants should be given the same work opportunities as native Norwegians (SSB 2004c). However, the same survey also shows that 56% of all respondents are in favour of toughening immigration policies; 40% think immigrants are the cause of (domestic) social insecurities; and, 39% believe most immigrants abuse the system of social benefits. Overall, with respect to integration/assimilation, half of the Norwegian population (54%) is in favour of immigrants adopting Norwegian life-styles.

National attitudes towards immigrants and immigration differ with *age*, *educational level* and *place of residence*. Individuals possessing higher educational levels tend to be more positive and tolerant than the average population. Older age groups (67-79 years old) on the other hand, tend to be less positive towards immigration when compared to their younger counterparts (SSB 2004c). People inhabiting main urban centres, such as Oslo, Drøbak and Akershus have generally more contact and knowledge of immigrant communities (and issues), thus making them more positive towards their overall contributions (and influences) into Norwegian society.

Recent reforms in the traditional Scandinavian models of welfare provision, in tandem with the introduction of market mechanisms in the domestic HE system (c.f. DEP 2003a; Nyborg 2002), have raised new concerns towards such social issues as *equity* and *exclusion*. In the European Union (EU) context, recent developments have led to considerable focus being put on balancing economic (competitive) imperatives with proper mechanisms of social protection ('The Lisbon Agenda', in EurActiv 2005b). At the European level, a particular emphasis has been given to 'social cohesion' (Europa 2004), as well as peoples' overall levels of 'quality of life' (Europa 2005).

In this ('new') state of affairs higher education institutions (HEIs) are expected to play a critical role due to their valuable contributions towards *economic growth* and *social stability* (Europa 2003; Bologna Declaration 1999; EUA 2003). As stated by Norway's former Minister of Education and Research during a recent visit to South Africa, "Higher education institutions are more central to the welfare of the country [Norway] than ever" (UFD 2004).

1.2 Motivation and Rationale

The motivation for the theme covered in this study lies on the growing importance of the integration of ethnic minority groups across European societies. As Europe faces an unprecedented demographic challenge in years to come, social issues affecting minority and immigration groups have come to the fore of political debates. Norway presents an interesting case study as the country is, due to its vast natural resources, less affected (economically) by migration flows in and out of the country. Nonetheless, as a small, fairly homogenous country, with a young national identity and a long history of 'distrusting outsiders' (e.g. Swedes and Danes), Norway is facing considerable challenges with regard to the integration of ethnic minority groups. Recent, centre-right (coalition) governments have toughened their attitudes towards non-natives (especially asylum seekers), and, in the process, been the target of extensive 'human rights' criticisms by such international observers as the United Nations (UD 2005).

The life circumstances of non-native ethnic minority groups living in Norway, as discussed in chapter 4 of this study, have been examined in recent years. Nonetheless, few (if any), of these studies focus on the role of HE with respect to the 'quality of life' (QoL) of ethnic minority individuals living in the country. Despite convincing evidence on the serious problems facing minorities within the broad educational system (e.g. high drop-out rates, underperformance, etc.), in-depth analysis of the life circumstances surrounding those individuals who have successfully completed HE studies in Norway has not yet been undertaken. In our view, a thorough understanding of the impacts of HE endeavours (or experiences) at the micro (individual) level is key if one is to realise the contribution of the sector towards personal and social levels of wellbeing.

Most importantly, as is the case with many capitalistic-oriented societies the gaps between better and lesser-off social groups tend to increase over time. Take the U.S.A as an example.

In the period 1979-2001, the average after-tax income of the top 1% of households more than doubled (up to \$700,000) whereas the income of the middle fifth rose 17%, and the bottom fifth only 9% (MoneyWeek 2005). Education, particularly HE is seen as a major contributing factor. In the U.S.A, the gap in income levels between those with a college degree and the rest increased from 31% (in 1979) to 66% (in 1997) (*ibid.*). In other words, HE has the potential of acting as a levelling mechanism able to tackle social inequalities and foster ‘social cohesion’.

1.3 Focus of the Study

This study brings together three distinct concepts, namely: (a) *quality of life*; (b) *ethnic minorities*; and, (c) *higher education*. The main focus of the study lies on the *analysis* and *interpretation* of individuals’ quality of life outcomes (micro-level) in the context of their higher education experiences. Background information at the macro (governmental policies) and the mesa (institutional) levels is also provided.

1.4 Research Problem and Questions

The *core* research question (or problem) driving the study is:

- ***‘How has the (domestic) higher education experience of individuals with a non-western ethnic minority background contributed to their quality of life outlook?’***

The following *five* research questions help answering (operationalise) the above query:

1. *How has the concept of quality of life been defined and operationalised?*
2. *What sort of data with regard to individuals’ quality of life have global studies been revealing?*
3. *What is the nature of the relationship between quality of life, (higher) education, and minorities?*
4. *How can the quality of life of highly educated (non-western) ethnic minority individuals living in Norway be characterised?*
5. *What is the contribution (impact) of the higher education experience to these individuals’ levels of (global) quality of life?*

1.5 Conceptual Framework

The study sheds light on ‘quality of life’ (QoL) as a research construct. Based on the literature review on the subject (chapter 2), an operationalisation model (table 6) has been conceptualised and empirically applied. The latter focuses on five QoL domains (or ‘capitals’), namely: (1) economic; (2) social; (3) civic; (4) self; and, (5) surrounding environment. A quantitative analyses of the data gathered is presented. Two inter-related but specific analyses are undertaken. Firstly, individuals’ (global) QoL outlooks, and, secondly, the extent to which those outlooks were (directly/indirectly) determined by individuals’ HE experiences. Hence, significant trends across respondents and QoL domains, as well as relationships between variables are established and reflected upon.

In addition to QoL, the other two key concepts used throughout this study are: (a) ‘Higher Education’; and, (b) ‘Ethnic Minority’/‘Immigrant’.

- a) *‘Higher Education’*: Defined by Cambridge Advanced Learner’s dictionary as, “education at a college or university where subjects are studied at an advanced level” (Cambridge 2004). In the great majority of the situations, the term ‘higher education’ (HE) in this study refers to the aggregation of individuals’ experiences during one’s post-secondary studies (i.e. lectures, examinations, supervision, social events, etc.).
- b) *‘Ethnic Minority’*: Defined as any group that has different national or cultural traditions than those composing the majority of the population (WordNet 2005).
Immigrant: An individual whose parents and grandparents were born outside Norway (SSB 2002).

1.6 Methodological Approach

1.6.1 Research Design

Joseph Maxwell (1996) proposes a flexible ‘interactive’ research-design model built on Martin’s (1982) ‘garbage can’ concept and its latest revisions (c.f. Grady & Wallston 1988). This approach opposes the traditional view of research as a ‘linear process’ and instead characterises it as ‘non-linear’, where different elements are tightly related and interdependent, hence determining the outcome of the (research) process. As stated by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 28), “research design should be a reflexive process

operating through every stage of a project” (Maxwell 1996: 2). This involves continuously collecting and analysing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or reframing research questions, and identifying and eliminating validity threats. This is in line with Maxwell’s characterisation of the process, “as the underlying structure and interconnection of the components of the study and the implications of each component for the others” (*ibid.* p, 4).

Maxwell’s interactive model is composed of *five* elements of which the central one (research questions) facilitates the development and empirical operationalisation of the study. The remaining (four) elements are: (a) *Purposes* (the aim of the study); (b) *Conceptual Context* (theories and frameworks); (c) *Methods* (approaches and techniques); and, (d) *Validity* (internal and external). The researcher had these five elements in mind during the several stages characterising the development of this research study.

1.6.2 In-Depth Interviews

There are three basic types of interviews: (a) *fixed-choice*; (b) *semi-structured*; and, (c) *informal (or open)* (c.f. Maxwell 1996; Patton 2002; Kvale 1996; Silverman 2000; Hoyle *et al.* 2002; Punch 1998). The empirical work in this study includes ‘semi-structured’ (in-depth) face-to-face interviews. Amongst other things, this method allows interviewees to respond in an open-ended way, leading to the emergence of valuable interpretations and meanings associated with individuals’ “subjective worlds” (Layder 1993: 41). Furthermore, due to a combination of structure (themes/questions) and flexibility (exploration), ‘semi structured interviews’ allow the interviewer (researcher) to react (and explore) adequately to new (emerging) circumstances. Thus, the perspective adopted in this study is of an interview as an inter-view, i.e. “an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (Kvale 1996: 14). As such, the researcher acts as a *traveller*, wondering around throughout the landscape exploring un-chartered waters, and reconstructing (interpreting) loose stories that are to be communicated to others (*ibid.*).

All the interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed in verbatim. When adequate, additional (complementary) notes during the interview were taken. An individual interview report after each session was developed by the interviewer/researcher pinpointing critical (data) points and constraints. A preliminary assessment of the elements gathered was

undertaken after each interview session. Interviews were held on a quiet location (university room or respondents office) and lasted between 2.5 and 4.5 hours. In two of the (six) cases, the interview was split into two separate sessions. When required, interviewees were contacted in order to provide additional (missing) information, and/or clarify any remaining issues (or themes) that surfaced during the face-to-face encounter.

1.6.3 Sampling

The sampling method used follows the guidelines indicated for *quota* or *purposive sampling* (Hoyle *et al.* 2002: 187). This method aims at selecting individual cases that are representative of the specific (minority) population being studied. In order to be able to do so, sampling criteria were set, namely:

- Born outside Norway with both parents of foreign nationality (1st generation).
- Speaks and writes fluently Norwegian.
- Has been in the country for at least five consecutive years.
- Originates from a non-western ethnic background, with the exception being Eastern Europe.
- Has undertaken and completed (at least) a full undergraduate degree at a Norwegian higher education institution with Norwegian as the main language of instruction.

Due to practical constraints related to the accessibility of tentative respondents, the original sample of ten individuals was reduced to six. This was mostly due to the difficulty in tracing respondents who fitted the sampling criteria, as well as the result of some ‘cultural stigmas’ (or stereotypes) associated with the nature of the research work, i.e. minorities/quality of life. For example, anecdotic evidence indicates that some (minority) individuals did not feel comfortable at all in being addressed (or categorised) as ‘minority’ or ‘immigrant’, as well as sharing elements surrounding one’s life spheres with a “stranger”. We also expected individuals who are ‘worse-off’ with regard to their (overall) life situation (e.g. unemployed, under-paid, etc.) to decline participation in the study. Moreover, the traceability of minority individuals who had completed their HE studies in the last couple of years was an additional barrier, as these people moved out of the campus to become an active member of the wider full-time working population. Therefore, and as a result of some of the constraints mentioned

above, the majority of the interviewees selected were still undertaking (graduate/post-graduate) HE studies at the time of the interviews.

The *demographic* characteristics of the six interviewees/respondents are as follows (see appendix 3):

- *Gender*: Four males and two females.
- *Age*: From late twenties to early forties.
- *Status*: First generation immigrants with lengths of stay in Norway ranging from 8 to 21 years. Average period in Norway across the sample was 14.2 years. Four individuals possessed Norwegian citizenship.
- *Regions of Origin*: Latin America (1 person), Africa (3 persons), Middle East (1 person), and Eastern Europe (1 person).
- *Level of Education*: Completed bachelor and ongoing master degree (1 person); completed bachelor, and two ongoing master degrees (1 person); completed bachelor and just completed master degree (1 person); completed bachelor and master degrees, and ongoing doctoral degree (2 persons); and, completed bachelor, master and doctoral degrees (1 person).
- *Higher education institutions attended*: University of Oslo (UiO), Høgskolen I Oslo (HiO), University of Bergen (UiB), and University of Trømso (UiT).
- *Academic Fields*: Social Sciences (2 persons), Educational Sciences (3 persons), Information Technology (1 person).

1.6.4 Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis (and interpretation) of the empirical (qualitative) data gathered uses two distinct philosophical approaches (or methodologies): (a) *Phenomenology*; and, (b) *Hermeneutics*. The phenomenological approach (c.f. Giorgi 1985; Moustakas 1994) has been defined as, "...the study of the structure, and the variations of structure, of the consciousness to which any thing, event, or person appears" (Giorgi 1975 in Kvale 1996: 53). Its orientation is one of understanding social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives, thus aiming at describing the world as experienced by the subjects. Furthermore, this approach also attempts to move beyond immediately experienced meanings and make the 'invisible', visible. The researcher mostly used this particular

interpretative method *during* the course of the interviews, in order to explore certain ‘hidden’ elements, and shed light on individuals’ (own) meanings and interpretations.

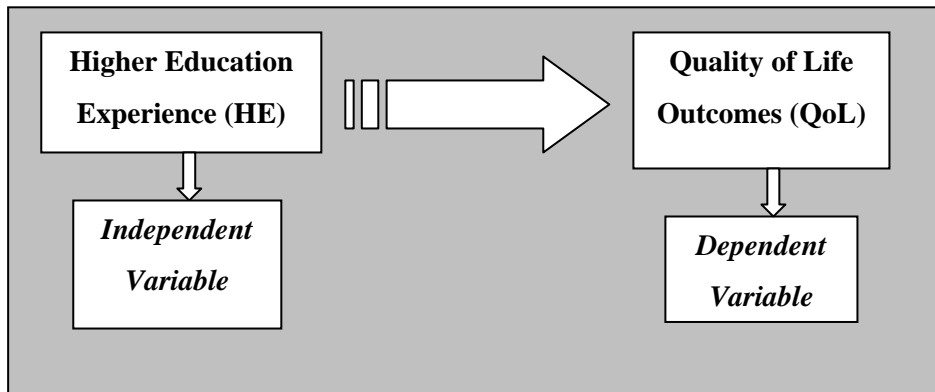
In a similar vein, *hermeneutics* or the interpretation of texts (c.f. Packer & Addison 1989; Palmer 1969) was used to aid the analysis of the data findings after the interview session, in order to develop a thorough understanding of the different parts of the text in the context of the interview as a whole. According to Kvale, “...the interpretations of an interview will stop when the meanings of the different themes make *sensible patterns* and enter into a *coherent unity*” (Kvale 1996: 48; My italics). Notwithstanding, this approach implies a set of premises from the part of the researcher, namely: (a) sticking to the content of the statements and understanding their relevancy in the context of the life world of the subject; (b) possess an extensive knowledge on the themes covered; and, (c) being aware of one’s own presuppositions and modes of influence, i.e. ways of seeing and perceiving (*ibid.*).

It is important to stress that, in the context of any given study, interviews are seen as, “stepping stones to meaning” rather than finished entities per se (Kvale 1996: 183). The interpretation of qualitative data is then part of an on-going process initiated *prior* (design), *during*, and *after* the interview session. Three main steps, as suggested by Kvale (1996: 189), were used whilst interpreting interviewees’ transcripts: (1) Structuring the material (‘organizing’); (2) Clarifying the material (‘cleaning up’); and, (3) Developing a proper analysis of meanings (‘interpreting’). During the third stage (analysis of meanings), an *ad-hoc* approach using several instruments was exercised. This process was aided by such techniques as: (a) *meaning condensation* (central themes); (b) *meaning categorisation* (categories with scores); (c) *narrative structuring* (coherent story); and, (d) *meaning interpretation* (re-contextualisation) (*ibid.* p, 191).

1.6.5 Key Variables

The study’s *independent* variable relates to individuals’ ‘Higher Education Experiences’ (often referred as ‘HE’), whereas the *dependent* variable consists of individuals’ ‘*Quality of Life Outcomes*’ (referred to as ‘QoL’). Therefore, the analysis of the empirical work aims at determining the nature of the relationship between the two variables, i.e. the extent to which individuals’ HE has contributed to, or impacted on, their (global) QoL outlooks.

Figure 1: The Study's Key Variables



In order to recognise patterns in the data and lead to the recognition and understanding of causal relations between variables, a framework with dominant *themes*, as suggested by Maxwell (1996: 131), was developed. Each theme was then ‘dimensionalised’ (i.e. broken into factors), and graphically displayed so that relationships between themes could be recognised and illustrated. Cross *displays* and *matrixes* across the different QoL domains (and interview cases) were developed in order to facilitate the identification of new patterns (and themes) emerging from the data. The rationale for this process lies on providing the reader, as well as the researcher, with a “logical chain of evidence” (Scriven 1974).

1.6.6 Validity

According to Hoyle and colleagues, a discussion on validity should look at *three* important elements: (a) *Construct*; (b) *Internal*; and, (c) *External* Validity (Hoyle *et al.* 2002: 33). *Construct validity* inquires whether the constructs of theoretical interest are successfully operationalised in the study. *Internal* validity focuses on the effects of the independent variable in the dependent one. Finally, *external validity* lies on the ability to generalise the empirical findings (from the study sample) to a broader population. Below, we present the study elements associated to each one of the three validity types.

Construct Validity

As shown earlier, the main theoretical construct used throughout the study is ‘Quality of Life’ (QoL). The latter is operationalised in this study in a variety of ways. Firstly, a distinction is made between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ perspectives. Secondly, in order to better comprehend (and isolate) its diverse impacts, the construct was split along *five* distinct QoL-domains (or ‘capitals’), namely: (1) *Economic*; (2) *Social*; (3) *Civic*; (4) *Self*; and, (5)

External. Thirdly, a separate analysis with respect to: (a) individuals' (global) QoL outlook; and, (b) the impact of HE on their QoL, is shown. The most important query surrounding 'construct' validity relates to the different variables (or sub-domains) used to measure each one of the five (QoL) domains. This is due to the fact that, "...variables measure not only the construct of interest but also what we might call *constructs of disinterest* – things we would rather not measure" (Hoyle *et al.* 2002: 34; My italics). In addition, as stressed by the authors, "...any variable is likely to contain within it random errors of measurement" (*ibid.*).

With regard to the variables selected to measure and interpret each one of the five QoL domains, attempts by the researcher were undertaken in order to maximise the reliability of the data gathered. However, and due to the subjective nature of some of the sub-dimensions (e.g. self-esteem, identity, life perceptions, etc.) it is indeed possible that some 'constructs of disinterest' may have affected the final analysis. While organising and interpreting the data (i.e. finding meaningful patterns) the researcher came across a variety of less reliable information that was carefully 'flagged' and critically assessed in terms of its overall validity. Nevertheless, despite all our best efforts it shall not be excluded that some of those elements may have, to a certain extent, 'contaminated' the final results. It is worthwhile stressing that throughout this process, the methodological advices provided by the two schools of thought mentioned earlier, as well as Kvale's were thoroughly applied as a means to increase the study's overall construct validity.

Internal Validity

A key aspect inherent to internal validity relates to the reliability of the data gathered, i.e. the random errors occurring throughout the study. Qualitative studies are often accused of being prone to data errors due to their subjective (ambiguous) nature. Methodological approaches such as personal (in-depth) face-to-face interviews have the potential of being coloured by individuals' *emotional*, *cognitive*, and *intellectual* profiles. This is indeed a risk all qualitative research needs to take. On the other hand, it is also widely recognised that, generally speaking, qualitative methods are better equipped to deal with the complex and often contradictory realities surrounding individuals' social (outer) and personal (inner) worlds.

In the context of this study, the great variety of cultural and educational backgrounds amongst interviewees made it almost impossible for the researcher to be thoroughly acquainted with a variety of (key) factors of an ethnic/cultural nature. This means that, even if rationally attempted, interpretations of the data cannot avoid being (somehow) coloured by the eyes of the beholder. Furthermore, limitations in terms of time (scarcity), as well as language (all interviews were conducted in English amongst non-native English speakers) *might* have created additional constraints to gathering ‘clean’ and ‘objective’ data. With respect to the five QoL domains surveyed, a variety of challenges faced both, interviewees as well as the researcher/interviewer. This process was most visible when individuals were asked to reflect upon self-related dimensions and (past or difficult) life circumstances. Furthermore, interpretative mistakes (i.e. not understanding the question/answer) and difficulties in developing a ‘logical chain of reference’, by either the interviewee (describing) or the researcher (interpreting), *may* have led to unrecoverable (data-) ‘gaps’ that are critical to the re-construction of individuals’ social realities.

As regards the determination of causal elements, i.e. the effects of the independent variable (‘HE’) on the dependent one (‘QoL’), a few elements deserve to be highlighted. First, the research strategy (and design) adopted conceptualises ‘higher education’ from a broader perspective (i.e. the sum of educational-related experiences occurring throughout individuals’ active enrolment). This factor per se, makes it difficult to accurately ‘measure’ (and ‘control/isolate’) the impact of a given (educational) element on the dependent variable. Second, since HE occurs throughout a considerable (long) period of time (three to eight years), and at a stage of critical personal transformation (early adulthood), it is possible that factors counted as directly associated to the educational experience (by both interviewee and researcher), *may* instead have originated outside HE; for example, as a result of external influences (and experiences) coming upon important social domains like one’s family, friendships, and/or society at large. Third, educational endeavours tend to have a long-term effect, meaning that the outcome of individuals’ HE experiences *might* only be revealed a few years after their graduation. Lastly, it is important not to underestimate the impact of individual-specific aspects, such as *personality* and *motivation/ambition*, as these are susceptible of determining individuals’ life choices and circumstances, hence their QoL.

External Validity

In what way is the sample used in the study representative of the overall (highly educated) minority population living in Norway? Several aspects deserve our analysis. Firstly, the sample used covered a wide variety of national backgrounds, rather than an in-depth analysis of a particular ethnic group. This ‘variety’ was operationalised via only one individual (per country), which per se, may lead to validity concerns, i.e. if that particular individual differs substantially from other highly educated persons belonging to the same ethnic group. Secondly, due to the constraints in gaining access to a broader audience (mentioned above), especially the fact that some interviewees were (still) actively undertaking HE at the time of the interview (even though they were all senior graduate/post-graduate students and many of them possessed, already, considerable full-time working experience and personal maturity), the “ideal” ‘time-lag’ necessary to accurately measure the effects of HE (discussed earlier) was, to some extent, absent; thus, affecting (negatively) the representativeness (external validity) of the individual cases selected. Thirdly, the lack of a ‘control group’ in the study, i.e. a group with similar ethnic characteristics but without HE experiences and/or an equally highly educated group composed of native Norwegians, can be seen as a major constraint with regard to the generalisation of the study findings to a broader sample or the overall (minority) population.

Notwithstanding the arguments presented above, it is important to bear in mind that the relative importance of each one of the three ‘validity’ elements is dependent on the purposes addressed in the research study (Hoyle *et al.* 2002: 32). Since research on the QoL of highly educated minority individuals living in Norway is in its infancy, the study, first and foremost, aims at shedding light on the live circumstances of those individuals, “...without worrying too much for the time being about whether the association is a causal one” (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, we are confident that the methodological approaches used throughout the study in tandem with the researcher’s careful analysis, have leveraged the overall validity of the data findings; leading to its high relevancy within the social sciences. In other words, this study is a good starting point with respect to the explorative quest surrounding the impacts of HE experiences at the micro (individual) level, and in help describing (and interpreting) the life circumstances of ethnic minorities in Norway and beyond (Scandinavia, European region, OECD-member states, etc.).

1.7 Significance of the Study

This research study sheds light on *two* important areas within social science research. Firstly, the life circumstances of individual members of a minority group possessing higher education. An area characterised by scarce research enquiry (and evidence) to date. Secondly, a reflection on the critical role undertaken by HE experiences in the context of individuals' levels of personal and social well being. Most importantly, this study shows the extent to which HE has the potential to act as a major force in the integration of socially disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities/immigrants. The arguments and data presented in this study are relevant to all professionals dedicated in gaining an understanding of the critical (social/economic) role of higher education at local and regional levels. Therefore, the study is targeted at such audiences as: social science researchers; higher education students; policy makers; institutional stakeholders (academic and managerial); individuals with a minority background; and, ultimately, the Norwegian population as a whole.

1.8 The Study's Structure

This study is composed of *seven* chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1 (current) provides an introduction to the research study, shedding light on the contextual background, motivation and rationale, research problem and questions, focus and levels of analysis, the theoretical framework used, methodological approach, main concepts and definitions, as well as the study's main contribution(s).

Chapter 2 highlights the most important elements inherent to the concept of 'quality of life' (QoL) with a special focus on construct-definitions, disciplinary perspectives (conceptualisations), core methodological issues (dilemmas), study domains, key findings, as well as conceptual models. Hence, this chapter provides an extensive review of the theoretical framework used in the study.

Chapter 3 reflects upon the interception of the *three* core elements composing this study, i.e. *quality of life*, *(higher) education*, and *minorities*. In the first section, an overview of the most important structural trends with respect to the importance of education in general and

higher education in particular (within the context of knowledge-based societies), is provided. The second section of the chapter highlights the particular relationship between ‘quality of life’ and ‘minorities’.

Chapter 4 summarises the most important contextual elements with regard to Norway as a country case study. The most recent (QoL) findings about several ethnic minority groups living in the country are presented. The structure of the Norwegian higher education system is briefly outlined, and the position (and role) of minority individuals within it described. Further, a brief overview of the main policy frameworks shaping Norway’s (official) ‘minority strategy’ in the context of HE is given. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the strategic actions undertaken by the two most important institutional players (tertiary level) within the country, when it comes to minority-inclusion in academia.

Chapter 5 presents the qualitative findings from the empirical work at the individual (micro) level. Special attention is given to the description and interpretation of individuals’ life-stories in light of the five QoL domains selected. Moreover, a brief summary of the major trends detected in the empirical data is provided.

Chapter 6 links the (empirical) data presented in chapter 5 with core elements inherent to ‘quality of life’ as a research construct (chapter 2), as well as earlier (QoL) findings on minorities in Norway and beyond (chapters 3 and 4).

Chapter 7 concludes the study by highlighting the key findings in the context of the research problem (and questions) posed earlier. It also provides a set of practical suggestions to the study’s main stakeholders (audiences).

Chapter 2: Quality of Life

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on the concept of ‘Quality of Life’ (QoL). The areas explored include; definitions and disciplinary perspectives, methodological issues, conceptual models (and their operationalisation), and some key empirical findings. The chapter concludes with the presentation of the conceptual model developed by the researcher, outlining the five core areas of enquiry, i.e. QoL domains.

2.1 Definitions

Quality of life (QoL) as a concept and ‘regulative idea’ had its origins during the 1960s around lively sociological debates on the *affluent society*, *new frontier*, and *great society programmes* (Zapf 1980: 249). In 1954, a United Nations (UN) expert-group raised worldwide awareness towards the limitations in using (solely) Gross National Product (GNP) while measuring well-being (UN 1954, in Erikson 1993). This development, in tandem with the failures associated with earlier development policies in defining and measuring human needs, led to the UNESCO’s adoption of QoL, “as a broad, inclusive approach towards development” (Solomon *et al.* 1980: 225). Philosophers and other social scientists alike have long advocated the critique of the ‘utility approach’, i.e. a pure econocentric perspective. These individuals have since advocated a broader approach with respect to analysing resource distribution and its impacts on people’s lives (c.f. Nussbaum & Sen 1993).

The concept of *well-being* is not a recent social phenomenon and, as such, lies at the heart of western civilisation. During the 4th century B.C., Plato’s disciple, Aristotle, elaborated thoroughly on the natural human desire to achieve happiness and the extent to which moral conduct may lead to what he considered “the good life” (Ross 1954). This very same ideal is embedded in modern democracies (e.g. the 1776’s U.S. Declaration of Independence). In 1812, Thomas Jefferson wrote: the “only aim of the government is to secure the greatest degree of happiness possible to the general mass of those associated under it” (Jones 1953, in Luckasson 1997: ix). More recently, broader social debates around *well-being* and *happiness* have led some to characterise the 1990s as, “the decade of quality of life” (Schalock 1990, in Schalock 1997: 225). A study of quotations within the medical science

literature in the period 1989-1993, revealed the usage of the 'QoL' term in approximately 1.500 different publications (Garratt & Ruta 1999: 105).

As is the case with many other social constructs, a wide variety of (QoL-) definitions does exist. Health researchers such as Bech (1999: 51) argue that the concept refers to the personal domain of subjective experiences of 'well-being' or 'meaning'. Philosophers, on the other hand, prefer to characterise QoL as, "the fulfilment of informed desire" (James Griffin 1988: 75). Nordic scholar Erik Allardt (1973) relates the QoL concept to "perceived happiness", and the subtler dimensions of *objective welfare* like 'loving' and 'being' rather than 'having' (cited by Zapf 1980: 251). Hence, QoL (or sense of well-being) is, "a complex psychic state composed of intricate interplay of conscious and subconscious as well as emotional and cognitive elements" (Hawkins 1983: 21).

Following this line of thought, John Browne (1999: 159) refers to QoL as, "the sum of satisfactions derived from important life domains". This rationale is in line with commonly used definitions of 'life satisfaction' as, "an indicator of summary evaluations about current life functionings" (Minor *et al.* 1980: 130). According to the latter authors, individuals' (overall) life satisfaction is a reflection of realised *expectations* and *aspirations* around the various life domains (e.g., work, family, etc.).

Philosophers such as Culyer (1990: 21) defend that QoL relates to shared views on how one ought to be able to live. This view is in line with arguments forwarded by the Aristotelian school (c.f. Megone 1990), and the idea of the "purpose of man". According to this perspective, the realisation of man's purpose (or 'function') leads to the fulfilment of "the good life". The latter, persuasively argued by Aristotle, is achieved via the human ability of behaving rationally (c.f. Ackrill 1973). Hence, "quality of life is a value-laden concept" (Mukherjee 1980: 189), since it relates to attributes that are either desirable or undesirable.

Renowned Harvard Professor, Amartya Sen, relates QoL to the concept of *freedom*, defined as "a function of what one achieves plus the opportunity to choose from a set of options" (Sen 1983: 34). In a similar vein, Schalock (1997: xi) associates QoL with the fulfilment of *basic needs* and the opportunity to pursue and achieve *personal goals* in major life settings (e.g. home, community, etc.). Following this line of thought, Griffin (1988: 41) stresses that

“needs” are not a sub-class of desires, and that one can distinguish needs that are ‘instrumental’, i.e. fulfil certain ends, from those that are ‘basic human’ (or absolute), such as food or shelter.

Some scholars on the other hand, warn researchers about the common mistake of confusing ‘QoL’ with ‘standard of living’ (c.f. Thring 1981: 29). According to them, whereas the latter concept uses *monetary goods* and *status symbols*, the former deals with individuals’ (inner) *feelings*, in the attempts to achieve self-fulfilment and experience life as worth living. This line of thought is coherent with the seminal works of Ervin Laszlo (1974) and Abraham Maslow (1959), where both authors shed light on the human desire towards the fulfilment of (basic) needs beyond survival, namely: physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualisation, cognitive, and aesthetic.

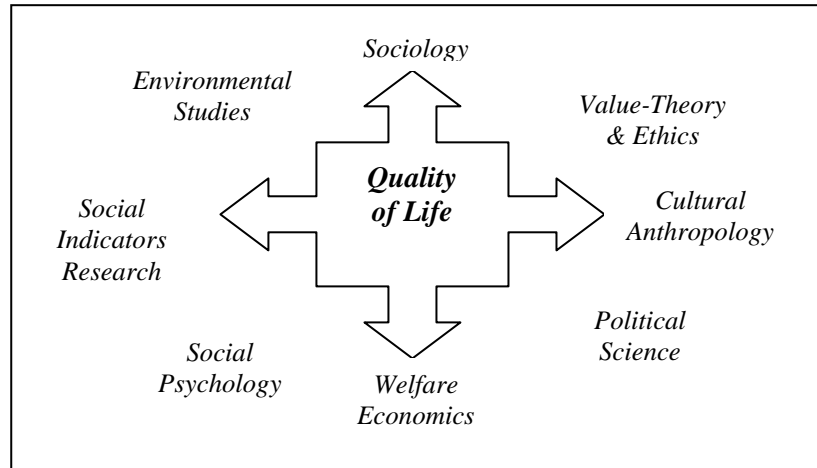
From a social sciences perspective, QoL has been approached as an “all inclusive notion of life and living” (Szalai 1980, in Mukherjee 1989: 23). As such, it has evolved over time to become the ultimate goal of public welfare policies (Berger-Schmitt 2000), as well as the symbolic pursuit of individual happiness (Zapf 1980). As stated by Wojciechowski, whilst discussing the development of knowledge from a philosophical point of view, QoL “is an evolutionary property, a function of man’s increasingly rational feedback relationship with himself and with his evermore complex environment...it is a systemic problem which has to be dealt with in a systemic perspective” (Wojciechowski 1981: 144-9). Hence, in line with the ambiguity and contradictions inherent to the different conceptualisations of QoL “the definition and measurement of quality of life is neither easy to resolve nor possible to ignore” (Baldwin *et al.* 1990: 2).

2.2 Perspectives

Research on QoL has been characterised as: (a) being embedded in a network of various social sciences; (b) having as its basic concern the promotion of human well-being; (c) analysing a wide range of economic, social, social-psychological, environmental and cultural factors; (d) drawing its data from the social sciences and other fields; (e) using both subjective and objective indicators; (f) being part of an integral system of interacting variables; (g) being conscious of plurality and relativity of value frameworks; and, (h) aiming at past, present and future orientations (Solomon *et al.* 1980: 225-7).

Approaches to the study of QoL are highly dependent on the disciplinary perspective being adopted. Figure 2 (below) highlights the multiplicity of scientific fields surrounding QoL-studies.

Figure 2: QoL Research and Relevant Disciplines



Source: Solomon et al. (1980: 227)

As a consequence of the disciplinary diversity surrounding QoL studies, the (research) emphasis given by stakeholders also tends to differ slightly. For example, physicians and clinical researchers prefer to focus their efforts on developing methods for measuring QoL within a clinical setting. Social scientists on the other hand, elaborate thoroughly questions of definition, whereas moral philosophers' main interest lies on issues related to concept-definition and measurement (Häyry 1999: 9). Thus, in reality it can be argued that "there are different 'depths' of quality of life" (Joyce et al. 1999: 217).

Within the social sciences, a considerable divide separates 'utilitarian' from 'non-utilitarian' approaches. As such, QoL is commonly defined either *directly* by the means of the welfare from goods (i.e. commodities), or instead, *indirectly* in terms of the welfare coming from the characteristics of those goods (i.e. individual benefits). Economists tend to follow the utilitarian approach that focuses on commodities, studying people's actual behaviour rather than what they say; " 'Talk' is looked upon as 'cheap' when compared to the real resources individuals have to commit when they follow one path of behaviour rather than other" (Power 1980: 6). Over time, this dominant perspective has shaped the development of welfarian concepts (widely) used across the world. The former appeals to policy makers due

to its pragmatic (action-oriented) and objective (measurable) nature. Thereafter, an important element to keep in mind is that the pattern of the distribution of goods, both material and immaterial, is seen by many as a basic requirement for QoL research (Hankiss 1980: 44).

Sceptics of the utilitarian school of thought claim that the latter is rather restrictive, and it should instead be replaced (or complemented) by the analysis of individuals' characteristics (e.g. health, social relations, etc.). According to Scheer (1980: 146), *money* alone is unable to guarantee the fulfilment of such critical (QoL) factors as *personal health* and *security*. Hodge (1990: 48) advances that "the utilitarian approach reduces well-being to a sum of easily identifiable and comparable conditions". According to existentialists such as Heidegger, utilitarian attempts to measure individuals' QoL often tend to destroy the factors that they aim to measure in the first place (Heidegger 1977, in Hodge 1990: 49). Hence, according to the advocates of the non-utilitarian approach, QoL should be approached as one key component belonging to a broader dynamic-system composed of *economic*, *social*, and *human* sub-systems (Hankis 1983: 25).

Another critical issue at the heart of the QoL debate is the distinction between "wants" and "needs". For Bullinger (1999: 32), in light of Lewin's (1935) 'Cognitive Personality Framework', (individual) *needs* relate to physiological states whereas *wants* are instead linked to peoples' learned social nature. This distinction lies at the core of an old historical debate involving philosophers, theologians, reformers, and scientists, namely: 'Is it more important for human happiness to achieve what one wants or rather to be provided with what one needs?'

Häyry (1999) provides the reader with an insightful discussion on the contrast between the 'needs' and the 'wants' approach. The author associates the former with Thomas Moore's 'Utopian Theory' (Moore 1910), first published in 1516 and focusing on the satisfaction of basic needs, and the denial of purely subjective and psychological dimensions of human life and experience. On the other hand, the 'wants perspective' (c.f. Calman 1984) claims that QoL can only be described in individual terms, thus being highly dependent on such contextual elements as *life-styles*, *past experiences*, *future hopes*, *dreams*, *ambitions*, etc. Notwithstanding, want- and need-based approaches are simultaneously, mutually distinct as

well as inter-related components of the complex whole characterising QoL studies (Mukherjee 1989: 46).

Two additional (and critical) elements inherent to QoL-research are: (a) the *level*, i.e. individual versus group orientations; and (2) the *nature* of analysis, i.e. context-specific versus standard-based (or universal). A variety of social and health scientists defend the rationale that QoL measurements should not be based on pre-determined categories and values but rather flexibly dependent on individuals' conceptions and definitions (c.f. Joyce *et al.* 1999; Schalock 1997). This reasoning is in line with the 'existentialist perspective' referred to earlier, which questions the ability of providing a *single measure* of value and a *single account* of what humans need to flourish (c.f. the works of Nietzsche, Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger).

On the other hand, critics of the 'individualised approach' defend that, "in its application as a social research concept, quality of life is a collective attribute that adheres to groups or categories of people, not to individuals" (Szalai 1980: 16). These authors also point to limitations with regard to *construct-ambiguity* and *comparative usefulness* (Szalai & Andrews 1980). "While the quality of life is experienced by individuals, it is closely related to the quality of life of social groups, communities and nations" (Solomon *et al.* 1980: 224). In a similar vein, Megone's concepts of private- versus public QoL, states that individuals are determined by the social conditions in which they live (Megone 1990: 29).

Furthermore, the existing literature sheds light on a set of ambiguous (social) constructs surrounding QoL. These include concepts such as 'life-styles', 'standards of living', 'level of living', 'ways of life', 'welfare', 'well-being', and 'happiness' (Bliss 1993; Milbrath 1981; Rezohazy 1980; Bestuzhev-Lada 1980; Sen 1993; Allardt 1993; Erikson 1993; Wojciechowski 1981). Nonetheless, as stressed by Schalock (1997), key social concepts like 'happiness' have run out of fashion and have been (recently) substituted by more appealing conceptualisations such as 'quality of life'.

2.3 Methodological Issues

As regards the operationalisation of the QoL construct and its associated variables, the review of the literature reveals a variety of approaches. We will start this discussion by shedding light on the ‘individual’ versus the ‘group’ approach mentioned earlier. Attention will also be given to the heated (QoL) debates surrounding ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ elements, as well as other (critical) methodological dilemmas.

2.3.1 Group versus Individual

Bullinger (1999: 30) refers to two basic approaches to measuring QoL, *deductive* and *inductive*. The former uses a priori conceptual models (or theories) guiding the empirical work and is associated with the ‘nomothetic approach’ in the social sciences, whereas the latter attempts the development of theory directly from data-collection and being closely related to the ‘ideographic approach’. These two (distinct) approaches also differ with respect to their level of analysis, i.e. the ‘individual’ versus the ‘group’. For example, across the different theories of personality, *trait approaches* (c.f. Allport 1961) tend to have a strong group-orientation (universalism); *cognitive approaches* (c.f. Lewin 1935) focus on individual elements; and, *interactionist* or *social cognitive* perspectives (c.f. Mischel & Shoda 1995) provide a synthesis of both group and individually based methodologies. This (latter) multi-dimensional focus is stressed in Brofenbrenner’s (1979) *ecological perspective* of personality/identity development (cited by Schalock 1997: 226), where a person’s ‘ecology’ is composed of four different levels (or systems), nested within each other, namely *micro*, i.e. immediate social setting (e.g. family); *meso*, i.e. links connecting the different micro-systems; *exo*, i.e. neighbourhood and community structures; and *macro*, i.e. patterns of culture, social-political trends, etc. (*ibid.*).

In a similar vein, Waldron and O’Boyle (1999: 199) report that within the health sciences, QoL assessments are usually undertaken at three main levels of analysis: (a) the *micro* (individual); (b) the *meso* (groups of patients); and (c) the *meta* level (whole population). According to the authors, individual assessments per se tend to be more context-specific allowing patients themselves to set (partly or totally) the (QoL) dimensions being studied. Kind (1999: 65) calls the latter the “bottom-up” approach to QoL in contrast to the “top-down” orientation in which the researcher previously sets the relevant dimensions.

The type of methodological dilemmas addressed above shed light on the different levels of analysis in which QoL research, mostly of a comparative nature, has been operationalised to date. Overall, this range includes: (a) *individual*; (b) *group*; (c) *strata*; (d) *community*; (e) *regional*; (f) *national*; (g) *global*; and, (h) *cross-cultural* levels (Solomon *et al.* 1980: 232). As a result, such methodological concerns of a *validity* nature as “the aggregation of individual life experiences resulting in a summary statement of the quality of life of a community or a nation” (*ibid.* p, 224) are raised. Kind (1990: 64) suggest that “in order to measure quality of life we [researchers] need first to describe it, preferably in such a way that the different levels or states can be [clearly] identified”.

2.3.2 Single versus Set of Indicators

An additional methodological issue is the extent to which *several* (a set) rather than a *single* (core) QoL indicator is being used (operationalised). It is widely acknowledged that single measures are usually attractive to policy-makers. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the former shall be based on a *single dimension* (Baldwin *et al.* 1990: 4), i.e. several distinct dimensions can be aggregated under one core indicator (e.g. health). Amongst the defenders of a *monistic approach* (i.e. a single integral indicator), Kiuranov (1980: 172) states that *pluralistic perspectives* (c.f. Dreitzel 1974), may lead to merely ‘descriptive’ rather than ‘analytical’ (QoL) studies. Opponents like Erikson (1993: 75), point to the fact that “no single ordered indicator of level of living can be constructed either at the individual or aggregate level”. Thus, advocates of the ‘pluralistic approach’ stress that (individual) differences need to be described for each single component. Amongst those is Hodge (1990), who defends that (QoL) measures are the product of the societies in which they are used; hence, no single measure can fit all policy evaluations.

2.3.3 Subjective versus Objective

By now (we hope), it has become clear to the reader that no consensus seems to exist with regard to the definition and measurement of the QoL construct. The literature reviewed shows a clear divide between two distinct camps: (a) those advocating *objective* (quantitative) measures; and, (b) defenders of *subjective* (qualitative) approaches. Nevertheless, some general consensus amongst (QoL) researchers seems to be in place when it comes to using both methodologies as complementary (e.g. via triangulation). These methodological developments (and clashes) are in line with the different disciplinary

perspectives highlighted earlier. In reality, a great majority of (QoL) indicators are usually drawn from the ‘socio-economic’ and ‘social psychology’ traditions (Stone 1980: 211).

Bowling (1999: 175-6) sheds light on the impact of three main scholastic traditions while studying QoL: (a) *Positivist*; (b) *Phenomenologist*; and, (c) *Hermeneutic*. According to the author, the *positivist* tradition emerging from the natural sciences led to the rise of ‘functionalism’ within the social sciences. As such, social behaviour is seen as determined by observable (quantitative) *causes* and *effects*. *Phenomenologists* prefer qualitative approaches instead and advocate that reality is a ‘social construction’ resulting from the interaction of individuals using *symbols* to assign *meanings*. Finally, the *hermeneutic* school focuses on the analysis of *value-dimensions* throughout the use of in-depth qualitative methodologies such as face-to-face interviews or focus groups.

Kind (1990: 66) points out that within the social sciences, and despite common belief, the analysis of *attitudinal* and *subjective* response-data often used in QoL studies has a long tradition (c.f. Thurstone 1927). According to Kind, the lack of consensus on the superiority of the different techniques used, and the scale-values they produce, is mostly due to the inexistence of standard measures used to validate (QoL) scoring-indicators (Kind 1990: 69). McKennell and colleagues argue that this problem is even more acute while attempting to develop studies of a comparative nature (McKennell *et al.* 1980). Out of this impasse, Scheer (1980: 147) proposes that comparisons shall instead be eased through the adoption of a ‘sectoral approach’, i.e. to analyse one specific (common) aspect of QoL.

The OECD’s ‘Social Indicator Development Programme’, a collaborative effort across member nations to measure and compare QoL indexes, mentions two key conditions to enhance study-validity, namely: (1) the adoption of a single notion (definition) of QoL across countries; and (2) the use of identical measures (indicators) and measurement (data-gathering) techniques (Verwayen 1980: 236). Critics of comparative (quantitative-based) approaches claim that these fail to incorporate the *meanings* attached by individuals to the situations in which they find themselves, thus making it difficult to analyse QoL statistically, in a meaningful way (Shiell *et al.* 1990: 110).

The Swedish sociologist Robert Erikson (1993: 74) draws attention to the fact that, overall, QoL dimensions have a strong *political bias*, as they tend to be selected since they are easy to be influenced by policy-makers. Erickson also proposes that it makes more sense to distinguish ‘descriptive’ from ‘evaluative’ approaches rather than ‘subjective’ from ‘objective’ ones. This basically means that if QoL is based on “needs” the *individual* (him/herself) should be used as the measure. On the other hand, if instead the focus is on “resources” the *researcher* should be the one setting the evaluative criteria. This brings to the fore the distinction (made earlier) between the “Basic Needs” (Galtung 1980, in Allardt 1993) and the “Resource” (Johansson 1970, in Erikson 1993) approaches to studying and operationalising QoL.

Szalai and Andrews (1980: 16) define QoL indicators as “objective observable facts and conditions of life in society plus people’s subjective perception and assessment of their life”. Other authors agree with this “hybrid” (complementary) approach (c.f. Scheer 1980: 150; Stone 1980: 215). For example, Igor Bestuzhev-Lada (1980: 161), in an interesting methodological essay on social indicators concludes that “[T]he life of [any] society also represents a dialectical unity of the objective and the subjective, of statics and dynamics, of quantitative and qualitative aspects”, his conclusion is that “Any such ‘anatomical’ dissection [quantitative/ qualitative] is purely conventional and is practiced only for the sake of convenience in the process of investigation”. In a similar vein, Hankiss (1983: 27) stresses that (QoL) indicators ought to be attached to key *economic* and *social* parameters, as well as (subjective) *attitudinal* responses to changes taking place within the economic and social environments of a given society. Finally, Mukherjee (1989: 25) demonstrates that QoL, as a variable, relates to both the *subject* (individual) as well as the *object* (life conditions) of enquiry.

Analysis of the structural variables in QoL-research reveals a loose and ambiguous relation between *objective* (e.g. per capita gross national product or GNP) and *subjective* (e.g. life satisfaction) indicators (Hankiss 1980). For example, a U.S.-based study using data from a 20-year period (1946-65) provides evidence of the decline of citizens’ ‘Life Satisfaction Index’, despite a considerable increase in GNP levels (Scitovsky 1976, in Hankiss 1980: 49). Similar findings from the Scandinavia region indicate a weak correlation between ‘income’ and ‘income satisfaction’, and no correlation whatsoever between ‘income’ and ‘overall life

satisfaction' (Allardt 1977). In light of these sorts of results, Erikson (1993: 78) claims that it is the aspect of individuals' conditions (i.e. endogenous elements) rather than the general level of living (i.e. exogenous factors), which impacts on (individual) life-satisfaction. Nonetheless, evidence from other contexts seems to contradict the above findings (c.f. Gallup 1976; Inkeles & Diamond 1978), thus making any (final) conclusions with respect to the relation between subjective and objective elements tentative at best. Interestingly, according to Andrews (1980: 278) exploring links between the two approaches has emerged as an important item on the QoL research-agenda.

To conclude this discussion, and paraphrasing the Norwegian social scientist Torbjørn Moum's (1983: 114) controversial suggestion, "To the extent that we [researchers] have confidence in our quality of life measures, then we should feel free to let subjective reports override objective conditions when passing quality judgements". Nonetheless, the author warns, control for *response-biases* for each and every case may have to be exercised if the researcher is to ascertain the accurate relationship (s) between the independent and the dependent variables (*ibid.* p, 121).

2.3.4 Additional Methodological Dilemmas

Scales & Weighting

One of the common problems researchers face while studying QoL is related to the use of *scales* as a quantitative measure. Studies have shown that the selection of scaling methods (quantitative data) and descriptive materials (qualitative) is susceptible of affecting individuals' responses (c.f. Llewellyer-Thomas *et al.* 1984, in Kind 1990: 69). According to Häyry (1999: 17) it is rather unrealistic to provide equal importance (i.e. similar weight) to all QoL-items. Scheer (1980: 151) agrees with this reasoning, but warns that "the contribution of a social indicator to the individual's quality of life is not necessarily the same for an individual throughout his or her lifetime, and is not the same for all residents of a particular country at any particular time". However, critics of 'social weighting techniques' defend that these are seriously misleading since the relative position of *values* on their utility (i.e. desirability) curve varies from individual to individual (Hankiss 1983: 23). This brings us to another critical discussion within QoL-research, the 'value' dimension.

Values and Culture

Values have an impact on QoL studies at two main levels: (a) the individual/society (subject/object); and (b) the observer (researcher/interpreter). More specifically, it has been stated that, “values ought to play a crucial role in shaping and modifying the quality of life experience of individuals” (Moum 1983: 129). In this context, Banathy (1981: 330) comments that the decisions individuals make in their daily lives are guided by the *beliefs, values, dispositions*, as well as *ethical and moral standards* present within a given social setting. Hence, all these elements point to the notion of *culture* as a key factor within QoL.

‘Culture’ has been characterised by some as “a construct involving shared values, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes” (Matsumoto 1994, in Schalock 1997: 225); an ‘integrated whole’ consisting of a set of core subsystems, i.e. *social relations, language, technology, and ideology* (Williams 1972, in Hayman 1981: 280). It has been stated that, “culture and society determine the quality of life of an individual and establish commonality [of behaviour and/or perception] among individuals by group formation” (Mukherjee 1989: 33). Social scientists call the process of ‘group formation’, *ethnicity*. The latter relates to groups of people with a similar national and cultural heritage (Kuehn & McClainm 1994, in Schalock 1997: 225). *Culture* and *ethnicity* play an important role in defining individuals’ identity and the way they conduct their (private and public) lives. Therefore, it can be argued that individuals’ (subjective) perceptions of their life satisfactions are directly dependent on cultural values and taken for granted assumptions.

From a methodological perspective, Erikson (1993: 75) highlights a value-dilemma that researchers face while selecting QoL-indicators. According to the author “the question is not whether we [researchers] should make value judgements or not, but rather when we should make them and when we should leave them open”. Mukherjee (1989: 234) emphasises the fact that “all researchers have their own value premises”, and that social research approaches should be driven from the ‘bottom’ (individual) rather than the ‘top’ (researcher). Furthermore, in light with the elements exposed above with regards to *culture*, this factor is seen as influencing both the research process, as well as the cross-cultural application of the QoL concept. Kuehn and McClainm (1994: 191) shed light on the matter while stating that “The [research] challenge is to develop an awareness and knowledge of the diverse cultural beliefs and behaviours...and to develop an understanding of the ‘good life’ as perceived by

different racial and ethnic groups” (in Schalock 1997: 234). In our opinion, the latter condition is paramount if one is to attempt the development of a ‘Grand Theory of QoL’; a goal far beyond the scope of this study.

Sociologist Elemer Hankiss (1983: 33-44) introduces the idea of *value filters*, defined as, “those elements of a system which modify the content of the value flows” (*ibid.* p, 33). This basically means that different communities living under the same objective conditions, and having similar sets and amounts of goods and services at their disposal, will differ in terms of their QoL if their value-systems do not coincide (e.g. ‘Puritanical Acquisitive’ versus ‘Eastern-Spiritual’). Hankiss highlights that such elements as *religion, ideologies* (political and social), and *cultural traditions* act as value filters which help determining individual and/or group ‘goal setting’ (“needs”), as well as ‘aspiration-generating’ roles (“wants”). The author concludes by suggesting that QoL studies should examine value-systems operating within the society under study. This process can be achieved by looking at: (a) *anachronisms*, i.e. factors hindering development; (b) *heterogeneity*, i.e. multiplicity of systems in the same society; and (c) *historical changeability*, i.e. value shifts (e.g. from modern/liberal to conservative) (Hankiss 1983: 35).

Miscellaneous

To conclude our discussion on core operational (research) dilemmas, Hankiss (1983: 20-2) sheds light on a set of common methodological problems surrounding QoL-studies. These include:

- (a) *Measurement bias*: Attitudinal scales in QoL surveys have wider measurement errors than standard attitude scales of psychological and social psychological tests.
- (b) *Positive aura of well-being*: The tendency for respondents to use the positive side of the scale while answering QoL questionnaires.
- (c) *Reference frame bias*: The impact of conscious and semi-conscious individual frames of reference.
- (d) *Cognitive bias*: Surveys tend to ask people to translate a complex experience in a single dimension.
- (e) *Bias of static measures*: Perceived (i.e, subjective) QoL is a dynamic (evolving) process over time.

(f) *Funnel effect*: ‘Subjective’ (QoL) indicators tend to have lower variances than ‘objective’ ones.

2.4 Quality of Life Domains

In tandem with the different conceptualisations of the QoL concept (presented above), the review of the literature shows the use of a wide variety of (QoL) ‘domains’. In order to be properly understood, these need to be contextualised in light of the nature of the research study, as well as the disciplinary perspective (s) being used. Table 1 (below), provides an overview of some of the most commonly used domains in QoL-research, by type of study.

Table 1: Commonly used QoL Domains

Quality of Life Domains	Context	Author/Source
(7 domains): Interpersonal relations, leisure, financial status, work situation, residential environment, affective states, and, physical health.	Various social groups in the U.S.A.	Minor <i>et al.</i> (1980)
(15 domains): Health, learning, employment, work life, time and leisure, income/wealth, housing, environment, crime/victimisation, inequality, etc.	International, comparative (OECD)	‘Social Indicator Programme’ (Verwayen 1980)
(Various domains): Population, social status/mobility, employment and working conditions, consumption patterns, transportation, housing, health, education, civil participation, environment, crime, leisure, etc.	Germany’s SPES: ‘Social Indicator System’	(Zapf 1980; Gesis.org)
(14 domains*): Affluence; economic racial balance; poverty; employment; housing; crime; demographics; growth rate; health; air quality; weather; education; civic concern; and leisure. (6 domains**): Crime, recreational opportunities, air pollution, travel time, traffic congestions, income.	Comparative study across U.S. states	*Grooms (1980); **Power 1980
(10 domains): Legal rights; relationships; satisfaction; environment; economic security and well-being; social inclusion; individual control; privacy; health; and, personal growth and development.	International health study across seven countries	Keith <i>et al.</i> , (in press) in Schallock (1997)

Table 1 (Continue)

(60 Indicators): Diet; clothing; fuel and light; home amenities; housing facilities; home environment; conditions and welfare/work benefits; family support; social contacts; basic home appliances; leisure; etc.	U.K households. Poverty & Exclusion	Towsend (1979) (seminal study)
(11 domains): Housing; neighbourhood; financial situation; health; marriage; work; friends; leisure; education; life as a whole; and, Norway as a country.	Norway 's student population	Moum (1983)

Despite the diversity of opinions regarding the ‘best’ way to measure QoL, a consensus amongst several experts seems to have (recently) emerged when it comes to the *core* QoL dimensions and their respective (performance) indicators (c.f. Campbell *et al.* 1976; Dossa 1989; Felce & Perry 1996; Flanagan 82; Hughes & Hwang 1996; Gardner & Nudler 1997; Schalock 1994; 1995; 1996; all authors mentioned in Schalock 1997: 247-50) (see table 2 below). Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether these core dimensions (and indicators) are being applied across a variety of (distinct) QoL studies. Our literature review (above) indicates that despite some overlap on the types of dimensions and indicators commonly used, considerable differences depending on the study’s context still exist in line with disciplinary perspectives and schools of thought being applied, the overall aim of the research effort, the owner of the report/origin of the funding, amongst other things.

Table 2: Core (QoL) Dimensions and Indicators

QoL Dimension	QoL Indicators
Emotional Wellbeing	Safety, spirituality, happiness, freedom from stress, self-concept, and contentment.
Interpersonal Relations	Intimacy, affection, family, interactions, friendships, and supports.
Material Well-Being	Ownership, financial, security, food, employment, possessions, socio-economic status, and shelter.
Personal Development	Education, skills, fulfilment, personal competence, purposeful activity, and advancement.

Table 2 (Continue)

Physical Well-Being	Health, nutrition, recreation, mobility, health-care/insurance, leisure, and daily living activities.
Self-Determination	Autonomy, choices, decisions, personal control, self-direction, and personal goals/values.
Social Inclusion	Acceptance, status, supports, work environment, community activities, roles, volunteer activities, and residential environment.
Rights	Privacy, voting, access, due process, ownership, and civic responsibilities.

Source: Schalock (1997: 250)

2.5 Conceptual Models

In line with the different (QoL) perspectives presented earlier, a variety of conceptual models aimed at operationalising QoL has been identified in the literature. A brief summary of some of the most widely used operational models is presented below.

Browne (1999: 159-69) provides an overview of the most frequently used *qualitative methods* for accessing ‘subjective’ QoL at the individual level. These are:

- ‘*Quality of Life Index*’ (Ferrens & Powers 1985): Focusing on the ‘importance’ and ‘satisfaction’ across four core domains, i.e. (1) health and functioning; (2) social and economic; (3) psychological and spiritual; and (4) the family. Sixteen (16) sub-domains, such as marriage, education, and leisure, are used.
- ‘*Subjective Quality of Life Profile*’ (Dazord *et al.* 1994): Stressing ‘culture’ as a deterministic aspect of individuals’ (QoL) priorities. Looks at four key domains, i.e. (1) motor/physical function; (2) social life; (3) material life; and, (4) spiritual life.
- ‘*Repertory Grid*’ (Kelly 1955): Aims at measuring individuals’ ‘personality’ using personal constructs across ten domains, i.e. (1) psychic and (2) physical well-being; (3) mood; (4) locus of control; (5) work; (6) religion; (7) leisure; (8) social relations; (9) sexual function; and (10) finances.

- *'Goal Attainment Measures'* (c.f. Emmons 1986): The model's chief assumption is the relation between individuals' attempts towards reaching their 'aspired goals' and their 'personal well-being'. It looks at such domains as: altruism, personal attainment and self-expression, practical life and self-expression, coping with society, and, death and dying.
- *'Wisconsin Quality of Life Questionnaire'* (Becher *et al.* 1993): Designed for individuals with mental disorders. Based on nine core domains, such as housing and transport, occupational activities, psychiatric symptoms, goal attainment, social relations, etc.
- *'Standard Measures of Well-Being'* (Flanagan 1978): Assesses directly 'subjective' well-being through the identification of external influences aimed at predicting it. Across five domains: (1) physical and material; (2) relations with others; (3) social, community and civic activities; (4) personal development and fulfilment; and (5) recreation.

Authors such as Coen (1999: 187-8) refer to Lawton's QoL model (Lawton 1983) as an useful 'conceptual framework'. This model focuses on four broad sectors that overlap with each other, and can be evaluated either from a 'subjective' or an 'objective' perspective, namely: (1) behavioural competence, i.e. health, functional ability, cognition, time use, and social behaviour; (2) objective environment; (3) psychological wellbeing; and (4) perceived QoL. Rezohazy (1980: 207) on the other hand, proposes the use of a hierarchy of 'structured life activities' while studying individuals' QoL. According to the author, there are seven main areas (or 'life poles') that researchers should focus on. These are, in order of importance: the family; human contacts (primary relations); profession and work; ways of consumption; free time, culture, leisure; attitudes towards society (i.e. politics and social issues); and, attitudes towards life after death (i.e. religion and conceptions of life).

From a comparative perspective, Zapf (1980: 250) sheds light on four distinct approaches enabling the *definition, operationalisation, measurement, articulation, and aggregation* of QoL. These are: (1) 'Net National Welfare', as a complement to GNP (c.f. Nordhaus & Tobin 1972); (2) 'Overall Quality of Life Index', the level of living index developed by the U.N.'s research institute for social development (UNRISD); (3) 'Perceived Quality of Life', individual perspective (c.f. Allard 1973); and (4) 'Systems of Social Indicators', the degree of goal attainment in selected goal areas, social concerns and sub-dimensions (e.g. OECD's 'Social Indicator Programme') (c.f. OECD 1976).

Allardt (1993) developed an interesting (QoL) model focusing on three core dimensions, i.e. (1) *having*; (2) *loving*; and (3) *being*. This perspective uses the ‘Basic Needs Approach’ proposed by Norwegian social scientist Johan Galtung (1980: 50-125), focusing on the level of ‘need satisfaction’ in contrast to the traditional welfare oriented ‘Resource Approach’ (c.f. Erikson 1993). According to Allardt, *having* corresponds to the material conditions of life (e.g. economic resources, housing, work, health and education). *Loving* represents the need to relate to other people and form social identities (e.g. attachments to community and family, patterns of friendship, relationships with work peers, etc.). *Being* symbolises the need for integration in society and harmony with nature (e.g. personal growth, political participation, leisure, creative work, etc.). In light of Allardt’s typology, ‘objective indicators’ are associated to “reports of factual conditions and overt behaviour” (“needs”) whereas ‘subjective indicators’, “attempt to measure individuals’ attitudes towards life and living” (“wants”) (*ibid.* p, 92).

Table 3: Types of Indicators for QoL Analysis

<i>Core Dimension</i>	<i>Objective Indicators</i>	<i>Subjective Indicators</i>
<i>Having</i> (Material & Interpersonal Needs)	1. Objective measures of level of living and environmental conditions	4. Subjective feelings of dissatisfaction/satisfaction with living conditions
<i>Loving</i> (Social Needs)	2. Objective measures of relationships to other people	5. Unhappiness/happiness subjective feelings about social relations
<i>Being</i> (Personal Growth Needs)	3. Objective measures of people’s relation to society and nature	6. Subjective feelings of alienation/personal growth

Source: Allardt (1993: 93)

From a public-policy perspective, Turnbull III and Brunk (1997: 202-5) suggest seven ways in which to *measure* and *conceptualise* QoL, as: (1) Measured by science (scientific models); (2) Measured by rights (law); (3) Direct democracy and citizen participation (shared decision making); (4) Mutual accommodation (integration/participation in society); (5) Value-driven policy (tied to values); (6) Determined by evaluation and accountability (input/outcome measures); and (7) Reflected in public policy (political ideologies).

With regard to *culture*, Schalock (1997b: 227) proposes a ‘conceptual framework’ aimed at leveraging comparisons between different *cultural values* and *assumptions*. This perspective is based on previous research efforts undertaken by Lynck and Hanson (1992) and Triandis (1990). Its seven core dimensions are: (1) relation with nature (e.g. mastery versus harmony); (2) time-orientation (e.g. future versus present/past); (3) interpersonal relations (e.g. competition versus cooperation); (4) self (e.g. individuality versus anonymity); (5) use of wealth (saving versus sharing); (6) thinking style (e.g. analytical versus contemplative); (7) support systems (formal versus informal).

While operationalising QoL, Bart (1981: 77-9) sheds light on two main principles inherent to the concept: (1) ‘the Possessions Principle’; and (2) ‘the Simplicity Principle’. Whereas the former is composed of four different classes of personal possessions, i.e. physical versus psychological; external versus internal, the latter relates to, “the extent to which personal possessions are used interactively to develop and maintain inherited internal possessions and to produce optimal brain stimulation on a regular basis” (*ibid.* p, 79). According to this principle, the maximisation of internally held possessions (physical and/or psychological) leads to higher degrees of *happiness*, *fulfilment*, and *development* at the individual level.

Table 4: Classes of Personal Possessions

	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Psychological</i>
<i>External</i>	1) Money 2) Food 3) Shelter	1) Friendships 2) Acquaintances 3) Social relations
<i>Internal</i>	1) Senses 2) Muscles 3) Psychomotor Skills	1) Cognitive Skills 2) Knowledge 3) Affective states

Source: Bart (1981: 78)

From a system’s perspective, Gilberto Gallopin (1981) proposes a (QoL) model as a “unifying concept”, resulting from the interaction between ‘individual needs’ and ‘societal requirements’ on the one hand, and the ‘process of development’ on the other. As such, individual needs and social requirements are characterised across four specific dimensions: (a) *Existence*; (b) *Integration*; (c) *Optimal functioning*; and (d) *Perfectibility*.

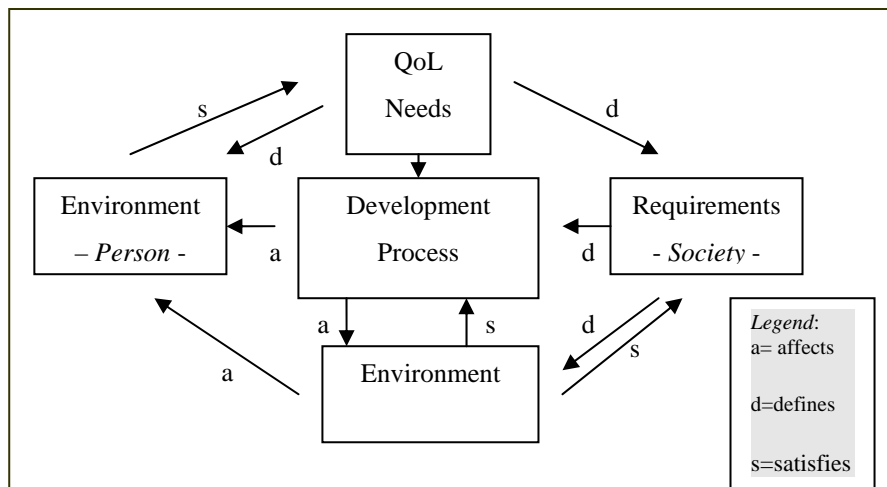
Table 5: ‘Quality of Life as a Unifying Concept’ (I)

Types	Individual Needs	Society Requirements
<i>Existence</i>	Maintenance, Protection, & Love	Maintenance, Protection, & Recognition
<i>Integration</i>	Understanding & Self-Reliance	Understanding & Self-Reliance
<i>Optimal Functioning</i>	Creation & Recreation	Creation & Cooperation
<i>Perfectibility</i>	Meaning & Synergy	Development, Meaning, & Synergy

Source: Gallopin (1981: 125-127)

According to Gallopin (1981: 127), QoL “is the ultimate goal of [social/economic] development and the central criterion helping characterise the human environment”.

Figure 3: ‘Quality of Life as a Unifying Concept’ (II)



Source: Gallopin (1981: 126)

In a similar vein, Milbrath (1981: 235) refers to QoL as the “fulfilment of one’s values, goals, aspirations and needs”. The author stresses that *values, life-styles, and basic beliefs* (all) influence ‘perceived’ (i.e. subjective) QoL. As such, “Life-styles are constrained by the physical, economic, and social characteristics of the community and by the socio-economic situation in which a person lives, as well as by beliefs about how the world works” (*ibid.* p,

237). In light of these considerations the author presents an “inter-connected” QoL model (see appendix 2). An important characteristic of this model is the distinction between ‘personal-’ and ‘community-based’ QoL, as a result of an ongoing process of individuals’ learning about their inner and outer worlds.

2.6 The Study’s Operational Framework

In light of the literature review presented in this chapter, as well as the existing consensus concerning the most influential QoL domains, an operational framework (table 6) was developed, baring in mind the study’s research problem and questions. As such, this framework is composed of five distinct QoL domains or ‘capitals’. The concept of ‘capital’ has been conceptualised by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In his *‘The Forms of Capital’* (Bourdieu 1986), the author distinguishes between *economic capital* (i.e. command over economic resources), *social capital* (i.e. resources based on group membership, relationships, and networks of influence/support), and *cultural capital* (i.e. forms of knowledge, skill, or education giving a person a higher social status). The concept of ‘capital’ in the Bourdieuan sense has been frequently used within cultural studies in the operationalisation of theoretical assumptions. Thus, in the context of this study, ‘capital’ refers to those critical life domains that can be expected to influence individuals’ (global) QoL outlooks. In the framework of this study, and based on the literature review presented earlier, the following *five* capitals were used in the operationalisation of the QoL concept.

- ***Economic Capital***, shedding light on individuals’ overall financial circumstances and consumption patterns.
- ***Social Capital***, highlighting the critical role of individuals’ social networks in the context of one’s life.
- ***Civic Capital***, looking at individuals’ legal rights and the degree of civic/political participation in the host society.
- ***Personal Capital or ‘Self’***, providing an indication of individuals’ innermost factors that help determine the course of one’s life.
- ***External Capital or ‘Surrounding Environment’***, outlining some core elements at the macro (system) level affecting individuals’ life circumstances.

In our view, and in line with the existing knowledge in the area of QoL (above), these five capitals (or domains) represent a good compromise when it comes to studying the complex picture of individuals' daily life circumstances. Furthermore, they provide insight into a set of critical (internal/external) factors that help determining individuals' global QoL outlooks. Despite being analysed separately, the five capitals used in the study are interconnected since individuals' (highly ambiguous) personal life spheres are a result of the interaction between a variety of life domains. Moreover, as the study shows, these five capitals are likely to affect each other, though in different degrees.

Finally, each one of the capitals is further operationalised into a set of 'sub-dimensions'. The criteria for the final selection were based on the elements revealed during the literature review (i.e., previous studies and outcomes, methodological issues, conceptual approaches, etc.), as well as the specific interests of the researcher in light of the research problem (and questions) driving this study.

With regard to the 'weight' given to each of the five capitals (and their sub-dimensions), and in light of the suggestions provided by the literature (Hankiss 1983, in section 2.3.4), we have decided to attribute an equal weight across all domains and study respondents, though we are well aware that some life domains *may* have a stronger impact on individuals' QoL outlooks than others. In our view, a uniform weight-criteria across the sample enhances the researcher's control over the overall complexity and validity of the study findings. Furthermore, the limitations inherent to the empirical work (timeframe, scope, availability of respondents), as well as the lack of in-depth knowledge on those critical factors (individual level) susceptible of increasing/decreasing the importance of one life domain over the other (e.g. ethnicity, life situation, personal characteristics, etc.), where all important elements when it comes to applying an equal weight across study domains and respondents.

Nonetheless, it is worth stressing that not all the five life domains had the same level of exposure (theoretical/empirical) throughout the study. For example, the 'economic domain' was given a privileged focus due to the assumption in the literature concerning its direct and indirect relationships with education in general and higher education in particular, as discussed in section 3.1.2. Moreover, the lack of empirical evidence across certain life domains with regard to ethnic minority individuals (and/or groups) both in Norway and

beyond can be seen as an additional constraint in providing an equal amount of data for each of the QoL domains studied. To conclude our argument, the five selected capitals and their respective sub-dimensions provide (in our view) an adequate balance between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ life assessments as well as approaching QoL as an “all inclusive notion of life and living”, as suggested in the literature (Szalai 1980, in Mukherjee 1989: 23). Table 6 and appendix 4 give an overview of the operational framework used in this study.

Table 6: The Study’s Operational Framework

Total Life Situation (Global QoL)	Capitals or QoL Domains	Sub-Dimensions
	<i>Economic Capital</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local labour markets: Access to, attractiveness of higher education and nature of current job. ▪ Financial situation and standard of living. ▪ Overall impact of the higher education experience.
	<i>Social Capital</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family. ▪ Friends and acquaintances. ▪ Other social networks (formal/informal). ▪ Overall impact of the higher education experience.
	<i>Civic Capital</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal status and respective rights. ▪ Participation in political activities. ▪ Civic engagement. ▪ Overall impact of the higher education experience.
	<i>Personal Capital or ‘Self’</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professional identity. ▪ Personality development. ▪ Self-esteem. ▪ Values and beliefs. ▪ Overall impact of the higher education experience.
	<i>External Capital or ‘Surrounding Environment’</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Levels of social inclusion/discrimination. ▪ Structural elements (macro-level). ▪ Norway as a country. ▪ Overall impact of the higher education experience.

Chapter 3: Quality of Life, (Higher) Education and Minorities

This chapter sheds light on the relationship between quality of life (QoL) and higher education on the one hand, and QoL and minorities on the other. Major theoretical perspectives, as well as empirical findings (global/regional/national) are presented and contextualized.

3.1 Quality of Life and Higher Education

3.1.1 Structural Trends

The globalization process initiated during the late 1970s, together with the technological (digital) revolution originated in the same period, led to the consequent disruption of established social and economical arrangements. At the heart of this new state of affairs lies a global-based economy with *knowledge* as a key productive factor (c.f. Fukujama 1999; Schultz 1961), as well as a source of (global) competitive advantages (Currie *et al.* 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar 2001; Friedman 1999). According to several stakeholders, education in general, and higher education (HE) in particular, are to play an increasingly important role in the development of ‘knowledge based societies’ across the world (World Bank 1999, 2002; UNESCO/World Bank 2000; EUA 2003; EU 2005a).

Nonetheless, the emergence of a knowledge-driven-economy was only possible due to the exponential growth in the number of students entering educational establishments, particularly HE. All over the world, starting in the U.S.A. after the Second World War, tertiary enrolments have expanded leading to an unprecedented massification of the sector. This phenomenon per se, has changed the profile of HE from an *elite* club reserved to the few into a *universal* good available to the masses (Trow 1973).

More recently, and within the European (regional) context, the ‘Europeanization process’ (c.f. Olsen 2002), as well as core strategic initiatives such as the European Union’s ‘Lisbon Agenda’ (EU 2005b; Kaiser 2004) have stressed the critical role undertaken by *knowledge* and *education* in propelling the region to becoming the number one (“most competitive”) knowledge-based economy within a decade (2000-2010). Higher education has also been the focus of (regional) intergovernmental (voluntary) agreements such as ‘Bologna’ (Bologna

1999; EU 2003; EurActive 2005a), as well as (global) commercial arrangements like the World Trade Organization's negotiations concerning a 'General Agreement on Trade and Services' (WTO-GATS).

3.1.2 The Human Capital Approach

Some scholars, mostly economists, have demonstrated that investments (both public and private) in education lead to the generation of a particular type of capital, *human capital*. 'Human capital theory' argues that individual citizens, as well as society as a whole, profit (i.e. obtain economic benefits) from investments in intellectual capital (c.f. Becker 1964; Mincer 1974; Schultz 1961). The educational benefits mentioned include: (a) increases in the human capital stock of societies; (b) overall improvements in (individual) job and economic (society) productivity; and (c) the betterment (well-being) of society at large (Denison 1983; Walberg & Zhang 1998; Benhabib & Spiegel 1994). Within this particular school of thought it is widely agreed that education is a main contributor towards the improvement of individuals' and society's well-being. As stated by some "At the broadest level, the wealth of a society is determined by the potential of its citizens. As the ability of this citizenry to contribute to the national economic production function increases, general social welfare also increases." (Davis & Noland 2002: 149-50).

Empirical studies have provided robust evidence on the (theoretical) arguments advanced by the human capital school. For example, Schultz's seminal work (1961) on the U.S. economy, stresses two main findings: (1) a significant proportion of the *economic growth* of the country in the period 1900/56 was unaccounted for by conventional economic means of measurement; and (2) a considerable amount of *personal income growth* was found to be related to increased levels of educational attainment amongst individuals. According to economists such as Sweetland (1996), human capital investments generate, on average, a 10% margin of return. Studies by Barro (1997) indicate that yearly increases in the average level of schooling (amongst the male labour-force) generate as much as 1% of GNP growth. Further, it has also been acknowledged that educational attainment influences *consumer spending* in a wide variety of goods such as housing, foodstuffs, and transportation (Davis & Noland 2002).

Tinbergen (1971) found a (positive) correlation between reductions in ‘income inequality’ and increases in the ‘average years of education’ amongst citizens. This finding was confirmed by similar studies pointing to a 10% decrease in ‘income inequality’ coming upon one extra year of education (Marin & Psacharopolous 1976, in Psacharopholos 1994). Studies by Bourguinio and Morrison (1990) show evidence of the fact that reductions in income inequality amongst all social strata, as a result of educational attainment, are particularly significant in the case of those individuals placed at the bottom third of the ‘wage differential scale’. Hence, human capital theorists have (somehow convincingly) confirmed the direct (inverse) relation between *education* and *poverty*.

Several (QoL) studies provide evidence that *education* induces a positive impact on the *health* and *social well-being* of communities (Curtin & Nelson 1999; Gibson 1996; Harrison 1997), as well as the *psychological capital* of individuals (Goldsmith *et al.* 1997); the latter, being composed of elements such as ‘perceptions of self’, ‘attitudes towards work’, ‘ethical orientations’, and ‘outlook towards life’ (*ibid.*). Studies from the U.S.A. have shown that educational investments lead to a reduction in the participation rates of social welfare programmes (IHEP 1998; NCES 1998). Leigh (1998) provides an extensive literature review on the subject, and concludes that there is a (positive) correlation between *educational investments*, and: (a) ‘reductions of crime/violence’; (b) ‘increased health’; (c) ‘family stability’; and (d) ‘the environment’. With respect to *crime*, Lochner (1999) demonstrates that U.S. high-school graduates are less likely to participate in criminal activities and/or of being target of incarceration. The author points to publicly available data indicating lower ‘property crime indexes’ across U.S. States possessing higher educational attainments, in tandem with tough criminal penalties.

Research within the European Union (EU) reveals that non-skilled employees tend to have lower levels of ‘employment commitment’, ‘job satisfaction’ and ‘job security’, as well as high levels of ‘work pressure’ (stress), when compared with their (highly) educated counterparts (Gallie & Paugam 2002). In the European context, education (all levels) is being approached by a variety of policy-makers as a key factor enhancing ‘social cohesion’ across the region (Berger-Schmitt 2000).

A recent study on ‘the return of schooling’ across fifteen European nation-states reveals that the average is around 6.5%, with the UK and Ireland ranking *higher* than average, and the Scandinavia countries, i.e. Norway, Sweden and Denmark, *lowest* (Harmon *et al.* 2000). It was also found that, on average, women possess higher return rates when compared to men, and that average returns in the 1970s and 1980s were lower than those in the 1960s and the 1990s. Furthermore, the data highlight that ‘returns on education’ vary widely across wage distributions, with those in the top 10% (highly skilled jobs) having considerable higher returns than their bottom (10%) counterparts, 7 and 2.5% respectively. In a similar vein, Mason (1996) refers to the phenomenon of ‘over-education’ and provides empirical evidence that the average return to surplus years, i.e. one additional school year, in the U.K. equals 2.6%.

Another interesting debate in the economic literature on *educational attainment* relates to its ‘private’ versus ‘social’ benefits. Studies from the U.K. reveal that the ‘social returns to education’ differ by subject area (Dutta *et al.* 1999). For example, graduates from the *humanities* and/or *biological sciences* average close to zero social returns whereas their peers from *medicine, business, social studies, computing, and other science related fields* can reach up to 11% returns. Harmon and colleagues, on the other hand, defend the idea that, “Education is a signal of inherent productivity of the individual rather than a means to enhance the productivity”, and that, “Despite some of the subtleties involved in estimation there is still an unambiguously positive effect on the [private] earnings of an individual from participation in education” (Harmon *et al.* 2000: 37-8).

Comparative studies across different geographic regions reveal that ‘return on schooling’ estimates are higher in the U.S.A. than in any other country, and that they have continued to increase since the 1980s (Ashenfelter *et al.* 1999); leading the authors to conclude that “the evidence that schooling investments have a significant economic payoff is therefore very strong” (*ibid.* p, 466). Nonetheless, many argue that it is still unclear from the available data whether the overall ‘social return’ to schooling exceeds ‘private benefits’, and vice versa (c.f. Krueger & Lindahl 2001: 1130).

In short, human capital theorists, as well as QoL researchers have both provided scientific evidence for the (positive) correlation between *education* in general, and increased levels of *social, economic* and *physical* well-being amongst individual citizens and the entire population as a whole.

3.2 Quality of Life and Minorities

Research on the QoL of ethnic minority groups across the world is still in its infancy. A considerable number of the existing literature is North American based. Nevertheless, a global interest amongst policy-makers (e.g. Europe, Australia, Canada, and Scandinavia) is resulting in new research endeavours that shed light on the life circumstances of ethnic minority groups. Below, we reveal some of these global/regional findings.

3.2.1. Global Findings

In the U.S. context, QoL studies amongst African Americans in the period 1980-1992 reveal that indicators of ‘objective well-being’ such as: *health, education, and economic status*, either remained stable or stagnated (Bennett 1993). Interestingly, public data collected at the national level during the same period reports an increase in the population’s general life satisfaction or ‘subjective well-being’, in tandem with a decrease in ‘reported happiness’ (Jackson 1991). Adams (1997) hypothesizes that this ambiguity is due to the fact that for African Americans these two (latter) measures of global (subjective) well-being seem to describe different life aspects. Thus, contrary to the initially assumed, ‘general life satisfaction’ and ‘happiness’ do not seem to be interchangeable variables while studying QoL amongst African Americans. The author suggests that maybe questions of general life satisfaction to this audience trigger a cognitive response that acts like a ‘coping mechanism’ (*ibid.* p, 209).

From a *health* perspective, U.S. studies on the incidence of depressive symptoms across native and ethnic minority groups conclude that *gender* and *socioeconomic status* are more crucial factors than *ethnicity* per se (Jackson-Triche *et al.* 2000). However, if demographic factors are not taken into consideration (i.e. un-adjusted data), individuals with African-American and Hispanic backgrounds possess the highest depression rates. As far as suicidal tendencies are concerned, Whites rank highest and African-Americans lowest. On the other hand, the study shows, Hispanics and Whites are more likely to suffer from melancholy.

Michalos & Zumbo (2000) undertook a study measuring the impact of *social cohesion*, *diversity*, and *social prejudice* on the QoL of three ethnic minority groups living in Canada (i.e. 'aboriginal', 'non-aboriginal', and 'other minorities'). Comparisons across the three groups reveal that individuals belonging to the 'aboriginal' community report an overall QoL lower than the other two groups. Differences between 'non-aboriginal' and 'other minorities' were not found to be significant. This study also reveals that members of the 'non-aboriginal' group tend to be simultaneously the most prejudiced, as well as optimistic, whereas 'aboriginals' are the least prejudiced and optimistic group. 'Other minorities' rank in between the other two groups.

Studies from the Netherlands amongst adolescents with ethnic minority backgrounds shed light on the impact of school characteristics on individuals' *self-esteem* (Verkuyten & Thijs 2003). Researchers found 'classroom context', i.e. size, teacher characteristics, student composition, etc., to (partially) impact on individual levels of self-esteem. For example, 'ethnic self-esteem' tends to be higher in classes where the teacher pays frequent attention to issues such as multicultural sensitivity and ethnic harassment (*ibid*, p.268). The author also revealed that the proportion of Dutch pupils in the class affected significantly the self-esteem of minority pupils. Similar impacts across native students were not found. Interestingly, and despite the above findings, this study shows that members of minority groups possess (overall) higher levels of 'ethnic', as well as 'global' self-esteem when compared to their native (Dutch) counterparts. Finally, *gender* was considered to be an important variable with males having (on average) higher levels of self-esteem than females, independently of the age group. Hence, in a broader context, studies like this "provide evidence that personal and ethnic self-esteem are not only determined by individual characteristics, but also independently by classrooms settings and structures" (*ibid*. p, 272).

Biswas-Diener & Diener (2001) undertook a study of 'subjective well-being' amongst individuals living in the slums of a major Indian city across nine life-domains (e.g. self, social relations, basic needs, etc.). Despite the fact that those individuals experienced a lower sense of 'global life satisfaction' in comparison to the Indian population at large, the researchers also found that individuals living in slums were (nevertheless) more satisfied than initially expected. "People who live in poverty appear to suffer a lower sense of well-

being than those who do not. But even in the face of adverse circumstances these people find much in their lives that is satisfying” (*ibid.* p, 349) the study concludes. This level of life satisfaction was partly determined by the positive outcome arising from individuals’ social relationships (networks): “to the extent the poor can utilize their strong social relationships, the negative effects of poverty are counterbalanced” (*ibid.* p, 347). Additionally, participants reported being fairly satisfied with self-related domains such as *morality* and *physical appearance*.

A recent U.K. study shows the country’s ‘non-white’ (minority) population as being better integrated with other ethnic communities than the majority ‘white-population’ (CRE 2004). Further, ‘older people’ belonging to ethnic minority groups are far more likely to integrate than their ‘younger’ counterparts (e.g. 58% of minority individuals over 50 years old have mainly or entirely white friends, compared to only 36% among the under 30s). Interestingly, researchers also found that the reverse is true of younger ‘white people’, i.e. 43% of them mix more with other communities than older individuals, who are themselves more likely (60% of the total) to have ‘white-only’ social contacts (e.g. friendships). Overall, the majority of ‘whites’ (70%) and ‘non-white’ (65%) agreed that (ethnic) minority Britons frequently live apart (i.e. excluded) from the rest of mainstream society.

A 1997 University of Pennsylvania study of ‘world social progress’, i.e. the ability of nations to provide for the basic social and material needs of their citizens, ranks Denmark, Norway and Sweden (respectively) as the top-three nations (Sociolog 1998). The study commonly known as ‘WISP’, measures country performance across forty-five *social, political, and economic* indicators grouped along ten sectors of social development (e.g. health, education, social services, diversity-related conflicts, etc.). Furthermore, ‘WISP’ also assesses the impact of (a) military expenditures, (b) diversity-related issues, and (c) political factors, on overall *development patterns*.

Scandinavia (Denmark and Sweden)

Several empirical studies have demonstrated that the ‘educational attainment’ of ethnic minority individuals living in Denmark is considerably lower than the native population (Rosholm *et al.* 2002; Skyt Nielsen *et al.* 2003). Researchers concluded that larger differences in the educational distribution are likely to persist over time since ‘intergenerational mobility’ of equal magnitude across minority groups is fairly low. In a similar vein, a recent statistical study across four ethnic groups (i.e. native Danes, immigrant children in aggregate, Turks, and Pakistanis), found two causal factors explaining differences in educational attainment across the groups; 1) high drop-out rates, and 2) intergenerational transmission of the parents’ (weak) socio-economic status (Colding 2005).

Moldenhawer (2005) argues that the demand for education has become a central factor in ‘social mobility strategies’ of Pakistani migrants living in Denmark. Despite the existence of other (key) factors in maintaining the ‘social positions’ and ‘relations’ of migrant groups, *education* per se “has clearly become one of the most significant forms of symbolic capital due to its importance in providing social position” (*ibid.* p, 52). Interestingly, the author stresses that *past* and *current* positions of ethnic minorities within their place of origin (e.g. Pakistan) are important factors in understanding both their social position within the receiving (host) society, as well as the educational ‘success rates’ in the host country.

With regard to educational achievements, the situation in Sweden is far from ideal. In 2000, as many as 25% of *all* 16 year-old school leavers failed at least one subject, with 15% flunking two or more academic subjects (Hällgren & Weiner 2001). With respect to minority groups, more than a third (38%) of the ‘failing students’ had an immigrant background. In comparison to other countries, Sweden’s minorities rank considerably poorly in educational attainment and performance. A recent ‘PISA’ study, the OECD’s controversial analysis across thirty-two member nations and a quarter of a million students, revealed that Swedish students with an immigrant background were the poorest performing of all participating countries (OECD 2000).

An analysis of the participation of Swedish immigrant communities in adult education programmes outline, amongst other things, that more recent immigrants tend to possess higher participation rates than early migrants (Norlin 2003). This analysis also shows that

‘theoretical oriented programmes’ aimed at more recent waves of immigrants have, in general, very low participation rates. The exception to this rule was found amongst naturalised Latin Americans across different migrant periods (waves). In contrast, it was found, immigrants are more likely to participate in ‘vocationally-oriented programmes’ especially so if the individuals originate from geographically distant regions. Moreover, in some of the cases, the *period* of migration may have an impact on individual preferences. For example, Eastern Europeans arriving in Sweden during the 1990s were more likely to undertake *vocational education* than their (national) counterparts who migrated a decade earlier (*ibid.* p, 22).

A Swedish-based study amongst adult professionals (26 to 45 years old) born outside the EU (who had moved to Sweden during the period 1991-1997) and their Swedish born counterparts, reveals major differences with respect to *employment rates* and *type of employment* (Berggren & Omarsson 2001). Amongst other things, researchers found it to be “much more uncommon” amongst professional workers born abroad (i.e. outside the EU) to have a job corresponding to their competence level (i.e. a ‘qualified job’). Overall, only about a third (39%) of all immigrant professional workers (from all regions) possessed a ‘qualified job’, compared to 85% amongst native professionals.

Finally, a study looking at the impact of (native) Swedish language skills on employment outcomes shows that immigrants with ‘higher reading skills’ have a higher probability of being employed (Rooth 2001). Calculations by the researcher demonstrate that a qualitative move from ‘low’ to ‘basic’ reading skills amongst non-native speakers increases the likelihood of employment by 24%. An interesting finding of the study is the extent to which the ‘region of origin’ as a variable (e.g. Nordic, European, etc.) becomes insignificant in predicting labour market outcomes if (and when) ‘language’ is included in the employment equation (*ibid.* p. 13). Thus, these findings contradict commonly held assumptions that cultural differences (e.g. place of origin) are the main deterministic factor regarding employability amongst ethnic minority groups.

Chapter 4: Norway

This chapter introduces the reader to the contextual elements surrounding the situation of ethnic minority groups living in Norway. A brief introduction of the domestic higher education (HE) landscape is provided. Furthermore, recent data concerning the characteristics of ethnic minority groups undertaken HE is presented. The chapter concludes with a generic overview of the policy framework concerning higher education and minorities, as well as a brief outline of the most important institutional initiatives across the higher education sub-sector.

4.1 Quality of Life and Minorities

By 1865 (earliest available), 1.2% of Norway's population was of foreign origin, 90.6% of which originated from the Nordic countries; 8.7% from Western Europe except Turkey (SSB 2004b). The 'rest of the world' represented barely 0.7% of the foreign population living in the country. By 2004, however, a considerable shift had occurred with 7.6% of the Norwegian population (349 000 individuals) possessing a 'foreign' background (SSB 2004a). Of these, 82% were born abroad of two foreign-born parents (i.e. 'first generation'). 'Second generations' (i.e. born in Norway of two foreign-born parents) accounted for 17.1% of the total (60 000 individuals). These two groups compose the official Norwegian 'immigrant population'. Officially, *citizenship* has not been historically used as a statistical definition since approximately 140 000 individuals have been naturalised ('Norwegian') since the late 1970s (Østby 2002).

The first QoL studies in Norway, as well as the whole of Scandinavia, emerged during the 1960s (Erikson 1993). Nonetheless, due to the recent history of (ethnic) migration across the region, minority data did not surface until recently. Studies focusing on the life aspects of ethnic minority groups living in Norway have their origin in the mid 1990s. The main areas of inquiry include: *education* (c.f. Bakken 2003; Arnesen 2003; Vabø & Aamodt 2005; Helland 1997; Sletten 2000; Dæhlen 2001; Støren 2004); *labour market* (c.f. Barth *et al.* 2004; Hayfrom 2001, 2002; Longva & Oddbjörn 2000); *crime and violence* (c.f. Bratt 2004; Torgensen 2002, 2005; Haslund 1999; Hustad 1999); *civic rights* (c.f. Furseth 2000; Predelli

2003; Aalandslid & Tronstad 2005); *health* (c.f. Lie *et al.* 2004; Bloom 1998; Berg & Johnsen 2004; Larsen 2000); and *living conditions* (c.f. Hansen 1994; Hayfron 1999).

Some (QoL) studies have focused on specific ethnic communities and life circumstances such as ‘asylum seekers from Somalia’ (c.f. Engebristen & Farstad 2004); ‘Norwegian-Pakistani Muslims’ (c.f. Østberg 2003); and ‘Family relations amongst immigrant youth’ (c.f. Selte 1998). Below, a brief summary of the major findings coming upon each one of the referred QoL domains is given.

4.1.1 Labour Market

Hayfron (2001) analysed the impact of *language* (training and proficiency) amongst immigrant men from developing countries living in Norway. Despite strong (positive) correlations between the ‘level of language training’, and ‘speaking and reading skills’, the analysis as such did not reveal any major correlations between ‘language proficiency’ and ‘financial earnings’ in the labour market. The author hypothesises that this may be due to the fact that foreigners are required to learn the (Norwegian) language prior to getting a job (i.e. as a basic requirement), but once the job position is obtained their salaries are not necessarily affected by their language skills.

The above study also shows that recent waves of immigrants have (on average) lower earnings when compared to their earlier (migrant) counterparts. A partial explanation for this ‘earning deficit’ is given (by the author) on the basis of ‘language deficiency’ characterising most recent immigrants. In a similar vein, the analysis of the ‘earnings gap’ amongst immigrants by gender shows evidence of a ‘double negative effect’ on female immigrant earnings (Hayfron 2002). When this “gap” was tested (i.e. decomposed) in light of such variables as ‘gender’, ‘ethnicity’, and ‘productivity differentials’, the data indicated that ‘gender effects’ (male/female) are considerably more important than ‘ethnic effects’ (country of origin).

Barth and colleagues looked at the impact of macroeconomic conditions on the *earnings* of Norwegian immigrants as well as natives (Barth *et al.* 2004). The authors found out that earnings from immigrants from non OECD member countries were more sensitive to shifts in the local labour market (i.e. unemployment) than those of natives and/or individuals

originating from the OECD area. A (positive) correlation between the ‘length of stay’ in the country and ‘sensitivity to local unemployment’ was also found, meaning that immigrants from non-OECD countries were less vulnerable to short-term changes in the local labour market after a considerable period of stay in Norway, usually a decade. This study also reveals that ‘earning gaps’ between natives and immigrants tend to increase during (seasonal) periods of high unemployment. Researchers conclude that small differences (i.e. ‘earning sensitivity’) do exist with regard to the earnings profile of native Norwegians, immigrants from the OECD region, and European migrants (living and working) in Norway.

In a similar vein, Longva and Oddbjörn (2000) analysed the ‘relative earnings growth’ of immigrants in the period 1980-1990. The authors found that individuals originating from OECD member countries possessed average earnings comparable to those of native Norwegians. This situation was stable not only at the time of entry in the country but also in the long-run. However, immigrants from non-OECD countries were found to earn considerably less at the time of entry in Norway than natives, however, their ‘relative earnings’ improved gradually over time, i.e. they were positively correlated to the length of stay in the country. The authors hypothesise that the modest ‘earnings growth’ amongst non-OECD immigrants as a group (period 1980-1990), *might* be due to their over-representation in sectors of the economy with low productivity growth (e.g. low skilled jobs). Additionally, it is also speculated that ‘business cycles’ (i.e. unemployment rates) *could* have had a stronger effect on this particular group than on native workers and the OECD’s.

4.1.2 Health

A survey involving close to two thousand refugees who had experienced war/trauma prior to their arrival in Norway reveals that factors like the ‘close presence of family members’ (spouse, children, etc.), ‘active employment’, and the ‘participation in training activities’ were found to have had a positive effect on individuals’ post-traumatic experiences; regardless of the level of traumatic exposure (Lie *et al.* 2004). A (positive) correlation was discovered between the ‘level of traumatic exposure’ and the ‘effects of family’, meaning that those highly exposed to conflicts (i.e. traumatic experience) denoted stronger family effects on their health. Overall, this study sheds light on the importance of ‘family systems’ and ‘occupational development strategies’ as useful mechanisms to leverage *social integration* amongst refugees from conflict-torn areas.

An analysis of the rate of admission to *acute psychiatric treatment* in an Oslo-based institution shows that one out of five individuals (20% of all beds) possessed a non-Western immigrant background, of which the great majority of those were young males (Berg & Johnsen 2004). Typical pathologies included ‘psychosis’ requiring compulsory treatments. It was also revealed that citizens from non-Western countries indicated relatively lower levels of ‘substance abuse’ (e.g. drugs, alcohol) than other patients (e.g. native Norwegians), but both groups revealed similar ‘suicidal tendencies’. Somehow surprisingly, this study did not show a substantial difference between non-westerners and other groups of psychiatric patients. Nonetheless, it is suggested by the authors, immigrants (overall) have greater difficulties in presenting their psychological problems to doctors, leading to the development of severe symptoms prior to their admittance into treatment.

Lastly, Larsen (2000) analyzed the incidence of *diabetes* amongst the Norwegian population and recognized a considerable higher pattern of incidence amongst ethnic minorities with a non-Western background. Amongst the major factors that led to this situation were ‘cultural elements’ such as ‘language proficiency’, ‘illiteracy’, ‘religious fatalism’, and ‘patients’ reluctance of taking responsibility for their health’. Moreover, within Muslim communities, ‘long periods of fasting’ (during Ramadan) leading to irregular eating patterns, were found to have considerable effects on the development of diabetes, as well as the overall health profile amongst (Muslim) patients. In a similar vein, several *anaemia* cases have been identified amongst children from Somalia who did not receive proper nutrition prior to their arrival in Norway (Madar 1997, cited by Engebristen & Farstad 2004).

4.1.3 Civic Rights

Furseth (2000) analyzed *religious rights* (i.e., the freedom to practice one’s faith) amongst ethnic minority individuals with a Muslim background at two state-run institutions, prisons and the military. The author found that despite the Norwegian constitution assuring individuals the right to practice their religious faith, differences in treatment between Christians (e.g. Protestants) and non-Christians (e.g. Muslims) were present at both types of institutions. A main reason for this was the *monopolistic* position of the clergy of the Church of Norway with respect to the responsibility for administrating religious affairs within the country. The study sheds light on some of the ‘structural barriers’ (i.e. daily social practices) hindering the full recognition of (minority) religious rights still present in contemporary

Norwegian society. Similar findings amongst ‘second generation Pakistanis’ indicated that being identified as a “Muslim” (by mainstream society) was referred as a factor having strong (negative) influences over the *personal lives* and *self-identities* of those individuals (Østberg 2003).

An analysis of the level of *political participation* (and power) amongst voluntary organizations representing women belonging to ethnic minority groups from non-Western countries, shows that these tend to have regular contacts with major political parties and influential political figures (Predelli 2003). Nonetheless, this process was found to occur in a rather ‘informal manner’ i.e., through networking and lobbying. As such, more institutionalized political (power) structures such as local assemblies, the national Government, and/or Parliament, still lack regular (i.e., formal) means of ethnic representation. This study also provides evidence of the impact of key ‘social structures’ like the general media (TV, press, radio, etc.) due to their ability to *influence* and *diffuse* minority-related issues into mainstream Norwegian society. Hence, according to the data findings, ‘political influence’ and ‘access to institutionalized power structures’ is facilitated when (and if) the public media takes an interest for minority issues.

With respect to the (general) political representation of non-Western minorities at the local/regional levels (i.e., ‘Kommune’), the 2003 national elections enabled this particular minority sub-group to gain access to less than 1% of the total seats available within the respective formal structures (i.e., ‘Kommunestyret’); even though non-Westerners represented at the time, 5% of the total Norwegian population (Aalandslid & Tronstad 2005).

4.1.4 Crime

A study focusing on out-of-school ‘adolescent violence’ amongst majority (natives) and (ethnic) minority groups revealed that males belonging to the latter group report a higher fighting frequency than their native counterparts (Bratt 2004). In the case of minorities, a stronger association seemed to exist between ‘out-of-home activities’ (i.e. activities not supervised by an adult) and ‘frequent fighting’. Despite some limitations regarding the representation of the different ethnic groups involved in the study, significant differences were found across groups. For example, ethnic Pakistanis’ fighting frequencies were similar

to those of native Norwegians, whereas other Muslim groups such as ethnic Turks and Somalis reported relatively (higher) frequent fights. Anecdotal evidence by the author (i.e. not formally part of the study), indicates that fights amongst adolescents living in the areas under study occurred mostly between members of different ethnic groups. As regards the study's main *variables*, a correlation between 'alcohol consumption' and 'fighting' was found, affecting both male groups (i.e. native and immigrant), as well as immigrant girls with a non-Muslim background. As for the 'use of illegal drugs', this factor was shown as contributing to fighting amongst natives, while on the other hand, it had no impact whatsoever on minority adolescents.

Official data from 1998 indicate that immigrants are more likely to be charged as a result of criminal behaviour (41 criminals per 1000 inhabitants), when compared to the Norwegian population at large (27 per 1000) (Haslund 1999). Nevertheless, substantial differences exist across the different immigrant sub-communities. For example, individuals with Nordic backgrounds were found having the highest crime-rates amongst Western immigrants (25 per 1000), but were surpassed by Non-Westerners (from Asia, Africa, Central and South America, and Turkey) with an average of 55 per 1000. On the other hand, immigrants from North America and Oceania reported the lowest crime rates (11 per 1000). Overall, 81% of all immigrants (formally) charged with criminal misbehaviours (during 1998) possessed a non-Western background.

As for the types of sanctioned activities amongst immigrants (above study), these include: *illegal driving, shoplifting, narcotics, and general public offences*. Many researchers carefully warn against the meaning(s) associated with these sorts of statistical data. Amongst other things, they point to the fact that, when compared to the general Norwegian population, non-Western immigrants have lower levels of education and occupational status, exercise more modest life-styles, and report a higher incidence of loneliness and depressive symptoms (Hustad 1999; Blom 1998; Haslund 1999). Thus, careful observers argue, statistics reflect first and foremost differences in the *life circumstances* amongst different 'social groups' composing Norwegian society as a whole, rather than *ethnicity per se*.

Studies amongst 'second generation' (immigrants) and native youth (14-17 years old) living in the greater Oslo area, revealed that those with a Pakistani background were more likely to

suffer from depressive (psychological) symptoms than their native counterparts (Torgersen 2002; 2005). 'Conflicts with parents' were seen as a major *risk factor* amongst second-generation youth, whereas 'anti-social behaviour' was found to vary less across the two groups. Regarding 'violent behaviour', the data shows that children with an immigrant background participated less frequently in *minor crimes*. However, *adolescent males* belonging to some ethnic communities engaged more frequently in violent crimes than both other second-generation males, as well as natives. Finally, 'acculturation to the host society' was shown to be (positively) correlated with 'delinquency' amongst immigrant girls, but negatively so amongst boys of the same group. Within the latter group, however, 'deviant behaviour' was often associated with such factors as strong ethnic pride; feelings of group belonging; low participation in cultural activities; as well as, reduced social contacts with the native youth.

4.1.5 Living Conditions

With respect to the housing situation of minority groups living in Norway (particularly non-Western), evidence exists supporting the fact that these individuals live, on average, in more overcrowded physical conditions than native Norwegians (measured as more than one person per room) (Hansen 1994). Some of the main *causes* highlighted are: low (average) disposable incomes; lack of access to capital; and, differential preferences (values) concerning housing arrangements, when compared to other consumption patterns. Similar studies highlight that large families (e.g. children) find it difficult to cope with the high real estate prices of the inner (Oslo) city (Engebristen & Farstad 2004).

Hayfron (1999) surveyed the evolution of housing conditions in a 30-year period (1960/90) amongst immigrant and native populations (the latter including foreigners with Norwegian citizenship). The variables *age*, *level of education*, *tenure status* and *year of arrival* were found to play a key role in explaining overcrowding conditions amongst both groups. The empirical data revealed three major findings. Firstly, a considerable high proportion of immigrants and Norwegians lived in overcrowded conditions in 1980. Secondly, both groups have experienced a decline in overcrowding in the decade 1980/90. Thirdly, the 'rate of overcrowding' amongst immigrants converged rapidly towards that of natives over time (length of stay). In this context, *age* was seen by the researcher as a major factor, since older immigrant groups (i.e. 1960/69 cohort) had experienced better living conditions than their

younger (migrant) counterparts (i.e. 1970/79 and 1980/89 cohorts). Hayfron also showed that recently arrived immigrants tended to be of a younger age (by 1990, 66% of the immigrants who had arrived in Norway in the period 1980/89 were part of the 'age group' 27-36 years old). Not surprisingly, the study highlighted that 'declines in overcrowding' correlate (positively) with 'increases in disposable income', observed via the rapid change in home-ownership across the two groups.

4.1.6 Family

In the area of family relations, a study comparing young women with a Pakistani background and their native (Norwegian) counterparts suggested that variations between the two groups were much lower than initially expected (Selte 1998). However, despite minor variations within each particular (ethnic) group, some significant differences across groups were detected. For example, minority females tended to have a more family (collectivistic) oriented lifestyle in comparison to the individualistic (independent) nature of their native counterparts. On average, Pakistanis females spent considerable more time with their family members than Norwegians. The latter group on the other hand, was more prone to *quarrel* and *argue* with their parents (approximately a third more often than Pakistanis).

Similar findings amongst minorities possessing a Somali background disclosed that major differences with respect to *family life*, between this group and the native population, do exist (Engebrigtsen & Farstad 2004). Within the former group, *family* is seen as the most important 'social unit', and loyalty to one's family (group) comes before anything else (e.g. individual). For example, many Somali women have responsibility for looking after their relatives' children in addition to their own. On the other hand, *emotional* and *financial* support was being provided by close relatives when required. Nonetheless, and according to the authors, despite some clear advantages (e.g. financial/emotional support) the level of 'social cohesiveness' amongst Somalis leads to additional (QoL) problems such as considerable numbers of individuals living together in fairly precarious housing conditions, as well as the sacrifice of one's needs (and wants) on behalf of the group's (*ibid*, p. 33).

4.1.7 Education

In the area of education, the existing data shows that ‘second generation’ minority students at the secondary level, whose native language is other than Norwegian, have consistently *lower* academic performances than other student groups (Bakken 2003). The rationale for this under-achievement is (often) based on the grounds of ‘family characteristics’, namely difficult economic conditions; lower educational backgrounds; and the lack of facilitated access to rich information sources like books and personal computers. In other contexts, it has also been recognised that youth immigrants with a non-Western background whose parents undertook more than four years of higher education studies, are likely to have higher Norwegian language scores (at school) than their immigrant counterparts from families whose parents completed only basic (compulsory) levels of education (Arnesen 2003). In a similar vein, Norwegian students (both, native and non-native) whose parents, at least one of them, attained a HE degree are five times more likely to enrol in HE endeavours than those whose direct family members did not go beyond basic education (Vabø & Aamodt 2005).

With regard to (Norwegian) higher education, studies using data from the period 1980/1996 indicate that non-Western minorities (particularly females) rarely enrolled in HE; in contrast to native Norwegians and Western immigrants (Dæhlen 2001). *Social background* was found to be a critical factor determining the likelihood of participation in tertiary education. This assumption was empirically supported by earlier studies at the secondary level, indicating strong educational (motivational) aspirations amongst non-Western pupils belonging to *higher* social classes (Helland 1997; Sletten 2000). Amongst other things, individuals composing the latter group tend to spend more time reading, are more positive towards schooling, have better academic achievements, and show higher life aspirations (i.e. objectives); especially so when compared with native (Norwegian) students coming from families of *lower* social statuses. Hence, differences between ‘non-Western’ youth and ‘natives’ are substantially levelled when the variable *social class* is controlled. Researchers’ judgments (classifications) regarding *class* are often attributed to the *education levels* and *professional occupations* of individuals’ parents (Dælen 2001).

Støren (2004) analyzed the local (Norwegian) labour market’s assimilation of higher education graduates with similar levels of education across three distinct groups: *native Norwegians*, *Western* and *non-Western immigrants*. Considerable high risks of

unemployment were detected amongst individuals belonging to non-Western ethnic groups, both in the period shortly after graduation, as well as long-term. No significant variations were shown between those with a degree taken in a Norwegian institution vis á vis a foreign education. Overall, highly educated Western immigrants did not differ substantially from their native counterparts. The author also found that ‘language skills’ seem to have a much lower impact than the ‘length of stay’ in the country. As such, non-Western immigrants who have lived longest in Norway were characterised as having their ‘unemployment risks’ reduced from three and half to five years (from graduation) vis á vis those who had recently moved into the country. This (time) factor enabled the former group to develop better (and larger) *social networks*, an element widely recognized as critical in gaining access to local labour markets across the world (c.f. Petersen *et al.* 2000; Marmaros & Sacerdote 2002). Støren’s study also highlights the fact that non-Westerners, especially those possessing a non-Norwegian higher education degree, were much more likely to have a job for which they were over-qualified, independently of the time-period previously spent in the country.

4.2. The Structure of the Higher Education System

Norway’s 4.6 million inhabitants (2004) are served by a variety of tertiary education institutions, both public and private. The public sector includes 38 institutions: 6 traditional universities (‘Universiteter’), 5 specialised scientific colleges (‘Vitenskapelige Høgskoler’), 25 vocational colleges (in English termed ‘University Colleges’), and 2 national academies of the arts (‘Kunsthøgskolen’). With respect to the private sector, there are close to 30 private higher education providers of which 21 are supported by the state (NIFU-STEP 2005a). The sector is regulated by the ‘Act on Universities and University Colleges’, as well as the ‘Act regulating private higher education’ (DEP 2005). Education (teaching) and research-based activities are under the supervision of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (‘Utdannings og Forskningsdepartementet’).

During 2003, the Norwegian higher education system enrolled close to 210 000 students (60% women and 40% men) and employed about 25 000 staff (statistics Norway). The largest enrolment rates occurred at the vocational colleges with 47% of the total number of students, followed by the universities with 34%. The private sector enrolls 14.5% of the student population. As regards staff, the largest higher education employers are the universities (54%) followed by the vocational colleges (37%).

Table 7: Students and Staff in Norwegian HE (2003)

Type of Institution	Students	Staff
Universities	71 252	13 375
Specialized scientific colleges	7 501	1 981
National Academies of the Arts	851	221
Vocational colleges	98 315	9 030
Other colleges (police, etc)	1 421	-
Private colleges	30 430	-
Total	209 770	24 608

Sources: NIFU-STEP 2005b

Higher education governance arrangements have been evolving in the last few years from a system putting an emphasis on *central steering* and *input* factors towards new processes aimed at *decentralising* decision making (i.e. increase institutional autonomy), leverage public *accountability*, as well as introducing *output* orientations based on performance indicators. During 2001, a proposal for a ‘Quality Reform’ of the higher education sector was submitted to Parliament (‘Stortinget’).

The implementation of the final outcome of the reform proposals is well under way (since 2003), and it became consolidated in the passing of a new law on ‘Universities and Colleges’ by Parliament (DEP 2004a). The latter consists, amongst other things, of the following elements: (a) changes in governance at the institutional level; (b) strengthening of institutional autonomy; (c) new funding formula; (d) new degree structure (in line with the Bologna Process); and, (e) a new national agency for quality assurance (‘NOKUT’). (DEP 2003a; Nyborg 2002). Overall, the above reform represents a comprehensive effort to ‘re-design’ Norway’s higher education sector both in relation to developments at the regional (European) level, as well as domestic needs (or perceptions) of quality improvement.

In terms of future developments at the system level, a new ‘higher education law’ is expected to be discussed in Parliament during 2005. Further, the first evaluations of the reform effort (currently underway) will also be made available, and consequent ‘refinements’ are expected. In the long run, and according to local analysts, balancing *sustainability* and continuous *system growth* are seen as two of the most critical priorities at

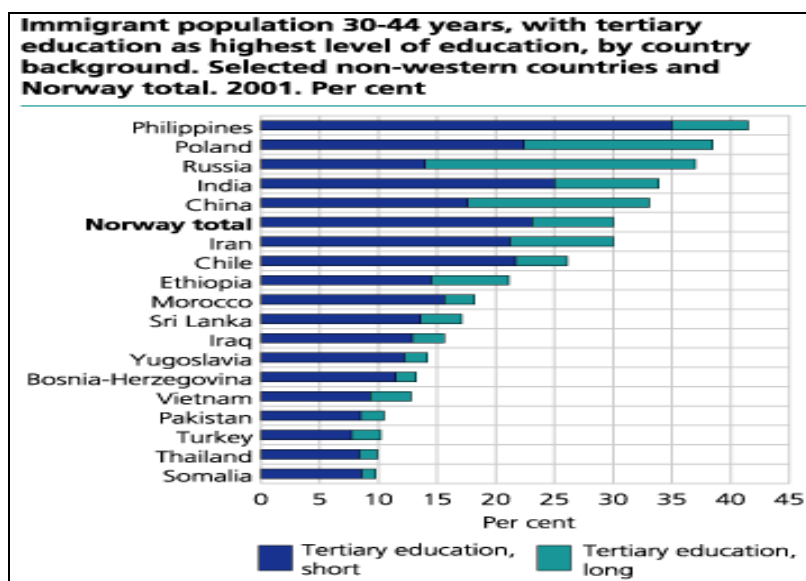
the system level (NIFU-STEP 2005b). Additionally, the country's efforts towards reaching the goals (and objectives) defined in the EU's 'Lisbon Strategy' (UFD 2005), as well as the international (educational) comparisons and benchmarks (e.g. 'PISA', world university rankings, etc.) will be the target of considerable public scrutiny.

4.3. Minorities in Higher Education

Recent data reveals that considerable differences do exist with regard to the educational attainment of specific ethnic groups living in Norway. Considerable variations are found amongst non-Western immigrants. On average, minority groups with an Asian or African background possess the lowest attainment rates (SSB 2003a). However, when analyzed by country of origin, individuals with Philippine, Polish, Russian, Indian and/or Chinese backgrounds have higher HE attainment rates than native Norwegians (figure 4, below). The least represented groups include Somalis, Thai, Turkish and Pakistanis; where close to 10% of all individuals have completed some type of HE studies.

Gender differences amongst non-Western minority groups also contrast with the native population (as well as, other Westerners) where women (often) have higher levels of educational attainment than men. Women from Asia (Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam) and Africa (Morocco, Somalia and Ethiopia) are particularly underrepresented. With respect to participation rates amongst different immigrant generations, and despite the fact that 'second generations' are much younger than 'first generations' (i.e. 60% below 10 years old, and 4% above 30), educational attainments amongst the former group are considerably higher (in all levels of education). Nonetheless, regarding higher education, both groups still lag considerably behind when compared with national averages (close to 40% participation rate) with differences of -11.4% (first generation) and -5.5% (second generation) in the traditional student group (19-24 years old). However, in the group 25-29 years old, participation rates amongst second generations surpass the country's national average (*ibid.*).

Figure 4: Higher Education Attainment: Minorities (2001)



Source: SSB 2003a: 120

During 2003 a total of 7.500 minority students were registered at Norwegian higher education institutions, representing 3.6% of the total (Norwegian) student population (NIFU-STEP 2005a). Amongst those, the great majority of individuals were of a ‘first generation’ background, but it is worth mentioning that the proportion of this group enrolled in colleges and universities across the country is much lower than ‘second generations’; 16 and 27% of all 19-24 years old, respectively. The overall figure for all 19-24 year olds in Norway (i.e. irrespective of ethnic background) was 29% (SSB 2004a). The most represented ‘first generations’ include ethnic groups from China (46%), Russia (37%), Bosnia-Herzegovina (33%), Vietnam (23%), and Iran (23%) (SSB 2004B: 70). With respect to ‘second generations’ these tend to be over-represented amongst individuals whose parents originated from China (44%), Sweden (43%), Vietnam (42%) and India (39%).

In 2002, 26% of minority students who had completed high school education (‘Videregående Utdanning’) enrolled at higher education institutions across the country in the following semester. Amongst those, the largest regional groups were composed by students with an Asian (44%) and European (37%) ethnic background (SSB 2002). College education rather than traditional university studies ranked as the most popular choice. As for the fields of studies in general, minority groups tend to prefer vocational-oriented

(‘professional’) fields, such as economics and business studies, health (e.g. nursery), engineering and computer technology. Under-representation tends to be common across the humanities, and the social and natural sciences. Regarding the length and level of educational endeavours, 16.7% of all immigrants above 16 years old (2002) possessed a ‘short-term’ higher education (up to 4 years) and 6% a ‘long-term’ one (over 4 years). The figures amongst natives were 17.1 and 4.5%, respectively (SSB 2004B: 72).

4.4. Policy Framework

From a broad social perspective, Norway, in line with its Scandinavian neighbours, shows a long history of emphasising *equality* aspects across a variety of public-level arrangements. Education is no exception, and national policies have long been geared towards *broadening access, universal arrangements, and student inclusion* (Sopemi 2004). Language-minorities, both native to the region (Sámi) as well as recent newcomers (immigrants) are provided with the same educational opportunities (rights and obligations) as native (Norwegian) speakers. Special education and financial support are made available by the state for bilingual subject instruction at the primary and lower secondary levels. Nevertheless, Norway’s ideological focus on *equality* (‘likestilling’) rather than *diversity* (c.f. Greek & Joensmoen 2004) has often created additional difficulties for those individuals who differ from the dominant (majority) group.

In recent years, a strengthened focus has been put on the education of children and youth of immigrant (minority) backgrounds. Strategic priority areas include: (a) the improvement of native (Norwegian) language skills and general knowledge of the host society amongst children/youth and parents alike; (b) more involvement and active participation of parents in school affairs; (c) better follow-up of minor age individuals; and (e) the increase of participation in cultural and sport-related activities (KRD 2005a). Since 2004, new requirements are in place with respect to individuals’ eligibility to free language and civilisation (‘integration’) training, namely to be 16 years old of age (or older) and possess a valid residence permit for a period longer than three months. Temporary migrants like foreign students and/or asylum seekers are not entitled to free language training.

In 2003, a 5-year strategic plan titled ‘Equal Education in Practice’ was launched by the Ministry of Education and Research, targeting Norway’s minority (language) population. Its

core objective is the improvement of learning abilities and participation rates across a variety of educational establishments (DEP 2003b). The plan aims at reducing the performance gap between minority and majority students, the highest within the OECD member nations (Clemet 2002). At the secondary level, minority students have historically (and systematically) scored below national averages (Bakken 2003; OECD 2000, 2003). More recently, policy proposals focusing on the adequate exploitation (and adaptation) to the growing diversity amongst pupils, stress the need to change established attitudes, adapt new knowledge structures (e.g. curricula), as well as enhance learning and competence opportunities amongst teachers (DEP 2004b).

The Ministry's of Education and Research 5-year (2004/09) strategic plan mentioned above focuses on an "integrated educational approach" for minority pupils, from day-care institutions and schools to colleges and universities. The plan sets five main goals, namely: (1) to ensure that minority language children of pre-school age have a better understanding of the Norwegian language; (2) to improve the educational achievements of minority language pupils; (3) to increase the percentage of minority language pupils and apprentices who begin and complete their upper secondary education; (4) *to increase the percentage of minority language students in higher education*; and (5) to improve the Norwegian language skills of minority language adults (DEP 2003b: 33).

In the context of HE (goal #4), the strategic plan mentions the importance of attracting minority (language) students into fields outside the sciences and technology, such as teacher education (*ibid.*, p. 24). The rationale for this focus is related to the fact that ethnic minority teachers have a bilingual and cultural advantage and are able to act as valuable role models to minority pupils. Other priorities include minority recruitment into the social sciences, humanities and journalism. Specific measures with regard to minority recruitment in higher education include: (a) the establishment of a special fund by the Ministry to support institutions with their recruitment activities; (b) the sharing of institutional best-practices concerning recruitment, drop-out prevention, and labour-market integration; and (c) the development of special framework plans and new curricular structures geared towards the introduction of multicultural aspects into teacher training programmes, at all levels.

4.5 Institutional Strategies

In 1997 the Norwegian Parliament stated a general wish of improving the inclusion of different ethnic minority groups into higher education (Stortinget 1997). After a period of inertia, a joint report during 2002 was produced by a working group composed of representatives from the University of Oslo (UiO) and the Oslo University College (HiO). The report (addressed to the Ministry of Education and Research) suggests a set of practical measures like the need to develop a multicultural student environment as an important component of a ‘multicultural society’ (UFD 2002). It also highlights the major *barriers* with respect to the academic recruitment and integration of minority groups into higher education. These include critical issues such as *personal motivations, family influences, study preferences*, etc. During 2003, the Ministry granted UiO and HiO the right (and funding) to create an internal (strategic) framework aimed at leveraging the *recruitment, integration, and completion* of HE studies amongst minority groups. The set of activities undertaken by each one of the institutions is briefly described below.

4.5.1 University of Oslo (UiO)

The strategy of the University of Oslo (UiO) for the (internal) inclusion of ethnic minority individuals on campus is known as *MiFA* (‘Minoriteter i Focus i Akademia’). Several internal stakeholders are involved, but a stronger focus is given to the academic fields that are the least popular (under-represented) amongst minority pupils. These include, but are not restricted to, the *social sciences* (e.g. sociology, social anthropology, and psychology), the *humanities* (e.g. history), and the *natural sciences* (e.g. chemistry and biology). MiFA’s outreach strategy targets a set of selected upper secondary schools (‘Videregående Skoler’). These are known internally as ‘project schools’. There are currently *five* targeted institutions, all located within the greater Oslo area and of which one is an ‘adult education centre’ (‘Rosenhof Voksenopplæringscenter’). These educational institutions possess the highest number of minority pupils within the country, between 50 and 62% of total enrolments. MiFA’s internal activities are split across four main areas: (1) *Recruitment*; (2) *Support*; (3) *Labour market integration*; and (4) *Curriculum development* (MiFA 2005). The primary focus to-date has been on the first two activities (recruitment and support).

With respect to the impacts of the MiFA project, it is important to stress that no particular ‘performance indicators’ have been set by UiO or the Ministry. Despite being only 2-years

old, a set of positive trends are already visible. Firstly, more minority students have been attending special activities like MiFA's informal discussions ('Cafées') and career orientation sessions. Secondly, the number of minorities applying for a study place at the UiO increased by 42% during the fall semester of 2004 (Aftenposten 2004); 30% for the academic year as a whole (MiFA 2005). In 2004 a total of 157 minority applicants attempted to pursue HE studies at UiO, together with an increase in the number of total applicants at the system level (21% more from upper secondary schools located in the greater Oslo area).

A positive impact has also been registered in the number of total applicants (natives and minorities) coming from MiFA's project schools (18% increase in 2003/04, from 66 to 79 individuals). In relative terms, the percentage of applicants to UiO coming from the project schools increased by 7.4% in one year to 39.2% (2004). The corresponding (relative) increase in the number of applicants from the remaining (non-project) upper secondary schools (in Oslo) was 5% in 2003/04, the same as in 2002/03 (*ibid.*). MiFA has also been fairly successful at enhancing its internal profile and recognition across a variety of stakeholders. A tight cooperation with minority-student unions (e.g. Pakistani, Iranian, and Somali) is currently in place.

In the area of programme development, the emphasis on shorter educational tracks (e.g. one year programmes or bachelors), multicultural offers (including the use of English language), and more clear information channels addressing the concerns of minority students (and their parents) have also been articulated, with different degrees of success. Despite these positive developments, the number of minority students at UiO is still relatively low. According to MiFA, this figure is currently under 6% of UiO's total student population or close to 1 800 pupils. However, differences across study fields (e.g. medicine with 10% participation rates), and difficulties inherent to a "clear" definition of 'minority student' are pointed as barriers to an exact assessment of UiO's minority strategy (*ibid.*).

Finally, recent student data indicates that UiO still has a long way to go when it comes to creating an academic environment where cultural (ethnic) diversity is welcome and celebrated. A recent survey (spring 2005) amongst a sample of UiO's student population (6046 individuals) has revealed that 16% of the students who did not have Norwegian as a

their first language (i.e., non-native speakers) indicated as having been (at least once) the target of discriminatory behaviour due to their ethnic background (Universitas 2005).

4.5.2 Oslo University College (HiO)

In 1999 the executive board of the Oslo University College (HiO) formally articulated a strategy aimed at becoming a “multicultural institution”. The chief *objective* became the creation of an active international and multicultural environment across all internal activities. Important in the agenda has been the recognition that socially disadvantaged groups living in the greater Oslo area possess little knowledge of HiO’s programme offering, and the benefits brought by (vocationally-oriented) HE. In this context, a special focus has been given (since 2003) to reaching out to ethnic minority communities. A set of core activities is currently underway such as: (a) the development of innovative communication strategies; (b) the re-thinking of traditional pedagogical methods and curriculum; and (c) the proper training (competence development) amongst all internal stakeholders (academic staff, administrators, and students).

An important aspect of HiO’s multicultural strategy is the gradual re-shaping of its internal *culture*, an aspect seen as critical for the successful accomplishment of its pluralistic vision. A four-year internal project initiated in 2003 aims at leveraging an understanding of *diversity* as a resource rather than a burden (HiO 2005a). A strong focus is being put on the *social inclusion* of minority groups. This ‘new’ normative/cognitive paradigm is based on *flexibility* as a cornerstone, and puts a strong focus on student- needs and expectations. According to HiO, to gradually develop teachers’ (multicultural) understandings of themselves and others, as well as provide them with the required competencies and resources to succeed, is paramount.

HiO’s ‘competence development programme’ consists of two distinct elements: (a) training provided to HiO’s staff as a whole; and (b) special (in-depth) tutoring for teaching staff (Greek & Joensmoen 2004). Additional strategic initiatives include, the active recruitment of minority students and the provision of specialized student support and guidance; inclusion of multicultural dimensions and perspectives in the curriculum; development of special teaching programmes focusing on ‘multicultural work’ and ‘international studies’; exchange

of students (cross-country); increasing the number of courses taught in a foreign language; and hosting a national center for multicultural training (Andersen 2004b).

During the academic year 2004/05, 14% of HiO's undergraduate students possessed an ethnic minority background (i.e. both parents born outside Norway), up from 12.7% a year earlier (HiO 2005b). Of these, approximately 8% originate from a non-western country, mostly in Asia (Andersen 2004a). The highest concentrations (number) of minority students at HiO occur in the *Health studies* (e.g. nursing), *Teaching Education*, *Engineering* (e.g. computer science), and *Business Administration/Economics*. However, areas like *Teaching Education*, one of the largest student populations at HiO, attract only 5% of minority students. The most popular fields amongst minorities are *Computer Science*, and *Bio-Engineering* (37 and 35%, respectively); followed by *Pharmacy* (34%) and *Chemical Engineering* (29%). The lowest minority representations occur in the fields of *Art and Design* (3%), *Drama and Theatre* (4%), and, *Physiotherapy* (4%) (HiO 2005c).

In the spring semester of 2005, 28 of the 175 master students enrolled at HiO (16%) possessed a minority background. The most popular study fields amongst this group were *Multicultural and International Studies*, and *Computer Science* (*ibid.*). HiO's 'semester registration survey' (Spring 2005), revealed that, amongst HiO's minority students: 35.6% had a 'first generation' background; 30.2% were born in Norway ('second generation'); 25.4% moved into the country before completing basic (compulsory) education; and 8.8% undertook a basic education outside Norway but completed upper-secondary education ('Videregående') in the country.

Several studies within HiO on the causes of under-educational achievement (drop-out rates) amongst native and non-native students show both *language* and *ethnicity* to be rather insignificant components (Mastekaasa & Smeby 2005; Greek & Joensmoen 2004). On the other hand, *social integration* amongst students was found to be the key element determining students' motivation, hence educational success. Research also shows that the educational (personal) needs and dilemmas facing minority students at HiO do not differ considerably from the native population (Greek & Joensmoen 2004). These (internal) studies also disclose that minority students with non-western backgrounds differ slightly from their western counterparts (who tend to resemble the native population in terms of *motivation* and

background). Amongst other things, it was found that non-western minorities: (a) tend to be concentrated across a small number of study fields (engineering and nursery); (b) come from families with lower educational backgrounds; (c) have less educational and working experience; and (d) approach education mostly as a means to gain access to the local labour market (Dælen 2002).

With regard to strategic outcomes, recent data indicates that the total number of minority students at HiO increased by 1.3% in the year 2004/05 (14% of the student population). HiO's vision of a "multicultural institution" is slowly reaching its academic heartland (Clark 1998). HiO has been pro-active in gathering and analysing information concerning the broad student population through its internal database system known as 'StudData' (HiO 2005c), as well as the collection of students' demographic data from its semester registration system.

Chapter 5: Empirical Work

This chapter presents the qualitative data gathered in the course of the empirical work on the ‘quality of life’ and ‘higher education experiences’ of minority individuals (micro-level). Elements associated with each one the five QoL dimensions are presented, and the major trends across the sample highlighted. The second section of the chapter provides an overview of the most important (i.e. meaningful) qualitative elements gathered from the interviews.

5.1 Describing and Interpreting Data

The analysis of content as a research technique has been broadly defined as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages” (Holsti 1968: 608, in Berg 1989: 223-4). As such, content analysis provides a method for obtaining good access to the words of the text or transcribed accounts offered by subjects (Glassner & Loughlin 1987, in Berg 1989). Thus, content analysis “is not a reductionistic, positivistic approach. Rather, it is a passport to listening to the words of the text, and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words” (Berg 1989: 225). According to some, during the process of qualitative analysis it is paramount that the researcher understands respondents as people and attempts to develop a cognitive understanding of their social worlds from the perspective of their own viewpoints and personal experiences (Mostyn 1985: 121).

The most important analytical elements per QoL domain are thoroughly described below. Please note that in some cases, the quotations used were slightly modified or re-phrased from the original script in order to ease interpretation and protect individuals’ anonymity.

5.1.1 Economic Capital

In light of the five QoL domains studied (Table 6), the economic dimension (or ‘capital’) sheds light on such elements as: (a) the relevancy and attractiveness of an individual’s HE profile in the context of the local labour-market; (b) the access to the labour-market prior, during, and after graduation; (c) the overall economic and social benefits provided by the current employer; (d) an indication of one’s standard of living (possessions, consumption

patterns, leisure, etc.); and, (e) the ‘subjective’ (self-) assessment by the interviewee of the contributions (impacts) of HE to one’s financial well-being. The major trends with regard to the ‘economic capital’ are as follows:

Attractiveness of Higher Education

When inquired about the attractiveness of their HE (area of expertise) in the local labor market, a split seem to exist between those (2 persons) who felt their skills had a higher demand, and the ones (4 persons) skeptical with respect to job mobility. Members of the first group provided statements like; “I am optimistic, there is a lot of use for the knowledge on the issues me and others [professional peers] are working on”. On the other hand, the less optimistic group pointed to recent difficulties within the professional field or industry (e.g. IT), the lack of recognition of degrees (e.g. less applied areas or less main stream theories), as well as structural difficulties inherent to the local labor market (e.g. ethnic discrimination). With respect to the latter factor, one of the respondents working for a major international (civic) organization commented: “I am confident that I could get a job elsewhere... [However] in Norway whether your education is good or not is not enough...I call it ‘structural violence’ within the system...you can have a good education relevant to society but because you are not Norwegian-born you are not qualified!”

Examples of ‘disqualification’ were given on the basis of *language*, “used technically to put you out of the labor market!” This element seems to connect (somehow) with our earlier discussion on the difficulty of obtaining the first job if one does not possess a relevant social network. Political factors were also mentioned: “Left parties are more minority-friendly, so if there is a future change in government (from centre-right to centre-left) there may be opportunities for those of us specialized in these areas (minority issues/education)”. Overall, when crossing individuals’ demographic characteristics (see appendix 3), our analysis seems to point to the fact that those closest to higher levels of educational achievement (the doctoral) are the ones more confident (optimistic) on their job mobility in the near future. However, these also tend to be the ones with the longer full-time working experience.

Access to the Local Labour Market

The majority of the interviewees (four out of six) gained access to their current (or previous) job without ever sending a personal résumé (CV). As one of the interviewees stated, “I never applied for any jobs, but got an offer to participate in a project after graduation through a contact close to my academic supervisor”. Another one commented, “Before I started in my previous job, I had several job offers...since I was known as an expert in the field and have a considerable high profile”. A third one highlighted, “I have just finished my final (master) thesis and already have a working project lined-up for the next twelve months”. Indeed, key contacts (social network) close to one’s professional area of interest/expertise seem to have been the key criteria to gain access to the labour market, especially so in the case of the first (full-time) job experience.

One interviewee outlined, “After my first job I could get other jobs, but the first job, especially for foreigners is very, very difficult...almost impossible! In my case, I did not have any old friends from kindergarten or something liked that.” This person went on describing the difficult process of gaining access to the local labour market prior and after graduation. “I sent more than one hundred CVs, and was not called for a single interview...it became easier after I finished my master’s degree”. Many acknowledged that after the first (full-time) job it was easier to gain access to the local labour market. “It is as if you have been accepted (certified) by the system!” It is important to mention that all respondents worked (part-time, some even full-time) during their HE studies. However, during this period, only two of them undertook (working) activities directly related to their field of studies. In short, HE in tandem with relevant job experience and an active (relevant) social network seem to have been the key conditions for gaining access to the local labour market.

Nature of the job

Four of the six respondents currently employed (full/part-time) have a job that is directly related to their HE studies. Of the remaining two, one is temporarily unemployed and the other is a full-time student. These two expressed general concerns about the attractiveness of one’s (HE) background. “No one really knows very much what sort of jobs you can get with this (undergraduate) degree” or, “I am not sure I will ever be able to use this (graduate) degree!” One of the problems (former case) is due to the old (i.e. prior to the Quality Reform) undergraduate degree system where students were freely allowed to collect credits

across disciplinary fields and areas of personal interest, without necessarily engaging in any particular specialisation or area of expertise. This issue seems to be more critical in the case of those who have undertaken studies in 'less pragmatic' (marketable) fields/disciplines such as the social sciences or the humanities.

One of the respondents decided to pursue a totally different professional direction even after having successfully undertaken the highest level of academic achievement, the doctorate. When asked about the (economic) returns on education, the reply given was, "I did not adopt a consumer perspective on my studies...I cannot compare the level of satisfaction with my current job", i.e. less money but more pleasure! Surprisingly, this attitude was seen across all the six respondents where the nature (and satisfaction) of the job was considered to be the number one criteria rather than its financial outlook. One of the respondents suffered a considerable loss of income from a previous job. "I went down dramatically but this job is a kind of future investment". Another one commented, "Many people thought it was odd to take this [current] job after all my education".

Three of the respondents held jobs directly related to their HE studies, in the sense that all of them are currently employed by their former academic departments, though only in one case directly after graduation. These three individuals are (legally) provided with the same benefits (social/professional) given to their native counterparts, i.e. social security, taxation, working allowances, etc. However, as one of the respondents mentioned, "The legal rights are one thing but the informal tips and tricks on how to get more from the system (e.g. pay less taxation) are not accessible to all, especially to foreigners. You need to have contacts, e.g. access to a public office, a lawyer, knowledgeable family-member, etc."

Standard of Living

The overall standard of living of the six respondents can be categorised in two major groups. The first and most comfortable group (3 persons) is composed by those who have stable marital relations and whose partners (equally highly educated) also possess a full-time job. This group tends to have an average of two children per couple with ages varying from 15 years old to recently born. In addition, two of the three own a house (the third has housing included as a work benefit), all have their private car, and all go regularly on holiday abroad to visit relatives or on leisure. Due to the fact that they have young family members

(children), these individuals' life-styles have been adjusted accordingly with those preferring to undertake more 'home activities' in the company of friends and/or family members. Financially, individuals belonging to this first group seem rather comfortable and are fairly satisfied with their 'purchasing power' and 'material wealth'. "We [nuclear family] have a very relaxed life!"

The second group (3 persons) is composed by individuals without full-time employment in recent months (only one is currently having an income via part-time employment). Within this group, a distinction must be made, between those (2 persons) who have family responsibilities (dependents) and the one who does not ('single/bachelor'). In the former case, the two individuals struggle considerably financially, especially so since their partners (spouse and/or co-habiting partner) do not have full-time employment either. These (two) individuals barely manage to cover their monthly expenses, have fairly modest life-styles (no restaurants or cinemas, etc.), and cannot afford to buy their own house, i.e. get a loan. Furthermore, in one of the cases, the pressure to 'help' other family members (relatives) is also there. "Once in a while I get a call from back home asking for some financial support". However, the single individual (no direct dependents) this spends most of his/her time at work and (still) has a life-style that can be characterised as 'typical student', i.e. going out with friends during the week, a party here and there, unplanned schedules, etc. This individual neither owns a house nor possesses a private vehicle. Travelling abroad occurs mostly through one's work rather than for leisure activities. Regarding 'student debt' only one of the six interviewees did not acquire a student loan (via Lånekassen) since he/she got a scholarship from the (Norwegian) government combined with income from part-time work.

Impact of Higher Education

When inquired directly about the contribution of HE to the overall economic situation surrounding one's life, the (subjective) assessment by the interviewees revealed the following tendencies. The individuals composing the first group described above ('better off') differ slightly in their assessments. The first of the interviewees categorically mentioned that one's recent job-shift did not bring economic benefits: "I could earn more money in the private sector...this environment (public sector/education) does not bring financial prosperity". The second individual, also undertaking an academic career, sheds light on the importance of the 'holistic dimension'. When asked if HE has had any economic

contribution, the reply was: “Absolutely yes! However, not only my education from Norway but also my previous educational background [home country], and the support provided by my parents. All these factors enabled me to make the right choices at the right time”. The third member composing this group possessed a job unrelated to his/her HE and is over-qualified for the role. Access to his/her current job (with good financial benefits) would have been possible without the attainment of HE per se, even though the latter is seen as major benefit in helping to cope with job tasks and (new) emergent circumstances. “HE has helped me taking critical decisions in my daily tasks!”

As for the second group introduced in the previous section (i.e. ‘less stable economically’), the first individual who struggles financially has not gotten any economic pay-off (yet) as result of his/her educational attainment. “My HE has not contributed to my financial situation, but it has given me a sense of empowerment. It provided me with the necessary ‘cultural capital’”. As for the second interviewee, when asked about the pay-off of one’s HE, there was an acknowledgement of the importance of the latter, however, not in the short term. “I have a huge student loan, and I don’t have house or car!” Lastly, the third respondent commented, “Higher education had a minimum impact on my financial situation”. It is important to bare in mind that two of the three individuals composing this second group have never had a full-time job, and none of them has (yet) completed their graduate studies; though all have completed their undergraduate degrees (in one of the cases more than one programme).

5.1.2 Social Capital

With respect to one’s ‘social capital’, the study focuses on three main individual networks: *family; friends/acquaintances*, and broader *social communities*.

Family

Only two out of the six interviewees indicated having close family members (parents, brothers/sisters) living in Norway. A third one possessed distant relatives in the country both in the greater Oslo area and beyond. However, in the first two cases, the immediate family was spread across the country and fairly inaccessible from Oslo (North, South, West). Nonetheless, the geographic distance was not a barrier in keeping regular contact with one’s family. As two of the respondents pointed out: “I speak with them [close family members]

almost daily on the phone, and we visit each other frequently...this is the only family I have” or “My mother is the centre of information, through her I know what’s going on with all the others”. The second case (distant relatives) stated: “We meet each other regularly, usually at our houses and have tea together”. Nonetheless, one’s economic situation does have an impact in family relations, especially so amongst those facing the most financial challenges: “They [direct family] meet regular at Christmas or during the summer but I cannot afford the trip, so I don’t see them so often”, or “I have two sisters living in the Nordic area and I have visited them three times...However, I have not seen my mother back home for a long time, the trip is very costly”.

On the other hand, of the remaining (four) respondents with direct family members living outside Norway, three kept a close contact and visited them regularly in their countries of residence once or twice a year. This led to considerable financial stretch, especially so in those cases where one’s nuclear family is relatively numerous (e.g. three children and wife) and the direct family members live in countries far away from the Nordic region (e.g. Africa). “It will cost us all [nuclear family] around 45.000 NOK just for the trip!” With regard to financial and/or emotional support, the great majority of respondents indicated that they could count on their family members in case of any problems, nonetheless, ‘emotional support’ was seen as more relevant (and practical) than financial aid. One of the interviewees stated: “They [brothers and sisters] have big cars and big houses and also struggle to pay their bills...” Not surprisingly, amongst those with children (5 persons), and long-term partners (husband/wife) (4 persons), one’s nuclear family was seen as the most important (central) element in one’s life.

As for partners’ nationality, amongst those (5 persons) with relationships, only one is Norwegian-born, with two of them having a current partner from the same country of origin. Another interesting element found concerns parental influence in one’s educational aspirations. “Both my parents are highly educated...I remember talking regularly with them about my plans for the future, which also included studying abroad...They have always been very supportive, and pushed us [children] to excel in school”, or “In my family, education has always been a priority. My parents always said to us [brothers and sisters], ‘this is your job!’ ...To drop-out was out of the question...They have always been very selective in the type of schools we enrolled at” or “Both my elder brother and my uncle took HE and

motivated me to go to university...I travelled from the Indian ocean to the Atlantic ocean just to find a place to study. It was very hard to leave my family behind”.

On the other hand, those whose parents were not necessarily highly educated seem to be more ‘inner driven’: “My family was not very educated, we came from under-middle class...I have always been a good student and once I moved to Norway, to enrol at the university was my number one priority!” or “My parents never really motivated us [brothers and sisters] to undertake higher education...My mother was more of the pragmatic type, she loved middle-class life (e.g. car, TV, house, etc.)...My dream was always to get into the university, I moved into the city because of that”. A final example stated: “Higher education was my personal initiative! My father was a little educated (basic level) and I remember him sending me to school, my mother was not educated at all but she provided all the resources for school...I was the only one in the family to get into the university, the motivation and endurance were internally generated”.

Friendships and Acquaintances

With respect to friends, all respondents indicated that in one way or another, foreigners were an important element of their (intimate) social network. One individual indicated, “When I think deep, I have no Norwegian friends, it is sad but it’s true!” Others seem to be more balanced, “I have both foreign and Norwegian friends, and of course, I behave differently with either group. Friendships in my own country have a different meaning”. Another respondent stated, “My closest friends are both foreigner, however I do go for a beer after work with some of my Norwegian colleagues”. Language seems to be an important element surrounding one’s friendships; “I speak my own language when I am with people from my country” or “I mostly use two languages with my friends, my own and English”. One of the respondents seems to have (almost exclusively) friends from his/her own country: “I used to have a good Norwegian friend but I got disappointed...Friendship is a kind of soul-mate, and it is very difficult to find this feeling!”

As for the origin of the friendships, in three cases they came from one’s own (current/previous) job network: “All my close friends are also my colleagues” or “I met most of my Norwegian friends either at work or during my higher education studies”. *Leisure activities* are another important social space regarding friendships: “I have friends from

different milieus...We play football together, video-games, etc.” or “I used to go mountain biking with a group of seasonal [migrant] foreign workers in the summer”. In four of the cases, the HE experience had a considerable impact on one’s friendships: “I met all my friends on campus”, or “I socialise often with international students spending a period in Norway”. Lastly, in the majority of the cases, one’s close friends also possess high levels of educational attainment: “All my friends have higher education degrees”.

Other Social Communities or Networks

An important element shared across all but one interviewee is the extent to which individuals are *not* directly involved with their own ethnic community. “I’ve tried several of the cultural communities from my own country but did not share the same interests [e.g. religion, nostalgia for the past, etc.]”, or “I have no special involvement with people from my country”. A respondent from Africa expressed difficulties in being part of his/her own domestic (national/ethnic) community in Norway: “They [countrymen] are native English speakers and I am not, we do not share the same values and life orientations”. Another African respondent commented on the loyalty dilemmas of belonging to a specific community: “There are different competing national facets (e.g. by region or tribe) amongst my own ethnic community here in Norway, and they don’t like it if you have contacts with the other side”.

In the case of the only respondent directly involved with his/her (national) ethnic community in Norway, the level of involvement is very high: “My ethnic community uses me as a resource. I know the system well and how it works. I provide a mediating role between ‘them’ [natives] and ‘us’...I am trusted amongst my own countrymen, also because I am one of the few highly educated”. Two of the respondents kept a distant contact with their own (national) ethnic communities spread across the world (‘diasporas’): “I try to keep a contact with those, who like me, have also left the country...When I go back [visit own country] I try to organise social events where we can all meet” or “Once or twice a month, I chat online with other people from my country who are now living in other countries...It is a way of keeping connected”.

With regard to *religion*, this factor plays an important role in three of the cases (all citizens from an African country, very strongly amongst two of them): “I am an active member of the

religious association” or “Religion is the core of my life!” The remaining (three) respondents clearly stated that they were not, as such, religious persons. It was also common across all respondents to be part of professional communities of reference. When inquired about the impact of HE in the access to broad social networks, all interviewees acknowledged its importance: “Higher education is very important! For example, if you don’t have language competency you cannot do anything in Norway, you need to talk with the locals in order to get into the social networks that give you access to the labour market, or even to get general info about the system (taxation, social benefits, etc.)”. “My education, combined with my working experience and ethnical background, has enabled me access to new social spaces” or “Higher education acts as a mirror effect... You are respected for what you have achieved, it is a kind of ‘social capital’ ”. “I met all my friends and acquaintances on campus, this physical and social space lies at the centre of my life in Norway”.

5.1.3 Civic Capital

This QoL domain sheds light on the extent to which individuals are active, politically and civically, in the host society. Of the six respondents, four have Norwegian citizenship. Those are also the ones with the longest period of stay in Norway (average stay across the four is 16 years). The remaining two individuals (‘non-citizens’) have an average stay of 10 years. One of them expressed no desire to become a Norwegian citizen: “I am a real refugee that is who I am, if I naturalise I loose my status”. The other respondent expressed concerns with having to give-away one’s nationality: “We [self plus partner] are in a dilemma... We would like to go back to our country one day, and our children should have this ethnical reference”. One of the respondents mentioned practical reasons whilst applying for citizenship: “I was planning to study abroad, and it was much easier if I had Norwegian nationality”.

All six respondents were entitled to vote and most exercised this right, nonetheless, the levels of involvement in (domestic) political debates varied. Three of the individuals were very active politically and were highly involved with issues concerning ‘education’, ‘minorities’, ‘integration’, etc. “I have been a member of a political party for a while” or “I am often contacted by several parties in the issues I am involved with” or “I meet regularly with members of political parties (mostly left-wing) with regard to the issues facing my ethnic community”. A fourth individual acted (for a short period) as a political representative for his/her ethnic community: “I felt uncomfortable with the mediating, political role... My

age [too young] was also an issue”. A fifth respondent has been (partly) active in student politics but, as such, does not belong to any political party.

With respect to following national (political) debates two groups were identified. The first, composed by four individuals, follows very closely social debates in the media with a special interest in minority issues and the future of the welfare state: “I read many different newspapers, I like to gain different perspectives on the same issue” or “I engage in critical social debates with my friends as well”. “I mostly watch the debates on TV (NRK1 and TV2)...I have also participated in public demonstrations”. An interviewee pursuing an academic career commented: “The work I do is pretty much political. I am involved in the way the knowledge I produce is used in practice”. The second group (2 persons), on the other hand, does not follow national debates so passionately: “I don’t read any Norwegian newspaper, but I watch the evening news” When asked about the discourses surrounding the ‘integration of minority groups living in Norway’ two of the respondents highlighted: “Once in a while I follow the debates on TV but it is only words and no action...We have heard these intentions previously, so I don’t pay any attention anymore!” or “It is important to understand the ideologies behind the discourses”.

Finally, while accessing the (subjective) impacts of HE on the ‘civic capital’, all but one interviewee recognised a direct connection: “I use the methodologies learnt (e.g. Freire, Goethe) to interpret the macro and micro environments”, or “My education helped me in the critical analysis of public discourses”. “Being aware of those [civic] issues contributed to my integration” or “It is very, very important, to know what’s going on in politics, what it is all about! To understand the position of minorities and to be able to judge what is only talk from meaningful actions...There are many (minorities) who do not know what to do, where to go, who to meet. Information and knowledge is key”. A sceptical respondent replied: “Higher education did not contribute at all...I was much more involved in political issues before coming to Norway...This environment [university] is very mild in politics...However, my academic tools did help me structuring my views on both, Norwegian society as well as the world”.

5.1.4 Personal Capital or ‘Self’

This QoL domain focuses on the exploration of the impacts of HE on the development of individuals’ professional identities, personality, self-esteem, and values and beliefs.

Professional Identity

With the exception of one interviewee, HE seems to have played an important role in the ‘shaping’ of professional identities. This exception occurred in the case of an individual whose professional role is not (at all) associated with his/her HE attainment. Overall, the *field of studies* and the *character of the discipline* are both critical elements in the way individuals see themselves. Nonetheless, such connections were not always straightforward. A respondent that recently started professional (academic) socialisation stated: “I have this (professional) identity because of the equipment (methodologies, theories, etc.). I use, but I don’t have a strong relation to my professional status”. Another (more senior) academic professional said: “I feel scared thinking of not having my professional identity, it is as if I would loose part of myself!” Others reflected upon the impact of their professional *images* and *roles*: “I see myself as a religious professional with the characteristics of a lecturer. I have become much more abstract on my thinking. For example, when I deliver a sermon I feel that I am really lecturing”.

Some of the respondents, on the other hand, did not perceive HE to have had a strong impact on their identity formation: “I am not really sure! I built myself according to the circumstances and places, a process of self-discovery, often through various books [not necessarily academic-related]” or “I have chosen this subject at the university as I was trying to understand who I was as a person”. One of the respondents, reflecting on his/her broad HE background (i.e. humanities, social sciences, and educational sciences), stressed the fact that ‘professional identity’ is related to one’s long term commitment to a profession: “I don’t feel any job security in any of my study fields. It is then difficult to say something about my professional identity!”

While inquiring about the impact of *role-models* (e.g. teachers, peers, etc.) during the process of identity formation, all interviewees acknowledged the importance of a close teacher/supervisor/mentor during the educational experience, despite differences in degree. This was seen in such statements as: “He has been a model for me on how to be a good

human being” or “I had this fantastic geography teacher in secondary school. I really wanted to be a cartographer!”. “I once had a lecturer, the way he talked and described the subject was so fascinating that for the first time in my life I thought to myself: I wish I was him”, or “He is a kind of a mentor (and father figure), pushing me to be focused and finish my academic work”.

Personality

Interviewees were asked about their *personality traits* and the extent to which these may have been influenced by their HE experience. The comments varied in degree: “I am an energetic, effective and fast-thinking person...This is partly nature and partly nurture...I owe a lot to education in the way I organise things, the way I think or reflect within a certain method. More abstract/analytical”, or “I read a lot of literature and philosophy (e.g. Hemmingway, Tolstøy, etc.), this has helped me in the formation of my personality, as well as the way I handle my emotions. Especially in Norway, where everyone is more controlled!”. “Education taught me that the world is complex. I now realise that, as a person, it is ok to be complex also! It is a kind of confidence on my complexity”, or “Higher education helped me to be goal oriented, as well as gain a sense of continuous improvement, i.e. that learning has no end”.

Others, reflecting on the nature of their professional/academic field, shed light on the ‘chicken and egg’ dilemma: “It is a two-way street, I choose it [field] because I liked the environment...People have humour, are creative, and have a laid-back life-style...This world [own professional field] is dominated by men, we are some kind of geeks, but I love it since it fits my personality”. Other respondents were more direct: “My professional [religious] identity influences my personality and behaviour. For example, I cannot wash the car on Sundays as this is a day where one is supposed to take a rest from work” or “I see myself as a ‘multiculturalist’ since I do want to know more about other places and people”.

Self-esteem

In order to comprehend the extent to which individuals’ self-esteem is/has been influenced by HE, the following questions were posed: ‘Does the knowledge taught at the university/college make you feel more confident on your own ideas and perspectives, or while addressing complex issues?’; ‘How do you feel when other people criticise your

opinions or have a different perspective of seeing things?'; 'Do you feel more valuable as a person after your HE experience?'. This enquiry led to many different reflections: "Higher education gave me the academic validity to talk about critical issues...I have learnt from pedagogy [e.g. Freire] that no matter who you are, you are a valuable person!" or "I think it is a combination of elements...My parents saw the strengths in me, their optimism was enormous and fantastic...Feedback from peers is also important...I don't struggle with lack of capacity [e.g. depression] but with lack of time!". Other respondents highlighted: "Higher education has had a 95% impact on the fact that I strongly believe in myself. That I have achieved all these things on my own. This gave me the confidence to embrace new challenges". "I am relaxed and comfortable with myself, partly because of my understanding of myself, partly due to my analytical understanding of things around me". A final respondent stressed a sense of responsibility and life purpose: "Higher education has had a strong effect on my self-esteem. I struggled in order to get an education so it would be useful to myself, as well as other people; a means to something".

Values and Beliefs

Regarding more normative dimensions, the respondents elaborated the (direct/indirect) impact of HE on their personal values and beliefs. "Learning about such issues as 'multiculturalism', 'democracy', and 'social justice' made me realise that if I stop talking about what's wrong, then it will be difficult for others coming after me...I feel a sense of responsibility in help changing things" or "I read a lot about the different ideologies, i.e. democracy, welfare, republicanism, multiculturalism. Some are more aspiring rather than 'real politics'. I have fallen for the multicultural debate that I want to be a part of". An African interviewee stressed the importance of 'Western values': "I've got new values like 'rationality'; to use one's intellectual capacity fully. I respect a lot the way Westerners work and I feel part of them, despite differences in religion and culture". The same respondent emphasised the 'humanistic orientation' of Norwegian society: "I saw in practice how they treated the weak, the elder, nature, etc., and I said to myself: 'These people are very good!'...If one day I go back to my own country, there will be little difference between me and a Norwegian living there. I'll be seen as a stranger due to my (new) way of thinking and talking!"

One of the interviewees stressed the 'value' dimension surrounding academia: "To an extent, when it comes to applying for (research) funds, you need the money and you know where it

is (e.g. development projects). You wonder if people really care in helping developing countries. I do ask myself this question every time: Am I really making a difference?”. Some, on the other hand, shed light on the difficulty of analysing personal *values* and *beliefs*: “They [values/beliefs] come from many different places; family, friends, society, teachers, peers, etc.” Finally, one of the respondents highly involved with civic issues mentioned: “Higher education taught me two main things. Firstly, that everybody can change the situation they live in. Secondly, that ‘social capital’ in the form of supportive networks is critical to one’s life. Unfortunately, most people today put more emphasis on the ‘economic capital’! “

5.1.5 External Capital or ‘Surrounding Environment’

The last section of the interview guide focused on the macro-level conditions surrounding individuals’ daily-life situations. The main objective of studying this QoL domain is to comprehend the degree to which: (a) individuals feel discriminated (i.e. are treated differently); (b) see themselves as part of mainstream Norwegian society; (c) assess Norway as a country to live; and (d) HE contributes to integration/acclimation efforts.

Social Exclusion/Discrimination

Overall, all respondents indicated that they have been target of some form of discrimination, either ‘hidden’ or ‘visible’. The most positive of the respondents with regard to this particular issue stressed: “I would not call it ‘discrimination’ but ‘disfavour’ for not being a born member of this society”. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile mentioning that this (latter) respondent is the only one possessing a European background and physical appearance resembling the native population (light skin-colour, blond hair, blue eyes, etc). Amongst the remaining five interviewees, four can be characterised as ‘particularly critical’ of the way Norwegian society tackles such issues as: ‘respect for diversity’, ‘ethnic discrimination’, and ‘pluralism’. One of the individuals composing this group has been facing considerable challenges in coping with the local culture, despite his/her considerable long period in the country, i.e. more than 20 years. When asked about the levels of social inclusion, he/she replied: “I feel very alone with my thinking...I read a lot and try to find trust in my own children. I feel I am too open and emotional for this country! I am easily miss-understood”. Stories of unequal treatment soon surfaced in the eyes of some of the interviewees. “There are some hidden ways in how to communicate this attitude. For example: judgmental looks

in the streets for being seen together with a foreign partner; preferential treatment in public services, etc.” or “Formally, all the laws protect you [minority], but in practical terms you feel you are not part of the group (e.g., at work)”. One of the two African respondents commented: “Minority groups in Norway are classified on the basis of colour. Other Scandinavians do not feel as foreigner”. The same respondent went on highlighting: “The treatment you get is based on your language accent. There is a strong correlation between born or socialised in Norway and social mobility. If you do well in life, people automatically assume you were born here!” The differences in treatment were confirmed by another respondent: “My partner could not rent a house while studying because of his/her physical look (i.e. ‘foreigner’), but the landlord rent it to one of his/hers Norwegian friends.”

As for the social places of discrimination, several respondents mentioned public services that handle immigrant-related issues, such as the ‘Police’ or the ‘UDI’ (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration). “They [police/customs] stopped me while driving the car, and asked if the car was my own and if I possessed a valid driver’s licence. My wife was sitting besides me and they assumed it was her car because she was better (formally) dressed than me!” or “We went to the police station to denounce a serious crime that was going on in an immigrant residential area. They totally ignored us! I am sure this would not have happen if we were Norwegians”. “They see your passport saying ‘Norway’ but look at you and can see you are a foreigner, so they go and double-check to see if your papers are valid!” or “I was going to travel and needed to renew my documents. I called several times and even went there [Police] directly. I felt ignored all the time! I was told later on by friends that I should have asked a Norwegian friend to call on my behalf.”

Additional personal stories include: “When you come from Africa, they [public services] assume you are retired! They talk to as if you were a child” or “We went back home for a period after which our Norwegian visa had expired. My current job wrote them (UDI) a good reference letter so I could get into the country (again) to work, but they really made it difficult for me”. The labour market also surfaced as one of the social spaces where discriminatory behaviour occurs: “My partner lost his/her job and because he/she was a foreign they (employer/social office) did not give him/her the same unemployment compensation provided to Norwegians”. A final respondent commented: “I had once some problems in my current work place. A working colleague who did not know me at all

assumed that because I was a foreign, I would be lazy and irresponsible. These sorts of stereotypes are still out there!” In addition, the educational system (school) seems to be another social space where diversity is not (always) well received: “My children have received harmful comments from class mates, this makes them feel different!” or “My child has class mates from several countries but there is not a single reference (e.g. flags) to them at the school. All the commemorations (e.g. Christmas, Easter) are only done ‘one way’; the ‘Norwegian way’”

When inquired about the overall level of integration in Norwegian society, one of the respondents replied promptly: “I really don’t like the concept or ideology of ‘integration’, in my opinion being integrated is not a good thing. I do not want to be identified as a Norwegian! Don’t get me wrong, I like them but I don’t agree with many things” Two other respondents reacted similarly when asked about their citizenship: “I don’t want to be identified as one of them [Norwegian], this would be to betray my own community of reference” or “It [citizenship] wouldn’t change my status at all. I will still look different and they can see you are not from here...The skin-colour is an issue”. Lastly, one of the respondents encountered problems within the HE system: “I have assisted to a few situations where ethnical comments of a discriminatory nature were done. Some people, including myself, got surprised and hurt that this could happen at the university level.”

Structural Elements

Of the six interviewees only one (of European heritage) can be characterised as identifying him/herself with mainstream Norwegian society. All the others used terms like ‘foreigner’, ‘immigrant’, ‘minority’, or ‘outsider’ to describe their life situations. While at work, one of the respondents commented: “Everyone [colleagues] thinks you were born here since you are doing pretty well. This is another reason why I enjoy my ‘foreign’ status so I can help change this stereotype”. Another one said: “The feeling that everyone around you does not speak your own language is always with you...I still feel like a foreigner”. The same person shed light on some contradictory elements composing Norwegian society: “There are many structural contradictions in Norway, you are expected to be yourself as a unique individual but at the same time you have to look pretty much like the others, i.e. individuality versus the philosophy of sameness or *Likehet*“. A very critical interviewee stated: “It is very difficult to be yourself in Norway! The focus is on adapting, adapting...If you become more

like the majority you have no problems. Unfortunately, I have problems with this way of thinking.”

In the context of this discussion, one of the respondents shed light on the issue of ‘social class’ surrounding immigrant communities, “This issue (class) is key to understand the status of immigrants in Norway. For example, ‘asylum seekers’ are not accorded the same status as ‘international students’...These sort of discussions concern the relations between the ‘majority’ and the ‘minority’. The majority position is always taken for granted (automatic), and is never debated openly or questioned...I am privileged since my education both from Norway and my own country gave me a ‘capital’ that is key in determining my social positioning”. The same interviewee also reflected on Norway’s ‘nation-building’ mode: “The strong nation-state ideology affects considerably immigration policies. There are integration problems every day!” While commenting on the 17th of May (national commemorations), he/she stressed: “There is a clear clash [contradiction] between a strong sense of unique national (and cultural) identity and an open pluralistic (multi-ethnic) society”.

One of the interviewees suggested a way out of these sorts of dilemmas: “Minorities in good social positions should be publicly shown as ‘success cases’ to both minority groups, as well as the majority population. This would deliver a strong message across the two communities. First, that the system offers possibilities, and, equally important, that minorities also contribute to Norwegian society. The government needs to do more to promote this! ...‘Multiculturalism’ should mean that all ‘success cases’ are showcased, not only the ones of the dominant culture”. The same respondent went on highlighting that the *few* successful cases from his/hers ethnic community, “end up disappearing in the system, rather than being used as bridges for integration”.

Another important element highlighted by many of the interviewees relates to Norwegian society’s orientation towards conflict-avoidance: “I know people who have hated each-other for a long time but have never expressed their feelings openly. This is not possible in my own country. In Norway, you have to learn how to use ‘language’ in a very skilful way, i.e. not to clash directly with someone, by using terms such as ‘ikke got å si’, ‘det er mulig der’, ‘jaaaa’. This is an art and takes a while to master!” In a similar vein, a second respondent

outlined: “My personality pushes me to be rather direct when conflicts arise, but if I do it, it is [professional] suicide!”

Impact of Higher Education

When inquired about the overall impact of HE in the context of one’s acquaintance/integration with Norwegian society, in one way or another, all six respondents acknowledged its importance. “My education in Norway, together with my working experience, has made me aware of how to position myself in this society. For example, how to handle my emotional side and separate the professional from the personal”, or “The introductory course in ‘Norwegian society and culture’ at the university plus the long-term stay in this country, were very important elements in order to understand the local values. To really know what they mean. For example: the importance of punctuality; raising your arm if you want to speak; etc.” When asked if HE had helped him/her ‘coping’ with the host society, one of the respondents replied: “Rationally yes! Hypothetically yes! But I could tell you the same if I had a restaurant and got access to certain valuable assets like money and social esteem”. Further, the importance of ‘social networking’ was outlined by some: “The contacts I have developed around this environment [HE] are critical for my future position in this country”. Structural barriers were once again referred to: “I feel higher education gave me the ‘capability’ to be more integrated but I don’t get the ‘possibility’ to do so.”

Norway as a Country

As part of the conversation on the broader surrounding environment, all respondents were asked the following question: ‘Based on your own personal experiences, what would you say to a close friend or family member willing to move permanently to Norway? As expected, the nature of the responses differs slightly. Nonetheless, some common patterns could be observed. For example, a cautious respondent replied: “I would encourage anyone to experience Norway (the country, the nature, the people), but I would not go that far as to encourage anyone to leave their own country and come to Norway. This is a very personal decision and requires self-judgement, pros and cons...I also would not like anyone to tell me to go back to my own country, this is my own decision...Deciding to stay in Norway was a very complex decision for me to make. I was brave in a way, since I was able to break those strong bonds I had with family and friends!” Another interviewee warned: “I would not suggest people to live here because it is very cold. The main thing is to believe in yourself!

No matter where you are in the world you need to know where you stand. I could never use the right words to say to someone if Norway suits them or not. Some people have what is needed (i.e. personality, character, motivation) others don't!"

Half of the respondents emphasised the *background* and the *circumstances* surrounding one's tentative move to Norway: "It all depends on the person's background. If the person has higher education and a secured job in Norway than it is ok. Otherwise, it would be better not to come", or "It pretty much depends on your background (education, qualifications, occupation, etc.). There are, of course, many challenges like the weather, the culture, the cost of living, and the job-market, but someone with good working experience and a proper job can have a good life here with true freedom". One interviewee was even more specific: "There are basically three options: (1) get own means of financial independence; 2) make sure one's qualifications are needed in the local labour market; and/or, 3) come to Norway via the state's church". The same individual went on stressing: "Norway is a small country. The culture is rather closed and peoples' experience with foreigners is very limited. On paper ('law') this country is very nice. However, in practice, there are many challenges. For example, the problem of 'self-realisation'. It is not wise to come to Norway with high (life) expectations, it is much easier to just find a simple job and settle down!"

When inquired if Norway and Norwegians would not be too closed as a people/country for a person coming from Africa one of the three African interviewees stated: "Sure! It is a difficult aspect here but in Oslo there is a big international community composed of outsiders. Life here would get really lonely for many without the existence of this foreign community". Reflecting on their own experience from other parts of Norway (e.g. North, South, West) three of the respondents highlighted: "People from small towns are more open than in Oslo. Everybody knows each other, cities are different. Even in (mid-size) cities like Bodø there is a strong sense of community", or "The North was easier for all of us (family). There are many foreigners in Oslo and there is some crime amongst this community. They are unemployed and get involved in criminal activities, so they carry a negative stereotype here (Oslo). Up North, however, there are not that many foreigners and the ones living there are fairly well integrated. In general, Northerners are more receptive to strangers".

5.2 Summarising the Findings

Having presented the most relevant empirical data gathered during the interviews, it is now time to provide a brief overview of the most important qualitative elements (and disclosed trends) with regard to the five QoL dimensions.

The Economic Capital

Attractiveness of higher education

- Two distinct groups were found: one composed of ‘sceptics’ and the other of ‘optimists’. The latter group possesses higher educational attainments (i.e. doctoral), and more years of full-time working experience.
- Macro-economic and structural elements: Industry turmoil (e.g. IT sector); problems in the recognition of old degrees (prior to 2003 reform); discriminatory behaviour in the labour market; and, society ideological orientations, i.e. conservative (right-wing) versus more liberal governments with regards to minority issues (left-wing).

Access to the local labour market

- Personal contacts (social network) seen as a key element, especially with regard to the first job.
- Market opens up after the first experience due to ‘certification’ element plus broader contact network.

Nature of one’s job

- Majority of currently employed have job related to their HE studies.
- Nature and satisfaction of the job more important than its financial benefits.
- Same legal rights and conditions provided to natives, but ‘informal’ element (e.g. access to information about the system) seen as important and more restricted to ‘outsiders’.

Standard of living

- Two distinct groups: better off versus worse off (split evenly).
- *Better off group*: Individuals possess stable families including partners with full time employment. They have dependents (two children, average), and own or have access to private housing. They also own their private transportation and travel regularly abroad (leisure). Overall, they are rather comfortable economically and their life style can be characterised as traditional ‘middle class’.
- *Worse off group*: Neither individuals nor their partners have full-time employment. They have dependents (one children, average), and their life-styles (e.g. consumption patterns) can be considered as very modest (i.e. working class level). They neither own private housing nor any means of transportation. One of these individuals is also pressured (‘expected’) to support their close family members back home.

The impact of the higher education experience on the economic capital

Overall, a lower than expected impact given the evidence provided by the ‘human capital’ school (section 3.1.2). Nonetheless, half of the respondents can be characterised as having a “positive” outlook with regard to their ‘economic capital’. The length and the nature of educational studies were found to have a slight impact, with those studying more specialised (applied) subjects at higher levels (doctoral) obtaining the highest (economic) returns.

The Social Capital

Family

- Only a few individuals have close family members in Norway, and even in those cases those are dispersed throughout the country. One’s financial situation was found to have an impact on the periodicity of (family) visits and gatherings. Those individuals having a comfortable financial situation (better off) whose family members live outside Norway often visit them overseas.
- Families are an important basis for financial and emotional support. Nevertheless, the latter aspect was seen as more relevant in the majority of the cases. In fact, obligations

towards supporting one's family were found to be an additional pressure factor, particularly amongst those with the strongest economic difficulties.

- Amongst those with dependents, i.e. spouse and children, the nuclear family was considered to be the central element in one's life.
- In only one of the cases, the partner's nationality was that of a native Norwegian. In two other cases, both partners originated from the same country.
- Parental influence with respect to educational aspirations was considered high. Highly educated parents motivated their children to undertake university studies, whereas those coming from families with low educational attainments were much more inner driven, i.e. education was seen as a personal life goal.

Friends and acquaintances

- Foreign nationals were found to be an important element composing respondents' intimate social networks.
- Differences in the types of relationship were disclosed; foreign versus native friends. The language of the relation (own, native, English, etc.) was also seen as an important factor.
- Friendships usually originate from such social spheres as the labour market, leisure activities and higher education.
- In the great majority of the cases one's friends also possess higher education, but not exclusively.

Social communities/networks

- The great majority of respondents indicated not being directly involved with their own ethnic community in Norway. The reasons for that varied from differentiated values to language to approaches to life and living. In only one situation the interviewee referred him/herself as being an essential resource for his/her own ethnic community, mostly due to high levels of educational attainment. A few individuals, however, maintained regular contact with own Diaspora groups living overseas or close friends back home.

- Some national (ethnic) communities, particularly from Africa, were characterised as being split along regional dimensions, native language, tribal references, etc.
- Religion was found to be an important life element amongst half of the respondents, especially those with an African background, both Christians as well as Muslims.
- The majority of respondents indicated being actively involved with professional communities of interest like academic associations and/or professional unions.

The impact of the higher education on the social capital

All respondents indicated that HE has had a positive contribution with respect to their social capital. Especially so when it comes to such important factors as: language and culture; information on the system; local labour market; and access to important ‘social spaces’. The university campus was seen as one of those critical ‘social spaces’, providing access to a variety of resources (students, teachers, employers, local community, etc).

The Civic Capital

Citizenship

- The majority of respondents possessed Norwegian citizenship. This was mostly common amongst those with the longest periods of stay in the country.
- Dilemmas associated to such factors as personal identity and the wish to go back to the country of origin, were referred as critical in deciding not to apply for citizenship.

Legal rights/political and civic involvement

- The majority of individuals possessed the same legal rights as natives. All respondents had the right to participate in local/national elections.
- A great majority of individuals followed closely political debates. Particularly around such issues as ‘education’, ‘minorities’, ‘integration’, ‘welfare’, etc. In this context, two specific groups were identified: one very active (four persons) and the other (two persons) less directly involved.

The impact of the higher education experience on the civic capital

The respondents indicated a strong relationship between their level of civic involvement and their own HE experience. Particularly with regard to issues such as personal empowerment, the understanding of the political system, and awareness of the hidden agendas determining public (and governmental) discourses.

The Personal Capital

Professional identity

- Higher education was seen by the great majority of respondents to play a major role in the shaping of their professional identities. Two elements were considered particularly important: the *field of studies* and the *character of the discipline*.
- The importance of role models connected to the HE system (teachers, advisors, personal mentors) was referred by most interviewees as having had a positive impact.

Personality

- Many respondents indicated that HE has had a slight impact on their personality traits. This was most notorious in such areas as ‘rational behaviour’, ‘thinking styles’, ‘self-awareness’, and ‘continuous learning’.
- It was also referred by many that the rationale for the selection of a given academic/professional field was due to a harmonious ‘fit’ between the latter and individuals’ personality on the one hand, and their values and beliefs on the other.

Self-esteem

- More than one respondent indicated that HE had provided him/her with the necessary credibility to talk about critical social issues.
- Many individuals revealed that HE had provided them with a sense of personal empowerment/achievement, leading them to embrace with confidence future life-challenges.

- HE was shown as having successfully helped individuals to cope with their complex social (external) and personal (inner) realities.

Values and beliefs

- Some respondents indicated that HE has had an impact on one's 'sense of responsibility' with respect to help solving major social dilemmas.
- The comprehension of diverse ideological perspectives was acknowledged as being an important direct (HE) contribution.
- Adoption of new Western-oriented values such as 'rationality' was mentioned by some as an important contribution brought by HE.

The impact of the higher education on the personal capital

Overall, respondents indicated that their HE experiences have had some sort of an impact (direct/indirect) on their identities, personalities, self-esteem, and values and beliefs. However, it is important to stress that variations in degree of influence were detected from case to case.

The External Capital

Social Inclusion/Discrimination

- Individuals were disfavoured on the grounds of not being a born-member of society.
- The great majority of respondents were highly critical of Norway's governmental policies with regard to integration of minorities and the recognition of ethnic diversity.
- Public discriminatory behaviour was indicated as being exercised in a 'hidden' way.
- Language proficiency was seen as a key factor in determining natives' social behaviour towards foreigners.
- A correlation between born and socialised in Norway and 'social mobility' was referred.

- The major social spheres of discriminatory behaviour were: labour market, police, UDI, social offices, real-estate market, and educational establishments (schools and universities).
- Widespread stereotyping indicated as a major barrier (e.g. All Africans are lazy)
- Integration (i.e. cultural assimilation) was perceived as negative by some respondents. Identity and loyalty to individuals' own (ethnic) community of reference were seen as more important than 'becoming a Norwegian'.

Structural elements

- The great majority of respondents saw themselves as 'outsiders', the exception being the only person whose physical appearance resembles native Norwegians.
- The presence of structural contradictions (individuality versus philosophy of sameness), with the focus being put on 'adaptation', i.e. to become like the majority.
- Social class (status) referred as a key element in comprehending social positioning (e.g. international students versus asylum seeker). Education seen as a 'key capital' determining individuals' social position.
- The majority position is taken for granted, i.e. rarely questioned.
- Direct ideological clash between nation-building (cultural) projects and multicultural aspirations, i.e. an open and diverse society.
- Success stories amongst minority individuals indicated as having low public visibility. A strategy seen as essential in tackling public misconceptions and help creating positive role models (identity reference) amongst minority communities.
- Cultural dilemmas inherent to Norway's traditional orientation for 'conflict-avoidance'. The careful use of the language seen as an integrative (cultural) barrier. Impact of HE on individuals' integrative efforts.

Norway as a country

All respondents were careful in advising anyone to move into Norway. Individuals' 'background' and the 'circumstances' surrounding the entry into the country were seen as key determinants. In this context, proper education and opportunities in the labour market were referred as critical elements. Some focus was put on the individual him/herself, and the fact that one should have what is required in order to cope with the new culture/life situation. 'Self-realisation' was also seen as a problem for the newcomer with high life expectations (i.e. ambitions). Substantial differences were pointed out between the life experiences in urban environments like Oslo and those of smaller cities such as Trømsø, Bødo and/or Kristiansand. As such, Oslo was considered to be rather hostile to foreigners due to negative stereotyping (e.g. crime, unemployed, etc.), whereas smaller communities were characterised by a stronger sense of belonging and integration. On the other hand, Oslo was characterised as an ideal place for newcomers due to its international and multicultural nature. To some extent these results are not particularly unique to Norway, as the impersonal and competitive nature of big urban centres can be identified elsewhere around the world. In a similar vein, a certain level of structural contradiction seems to be present in the reports, as smaller (less cosmopolitan) areas are generally known by their lack of openness towards foreigners, especially those originating from less developing nations. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that, in the Norwegian national context, some smaller urban centres are rather international (e.g. Bergen, Stavanger, Trømsø) due to the presence of a rather large expatriate community (oil and gas sectors), as well as large foreign students population.

The impact of the higher education experience on the external capital

All respondents (in different degrees) acknowledged the importance of HE with respect to becoming acquainted with the host society. Elements referred included the importance of learning how to position one self, the knowledge about local values and customs gained at the university, as well as the importance of the social network around higher education. Structural barriers were seen as the biggest hindrance for individuals' self-realisation, i.e. HE provides the capability but individuals lack the adequate opportunities. Overall, the data indicates a strong (positive) contribution by individuals' HE experiences when it comes to the way they experience (and perceive) their surrounding (external) environment.

Chapter 6: Relating the Findings

This chapter establishes a connection between the main elements drawn from the empirical analysis presented earlier (chapter 5), and the literature review (and operational framework) on QoL (chapter 2) on one hand, as well as earlier empirical (QoL) findings on the other (chapters 3 and 4).

6.1 The Economic Capital

The qualitative data obtained from the analysis of this particular domain (section 5.1, above) seem to confirm the fact that, according to earlier findings, the ‘returns on education’ within the Scandinavian region are relatively low when compared to other regions (Harmond *et al.* 2000, in section 3.1.2.). It is nevertheless important to keep in mind that some of the respondents were still undertaking their HE studies at the time of the interview, though at senior levels (graduate/post-graduate) (see appendix 3). Interestingly, the analysis of the elements composing the economic capital also shows that the nature (i.e. personal satisfaction) of one’s current job was considered to be more important than its financial benefits; in synch with earlier findings elsewhere (Kiuranov 1980, in section 2.3.2).

In this context, it is curious to notice that the ‘value orientation’ referred above is in line with the cultural makeup of Norwegian society, i.e. less emphasis on the material aspects of life (Moum 1983, in section 2.3.4), as well as weak (and/or non-existent) correlations between ‘income’ and ‘life satisfaction’ (Allardt 1977 in section 2.3.3). However, these findings *may* indicate the extent to which respondents have successfully “adopted” traditional values originated from the host culture. As such, limitations with respect to the representativeness of the study-sample do not allow us to take any conclusions. For example, would the situation differ had we interviewed individuals possessing other ethnic backgrounds and/or those from more vocationally oriented study fields?

The analysis of the impacts of the ‘economic domain’ on individuals’ global QoL indicates that the former possesses a weak contribution, i.e. only half of the respondents indicated having had a positive return on their HE investments. This is quite surprising since advocates of the ‘human-capital theory’ have provided considerable evidence of the positive

(private/social) contributions on earnings brought by educational achievements (see section 3.1.2). Nonetheless, this element *could* be related to the fact that, as highlighted in the theory, individuals' satisfaction/dissatisfaction is dependent on the fulfilment of their basic "needs" and "wants" (Kennedy & Lalu 1991). In other words, the 'gap' between the "objective measures" of their level of living and that of the "subjective feelings" associated with those same living conditions (Allardt 1993, in section 2.5). As such, anecdotic evidence points to the fact that individuals possessing higher levels of education (especially HE) tend to have higher life expectations (and ambitions) than their less educated counterparts. This basically means that, in the short run (i.e., just after graduation) and while reporting on their current levels of "life satisfaction" (including their financial situation), the former group tends to be outperformed by the latter one. It is worthwhile mentioning that the lack of a 'control group' as part of the study sample does not permit us to advance with confidence any final conclusions on this issue.

Moreover, it could also be that higher levels of educational achievement amongst minorities denote a strong 'symbolic' dimension, i.e. provide unique social statuses due to its scarcity within the ethnic community of reference (Moldenhawer 2005, in section 3.2.1) (note that our limited knowledge of the cultural elements composing each one of the different ethnic groups included in the study does not allow to take any reliable conclusions on this matter). In a similar vein, Barth (1981, in section 2.5) suggests that internally held possessions such as 'skills' and 'knowledge' are more important for individuals, i.e. lead to higher life satisfaction, than externally held ones like 'money'. This may well be the rationale for some of the respondents' study and career choices, shedding light on the "subtler dimensions of objective welfare" like 'loving' and 'being' rather than 'having' (Allardt 1973, in section 2.1).

It is, however, worthwhile emphasising that in line with earlier findings from other national contexts (UK), the economic contribution of HE seems to favour certain study-fields namely, those of a more applied (specialised) nature (Dutta *et al.* 1999, section 3.1.2). This element could not be fully confirmed from the study sample used, as the majority of respondents possessed degrees in less-vocational areas such as the social and the educational sciences. Nonetheless, a (positive) correlation was found between those studying more specialised subject matters (versus generic ones) and the attractiveness of their HE profiles

in the local labour market. Furthermore, the level (and length) of studies also correlated positively with some of the sub-dimensions composing the ‘economic capital’, i.e., job mobility/attractiveness, income levels, consumption patterns, etc.; with those at higher levels of educational attainment (e.g. doctoral) having stronger ‘economic’ (QoL) outlooks.

The data findings also point to the importance of the ‘family situation’ rather than the level of education alone, as advocated by human capital theorists (section 3.1.2). In this context, such critical issues as the partner’s level (and type) of education, and employment status, as well as the number of direct (and indirect) dependents, were all found to be susceptible of impacting on individuals’ economic capitals. As shown earlier, studies from other contexts seem to indicate a positive correlation between educational investments and ‘family stability’ (Leigh 1998, in section 3.1.2). This element was confirmed by the respondents who struggle the most financially (worse off), as their employment statuses combined with their partners’ low levels of educational attainment (and employment) contribute to their “negative” economic outlook.

With regard to ‘access’ and ‘integration’ in the local labour market, all respondents confirmed the importance of individuals’ social networks, particularly when it comes to the first full-time work experience after graduation. This element is in line with earlier findings from Norway shedding light on the importance of the ‘length of stay’ in the country when it comes to the assimilation (short and long run) of HE graduates (particularly non-western) into the local labour market (Støren 2004, in section 4.1.7). Nonetheless, macro economic conditions such as seasonal shifts affecting some economic sectors (e.g. I.T) were found to be relevant, as highlighted in earlier studies (Barth et al. 2004). However, a significant positive correlation between ‘financial earnings’ and the ‘length of stay’ in the country, as found in earlier analysis (Longva & Oddbjörn 2000, in section 4.1.1), could not be confirmed.

Additional elements referred to in the existing literature such as the likelihood of non-EU immigrants of being overqualified in their previous/current jobs (Berggren & Omarsson 2001, in section 3.2.1) seems to be confirmed from the data findings, particularly with respect to the first full time job in Norway. Housing conditions amongst those individuals facing financial hardships also seem to be in line with earlier findings, especially so with

regard to the difficulties in coping with the high costs of the inner (Oslo) city (Engebristen & Farstad 2004). Finally, declines in overcrowding were found to be positively correlated with an increase in respondents' (aggregated) family disposable income, as shown by earlier data from the period 1960-1990 (Hayfron 1999, in section 4.1.5).

6.2 The Social Capital

The analysis of the empirical data gathered in this study indicates the 'social capital' as being one of the most positive (QoL) domains across the sample, meaning that respondents revealed a considerable rich social-life spanning across the sub-domains of family, friends, and broad social communities. As mentioned earlier, the critical importance of elements composing individuals' social lives has been highlighted by many (c.f. Rezohazy 1980, in section 2.5; Biswas-Diener & Diener 2001, in section 3.2.1). Earlier empirical studies on minorities in Norway have revealed the importance of *family relations* on the overall life-outlook of individuals, particularly with respect to their health, both physical and psychological (Lie *et al.* 2004, in section 4.1.2). The data gathered in this study seems to confirm the importance of the family as a core social institution, as well as a means to gain additional support (both financial and emotional) if/when required. In at least one case (African national), financial responsibility towards one's close family members was mentioned, confirming earlier findings from specific ethnic communities (e.g. Somalis) living in Norway (Engebristen & Farstad 2004, in section 4.1.6).

The data shows that collectivistic orientations and time spent with family members (c.f. Selte 1998, in section 4.1.6) seem to vary from case to case, by ethnic origin and individual life circumstances. For example, amongst those respondents with family members living in Norway, an effort was undertaken to keep a certain level of regular contact, in some cases on a daily basis. Africans and Latin Americans, traditional collectivistic-oriented cultures, seem to be particular keen on this endeavour. However, any ethnic conclusions are at best tentative since: (a) there was only one respondent per ethnic community, and (b) individuals possessed different life circumstances, i.e. only half of the sample had family members in Norway.

When it comes to individuals' educational motivations, the data reveals 'family background' and 'personal motivation' of being two critical factors, well in line with earlier empirical findings within the (Scandinavian) region (Hvistendall & Roe 2004; Vabø & Aamodt 2005,

both in section 3.2.2). Some evidence also seems to exist with regard to the intergenerational transmission of the parents' weak/strong socio-economic status (Colding 2005, in section 3.2.1). This factor was highlighted in such statements across the sample as: "I was the only one in my family who undertook higher education studies" and/or "My parents always stressed the value of education at home". Thus, our analysis confirms earlier evidence from Norway on the role undertaken by 'social background' when it comes to educational endeavours (Helland 1997; Sletten 2000; Dæhlen 2001, all in section 4.1.7).

The data collected in this study also highlight the importance of such critical social spaces as 'work', 'communities of interest' (e.g. leisure), and higher education institutions, as indicated elsewhere (c.f. Minor *et al.* 1980, in section 2.4). The role of the university/college was particularly stressed as being an important space in providing individuals access to a broader (and valuable) social network, both short and long-term. This seems to be in line with empirical findings shedding light on the role of educational endeavours with regard to the social well being of individuals and the communities they are a part of (Curtin & Nelson 1999; Gibson 1996; Harrison 1997, all in section 3.1.2).

Finally, the data gathered seems to confirm earlier evidence from other (national/social) contexts of the importance of social relations independently of individuals' financial situation and/or 'economic capital' (Biswas-Diener & Diener 2001, in section 3.2.1).

6.3 The Civic Capital

The data reveals individuals' civic/politic participations of being strongly (i.e. positively) affected by their HE experiences, though at different degrees. As referred to earlier, *civic involvement* is seen by many as a key element in QoL studies (Grooms 1981; Rezohazy 1980; Turnbull II & Brunk 1997, in sections 2.4 and 2.5).

The empirical analysis seems to indicate a relatively high 'civic involvement' amongst those individuals who characterised their 'economic capital' as weak or "negative", though not exclusively. This finding is in line with existing evidence of asymmetries of power amongst socially disadvantaged (ethnic) groups living in Norway (section 4.1.3). In this context, the data confirm the importance of informal political-channels like networks, lobby activities, and the public media in opposition to more formalised structures such as political parties

and/or ethnic associations (Predelli 2003, in section 4.1.3). The data also point out to the critical *leadership role* undertaken by highly educated (minority) individuals within their own ethnic communities. Thus, once again, shedding light on the existing evidence of the positive (private and social) returns on (higher) education (section 3.1.2).

The variable ‘length of stay’ in the country was positively correlated with the rights provided to minority individuals, for example with respect to Norwegian citizenship. However, in this context, it is worthwhile stressing the fact that ‘citizenship’ was not seen as equally attractive across all respondents. This seems to contradict anecdotic evidence from Norway with respect to the willingness and eagerness by minority individuals in obtaining full citizenship recognition. As stressed earlier, and based on the data gathered, structural elements such as ‘identity’ and ‘discriminatory behaviour’ are to (partly) account for this state of affairs. Finally, the data reveal a positive correlation between individuals’ higher education experiences and their levels of civic/political involvement. This finding is well in line with anecdotic evidence showing relatively high levels of (domestic) political engagement amongst highly educated minority individuals living in Norway (c.f. utrop).

6.4. The Personal Capital or ‘Self’

With regard to the personal sub-domains like *professional identity*, *self esteem*, and *values and beliefs*, the empirical data shows that a great majority of respondents confirmed HE of having had a positive contribution, though differences occurred from one sub-domain to the other, as well as across individual cases (see sections 5.1 and 5.2, above). These findings are in line with the existing literature on the subject, shedding light on the impact of both emotional and cognitive elements on individuals’ QoL (Schalock 1997; Browne 1999; Allardt 1993, all in chapter 2). Nonetheless, it is worth stressing that this process manifests itself in a rather subjective matter, as it tends to affect individuals’ “perceived life satisfaction” (Allardt 1973, in section 2.1).

Furthermore, earlier (empirical) evidence from a variety of contexts indicates *ethnicity* as being an important factor with respect to individuals’ cognitive, emotional, and value-laden dimensions (Moum 1983, in section 2.3.4; Verkuyten & Thijs 2003, in section 3.2.1). In the Norwegian context (section 4.1), such aspects as: individuals’ self-esteem (Østberg 2003); orientation towards material values (Hansen 1994); and one’s family (Engebriksen &

Farstad 2004), have been shown as susceptible of affecting the QoL of ethnic minority groups. The data gathered in this study seems to confirm a positive correlation between the HE experience and the elements composing the ‘personal capital’, as found elsewhere (Goldsmith *et al.* 1997, in section 3.1.2). However, it is worthwhile mentioning that the lack of a (study) control group on the variables ‘ethnicity’ and ‘higher education’ makes the generalisation of these preliminary findings tentative at best.

6.5 The External Capital or ‘Surrounding Environment’

In tandem with the economic capital covered earlier, the elements (sub-dimensions) composing respondents’ *external capitals* were characterised as having a rather negative influence on individuals QoL outlooks. Particularly when it comes to ‘discrimination/social exclusion’ the data reveals considerable high levels across all respondents. These findings are in line with earlier (empirical) evidence from other contexts (Canada and the UK) showing a correlation between low levels of ‘social cohesion’ and high levels of ‘external prejudice’ across a variety of ethnic minority groups (Michalos & Zumbo; CRE 2004, both in section 3.2.1). The data also identifies the critical ‘social spaces’ where this behaviour tends to occur on a regular basis (e.g. police, labour-market, school, public offices, etc.), pointing toward earlier evidence with regard to the life situation of minorities (particularly non-western) living in Norway (NIFU-STEP 2003; Rogstad 2004, both in section 1.1) (Longva & Oddbjörn 2000; Furseth 2000; Østberg 2003; Haslund 1999, all in section 4.1).

Furthermore, such *structural elements* as: (a) the relation between the dominant majority and minority groups; (b) the pressure to adapt and be like the others; and (c) the avoidance of conflict at any cost; were pointed out by respondents as critical factors when it comes to the characterisation of their surrounding (external) environment. ‘Social class’ (i.e. perceived status) was also found to play an important role, as it has been confirmed in other studies (Dælen 2001; Helland 1997; Sletten 2000, all in section 4.1.7). In this context, ‘family background’, ‘the circumstances leading to the migration into the host country’ and ‘educational achievements’ are all seen as particularly relevant factors. Most importantly, the critical role of individuals’ HE experiences in leveraging integration and acculturation efforts in the host society (including social mobility and networks) was acknowledged by the majority of the respondents.

Finally, with respect to Norway as a country, substantial differences between the life circumstances in the capital city (Oslo) and that of smaller cities were stressed, as shown elsewhere (NIFU-STEP 2004b, in section 1.1). Educational backgrounds, the circumstances surrounding one's move into the country, as well as the attractiveness of the local labour market, were seen as crucial factors determining successful integration in the host society (note that no definition of 'integration' was advanced by neither the interviewer/researcher nor the interviewees, though different reactions to the term were expressed). Nonetheless, some of these (positive) elements were counterbalanced by remaining structural barriers (e.g. 'self-realisation') across the country, as indicated in recent public surveys (SSB 2004c, in section 1.1).

6.6 Methodological Issues

The empirical data (chapter 5) seems to be in line with earlier findings regarding a loose and somehow ambiguous relation between 'objective' and 'subjective' assessments (see section 2.3.3), if one assumes here that by 'objective' we mean the set of life circumstances affecting the different domains of QoL, and by 'subjective', the extent to which the higher education experience is perceived by respondents as having had an impact on their QoL outlooks. Associated with this process is the important distinction made earlier between individuals' basic "needs" and their "wants" (e.g. Bullinger 1999; in section 2.2.), i.e. the gap between their current life circumstances and the state that they aspire to achieve, now or in the near future. This particular factor was most visible across some specific (QoL) domains such as the 'economic' and the 'external' capitals.

On the other hand, the 'objective' reports provided by individuals also seem to indicate a (positive) correlation between the latter type of assessment and their 'subjective' judgements on the overall contribution of the HE experience to their QoL. Hence, leading us to conclude that any final relationships between the two variables are tentative at best, as suggested elsewhere (section 2.3.3). Nonetheless, if one applies Moum's (1983, in section 2.3.3) controversial suggestion to the solving of this methodological dilemma (i.e. that researchers should feel free to let subjective reports override objective conditions when passing quality judgements); then, and based on respondents' testimonies, we can assume that the only QoL domain that failed to be positively affected by individuals' higher education experiences (in the majority of the cases) was the 'economic capital'. However, in applying the following

criteria, Moum also warns researchers for the dangerous of ‘response-biases’, i.e. the overall validity of the study-sample; which, as stated earlier in the context of this study (section 1.6.6), should be carefully reflected upon.

With respect to the most common methodological problems inherent to QoL studies (Hankiss 1983, in section 2.3.4), the empirical data collected reveal the following:

- **Measurement bias:** The study seems to confirm the potential for wide measurement errors around the subjective dimensions of QoL (i.e. “perceived impacts”, for example with regard to the self domain or ‘personal capital’).
- **Positive aura of well being:** Since this study did not use questionnaires it is impossible to advance any conclusions regarding the tendency for individuals to use the positive side of the scale when answering questionnaires. Nonetheless, and in some particular cases, respondents’ (qualitative) ‘subjective’ assessments tend to be less positive (i.e. more sceptical) than their ‘objective’ reports would predict; somehow contradicting the ‘positive bias’ suggested by the literature.
- **Reference frame bias:** This study seems to confirm the impact of individuals’ (conscious/semi-conscious) frames of reference on the final data, particularly with respect to ‘ethnicity’ (cultural traits) and one’s ‘values and beliefs’. Generally speaking, this process occurred in a more conscious (self-reflective) matter amongst individuals possessing higher levels of educational attainment, i.e. the doctoral. This could be due to the fact that those individuals have (or are still) undertaken training with regard to being aware of their personal frames of reference, especially those within the social sciences.
- **Cognitive bias:** Despite careful attempts by the researcher in operationalising the five QoL domains, a viable argument can be made on the fact that the study may have led respondents to translate complex social experiences into single (simplistic) dimensions of life and living, operationalised through the five selected capitals (or QoL domains) and their respective sub-dimensions. The researcher’s choice of an open and flexible methodology such as semi-structured interviews was partly aimed at reducing this potential validity concern by allowing in-depth exploration of emerging topics.

- ***Bias of static measures:*** ‘Temporal dimensions’ (i.e. time) have been identified in the literature as having an effect on QoL judgements by respondents (Scheer 1980, in section 2.3.4). Since perceived QoL is part of a broader dynamic process in the life of individual respondents, it would not be unreasonable to expect individuals’ (life-) circumstances at the time (and during) of the interview situation to affect their overall judgment with regard to the impact of their HE experience in their QoL. As an example, those respondents who were (at the time of the interview) facing difficulties in gaining access to local labour markets were more likely to underplay the role of their HE experience on the ‘economic capital’, i.e. in getting a well paid job. A similar reasoning could be applied to the different dimensions composing the ‘external capital’ (e.g. integration, discrimination, etc.).
- ***Funnel effect:*** The qualitative nature of the study neither confirms nor rejects the common trend amongst QoL studies in terms of subjective assessments having lower variances than objective ones. However, as stated above, the nature of respondents’ subjective statements were (generally speaking) undertaken on a more cautious manner.

6.7 Overall Assessment

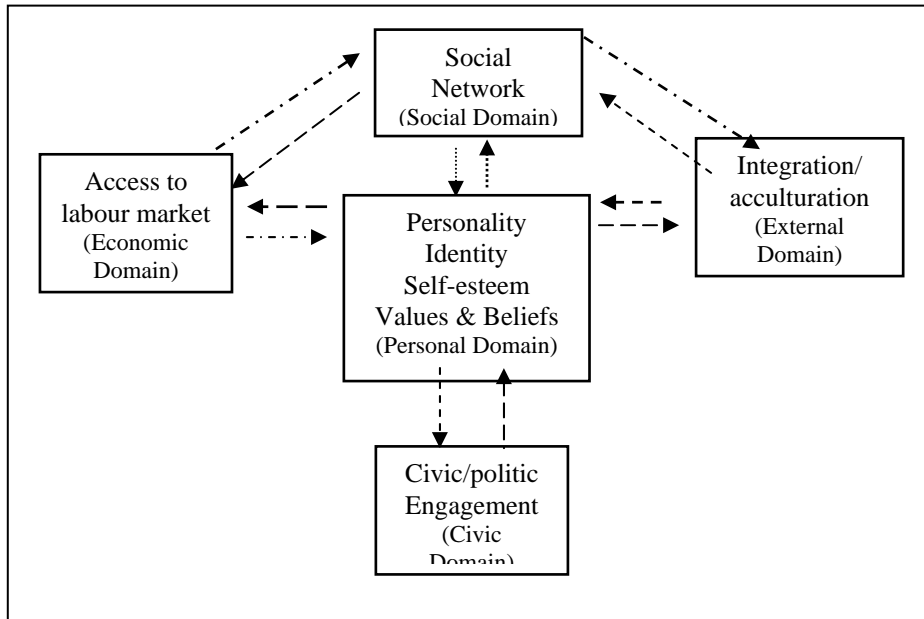
6.7.1 Interactive Relationships

As indicated earlier, QoL represents a ‘holistic’ (integrative) perspective of individuals’ life circumstances. Both direct and indirect impacts of, and associations across, the five QoL domains (or capitals) were detected. For example, ‘access to local labour markets’ (a sub-dimension of the ‘economic domain’) was seen as a critical means to increasing one’s ‘social network’ (a sub-dimension of the ‘social domain’). As such, respondents considered ‘social networks’ a critical asset when it comes to individual efforts in getting acquainted with the host society (a sub-dimension of the ‘external domain’). In a similar vein, broad ‘social networks’ and ‘acquaintance with the local system’ (political, legal, social, etc.) were characteristics of those individuals highly involved in civic/politic matters (the key sub-dimension of the ‘civic domain’). Finally, individuals’ *identities, personalities, self-esteem, and values and beliefs* (sub-dimensions of the ‘self domain’) were all factors capable of impacting on: (a) the access/integration in the local labour market (‘economic capital’); (b) the level of broad social engagement (‘social capital’); (c) the integration/acculturation to the

host culture/system ('external capital'); and (d) the willingness of being actively involved in civic/politic activities beyond one's daily occupation ('the civic capital').

Furthermore, the data indicates that some of the (sub-) variables seem to be (directly/indirectly) influencing each other. For example, broader 'social networks' were found to leverage 'integration/acclulturation efforts', but these same efforts (if successful) may also lead to an enlargement of individuals' social contacts. 'Socialisation' on the other hand, has the potential to affect individuals' personal domains, which themselves *may* (partly) determine the nature of one's network activities. In a similar vein, active 'civic engagement' *might* have an impact on individuals' self-related dimensions. However, those dimensions (in the first place) determine the level of (civic) engagement and initiative. Furthermore, successful 'integration/acclulturation' into the host society is likely to affect individuals' personal dimensions such as 'self-esteem' and 'values and beliefs, acting as a (self-) reinforcing mechanism. Finally, and to conclude this example (others could have been explored), 'access to local labour markets' are *partly* determined by the sub-dimensions composing the 'personal domain'. On the other hand, professional socialisation and work experience are *likely* to influence the development of individuals' selves. Figure 5, visually illustrates the relationships explored above.

Figure 5: Interaction between (QoL) sub-dimensions and domains



6.7.2. The Study's Main Concepts

Overall, the data findings indicate the following with regard to the three main concepts used throughout the study, i.e. *quality of life*, *higher education*, and *ethnic minorities*.

Quality of Life

Generally speaking the study confirmed the core premises around the QoL construct indicated in the literature, namely: the ambiguous relationship between 'subjective' and 'objective' elements; the focus on utilitarian and non-utilitarian approaches to studying QoL; the importance of the distinction between individuals' "needs" and "wants"; the contrast between 'individual' and 'group-oriented' perspectives; the option of using a single versus a set of indicators; and, the alternative of letting respondents setting the study criteria ('bottom-up') in opposition to the 'top-down' approach where the researcher remains in total control. This study, first and foremost, attempted to bridge the above perspectives and, whenever possible, use triangulation (i.e. a combination of methods) as a means to enhance the overall validity of the findings.

Nevertheless, a few critical elements (shortcomings) deserve our attention. Despite some indication amongst researchers that alternative (i.e. diverse) approaches should be used while operationalising QoL, little is said on the way in which this process can be exercised. Our experience indicates that, though valid, this endeavour is highly complex and should be undertaken carefully; depending on the study's nature, scope, study-sample, and core research assumptions and queries. The literature is also sketchy in the way it approaches 'soft' (i.e. subjective) dimensions associated with inner domains such as individuals' 'personality' and 'identity', amongst others. Our study seems to indicate that the use of psychometric methods coming from fields such as (socio-) psychology and the behavioural sciences may have to be used.

Moreover, theoretical concepts from the social sciences (e.g. sociology, political science, etc.) and the humanities (e.g. philosophy, history) may prove themselves useful with regard to shedding light on the macro (structural) elements determining individuals' life circumstances. In opposition to what is argued by some QoL researchers, our study confirms the importance of focusing the analysis on a variety of levels from the micro (individual) to the mesa (ethnic community) to the macro (society). As such, and based on the data findings, we do not believe QoL studies can be approached solely at one level, as relationships between levels (and their variables) need to be identified and interpreted. Finally, as per the methodological approach, we recommend the use of both qualitative (interviews and/or focus groups) and quantitative techniques (questionnaires). However, if the scope of the study is limited to either 'objective' or 'subjective' (life) conditions a single approach may suffice. [Note: in the current study the use of questionnaires geared toward gathering data on individuals' objective (and quantifiable) life conditions would have been useful in detecting major relationships (and trends) amongst variables and across respondents].

Higher Education

The theoretical framework used throughout the study to measure educational investments (or returns) was that of 'human capital theory'. Vast empirical evidence was presented with regard to the private and collective benefits brought by educational endeavours. Generally speaking, our study partly confirmed the arguments forwarded by this school of thought, as only half of the respondents indicated as having had a "positive" return on their (higher) education investments. A few remarks deserve to be made.

First, as indicated in the literature review on the subject, human capital theorists are still struggling when it comes to (accurately) account for the split between ‘private’ and ‘social’ returns. As this school of thought has been dominated by economists (and welfarists) a strong focus has been given to the ‘objective’ (i.e. quantitative) dimensions such as income levels and GNP growth. Our study confirms the importance of exploring subtle dimensions associated with the ‘economic capital’ such as: access to labour markets, recognition of degrees, and the length of studies, amongst others. Moreover, by exploring more subjective elements like ‘social networks’, ‘civic involvement’ and ‘personality/motivation’, our study reveals a strong relationship between these (“soft”) dimensions and both private and collective returns. For example, across the sample it was found that: (a) individuals’ networks were key to gain access to local labour markets, independently of their educational attainment per se; (b) highly educated individuals provided their close communities of reference with valuable public services due to their knowledge and skills; and (c) individuals’ inner drive and personal aspirations (rather than family background alone, i.e. social class) were key factors in determining individuals’ (higher) educational attainments and their academic performances.

When it comes to minority individuals, the core premises highlighted by human capital theorists should be revised (adapted) in order to consider the critical role undertaken by existing ‘structural barriers’ in a given social setting, such as ethnic discrimination in local labour markets (as found in the study). In our view, advocates of the human capital school should also pay more attention to other qualitative aspects associated with individuals educational attainments such as the ‘type of degree’ (master/bachelor), the ‘field of studies’, and ‘the nature of the education’ (vocational, specialised, theoretical), as these factors were found (in the study) to have an impact on individuals ‘economic capitals’.

Ethnic Minorities

This study shows that the category ‘ethnic minority’ as a research construct should be used carefully, as this does not correspond to a single homogeneous group. As such, individual differences are due to occur within each ethnic group, due to the particular inner and outer realities determining individuals’ life circumstances. Despite considerable evidence on certain life domains with regard to minorities in Norway, the literature lacks a clear

understanding of the role played by HE. This study, despite some of its limitations, contributes to reducing this 'knowledge gap'. Overall, the data discloses that all respondents have successfully managed to navigate through the domestic HE system, despite the existing structural barriers. It was found that value-orientations towards 'money' and 'material goods' amongst respondents mirrored those of the native population, in opposition to earlier findings amongst the general (minority) population. A better understanding of the value dimensions inherent to each particular ethnic group living in Norway is required. Attention should be paid towards in-group differences with regard to 'gender', 'age', 'profession', 'social class', 'place of origin' (rural/urban), etc.

Social networks were pointed out as one of the most critical elements when it comes to individuals' QoL outlooks. In general terms, researchers should be wary toward over-estimating the formal (bureaucratic) nature of the Norwegian society. Instead, a better understanding of the way in which informal (social) channels operate is paramount. In our view, it is of considerable importance to comprehend the informal links within (and across) ethnic groups, as well as between these and the native (majority) population. Furthermore, the (educational) literature on minorities shows that too much attention is placed on 'language skills', in detriment of other critical factors such as 'family background', 'personal motivation', 'place of origin', 'family views on education', 'years of length in the country', etc. Our study shows that factors like the 'type of studies' (specialised/general), the 'level of education' (master/doctoral), 'partners' background' and 'previous work experience' have a strong impact on the QoL of individuals, particularly with regard to their 'economic capital'.

Finally, the study also indicates the importance of looking at (life) dimensions that are associated with political/civic involvement, as well as personal characteristics ('the self'). Future studies should look in more detail to the role undertaken by highly educated (minority) individuals across the different communities that they are part of, particularly when it comes to leverage the integration/acclimatisation process of their (ethnic/religious/local) community counterparts. As for personal factors like 'personality', 'identity', 'self-esteem' and 'values and beliefs', ethnographic studies using methodological approaches originated from the social sciences (sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.) should be of considerable help to QoL researchers. This study shows that these sorts of

personal factors are susceptible of having an impact on individuals' QoL, as well as their educational attainments (and academic performances).

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Suggestions

7.1. Conclusive Remarks

At the beginning of this report (chapter 1), we presented the main research problem driving this study as being:

How has the (domestic) higher education experience of individuals with a non-western ethnic minority background contributed to their quality of life outlook?

Further, the following *five* research questions were operationalised throughout the report:

1. *How has the concept of quality of life been defined and operationalised?*
2. *What sort of data with regard to individuals' quality of life have global studies been revealing?*
3. *What is the nature of the relationship between quality of life, (higher) education, and minorities?*
4. *How can the quality of life of highly educated (non-western) ethnic minority individuals living in Norway be characterised?*
5. *What is the contribution (impact) of the higher education experience to these individuals' levels of (global) quality of life?*

In a nutshell, this study highlights the fact that 'quality of life' (QoL) as a construct presents researchers with a set of methodological challenges. Different conceptual perspectives were shown as being in line with the particular disciplinary fields and study (and policy) objectives. A review of the existing literature on the concept reveals a considerable array of knowledge across the world, particularly since the late 1960s and early 1970s with its apogee during the mid 1990s. It was also shown that considerable data (and trends) have been gathered with regard to the links between QoL and (higher) education on the one hand, and QoL and minorities on the other. Analysis at the global and regional (Scandinavia) levels, confirm the common assumption that minority-related issues are relevant across a variety of cultural and national settings.

The study reveals that the levels of QoL enjoyed by individuals with an ethnic minority background possessing higher education differ slightly from case to case. Nevertheless,

common trends were identified across the study-sample. The effect of the ‘economic capital’ was indicated as being relatively weaker than expected, especially with regard to individuals’ financial situations. As argued elsewhere, this could be due to a variety of contextual factors such as lower returns on education in Norway, the demographic characteristics of the sample, and/or the particular life circumstances affecting the respondents’ at the time of the interview. The data has also confirmed the importance of the ‘social capital’ in the context of individuals’ personal well-being. When it comes to ‘civic involvement’, quite curiously, those respondents who characterised their ‘economic capital’ as low (or weak) tended to be the ones with the highest levels of (political/civic) participation.

As regards to the impact of the HE experience on individuals’ QoL outlooks the following trends were identified. The ‘economic capital’ (i.e. the returns on education), considered by many as one of the most important private/social contributions brought by educational endeavours, had a lower (overall) impact than initially expected; though half of the respondents indicated a “positive return” to date. This basically means that for the other half of the sample: (a) the time and effort invested in HE has not (yet) paid off economically; and (b) the financial element (i.e. money) was not considered to be the most important factor while deciding to undertake a particular academic/professional path. Validity concerns regarding the findings surrounding the economic domain have also been addressed, with special attention being put on the demographic characteristics of the study-sample (consult appendix 3).

On the other hand, individuals’ HE experiences were found to have had a considerable (“positive”) contribution to the remaining QoL domains, i.e. ‘social’, ‘civic’, ‘personal’ and ‘external’. Respondents stressed the critical role of the university/college in providing access to broader ‘social networks’, as well as its positive contribution with respect to ‘integration/acclimatisation’ efforts in the host society. Overall, major trends were identified and relationships amongst variables, sub-dimensions, and QoL domains were highlighted. Hence, this study provides a clear “chain of evidence” with regard to the direct (and indirect) relationships between the ‘independent variable’ (HE experience) and individuals’ quality of life outlooks, the ‘dependent variable’ of the study.

A set of brief *conclusions* can be taken with regard to the contribution of this study to the existing repository of knowledge on ‘quality of life’, ‘higher education’, and ‘minorities’.

- Firstly, the study confirms the importance of accessing individuals’ life situations beyond the economic perspective, as suggested by others.
- Secondly, the study shows that ‘quality of life’ (QoL) as a research construct can be successfully operationalised (i.e. trends, relationships amongst variables, methodological lessons, etc.) at the micro (individual) level, in the context of ethnic minorities and their HE experiences.
- Thirdly, from a methodological perspective the study confirms the ambiguous relationships between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ (QoL) assessments on the one hand, and the importance of analysing ‘individual’ and ‘group-related’ factors on the other.
- Fourthly, the empirical data provides evidence of the importance of individuals’ HE experiences for a variety of important life domains. This means that education in general and higher education in particular, should be taken into account while *designing, operationalising* and *interpreting* future QoL studies.
- Fifthly, multidisciplinary methodological tools from a variety of academic traditions (e.g. psychology, philosophy, sociology, etc.) are required if one is to study accurately the impact of individuals’ self-domains like ‘personality’, ‘identity’, ‘values and beliefs’, etc.
- Sixthly, researchers should pay attention to the structural dimensions at the *macro* (social, cultural, political, etc.) and *micro* levels (work, community, family, friends, etc.), when attempting to interpret individuals’ global QoL outlooks.
- Seventhly, this study indicates that the basic premises of the ‘human capital theory’ should be adapted in light of the specific circumstances affecting ethnic minority individuals (and groups) in a given host society (e.g. structural barriers, group dynamics, cultural traditions, role of the family, etc.).
- Eighthly and lastly, this study confirms three important *trends* identified earlier in the literature: (a) the relatively low (financial) returns on education within the Scandinavian region; (b) the existing gaps between the ‘majority’ and the ‘minority’ populations, when it comes to social treatment (and mobility); and, (c) the important role undertaken by

domestic (higher) education systems with regard to bridging ‘social inequalities’ across specific ethnic communities and the population at large.

7.2 Suggestions to Stakeholders

The following ‘call for action’ is addressed to the core audiences of this study:

To Norwegian policy makers:

- Governmental authorities should continue to support (and further promote) ongoing efforts to recruit ethnic minority individuals into higher education. This study shows that (some) minorities are successfully navigating through the educational system and have started joining their professional peers. As shown earlier, the socio-economic benefits accrued from educational investments affect both private individuals, as well as the nation as a whole (in the short and long term).
- A long-term strategic plan involving all social stakeholders (including minority groups living in Norway) across the public and the private sectors, should be devised. This plan (developed jointly) should clearly and realistically pinpoint the rights and responsibilities of the different minority groups living in Norway, when it comes to help building the country’s future welfare model. In this context, positive case studies (success stories) of minority individuals should be widely promoted and communicated, as suggested by one of the respondents. Such an initiative, if backed up with strong political will, would send a strong and positive message to both minority and majority populations, with regard to making Norway a truly ‘inclusive society’ (i.e. high levels of social cohesion amongst inhabitants); a model that could be emulated by other rich nations across the world.
- A serious and honest analysis of the structural barriers facing ethnic minorities across the public and private sectors should be attempted. Broad public debates such as those already underway within academia (e.g. ‘Kulturell Komplexitet I Det Nye Norge’) across a variety of community settings, should be stimulated with the ultimate goal of understanding the root causes of structural impediments.

- A concerted effort across a variety of stakeholders should be undertaken in order to comprehend in more detail the ‘causes’ and ‘consequences’ of having highly educated minority individuals who perceived ‘integration’ in the host society as something undesirable. This issue is critical since the success of building an inclusive society depends on a (broad) shared feeling of ‘belongingness’ (c.f. Maslow 1943).

To social scientists, particularly those involved with quality of life, higher education, and/or minority-related issues:

- Follow up studies using a similar methodology to the one used here should be undertaken. However, the study sample should be expanded to accommodate a variety of (minority) individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds both, with and without higher education attainments. Particular attention should be given to the ‘representativeness’ of the study sample in the context of the overall minority population, both within and outside academia. A particular interesting research area would be to shed light on the differences between university and college (vocational-oriented) educations, and their consequent (QoL) impacts at the individual/group levels.
- Solid empirical evidence needs to be established with respect to the ‘private’ and ‘social’ returns as a result of higher education attainments, in the Norwegian national context. Equal attention should be given to economic, as well as non-economic factors. Particularly relevant would be to highlight differences with regards to ‘the level of education’, ‘the type of institution’, ‘the field of studies’, ‘the length of the programme’, etc. Moreover, significant differences between ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ groups should also be included.
- Future and ongoing research on ‘minorities’ should consider ‘higher education’ as an important factor while studying their life situations. Important demographic information needs to be gathered with regard to the specific profiles of the major ethnic communities living in Norway. Additionally, elements such as ‘normative orientations’, ‘culture and traditions’, ‘community settings’ and ‘structural barriers’ for each one of the specific ethnic groups should be taken into account.
- Quality of life studies should attempt to develop inter-disciplinary approaches via collaborative efforts across different areas of expertise, particularly within the social sciences. New conceptual approaches should be devised bearing in mind the particular

characteristics and challenges facing minority individuals (and groups), in order to tackle a variety of minority-related (QoL) issues from a “holistic perspective”.

- Finally, new (innovative) research projects aimed at understanding the socio-economic contributions of higher education systems at a variety of levels (local, regional, national, international) should be encouraged. A special focus should be placed on the interaction between higher education institutions and their complex surrounding environments, i.e. community, industry, public sector, youth, etc.

To managers and administrators of higher education institutions:

- The data gathered with regard to the initial steps taken by HiO and UiO, indicates that some positive outcomes when it comes to minority students are starting to occur. Nonetheless, in our opinion, both institutions need to substantially increase the amount of resources allocated to those sorts of activities. Further, Norway’s Ministry of Education and Research needs to sustain its long-term commitment by providing funding to institutions on a mid to long-term basis.
- Higher education institutions together with the Ministry should set ambitious but realistic (measurable) targets with regard to minorities, in order to sharpen their strategic endeavours and apply a coherent approach across the broad educational sector. Regular monitoring and the use of (international) benchmarks should also be enhanced.
- The critical importance of such factors as ‘social networks’ and ‘civic participation’ (as per the study findings) when it comes to individuals’ life circumstances, should be taken into consideration during the development of (academic) integration strategies targeting minority students. In fact, it is reasonable to expect that these two factors are equally important in the case of native Norwegian students, thus broad strategic initiatives across the bulk of the student population should be considered.

To ethnic minorities in Norway, and the Norwegian population as a whole:

- The review of the life situations facing minorities in Norway, as well as the empirical findings of this study indicate that a set of critical challenges remains ahead. Nonetheless, the data is rather revealing (i.e. positive) when it comes to the QoL enjoyed by highly educated minority individuals, and the (positive) impact of their HE experiences. As shown throughout the study, individuals benefited immensely from their periods at the university or college. With the exception of the ‘economic capital’, all the other four capitals indicated *strong* positive correlations (across the sample) between one’s HE experience and important life domains such as ‘social networks’, ‘level of civic involvement’, and ‘acculturation/integration into the host culture’.
- It is important to bear in mind that, generally speaking, higher levels of educational attainment have been found to be associated with better life opportunities. As the nature of the Norwegian welfare system adapts itself to a global economy based on knowledge, as well as a European region in a phase of transition, the value associated with a higher education degree should not be underestimated. Furthermore, and despite seasonable fluctuations in the local labour market, it is important to make a reflective choice on the type of degree desired in light of the fact that today’s events span across national borders and regional boundaries. Therefore, an education that provides the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully cope with a world in transition (from industrial to post-industrial or knowledge economy), and at the same time fulfils individuals’ desire for personal and intellectual growth, should be taken into consideration independently of its short term financial returns.

Lastly, the unprecedented historical opportunity provided to Norway in terms of its diverse multicultural population at a period in world history where that diversity is considered as an ‘asset’ not a ‘liability’ should be widely acknowledge by both minority and majority populations. As the first generation of newcomers helped rebuild the Norway of the oil era, their off-spring (children) should be prepared to help Norway face the challenges posed by an increasingly connected world where knowledge and competencies rather than natural resources will come to play a primordial role in decades to come.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

1. **Presentation of the researcher/study**
2. **Establishing Rapport/Warm up:**
 - a. Interviewee background (country, family, moving/years in Norway, etc.)
 - b. Education (including HE history); recruitment into HE/Norway (family, own motivation, advertising, friends, etc.)
 - c. Why to undertake HE (personal motivations)?
3. **Economic Capital (QoL Domain)**
 - a. Type of work HE trained for?
 - b. Work held today/past, why?
 - c. Interview process/access to labor market
 - d. Conditions current work (personal development/milieu/mobility)
 - e. Attractiveness of labor-market/own profession
 - f. Overall economic benefits. Other benefits?
 - g. Standard of living? (house, car, possessions)
 - h. Consumption patterns? (holidays, hobbies, goods/services)
 - i. Overall impact of HE in economic capital?
4. **Social Capital (QoL Domain)**
 - a. *Family:*
 - i. Family members with HE degrees?
 - ii. Perceptions of HE by family members? (good, bad, neutral)
 - iii. Family pressure (professions, money, short-term)
 - iv. Overall impacts of HE in family: nuclear/extended
 - b. *Friendships:*
 - i. Types of friendships? (before/after HE)
 - ii. Nature/Context of friendships (job, hobby, school, are residence, Norwegian, age)

- iii. Friends possess/views on HE?
- iv. Overall impact of HE in existing + new friendships?

c. Memberships/Networks:

- i. Types & nature of social memberships/activities (religious, sports, local, international, multicultural)?
- ii. Within or outside academia?
- iii. Professional (job) memberships?
- iv. Overall impact of HE in social memberships/networks?

5. Civic Capital (QoL Domain)

- a. Active in political/civic activities (type, nature, frequency, length)?
- b. Entitled to vote/citizenship rights & responsibilities?
- c. Follow national political/social debates in Norway (how/engaged?)
- d. Overall impact of HE in Civic Capital?

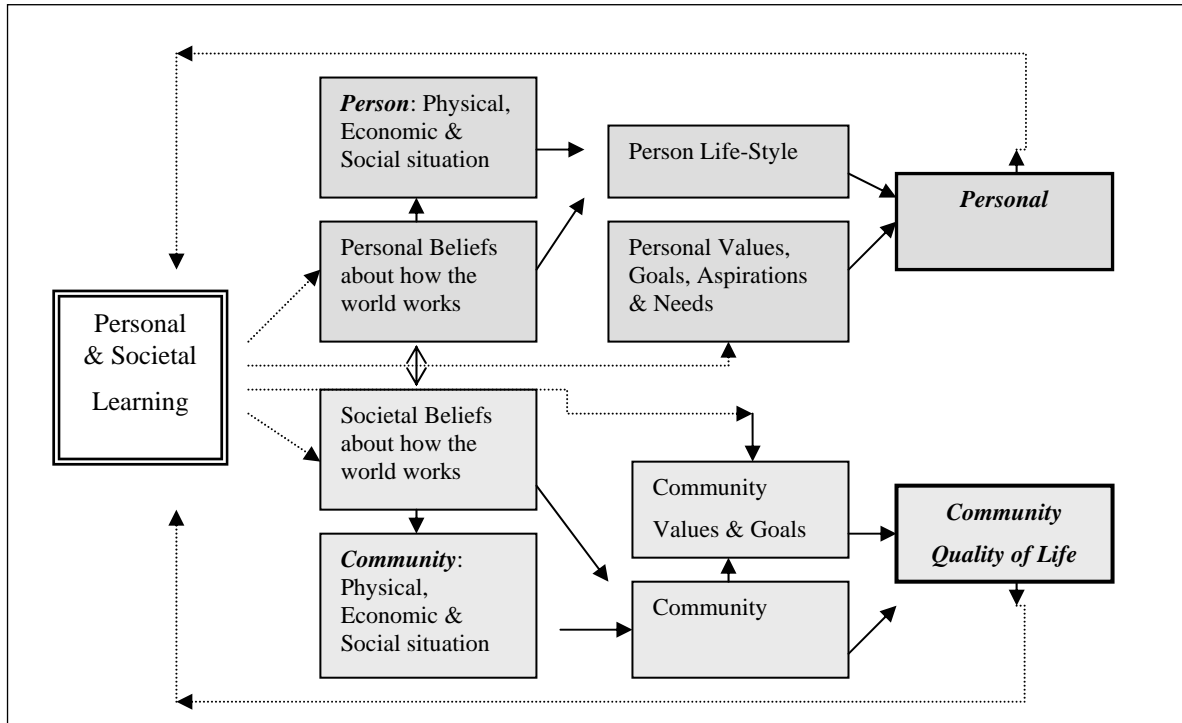
6. Self (QoL Domain)

- a. HE impact on professional/personal identity?
- b. HE impact on personality construction?
- c. HE impact on self-esteem?
- d. HE impact on held values and beliefs? (attitudes towards life & society)
- e. Overall impact of HE in the perception of surrounding realities (own/external)?

7. Surrounding Environment (QoL Domain)

- a. Inclusion/Discrimination (when, how often, by whom)?
- b. Equality (treated as 'equal', i.e. natives)? (opportunities for self & family)
- c. Feel/see one-self 'different' than 'others' (i.e. majority population)? (How, why, how to cope?)
- d. Overall integration in society (job, social, culture, etc.)
- e. Norway as a country (likes, dislikes, wishes, would recommend...)?
- f. Overall impact of HE in the Inclusion/Integration in Norwegian society?

Appendix 2: 'Milbrath's Interactive QoL Model'



Source: Milbrath (1981: 236)

Appendix 3: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

	Interv. #1	Interv. #2	Interv. #3	Interv. #4	Interv. #5	Interv. #6
Status	Single	Married *	Married *	Married *	Partner *	Married *
Education Level/Status	Master (just completed)	Doctoral (completed)	Doctoral (ongoing)	Doctoral (ongoing)	Master (ongoing)	Master (ongoing)
Field of Studies / Focus	Information Technology (Specialised)	Educational Sciences (Specialised)	Social Sciences (Specialised)	Social Sciences (Specialised)	Educational Sciences (Generic)	Social Sciences + Education (Generic)
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Length Stay in Norway	8 years	12 years	13 years	17 years	21 years	14 years
Work Status	Part-time	Full-Time	Full-Time	Full-Time	Unemployed	Student
Previous Full Time Jobs	0	0	1	3	0	2

* With dependents, i.e. spouse and children.

Appendix 4: The Study's Operational Framework

