

Transition from studies to the real world of work in Denmark

- Insights into the challenges of international engineering graduates –

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Sincerely,

Dilyana & Cristina

Abstract

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in retaining international graduates in Denmark after their graduation due to economic benefits for the Danish society and industry. However, there are not so many studies exploring this matter. This Master Thesis purpose is to fill the gap in the existing literature and to provide a holistic view on the challenges and obstacles encountered by newly international engineering graduates who decided to remain in Denmark and to search for an employment in the Danish Engineering sector.

Our research paper presents an exploratory case study of the outcomes of international engineering' employability situation. In addition, a mixed methods research design is applied in or order to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. We have conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with international graduates from the Engineering field of study. All of them obtained their higher education degrees in Denmark and remained in the country after graduation to seek an employment in the Danish labour market. In addition to this, we have conducted a quantitative online survey in which participated 13 companies from the Engineering industry sector in Denmark. The survey aimed to expand the awareness of our research problem and to supplement the findings from the interviews, by tackling another perspective different than the one of the graduates.

In order to enrich and broaden the knowledge on the phenomenon under study the data was approached on three different levels: institutional, individual and organizational level. The gathered data is interpreted based on relevant theoretical perspectives, such as Neoclassic theory, Bourdieu's forms of capital theory, Communication adaptation theory, and Diversity management theory. Our main findings include the international graduates' challenges and experiences of transitioning from higher education to work. In addition, the Danish employers' perspective and attitudes towards hiring international engineering graduates as well as the input of the European and Danish policies on labour market integration, diversity and mobility are taken into consideration. Overall, the idea to make the connection between international

graduates and Danish companies is seen as a complex integration process that needs the support of all three levels in order to be successful.

Finally, the findings of this research study will be useful for current and future international students as well as for policy makers, Danish companies and other researchers exploring the issues of international graduates' integration and employment.

Keywords: international engineering graduates, obstacles, companies, engineering industry, Danish labour market, Danish policies, integration, mobility, cultural diversity

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Chapter 1 – Introduction and Problem Formulation

1.1. Introduction

In recent years, Denmark has been ever more recognized internationally as a great place to study, work and live in (The Local, 2015). Every year Danish universities welcome a great number of international students from all over the world. Statistics show that in 2014 the number of international students coming to study in the country has already increased twofold in size, compared to 2008 (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2015). Denmark has been an attractive study destination for international students for two main reasons. Firstly, the Danish universities are well-known for providing high quality and tuition-free education for students coming from other European Union countries. Secondly, the reputation of the universities in the country is highly acknowledged as they are known to be amongst the best places in Europe to obtain higher education (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2016).

The high-quality higher education Denmark provides to international students can help them to accelerate their professional life after obtaining a degree. The discussion of the topic of where the skills and knowledge attained during their studies could be put into practice is brought to the forefront of the public and political discourse in the country. In this context, international graduates' employment is increasingly becoming a concern in terms of supporting the Danish labour market development and economic growth. A recent study on the employment of international graduates, conducted by the Danish Agency for International Education, shows that more than half of the international students leave Denmark after graduation (DAMWAD, 2012). Yet, it is significant to note that the Danish Government recognizes the potential lack of proper retention for economic development purposes of fresh graduates in the country. There are already strategies and practices put into place by the Danish government that work in this direction (UMF 2015; UMF 2014; International student mobility on full education programmes in Denmark Report 2014).

Amongst the main reasons why Denmark is working on the retention of these international students who have finished their studies in Danish universities, is firstly because the government is investing a tremendous amount of money in their education (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2015). Another important reason is that in the next 10 years, it is expected that the country will experience a lack of native workforce in various industry sectors (Global talent, p.12). Moreover, if the companies that run on the Danish labour market have the necessity to grow, expand and be competitive on a global scale, then they will need highly qualified labour from abroad (The Local, 2016). Currently, the segment of the Danish labour market that is lacking the most native highly qualified and skilled workforce is scientists and engineers (Global talent, 2016, p.17).

In this Master Thesis is set to investigate the aforementioned issues, particularly focusing on international EU graduate students that have studied Engineering and who would want to seek employment and remain in Denmark after their graduation.

In order to delimit the target group for this Master Thesis we have used two main factors to describe it. The first factor defines an international graduate as an individual with a foreign origin who has successfully completed their studies at another international educational institution that is different from Denmark. The second factor defining the target group is that the same international graduate has successfully obtained their higher education in Denmark. This way, the international graduate is in the possession of a recognized degree in the Danish labour market and at the same time demonstrates experience obtained during their life in the country.

As mentioned earlier, this research will focus particularly on international engineering graduates for several reasons. Firstly, engineers play an important role in every society, continually developing our future through their work. Secondly, we are taking into consideration the significant role of the engineering industry in the Danish economy, taking into account that the Engineering industry represents the biggest sector of Danish economy (Hasselbach, 2010), comprising engineering companies that are leaders at global level in their field (e.g. Grundfos, Vestas, Danfoss, Ramboll etc.). And thirdly, as already stated above, it is

estimated that there will be lack of highly qualified domestic workers in this respective field, which might be filled by hiring international graduates.

In line of this, the technical association “Engineer the Future”, foresees that Denmark will lack 13 500 highly educated professionals with technical and scientific background by 2025 (IDA, 2016a). Comparing the data from 2016 and 2009, the job postings solely for engineers are six times higher (IDA, 2016b). Moreover, according to the chairman of the Council of Employees of IDA, Morten Thiesses: *“it’s a problem for Danish companies who may have to reject orders or delay company expansions because of the lack of knowledge workers”* (Idem.) Another report made by CBS states that the shortage of engineers is the most significant in Denmark – 32% from 789 companies that were included in the report (CBS, 2016, pp.18).

When taking all this into account, identifying the obstacles that prevent international graduates from entering the Danish job market is highly important. Addressing these issues could prove to be highly beneficial on many levels both for companies and for international students. This is the reason why, we will be taking a multi-faceted perspective on this topic and will investigate both the perspective of Danish companies hiring and working together with international graduates as well as will look into the international students’ challenges. We have chosen this multi-faceted approach as the same challenges and pressures are shared both by Danish companies and the graduates themselves. Here is an example, in light of modern globalization, Danish companies face a highly competitive market, and therefore they are in demand for more highly educated and qualified employees, both national and international. Danish companies need to be able to attract and utilize international graduates in order to function optimally and compete on a regional, national and international level. These companies have to learn how to understand and use cultural diversity within their business in order to reach more clients, and adapt successful strategies that fit both their organisations and their customers (Berrone, 2011).

A widely discussed issue in the literature of labour market integration is whether or not companies behave differently towards migrants than towards ethnic natives entering the labour market, given the fact that migrants are observed to have limited success in the high-

skilled labour market compared to natives (Constant & Rinne 2013, Gupta & Kromann 2014). Based on this assumption, another objective of this thesis is to investigate the actual expectations and experiences of Danish companies towards our target group, as well as to investigate the advantages and disadvantages they experience in hiring international graduates.

1.2. Problem Formulation

This thesis aims to formulate a research study on specific challenges, obstacles and pitfalls that international engineering graduates encounter that might hinder their access to the Danish labour market. With this goal in mind, we will define our research question as:

“Which obstacles do international engineering graduates faces while trying to integrate into the Danish labour market?”

In order to answer this research question, we will take into account the perception of international engineering graduates, the practical experience of Danish companies and specific insights from Danish integration policies. This approach will allow us to offer a broad overview of the research problem.

To begin with we will provide a sound overview of the experiences of an international engineering graduate in Denmark. We will dive in their transition from study to work and discuss the undergoing challenges and expectations that will impact their employment in the Danish labour market. We will also seek to understand the advantages and disadvantages an international graduate may bring inside a Danish company, as well as how important it is for these companies to have cultural diversity amongst their employees. Thirdly, we will aim to identify how important it is for Denmark to retain these international graduates and to observe where the gap (if any) between policy making and actual experience lies. Last but not least, we will aim to identify how our target group can increase their chances of acquiring an engineering job in the Danish labour market.

In summary, this research paper will enable us to shed more light on the actual relationship between potential employees and their employer and see if the nationality of the employee has any effect on the final hiring outcome.

1.3. State of the art

This section aims to situate the topic of this current master thesis in the context of the relevant research work done prior. This is why we will be reviewing some of the key research findings and insights on the topic that have previously contributed to the research body on this issue. We will also point out some current omissions of the existing literature and will aim to extend this research body and fill some of the gaps with this master thesis work.

As already discussed, international graduates are seen as prospective skilled workers in Denmark. For an example, a study by Ana Mosneaga and Lars Winther in 2013 has focused on the relationship between international students' decision to study abroad and their perspectives on continuing their career after graduation in Denmark. This paper addresses this topic by analysing the perspective of international graduates on the study-to-work transition in Denmark through 43 interviews made with international students enrolled in postgraduate science and technology programs in university from Copenhagen region and international graduates who finished their studies in Denmark and are searching for a job. The results of this study illustrate how multiple spheres of individuals' lives influence the plans and paths of student migrants before and after their career start in the host country (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013, pp.190). The findings of the study clearly indicate that the social networks and relationships that exist independently of any policy framework strongly influence the individual's decisions, but these decisions are also affected by "unforeseeable externalities of specific situations" (pp.191). Besides these influencers, finding relevant job opportunities is seen as a powerful retaining factor after graduation, emphasizing that "social networking during study time is the key for nurturing international students' attachment to the host country" (pp.191).

Another report for the Danish Industry Foundation (2012) has tapped into why companies in Denmark should focus in international graduates and the findings show that: *“access to a larger pool of professionals with sought-after skills, access to new growth markets as international graduates bring insight and cultural sensitivity from their home countries as well as knowledge of the host country, which can be utilized actively to market products to their home countries”* (DAMWAD, 2012, pp.6) and nonetheless the diversity brings an increase in innovation and better problem solving inside the organization. The research findings identify two challenges for international graduates in Denmark: first, finding a job is more difficult comparing with Danish graduates given the lack of a network and relevant job experiences and second, even though work life is considered attractive in general, the integration into the workplace is not so smooth.

Another research project that sheds more light on this topic and supports the previous findings was conducted in Denmark with the purpose to investigate the international students' perceptions of the Danish job market (Chobotova, 2010). It was implemented in the framework of a project funded by the European Union and Mid-Judland region called InterResource, who attempted to connect international students with the Danish companies. The project was conducted through a qualitative method, by making focus groups discussions with international students. Again, the main finding of this study as well as others was that *“the lack of connections [which] has been identified as a main entry barrier for an international student on the Danish job market”* (Chobotova, 2010, pp.8). This study emphasizes that the *“perspective of linking international students with the Danish job market should be seen as a part of a complex integration process, rather than a single act.”* (Chobotova, 2010, pp.9)

Another important study to note, despite the fact it focuses on graduates from Universities of Applied Sciences in Tourism and Hospitality degree programs in Finland, was conducted by La Ling Giang and Nobel Mohammad (2014). The main objective of this research paper was to investigate the expectations of their employment after graduation which the international graduates from this degree program might have and the obstacles that they face while entering the Finnish labour market. This study was undertaken by analysing 6 semi-

structured qualitative interviews held with international graduates and 30 questionnaires addressed to the same target group. What the research findings supported was that all the international graduates had high expectations about their salary level, working conditions and job prospect, even though they come to the conclusion that Finland is not a country where you could easily get employed after graduation. Moreover, some of the obstacles they encountered were very specific for international students such as *“a lack of Finnish language skills, high competition, lack of experiences, lack of recommendation and society”* (Giang & Mohammad, 2014, pp. 63).

Another study worth mentioning on the topic focused on the *“employment opportunities and barriers on the Russian and German labour market for international graduates with domestic degrees”* (Shchegolev et al., 2016). This study used in-depth interviews with recruiters from 12 companies in Germany and Russia and it attempted to identify and compare the job opportunities and the obstacles encountered by international graduates at an individual, organizational and institutional levels. The findings of this research article are that country-specific human capital is very valued by employers, but the stage of internationalization of where a company is situated influences very much this valuation. Moreover, the institutional framework on labour migration law determines the employers' openness for international graduates.

Comparing the above-mentioned research studies to our own research, we can observe similarities among the methods used (mostly, it was used qualitative methods) as well as the findings. Most of the research findings discussed above confirm our own observations and hypothesis, meaning that a lack of host-country language skills, a lack of network, and a lack of experiences in the industry and society, and stigmatization represents obstacles and challenges for international graduates looking to integrate into the labour market. Even though there are some previous studies conducted on the topic of international students in general in Denmark, what is specific to our study is that we are looking into this specific issue through the lens of international engineering degree students, which is still a topic that needs further exploration.

Moreover, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of international graduates' employment not only from the graduates' perspective but also the employer's perspective.

Our study contributes to the research literature by, first, taking into account the challenges and the difficulties that our specific target group encounters while entering the Danish labour market and, secondly, by relating these findings to the various expectations companies in Denmark have towards recent international engineering graduates. We take a deeper dive into the various obstacles that an international graduate specialized in the engineering sector is facing, while making the school-to-work transition. This research thesis aims to extend the body of research on the topic and also contributes with additional data specifically shedding more light on the engineering sector.

1.4. Thesis Structure

In order to answer the main research question, here you will find a brief outline of the structure of the thesis. We will focus further on the five main chapters.

In the first chapter we provide a broad overview of the issues faced in the Danish labour market, especially focusing in depth on international graduates who have obtained an engineering degree in Denmark and who are willing to remain in the country and be active on the labour market. We identify our research question and with State of the art we situate our master thesis in a relevant context in light of the current research body on the topic.

Chapter 2 deals with the ontological and epistemological considerations, research strategy, design and methods chosen for further investigating our research topic. An exploratory case study was selected to approach the problem through a constructivism and interpretivism paradigm, using mixed methods research for gathering qualitative and quantitative data in order to analyse our research question. There were 12 semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted and 13 companies that have filled our quantitative survey.

Chapter 3 discusses the chosen theories on three different levels: institutional, individual and organizational. In the first level, we use the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu' forms of capital theory and communication adaptation theory. In the organizational level, diversity management paradigms will guide the discussion of investigating the prospects open to international engineering graduates. Last but not least, on the institutional level we will pay attention to neoclassic theory which helps us to make the connection with the specific laws and policies within the European Union legislative framework, focusing on the mobility regulations and on Danish integration policies.

Chapter 4 deals with the analysis of the empirical data gathered for this thesis. We will connect the theories discussed in the theoretical section to the most important findings of our interview and survey samples. We will also discuss this data in light of the Danish labour market integration policies. The main purpose of the analysis will be to provide a holistic view on the journey of the newly graduates who have decided to live and work further on in Denmark and to search for a job in the engineering field.

The final chapter will present the conclusion of the thesis, including an overview of the main findings and a discussion of the study, where we identify how our group target can increase their chances of acquiring an engineering position in Denmark. Additionally, an insight to our proposed further research topics will be provided. Following this, the list of references and appendices will be included at the end of the thesis.

Nonetheless, the following figure illustrates better the connections made inside the section of this research paper:

I

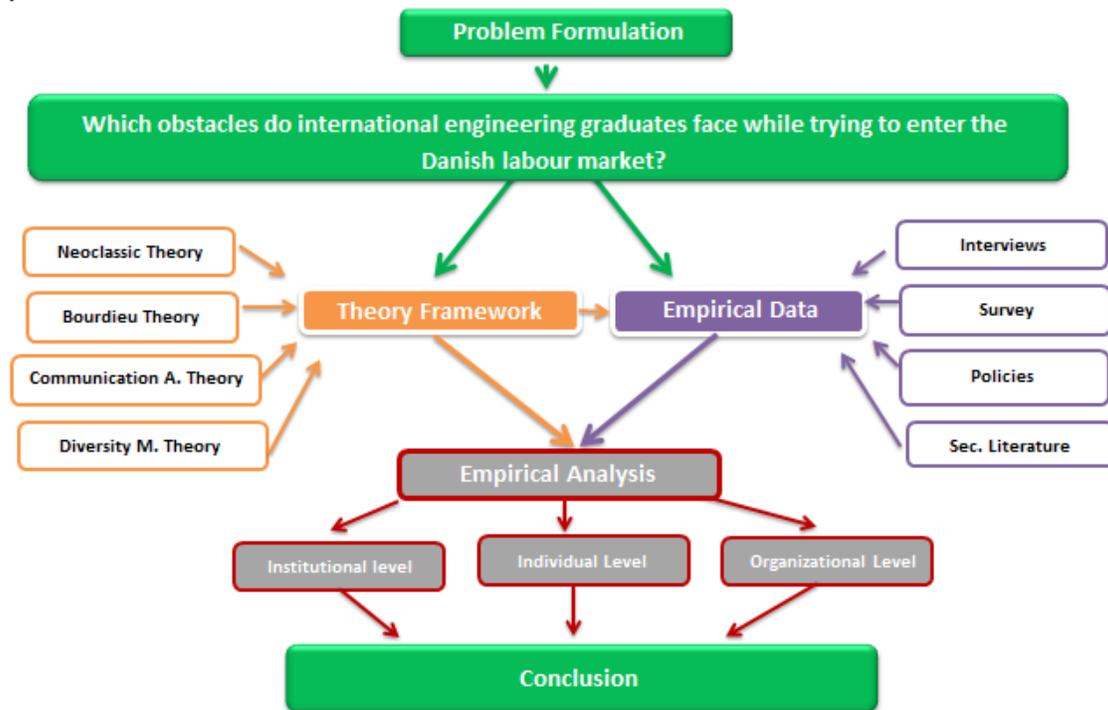


Figure 1.1 – Thesis structure (own design)

Chapter 2 – Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the methodological considerations we have made during the work process. The section will be divided into 7 subsections, as follows 1. Paradigm of choice 2. Research design 3. Data collection 4. Research method 5. Validity of collected data 6. Limitations and 7. Strategy of analysis.

2.1. Paradigm of choice

A research paradigm is a basic set of fundamental beliefs that assembles the researcher' thinking framework (Wahyuni, 2012). In other words, a paradigm is the main instrument that guides a researcher in their choices and decisions on how to carry out the study.

“A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates of first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world”, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts.” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

There are two main philosophical dimensions of a research paradigm and these are ontology and epistemology. While ontology reflects to how one is perceiving the reality, epistemology represents the nature of knowledge with regards to the methods of its assembly, accumulation and comprehension (Bryman, 2012).

2.1.1. Ontological considerations

The first dimension of a social research paradigm, ontology, is constituted by two positions – *objectivism* and *constructivism*. According to Bryman, the concept of constructivism advocates that a social phenomenon is being achieved repeatedly by social actors. Moreover, constructivism as an ontological position is allowing the researcher to present a distinct interpretation of social reality, instead of performing a version that is absolute and definitive (Bryman 2012, p.33). Objectivism, on the other hand, is an ontological stance which implies that a social phenomenon is independent and objective by social actors, while according to the second ontological position, constructivism the social phenomena is dependent and subjective by the social actors (Idem).

In a social research the mystery of human behaviour is being explored. In our opinion, there are two ways a researcher could test this behaviour – by taking an objective or a subjective position. Our perception for the existing world is that people as individuals are dependent on their present and past. Furthermore, people are influenced by their historical, cultural and social background and characteristics, which are affecting not only their past and present, but future, too. This means that our ontological approach to this master thesis will be Constructivism. In this matter, we, as researchers, assume that the world we live in is subjective

and socially constructed one, and is transforming over and over again depending on different social actors (Wahyuni, p.69, 2012).

2.1.2. Epistemological considerations

The second dimension of a research paradigm, which is epistemology, deals with the question what is the nature of knowledge and unravels the perception how is this knowledge deemed to be effective and valid in the social world. Similarly to ontology, epistemology also has two positions. These would be Positivism and Interpretivism (Bryman 2012, p. 27). Positivism' common perspective is that the social reality is objective and external. Researchers who lean on positivist position carry out a value-free research and believe in the presence of an all-purpose (universal) generalisation. They are more likely to use data and knowledge in order to test a certain hypothesis. (Wahyuni 2012, pp.71).

Interpretivism is in epistemological contrast with positivism to all paragraphs. Researchers, who adopt Interpretivism as their paradigm of social study, deny objectivism and acknowledge subjectivism instead. (Wahyunim 2012, pp.71). Which means that for an Interpretivist researcher' the data and knowledge acquired will be subjective, internal, and full with value. Moreover, a researcher is more inclined to comprehend the knowledge rather than to prove a hypothesis. As researchers, we believe that an individual gains his knowledge about the world in a very subjective way. Therefore, in this Master Thesis the epistemological position we accommodate will be Interpretivism.

2.1.3. Why choosing Constructivism and Interpretivism?

In accordance to the research paradigms of Constructivism and Interpretivism, which will be applied in this Master thesis, we find important to explain our choice. In this thesis we concentrate on the experiences of international engineering graduates who seek to obtain an employment at the Danish labour market. We take into account the significance not only of what they are sharing with us, but also why they are sharing it. Having this in mind, we want to

answer the question *“How do they see themselves in the social reality?”* by following their history and life experiences. By applying the Constructivist paradigm we will also be able to look into their social and cultural heritage and to grasp how they have formed their opinion and beliefs of the world surrounding them. By implementing all these components we will consider the data we gather to be still subjective and full with value. The interpretivist paradigm, on the other hand, will allow us to better understand and comprehend what the subjective data actually means (Bryman 2012; Wahyuni, 2012).

In order to introduce the reader how we consider the data under study to be subjective, we will hereby clarify our role as researchers in this project. We, as the investigators of this paper, are conscious and transparent about our own beliefs on the topic under study. Due to this transparency, we will openly interpret the subjective opinions and experiences of the participants of this master thesis. In addition, our choice of topic was not arbitrary. To some extent, it is influenced by our own interests and situation. Still, our own position influences our interpretations. How we see our data is really our own interpretations on the participants' interpretations. Here, it is key to clarify why we nominate the international graduates as “participants”. The reason lies in the fact that we comprehend them as participants or informants in this master thesis, as they “tell” us about their own experiences in the job search process in Denmark after graduation. The ultimate goal is by no means to make generalizations of our findings, but rather to paint a picture about the specific situations the subjects under study are experiencing. We will accomplish this by going into debt with their individual accounts and experiences. Last but not least, it is important to explain how we overcome biases. In order not to take either the graduates' or the companies' side, we attempt to collect as much data as we can, both primary and secondary, in order to enrich our knowledge and to broaden our understanding of all perspectives.

2.2. Research design

This sub-chapter will provide the necessary information to sustain why we choose to use exploratory case study for undertaking the research design of this project. The present research is an analysis of a single case, namely the challenges encountered by the international engineering graduates while entering the labour market in Denmark. We came to this approach considering that the problem we decided to investigate is not thoroughly researched in the literature, given the limited analyses and existing data on the matter. Moreover, it represents a big interest for us, the researchers, to explore in-depth the subject and likewise, to gather enough information in order to form a holistic perspective of the phenomenon. However, the aim of this study is not to create universal knowledge, but to explore patterns of social processes in our context, which makes an exploratory case study design a good fit for this research.

The chosen research design will give us direction, schematize the research and enable us to start a plan of our research question and by that, helping to formulate clear and focused conclusions to it. *“The function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible”* (de Vaus, 2001, pp.9). Moreover, it provides the overall direction of the research, including the process by which the research is conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2007). There are multiple types of research design, each of them affecting the study results and how the findings are concluded (Blakstad, 2012). The nature of our study research is consistent with an interpretive epistemological position, as already established above. Given this aspect, according to this paradigm, we will proceed further by choosing the case study type.

The reason for choosing to use the case study approach is because of its particularly usefulness to respond to what, how and why questions about an existing event (Leonard-Barton, 1990; Yin, 2004). As argued by Gummesson, an important advantage of the case study is the prospect for having a holistic view of the manner: *“the detailed observations entailed in*

the case study method enable us to study many different aspects, examine them in relation to each other, and view the process within its total environment..." (Gummesson, 1988, pp.76)

Case study is widely used in organizational studies in the social science discipline and consists in detailed investigation of one or more organizations, or groups within organizations, which provides an analysis of the context under study (Hartley, 1994). According to Robson, case study is *"a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence"* (Robson, 2002, pp.178). Therefore, the aim of a case study is to provide detailed and intensive analysis of the case considered (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Case study research is not restricted to a single source of data. *"In fact, good case studies benefit from having multiple sources of evidence... In collecting case study data, the main idea is to <<triangulate>> or establish converging lines of evidence to make your findings as robust as possible"* (Yin, 2004, pp.9). By including both quantitative and qualitative data, case study supports to explain the process, as well as the outcome of the research problem *"through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation"* (Tellis, 1997).

In order to organize and conduct a case study research, scholars such as Robert E. Stake and Robert K. Yin have suggested a six steps plan to be followed (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009): plan, design, prepare, collect, analyse and share. In the first instance, it is important to determine and define the research question, which according to our research is *"What are the obstacles engineering international graduates face while trying to integrate into the Danish labour market?"* The second step is to select the cases – here it is established by the researcher what tactics to use in opt for single or multiple case studies to examine in depth. According to our research we conduct a single case study, because our research is focused on international engineering graduates and it aims to use their experiences and opinions to build a broad theory of the challenges met on the transition study-to-work in the host country. The third phase is for preparing to collect the data, which are going to be explored bellow in the data collection and methods section, and is followed further, by collecting the data in the field through semi-structured interviews, survey and secondary sources. The fifth step represents the data analysis

phase, which means a search for a pattern in data-recurrent behaviours, which is after interpreted in terms of existing theory. Last step is preparing the report as portraying the researched issue in an easily understanding way for its readers.

According to Yin, there are three types of case study purposes: explanatory, exploratory and descriptive (Yin, 2003). Given our interest, we will proceed with the exploratory research, which is applied for a research problem that has not been evidently researched and has as an objective to gather preliminary data that will help to define the problem and suggest relevant insights into a given situation (Babbie, 2007). We would like to discover if there are any constraints linked to the option of remaining in Denmark after finishing an engineering education, when pursuing the transition from study to finding a job here. According to McGivern, the explorative type is a fit for the investigator who has as a purpose to identify and clarify problems (McGivern, 2006).

Nonetheless, the exploratory case study approach will provide the opportunity to explore holistic impressions (Yin, 2009) First, by taking into account the challenges and the difficulties that our target group is encountering and secondly, by presenting additional information to sustain the findings and by trying to correlate the outcomes to the different expectations which companies in Denmark have from the recent international graduates.

2.3. Data collection

This master thesis is built on both primary and secondary sources. As primary data we have conducted 12 semi-structured qualitative interviews with international graduates within the engineering field, accompanied by a social survey presenting the expectations and experiences of companies that run their businesses in the Danish labour market. The EU and Danish policies on mobility and integration have been brought into play as a secondary literature. In addition, we have looked at many research reports, social studies, books, articles and press releases that we consider as relevant secondary sources for our research study.

2.4. Mixed methods research

The figure below illustrates the model of the research methods we applied, in order to gather data for our Master thesis.

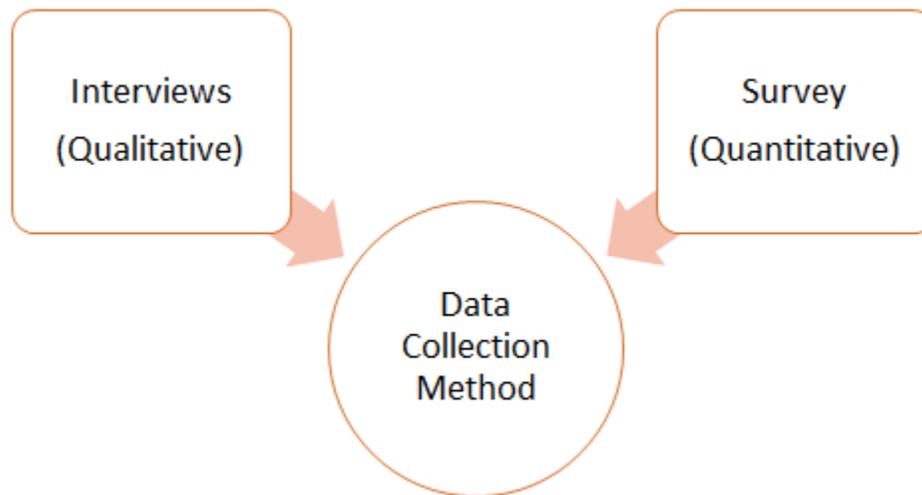


Figure 1.2 – Research methods model (own source)

The methodology approach which is going to be applied in this research paper is a mixed-methods approach. Also found in the methodology research literature as pragmatic approach to research, that is *“integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to generating new knowledge and can involve either concurrent or sequential use of these two classes of methods to follow a line of inquiry”* (Stange et al., 2006, pp.1).

Supplementing the existing quantitative and qualitative designs, mixed methods research has been created over the past twenty years as a third methodological movement (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) in order to find *“an appropriate paradigm to provide a legitimation for the use of mixed methods comparable to the paradigms that have been widely accepted as justifying the use of quantitative and qualitative methods separately”* (Hall, 2012, pp.1).

There are three types of mixed methods research differentiating by the given significance of one specific type of research: quantitatively driven approach, qualitatively driven approach and interactive or equal status designs. In our research project we will choose to apply the qualitatively driven approach, which is the research study at its core a qualitatively study with quantitatively data added to complement and increase the qualitative study by providing an added value in responding to the research question (Johnson et al., 2007). The reason we choose this type of mixed methods approach is based on our focus on the graduates' challenges and not specifically on the company' experiences. The latter one only supports and adds more value to our research and helps in gathering wider and more complex answers for our research question.

The added value for this research thesis in using mixed methods consists in gaining a completer image and deepening our knowledge in the analysis under study (Bryman, 2004; Fielding & Schreier, 2001; Kelle, 2001). The perception of both graduates and employers are taken into account in order to discover if there are any constraints linked to the option of remaining in Denmark after finishing an engineering education when pursuing the transition of finding a job here.

2.4.1. Triangulation

Bryman identifies several different approaches to conducting a social research where knitting together qualitative and quantitative research. In this paper we are choosing to apply the Triangulation model. In his book *Social Research Methods* (2012), Bryman explains further on that triangulation *"refers to the traditional view that quantitative and qualitative research might be combined to triangulate findings in order that they may be mutually corroborated"*. The main idea of using the triangulation model in a social research study is that the results from one research strategy are cross-checked with the results of the other research strategy that is used by the researcher. Ultimately, this model of mixed methods research is a method to make the findings more robust.

2.4.2. Criticism of mixed methods research

There are two main arguments that are debating the mixed methods research. On one hand, it is the statement that a research method bears its methodological implications. On the other hand, there is the belief that social paradigms are what distinguish qualitative from quantitative research. Although there are some authors (Smith 1983; Smith and Heshusius 1986; Guba 1985; Morgan 1998b) that criticise the integration of qualitative with quantitative research in one project for the above-mentioned reasons, in the recent years mixed methods research has become widely popular and accepted as a way to carry out a social research (Bryman 2012, p.629).

Our standpoint, as researchers, is that mixed methods research is applicable only in cases, in which either one of the two methods, qualitative or quantitative, is used to supplement the prior sampling method, and to provide the researcher with an additional perspective. As this is relevant to our case, we will carry out this Master Thesis through a qualitative research method, and a quantitative add-on method.

2.4.3. Qualitative method

“The essence of qualitative research is to identify the characteristics and structure of phenomena and events examined in their natural context.” (Jonker & Pennink 2010, p.77).

Qualitative research is the one that a researcher uses when he or she wants to see the world through the eyes of people being studied, and to put an accent on their words and life experiences. As a qualitative research method, we have conducted twelve qualitative semi-structured interviews with graduates from different nationalities. What comprises this particular profile is that all twelve of them have different cultural heritage and share the same goal – to find an employment within the engineering sector in Denmark, where they have finished their higher education within the engineering field.

Interview as a method

“Conversations are an old way of obtaining systematic knowledge.” (Kvale 2007, p.5)

As Kvale argues conversation is a long known method to acquire information. But there is a significant difference between an ordinary everyday conversation and an interview for social research. While in a standard dialogue between two people, both parties have equal authority and importance, in a single qualitative interview the circumstances are not quite the same. What makes the interview a specific type of a conversation is that it has a certain structure and goal that is identified by the one party, namely the interviewer.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interview’ purpose is to acquire a presentation of the life experiences of the participant, so the researcher can read and translate this experience later on (Kvale & Brinkmann). The nature of semi-structured interviewing approach lies in the fact that the interviewer is prepared with a list of questions on a specific topic, and to some extent he follows a definite script, but the interviewee is the one that has the leeway to choose how to answer these questions. In this sense, semi-structured interview is kind of a flexible approach to acquire empirical data. Still, the interviewer plays a significant role as he is the one who interprets the findings in the end. As Bryman suggests, one of the most important elements of doing an interview is the listening part where the interviewer should be very observant and careful on what is said and what is not said during the conversation.

According to Bryman, there are several steps in a semi-structured interview. These will be a) Preparing an interview guide and b) Recording and transcribing the interview. At the first step of “Preparing an interview guide”, a researcher has to decide on what kind of questions he wants to pose to the interviewee. The interview questions are extremely variable. At that nascent stage we adopted Kvale’ (1996) suggestion on nine different types of questions – 1. Introducing questions 2. Follow-up questions 3. Probing questions 4. Specifying questions 5. Direct questions 6. Indirect questions 7. Structuring questions 8. Silence and 9. Interpreting questions (Bryman 2012, p.478)

We aimed to create clear and coherent questions that in the end will provide us with information on how and why these graduates are looking for a job in the Danish labour market. Ultimately, our focus was on both “why” and “how” question they make the job hunt process to happen. We did not want to focus too much on the reasons why the international engineering graduates have decided to stay in Denmark and look for an employment here, as this is not the main purpose of this research, but to concentrate on discovering and highlighting the obstacles they encounter in this process. We were primarily interested of knowing what are the main challenges, obstacles and barriers they see along the way to employment, and eventually to investigate whether they are able or not to overcome them.

After determining the central point of the interview itself, we proceeded by choosing the participants.

➤ Selecting the interviewee

It is important to explain how we have selected our interviewees. The illustration below gives an overall view on the engineering international graduates’ characteristics.

Name	Age	Country of origin	A graduate from / since	Study program	How long have they been in Denmark?	How long after graduation did it take them to find a job?
Alexander	25	Romania	AAU/ June 2016	Electric engineering	2 years	Still unemployed
Anabel	25	Spain	AAU/June 2016	Structural and Civil engineering	2 ½ years	Started in November 2016
Carl	25	Romania	AAU/June 2016	Management in the building industry	6 years	Started in September 2016
Christian	24	Romania	AAU/ June 2016	Electric engineering	2 years	Right after graduation he was offered a job as a

						research assistant at AAU.
Georgios	26	Greece	AAU/ June 2016	Structural and Civil engineering	2 years	Still unemployed
Joana	29	Romania	AAU/ January 2013	Civil engineering	6 years	Employed since March 2016
Klaus	26	Bulgaria	AAU/ June 2016	Entrepreneur in engineering	7 years	He is working for the past 1 year and 3 months.
Leon	25	France	AAU/ June 2016	Structural and Civil engineering	2 years	Still unemployed
Luis	25	Romania	AAU/ June 2016	Electric engineering	2 years	Still unemployed
Mihai	26	Romania	AAU/ June 2016	Structural and Civil engineering	2 years	Still unemployed
Tibold	26	Hungary	AAU/ June 2016	Structural and Civil engineering	2 years	Started 3rd of August 2016
Tiffany	27	Romania	AAU/ June 2016	Electro-mechanical Systems Design	8 years	Still unemployed

Figure 1.3 Interviewees' Characteristics (own source)

The main significance was that they fit in the profile of an engineering international graduate that is seeking an employment on the Danish labour market. Our goal was that we approach as many diverse nationalities as we can. This intention of ours was prompted by the fact that if we specify on a certain nationality other implications will acquire which are not going to be relevant for this master thesis. We believe that the diversity in the nationality backgrounds of the engineering graduates is a key factor in order to demonstrate fairness and

impartiality. Therefore, we have succeeded to conduct interviews with graduates from 5 different EU countries – Bulgaria, France, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Spain.

We have made the first interviews with people from our own network that were corresponding to the profile explained earlier, and later on we applied the snowball method of gathering data. According to Bryman, the snowball method is: *“a sampling technique in which the researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience of characteristics relevant to the research. These participants will then suggest others and so on”* (Bryman, 2012, pp.424). We have applied this type of sampling by asking each interviewee for new references and a recommendation for other graduates, so we ended up to interview people that we did not know at first place.

The type of the interviews was the semi-structured, as it provides the researcher with certain flexibility in the interview process, and it gives him a deep insight into the participants' perspectives (Bryman, 2012, p.471). Seven out of twelve interviews were conducted in person. We have provided the engineering graduates with a quiet and undisturbed setting, such as the adequate areas provided for study purposes by the main library of Aalborg and Aalborg University. The interviews with the rest five engineering graduates were held on Skype, as these participants had already moved from Aalborg area to Copenhagen. The length of the interviews continued for approximately one hour, as the conversations were audio-recorded after the explicit permission of the participants. To have the interviews on a record was a great advantage for us, as it made their transcription possible. Another aspect which was discussed with the selected participants was the ethical concerns that this research may entail, such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. In order to respect their privacy and to avoid any misrepresentation, we are providing the international graduates with anonymity by replacing their real names with pseudonyms.

2.4.4. Quantitative method

In the very beginning of this master thesis, when we were still discussing on how to collect primary data and whom to approach for this matter, we decided that besides graduates' perspective we find companies' opinions quite significant, as well. Our original plan was to conduct face to face interviews with companies which will allow us to obtain additional information by asking them supplementary questions in person. Unluckily, we soon found out that this method to gather data is not suitable for the companies and will not be successful. The decision to conduct an online survey, instead, was prompted by the failure of our initial plan. Although we changed the method of collecting data, we still found it crucial to seek the perspective of engineering companies that run on the Danish labour market. The reason to consider them as an important factor to the findings of this thesis is because we find it necessary to take into account the perspective of both sides, the one of the international engineering students at first place, but also the employers' perspective.

The central point of the survey was to track what companies' expectation towards international graduates are, in terms of the personal and professional qualities and skills of the latter. Taking into account companies' point of view, we believe that we expand the awareness of our problem, and moreover this will allow us to supplement our findings in the analysis section further. The reason why we find the results of the survey very valuable to this master thesis is because they give us another perspective, the one of the employer' side. The survey highlights not only the expectations of companies towards a graduate with an international background, but also their experiences with representatives of this profile. The information from our survey gives a hint on how international graduates with different mind-sets, cultural background and life experiences can overcome the challenges for getting an employment.

➤ *Survey*

As we already discussed earlier, the survey aimed to gain an insight into companies' perspective for an international graduate as their employee. We have approached more than 70 companies across whole Denmark. All of them being in the engineering sector, as some of

them are entirely Danish companies, and some are international companies that also run on the Danish labour market. From these 70 companies, we have received back 13 completed questionnaire forms, and even though this number is not high, we still find this data relevant to this master thesis, as it gives us insight into another perspective different than the one of the graduates, the one of the companies. Once we started sending out emails to the companies our goal was not only to approach the HR department, but also to address the survey directly to hiring managers and ask them for cooperation. In case we were not contacting the person responsible for hiring graduates, we were asking, if possible, to forward the survey to the right person in order to obtain as many as possible relevant answers back.

The questionnaire itself was presented to the companies with a brief introduction on the topic of our master thesis and the purpose of the survey. The latter, contains 22 questions since we did not want to put too many, so the interviewer does not lose an interest at some point. The survey was carried through the online survey application www.survey-xact.dk, and it was active for more than one month.

Several different types of questions are applied in this survey. We have asked questions where the participant had options to answer by using multiple choices, and other questions requiring the selection of only one possible answer. We consider that one way to make the nature of our online survey a bit more qualitative is to also include open ended-questions, which will enable us to have and comprehend participants' own opinion and perspective. In the end, our main task was to construct the questions in a clear way, so we do not cause any confusion for the survey participants.

We will continue by introducing the 13 companies, who took part in our online survey, in terms of their origin, business activity, and size. The survey shows that the majority of the companies interviewed, have a Danish origin. In order to demonstrate this with numbers - only 3 out of 13 companies, identified their company' origin as "other than Danish". Our initial goal, when selecting the companies, was that these companies are present in an industry with a high demand for engineering professionals. In the end we have received completed questionnaire forms by companies in the construction, engineering consultancy, entrepreneur and energy

management, production and even pharma sectors. In the survey participated different in size companies. The majority of them identified having between 1000 and 5000 employees, but we also received an answer from much smaller businesses, such as companies that have up to 100 employees in total, and in the same time there were responses from much bigger companies that employ over 5000 employees.

Finally, we acknowledge both disadvantages and advantages of conducting an online survey. Some of the drawbacks that should be borne in mind are non-response and/or low response rates; lack of a personal contact between interviewer and interviewee; failure to help the interviewee if the question is misunderstood; impossibility to ask supplementary questions, hence to gather additional data; and unknowing the participant due to anonymity (Bryman 2012, pp.658). All these shortcomings influenced the amount of data we gathered through the quantitative survey, but given the fact that the latter is only a supplementary element to our primary source of information, the international engineers' interviews, we can still justify its presence and validity to our study. In addition, our strategy to counteract the above-mentioned disadvantages of having this small sample was to pose as many as possible open-ended questions which to enrich the inferable data.

On the other hand, the benefits of conducting an online survey are not less. Bryman argues that *"questionnaire that are completed by respondents themselves are one of the main instruments for gathering data using a social survey design"* (2012, pp.232). Among the advantages is the undisputed convenience for the respondent that he is the one who decides when to participate in the survey, and can also self-determine the speed he needs to answer the questions. Another advantage is that the questions are put in a certain order that does not lead to any confusion in the interviewee. And last but not least, participation in an online survey could be quite advantageous for both parties, as it is inexpensive and not so much time-consuming method of gathering data as an interview could be (Bryman 2012, pp.233).

2.5. Validity and reliability of the collected data

In order to get both valid and reliable data, we will use both semi-structured interviews to add validity and a quantitative survey that will support the qualitative data and add reliability to the framework. Although, concerning the semi-structured interviews that were held might become influenced by our subjectivism, therefore there is a possibility to alter the analysis, but we consider that all viewpoints are simply another way of approaching a subject and explore it more in-depth and tried to reduce it by cross-checks and intensive discussion among us, the researchers. Anyhow, since our framework will mainly be based on a small number of people' subjective opinions, focusing on their experience, the approach of this thesis, as mentioned before, will be focused on the interpretative and constructivism research paradigms.

Feldman defines validity as the *“degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific topic that the research is attempting”* (Feldman, 2003, p. 26). It is embodied in this argument that validity determines whether the research manage to truthfully present the scope and the results indented. Reliability is defined by Joppe as: *“...The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable”* (Joppe, 2000, pp.1). It is inherent here the importance in a study of replicating and the ability to repeat the results of the analysis. Though, taking into consideration that our research is an exploratory study and is not concerned with measuring change over time, the attention will be concentrated in exploring current practice and issues.

Nevertheless, for improving the validity and the reliability of a research, triangulation is a representative strategy used by scholars (Mathison, 1988; Barbour, 1998; Patton, 2001). According to Patton, *“triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches”* (Patton, 2001, pp.247). By using this approach, the variation in data collection we used had the purpose of increasing the validity of our paper, getting the perspective and

experiences of the graduates and backing it with the employers' experiences. We considered important to have as many sides of insights as there can be investigated, in order to ensure that pre-existing assumptions about a particular side are less likely to occur, and to have a complete outlook of our research question.

2.6. Limitations

One of the main restrictions is the fact that the primary data we have gathered and assembled for the purpose of this master thesis, most probably is not sufficient. The reason is that we were able to conduct face to face interviews with only twelve international engineering graduates and this number is far away from the actual amount of international students who seek for an employment in Denmark.

As mentioned earlier, another restraint of our primary empirical findings is the fact that we did not manage to conduct in person interviews with the companies as well, and ended-up with an online survey with a low response-rate. The reason why we failed was that we did not collect a sufficient number of positive responses that can make an actual meeting between us and an employer to happen. Among the reasons for a "no" answer was that it is against the company' policy to participate in this kind of a research; they cannot assist us due to the large number of inquiries they receive from other students and/ or simply do not have time to help us by taking part in our research. For all these reasons, we turned to another method to gather the information we need, namely the online survey which we spread among a vast number of companies. Ultimately, the response rate of our survey was not as high as desired at first place, so in this sense it presents quite small part on the companies' perspective. Another limitation of our small survey, with rather restricted findings, was that it left a lot on our own interpretation. In addition, we reflect on the risk that the participants may provide the supposedly "right" or "good" answers, and that they are maybe pointing a nicer picture than their practices are. We consider that instead of having a limited survey, presenting the perspective of solely 13 companies, it would have been better to make a case study of only one company. Having

multiple face to face interviews in only one organization would give us richer perspective on the possible challenges of having an international graduate as an employee. Even though, we find the primary data we have assembled from both interviews with graduates and survey with companies to be very relevant to our Master thesis, as it gives us an insight into the phenomena under study.

A drawback of gathering secondary data was that we were not always able to find the most relevant secondary sources for this study. Sometimes we found it challenging to select and extract only the accurate and relevant sources for our topic.

Another limitation for us was the time frame of this Master thesis. We were aware of the fact that we have to fit in a certain period of time to make our research, but within this period we did not see a potential for doing a further research on our topic. By doing a future research, we will be able not only to touch on more graduates and the obstacles they encounter, that may differ from our current findings, but also to investigate if these obstacles vary for different time periods. Furthermore, we could also study the question: “If and how the job market for international graduates changes in time?” At last, we do find our data to be corresponding to the current obstacles and barriers international graduates may have to overcome.

2.7. Strategy of analysis

This subsection’s goal is to provide the reader with an understanding of how the collected data for this Master thesis is going to be analysed further. Earlier in the methodology chapter, we have explained the overall approach of our research, which is the interpretivist paradigm. In addition, this will be the way we are going to approach the analysis of the empirical findings.

Once the interviews’ data has been collected, our strategy was to get as many different dimensions as possible. In this context, we find relevant to take into consideration all the

obstacles which have been recognized and individualized by the international engineering graduates. Our strategy to approach the survey’s findings was the same. We back up this action plan of ours with the exploratory research logic. While the face to face interviews are entirely exploratory in nature, the survey consists of both closed and open-ended questions. The latter represent the majority of the questions and enable us to enrich our knowledge of the participants’ attitude, perception and manner towards international graduates.

And finally, the figures below illustrate how we apply theories and our data across the Analysis section:

Theory	Analysis
Neoclassic theory	Institutional level
Bourdieu’s Form of Capital;	Individual level Organizational level
Communication adaptation theory	Individual level
Diversity Management theory	Organizational level

Figure 1.4 The relationship between theory and analysis (own source)

Data	Analysis
Policies	Institutional level Organizational level
Interviews	Individual level Organizational level Institutional level
Survey	Organizational level Individual level Institutional level

Figure 1.5 The relationship between data and analysis (own source)

Chapter 4 - Theory Chapter

3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to present the theories that will be used for understanding our research problem and tries to provide a guide to understand the labour market integration concept. By correlating the chosen theories in the analysis, it will help us to better understand the position of our target group and form a holistic view of the phenomenon.

We decided to theoretically investigate our research problem from a multi-level dimension perspective, which is going to be further explored in three different stages: an institutional, an individual, and an organizational one. Firstly, in order to explore what makes an individual to move from the source country in order to improve his well-being in economic aspect we will shed light on the neoclassic theory in the institutional level. Secondly, for the individual level the essential aspect is how the characteristics, competences and the skills acquired by the international graduates can counterpart with the requirements and expectations of the organizations which are looking to hire on engineering positions. The mix between the international heritage and the host-country degree is a particular characteristic which we look upon at graduates, within the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's the forms of capital theory and communication adaptation theory. Last but not least, in terms of the organizational level the prospects open to international engineering graduates might be inherent in the business and the human resources strategies, along within the policies of the organizations towards them. This aspect will be seen through the lenses of diversity management paradigms.

We consider necessary to briefly explain what the labour market integration and segmentation stands for, prior to move deeper to explain the selected theories in order to get a better understanding of the problem area in this thesis.

Labour market integration

A labour market can be seen as a place where workers find paying work, employers find willing workers and where wage rate are determined. *“Labour market characterized by flexibility and efficiency in allocation of human resources is a key prerequisite for a competitive economy, providing incentives to employees to perform at top capacity and ensuring equality of workers’ rights and opportunities”* (IOM, 2010, pp.7)

The level of labour market integration of international graduates *“can be influenced by educational attainment, occupational skills, language competence, ethnic origin and cultural proximity, but also by demand in the host economy”* (IOM, 2010, pp.14). The labour market integration challenges the international graduates to successfully make the transition from studies to the labour market. There are some specific factors which may impact the success of integrating into the labour market, such as the correspondence between the job requirements and the educational achievements, the timeframe necessary to find a job, the wages or the economic security provided by the job (Zaharie, 2007).

Labour market segmentation

Labour market segmentation describes the economic marginalization of ethnic minorities, lower classes and women (Clairmont et al., 1983; Fevre, 1992). According to this notion, jobs and labour are divided into labour market segments and can function moderately autonomously. This aspect can occur because both jobs and workers are separated by demand-side (skills and educational demands, job stability, wages) and supply-side processes, such as education, job skills, occupational preferences (Gordon et al., 1982; Lee & Loveridge, 1987).

The segmentation of labour market is labelled by a dual market hypothesis that divides the economy into two segments, such as: skilled and unskilled employees, or native workers and immigrant workers (Prior, 1979). When connecting the cultural differentiation and labour market segmentation, we observe that they are treated in the literature as interlocking processes (Bourdieu, 1984), and this aspect will be further developed in the individual level.

3.2. Institutional Level

There is no single theory that can explain migration as a phenomenon. Even so, neoclassic theory is one of the best known approaches to study international migration (Tomanek, 2011). This theoretical approach focuses on what are the triggering push and pull factors for an individual to make the decision to move from one country to another, thereby from one labour market to another. Push factors bring together all the reasons which force people to leave their home countries. Among the causes to leave the source country might be dissatisfactory level of the education system, less or none employment opportunities, lower wages and bad economy, poor health care system etc. Contrary to push factors are pull factors that will attract people's movement to certain countries because of better standard of living, varied job opportunities and higher wages, high quality of education, better health care system and availability of services (Castles & Miller, 2009).

In its essence neoclassic theory of migration makes the assumption that the decision of individuals to migrate is taken up by the intention and striving to secure themselves economically after carefully calculating the differences in the wages in both source and host country (Borjas, 1989). Despite of this, the decision depends of course on the individual's economic capital to accomplish the movement from one country to another – the extent of his economic capital will make this feasible or unfeasible. And last but not least, the individual complies with the immigration policies and regulations that will access or deny the entry into certain country as well as he might take into consideration the integration strategy and policies of the host country (Ibid).

According to Borjas, after taking the decision for leaving the source country the individual selects the geographical area for migration in correspondence with several factors. Neoclassic theory presupposes that an individual will chose a country that offers to maximize his well-being, prosperity and employment opportunities. After moving to the host country the individual experiences the adaptation stage in which he has to adjust to the cultural, economic and political characteristics of the country. Borjas argues that neoclassic theory of migration

gives an explanation to what kind of features an individual needs to possess in order to reach successful integration. In line of this, some theories perceive migration as a human capital investment. The significance of the adaptation of immigrants to the labour market in the host country has been a subject of intensive research. In addition, it is important to take into account how successfully immigrants adjust and integrate in a foreign environment, as this may have consequences for both the immigrant and the host country's labour market. The adaptation in the economic model of the host country can be explained simply by applying one of the major concepts of neoclassic theory of migration which is human capital with regard to the specific resources, skills and knowledge of the immigrant. In this sense, migration is seen as an investment in one's human capital that afterwards is expected to pay out in his economic prosperity (Castles & Miller, 2009). Furthermore, human capital may give a foreknowledge about the adaptation process of an international job seeker (Borjas, 1989).

3.3. Individual Level

Theory to shed light on factors that will lead an individual to a success in the job search

In this Master thesis the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu's forms of capital theory are used as a tool to analyse the dimensions which are favouring the integration of international graduates in the Danish labour market.

Bourdieu (1986) argues that what determines one's position in the social reality is his capital. In his theory Forms of capital, Bourdieu defines a capital as the set of resources and potentials which an individual may possess. It is a matter of how this individual manages to use his resources and whether or not he is able to put them adequately in practice. These resources can either help or hinder one to situate better in the social reality. According to the possession of certain resources an individual might be seen as valuable asset for a particular social setting and simultaneously, the lack of special knowledge and skills to be perceived as a disadvantage or an omission. As Bourdieu says the capital is like "*roulette, which holds out the opportunity of*

winning a lot of money in a short space of time, and therefore of changing one's social status quasi-instantaneously..." (Bourdieu, Forms of Capital, 1986 pp.246).

According to Pierre Bourdieu's forms of capital theory there are three types of capital, depending on the different fields they might be put into practice. Bourdieu presents economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Economic capital is convertible into money and property rights which relates to one's possession of economic goods. Cultural capital associates with educational achievements that in certain circumstances can lead to transformation to economic capital. Social capital consists of social obligations ('connections'), which in certain environment and circumstances might transform into economic capital and might be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (pp.247).

Cultural capital

The main institutionalized form of cultural capital is presented by the educational credentials, linguistic and cultural skills and knowledge of an individual. The concept of cultural capital is possible in three forms – embodied state, objectified state and institutionalized state.

Embodied state exists as a form of cultural capital which acquisition *"is called culture, cultivation, Bildung, and presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labour of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor"* (p.248). Acquisition of embodied state is a self-improvement process which besides the time factor which an investor should consider there might exist other dimensions as sacrifice, renunciation and privation.

The objectified state is *"in the form of cultural goods"*. This form of cultural capital refers to the possession of all kinds of material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments etc. (p.250). The cultural goods can be converted into a material and symbolic form, as materially they suppose economic capital and symbolically they suppose cultural capital.

Institutionalized state is *“a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee”* (Ibid.)

Social capital

Social capital refers to the resources of network, connections, relationships or in general a membership in a group. The quantity and quality of the social capital an individual may possess depends on the volume of his network of relationships. In addition, it is significant the size of the capital in economic, cultural and symbolic terms. The benefits of a social network come from the membership in a group and they represent the basis of cohesion and unity which makes them possible (the benefits). According to Bourdieu, the existence and the accumulation of network connections is not naturally given appearance. However, it is an outcome of the investment strategies and efforts undertaken by the individual to establish social connection that might be beneficial for both short and long-terms. Furthermore, the enhancement of a social capital presupposes continuous application of sociability.

According to Bourdieu, when an individual accrues his social capital with new connections he is also rising his cultural and even economic capital. In his book *“Forms of Capital”*, Bourdieu explains further why it is important for one to have a good social capital – it is because of the possession of a social network an individual is *“sought after for his social capital, and because he is well known, is worthy of being known (‘ I know him well’), he does not need to ‘make the acquaintance’ of all his ‘acquaintances’, he is known to more people than he knows, and his work of sociability, when it is exerted, is highly productive”* (p. 253).

In addition, Bourdieu explains the title of nobility as the form of institutionalized social capital which provides the individual with a certain form of social connections in a long-term much better than any other form of social capital. In other words, the individual agent has an influence on his network, as the same network has given him this power.

Conversions

The various types of capital can be obtained from an economic capital but this is only feasible at the expense of more or less great application of transformation. Bourdieu (1986) argues that economic capital is the root of all other capitals, but is the root of their effects. According to him the other forms of capitals are just transmuted and disguised forms of economic capital and the latter is the root of their effects. In accordance with Bourdieu's vision on how a capital can function it is important to say that transformation from one capital to other is possible.

It is feasible that economic capital transforms into social capital. Bourdieu gives a simple example how this conversion can be possible – from economic viewpoint, if a person takes the time, interest and care to initiate a personal gift to somebody else, this act will be perceived as sure investment and act of a social exchange. In the long run the effect and benefits of this social exchange will appear in other form, for all one knows it could come forward to consolidation and accumulation of social capital. In line of this, economic capital may transform into cultural capital. The latter accumulates thanks to the possession of the required resources such as time which derives from economic capital. Time is one of the costs to acquire cultural capital which becomes possible if one possesses economic capital. In case an individual invests monetary capital in his educational qualifications, the transmission from economic to cultural capital is easily achievable.

Theory to shed light on the obstacles that hinder an individual from employment

Intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation has been a subject of examination and studying by many researchers interested in the phases an individual agent goes through when setting his foot in a new culture (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Furnham, 1988; Kim & Ruben, 1988; Nwanko & Onwumehili, 1991; Searle & Ward, 1990). Communication adaptation theory is an intercultural theory that deals with the interaction between people with different cultural heritage. Their behavior is been examined while communicating with

each other. This theoretical approach has been used as a tool to explain why people are more likely to converge or diverge their linguistic skills to other people within cross-cultural setting.

Communication adaptation theory supposes that people converge to the “others” when they want to enhance and improve their communication skills. Different then convergence approach is the one that hinders the intercultural communication. Oftentimes communication between native and non-native speakers fails to happen (Gass & Varonis, 1991). The reason lies on the fact that native and non-native speakers share different language histories (Cai & Rodriguez, 1996).

One of the main purposes of communication adaptation theory is to give an explanation on why people may not be able to adapt in cross-cultural interaction. Later on in the analysis section, we will discuss that the incapability to adjust to intercultural environment is one of the determined obstacles for better integration into the Danish labour market for the subjects under study in this research paper. Therefore, we find relevant to look at the assumptions of the communication adaptation theory in this matter. Three main problems are found on this level that provides an explanation. Firstly, Kim and Ruben (1988, p.313) introduce a model explaining how the cultural communication may suffer failure because of stress created by intercultural experiences. Secondly, communication adaptation theory presents a model of strategies that include putting an effort to enhance the understanding of the language, but these strategies do not explain how the process is being established. This means that if one has an experience in intercultural communication he will improve the results of this type of communication. And on third place, the reason why adaptation may not happen is only because of the initial existence of conversational partner.

Finally, the communication adaptation theory focuses on how a person can attune to his conversational partner. Two cases are possible – convergence and divergence. In the first case, convergence explains that an individual is more likely to change his language behaviour in order to be alike his conversational partner and to perhaps get his approval in some way. In addition, by converging to the natives’ language an individual shows respect to their culture and eases his integration within to society. The more a speaker is willing to adjust, the more assets he gets

from his partner in conversation. And on the contrary, the more a person is willing to diverge from his partner in conversation, the more he enhances the distance between them and puts the highlight on their dissimilarities (Cai & Rodriguez, 1996).

3.4. Organizational Level

The interest of a company in what concerns the process of hiring international graduates specialized in engineering is determined by their business strategies, their willingness to expand their business and to globalize their operations, but also about their human resources plans, policies and practices. The latter is required to be a corresponding strategy so that the implementation of the business strategy to be successful (Galbraith & Kozanjan, 1986; Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1992; Schuler et al., 1993).

Given the fact that the companies which were approached in order to gather data for our research were a mix of global and local companies, bigger or smaller in size of employees, different as structure and internal human resources policies, we will develop this theoretical level by expanding the input of diversity management inside a company by covering and differentiating the concepts of Dass and Parker (1999), Ely and Thomas (2001) and Podsiadlowski et al. (2009). We identified five diversity paradigms, which will be developed further in the text, that explain the fundamental incentives and consequences of organizations' approaches to diversity.

Proceeding with the meaning of diversity, this concept is explained by Ely and Thomas as *"a characteristic of groups of two or more people and typically refers to demographic differences of one sort or another among group members"* (Ely & Thomas, 2001, pp.230). Moreover, Kreitz is arguing that diversity is *"any significant difference that distinguishes one individual from another"* (Kreitz, 2008, pp.102), being gender, either age, or ethnicity, or nationality, education or work status.

Diversity management is a concept which highlights *“the value of difference among people in organizations”* (Podsiadlowski et al., 2012). According to Cox (1993) diversity management is the amount of practices in an organization created in order to maximize potential advantages of diversity. Moreover, it stands also as the recruitment policies and retaining talent from different backgrounds (Cox & Blake, 1991). Diversity management requests from leaders to take advantage of a diverse labour force in order to create competitive advantage (Kamp & Rasmussen, 2004). Nonetheless, it enhancing organizational effectiveness and promote equal opportunities, regardless of colour, ethnic background, sex, age, etc.

Considering the globalizing economy and the increase of migration, diversity management has two broad categories: intra-national and cross-national diversity management. The first type *“refers to coping with the realities of an increasingly diverse, both ethnic- and gender-wise, workforce in a given nation”*, and denotes a diverse workforce of citizens or migrants within a single national organizational context, while the cross-national type refers to the multinational corporation approach, as *“managing the interface between expatriates and host country nationals”*, a workforce composed of citizen and migrants in different countries (Tung, 1993, pp.462). Each of the above types of diversity management presents different challenges and dilemmas, as Cox argued *“the challenge of diversity is not simply to have it but to create conditions in which its potential to be a performance barrier is minimized and its potential to enhance performance is maximized”* (Cox, 1993, pp.16). There can be negative consequences, which leads to discrimination, stereotyping, employment inequalities and diverse conflicts, but also positive by nurturing creativity, innovation and performance and enhancing better problem solving by giving a different perspective on how to resolve a task (Krell & Wächter, 2006; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998).

In the research literature there are different organizational approaches to diversity management. Thomas and Ely differentiate three perspectives regarding an organization’s approach to diversity: the discrimination and fairness paradigm, the access and legitimacy paradigm, and the learning and effectiveness paradigm (Thomas and Ely, 1996). These

paradigms discuss to organizational members' normative beliefs and expectations about the reason to diversify, the value of diversity, and its connection to work. Another perspective was inserted by Dass and Parker (1999) and it is called the resistance perspective. This paradigm refers to the diversity viewed as a threat when the diversity demand from outside rises or is considered as not important to be even discussed (Idem). Through the literature there is recognized that exists possible reactions to diversity, such as to address or ignore it, to acknowledge the diverse cultural background of their employees as a challenge to be reactive or to be proactive with it. Looking further, Podsiadlowski reconsidered the examples given by the scholars explained above to suggest a conceptual framework of five diversity perspectives: Reinforcing homogeneity, Colour-Blind, Fairness, Access, and Integration and Learning (Podsiadlowski et al., 2009).

Reinforcing homogeneity is the diversity paradigm which avoids and even rejects the occurrence of diversity inside a company. Organizations which favour this paradigm discard the cultural diversity in favour for a homogeneous workforce and consider important to exist similarity in intergroup relations (Riordan et al., 2005; Schneider, 1987). The tendency to drive out diversity can be explicit or implicit, by using selection and promotion criteria that are attributed only to employees from the dominant majority, such as local business knowledge, access to networks, and experience. This tendency raises barriers and obstacles to employment for migrants, or in our case, for international engineering graduates (Podsiadlowski & Ward, 2010). Moreover, the organizations may not just ignore cultural diversity in the labour market and inside their own organization but actively resist it (Dass & Parker, 1999).

The colour-blind and fairness paradigms suggest that people should be treated equally no matter where they are from and that is important to guarantee them equal and fair treatment to avoid stigmatization and discriminatory practices (Podsiadlowski et al., 2009). In addition, cultural background is a matter that should not be allocated specifically to personnel management. The difference between these two paradigms lays in their reasons for ensuring equal employment opportunities: *“Colour-Blindness focuses on equal employment opportunities but without acknowledging potential differences due to different cultural backgrounds. Fairness*

ensures equal and fair treatment through addressing the need for specific support for minority groups, reducing social inequalities” (Idem).

The access perspective perceives diversity as a business strategy that provides access to a diverse customer base and international markets. The organizations are looking on the advantages gained precisely from creating a diverse workplace, while using diverse talents to meet organizational goals (Fish, 1999).

Similar to the previous perspective, the integration and learning perspective is very strategic, suggesting that change happens through mutual adaptation of minority and majority groups alike. According to this view, everyone can benefit from a diverse work environment, the organization as a whole as well as its employees. Diversity creates a learning environment where everybody, also within the organization, can benefit from a diverse work context (Podsiadlowski et al., 2009).

These five diversity perspectives can be observed on a scale from defensive (not doing anything specifically, even resisting diversity) to reactive (for example, meeting legal responsibilities or addressing intercultural conflict) to proactive (acknowledging the economic benefits of diversity and encouraging diversity as a learning opportunity for the whole organization) (Idem).

Correlating to these theoretical paradigms, our aim was to identify the different ways organizations approach diversity and how these approaches are related to perceived advantages and implemented diversity management practices. Overall, these diversity paradigms lead to a better understanding of the specific approach an organization takes toward diversity and reveals insights into the processes organizations choose for dealing with diversity, either if it is inside a local company or a multinational one.

Chapter 4 - Empirical Analysis

In accordance with the three levels established earlier in the theoretical section, we will adopt the same method of analysing the empirical findings we have gathered for the purpose of our research. Hence, the analysis section will be divided into three separate subsections, as follows: 1. Institutional level 2. Individual level and 3. Organizational level.

4.1. Institutional level

Taking into account that this master thesis centres on the obstacles international engineering graduates may encounter while trying to integrate into the Danish labour market, it is necessary to look at the steps that the international graduates have to follow in order to become part of the Danish manpower, and further to investigate whether or not there are any constraints on political level that will hamper their integration.

4.1.1. Introduction

The integration of immigrants in the labour market is a hot issue in Denmark. Immigration exists from a long time ago, and this is not a recent or unknown phenomenon for the country (Jensen, Schmidt, Tørslev, Vius & Weibel, 2009). The history recognizes few major immigrant flows from work immigrants or refugees back in the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s (Hedetoft, 2006). However, in 2001 has begun a new immigration wave, the one of immigrants coming from EU/EEA countries to Denmark with the particular purpose of studying or working in the country (Danish Immigration Service, 2010). After the enlargement of EU and the establishment of the EU Directive of free movement in 2004, the number of these immigrants has increased drastically. In this line, the EU legal framework on mobility follows to be presented.

4.1.2. EU legal framework on mobility

The target group of this research is engineering graduates who are EU-citizens. Therefore, they reside in Denmark under the EU regulations on mobility. However, there are

also many non-EU citizens who come to study and work in the country. In this line, we consider as important to delimit their situation as well, as this will clarify whether the challenges they meet after graduation are differentiating from the ones of our target group. Non-EU graduates' residence in the country and their employment in the Danish labour market after graduation is a subject of different regulations than the ones applicable for EU-graduates. In case graduates who are coming outside EU wish to work in the country, they are required to have a residence and work permit. After graduation, their residence permit could be prolonged to a fixed period of six months. In this timeframe they are allowed to seek for an employment in the Danish labour market (Study in Denmark, 2016). After outlining the situation for non-EU graduates to get an employment upon graduation, we will discuss the residence regulations for our target group.

On 29th April of 2004 the European Union has established a Directive of the European Parliament and Council giving the *“right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States”* (EC, 2004). In line with the union citizenship of the Member states nationals' the idea of free movement is to establish the fundamental freedom of the internal market. Every citizen is also given the right of residence in the host EU country for a period no longer than three months without being a subject of any other conditions apart from owning a valid passport or EU identity card. In case the period of three months expires, the host country may demand the citizen to register with the relevant authorities. Afterwards, he becomes a subject to the following requirements:

- *To be self-employed or engaged in an economic activity*
- *To have sufficient resources for themselves and their family so they do not become a burden on the social assistance system of the host member state during their period of residence*
- *To have sickness insurance cover in the host member state*
- *To be enrolled at a private or public establishment, for the principal purpose of following a course of study*

- To be a family member of an EU citizen who responds to one of the above-mentioned conditions (EC, 2004).

Correspondingly to the Directive, nationals from EU member states come into possession of the right of permanent residence on the condition they have resided legally and constantly at least 5 years in the host country (Europa.eu, 2016).

As the Danish regulations depend on the EU legal framework of free movement, this automatically makes the international graduates, interviewed for this master thesis, a subject of these principles. The reasons for migration, and particularly in this case to Denmark, could be related with the neoclassic theory discussed earlier in the theoretical sections. As Borjas (1989) argues, the decision to leave the home country and to settle in a new place is triggered by the intention for improving and securing one's economic status. The neoclassic theory suggests that the host country is chosen accordingly to the conditions and opportunities it may offer the migrant (Ibid.). In our particular case, Denmark has been seen as an attractive destination for the 12 international students, who decided to finish their higher education and seek for an employment upon graduation. In accordance with the Neoclassical theory, the EU legal framework on mobility and the idea of free movement of workforce reshaped the migration cost-benefit evaluation and made it possible for migrants to exercise the same rights as domestic population and to compete over jobs on the same terms as them in the host labour market.

4.1.3. The Danish labour market system

Since the international graduates, interviewed for this research, have made the choice to remain in Denmark and to seek an employment here, it is important to study and understand the model of the Danish labour market and to discover whether or not this model presupposes any legal constraints and obstacles for them to get a job in Denmark.

The Danish labour market model is known as a *flexicurity* model. This model can be delineated as a triangle of three pillars (Hendeliowitz, 2008). The first pillar is called flexibility

and it illustrates the employment protection and the rules that allow hiring and dismissal of employees. In line with the 'employment protection' aspect of the Danish labour market model, employees are guaranteed with a certain degree of a security by the social partners, represented by the so-called Trade Unions. In this relation, it is important to mention that during the interviewees we have not touched particularly upon this aspect of security, but one of the interviewees, who is already employed in a Danish company, stated: *"Being employed about one year, they (the Union) contacted me to tell me that if there is something wrong at my work I should call them"* (Klaus, 26). Although he has not had particular work-related issues with the company he is working for, he is acquainted with the social partners that generate protection and stability within the workplace.

The second pillar presents the security for the wage earners, and constitutes the high degree of social benefits. In case of unemployment, the job seekers and employees in Denmark have relatively high access to the unemployment benefit system, as their way in this system is granted after fulfilling some requirements (Hendeliowitz & Woollhead, 2007). As EU citizens, and because they have finished their higher education in Denmark, all of the international graduates we interviewed, have the right to join the unemployment benefit system right after graduation. Throughout our findings we discovered that the international graduates are familiar with the fact that they have the right of access to the unemployment insurance benefits, and one of the positive outcome for them, is that they are given the opportunity and the security to use their time of being unemployed in the best way in order to find the right job. As Klaus (26) stated: *"The main benefit is that I had time to actually prioritize what I am doing. I had never felt stressed that I wasn't working for one month. Because I always knew that I could have a kind of support that could help me as a new graduate"*. In addition, the international graduates are not only aware with the fact they have this right, but after graduation all of them exercise that privilege.

What the first and second pillars are allowing is to employ and dismiss people and after that to ensure them with generous unemployment benefits. The unemployment benefit system was reformed by the policy makers back in the middle of 1990s. This reform demanded the

“right and duty” concept, according to which every unemployed person has the initial right to receive a supplementary income, but at the same time has to comply his duty to be searching actively for a job in the labour market (Anderson and Svarer, 2007).

The third pillar of the flexicurity model is presented by the activation labour market program, i.e. ALMP (Kvist and Penderson 2007). The overall success of the Danish flexicurity model is resting on the results of the ALMP, which on the other hand has the purpose to decrease the natural unemployment rate in the country and to ease the job seekers in their “duty” to seek an employment. Moreover, ALMP is defined as what glues together the “*right and duty*” principle together (Serbanescu, pp.31).

By comprehending how the Danish labour market works in practice and what its main elements are, we are not able to find a specific policy constraint on the recruitment of the international graduates. The EU legal framework and the Danish government ensure them the legal right to stay in the country after graduation, and to seek an employment here. In this line, the international graduates’ employment in the Danish labour market is not hampered by residence or time restrictions. In addition, the graduates confirmed that the Danish government integration strategy provides them the right to attend Danish language courses from the moment they arrive in the country. This right has validity up to 3 years and it eases the process of overcoming one of the biggest obstacles for the graduates – the language barrier. Upon graduation they are given access to the unemployment benefit funds. Once the graduates enter the unemployment system the Danish municipalities become responsible to help them find a job. The job centres send the graduates to different courses that will improve certain skills or knowledge. Arranging monthly meetings in order to follow up the graduates’ progress is also part of this benefit. According to the majority of the engineering graduates this kind of help is beneficial for them. However, some identified a specific issue in the Job centre’s approach to help them find a job: *“In terms of searching for jobs I would say that you don’t actually receive the required support. Because they have to do their jobs based on generic profiles, they don’t really look at what type of candidate you are. The meetings with them were not really useful for me. I didn’t actually receive too much help from them (the Job centre/ A-kasse). Basically,*

everything that I have done till now, all the interviews that I have been so far, I did it myself, based on my own implication” (Klaus, 26). In line with this, we argue that the Job centre should change its strategy towards the graduates. Apart from giving them general tips on how to be better in the job search, how to approach companies, and how to write a good CV and cover letter, the job centres should work more in direction to help the graduates find a job in their specific field of study. They could accomplish this by providing them a database on companies from a specific industry. This way both parties, i.e. graduates and companies, will benefit the help which the government is providing.

4.1.3. Danish labour market integration policies

After clarifying the structure of the Danish labour market, we will proceed further by discussing what the integration policies are. In line with this, we will shed light on the initiatives and action plans of the Danish government which has been undertaken in order to ease the integration of international job seekers in the Danish labour market.

Before continuing, we must mention that the Danish government’ initiative to develop integration programs and to ensure equal opportunities for the migrants goes back in 1999. In this particular year Denmark became the first country in the world that enacted an Integration Act (Wise, 2016).

The Danish policy initiative on employability and integration of international graduates in the country started by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and the Danish Agency for Higher Education in April 2014 with a Two-Part Action Plan for internationalization of the Higher Education Institution sector (HEI). The first part is designated for outgoing mobility and the second part for the incoming mobility. The report for the incoming mobility is called *“Denmark – an attractive study destination. How to attract and retain talent from abroad”*. This is the first policy of the Danish Government targeting to attract and retain international students and graduates and to *“create growth and employment in Danish businesses”* (UFM,

2014, pp.1). This measure came from a strong necessity of international graduates who can live and work in Denmark, helping further to create growth for the Danish companies.

This policy includes 24 concrete initiatives and five strategic measures which follow mainly the subsequent two ideas: an increase by 2020 with 65% of *“more international students that should remain in Denmark on completion of their studies”* and an increase of 92% by 2020 of *“international graduates who remain in Denmark which must have the same employment ratio as Danish graduates”* (Idem). It is necessary to add that it was also foreseen that companies must be able to recruit international workers easier from a recruitment point of view.

The report made by the DREAM Group for the Ministry of Higher Education and Science shows that it is beneficial for Denmark to attract and retain international graduates completing full Master’s programs, even if some of them are receiving SU, because of those who remain and work in Denmark upon graduation. The DREAM analysis also shows that retention of international graduates within the Danish labour market has a greater socio-economic effect than the numbers of international students receiving SU (Idem).

In 2015 a report called *“International students in Denmark”* has been published. This study shows that graduates from technical or science programs in particular are inclined to stay in Denmark upon their graduation. According to the report, master’s students find a job relevantly fast, which results in a low *“break-even-point”*. In addition, after only 13 months of employment most of them have paid more in taxes than it has been invested in their education. This study was done in collaboration between the Danish Agency for Higher Education and the Danish Agency for Labour market and Recruitment, as the latter is now under the auspices of the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (University Post, 2015).

Furthermore, in October 2015 the Ministry for Higher Education and Science assigned 3 million Danish crowns for five pilot projects. The main purpose of these projects is to retain international graduates in Denmark, especially in the regions where companies are in high demand for qualified labour force (UFM, 2015). The strategy of these pilot projects is to create a tight collaboration between the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the higher

education institutions and the Danish employers. Minister Esben Lunde Larsen states that *“it is therefore crucial that education institutions collaborate with local companies so that international students already develop contacts with the business community while they are studying. And this is something that the pilot-projects will help develop”* (UFM, 2015, pp.1). The chosen projects will be made in collaboration between universities, colleges and academies of higher education, such as: University College of Northern Denmark, VIA University College, Business Academy Southwest etc.

When companies and universities work side by side, they become a strong engine with strive for innovation and economic growth. In this line, we consider that the initiative of the Danish Government to start this sort of pilot projects is admirable. According to the report made by Science Business (2012), the most productive collaborations are strategic and long-term, as they may take five to ten years. Denmark recently began to realize the great impact international graduates have upon the economy. The Government has recently started its policies of retaining international graduates, but these initiatives still need a timeframe to be implemented and to give results.

According to the graduates, the Danish government is doing enough in order to provide them good conditions to seek for an employment and has an overall good policies and integration strategy. However, after graduation they still experience that the Danish labour market remains, to some extent, closed for them. Therefore, we see the importance to scrutinize further why the government’ strategy is not working so well in practice.

We see the problem on two levels – firstly, it is a fact that the Danish government ensures the international students a good study environment, but what it does not provide so much, after the completion of their education, is an easy access to the labour market. As the deputy director of the Confederation of Danish Industry, Charlotte Rønhof says: *“The numbers of foreign students studying at universities in Denmark are increasing – but ever fewer are finding jobs immediately after graduation. Denmark needs a recruitment strategy to avoid the country becoming an ‘educational transit post’ and to ensure that Danish businesses are able to recruit the candidates they need”* (Confederation of Danish Industry, 2016).

Secondly, despite the efforts of the Danish Government to create the pilot projects in 2015, the perception of our interviewees is that the relationship between them and the Danish companies is not necessarily the suitable one. However, they do consider this relationship could be improved by the Danish Government. As Joana claims: *"...but I don't see them [the Danish Government] working on the other side, meaning with the companies - to encourage them in some way to hire internationals. They only focus on the internationals, but they disregard the fact that the companies are not used to the internationals' mind-set and to have non-Danes as employees."* The gap between international graduates and the industry has to be filled and this may be implemented in practice if they *"start with a shared vision and develop a strategy"* (Science Business, 2012, pp. 9).

The companies which participated in our survey confirm that they do not meet any institutional barriers towards hiring international graduates. In this line, we argue that they try to align with the initiatives of the Danish government to bridge the existing gap. Moreover, this aspect is reinforced in an experience that Mihai had while talking with some companies at a career fair: *"they told me that most of the companies are now trying to change their mentalities and they are hoping that in 4-5 years they will have more open-minded mentality [towards hiring international graduates]"*.

Taking into account that the Danish government allows the integration of internationals and tries to make this process as smooth as possible, we argue that the international graduates have a big share of responsibility on overcoming the obstacles they meet along the way to employment. In addition to this, the companies could also try to ease the integration of these candidates, by getting in contact with them from the early stage of study. This kind of relationship will prepare better both parties for the following recruitment process.

The policymakers need *"to ensure a predictable, stable environment of funding and regulation for long-term strategic partnerships to thrive"* (Science Business, 2012, pp.3). We need to reinforce the urge idea that the partnership between universities, international graduates and companies should be the main focus in order to keep the internationals inside Denmark and to enhance the competitiveness of Danish companies and regions.

4.2. Individual Level

4.2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this level is to shed light on the employment situation of the twelve international engineering graduates who took part with an interview for the purpose of our study. We will analyse their experiences and the factors which put them in a challenging position while they are trying to access the Danish labour market. Bourdieu's theory Forms of capital and the Communication adaptation theory that we have discussed earlier in the theory section, will come into play now, for the empirical analysis of this level, as we will apply these theories pursuant to their relevance with the encountered obstacles by the subjects of this master thesis.

After conducting the interviews with the twelve international engineering graduates, we were able to grasp what their main obstacles and challenges to getting an access in the Danish labour market are. According to the international engineering graduates, there are quite a lot of factors related with their job searching strategies, that may hinder them from getting an employment within the Engineering industry sector. Therefore, we find important to give an explanation for the reader about what our approach and strategy to analyse these obstacles is. After discovering the main issues and taking into account each one of them separately, we came to the conclusion that some of the issues have a different nature. Moreover, some of these obstacles set the international engineering graduates apart from the Danish graduates, while others not necessarily.

Hence, our intention is to start the Individual level by discussing all the obstacles our interviewees encountered, even the ones that we find as corresponding to domestic graduates as well, and then we will highlight and scrutinize further the ones which are relevant to international graduates only.

4.2.2. General obstacles identified and individualized

When an international graduate goes through the process of transition between higher education and the real world of work, what really may affect the success rate of getting an employment are the job searching methods he or she is applying (Shumilova, Cai & Pekkola). The job searching strategies may differ quite a lot. Social media, such as LinkedIn, as well as job portals and companies' webpages are the places where a job seeker could find a plethora of job advertisements. Most of the graduates use the standard way of application by just finding a vacancy that is matching their qualifications and then sending a CV and a cover letter, followed by some waiting time for a reply. Some find useful to experience their personal network, as well, for getting a recommendation, while others tend to be more active and persistent in establishing further, sometimes even a personal, contact with the HR department and the hiring managers. Another job searching tool is the attendance of job fairs, where the job seekers can meet employers and representatives of different companies, to ask them questions and to discuss different job methods, which in their opinion could be useful for the success in finding a job.

The data we gathered through the twelve semi-structured qualitative interviews confirms that these are the job searching strategies, as well, for the type of international graduates this master thesis is aimed to. Yet, our findings recognize that sometimes the lack of a proper CV and cover letter may challenge the process of getting to the interview stage. The lack of a previous work experience within the engineering field (i.e. lack of an internship or a master thesis written together with a Danish company), which according to our interviewees is highly valued by the engineering companies, may reveal as another obstacle. The lack of a strong network and somebody to recommend you, such as your thesis supervisor for example, and the intense competition that exists among all applicants were determined by the interviewees as not less important factors in order to get a job.

Furthermore, the participants identified some recruitment process issues which in their opinion might result in difficulties to get hired. Depending on the company and the position, the recruitment process differs and might include more or less selection instruments. Taking

into consideration that the specificity of the engineering sector is having a set of hard skills, it is important to be aware of particular technical aspects necessary for each of the position the candidates apply for. The good preparation for the interview stage sometimes may require spending time in reading the courses from the beginning of the studies. One of the obstacles encountered by three interviewees was the technical difficulties encountered at the interviews. According to Christian, his main struggle to pass further in the recruitment process was the detailed technical matters which he got asked at the interview: *“Sometimes, when I had a technical interview ... it is a bit awkward because they are not telling you before to prepare in something specific. That was my main obstacle... I went to interviews and they started asking me ‘Can you present this specific thing? Advantages or disadvantages for this or that’ ...but if you don’t work with them on a daily basis, you tend to forget the information that you have learnt, and at the interview you have an idea but you are not prepared to give a correct and complete answer to these question.”*

A method of testing the soft skills of a candidate is by organizing in the recruitment process different tests, such as psychological tests or team interviews. Especially for positions which require working in a team, having the abilities to communicate well and to be emphatic are of a great advantage for a candidate. In matters of soft skills, what we have identified in some of the interviewees’ experience was mostly the lack of confidence in themselves. Self-confidence means positive self-perception of the individual, the trust in one’s own skills and abilities. *“My problem was the interview. Because I have never had interviews before, so I was very nervous. And I think it took me 3 interviews to feel confident. And then the 4th interview was really good but it was with this company that hired me.”* (Anabel) The insecurity which a candidate shows at the job interview might have negative consequences for obtaining that position, as already seen in the Anabel’s experience.

However, all these obstacles that the international graduates encountered might be, to the some extend, relevant to any other graduate who is just getting out from a University, no matter of his or her national background. In this context, we do not find as that significance to go into details in order to discuss the above-mentioned challenges. Instead, we will concentrate

only on the ones that are particularly characteristic for the international graduates. Among the most interesting empirical findings which we were able to discover are: the language barrier; the network challenge; the perception of the international graduates that their Danish educational qualifications in combination with a lack of previous work experience is not enough to get hired; and their perception for a stigmatization.

4.2.3. Skills and factors related to the graduates' accessibility in the Danish labour market

The focus of this category is to examine how the lack of certain skills, such as their Danish language competencies, and factors such as the lack of a proper network affect and hamper the accessibility of international engineering graduates to the Danish labour market.

Language barrier

As language is one of the most mentioned barriers, we find as necessary to discuss this obstacles at first place. Nowadays, knowing another language different than your native language is considered to be an ordinary thing. In most of the European countries' education systems, English is established as a mandatory subject from a very early stage of education. Studying one or more foreign languages at the elementary and high school opens many doors for young educated people not only in their home countries, but outside their borders as well. It is a bit different though when it comes to integration in a country where the official language is different than English. In Denmark most of the people, no matter of their age, normally speak English at a very good level, but the official language of the country is Danish. Here comes the problem for foreigners who really want to integrate and work in Denmark.

As seen from the stories of all international engineering graduates who took part in an interview for this master thesis, this is one of the major barriers they see on the way of a successful integration in the Danish society and labour market. According to them, knowing Danish could be the ticket for getting an employment, and simultaneously, the lack of its knowledge could shut the door for entering into the Danish labour market.

Without a shadow of a doubt, all international engineering graduates confirmed that knowing the domestic language is one of the most important skills and determining factors when it comes to a successful integration in the host country. In line of this, we identified that some of the graduates were referring to knowing Danish as 'a must' for the successful integration in the Danish labour market, and some were only referring to the integration in the Danish society. Both standpoints will be taken into account.

The majority of the graduates have identified the Danish language as a great obstacle to get a job as an engineer: *"I think this is the biggest barrier for me in order to find a job as an engineer in Denmark."* (Mihai, 26); *"The language is what I really feel is holding me back."* (Leon, 26); *"The only problem that I actually see is the language"* (Klaus, 26); *"The language is still a barrier for me"* (Luis, 25); *"The main obstacle I have encountered is the language barrier"* (Carl, 25). However, some of them were not referring only to their own situation, but also to the experiences of other people they know. In line with this, we argue that when an individual is familiar with the fact that there is someone else that has been, or still is, in a similar situation, experiencing the same obstacles, his perception for these difficulties is being enhanced and 'confirmed'. As for example, Leon stated: *"all the people I know that found something is because of knowing Danish. And I can see that every time when I send an application the problem is not in my skills, it is the language"*. We argue that this graduate is maybe more inclined to believe that because the lack of Danish language proficiency is an obstacle for other people, this automatically becomes the main barrier for him, as well. By following his job searching process during the interview, we discovered that he has already been to interviews in Danish companies, even though he is not very good yet at speaking the language. In addition, at the time of the interview he was preparing himself for another interview in the upcoming week. In this sense, we argue that Leon's perception that the Danish language is a necessarily requirement to get a job and this is the main barrier for him to get hired, seems as though intense because he sees other people face the same obstacle.

All of these graduates acquired their educational qualification in the field of Engineering through the Danish higher education system, which encompasses both bachelor and master

diplomas. Some of them moved to Denmark only two years ago when they were enrolled for a master program in Aalborg University, but some of them have been living in Denmark for six or seven years, as they started their higher education at UCN and then continued at AAU for their master's degrees. During their studies and after graduation, the international graduates have accrued a cultural capital, which according to Bourdieu, consists of a set of general skills and knowledge, linguistic proficiency, educational credentials, and intercultural communication competencies. In his theory "Forms of capital", Bourdieu discusses that conversion between one form of a capital to another is utterly possible (Bourdieu, 1986). In this sense, Bourdieu argues that cultural capital in the configuration of education, for example, can be transmuted into economic capital. But as the linguistic proficiency is also considered to be an element of one's cultural capital, in some cases, the conversion from a cultural into an economic capital might be not so smooth.

As in the case of the kinds of graduates of our research, one of the high valued competencies by a Danish employer is the ability to speak the domestic language. Only three of all twelve international engineers stated that they have medium to full proficiency knowledge in Danish, as for the rest this is not the case. This automatically means that they do not possess one of the important elements of cultural capital, the knowledge in the domestic language, which will ensure them the way in into the Danish labour market. For that reason, even if they have accrued cultural capital in the form of their education, they still find it relatively difficult and challenging to transform their cultural capital into the economic one.

The language barrier is identified as one of the main challenges for the majority of international graduates in order to enter the Danish workforce. However, we should not neglect the fact that all of them realize that they have to overcome this challenge by actually learning the domestic language and after showing that to the employers, as Leon stated: "*then from that point it should be an open road*" (Leon, 26). All of international graduates have been assigned to Danish language courses and some are still attending them in order to improve and expand their language proficiency. In such an intercultural setting, as the kinds of the international graduates are placed in, it is very important what kind of approach one will

choose. As Communication adaptation theory suggests in this kind of cross-cultural environment one can either converge or diverge his or her linguistic skills to the language of the native population. As in our case, the international graduates obviously seek to enhance and improve their communication skills, so they can easier integrate and blend within the Danish society, consequently the Danish workforce. The international graduates are willing to attune to the Danish society by putting efforts and time to learn the domestic language, as they clearly realize that this would be a big asset for them.

Moreover, we find interesting and important to discuss the perception of some of the graduates that the language is not necessarily important to get hired, but to integrate within the Danish society and to establish social connections easier. Some of the international engineers stated: *"I believe it is really important when it comes to integration and having your life outside your work."* (Klaus); *"I think you really need to speak Danish in order to socialise, not so much to get a job."* (Anabel); *"You don't feel that integrated unless you speak Danish properly."* (Tibold). For many situations, knowing the domestic language of the host country is a necessity for the better and smoother integration within the society. Obtaining a job easier in the local labour market is only one of these situations. But when it comes to communication and socializing on different levels, either at the local shop or restaurant, or the bank or with your doctor, or simply with the Danes you meet in your everyday life, it is always an asset to be able to communicate in the local language. This can help one to make friendships and expand his network, hence to enhance his cultural, social and eventually economic capital.

Another obstacle some of the international graduates identified is the competition. That is one of the obstacles that apply for international graduates, but with the same force to Danish graduates, as well. The reason why we argue competition is seen as an issue by some of the interviewees is allied to the language barrier. We believe that the international students meet even greater competition than the Danish students, not only in terms of their educational qualifications but also in terms of the lack of good Danish language competencies. Meaning that if a Dane compete over a certain position that is requiring knowledge of the domestic language with another 100 applicants, his application will be considered at a much earlier stage

than that of the international graduate who has no such knowledge, or at least not at the same level as a Dane. Therefore, we argue that the language competencies play a role in the competition between both types of graduates, Danish and international, but it is a less favourable factor the latter.

Network obstacle

The empirical data confirmed that having a strong and massive social network of connections and having a personal recommendation from the teaching staff, such as the thesis supervisor, is a great asset when it comes to getting an employment after graduation and similarly, the lack of these resources may hinder the favourable outcome of an unemployment situation. According to Pierre Bourdieu's Social capital concept, a social network of an individual is defined as the relationships, connections, and interrelatedness one has with the rest of the people in the social reality. Bourdieu believes that by expanding and increasing the social contacts an individual may also grow his cultural and economic capital. Building this type of a social capital though is considered to be a difficult, burdensome, and oftentimes, a time-consuming process.

Having good social skills in order to maintain a social network is a crucial factor. As Tibold stated: *"My social skills are awful. That is another reason why I become an engineer because I can work very well with numbers, not so much with people. So for me this is kind of disadvantage in the job market. I am not good at socialising just with random people."* Sharpening the social skills and learning how to use them properly, however, can help one significantly to build better and more effective social capital. The conversion of the international graduates' social capital into economic capital, in the form of an employment, depends also on what kind of people their social network consists of. During the interviews we have not discussed particularly this question, but as most of the international graduates were constantly referring to their friends and/ or classmates and their experiences, we will assume the latter are international graduates as well who are searching for opportunities in the Danish labour market. In this sense, we argue that if an individual is trying to search through his own network help, tips and recommendations from people who are in the same situation as he is,

then this network probably cannot be used in its full potential. Even if they consider to have a good social network, it might be not the most suitable one for getting an access in the Danish labour market.

According to Tibold, having a good social network is one of the key factors for getting an access to the Danish labour market: *"... network is what is really important. Knowing the right people that can recommend you. Some of my classmates who are the most incompetent engineers I have ever seen they all, not all, but most of them got jobs in companies, and that I would never guessed."* Almost all of the graduates confirmed that they are searching for a job through their personal networks as well, for example Klaus says: *"I am searching for jobs, mostly, online and through my network, people that I know and might look for someone, they should keep their ears quite open around so they can help me."* Our findings confirm that all of the graduates are familiar with the fact that they can make a good use of the social contacts they have been able to accrue so far, and that this is one of the easiest ways to overhear about a job that has not even been posted as an online job advertisement for one or another reasons. As Tibold stated: *"Around 70% of the jobs in Denmark never get advertised. They are not even posted. They go through the friends network, they just ask their own employees " Hey do you have a friend who would like to work at this position?" and if they can find a good candidate, then they of course will hire him. What I have seen is that no matter how good you are the most useful thing for getting a job here is getting to know the right person."*

4.2.4. Interviewees' perceptions about the Danish companies

This category will treat the perceptions which our respondents have upon the professional and educational experience they have acquired before and while staying in Denmark and how they perceive the amount of opportunities encountered on the Danish labour market. According to the experiences which our interviewees shared with us they have the perception that even though having Danish engineering qualifications is an asset for them, it is still not enough for entering the Danish labour market.

The experiences that international graduates have and their perceptions of the Danish labour environment are crucial to understand how they construct and convert their cultural identity. The process associated with constructing cultural capital is distinct for international graduates, especially when they enter a new working environment that differs vastly from that of their home country.

When they have been asked how they perceive the Danish work culture, all of them expressed positive attitude. The respondents enjoy the flat structure in a Danish company, they like that is *“easy-going”* (Carl), they can just express their opinions and ask for feedback from a superior and they will be heard out: *“...there are no obvious differences between hierarchy levels, between the big boss and the employees and everyone is more or less equal. And you can go free to a supervisor for a constructive feedback without being scared to ask for it, to work with different colleagues, to have this teamwork environment.”* (Christian) Nonetheless, we consider important to specify that the amount of jobs available for engineers in Denmark is considered by most of the respondents to be average to high on a scale: *“I would say that there are actually quite many, because as a country this is the knowledge [engineering] that they require”* (Klaus).

Having a Danish diploma has been acknowledged as an asset by all of the graduates participated in an interview. However, few of them confirmed that the possession of a Danish degree helps them not only in order to apply for a job in Denmark but also abroad. This perception of some of the graduates is coming not only from their own experiences but also from the experiences of their friends. One of the international engineers referred to a friend of his, who has not been able to find a job in Denmark because of his lack of Danish language skills, however: *“When he moved back to Bulgaria, he immediately got a job, well paid and with many advantages”* (Klaus). In addition to this, another of the interviewees was speaking from her own experience when she said: *“I think that because of my Danish diploma I can get a job everywhere. I think if I go back to Spain now, it will be very easy for me to get a job. I got the job in England with my Danish degree”* (Anabel). At the time of the interview with Anabel, she has already been hired within a company in UK, and she was about to leave soon Denmark. In line

with this, it is important to notice that possessing a Danish degree is valued and appreciated not only in the Danish labour market, but also in other countries. Being part of a Danish higher education instruction opens many doors and is considered to be something prestigious not only by the graduates but also by the companies abroad.

We deem noteworthy to look deeper into this aspect so we will explore further down why they still have problems in finding a position in engineering in Denmark, even on the basis of being highly educated within a Danish University. Even though all the above-mentioned aspects, their perception is that their institutionalized cultural capital is not enough and is not the only factor needed in order to obtain a job in Denmark. While credentials acquired in the Danish Universities alone can assist with labour market access, it does not guarantee access or on-going success, according to Friesen (2011). A specific difficulty was that Danish companies were not open to things which are not familiar to them – therefore, the acquired cultural capital was apparently challenging to express (Andresen & Walther, 2012). From the experience of one of our interviewee, Joana, after many struggles to find a position, even though she had almost 2 years of experience in Romania, the moment she had her first internship in the engineering field in Denmark, everything started to move on: *“I didn’t realize it that time... that it was actually my way into the labour market. After that internship I think I had 10 interviews or something like that. And after a few interviews I got a job. But until I got that internship it took me a lot...The moment when I had my internship experience on...everything started moving”* (Joana).

Passing through many recruitment processes, many of our respondents come to the conclusion that the Danish companies have the expectation to know more in-depth the work culture, the labour market specificities and the career habitus which is that one habitus that fits to a specific career field. Mayrhofer et al. (2004) argues that the career habitus is developed through socialization and experience and ensures that actors act according to the rules and invest the ‘right’ combination of career capital on the respective field. *“If human capital reflects ability, social capital reflects opportunity”* (Friesen, 2011, pp.82) iterate very well the

connection between these two types of capital which needs to be complementary in order to attain success in entering the Danish labour market.

It is considered by great importance to be acquainted with the Danish work environment in order to better integrate yourself into the labour market: *“The idea itself that you have been there, you’ve integrated yourself a bit into the Danish market, you understand how it works, and you are not a newbie anymore. You know the schedule, you know when you could go to a coffee break, you know what to do or how to treat your colleagues, and you know the system”* (Joana). We explain this dynamic in relation to the Bourdieu’s theory, which often through capital, habitus and field explains this gap in an extended metaphor as a game (1990; 1997; 1998a; 1998b). The capital is embodied in the individual resources which are cherished in the game; the habitus represents the individual’s nature that appears from its *“feel for the game”* (1998b, pp.80) and the field symbolizes the social world within which an individual plays a specific game. In the labour market field, candidates are one set of individuals whose goal in the game is to meet the standards of future employers in order to move to the next level of the game, in our situation to be hired in an engineering position. To achieve success, the graduates need to use their capital they have received from their prior experiences, the communities they’ve been involved or to gain specific skills (e.g. learn the Danish language). There are winners and losers in this game and as Bourdieu suggests that a lack of familiarity (habitus) serves as a barrier to ascending in the Danish labour market. Being in another country, the respondents were aware of their distinct cultural capital and habitus, but the process of acquiring this capital set up one of the principal challenges to their labour market integration.

After succeeding in penetrating the Danish labour market, while being asked if the current position meets his expectations, Carl told us that *“not 100%, but as I said, for me the most important point was to gain access to the labour market, get some experience, connections, improve my professional language.”* Cultural capital assimilated in the current job allows Carl develop the proper habitus to navigate the Danish labour market further on and allows him to fit into a world that values a specific working culture.

4.2.5. Stigmatization

While analysing the interviews it appeared a recurrent aspect for almost all of the interviewees. They acknowledged a stigmatization practice which includes cultural differences, a close-minded attitude towards international graduates expressed by the companies or even reluctance to hire foreigners. They perceived that the companies have higher expectations from their side, comparing to the fact that the Danes graduates have a smoother access to the Danish labour market than they have. Nonetheless, they remark that is their own responsibility to put an extra effort for building the necessary capital for a specific job. We consider important to bring into discussion these aspects given the fact that to find a job, an international engineering graduate may need to nurture a form of a cultural capital, for example to have knowledge of social and cultural practices in the host country, which the Danes graduates already possess, giving them a supplementary advantage.

Even though many of the interviewees consider themselves integrated into the Danish society, they still encountered some difficulties to fit in and to connect with the Danes. Although this was not addressed directly as a question in the interviews, there were some respondents which had some opinions regarding the openness of the Danish people: *“...they [Danish government] could work more on integrating internationals and when I say that I say it from a point of view of educating the Danish people towards internationals because Danish people are a bit reticent and closed towards internationals and migrant people and is a bit hard to make friends with Danish people or have a sort of relationship with them.”* (Christian) The cultural encounter between Danes and internationals is a topic vastly discussed among the researchers and it leads to the importance of acquiring intercultural competence (Nygaard, 2010; Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Hammer, 2009). This know-how can be achieved through *“knowledge about other cultures, the ability to obtain such knowledge, self-insight, strong communication abilities and empathy”* (Nygaard, 2010, pp.5).

The interviewees mentioned cultural differences between Danes and the international graduates that prevent the latter from entering the Danish labour market: *“Cultural differences. It can be quite a challenge understand diversity and understand / follow even basic stuff, jokes...*

It can be quite a challenge for a foreigner, no matter the background to understand everything that is going on around them, without a bit of additional help and perhaps effort put in” (Carl). In our case, we argue that is important for our respondents, but also for the Danish people, to become aware of the cultural values, beliefs and perceptions of different cultures and to develop their intercultural competence in order to achieve the desired outcome: to create and maintain a friendship or a similar relationship between them. This reflection is also reinforced by our respondents, which stretch as great consideration their own implication: *“... I believe that the graduates should adapt to the Danish culture or to any culture, depending in which country they move in, as a sign of politeness and dedication to their integration process” (Carl).*

There are some respondents which agreed that society was a great obstacle. According to them, even though it is depending on the company, some Danish employers prefer hiring Danish employees and not international ones. According to Carl, for him, besides the language, *“The main obstacle... is the reluctance of Danish employers to hire a foreigner who might not know all the necessary things about the Danish work environment.”* It illustrates that this criteria of hiring act as a discriminatory tool. The differentiation sensed by most of the respondents in what concerns the success rate of getting a job after graduation between the internationals and the Danes is very elevated for the latter, but still the cultural and lingual compatibility explains part of the discrimination. From our interviewees’ experience, when they thought about the employment status of their former colleagues or friends, all specified that all their Danes acquaintances have a job immediately after their graduation, while many of the internationals who remained to search for an engineering position in Denmark are still struggling in this direction. *“We were 30 international students and as far as I know only 2 or 3 of them got a job, and it happened because they asked their supervisor to give them some recommendation and to tell them about the vacancies that he knows about. The Danish students of my class found a job already. But for them it is easier” (Georgios).*

The cultural inheritance plays a significant role for the integration of the international graduates into the Danish labour market and moreover, according to the respondents is their own responsibility to make an extra effort to integrate and be competitive in the Danish labour

market and, nonetheless, to adapt to the society they live in: “... [Jobs] *are sufficient as long as the international engineering graduates also put effort into adapting better to the Danish Environment...*” (Carl). We consider very important for the international graduates to develop a social network among Danes, even from the study period, which will enable them to understand the day-to-day customs and norms happening in a Danish workplace. Nonetheless, a role in easing these cultural differences has the company within the diversity is taking place and it could give the needed support and encourage interaction among different nationalities to facilitate communication and acceptance.

There were some respondents which felt discriminated in the interview phase and moreover, harassed by the interviewer with multiple questions about their motivation of being and staying in Denmark. “*I had an interview where they constantly asked me why I am not moving from Denmark – for sure that guy had a problem with internationals, I don’t know exactly why they called me to come there.*” (Tiffany) “*...she was insisting a lot like asking me questions <What about your parents?> <Don’t you want to go to Spain?>*” (Anabel). The case of Joana is even more obvious for this argument: “*All the interviews were very good in my opinion, except one which I felt that I was more in a police interrogation. He really came into me, like do you like Denmark, why do you leave in Denmark, why do you like Aalborg, where is your family, why aren’t you moving to your family, do you want to go back?! And after that, I went crying to my A-kasse person and told her.*” Discrimination against individuals with respect to ethnicity and their mobility competence has a wide impact on the labour market outcome – in our particular case it started from the beginning of the recruitment process and affects the possibility of obtaining the job. The employer is allowed to ask in an interview only if the candidate possesses the skills necessary for specific responsibilities of the job, not to address questions that may lead to discrimination and harassment (HG, 2016)

Girard and Bauder’s (2007) study of foreign-trained engineers showed that immigrants’ admission into a profession is dependent upon whether or not employers think the applicant fits into the dominant habitus of the profession, according to conventions of workplace behaviour and business. We want to emphasize here that in our research we need to make a

differentiation between habitus related to profession, education, culture and social networks. The education habitus is acknowledged in some degree that all our respondents acquired a Danish diploma and the culture habitus is questioned, and we ponder that is depending on previous work experience. To be admitted into the dominant habitus of the profession, our respondents need also to improve and develop their networks, to ease their accession to a company or a particular position.

There was a particular experience of a respondent which encountered that being an international graduate, considering the step made of moving to another country, might sometimes stay in the way of receiving a position and be discriminated for this decision. There are some companies which look to invest in their employees on long term and as experienced by Anabel, the fact that as an international she is predisposed on leaving the country, that alerted the company and not to offer her a chance on receiving that position: *"...she [the recruiter] said that I was not very convinced that I will be staying in Denmark for a long time. So probably you have to say that you really want to stay here which is normal. <<Because I don't want to give a job to someone who might leave, I will give it to someone that is going to be here 10 years rather than 2, because I am investing my money in that person. So I don't want to invest and then that person to leave>>."* Mobility and flexibility can be considered both an advantage and a disadvantage for an international graduate. We need to address in this particular case that the company who interviewed Anabel was not valuing mobility and flexibility as a competence. Perhaps, the position was requiring intensive training paid by the company and it wasn't included any mobility for attaining the tasks. But there are also researches which emphasize the importance of mobility, which *"have been critical to supporting new business growth, improving financial performance, bolstering employee engagement, succession planning, retaining and developing top talent, and increasing diversity"* (HBR & EY, 2014).

4.3. Organizational Level

This subsection represents the perspective of 13 companies within the engineering industry sector in Denmark. They participated in an online survey made for the purpose of our master thesis. The main objective within the Organizational level is to discover and analyse any possible obstacles faced by these companies, in order to recruit international engineering graduates, and to find the mutual connection between them and the obstacles discovered within the individual level. In line with this, our purpose will be to identify the advantages and disadvantages for these companies to hire an international engineering graduate. By finding this link we will be able to support our knowledge for the obstacles encountered by the graduates participated in the interviews. The theory of Diversity management, which was earlier discussed in the theoretical chapter of this master thesis, will be also associated with these challenges.

4.3.1. Introduction

We will begin by introducing the most interesting findings we were able to identify on this level of analysis. Our survey confirms that the majority of the participants see cultural diversity within their organization as an advantage. Most of the companies which participated in the survey confirm the perception of some of the interviewees that knowing the Danish language is from a moderate need, in order to be part of their organization. Another finding that we find interesting and will scrutinize further in the text is the perception that it is not important whether the candidate is a national or non-national, in case he is the right fit for the position. And last but not least, we will look at the expectations of these 13 companies towards the target group our interviewees is representing, the one of the international engineering graduates in a possession of a Danish degree, as they seem to be higher than the expectations towards domestic engineering graduates.

4.3.2. Cultural diversity

The ultimate goal of this subsection is to shed light on several issues. Firstly, we aim to discover whether or not cultural diversity has any significance for the companies. Secondly, our objective is to discover what the determining factors that make cultural diversity important inside a company are. And on third place, we examine whether the consequences of having a culturally diverse workforce have more positive or negative nature for the companies.

The keen interest to study cultural diversity lies behind our curiosity and necessity to grasp what kind of implications international workforce brings to the companies' work atmosphere. In line of this, we will start by exploring what current diversity policies are carried out at the European Union level and will follow what the process of implementation inside Denmark is.

In 2010 the European Commission created the European Union Platform of Diversity Charters (European Commission, 2015a). The diversity charter represents a document which *"is voluntarily signed by a company or a public institution"* (European Commission, 2016). The main objective of this initiative is to find methods for diversifying the European Union labour market: *"The EU aims to promote diversity in the workplace, to boost competitiveness and to promote equality and the wellbeing of its citizens"*. The diversity charter was taken up again in May 2015. The idea behind this platform is to connect the companies from the 14 European Union member countries, which adhered to the Diversity Charters (Denmark is one of them) in regular basis meetings. In addition, the main purpose is to interchange the best practices on diversity policies, to share their experiences, and to create tools and know-how (European Commission 2015a, pp.1).

In order to be competitive on international level, *"companies have to start considering a more diverse talent pool than they used to"* (European Commission, 2015b) and by agreeing with this document, a private company or a public organization from these countries pledge to take an action in order to encourage diversity and equal opportunities at the workplace through different methods: diverse pool of talent and a diverse workforce.

The Danish Diversity Charter has been established in July 2015. This initiative has been implemented in three cities: Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense (European Commission, 2015c). The main purpose of this national Diversity Charter is to promote key-campaigns with a focus on diversity, offering business knowledge, tools and methods in the diversity management field for the companies signed the agreement, contributing for more diversity and less discrimination in the Danish labour market. The current number of companies recognised the diversity charter is 640 and they are located in the three above-mentioned areas (Mangfoldighed Charter, 2014).

The reason why we look at what has been done at EU level is because we want to grasp first the 'big picture' of how culturally diverse workforce is perceived on multinational level. After discussing that the Danish companies are familiar with the diversity charters, we will proceed by exploring the implications of cultural diversity in their business.

Through our survey we have discovered that for the majority of the participants, cultural diversity within their work life is highly valued and was determined as a tangible advantage. Furthermore, it was confirmed by the companies that this is so because of their necessity for competitiveness. Undoubtable, diversity gives assistance for the peer learning and collaborative work which can give rise to a better application of the employees' competencies and accomplishments (Matuska & Salek-Iminska, 2014). Having a diversity of employees contributes not only to create innovativeness, but also to approach more customers and to expand the business on national, international and global level. At the same time, culturally diverse employees may be in a favour to improve the general picture of the company, as a place that offers a wide range of possibilities for career development and a specific organizational culture. If the company has a good reputation and is highly appreciated on the market, then it can be a role model or a representative of the industry of which it exist. All these assets of having cultural diversity promise companies' sustainability on the labour market (*Matuska, 2014, pp. 88–91*).

Notwithstanding the fact that the companies, who participated in our survey, confirm that they value cultural diversity and see it as an asset for their organizations, it is still difficult for the culturally diverse workforce, represented by the international graduates, to enter these

companies. On the question “*How many international engineering graduates are there in your company?*”, the answers varied from ‘none’, to ‘3-5 graduates’, and for the biggest in size companies with more than 5000 employees – it was stated ‘100 to 200’. Therefore we argue, that in reality there might be a lack of cultural diversity within these companies, which might turn into a potential obstacle. The reason may lie in the fact that, although companies argue the necessity of cultural diverse manpower, they are not targeting so much this group. In this sense, we consider the possibility that the companies are just trying to paint a nice picture and to say the right answer, rather than actually fitting in the framework of a culturally diverse organization.

Another important aspect that we take into consideration is that our survey is a small sample representing the perspective of 13 companies. Therefore, we are not able to grasp whether or not there is a stigmatization within the companies in the Danish labour market, which to hinder the recruitment of international engineers. Since our survey does not allow us to understand that, we will look at other studies that have examined this area. In line of this, we find interesting a research made by the Iranian software engineer Mozghan Gerayeli (Jobfinder, 2015a), who originally graduated from the Engineering College in Odense. As she is an educated and qualified engineer who has experienced a hard time of getting a job in the Danish labour market, she decided to conduct a study on why is it difficult to get hired if you have the required skills. The objective of her research was to test whether or not nationality matters in order to obtain a position in the engineering industry. She has sent out approximately 300 applications similar in their content, but different in terms of the applicant’s name. She got rejected many times by sending an application with a non-Danish name. However, the first time she was invited to a job interview was after sending an application signed as ‘Karin Jensen’. The second time when a company called to invite her for an interview, the employer thought he is contacting ‘Jens Jensen’ (Jobfinder, 2015b).

This kind of research proves that there might be a stigmatization within the companies in the Danish labour market, and that for one reason or another employers are not taking an advantage of the qualified international workforce. However, our survey rejects this idea, as

this is clearly not the case for the companies which participated in it. By looking at the Gerayeli's study, in particular, our purpose is far away from making a generalization, rather to consider and grasp another perspective on the theme of culturally diverse workforce and its employment in the Danish labour market.

4.3.3. Language and location

Most of the international engineers, who we interviewed, identified the Danish language as a main obstacle to enter the labour market. In line of this, we find important to grasp whether or not this perception represents the reality of the companies' requirements and expectations. In spite of the fact most of the companies, which participated in the survey, have a Danish origin, we have discovered that in only two of these companies the official working language is Danish. This leads us to the assumption that even though these companies have been created in Denmark, most probably by Danes, they still practice English as an official working language and the most possible reason for that is that they also operate internationally, and not only on the local labour market. In case this is not a reason for them to practice English as a corporate language, we assume that they may have many non-Danish speaking employees and/ or customers. When we posed the question to what degree knowing Danish is important in order to be part of the company, most of the answers indicated knowing the domestic language as "*moderately important*" matter, which confirms the perception of some of the graduates that knowing Danish is not necessarily 'a must' to get hired.

Since the survey was completely anonymous we cannot possibly know which of all companies, that have been contacted by us, participated in it. Therefore, we do not know where in the country these 13 companies are located. In line with this, our sample does not allow us to confirm or reject the graduates' perception that in some areas of Denmark is easier for a non-Danish speaking candidate to find a job. What the international engineers' experiences with different companies in Denmark so far show is that the company's location is quite an important factor for the success rate of getting an employment. According to the graduates, Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, would be one of the best places for a non-

Danish speaking engineer to find a job. For instance, one of the graduates explained why in his opinion Copenhagen is seen as a location where getting an employment is perhaps a bit easier. He related this with the kind of demand for professionals in the northern part of the country and the fact that the work there with clients requires speaking Danish: *“In Copenhagen most of the companies are also hiring non-Danish speaking people. But here, in Nordjylland, the northern part of Denmark, they don’t accept any non-Danish speaking engineers. Or if they do accept, then you are supposed to know at least a little bit, so to be able to hold a conversation. I have recently been to a job fair, and there I was told that here the companies would accept international graduates, but there is also a lot of talking with the customers. And the customers here are a little bit not so open-minded. So, it is not good for the business to talk only in English”* (Mihai, 26).

Two other graduates stated that they also avoided Aalborg region as an option for an employment and sent most of their applications to Copenhagen or the south part of Denmark: *“I applied only in Copenhagen and in Fredericia for Dong Energy. But in Aalborg I didn’t apply because I didn’t see any position in English. I think it is quite difficult to stay here.”* (Anabel, 26); *“Actually in Aalborg I haven’t applied to any company, because there are not big companies specialized in pole electronics field. Most of them are in south of Denmark.”* (Christian, 24)

However, as a rule the international graduates would apply across the whole country, but primarily they concentrate on the Copenhagen area. Even two of the graduates had already moved there, before getting an actual employment, as in their opinion this will, to some extent, increase their chances for getting a job. The main reason for their choice may be associated with the wide perception that larger cities, and in this particular case Copenhagen, as a capital of Denmark, is a multicultural and internationalized city. Oftentimes Copenhagen is seen by the graduates as the meeting point for the major Danish and multinational companies that perhaps are more willing to recruit international employees and even to be more open-minded towards the non-Danish speaking engineers.

When asking the companies about their expectations towards an international engineering graduate, one company identified the Danish language skills as an advantage. To

some extent, this statement sustains the opinions of the graduates who stated that the language is one of their main obstacles to obtain a position as an engineer. On the other hand, if this one company defines knowing Danish as an advantage, this does not necessarily mean that not knowing Danish would become a barrier to get a job. Considering that we received only one answer like this, we evaluate that the rest of the survey' participants have put more accent on the qualities and competences of the international graduates.

4.3.4. Expectations

In the following rows we will explore and analyse the companies' expectations in terms of the international engineering graduates' abilities, knowledge and competences. We look also at the drawbacks of hiring these candidates, in order to observe where is necessary to search for solutions and where improvements could be made. Moreover, we will also look at the advantages, so we can identify what knowledge and abilities are most appreciated by the employers. In line with this, we will be able to make adequate recommendations to the international engineering graduates.

Given the multi-dimensional characteristics of the companies questioned, we should consider that their direct experiences with international graduates might have had influenced their perception on the importance of having a multi-cultural diversity inside their company, and on which benefits an international engineering graduate can offer them.

The survey undertaken has highlighted that most of the companies, which responded, are aware of what they seek and expect from the international candidates in matter of behavioural, soft and technical skills. They are also mindful about what advantages or disadvantages this type of candidate might bring along for the company.

Starting with the question *“What are your expectations of the graduates? What knowledge, skills and competencies are you demanding from an entry position in engineering?”* we wanted to discover on one side what requirements they have from an international graduate, but also to calibrate it with the specificities brought by an entry-level position. The

survey confirms that most of respondents do not actually make a very clear distinction between what they are looking especially to an international and what particular on an entry-level candidate. The responses' focus was on particular skills related to personal skills, industry knowledge, cultural insights, and languages.

Our questionnaire generally shows that personal skills, such as self-reflection, adaptability, eager to learn outlook or open-mind attitude are highly valued and in a demand in these companies. All these competences are included in the emotional intelligence, which *“represents a breakthrough in the work of demonstrating how important emotional competences are for people’s ability to lead, cooperate and achieve results in today’s workplaces”* (Plum et al., 2008, pp. 44). Having an open-minded attitude, while also self-reflecting on you, forms a personality which helps in integrating better into a group, leading in making a group dynamics more successful. Eager to constantly learn is a good asset desired by the companies, considering that if there will be changes in the market or in the process, the employee has to adapt and continuously to improve and perform his activities: *“Like anything in life, you should be able to learn something from the successes and failures in a change process. Learning from change deals with evaluating the project, comparing planned results with actual results, discussing and addressing deviations, and also deals with bringing the project to an appropriate close”* (Hildebrandt & Brandi, 2007, pp. 11).

Another valuable asset mentioned in the responses would be “cultural understanding”, which becomes essential when it is necessary to interact in a group composed of people from different cultures. In our opinion is less related to education and technical skills than it is linked *“to the ability to manoeuvre in today’s global environment”* (CBS, 2016, pp.29). Cultural awareness is in close relation to the access, and integration and learning paradigms, where accepting diversity and make use of it is leading to meet the organizational goals and implicit, to move on a global environment and increase the business.

Nonetheless, our respondents report also that *“relevant work experience from either: volunteer work, student job or internship”* matters for them and it would be an asset for the candidate. We consider that through these kinds of professional experiences they will be able

to “*convert theory to practice*” – to make the first step in the transition process from studying at the university to work in a company and apply the learned knowledge for business purposes. Besides the personal skills, another competence which is required is proper technical skills in their field, acquired either from the faculty, or from the previous work experience.

We consider important to mention that it was an answer which stated that they are not asking for special requirements for international graduates – the needed skills are the same for a Dane as well for an international, if it is the right candidate for the position. In our opinion, on one side, this aspect offers uniformity to the recruitment process and creates a first step in preventing the stigmatization phenomenon, which can be seen as an advantage. On another side, we also can draw from the secondary empirical data that the companies have higher expectation from the international graduates when it comes about knowing the language and the in terms of adapting to the Danish working environment: “*exclusion from work-related tasks because colleagues naturally speak Danish, a cultural subtext being taken for granted in communication and having to adapt to a different social and work dynamic are common experiences*” (Nyuddannet.dk, 2016, pp.1). In what concerns the survey, the choice of doing it brought along also a limitation for our data, related to the fact that we can’t make a distinction on what is said politically correct as answers and what is actually real inside these organizations. As seen in the diversity management theory, the level of internationalization of a company influences the openness for a diverse workforce so regarding the Danish businesses, even though the globalization and diversity is a hot topic worldwide, some of the Danish companies appear to be behind this trend and still making differentiations between Danes and internationals (Idem).

Going more into depth, we approached the companies for identifying and giving more details in what they see as advantages and, moreover, disadvantages for hiring international engineering graduates.

The main input as advantages was that our interviewees are increasing the diversity at the workplace through the prism that they are coming from a different cultural background and possess a different culture which enriches the organization. A different culture brings along

know-how that the companies cannot find in Denmark and can improve *“inspiration and new ideas”*. Moreover, the international graduates present a strong point for the organization by the market knowledge that is inherent in employing workers from a specific country: *“to represent ‘the voice of our customers’ with their background [...] to find ambassadors”*. It is important to specify that this opinion is validated also from the graduates’ point of view, as Klaus was mentioning: *“I know specific cases where they have their production in Portugal and they are looking for internationals with Portuguese, which ease their communication, they know the culture, they could use their own language as a competence while working in Denmark.”* In this situation, the native language skills provide an asset to the organization and it eases its access to the international market – the individual characteristics add something or complement the working environment.

On the other hand, by identifying the disadvantages, the reader will note that the companies emphasize different aspects regarding the people they want to employ. When looking at the disadvantages, many employers express concerns about hiring international graduates in Denmark based on their experience with their lack or insufficient capability of adapting to the new culture: *“difficult to adapt to new culture, the weather, if they are on their own, they can get lonely”*. We consider necessary to emphasize that in the case of our interviewees, they already have spent minimum two years in Denmark to finish their master degree and most of them already feel integrated into the Danish society, according to their perception, and this is one of their reasons to choose to remain further on in this country and look for a job opportunity.

Moreover, the lack of Danish language skills appears into discussion again and is complemented with a permissively notice: *“...we will expect them to learn Danish within the first couple of years”*. We ponder on the aspect that the language is not a mandatory requested for filling the position, but it is desired to gain educational and cultural capital meantime. *“In spite of the corporations’ official claim to English as a corporate language, members from speech communities other than the Danish find that their integration into the organization depends on their willingness to acquire Danish”* (Tange & Luring, 2009, pp. 220). Not knowing

the language might prolong the process of integration of a new member inside the team, which enters as well in the drawback category. As perceived by the companies, integration of an international engineering graduate *“it usually is a very good investment”*, even if it requires extra-time to form that candidate, to explain all the procedures and to create a cohesive group.

As a final aspect which the companies pointed out as disadvantage is that most of the international graduates are not used to the Danish working culture and it is a process which the companies need to take into consideration when hiring an international engineering graduate. The Danish working culture is known by its flat organizational structure, where everyone’s opinions and suggestions count, where it is highly appreciated working independently and the work-life balance is well maintained (Aragao, 2013). Most probably, there will be necessary a specific time frame in order for the international graduate to behaviourally adjust to the Danish working culture, or even more it might involve revising some old cultural-business related habits (Idem). But it is important to keep in mind that our target group is comprised by international graduates who have been accustomed for at least the past two years with the Danish standards and culture. We must mention that 11 out of 12 interviewees have already been employed in Denmark before finishing their studies, on different positions (not necessarily in engineering). They have experienced how the recruitment process in Danish companies is, which lead them with having an introduction into the Danish working environment. Moreover, all the respondents were studying in Danish higher-education institutions which might have provided them work experience according to the Danish standards, as well their perception that having a Danish diploma are helping them very much to integrate into the Danish labour market.

Conclusion

The main objective of this Master thesis was to give an answer to the following research question: **'Which obstacles do international engineering graduates face while trying to integrate into the Danish labour market?'**

In order to answer this question we have decided on exploring the research problem on three separate levels – institutional, individual and organizational level, which at the same time have a clear correlation between each other. First, the goal was to explore the institutional level presented by the EU legal framework on mobility and Danish regulation. This allowed us to grasp if the graduates' residence in the country is a subject of any restrictions after graduation. In addition, we took into consideration the Danish policies on integration and international recruitment in order to see whether or not these policies suggest any constraints for the graduates' employment on political level. For the individual level, we have conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with engineering graduates coming from five different EU countries, as the objective was to take into account the identified challenges that might hinder their employment in the Danish labour market. And finally, in the organizational level we wanted to present the company's perspective on having international workforce within their business in order to locate what their perception and attitude towards the non-national employees is. In order to accomplish this goal we have conducted an online survey which aim was to approach companies, both national and multinational, in the engineering industry sector in Denmark. In this survey 13 companies took part, so only their perspective was taken into account in the analysis of this thesis.

The findings from each of these three levels brought clarity on what the obstacles for international graduates to get a job in Denmark are, and how they might be overcome. In the end by interrelating these findings we were able to find the answer to our research question.

As discussed earlier, in recent years the number of higher education applicants from EU countries to Denmark is keeping increasing. The circulating debate in the country shows that many companies have high demand of highly educated and qualified employees. According to

statistics, in the near future there will be a shortage of people on national level to fulfil all the vacancies; hence one of the solutions to this problem is to seek a workforce from abroad. Therefore, the role of the international graduates who have finished their higher education in Denmark is seen as very important for the Danish labour market and makes the Danish government to look at the international graduates as a good solution to this problem.

Since the government is investing a lot in international students' education, the logical step that the government is taking forward is to retain these graduates in the country after their graduation. In addition, the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science has allocated a tremendous amount of money in order to subsidize different projects that will promote the retention of international graduates in the Danish labour market. According to the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, international graduates are seen as a great asset for different sectors of the country and that is why it is crucial to keep them in Denmark.

The nature of the mobility idea is that it should make it easier for people to move from one country to another, from one labour market to another. But what is important to consider here is whether or not this idea presupposes equally easy access to the host's country labour market for all people, and whether or not the mobility within EU is efficient. We discovered that the initial right of residing freely in a host EU country does not provide equal rights for non-EU citizens and EU-citizens. Therefore, it is efficient only for the latter. As discussed earlier in the analysis of our empirical findings, third-country nationals are a subject of different regulations in order to reside and work in Denmark. It is more difficult for them to get an employment after graduation, as they have to comply with time restrictions, visa requirements and work permit. While the EU legal framework on mobility and Danish regulations do not imply any particular policy restrictions on the remaining in the country of the international graduates this Master thesis is aimed for. Furthermore, being EU citizens these graduates are not constricted and pressed by time restrictions and work permit requirements. In addition, the Danish labour market does not presuppose any legal constraints towards international recruitment. In line of this, we argue that the graduates' issues to enter the labour market are beyond this frame.

Yet, they still identified few obstacles which in their opinion hamper to some extent the success rate of their employment in the Danish labour market. Even though, Danish government provides an interesting study environment and the legal right of remaining in the country upon graduation, the graduates still experience a hard time to enter the job market. Firstly, according to some of them the Job centres' general approach to help graduates who are part of the unemployment benefit system should be rethought. And secondly, according to the international engineers' perception Danish government could work more in direction to establish a better and stronger relationship between companies and higher educational institutions in order to ease graduates' employment.

Looking at the individual level, four main obstacles have been identified specific for international engineering graduates related to a successful transition from education to job. The barriers that graduates encounter here are a lack of Danish language skills, a lack of a network, a lack of Danish job experience within the engineering industry and the existence of cultural stigmatization.

The cultural capital accrued while they were studying and living in Denmark has a massive impact whether or not the international graduates will enter the Danish workforce. The lack of Danish language skills plays a major role in whether or not the international graduates find employment after graduation, and also hinders social integration into the Danish society and enhances stigmatization. Also, networks are important when looking for a job and while trying to integrate into the society and assimilate the Danish culture. Danish engineering qualifications are considered to be a great asset for the graduates, but not enough – they need to gain work experience within Danish employers in order to be successful in acquiring a job in Denmark. Nonetheless, intercultural competence is a great skill that is useful to be developed in order to achieve a common cultural and social ground between Danes and internationals and to reduce stigmatization.

We gathered as main information from the survey that the companies appreciate cultural diversity inside their organizations and that they perceive what advantages and disadvantages exist inside the organization while having as an employee an international

engineering graduate. Moreover, there is also the finding that the companies perceive having the same challenges when recruiting international and Danish graduates and according to the companies, they do not differentiate between a national and international as long as the candidate is the right one.

Choosing a survey for gathering data from the companies' side proved to be a limitation for our analysis from two points of view: first, we cannot distinguish and evaluate a right answer from a politically correct answer and second, we cannot grasp the stigmatization aspect that might exist inside these organizations. Moreover, even if the companies do not relate in making a distinction between the internationals and Danes, clearly our data shows that this competition exists: companies have higher expectation towards international graduates in terms of knowing the language and in terms of adapting to the Danish working environment.

There is a gap between the openness expressed by the Danish Government and the Danish companies and what the reality of the Danish labour market is, and obviously, the following questions arise: If the necessity to retain more internationals is encouraged across whole Denmark, where is the gap? Why do international graduates still encounter many obstacles while entering the Danish labour market?

The international graduates have a big share of responsibility on overcoming the obstacles they meet along the way to employment. As it has been concluded from the interviews, the graduates are acknowledging that it is in their hands to put extra effort to better integrate into the Danish labour market.

In addition to this, the companies could also try to ease the integration of these candidates. In an even more globalized world, the Danish organizations need to realize that in order to stay competitive on the global market they need to support more and embrace the idea of internationalization. As the Danish engineering industry continues to grow and progress, the companies will need the knowledge, abilities and the technical skills of the international engineering graduates who finished their studies in Denmark and decided to stay further and work in the country. It will be in the companies' financial detriment not to consider making the

necessary steps towards being more internationally-minded when hiring international engineering graduates. This mind-set change is complex and difficult to implement, but the employers have a big contribution in introducing the concept of international integration and cultural diversity in their organizations.

As recommendations, the international engineering graduates can ease their transition from study to work and heighten their chances of getting a job in Denmark by implementing strategies and putting efforts undertaken individually. As Bourdieu's forms of capital theory argue, it is a matter of how a person manages to use its set of resources and potentials adequately (Bourdieu, 1986). Our suggestion for the international graduates is to take an advantage of the free Danish classes even from the start of their studies if they are interested in working in Denmark after graduation. Another recommendation would be to focus on building a social network among locals as well as internationals since the start of the university and this can be done through doing project work in mixed groups, participating in career fairs and other events hosted by the university, participating in social activities and using alumni networks and other online professional network such as LinkedIn. Moreover, having an experience from the Danish work environment through a student job, such as an internship, or making a semester project or a more complex project, such as the bachelor and master thesis with a Danish company, is a way of forming a base to enter the labour market and to understand the Danish working culture.

Our recommendation for Danish companies would be to ease the process of hiring international graduates and to take acknowledgment of the cultural diversity. One possible way to go in this direction would be to try-out at least, how it would be to have an international engineering graduate as an employee. This can be possible through trial periods or test tasks before hiring decisions are made. As a second direction we propose that companies collaborate more with the Universities in order to access more easily this pool of candidates and to prepare them accordingly to their expectations.

Last but not least, it is necessary to diminish and eliminate the existing gap between the perception and the reality. The Danish Government needs to quickly start implementing the

action plan of integrating the internationals before these ones leave, and to create strong partnerships between the universities and the companies.

Our study contributes to the research literature by taking into account the challenges and the difficulties that the international graduates, specialized in engineering are encountering while entering the Danish labour market. Moreover, we consider as an asset of this research paper that it has correlated the obstacles to different expectations which Danish employers have from our target group and to the integration initiatives and action plans of the Danish Government. This research uncovered that the process of integrating international engineering graduates in the Danish labour market is a process that needs the support from all the three levels involved to be successful. The government needs to create a bond through the policy framework that has to be favourable for integrating the internationals. The individuals need to pay more effort into developing their cultural capital and to expand their network even from the start of their studies and the companies need to acknowledge more the economic benefits and the advantages which an international graduate brings inside the organization.

Further research

This Master thesis shed light on the challenges encountered by international graduates to enter the Danish labour market. However, our study has also given rise to some other interesting themes which to be explored further.

Considering that the Danish Government has recently started its strategy on the retention of international graduates into the country, we consider that it would be interesting to repeat this study over time, after about 2-3 years from now. The purpose of such a study would be to compare the results, to observe if there are any changes in the obstacles encountered by international engineering graduates, and nevertheless to see the trends in the Danish policies on integration over time.

The perception of our interviewees that the national graduates have a smoother access to the Danish labour market than they have, gave us the idea that it would be a thought-provoking study to grasp the experiences and the perceptions of the Danish graduates as well. In line of this, we propose a comparative research study “International graduates vs. National graduates’ employment situation”.

A different approach which we deem to be a further research would be to analyse the standpoint of the High Education Institutions in how they can ease the integration process of their graduates. Another potential study would be how to better prepare the graduates in terms of increasing their future employability in Denmark. The complexity in this kind of study would be to explore the partnership between High Education Institutions and Danish companies.

Nonetheless, as a topic to study further we propose to focus on identifying the obstacles encountered by international graduates from other industries. Our research paper aimed to present the international engineering graduates situation but perhaps graduates from other specializations (such as marketing, IT&C, business etc.) encounter different obstacles.

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