Sourcing strategies, channels and geographies in the international recruitment of highly skilled work-force:

A case study of companies in the petroleum and maritime sectors in a non-urban location in Norway

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The geographical dimension covered by the international migration research literature is usually concerned with a host-/home-country focus. However, little attention has been paid to the function of the region as a “clearing house” through which companies in a recruitment process can identify and screen potential candidates that have already settled the country. This paper investigates the recruitment channels used by companies for recruiting highly skilled internationals to the Sunnhordland region in Western Norway. The empirical evidence, combining secondary data and company case study data, has shown that both regional and national recruitment channels play important roles in the search for highly skilled migrants that originally come from abroad. In particular, the data show the important roles of the Norwegian higher education institutions as well as regional networks in recruitment matters.

1. Introduction

The global mobility of human capital has received attention as one of the drivers of globalization (Dicken 2007; Ewers 2007), leading to a more flexible and adaptive work-force and a high degree of international orientation in many companies (Iredale 2001; Khoo, McDonald et al. 2007). Migration can be studied from a number of perspectives and there are various structural characteristics that influence the dimensions and directions of migration flows. Studies also investigate national and regional effects concerning country of origin and destinations in migration.

The existing literature on the migration of highly skilled work-force covers Multinational Corporations (Tzeng 1995; Khoo, McDonald et al. 2007; Williams 2009), migration through ethnic networks and the role of ethnic communities (Nagel 2004; Creese, Dyck et al. 2008), the expatriate culture (Benson-Rea and Rawlinson 2003; Beaverstock 2005; Bogren 2008), migration and the role of educational institutions (Ewers 2007) and recruitment agencies (Faulconbridge, Beaverstock et al. 2009) as well as recruitment channels and migration and demographic characteristics such as gender (Creese, Dyck et al. 2008). Evidently, highly skilled migration involves combinations of geographical directions and distances, crossing national borders. In addition, national and international migration policies (Iredale 1999; Burkert, Niebuhr et al. 2008), migration and the global city (Nagel 2004; Ewers 2007; Burkert, Niebuhr et al. 2008), migration to non-urban regions (Derwing and Krahn 2008) and recruitment and regional/national marketing (Derwing and Krahn 2008) have also been the focus of labour migration research.
This paper is based on results from a Master’s thesis study by Bruland (2010). We investigate the channels used by companies for recruiting highly skilled foreign migrants to the Sunnhordland region in Norway. In particular, we address the effects of regional characteristics in these processes, from the search for candidates, to the destinations of recruits. A key issue may be about how well the recruitment projects match the destination infrastructure and policy.

The regional context requires some background. Western Norway, including the Sunnhordland region of 61,000 inhabitants, is located two and a half hours by car south of Bergen. It hosts some of the largest manufacturing sectors in the Norwegian economy (e.g. petroleum, maritime and marine industries). High levels of investment have resulted in a general labour shortage. In the last three years, the regional unemployment rate has risen from 2.7% in 2007 to 3.6% in 2011, whereas most regions of Western Norway have shown lower levels (Statistics Norway 2010). This generally tight labour-market situation, combined with small wage differences across the country, has kept inland migration at a low level. Many private businesses and public work-places, therefore, have problems recruiting sufficient personnel. A current shortage of highly qualified personnel and particularly categories of technical personnel is predicted to remain in place for the foreseeable future (Arbeids-og inkluderingsdepartementet 2007-2008). High levels of investment and production activity within major industries, combined with a major generational shift of engineers over this period that included the international financial crisis, are reported as the main reasons for this shortage (Teknisk Ukeblad 2010). Some of the future demand for highly skilled personnel will therefore continue to be filled through international recruitment.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 investigates some of the existing theoretical contributions to the research on highly skilled migration, especially concerning the term “highly skilled migrant” and the various regional recruitment channels. Section 3 presents some statistics on Norway and labour migration. Section 4 details the qualitative methodological approach of the case study presented in the analysis. The case study findings on choice of recruitment channels are presented in section 5, whilst section 6 discusses the findings and the influences of the region in companies’ choice of recruitment channel, with some concluding remarks about the relevance of including a regional dimension when investigating the recruitment of a highly skilled international work-force.

2. Highly skilled migrants and their recruitment channels

A growing literature highlights the structures, processes and effects around work-related mobility. After considering the many perspectives on the subject, Koser and Salt (1997, 287) comment: “It is unsurprising that the existing literature does not agree on a single label for highly skilled migration.” A broad classification might be to distinguish between different definitions that include a focus on:

1) mobility details, differentiating between short-term and long-term migration (Tzeng 1995; Bogren 2008);
2) personnel qualifications, such as higher secondary education (Burkert, Niebuhr et al. 2008), and specialists, including specialists with large stocks of human capital with both formal and informal skills (Williams, Baláz et al. 2004);

3) organizational positions, such as executives and managers (Iredale 1999), investors and businesspersons, NGO employees and entrepreneurs (Ewers 2007). These categories are, however, far from mutually exclusive. Table 1 gives a more detailed overview of terms and definitions.

We consider “highly skilled migrant” the most suitable term for our study. It includes migrants with formal tertiary education qualifications, as well as those who do not hold formal qualifications, but whose skills and experience match those of their formally qualified peers. This case study focuses on international recruitment to Sunnhordland, including both short (1–3-year contracts) and longer-term migration, whilst seasonal workers such as short-term migrants who work in the country for less than six months are omitted because they are not registered in statistics as Norwegian inhabitants. Nevertheless, we should remember that the companies included among our cases hire this kind of short-term labour in addition to the longer-term positions that are our focus here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Focus</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Mobility details</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel qualifications</td>
<td>Highly skilled professional/Highly skilled migrant</td>
<td>Those with university degrees or extensive experience</td>
<td>Both long-term and short-term migration</td>
<td>-Iredale (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly skilled employee</td>
<td>Those with a university degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Koser &amp; Salt (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multinational transferee</td>
<td>Considered high-level employees by the companies transferring them</td>
<td>Temporary workers on 1-3 years</td>
<td>-Khoo et. al (2007a)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High degree of mobility</td>
<td>-Williams et. al (2004)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Burkert et. al (2008)</td>
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<td>-Tzeng (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational qualifications</td>
<td>Transnational professionals and expatriates</td>
<td>Those who make careers related to migration (specific skills not specified)</td>
<td>Temporary migrants High degree of mobility</td>
<td>-Coles &amp; Fetcher (2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Bogren (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elite labour</td>
<td>Workers fulfilling positions at the pinnacles or organisational hierarchies or specialist roles</td>
<td>Both long-term and short-term migration</td>
<td>Falconbridge et. al (2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Definition overview from examples in existing literature
2.1. Reasons for recruiting highly skilled migrants

Highly skilled recruitment can be considered as a business strategy for introducing new knowledge that can foster innovation and a competitive advantage (Koser and Salt 1997; Nagel 2004; Williams, Baláž et al. 2004; Ewers 2007), or to generally overcome skill shortages (Millar and Salt 2007) and within a short time period (Khoo, Voigt-GRaf et al. 2007). As Ewers (2007, 121) states: “When specific skills are lacking, the easiest way to improve a knowledge base is to import one.” Migrants’ own motivations, choices and decisions, including the company they prefer to join, their preferred location, and preferences concerning work content and conditions, are also highly relevant for an understanding of migration behaviour (Koser and Salt 1997; Nagel 2004; Beaverstock 2005; Sheppard and Barnes 2005; Ewers 2007; Bogren 2008; Verwiebe, Mau et al. 2010).

2.2. Recruitment channels

In principle, highly skilled migrants can be recruited in a number of ways. According to Seip (2007), some highly skilled migrants come to Norway through intra-company transfers in large Multinational Corporations (MNCs), whilst others migrate outside company structures. Migrants are recruited by international recruitment agencies, by personnel offices or international business networks, through advertisements, through institutions such as the European Employment Services (EURES) and through universities and research institutions. In fact, register-based data in a recently published OECD report on labour market integration in Norway (OECD 2009) show that around half of the tertiary-educated immigrants from OECD countries, as well as non-OECD countries (including Turkey), had a Norwegian university degree. However, it is not possible to attain a complete overview of the role of all potential recruitment channels through secondary data sources, partly because of a lack of systematic reporting, but also because several factors must be combined to explain an accurate migration process. Family, self-realization, making “a new start” or a particular lifestyle may to varying degrees influence a person’s migration decision and choice of destination.

Many highly skilled internationals are already living in Norway and some are already employed. Register-based data for 2007/2008 show that the employment rate among OECD working-aged migrants is 70.6%, which is only 5% lower than the employment rate for the native-born population aged 15–64 years. The employment rate among non-OECD migrants of 56.2% can be explained by the fact that whilst much of the recent migration from the OECD has been labour related, most of those originating from outside the OECD have immigrated on humanitarian grounds (OECD 2009).

An overview of recruitment channel options for a region, based on the case study findings, is presented in Table 2. Recruitment channels have been divided into two categories: direct recruitment, which is business and labour market related, and indirect recruitment, which refers to other channels.
2.3. Labour flexibility and labour attachment

Recruitment is also linked to how positions within an organization can be used to introduce flexibility into employment systems. Atkinson’s model (1984); e.g. discussed in (Kalleberg 2001) distinguished between functional flexibility, which refers to job rotation and team-work arrangements, and numerical flexibility meaning that the number of staff employed could be adjusted with changes in supply and demand. According to Atkinson, functional flexibility is associated with the core staff of the organization, whilst the numerical flexible component is associated with the periphery of the organization, often characterized by less skilled staff. The latter category of staff represents a buffer that protects the high-competence core group from major turnovers. This is different in our Stord cases, where the numerical/functional flexibility among company informants was associated with both low and highly skilled personnel engaged on short-term contracts. The need for numerical flexibility is particularly apparent for industries relying on unstandardized large-scale project bids, which is quite common in the offshore and maritime sectors.

Kalleberg (2001) argues that Atkinson has overlooked hiring alternatives to traditional staffing arrangements. On the basis of our findings, we argue that the different options also depend on a geographical context. Engaging a consultant on a temporary basis can sometimes be the only solution in cases where firms do not have available local candidates, or where the company, region, or both, are insufficiently attractive to potential outside recruits. Yet another alternative would be to move the whole process of staffing to another company location abroad, or outsource the task to others. Large companies operating in locations with a broad spectrum of available human capital resources and services have a better opportunity of choosing between all of the above-mentioned options. This brings us to the discussion about the role of the region in the recruitment process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct recruitment</th>
<th>Indirect recruitment (via)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Intra-company transfers</td>
<td>- Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- EURES</td>
<td>- Regional or National educational institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Recruitment agencies</td>
<td>- Ethnic networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Targeted Educational institutions abroad</td>
<td>- Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Company takeover</td>
<td>- Previous recruitment by others – inter-regional turnover</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4. Investigating highly skilled recruitment from a geographical perspective

Whilst some regions seem to recruit highly skilled labour on a frequent basis, other regions seem to find recruiting similar workers very difficult. Why does a highly skilled migrant decide to move to city A and not city B, or why do larger urban areas seem more attractive to migrants than smaller towns? Ritsilä and Haapanen (2003, 437-438) state: “Qualified individuals choosing a residential location expect a supply of relevant jobs, as well as interesting educational, cultural and recreational opportunities for themselves and their families. Thus, the location decisions of skilled labour are connected to the infrastructure and production of regions.”

Peripheral and smaller nations, regions and cities cannot compete with global cities in offering a range of job categories, services and cultural facilities to potential immigrants. Traditionally, Norway has been an attractive labour market for lower- and medium-skilled jobs in trades such as manufacturing, construction and private and public services because of high wage levels. At the same time, the labour market has struggled to recruit highly skilled personnel because of language barriers and the lack of attractive “global cities”. Those who move to Norway often do so for lifestyle reasons such as recreational and adventure activities. Some have already been introduced to these possibilities through tourist visits, whilst others may have previously studied at Norwegian universities, or know the country through family and ethnic networks.

More peripheral locations can succeed in recruitment when candidates are actually targeting specific job positions. In those cases, some basic infrastructural components such as acceptable housing facilities, kindergartens, schools and a second job in dual-career households are sufficient regional characteristics. These factors are considered a necessity rather than something that will make the location a favourable target destination for migration. The immediate quality of the site (referring to the settlement) is one component. Another is situation, which refers to the accessibility of facilities in the surrounding area, e.g. a larger urban area with more varied services, a range of cultural facilities, a diversified range of jobs and an international airport.

The situation components indicate that some places and regions will be in a more favourable position than others. For example, inhabitants in Sunnhordland are two and a half hours away by car from the city of Bergen and its international airport, but too far away for daily commuting. Including the issue of location when analysing a company’s recruitment strategy, introduces a more holistic perspective on the recruitment process. Ewers (2007, 122) notes: “The mobility of international human capital is geographical, but as part of a web of place-based national, urban, corporate and structural factors, as well as individual push and pull factors.” Thus, whilst a desirable position within a company can increase the value of a migration destination, it is crucial that the destination meets a certain minimum standard of living.
3. Norway and labour migration

According to the OECD report on labour market integration in Norway (OECD 2009), around 10% of the Norwegian population was born in another country. This level is almost identical to Denmark and 5% lower than in Sweden, Germany and the UK. Much of the recent labour migration from the EU/EEA countries have been labour-market related, whereas non-OECD migration has been largely humanitarian. Nationals from the Nordic countries have been exempt from the general rule of needing residence and work permits since 1954, resulting in a large Swedish immigrant population that has linguistic and cultural ties to Norway. From 1986 to 2006, the net immigration from Sweden was 1,700, from Denmark 500 and Finland 2,500 (Arbeids-og inkluderingsdepartementet 2007-2008). In 2006, 181 000 employees with foreign citizenship were registered as living in Norway, and 18% of these were from other Nordic countries. The European labour force survey of 2006/2007 shows that 37% of immigrants (foreign born) have tertiary education. Half of those with a higher education have a degree from Norway (OECD 2009). Almost two-thirds of highly qualified foreign-born inhabitants in Norway are also in a job that can be classified as highly skilled (ISCO 1–3). Among the OECD countries, only Switzerland has a higher share of a foreign-born labour force with higher education.

4. Methodology

This study includes empirical data and qualitative data from a case study of in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 16 informants located in Bømlo and Stord. A purposeful sampling strategy aimed to cover a broad range of the most important internationally oriented industries in the petroleum and maritime sectors. Interviews were also held in four Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs; with fewer than 250 employees) and three interviews were conducted with large enterprises to reflect the presence of these categories in the regional economy.

A third category of interviewees was from local municipal administration (four interviews). The objectives of these interviews were to address issues on infrastructure and place marketing, and to investigate the extent to which this actively met needs related to international recruitment “projects”.

Atheno AS (www.atheno.no), a region-business incubator owned by governmental and private business organizations, has been a valuable source in the process of identifying firms and key personnel actively involved in international recruitment (two interviews with Atheno staff were specifically about international recruitment strategies among businesses in the region). The firm cases offered valuable insights into motivations, strategies, processes and experiences with international recruitment. Migrant workers in three enterprises (three interviews) were interviewed to complement the information from the different interview sources. However, the migrant’s perspective was not the main focus of this study. All interviews took place at the work-place of the interviewee and lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.
The aim of this study has been to understand strategies, challenges and complexities of international recruitment in a regional context. This case study was carried out in September 2009 in the middle of the international financial crisis. The comments we recorded indicated that the crisis did have a temporary effect, resulting in a lower level of activity. The implication was lower levels of recruitment, especially of lower-skilled staff, whereas according attention to higher-skilled recruitment seemed to remain relatively intact. Retaining qualified personnel in a situation where the activity was lower than usual also became a priority, as the need for retaining competence and capacity of resources was crucial at short notice when bidding for new contracts.

5. Case study results

The case study presented below focuses on 1) strategies and choice of recruitment channels, and 2) the influences of geographical context.

Data from the case study showed that each company used multiple recruitment channels in direct recruitment of highly skilled internationals. The choice of recruitment channel was determined by many factors, such as availability, previous recruitment experiences, existing networks and preferences regarding short- or long-term employment engagements. Data also showed that many of the highly skilled internationals had been recruited through indirect recruitment channels, thus entering their current company through a local/regional or national recruitment network. This factor demonstrates the importance of including all geographical levels when addressing the issue of international recruitment, whether seen from the viewpoint of the enterprise, the recruitment service provider, policymakers or public labour market institutions (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service; NAV) operating on a national or regional/local scale.

The engagement of a recruitment agency was quite common in our interviews for two main reasons. First, you did not have to go through the process of finding and selecting the right candidates yourself. Instead, you listed certain requirements concerning the qualifications of the candidates, and the recruitment agency conducted the search process and sorted the potential candidates for you. Second, all the paperwork for immigration and taxes was taken care of by the recruitment company. One informant stated: “When you use a recruitment agency that hires and then out-sources personnel to others, you set a standard, and if the standard is not met by the personnel introduced to you, you can send the candidates back to the recruitment agency” (Informant G). This statement also suggests that the informants enjoyed the flexibility offered by such agencies in terms of not being required to face any obligations to retain personnel on a long-term basis.

However, flexibility can work both ways, since the hired personnel may not feel any obligation to stay. For this reason, some companies avoided using recruitment agencies. “We don’t want to engage highly skilled personnel via a recruitment agency, because you spend a lot of time with on-the-job training, and you never have any guarantee that they will stay and not move on to the next firm” (Informant D).

Local knowledge also plays its part. Rusten et al. (2005) identified social closeness and trust, gained through a shared culture and face-to-face interaction, as reasons
for companies sometimes choosing local consultancy services as opposed to external ones. Trust and social closeness also seemed relevant in the informants’ choices of recruitment agencies. Of those who used recruitment agencies to locate highly skilled internationals, most had chosen agencies located in the Sunnhordland region. This also meant that the agency had the necessary local knowledge of infrastructure, services and qualities of the community and could promote this to the potential candidates in an enthusiastic way. One of the informants explained it thus: “Some of these local agencies have a lot of competence, because they have been working with this [ed. recruitment] for many years. They have networks in other areas. They have systemized how to get them [ed. the recruits] through the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) system, with the papers and the administration, and in addition, they know the area here” (Informant E).

All informants had used intra- and intercompany networks for international recruitment and considered them valuable recruitment arenas. All companies participating in this case study either owned smaller companies outside Norway, or worked closely with foreign companies.

Nagel (2004) considers employee mobility as crucial for the distribution of expertise within global companies. This move can be characterized as a “tour of duty” and is common in many Transnational Corporations (TNCs) (Ewers 2007). For Informant D, the intra-company network had provided the informant’s company with expertise that had been very hard to obtain in Norway. In this case, it was a long-term contract. “We used our [ed. Business network] and asked other human resources departments if they had some local applicants with a background that would be of interest to us, and then our search led us to an employee in our office branch in Italy” (Informant D).

Hardly any informants reported that they selected their international employees on the basis of EEA member country of origin, and informants felt no restrictions recruiting outside the EEA area. EURES had only actively been used by two of the informants and neither was satisfied with the candidates they had obtained through this organization. Their experience was that engaging personnel through this institution was far more time-consuming than giving the contract to a private recruitment agency.

All informants preferred using recruitment agencies or intra-company networks for international recruitment, and had a range of requirements for the candidates. First, there was of course the requirement of high-level competence, ensuring the candidates’ capability to fill the needed position. Second, even though most informants specified that they did not ask the recruitment agency to target specific countries, they did prefer candidates who understood and spoke a Scandinavian language. They did however acknowledge that candidates could not always be obtained from these areas. Thus, one can say that whilst Scandinavian language was a preferred requirement, the English language was a definite additional requirement. The preference of informants for Scandinavian-speaking candidates was attributed both to day-to-day conversation and communication, and to culture and safety. Informant E stated: “It can’t be ignored that it is of a great advantage that they are Nordic speaking at least. (...) It’s about the communication and the working environment, the small-talk and all that.” The informant also had some concerns regarding safety, as the working environment could be quite dangerous if safety requirements were not followed.
The informants pointed out the need to market the rural characteristics of the region, so they would attract personnel that would be comfortable with this sort of environment. When recruiting for long-term contracts, Informant D’s experience was that recruiting employees with origins in “similar places” meant they would find living in Sunnhordland more satisfactory than those accustomed to an urban lifestyle, and they would therefore stay in the region for a longer term. Recruiting from Nordic universities had proved to be successful, but the climate could be a critical issue. Other informants had similar experiences even in cases of recruitment of persons living in Eastern Norway: “I know there’s a great risk that he might return as soon as he experiences the first autumn storm” (Informant E). “There’s nothing for you to do here on the island if you are a guy from Oslo who only drinks lattes” (Informant D). These statements indicate that company location and companies’ previous experiences play significant roles in their recruitment strategies.

Regarding a company’s ability to recruit, many stressed the importance of the local airport with daily direct flights to Oslo, as well being not too far from Bergen with its services and international airport. However, a lack of temporary housing and available jobs for accompanying husbands and wives was often a problem.

In a report by Seip (2007), a selection of private enterprises in Norway was asked to indicate the three most important recruitment arenas for highly skilled international employees. The results correspond well with the findings from the in-depth interviews from Sunnhordland. In both cases, private recruitment agencies and intra- and inter-company networks were frequently used, whilst EURES seem to play a minor role in highly skilled recruitment. However, note that it is possible that some private recruitment agencies collaborate with EURES and that the role of this organization is a more hidden part of the process. Contrary to the findings of our case study, Seip (2007) lists international advertising as the most frequent recruitment arena. It is unclear if this type of advertisement includes online applications and active marketing conducted by a firm, or through an agent. Either way, international job advertising was not mentioned by the informants in our case study as a frequently used arena of recruitment. In the case of online marketing, all informants except one had company web pages in English. However, whilst the larger companies had facilities for submitting an online application, hardly any of the SMEs in our study had anything similar. One of the informants in the latter category argued that he did not see a great value in advertising vacancies on their web site because of their small company size.

Regarding direct recruitment channels used in international recruitment, all our informants reported using recruitment agencies, intercompany networks and the Internet, with emphasis on the first two. A majority of companies (5 of 7) in our study reported using a company takeover as a means of recruiting international labour, and several (4) had used an intra-company takeover and foreign educational institutions as recruitment arenas. Some also reported that they occasionally targeted individual candidates on the basis of information from colleagues or other informal sources.

Most company informants (6) reported that their company had recruited highly skilled migrants through regional and national recruitment channels—what we have referred to as indirect recruitment channels. In fact, two of the informants reported that they had recruited about half of their international highly skilled personnel through regional recruitment arenas. The use of indirect and direct recruitment channels for highly skilled migrants is shown in Table 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Direct recruitment</th>
<th>Indirect recruitment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company B</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company C</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Company D</td>
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<td>Company E</td>
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<td>Company F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company G</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Overview of companies’ use of direct and indirect recruitment channels, bold indicates the channel mostly used.

6. Discussion and concluding remarks

The empirical evidence from the secondary data and the case study data, has shown that regional and national recruitment channels play important roles in the search for highly skilled migrants that originally come from outside Norway. In particular, the data show two important roles of higher education. The first is in the training of suitable candidates originally from outside Norway in accordance with the needs of Norwegian businesses. The second is the way in which years spent in Norway as a student represent an important “testing ground” for individuals considering future settlement in Norway. In this case, a social network and potential family relations can be a great motivation for settlement.

We found that a recruitment strategy from the viewpoint of the recruiting companies can often be described as a stepwise process, referring to the fact that most of our companies first searched regionally and nationally before eventually reaching the international level if the two previous arenas produced no results. The need to minimize resources on training personnel that would only stay for a short period (turnover cost), as well as minimizing resources spent on language skills were reported to be the main reasons for this strategy. Furthermore, in cases where personnel who understood Norwegian were needed, the region seemed like a natural starting point for the recruitment search, before moving on to a national level, then preferably Scandinavia, followed by an international level. From the data, there did not seem to be a preference for Europeans before other internationals, despite the liberated la-
bour regulations in the EEA area. This is not exceptional for international recruitment, but is in fact similar to what characterizes other forms of recruitment in non-urban locations (Rusten and Hansen 2002). Another reason is that the local/regional level is often an arena for informal recruitment processes.

As shown in Table 3, informants reported that they had recruited highly skilled migrants through indirect channels. Many of these highly skilled migrants had previously come to Norway prior to their current employment, as accompanying spouses, tourists, refugees, students, or had previously been recruited by another company. An important point made by all informants was that when recruiting for long-term contracts, it was a clear advantage to recruit someone with a local attachment as they were considered to be stable labour with a low degree of mobility. Thus, the element of retention had a high presence in the choice of recruitment strategies. The frequency with which we found highly skilled migrants were recruited through indirect channels in this case study was supported by the secondary data sources that we have reported (see section 3). Taken together, they underline the argument that highly skilled migration is not solely motivated by employment and achieved through targeted recruitment, but rather through more ad hoc procedures.

Choosing the region as the primary area for recruitment, and targeting regional recruitment channels seemed more important when recruiting for long-term contracts than for short-term contracts. The informants attributed this to the importance of the employee’s regional attachment for retention purposes. They emphasized the employees’ attachment to place as a vital factor. Informant C stated: “We advertise locally. We want them to have local attachment, because experience shows that those who have some sort of local connection stay with us for a longer period of time. All informants had also recruited migrants for long-term contracts from an international level, but this was mainly because of a lack of skilled labour within the region and the country as a whole. Targeted international recruitment projects seemed more frequently launched for short-term contracts of a certain scale, where there was less focus on retention. Preferring regional recruitment can also be motivated by access to knowledge about potential candidates, through either having met the candidate before, or acquiring information through the regional network.

If applied to Atkinson’s theory of the core and the periphery, long-term contracts define the core with functional labour flexibility, whilst short-term contracts define the periphery with numerical flexibility. However, some important points contradict Atkinson’s distinction between the highly skilled core and the lower-skilled periphery. As previously stressed, migration is an individual decision. Many articles emphasize the high level of mobility of highly skilled people. According to Beaverstock (2005, 246): “Within the TNC, the preference for frequent short-term/non-permanent circulation over long-term/permanent migration, has produced a ‘transient’ pattern of migration and established a highly mobile, cross-border transnational managerial elite.” Among the transnational elite, often also referred to as expatriates, the level of competence is high, but they are employed on short-term contracts, meeting requirements such as numerical flexibility. High-level competence exists then both in the core and the periphery of the company. Another point that has been mentioned previously is that a company can choose between standard recruitment, consultancy firms or independent professionals, utilizing staff employed elsewhere or relying on sub-contractors. It is also important to keep in mind that the range of options will very much depend on a combination of the attractiveness of the company as a work-place and the overall qualities of the region (site/situation).
Through the recruitment channel framework, the region proved relevant in many aspects of the recruitment of highly skilled internationals. First, it was discovered that many highly skilled internationals were recruited through regional or national recruitment channels referred to as indirect recruitment channels. Thus, the employment of highly skilled internationals might be termed “accidental” as much as the result of a conscious recruitment strategy by a firm. Accounting for highly skilled migrants that have come through indirect recruitment channels reveals some of the complexity of highly skilled migration as well as the relevance of including the regional labour market as a variable in the analysis of highly skilled migrant recruitment. This also brings relevance to using the term “highly skilled migrant” as opposed to “multinational transferee” or “expatriate”.

The geographical dimension covered by the international migration research literature is usually concerned with a host-/home-country perspective. However, little attention has been paid to the function of the region as a “clearing house” through which companies in a recruitment process can identify and screen potential candidates that have already settled in Norway. Foreign students at universities and colleges, or personnel already working in a country are examples of recruitment stepping stones that should not be overlooked. The ability to find information about potential candidates directly through references, on the basis of who the candidates have worked for, or inquiring through more informal networks, further demonstrate the value of the region’s role in recruitment, starting from the sourcing process.

Therefore, we suggest that when investigating strategies for recruiting highly skilled migrants, the region in which the company is located, as well as a company’s previous experiences with this type of recruitment to this specific region, can play a vital role in determining the choice of recruitment strategies, recruitment channels and the choice of potential candidates. A region might also develop a common practice, as a successful example of recruitment by one business can be followed by other nearby businesses.

At the time of our interviews, the administration in the eight municipalities had agreed upon forming a joint marketing project to attract potential inhabitants and businesses to the region. However, whilst the project has a web site that promotes the region, it is mostly in the planning stages. The information is only published in Norwegian, which clearly limits its value outside Scandinavia.

Local administrators had also planned to establish an introduction centre for those moving to the region, targeting both those coming from Norway and outside.
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