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In Sweden, the expansion of higher education (HE) among others implied that new university colleges were established in the less populated regions. The proportion of non-traditional HE students has since then increased. However, a parallel development is also possible; students originating from city regions, but without sufficient grades to enter the old universities, would move and study at a university college.

People with ample resources, such as private means and networks, have traditionally been mobile ([Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990](#); [Kivinen, Ahola, & Hedman, 2001](#)) and are expected to continue to be so ([Florida, 2010](#); [Machin, Pelkonen, & Salvanes, 2008](#)). They have moved to cities and to educational institutions, where it has been possible for them to gain and reproduce their family capital. Nowadays, the expectations of women (at least in most of the industrialised countries) are similar to those of men. However, if already socially privileged groups of students whose own achieved educational capital could not reach the standards required by the traditional universities that was proximate to where they grew up, they need to adjust their educational aims. Such an adjustment would be to apply for a study place in a less prestigious educational programme or at a less prestigious higher education institution (Kivinen et al., 2001).

In the big picture, the direction of the mobility is typically from less populated areas to urbanised regions, and mobility is more common among women than men, particularly in their early 20s ([SCB, 2014](#)). From a Swedish and Scandinavian perspective, people have generally been, and still are, well rooted in their home regions compared to people in other countries. Also, tertiary-educated individuals are reluctant to relocate. Only around four to five per cent of this group have moved during any given year. In other educational groups, it is even less common—half as many ([SOU, 2007](#)). Looking at gender, more women than men are tertiary educated, meaning that more women relocate, leaving men behind ([SCB, 2014](#)). In international comparisons, more higher-education students in Sweden are of a mature age ([HSV, 2011](#)), and they are more likely to be women. Even though Sweden is considered a gender-equal country, women still carry the main responsibility for the family (Holth, Jordansson, & Gonäs, 2012). Having a family clearly restricts the possibility of moving for mature students.

The question is, which groups of HE students are moving, and which are staying?

In the Scandinavian countries, the total population is registered in many aspects. Registers from different sources (education, residency, civil status, etc.) can be linked together at an individual level and allow researchers to study individual life trajectories. All students who had started (achieved ≥ 7.5 HE credit points) and who were born between 1974 and 1982 were included, around 220,000 individuals. The most recent data are from 2012, this being when these individuals were aged between 30 and 38 years. The earliest cohorts have reached an age when a majority of those who intended to undertake higher educational study have done so.

The definition of mobility is crucial; most common definitions are based on certain distances or crossing administrative borders. In a country like Sweden, where the geographical distances are perceived differently in the north and in the south, and where the administrative areas (municipalities, counties) vary in size, these measures are not reliable. In this study, we have elaborated on a '100 km border' by taking into consideration proximity to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and public transport. Mobility is defined as entering an HEI other than that/those nearest (that is, further away than 100 km) and as public transportation not supporting commuting on a daily basis (that is, shorter than 100 km). The mobility is calculated in relation to residency the year before the student enrolled in HE.

Preliminary results show that 47% of students have moved. The explanation for the high proportion of mobile students is probably due to different ways of defining mobility. In logistic regression analyses, field of study was the most determinant factor. Most common 'movers' were students within fields of agriculture and forestry (84%); these fields of study are only offered at three HEIs. Another 'obvious' explanation for mobility is residency; those who lived in less populated regions prior their HE enrolment were simply forced to move to be able to access HE. Students from academic family backgrounds were more likely to move than other students; this is in accordance with previous research and reproduction theory. Their mobility was to a large extent between city regions. Somewhat unexpectedly, no gender difference was found. Note that these gender-equal results occurred when family background, choice of educational field and previous educational merits (upper sec school grades) were the same for women and men.

The results are of interest for different HEIs in terms of their possibility to attract certain groups of students. The results are interesting from a regional planning perspective in terms of how to attract educated people who are expected to be innovative and contribute to the vitalisation of the region. From a gender perspective, it is interesting to know the characteristics of the mobile 'creative' class. This group is often addressed as computer programmers, scientists, engineers and artists. But they may be physicians or veterinarians, of whom a majority are women.

To study mobility from an educational perspective, focussing on the organisation of higher education (prestige and type of programmes offered) adds knowledge to a field that has been extensively researched from economic/business/sociological perspectives.

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