

**Hope and despair. Non-traditional students' transition
to the
labour market**

**Espoir et désespoir. La transition entre université et
marché du travail pour les étudiants non traditionnels**

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- The preliminary results from the Employ-project, aiming at enhancing the employability of non-traditional students in HE
- <http://employ.dsw.edu.pl/language/en/>





The aim

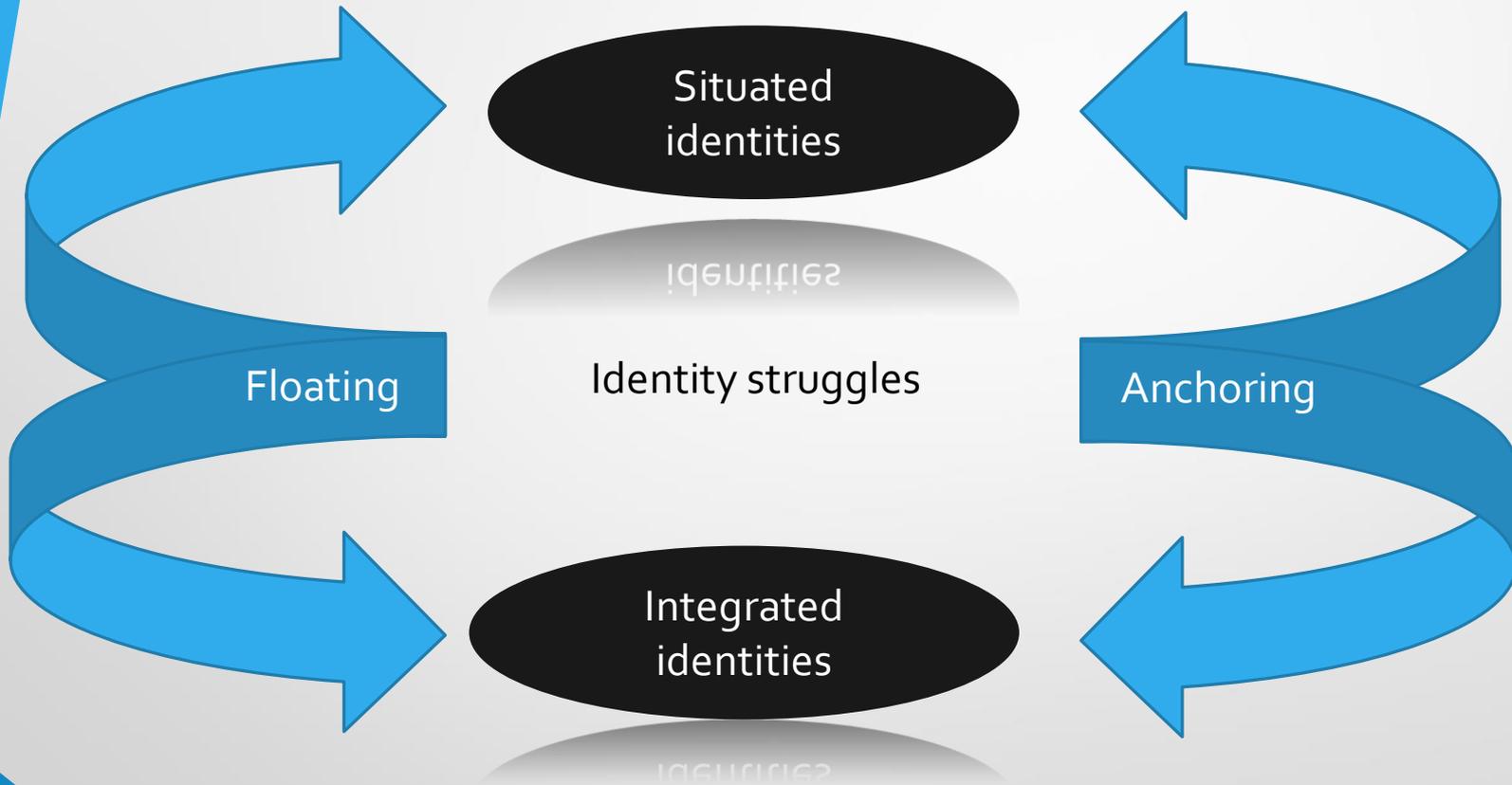
- to understand non-traditional students' experiences before their transition from higher education to the labour market.



Non-traditional students Employability

- Under-represented groups participating in HE, **mature as well as young adult students** that are **the first** in their **families** to enter HE in Sweden
- **employability** from a competence-based perspective, focusing on students' skills in relation to the needs of the labour market
- **students' own perspective on the competencies**

Biographical work





The Swedish context

- a three-year interdisciplinary BA programme in HRM at Stockholm University
- survey to 150 students at the last two semesters - background and approval to be interviewed
- 17 students interviewed; to some we will come back after a half year
- Here about three students



Anastasija

- an international background from an EU-country; a close connection to both Sweden and her “other country” all along
- 38 years old, and in Sweden since eight years, but has lived in Sweden as a kid
- Involved in many HE programmes and courses
- HRM programme to be able to establish herself in the LM
- Struggles with identity, language and culture – double life



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Alexandra

- 32 years old, came to Sweden seven years ago from an EU-country with her husband who got a job at an international company.
- HE from her country, but not appropriate for Sweden
- Struggles with language; fears if she gets a job, huge competition on the LM



Amanda

- 25 years old, born in Sweden, first in her family in HE
- Left well paid job to get to HE, love to study but works extra as everybody else to secure employment
- Sure that she gets a job eventually, at the location and with description that suits her



Analysis

- All struggle as being non-traditional students and starting a transition from HE to working life
- HE as a necessary part of adult life, but for Amanda a huge step to leave her position
- Language as a core issue for identity struggles, working emotionally on identity
- Struggle with general knowledge and competencies required at the LM; communications skills; to be accepted at the LM
- Financial worries
- Getting an academic job

Language

- **Process of Anchoring** - *I couldn't think of living here without being able to function as all the others, to be a part of society, in such language is very important for me.*

Anastasija

- **Process of Floating** - *When I think about my study, I am nervous all the time, as I am unsure of how to express myself as good as I would like to, this brings continuously anxiety, it is difficult to talk in front of others, and it seems that I am another person when I speak my mother tongue.*

Alexandra



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becoming employable

- *Everything goes quickly, there is only one year left which makes me **anxious**, I am nearly out of my mind. I think it will be very difficult, I do not know what I can say, but I talked to my classmates and some of them think it will be very nice to get a job, while I think it will be very tough. **I am scared**, as I do not know how it is going to be like.... This relates to different issues, in some way because I have **Swedish as a second language**, I am probably frightened, how, and who my employers will be, what kind of attitude are they going to have towards me. And partly because I am **a little older** – laughing – I am 38, but I think that everybody has different point of departure, different lives, so will be in my case too, so I am scared, I am scared really.*

Anastasija



becoming employable

*I have studied the whole of my life and now I know that there will be no more of that, and **this is terrifying**. The school is a form of some security for me, do you understand, to leave it is scary, I can tell, this is the only thing I know. Second, I am very frightening or worry about if I can get a job. ... **It is difficult to leave the school in three months**, it is unbelievable, it went so quickly, especially when I was studying and working at the same time. First I worked at the retirement home, with short hours... but I am not sure I want to work in care profession.*

Alexandra



Getting a job

*I am on the bottom of employment list, I am **an immigrant**, this shows from my name, this is not so good, I am a female, neither so good, I am over thirty which means that I soon can get children, not so good, I do not have any experience working on HR job... and I am not Swedish I am not really fluent in Swedish either and this is frightening employers. There are such ways or borders at the labour market that make me not even having a chance to prove myself or show my qualifications, I cannot get a chance to come closer to employers, and this makes me really terrifying*

***Expectations** are growing not because of myself, but also my poor boy (her husband), not easy for him, when I am studying all the time.*

Alexandra



Getting a job

*I am very **curious** about what the job will be, it is a very popular programme so there will be many who are applying, and this is **a kind of stress**, also that I have chosen an extra job within recruitment as I feel I have to have it to be able to get a job later on, and there are very many of the students who have already a relevant extra job.*

Amanda

Anchoring in education

Still it feels a little strange that I have chosen to study at the University after all. Perhaps strange is a bad word, but I had a lot of work and a family that did not push me to study... Well, this step was very good to take ... I listened to myself and left the safe job, if not I could not have learned new things despite them.

Amanda



Hope and despair of non-traditional students

- Students' voices give us insights into their perspectives on hopes and despair when in transition.
- At HE they felt safe and anchored.
- Yet to imagine future work as non-traditional, mature and especially foreigner feels scary and to become employable is like a threshold which requires **biographical work**. Thus, feeling of belonging, anchoring with oneself, dealing with double identity, floating and having enough competencies.

Conclusion

- **Hope** not necessary is in opposition to **despair** but can be easily included in it, and both can feel like a double edged of the **biographical work**.
- Despair seen as anxiety, fears and uncertainties. Thus, biographical work, when becoming employable in non-traditional students' stories includes both hopes and anxiety.
- the students' fear is related to the competition on the LM due to the attractiveness of the HRM programme. They also see their non-traditional background as an obstacle.



Becoming employable brings hopes

- *Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.*

Vaclav Havel



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THANK YOU!

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