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*Corresponding author: Maria Zackariasson, School of Historical and Contemporary Studies & Department of Teacher Education, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden
E-mail: maria.zackariasson@sh.se

Reviewing editor:
Jun Li, Western University, London, Canada

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INTERNATIONAL & COMPARATIVE EDUCATION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Academic literacies and international mobility. The organization and supervision of degree projects in Sweden and Russia

Maria Zackariasson^{1*} and Jenny Magnusson²

Abstract: In this article, we will discuss how circumstances and requirements on a micro-level may be of relevance for the conditions for international student mobility within higher education. This will be done through examining similarities and differences in the organization of degree project courses at universities in Russia and Sweden, and how supervisors and course representatives described their experiences of working with them. International mobility is often described as having the potential of improving quality within higher education institutions and benefiting individuals by offering new experiences and perspectives. But the changing of academic contexts, which international mobility involves, demands a great deal of adjustment from the individual student and can be a complicated process. Through examining similarities and differences in comparable courses at universities in two countries, this article aims to say something about what characterizes different local academic contexts and thus the differences in expectations students may encounter when going between them, here in particular concerning academic writing and the relationship to the supervisor. The article is based on empirical material from a qualitative research project on journalism education and teacher education in Sweden and Russia, and the discussion will be related to the concept of academic literacies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Zackariasson is a professor in European ethnology at Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden, where she is also Director of research at the Department of Teacher Education. Her research has concerned higher education and the experiences of university students, as well as young people's political and societal involvement. She has previously worked at the University of Oslo, Norway, and Uppsala University, Sweden. Jenny Magnusson is an associate professor in Swedish at Södertörn University, where she also coordinates one of the teacher education programs. Her main research focus is academic writing and other aspects related to higher education in general and teacher education in particular. She did her PhD at Linköping University, Sweden. This article is part of a research project currently conducted by Magnusson and Zackariasson, which focuses on supervision of degree projects within teacher education and journalism in Sweden and Russia, and particularly the views on and work with student independence.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This article examines courses connected to the writing of degree projects in two countries, Sweden and Russia, to investigate the kind of differences students may come across if they choose to do part of their education in another country. Even if international mobility is often described as having the potential of improving quality within higher education and being beneficial to individuals, the changing of academic contexts, which international mobility involves, demands significant adjustment from individual students. Although students in many countries are expected to write some kind of degree project or MA/BA-thesis towards the end of their education, the organization of these and the expectations on the students may differ. This may be due to national regulations governing higher education but also epistemological differences in the local academic contexts, for instance, regarding academic writing and the relationship to the supervisor, factors that are central for how international mobility is experienced by students partaking in it.

Subjects: Education; Higher Education; Teacher Education; Ethnology; Language and Linguistics

Keywords: international student mobility; higher education; academic literacies; academic writing; degree projects; teacher education; journalism education; Sweden; Russia

1. Introduction

One of the main goals of the Bologna Declaration from 1999, an international agreement concerning higher education signed by a large number of countries in Europe, was to facilitate mobility between countries for both students and scholars through making higher education in the European area more comparable (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, 1999, p. 385). Internationalization of higher education through international mobility was in other words perceived and presented as something positive and as a significant goal to strive for. There are a number of reasons why internationalization of higher education is regarded in such a positive light, on different levels. On a national level, increased international mobility may be described as having the potential of enhancing quality within higher education in a particular country, for example, through attracting high-quality students and scholars from other parts of the world (SOU 2018:3, 2018; SOU 2018:78, 2018). On a university level, increased internationalization is presumed to potentially increase quality, for instance in that highly qualified international students may contribute to future research development if they are convinced to stay on and manage to become prominent researchers later on in their career (Furukawa et al., 2013). On an individual level, internationalization in the form of student mobility is thought to potentially benefit a person's education through offering experiences he or she would otherwise not have (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2013).

Internationalization of higher education is, however, not in itself inherently positive, even though it may be declared an important goal from governments or university administrations (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2013; Hellstén, 2018; Sidhu & Dall'alba, 2017). If and how internationalization and international mobility contribute to increased quality within higher education and is beneficial for the individual, depends on how it works in practice. The existing research is, for instance, clear on that the changing of academic contexts, which international mobility involves, demands a great deal of adjustment from the individual student, and that such transitions can be a difficult and complicated process (Kelly & Moogan, 2012). As various studies have underlined, international students must adjust to new and different expectations when they move between universities in separate parts of the world, become part of a new and unknown local academic context and take part in the practices there (e.g. Ding & Devine, 2018; Doyle et al., 2018; D. Li, 2012; M. Li, 2016; Sidhu & Dall'alba, 2017). Students undertaking international mobility may feel excluded and disappointed if the education in the new country does not match their expectations and previous experiences or if they do not understand the implicit academic norms that are predominant there (e.g. Bilecen, 2013; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Gregersen-Hermans, 2016; Laufer & Gorup, 2019; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Öst, 2012; Zhou & Todman, 2009).

One significant aspect influencing international students' transition between different academic environments, which has not yet been particularly studied, concerns the specifics and characteristics of similar or corresponding courses at universities in different countries. For students who choose to do part of their education in another country, such aspects may be of great significance both when it comes to the international mobility opportunities available to them, and when it comes to the differences in expectations they may encounter in the various academic environments they find themselves in when going abroad. To study circumstances and requirements of this kind on a micro-level may, subsequently, say something about the conditions surrounding international student mobility on a more general level. In this article, we will aim to do this by examining courses connected with the writing of degree projects within journalism education and teacher education at different universities in Russia and Sweden. We will present some significant similarities and differences in how

the degree project courses at six universities in the two countries were organized, and how supervisors and course representatives described their experiences of working with them. We will then discuss these differences and similarities in relation to international mobility.

The writing of some kind of finishing academic text or essay is a kind of achievement commonly expected from university students in many European countries, as a culmination of their education. These finishing academic products, which may also be called undergraduate projects or BA/MA theses, normally constitute larger written works produced by the students under the guidance of a supervisor. They are in many countries obligatory for students to complete their education and obtain an academic degree, but the specific forms and requirements for and organization of them may differ, partly due to the national laws and regulations governing higher education. Previous research on the field has shown that expectations connected to academic writing and supervision as well as to the relationship between student and supervisor, may be of great significance for how students and doctoral students partaking in international mobility experience their time abroad (e.g. Fan et al., 2018; Wang & Li, 2011). All of these aspects make courses related to the degree projects particularly interesting to examine closer and discuss in relation to internationalization of higher education.

2. Methodology

In the larger research project, this article is a part of, we examine supervision of degree projects within teacher education and journalism education in Russia and Sweden. Within the project, different kinds of material related to degree project courses have been collected at six universities in the two countries. In this article, we will focus on and use examples from two parts of this material:

- (1) Focus group interviews made with supervisors of degree projects within teacher education and journalism education at these six universities. Twelve focus group interviews were made, each lasting one hour and including 4–6 participants. Fifty-five supervisors participated in the focus group interviews in total and the questions discussed concerned their experiences of supervising degree projects, with a particular focus on student independence.
- (2) Formal and informal discussions between researchers from the project and representatives from teacher education and journalism education at the six universities during research trips and a two-day-symposium arranged by the project group. The more formal discussions and presentations which took place at the symposium were recorded, to document the differences and similarities in the organization and supervision of degree projects that were acknowledged and discussed.

The material at hand thus includes two categories of people: supervisors, who work directly with the students within the degree project courses, and representatives from the universities, who are responsible for these courses on a more principal level.¹ The material has been analysed through comparative qualitative content analysis (cf Schreier, 2012). This analysis consisted of systematic readings of the material, through which a number of themes were identified, in which significant differences and similarities between universities in Sweden and Russia regarding the work with and assessment of degree projects were evident. The identified themes included: the organization of teaching and supervision within the courses, the practical conditions for the courses, policy documents and guidelines within the courses, the relationship between student and supervisor, the views on and expectations connected with student responsibility and independence, and the assessment, defence and grading of the degree projects. In the findings section of this article, these identified themes are discussed in relation to (a) the organization of the degree project courses and (b) the experiences from supervisors and course representatives.

In the text, the universities will be referred to as Swedish University 1–2 and Russian University 1–4, abbreviated with SU1, RU1, etc. The focus groups done at each university are abbreviated with FG1, FG2, etc.²

3. Theoretical perspective

Since this article is concerned with the organization and supervision of degree projects, it is related to the wider research field of academic writing. Scholars within the theoretical field of academic literacies underline that academic writing is not just a question of study skills or deficits. Instead, it is understood in relation to aspects such as institutional practices and power relations, as well as for instance, students' self-image and identity, and the processes involved are regarded to be concerned with meaning making and contestations of meaning (Lea & Street, 2000, p. 33ff, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007). One central element in this, which has been noted by Lea and Street (2000, p. 37 f), is that students throughout their education must adjust to the various epistemological presuppositions of academic knowledge and learning that are predominant in different academic settings and which often become particularly visible in the writing situation. Lea and Street (2000) term this process *course-switching*, and describe how this may occur when students move between disciplines, but also within disciplines, since even individual differences between tutors may require students to adjust to new ideas and ideals around academic knowledge and learning. When students move between universities and educational systems in different countries, they naturally also encounter and must adjust to differences in epistemologies, academic traditions and values.

Since both Sweden and Russia adhere to the Bologna Declaration for higher education, where one of the aims is to make higher education in the European area more comparable, as mentioned above, one could assume that higher education in the two countries should have significant similarities, and that this might make the transition for international students less difficult (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, 1999; Pursiainen & Medvedev, 2005). At the same time, universities and study programs in the two countries must follow national laws and ordinances governing higher education, which means that there are still significant differences on many levels (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 1993a; 1993b; Федеральный закон от 29 декабря 2012 г. N 273-ФЗ (Federal Law of December 29)). There are, furthermore, certain cultural differences between Russia and Sweden when it comes to predominant values and attitudes. The two countries are, for instance, placed in clearly different positions on Inglehart and Welzel's World Value Survey map. Here, Sweden ranks high on values connected to individuality, self-expression and independence, while Russia ranks high on values connected to authority, collectivity and/or restraint (Inglehart & Welzel, 2015, pp. 278–279; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Such differences in the views on authorities, individuality and self-expression could influence, for instance, the roles of and expectations on university teachers and students.

Differences in national laws and ordinances regulating higher education and in predominant values and attitudes in the two countries may in other words affect the organization of higher education as well as the epistemologies, academic traditions and values prevalent in local academic environments. On the course level, like degree project courses which are our focus in this article, this may be evident in syllabi, policy documents and writing guidelines, as well as in the practical organization of the courses, but also in how course representatives and supervisors regard the role, achievement and attitudes of the students.

4. Findings

In the comparative qualitative content analysis of the material, described in the methodology section, we focused on examples of significant differences but also of significant similarities in how the participating supervisors and course representatives at the Swedish and Russian universities presented and described the degree project courses and their work with them. We could, as mentioned, identify a number of themes where such significant differences and similarities were evident in the material: the organization of teaching and supervision within the courses, the practical conditions for the courses, policy documents and guidelines within the courses, the relationship between student and supervisor, the views on and expectations connected with student responsibility and independence, and the assessment, defence and grading of the degree projects. In the following we will present and further discuss our results, starting with examples of

significant similarities and differences in the organization of the degree project courses, followed by examples of significant similarities and differences in the experiences from supervisors and course representatives, before summing it all up with a concluding discussion.

4.1. Significant similarities in the organization of degree project courses

In our material, it was clear that there were significant similarities on a general and organizational level between the courses connected to the writing of the degree projects at the six universities in our study. All of the courses were primarily based on independent work by the student, meetings and discussions with a designated supervisor, and finally a presentation or defence of the thesis the students had produced. Several of the courses in both countries also included one or more seminars, where aspects such as how to write a well-formulated aim and research questions for the degree project could be discussed. These fundamental similarities may be understood in relation to that the principal purpose of the various courses was more or less the same at all the universities, regardless of country: students should produce a degree project under the guidance of a supervisor.

There were also significant similarities in the knowledge goals and quality indicators connected to the degree projects at universities in the two countries. A number of the knowledge goals within the different courses focused on independent work, self-direction, originality, managing the craft of conducting an empirical study and presenting the process and results in an appropriate way. At Russian University 1 for example, the knowledge goals for degree projects within teacher education included aspects such as the students' ability to conduct independent classroom-based research and the ability to analyse and reflect upon theoretical and practical issues. Similarly, the knowledge goals for degree projects within primary teacher education at Swedish University 1 included aspects such as the student's ability to independently identify and formulate a didactic problem, use empirical material to examine and analyse this and independently use scientific theories and methods related to research questions within didactics. The knowledge goals for this degree project course also included the student's capacity to produce, present and defend a scientific work in the form of an essay, while the knowledge goals at Russian University 1 included the students' capacity to present, report and communicate the research process and findings in an appropriate format (RU1, SU1).

Moreover, there were similarities in how the degree projects were assessed at the various universities. Quality indicators for the assessment of the degree projects at universities in both Russia and Sweden included aspects such as the choice of topic, for instance in relation to its novelty or originality, the choice and use of appropriate research methods, knowledge of the research field and the ability to position the study in a research context, the formulation of aim or hypothesis and research questions for the study, and the presentation and analysis of the data (e.g. RU1, RU3, SU1).

On the level of policy documents and guidelines, the students thus appeared to be graded on similar grounds, regardless of country, university and study program. However, even though quality indicators listed in a course plan or in grading criteria, such as working independently or presenting something in "an appropriate format", may appear rather straightforward at first glance, what they actually mean in practice may be understood differently in each local academic context or on an individual level, depending on differences in epistemologies connected to academic writing (cf Lea & Street, 2000). This was evident in the focus group interviews carried out within the project, where the assessment of degree projects was commonly described as a complicated and complex issue. According to interviewed supervisors in both countries, even people involved in same degree project course could have rather different views on what characterised good quality in academic writing or in a degree project, especially if they came from different disciplines or academic backgrounds (FG2SU1, FG1SU2, FG2RU2). Accordingly, the presence of similarities on a policy level in corresponding courses at universities in different countries does not necessarily indicate that these are understood and interpreted in the same way in practice in the local academic contexts.

4.2. Significant differences in the organization of degree project courses

The significant differences in the degree project courses and how these were organized, which were manifested in our material, were in some cases directly related to national laws and regulations and their influence on the practical conditions for journalism education and teacher education in the two countries. At the Swedish universities, for instance, the degree project courses formally lasted ten weeks, the equivalent of 15 ECTS (SU1&2). In certain of the courses, students would be given a chance of a head start through being assigned supervisors at the beginning of the semester, even though the course did not officially start until a few weeks later (SU1). At the Russian universities, the degree project courses were, on the other hand, more spread out and generally concurrent with other courses the students were taking. The degree project courses could consist of several smaller courses or special seminars, where writing the final course paper or essay was one central part (RU1-4). As a consequence, students would generally work on their degree projects for a longer period of time, but not with as much concentration as in the Swedish system. Furthermore, students could and were often expected to participate in other research activities as part of their work with the degree projects, such as attending conferences and writing articles or abstracts (RU3).

In addition, there were significant differences in what was expected of students in the two countries at the very beginning and the very end of the process of writing the degree project. For example, in the focus group interviews made at the Russian universities, many participating supervisors talked about the importance of students choosing a topic for their project (FG2RU1, FG1&2RU3, FG2RU4). To choose a topic was seen as a crucial sign of student independence and was also generally connected with the choice of a supervisor. The supervisors could be approached by students who had ideas for topics for their degree project, which the potential supervisor could then accept or decline. Even when the students were more limited in their possible choices, for instance through having to choose from a list prepared by the program director, as was the case at Russian University 2, the possible topics were listed with a particular supervisor, which meant that students chose a supervisor at the same time as they picked a topic (RU2).

At the Swedish universities, students could generally not choose a particular supervisor. The students would propose a topic for their degree project or, in some cases, choose from a list with suggested topics, but they were not automatically assigned to a specific supervisor by doing so. On the contrary, it was in many cases vital for the course organizers that this was not the case, since they might otherwise end up with supervisors who had supervision of degree projects as part of their planned workload for the semester, but whom none of the students had chosen. Consequently, the organizers needed to be able to assign students to supervisors not only based on their choice of topic, but also in relation to the available pool of supervisors (SU1 & 2). The relationship between student and supervisor could, in other words, have a rather different foundation, depending on whether or not students had a say in the choice of supervisor or were strictly appointed one. The differences regarding the relationship between student and supervisor were further emphasized by how the Russian students generally worked with their degree projects for a significantly longer period of time than the Swedish students.

Our findings show that another part of the work with the degree project where there were significant differences between universities in Sweden and Russia, was at the very end of the process. Some kind of public defence or presentation of the final product was obligatory at all the studied universities and programs, but what “public” meant, differed between the countries. At the academic departments at the Swedish universities, the defence of the degree projects was done through special seminars within the course and was in practice attended only by fellow students and the examiner. The defence seminars were officially open for supervisors to attend, but this only happened on rare occasions. Family and friends of the students, or other outsiders, were not invited and did not attend. During the seminar, a fellow student functioned as commentator on the text, responsible for presenting a summary of the work and for carrying out a critical discussion of the degree project. The other students of the group were expected to participate in the discussion, while the examiner often stayed in the background, unless it was necessary to add comments or criticism which the students had overlooked (SU 1 & 2).

The defence seminars thus constituted an opportunity for the author to present and discuss his or her work, as well as an assessment situation where the author was assessed on the ability to defend the text he or she had written, and where the student who functioned as commentator was assessed on the ability to discuss and critique someone else's degree project in a constructive way. The degree project was then assessed and graded by an individual examiner. In certain courses, the process included an examiners' meeting, where all the examiners within the course would meet to establish a common view on grading, and how the stated quality indicators should be understood, before doing their final grading of the degree projects (SU1 & 2).

In comparison, friends and family of the students were commonly invited to the public presentation or defence of the degree projects at the Russian universities. Sometimes stake-holders were also included, particularly within journalism education where the degree projects could be connected to internship done by the students. Moreover, the roles of and expectations on the students involved in the course differed compared to at the Swedish universities. At Russian University 3 for example, the author was expected to do a ten-minute presentation of the degree project, which was followed by a session of questions and answers. An assigned senior commentator/reviewer would then give his or her feedback on the text in a speech, as would a tutor, before the student was expected to respond with a final comment. The assessment of the degree projects was here done by the state validation commission, which consisted of 50% teachers and 50% representatives from stake-holders or potential employers (RU3). The students had a right to appeal the decision, which is not possible within the Swedish system.

There were, in other words, clear differences in how the final defence or presentation of the finished degree project was organized at universities in Russia and Sweden, according to our material. These organizational differences influenced the roles and responsibilities of both the student, supervisor and examiner, and were, consequently, significant for the expectations students in the two countries encountered at this particular part of their education.

4.3. Significant similarities in the experiences of supervisors and course representatives

According to our material, there were a number of significant similarities also in how supervisors within and organizers of these courses experienced their work. In the focus group interviews with supervisors and in the discussions between course representatives, it became apparent that many of the challenges they described resembled each other, regardless of whether they were situated at a Swedish or a Russian university. The described challenges existed on different levels and concerned, for instance, the students and their perceived capacity, knowledge level or maturity, the relationship between students and supervisors and the relationship between supervisors and the people responsible for the programs or degree project courses.

Challenges connected to the students' knowledge level and their perceived capacity for writing a degree project were frequently mentioned by supervisors from universities in both Russia and Sweden. A common topic in the focus group discussions was the supervisors' experiences of how students could be on noticeably different levels when commencing the degree project course. As several of the supervisors expressed it, some, or sometimes many, of the students were not well enough prepared for the task of writing the degree project when they reached that level of their education (FG2SU1, FG1SU2, FG1&2RU1, FG1&2RU2, FG1&2RU4). This was described as quite challenging, in the sense that a number of students then might need what was thought to be too much assistance from the supervisors in order to finish their degree projects.

The challenges connected to apparent insufficiencies in some students' capacity to carry out the kind of larger academic work a degree project constitutes could be seen as related to the more general dilemma of how to keep the balance between giving students enough help, recommendations and directions to ensure that they would finish on time and write a degree project of good enough quality, and at the same time trying to enable or encourage the students' independence in their work. This was also a recurring topic in the focus group discussions. Ultimately, both these

aspects are connected to the question of who should be seen as responsible for the final product, the student or the supervisor. Even though it was generally clear in guidelines and course plans that the students were responsible for the final result, supervisors described this as an issue that could become a challenge to handle, particularly when certain students did not live up to the expected quality levels (FG1&2RU2, FG2RU3, FG2&3SU1, FG1SU2).

4.4. Significant differences in the experiences of supervisors and course representatives

Although similar challenges were described in both the Russian and the Swedish material, there were, at the same time, certain differences in how these challenges were discussed in the focus group interviews in the two countries, as well as in how they were thought to be best handled. This was the case for instance, concerning the challenges connected to encouraging or enabling student independence and at the same time making sure students finished their work on time and with good enough quality. In the Swedish focus group interviews, several of the participants voiced the opinion that in order to encourage and enable student independence, supervisors should avoid being too directive in their supervision. Some described a Socratic supervisory ideal, where the supervisor should ask questions to make the students themselves think and come up with the answers, instead of telling them what to do (FG1, 2&3SU1, FG1SU2). The importance of student independence was acknowledged also in the Russian focus group interviews. However, here the discussions were, in comparison, more centred on how even though the students officially were responsible for finishing their work on time and reaching the desired quality level, the responsibility for this in practice to a large extent lay on them as supervisors. It was, consequently, described as both necessary and fruitful to use fairly directive supervision to make this happen (FG2RU1, FG1&2RU3, FG1&2RU4).³

Another example of how a seemingly similar challenge could be viewed and explained differently in the focus group discussions in the two countries concerns the supervisors' experiences of some students not being well enough prepared for the task of writing the degree project. In the focus group interviews with supervisors at the Russian universities, the students' chronological age was presented as one major contributing factor in this. Several of the Russian supervisors described students as immature, as a result of their youth or sometimes their personal development, and argued that this was an important reason for why a number of them appeared unable to take on the responsibility of doing this kind of larger and more independent academic work (e.g. FG1RU1, FG2RU3, FG2RU4). A few supervisors made comparisons with students from Western European countries, based on their experiences with exchange students, and claimed that there was a big difference between Russian students, whom they depicted as immature and very young, and students from Sweden or Germany whom they described as significantly more mature (FG1RU1).

In comparison, when the difficulties certain students had with writing the degree project were discussed in the focus group interviews with supervisors at the Swedish universities, the suggested explanations for their struggles were not primarily connected to the students' age or apparent immaturity. Rather, the Swedish supervisors talked about this perceived challenge in relation to what the students brought with them from their previous studies, and to what extent their present education prepared them sufficiently for the expectations they encountered once they reached the level of writing the degree project. A common view was that tasks related to academic writing and student independence should be better integrated in the education as a whole, in order to better prepare the students for the degree project courses (FG1, 2&3SU1, FG1SU2). The perceived reasons for or given explanations of why some students appeared insufficiently prepared for writing the degree project, thus differed clearly between focus group discussions in the two countries.

That challenges such as these seemed to be regarded and handled differently by supervisors at the studied universities, could be understood as a result of differences on a local level in epistemological suppositions concerning, for example, academic writing and what the concept of student independence may mean in practice (cf Lea & Street, 2000). However, national laws and regulations governing higher education also play a part in this. Swedish universities are, for instance, obliged to promote broadened

recruitment of students and both of the Swedish universities included here had the explicit goal to include more students from non-academic homes and with a non-Swedish background. In their presentations at the joint symposium, this was described as one significant challenge in relation to the extent to which students were sufficiently prepared and ready for taking on the academic task of writing a degree project (SU1, SU2). In comparison, the representatives from the participating Russian universities did not emphasise this particular aspect at all. Similarly, the Russian supervisors' descriptions of students as young and immature must be regarded in light of that Russian students may start their university education at an earlier age than Swedish students, due to the national organization of compulsory school and upper secondary school. There is, in other words, an actual difference between the two countries concerning the age-span of the students. National regulations, goals and ambitions thus directly impact the university student population in the two countries, and, consequently, which students, and perceived challenges, the supervisors encounter in the specific degree project courses.

5. Concluding discussion

In this article, we have primarily looked at the micro-level, through examining how specific courses of a similar kind, degree project courses, are organized at universities in two different countries, Russia and Sweden, as well as at the experiences and views of organizers and supervisors in these courses. As has been shown throughout the article, it was in our material possible to discern a number of significant similarities as well as significant differences in how the degree projects were regarded and how the work with them was organized at universities in the two countries, on this micro-level. Our findings may, however, also contribute to the macro-level discussion on internationalization of higher education. The practical and organizational differences related to the degree project courses on a national level discussed above, may, for instance, constitute a tangible obstacle for students who want to engage in international student mobility at this part of their education. One example is how the circumstance that the degree project in Russia often is written concurrently with other courses over a longer period of time, and in Sweden often is written full-time during a more concentrated time period, may make it rather difficult to write and finish one's degree project as an exchange student between these two countries.

Moreover, our findings illustrate how seemingly similar or comparable courses may in fact involve rather different roles for and expectations on students. In our material, this was evident for example in how Russian degree project students, but not the Swedish ones, often were expected to take part in other kinds of research-oriented activities, in how what was expected from students when choosing a topic and doing the final defence of the degree project was quite different in Russia and Sweden, and also in how the organization of the degree project courses in the two countries produced rather different conditions for the relationship between student and supervisor.

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, several studies have discussed how the changing of academic contexts as a result of international student mobility may demand significant adjustment from the individual student and can be a difficult and complicated process (cf Brown & Holloway, 2008; Kelly & Moogan, 2012; M. Li, 2016; Mason & Hickman, 2019). There are several examples of how international students must adjust to new and different expectations when they move between countries and become part of a new and unknown local academic context and take part in the practices there (cf Ding & Devine, 2018; Doyle et al., 2018; D. Li, 2012; M. Li, 2016; Sidhu & Dall'alba, 2017). The existing differences in degree project courses in Sweden and Russia which we have pointed to in our findings, both on an organizational level and in how supervisors view and understand their own and the students' roles and responsibilities, exemplify what students would have to understand and manage when adapting to a new academic environment if moving between academic contexts in these two countries at this level of their education. They show that the expectations students encounter when writing their degree project may vary quite significantly between universities in Russia and Sweden, even though both countries adhere to the Bologna Declaration and even when there appears to be similarities on a more superficial level. Both when it comes to the production of and the assessment and grading of the degree project, and when it comes to the relationship between student and supervisor and the distribution of responsibility between them.

As previous research has shown, students undertaking international mobility may feel excluded and disappointed if the education in the new country does not match with their expectations and previous experiences or if they do not understand the implicit academic norms that are predominant there (e.g. Bilecen, 2013; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Gregersen-Hermans, 2016; Laufer & Gorup, 2019; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Öst, 2012; Zhou & Todman, 2009). Since expectations and attitudes connected to academic writing and the relationship between student and supervisor can be of particular importance in this, the differences pointed out here could be expected to influence potential students' experiences of being abroad, and whether this is understood as a positive experience or not (Fan et al., 2018; Wang & Li, 2011). The problems international students may come across in this context could in other words be understood in terms of that the academic literacy which students have acquired throughout their education in one country may not necessarily be sufficient if they choose to do part of their education in another part of the world (cf Lea & Street, 2000).

Hence, we see a need for more studies of this kind, which investigate these issues through examining corresponding courses in several countries, to broaden the understanding of the challenges and differences international students may encounter when adapting to a new socio-cultural environment not only in their everyday life outside the university, but also in the new academic setting they become a part of and the relations, interactions and expectations they encounter there.

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Author details

Maria Zackariasson¹
E-mail: maria.zackariasson@sh.se
ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0223-8739>
Jenny Magnusson²
E-mail: jenny.magnusson@sh.se
ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0280-9095>

¹ School of Historical and Contemporary Studies & Department of Teacher Education, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden.

² School of Culture and Education & Department of Teacher Education, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden.

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Notes

1. The empirical material for the whole project also includes documentation of supervision practice through recorded supervision meetings (41 recordings in total), commented and uncommented text drafts and e-mail conversations between supervisors and students, as well as steering documents such as syllabi and course plans from degree project courses at the six universities. These have been treated in other publications from the project (eg Goldenzwaig, 2017; Magnusson, 2021; Magnusson & Zackariasson, 2018; Zackariasson, 2018; 2019). The specific contribution of this article is the comparison of the courses in the Swedish and Russian context.
2. Research ethical guidelines have been followed throughout the project, for instance, in that all participants at the symposium and in the focus groups have given their

informed consent for the discussions to be recorded for the project, and that all names and details have been anonymised. The focus group interviews were made in Russian and Swedish, and have been transcribed and when relevant translated to English.

3. The picture was not clear cut or black and white. Participants in the Swedish focus group interviews also talked about the need and value of giving students clear instructions at certain times, and participants in the Russian focus groups talked about using questions as a way to encourage independence. There were, however, differences in where the main emphasis lay in the focus groups in the two countries.

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