



Department of Education

Rural Pupils Making their Way through the Norwegian Education System

Enablers, Constraints and Agency in a Northern Norwegian Context

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Summary

This thesis focuses on pupils' agency and their experiences with and reflections on educational choices. The theoretical framework draws on Margaret Archer's morphogenetic approach as it examines parts of the educational situational logics, as well as her three stage model in which structural and cultural properties shape agents' situations. The thesis thus explores constraints and enablements pupils face, and courses of actions that are produced through their reflexive deliberations. The thesis is based on semistructured interviews at two points in time with eighteen pupils in one rural and one urban municipality; it is supplemented by the researcher's previous experiences and contextual knowledge.

This thesis argues that rural pupils are constrained by rural demography, the centralized education system, the assimilation/colonisation of the Sámi people and a spatially and ethnically unaware curriculum. Local opportunities' structures, to some extent, enable rural pupils. In addition, their decision-making capabilities enable them to navigate within existing structures.

In Archer's theory, spatial contexts are not entirely explicit; the way spatial constraints and enablements are actualised in specific structural contexts can be further developed. Theoretically, this thesis engages with spatial contexts in addressing structural constraints and enablements. It emphasises space within Archer's theoretical framework, as spatial properties produce unequal conditions for education.

Keywords: Archer, education, constraint and enablement, pupils, rural–urban, structure–agency.

Sammendrag

Avhandlinga setter søkelys på elevens aktørskap (agency) og deres erfaringer med, og refleksjoner omkring valg av utdanning. Det teoretiske rammeverket bygger på Margaret Archers morfogenetiske tilnærming. Rammeverket benyttes for å undersøke enkelte aspekter ved utdanningens situasjonslogikk. I tillegg gjøres det bruk av Archers Trestegs-modell som muliggjør en analyse av hvordan strukturelle og kulturelle egenskaper påvirker situasjonen til aktører. Avhandlinga undersøker dermed hvordan elevene refleksivt overveier egne handlinger i lys av strukturelle muligheter og begrensninger. Avhandlinga er basert på semistrukturerte intervju, utført på to tidspunkt, med atten elever i en rural og en urban kommune. I tillegg benyttes forskerens egne erfaringer og kontekstuelle kjennskap.

Avhandlinga antyder at rurale elever er begrensa av rural demografi, det sentraliserte utdanningssystemet, koloniseringa av Sápmi, og en læreplan som tar mindre hensyn til rom/sted og etnisitet. Lokale mulighetsstrukturer gir, til en viss grad, elever i det rurale området handlingsrom. I tillegg benytter de seg av egne beslutningsegenskaper, noe som gjør dem i stand til å navigere de eksisterende strukturene.

Archers teori har i liten grad tatt for seg kontekstuelle betingelser; hvordan muligheter og begrensinger blir aktualisert i spesifikke strukturelle kontekster kan derfor videreutvikles. På et teoretisk plan befatter denne avhandlinga seg med kontekst ved å adressere strukturelle begrensinger og muligheter. Ettersom romlige egenskaper produserer ulike betingelser for utdanning, fremhever avhandlinga romlige/stedlige aspekter i Archers teoretiske rammeverk.

Nøkkelord: Archer, begrensinger og muligheter, elever, rural–urban, struktur–aktørskap, utdanning

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1 Introduction

The title of this thesis indicates that this is a study about pupils. It investigates how pupils encounter geographical enablements and/or constraints while making one of the most important early decisions in life, namely, the decision regarding upper secondary school. This thesis is concerned with pupils in two municipalities in Troms and Finnmark, in the northernmost county in Norway. As such, it contributes to social science studies that apply empirical data from Northern Norway. It contributes theoretically by explicitly emphasising space within Margaret Archer's theoretical framework of structure, culture and agency.

Research on issues related to a specific Northern Norwegian identity has contributed to the development of an identity related to centre–periphery or rural–urban dimensions. Youth research has gained a place at UiT The Arctic University of Norway, especially the ways in which pupils deal with demands from the greater society regarding education and work; this is described, for example, by Hoëm (1976) and Edvardsen (1996). Traditionally, young people from Northern Norway have been regarded as feeling a particular sense of rootedness or belonging to their local environment based on, amongst other things, relations to nature and traditional industries, such as the Sámi livelihood, small-scale farming and fishing. This sense of belonging was regarded as being in opposition to demands from the greater society, especially the educational system, with its national and often urban focus (Høgmo et al., 1981; Lindbekk, 1974; Solstad, 1984). Researchers have pointed out there exists a contradiction between Northern Norwegian youth culture and demands from the education system (Edvardsen, 1996, 1997; Hoëm, 1976), these contradictions were not easily aligned, as the educational system was not sufficiently sensitive towards local issues (Høgmo et al., 1981; Solstad & Andrews, 2020).

Research conducted to ensure an equal education in Northern Norway, regardless of geography, class, gender or ethnicity, has a long history (Høgmo, 1986, 1989; Høgmo et al., 1981; Pedersen & Høgmo, 2004; Pedersen et al., 2012; Solstad, 1978, 1984). During the early 21st century, governmental reports focusing on dropout rates from upper secondary schools stated these rates were significantly higher in Northern Norway than elsewhere (Falch et al., 2010; Falch & Nyhus, 2009; Lillejord et al., 2015). Researchers in the field of youth studies related to the centre–periphery or rural–urban dimensions in education in Northern Norway, amongst other issues, centred around the high dropout rates from upper secondary school (Markussen, 2016; Reegård & Rogstad, 2016; Rogstad & Reegård, 2016), marginalisation of rural youth (Bæck & Paulgaard, 2012; Lødding & Paulgaard, 2019; Paulgaard, 2002, 2012, 2017), and spaces and places as gendered (Bæck, 2015; Dahlstrom, 1996; Paulgaard, 2008).

The challenges related to dropout rates from upper secondary school, out-migration and marginalisation of rural youth and the lack of females in rural areas can be understood as phenomena related to late modern societies across the Western world. Thus, this thesis contributes to the research on youth with regard to the rural–urban dimensions of education.

One reason why it is important to study youth is that this phase offers a favourable position to observe processes of social change and social continuity. If new trends or important social developments emerge, these changes will likely be observed first among young people (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Shildrick et al., 2009). Furlong and Cartmel (2007) suggested that researching young people’s lives enables examining the relevance of new social theories, as one would expect to find evidence of changes in structures among young people who are in the process of transition.

According to Krange and Øia (2005), new theories have emerged that break with former theories to explain late modern societies. These theories find that Western societies have changed dramatically, and therefore, earlier concepts no longer offer explanatory power (Krange & Øia, 2005). Theoreticians such as Beck and Giddens provided the terms *risk society*, *liquid* or *fluid* society and *individualisation* to describe contemporary society (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). However, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) and Shildrick et al. (2009) argued that while structures appear to have fragmented, categories such as gender and class still remain central when analysing life experiences. In addition, the substantial work by Archer (2003, 2007, 2012) has induced interest in exploring how people reflexively mediate structure and agency when making choices (see, e.g., Christodoulou, 2016; Farrugia & Woodman, 2015; France et al., 2013; Nico & Caetano, 2017; O'Connor, 2014; Pérez-Milans & Soto, 2016; Van Lancker, 2016).

The opportunity to investigate these changes among young people was central to my application for the PhD position with the research group Space and Time in Education (STED). The project aimed to examine education phenomena in relation to space and time, as well as other variables, such as gender, ethnicity and social background. These aims also guided my research after I was invited to participate in the FINNUT- project RUR-ED *Spatial Inequalities and Spatial Justice in Education*. I had the privilege to write my thesis as a part of the RUR-ED project led by Professor Unn-Doris Bæck at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. However, it is important to note that the aims of this thesis are not directed by RUR-ED. RUR-ED is financed by the Norwegian Research Council and applies a sociological case study approach by doing research in five municipalities in Northern Norway as well as areas in Finland and Canada. The project uses different qualitative and quantitative methods. My contributions are *longitudinal interviews* with pupils in secondary school together with my *experiences* as a teacher in secondary school for 20 years and having grown up in a context like that

of the rural pupils. RUR-ED aims to ensure a spatially just education system (RUR-ED, 2018), which is also an objective of my thesis.

This thesis demonstrates that by recognising how young people reflexively mediate the challenges of structure and agency in different locations, we can understand the various negotiations of identities and life trajectories.

1.1 Aims and empirical basis

This thesis aimed to explore the extent to which pupils are constrained or enabled by structures during their education. The pupils' educational orientations and decision-making processes are made within contexts that are not of their own choosing. However, structures play a significant role in young peoples' education because structures can both enable and constrain people and collectives of people living within them (Archer, 2003, 2007).

The work by Farrugia (2014), asking for a spatialised youth sociology, and Bæck (2015) and Paulgaard (2002, 2012), working on similar perspectives from Norwegian viewpoints, inspired me in developing the focus of this thesis. An overview of the literature enabled me to establish the main research question (see Chapter 2), which is:

How do rural pupils make their way through the Norwegian educational system, and to what extent do structural constraints and enablements frame objective structures?

The research question is partly empirical in nature. The answers are presented in the research articles in this thesis and are further elaborated on in this extended summary¹. In addition, part of the research question is addressed in this extended summary, as it emphasises space within Margaret Archer's theoretical framework of structure, culture and agency.

The following questions guided the work of the three articles, resulting in research articles I, II and III:

- I. How do coastal Sámi pupils reflect upon their education regarding Sámi issues, and how does the Norwegian education system provide opportunities for pupils to start negotiating personal identity?
- II. How does geographical location influence young people's orientation when it comes to education, and how do they experience the initial transition between lower and upper secondary school?

¹ 'Extended summary' (Norwegian: kappa) is interchangeable with terms such as 'thesis summary', 'comprehensive summary' and 'cover article'.

III. Can different reflexive modes inform how we understand pupils' reflexive deliberations over their education and life projects? What contextual factors constrain and/or enable these reflexive deliberations?

Based on previous research, theory and presented results, a synthesis was developed and is presented in this thesis.

This thesis includes articles written together with other researchers and includes empirical data collected by the author.

1.2 Background to the case municipalities

This research was conducted in two municipalities in Northern Norway. I chose this region because I live in Northern Norway. Moreover, the region is of particular interest as shown above, in the included articles, and in the discussion of this thesis. Northern Norway has had a significantly high dropout rate from upper secondary education, which could be informed by examining young peoples' educational orientations and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the region has, for hundreds of years, comprised a diverse group of people: the indigenous Sámi people and the ethnic minority Kven together with Norwegians. In addition, the region's location outside the geographical power centre in southern Norway makes it an interesting case regarding the spatial aspects of education.

The small, rural municipality, given the fictive name Coastal Valley, is a couple hours' drive from larger municipalities and has a population of less than 3,000 inhabitants. The population is scattered along a fjord and comprises three or four communities that have relied on small-scale farming and fishing for decades. The population is declining, skewing towards an ageing population. Most people in this municipality work in the public sector, especially in the health sector. The municipality has several public elementary schools, a couple of lower secondary schools and one private school. Most of the teachers in Coastal Valley are from the municipality or the surrounding area. The municipality is part of the Sámi Administrative Area; this implies, for instance, that it has aimed at improving and strengthening the services linked to the development and safeguarding of the Sámi language and culture.

The population comprises members who identify as Norwegian, Sámi, Kven, mixed descent, or other identity. The Sámi are the indigenous inhabitants of the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The Kven is a minority group descending from people who emigrated from Tornedalen, on the borders of what are today known as Sweden and Finland, to Northern Norway during the 18th and 19th centuries. From mid-1800 to mid/late 1900, the Sámi and the Kven were subjected to a Norwegianisation and assimilation process by the Norwegian state. The education system played an important part in the assimilation process, as the Sámi and Kven languages were prohibited in

schools and the official teaching language was Norwegian, a language the Kven and Sámi children did not necessarily master. The situation of the Sámi is an essential part of the historical and current spatial notions in Coastal Valley. This is explored in Article I and in part of this thesis.

The urban municipality in this study is Tromsø, one of the largest cities and administrative centres in Northern Norway. Tromsø comprises a city centre, several suburban areas and some more rural areas. Most inhabitants reside in the city and are employed in the public sector. There are several central institutions, such as the county administrative centre, a large hospital, a university and a notable public sector. There are many public schools in the municipality that differ in size and organisation, from individual and combined elementary and lower secondary schools to multi-graded schools. There are some private schools and several upper secondary schools. While many teachers are from the municipality, a large portion come from other parts of Norway.

1.3 An introduction to the Norwegian education system

In Norway, education for all is a fundamental idea, and public education is free of charge. Children and youth are granted equal rights to education independent of place of residence, gender, social and cultural background and social needs. Educational policy is set by the government and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Research. The ministry handles, amongst other things, compulsory school, upper secondary education, higher education and financial support for pupils. National standards are ensured through laws, regulations and a national curriculum (Opplæringslova, 1998).

The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training is the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research and has overall responsibility for kindergartens, education and governance of the education sector. It is also responsible for the implementation of acts of Parliament and regulations. The directorate develops the national curriculum in cooperation with academic communities and specialist environments in Norway, including the Sámi Parliament. The official curriculum in Norway has, since 1997, comprised two parallel and equal versions: the Norwegian and the Sámi (UDIR 2013). The Core Curriculum elaborates on the set of values in the Education Act and the general principles of education. It describes the fundamental view that characterises pedagogical practice throughout primary education. According to the Norwegian Education Act, governance of the education system is divided into three levels: municipalities are responsible for primary and lower secondary schools, counties are responsible for upper secondary education and the state is responsible for higher education (Opplæringslova, 1998).

In Norway, children must attend primary and lower secondary school for at least 10 years, from ages 6 to 16. Pupils enrol in primary school at age six and lower secondary school at age thirteen. They finish lower secondary school at age 16. When pupils enter lower secondary education, they are introduced to the grading system; this functions as the basis for their application to upper secondary education.

According to Education Act § 3-1, pupils have the right to upper secondary education and training until the year they turn 24; they have the right to change their course of study once and are then entitled to more time to complete their education. Approximately 98% of Norwegian pupils enrol in upper secondary education, and 78% complete it within five to six years (SSB, 2019). In upper secondary school, pupils can choose either a three-year academic track or a three- to four-year vocational track (VET). Pupils attending VET usually attend school for two years followed by one to two years of in-company training to get their apprenticeship diploma. Most pupils apply for upper secondary education within their counties. However, there are some courses of study that offer nationwide programmes; young people can apply to these, regardless of their home county. These courses are state financed. In addition, pupils have the right to one year of a supplementary programme for general university admission after they have achieved vocational competence (with or without a trade or journeyman's certificate).

1.4 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is article-based and comprises two parts: this *extended summary* and *three separate research articles*. An extended summary situates the separate articles in a broader research context; it also develops the theoretical points of departure, collectively elaborates the methods of data collection for the thesis, summarises the results and analyses and discusses the main contributions of the thesis. Chapter 2 describes how I arrived at the research question by examining previous research. This chapter situates the thesis within several research fields that have impacted the study. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework that guided the discussion of the thesis. Chapter 4 discusses the research methods and ethics, as well as the quality of the study. Chapter 5 summarises the results in articles I–III. Chapter 6 comprises a discussion of the articles in light of the theoretical framework; moreover, it discusses the contribution of the thesis and policy implications. Finally, the thesis ends with concluding remarks and implications for further research. The research articles and an appendix are attached.

2 Previous research

This chapter situates this thesis within pedagogy, youth sociology and the sociology of education, with a particular focus on young people's educational orientation and decision-making processes. The thesis also draws on Sámi research and comparative pedagogy.

This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature for this thesis and concludes by pointing to some of the research gaps. In line with researchers such as Bæck (2015), Coladarci (2007) and Paulgaard (2012), who argue for a spatial and/or place-sensitive approach in rural educational research, this thesis aims to include space in the analysis. Moreover, the thesis is an answer to some of the challenges put forth by Bæck (2015, p. 444), who argued that the urban is often viewed as the norm in educational research and thus disfavours pupils growing up in rural areas, and Paulgaard (2017, p. 44), who encouraged researchers to go beyond the metrocentric representations to understand the production and preservation of inequalities based on geography. Furthermore, Bæck (2015, p. 444) suggested focusing on the intersections between location and other factors such as social class, gender and ethnicity.

There has been a call for spatial awareness in education (Gulson & Symes, 2007), which has been addressed by researchers in Norway, such as Bæck (2015, 2019) and Paulgaard (2012, 2017) and beyond by (amongst others) British researchers, such as Furlong and Carmel (2007), the Canadian Corbett (2015; 2014), the Australians Farrugia (2014, 2015), Cuervo and Wyn (2012), White et al. (2017) and Wyn et al. (2012). In their meta-ethnography on education in the Nordic countries, Beach et al. (2018) stated there is a presupposed metrocentricity and a significant degree of spatial injustice in the Nordic countries. That the urban areas are presumed to be the norm is also found in research both in Norway and beyond (Bæck, 2015, 2019; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Cuervo et al., 2017; Farrugia, 2014; Hargreaves et al., 2009; Paulgaard, 2017).

The literature reviewed for this thesis is based on previous literature reviews conducted for the included articles and a supplementary review conducted for this thesis. The review was performed successively from 2017 to 2020 in the ERIC, Education Research Complete and EBSCO databases using different search strings.²

² Examples of strings: 'educational opportunities' OR 'access to education' OR 'educational background'; 'rural education' AND 'literature review'; 'rural urban' AND 'education' AND 'students' OR 'pupils'; 'rural urban' AND 'students' OR 'pupils'; 'rural education AND 'inequality'; 'Sámi people' AND 'education'; 'Sámi' AND 'education'; 'educational orientation' AND 'pupils or students or teens or young people'; 'pupils' AND 'place' AND 'gender'; 'young people or adolescents or young people or teen or young adult' AND agency; 'reflexivity' AND 'young people or adolescents or young people or teen or young adult'. Similar Norwegian terms were used.

2.1 Focus on space and place in educational research

According to Soja (2013, p. 6), at the end of the 20th century, Lefebvre was a leading urban spatial theorist and philosopher with a focus on spatial justice in the city. At the turn of the 21st century, building on Lefebvre, amongst others, researchers such as Soja, working on spatial justice in cities (2009, 2013), and Massey, arguing that space is relational and asking for spatial awareness in research (2005), contributed to a growing interest in *space* in the social sciences. Roberts and Green (2013) suggested that a spatial understanding in research is especially valuable when the rural is considered, as it is “systematically and historically constructed in Australia as ‘out there’, on the fringe of settlement” (p. 768) and compared with power centres outside the rural. The same could be suggested in a Norwegian context, where the peripheral North Norway is often referred to as “far-away” and “up there”, suggesting that it is far both geographically and in distance to the power centres of Oslo. In line with Roberts and Green (2013), this thesis employs a spatial understanding that can bring not only a new frame to practice-based approaches to justice but also a new way of understanding sociocultural dimensions in education.

For decades, it has been documented that the education system is unjust regarding class and that systems in the West are based upon *middle-class values* and assumptions (Bernstein, 2003; Bourdieu et al., 1977; Willis, 1977). Within this system, working-class children and young people are positioned as deficient and disadvantaged when entering school. *Neoliberal discourses*, whereby the individual is responsible for failure rather than addressing social structures and institutions, have been subject to extensive academic focus (Francis & Hey, 2009; Rose, 1999; Walkerdine, 2003). In addition, there has been a focus on the *intersectionality between gender, class, race and ethnicity* in the social sciences (Yuval-Davis, 2006), including *indigenous* (for instance, Kuokkanen, 2000, 2011; McKinley & Stewart, 2012; Morgan, 2003; Ngai et al., 2015; Smith, 2012; Tuck et al., 2014), and *Sámi perspectives* (for instance, Eidheim & Schjøtt, 1958; Gaski, 2008; Hoëm, 1976; Hovland, 1999; Høgmo, 2011; Jensen, 2005; Johansen, 2013; Kramvig, 1999; Minde, 2003; Nergård & Mathiesen, 2005; Niemi, 2017; K. Olsen, 2010b; Pedersen & Høgmo, 2004; Pedersen et al., 2012; Stordahl, 1996). The *spatial turn* in the social sciences, which also emerges in educational research, considers spatial perspectives when examining the aforementioned issues (Bæck, 2015; Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Farrugia, 2015; Gulson & Symes, 2007; R. White et al., 2017; S. White & Corbett, 2014). Kvalsund (2009, 2019) argued there is an urban emphasis in educational research, and there is a need to contextualise research on education. Spatiality in educational research is important, as it enables researchers to address power relations between places and spaces at both the national and global levels (Bright et al., 2013; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). As noted above, there is a large body of research

documenting spatial inequality in metrocentric areas in the Nordic countries (Beach et al., 2018). However, this thesis aims to give precedence to rural–urban differences.

2.1.1 What is rural?

According to the United Nations (UN), more than half of the world’s population lives in urban areas, and the proportion will increase to 60% by 2030. However, the vast majority of the world’s land and water are rural. Most food production takes place here and energy and natural resources are extracted from rural areas (Shucksmith & Brown, 2016). Although the rural population is decreasing, it is still significant.

In research, there is a lack of consensus as to what defines the rural (Hargreaves et al., 2009). *Rural* often appears alongside *urban*, as in a *rural–urban dichotomy* or *continuum* (Hernández-Torrano, 2018; Soo-yong et al., 2012). According to Shucksmith and Brown (2016), approaches to contextualising the rural, such as descriptive studies that rely on the premise that a clear distinction can be drawn between rural and urban areas, and spatial determinism, which imbues the environment with the power to determine social behaviour and relations, have been criticised for being empirically deficient. In the 1980s, rural locality studies drew on structuralist political economy approaches that were argued to be insufficient in transgressing rural–urban divides. Later, social constructivist approaches focused on the meaning of rurality (Shucksmith & Brown, 2016); here, rural is defined not by its boundary, but by the meanings fundamental to rural lives wherever lived, because the rural lifeworld comprises interactions and events tied to place (Hargreaves et al., 2009; Tieken, 2014). Many identify rural as the antithesis of modernity (Shucksmith & Brown, 2016), where the rural is characterised as depriving and in decline (Tieken, 2014). This is supported by researchers (see, for instance, P. Roberts & Green, 2013; S. White & Corbett, 2014) arguing that rurality is often seen as a deficit rather than different from urbanity, in the geographical and physical margins. Others see the rural as epitomising the good life (Shucksmith & Brown, 2016) and paint a rather romantic and nostalgic picture of the rural (Tieken, 2014). Tieken (2019) argued that neither of these contradictory views is realistic.

The periphery or the rural can be described as an *opportunity structure*, that is, as a space offering several possibilities of action to people living and working within it. However, the range and attractiveness of these possibilities are also heavily influenced by factors external to the periphery. The most important of these external factors emanate from the centre; in their interactions with the latter, some inhabitants of the periphery take a more active part than others (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983, p. 3). The research articles (I, II and III) carefully describe the contexts wherein this research took place as different rather than dichotomous. Moreover, as the population self-identifies as rural in Coastal Valley and

urban in Tromsø, and considering characteristics such as population density, age composition, distance to an urban centre and access to services such as secondary and tertiary education and hospital, Coastal Valley represents more rural characteristics than the urban Tromsø. Also, this thesis shows that the two municipalities encompass different opportunity structures that are significant for pupils when they make educational choices.

2.1.2 Understanding inequalities in educational research

Inequalities in educational research entail various perspectives, such as geography, identity, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Extensive research has documented the differences among pupils living in rural versus urban areas (Faber et al., 2015; Green & Corbett, 2013). Opportunities to pursue education based on where one grows up seem to matter, and rural pupils fare worse compared to their urban peers (Backman, 2014; Bæck, 2019; Ganss, 2016; Roscigno et al., 2006; Stenseth & Bæck, 2021). Research documents that rural pupils do worse than their urban peers on several measures, such as pupil attainment and aspirations (Hernández-Torrano, 2018; Soo-yong et al., 2012; Sutton et al., 2017). However, rural girls seem to have higher aspirations concerning education than rural boys (Agger et al., 2018; Dahlstrom, 1996); nevertheless, rural girls have experienced that the capacity to fulfil their aspirations has limitations (Hawkins, 2017). Corbett (2007) showed how the educational system itself constrains pupils from staying in rural areas. However, there is a lack of research in Norway, the rest of Europe and beyond that compares living conditions among young people growing up in rural versus urban areas (Hargreaves et al., 2009).

According to Coleman (2019), social class and socioeconomic status often intersect with race and ethnicity. The use of intersectionality is also addressed by others, such as Yuval-Davis (2006), who suggested that the point of intersectional analysis is to analyse “the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities” (p. 205). The intersection of socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity and geographical location is a concern in research.

In recent decades, there has been increasing interest in the growth of social inequality in, for instance, Britain (Francis & Hey, 2009). Furthermore, Piketty and Goldhammer (2013) offered a historical perspective on income and wealth inequalities in the USA, France, Italy, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Japan and several other countries. Their empirical analysis showed that, to a large degree, inequality is based on inherited wealth. In addition, research shows the significance of social class with regard to educational achievement (Blanden & Machin, 2007; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). Various reports from the UK have drawn attention to the intersections between factors such as ethnicity,

gender and social class concerning advantages/disadvantages in educational aspirations/achievement but assign privilege to the size of achievement gaps according to social class (Francis & Hey, 2009). In my research (see Stenseth & Bæck, 2021; Stenseth & Rød, upcoming), space and place are brought into this equation as an explanation. Moreover, “within neoliberalism the individual is produced as ‘the entrepreneur of the self’; flexible, resourceful, and able to remake her/himself to meet the needs of a dynamic, meritocratic global economy. Within this construction, society has a duty only to *offer* not ensure opportunity” (Francis & Hey, 2009, p. 226, original emphasis). The notion of *individual responsibility* is addressed throughout articles I, II and III in my work by showing how individuals are constrained by structural factors. People do not have unlimited opportunities to direct and redirect their lives, as proposed by late modern scholars such as Giddens (1991), Beck (1992) and Bauman (2000), who argued that social background is less significant for individuals when making choices. According to Kenway et al. (2006), rural youth must negotiate the local and global forces associated with the world of work. Giddens (1991, p. 22) argued that in a globalised world, no one can ‘opt out’ of the transformation created by globalisation. In addition, globalisation influences education and the world of labour. Thus, as shown in Article I, while rural youth must engage with globalisation, some resist its association of modernity with urban life by pursuing life in a rural area (Stenseth & Bæck, 2021).

In Norway, there has been a consensus on small differences and equal quality concerning public services across the country. Aasjord (2020) questioned these notions and argued there are geographical inequalities in Norway. She pointed to the fact, established by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (Folkehelseinstituttet 2018), that there are major health differences in Norway related to socioeconomic status and geographical location (Aasjord, 2020). Inequality is often viewed as an Oslo- or urban issue; she argued, however, that even though income inequality between people residing in the centre and the periphery is at its lowest in 120 years, there is a pronounced and increasing geographical inequality between the centre and periphery (2020). These inequalities are related to health, education, lifespan and especially wealth, where the periphery and especially Northern Norway fall short compared to the rest of Norway (Aasjord, 2020).

Education is a decisive factor with regard to public health. Municipalities in Northern Norway are overrepresented amongst municipalities scoring the lowest concerning quality in education in compulsory school (Aasjord, 2020), and Northern Norway has the highest dropout rates from upper secondary school (Falch & Nyhus, 2009; Reegård & Rogstad, 2016; SSB, 2019; Aasjord, 2020). In articles I and II, spatial notions are explored to investigate how young people experience education in two different contexts in Northern Norway.

2.1.3 Sámi education

Throughout history, there have been many explanations for why some groups of people have lower educational performance than others. Regarding Sámi education, three main political and cultural trends had important effects: nationalism, social Darwinism and security policy (Jensen, 2005). Niemi (1997) described the school arena as the battlefield of assimilation, where the teachers acted as combatants in implementing the assimilation process initiated by governmental authorities. Thus, the education system was described as the most important institution for carrying out assimilation policy (Ngai et al., 2015, p. 89).

During the 1700s, structured, formalised education became common in Norway. During this period, Norwegian missionaries established schools in the Sámi areas. An important aim was to teach literacy to the Sámi people so they would be able to read the Bible (Jensen, 2005). However, in the mid-18th century, the predominant view of the Sámi changed. From mid-1800 to mid/late 1900, the Norwegianisation process led to a thorough change in many Sámi communities; many Sámi, especially those along the coast, changed both their language and their ethnic identity and ‘became’ Norwegians (Høgmo, 2011; Johansen, 2010; Keskitalo & Olsen, 2019; Pedersen et al., 2012). The will to use the Sámi language in school decreased; by the mid-19th century, an assimilationist policy was carried out (Aikio-Puoskari, 2009; Ngai et al., 2015).

Since the opening of the Sami Parliament in 1998, there has been increasing interest in revitalising Sámi language and culture in Norway. When Norway ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 in 1990, it was an important step towards acknowledging Sámi rights. In 1995, this was also emphasised in the White Paper stating that education of Sámi pupils shall be based on the Constitution (Meld. St. 29, 1995).

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for all levels of education. The ministry determines the national curriculum for compulsory and upper secondary education through the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training with a *Core Curriculum* (CC) that targets the educational systems’ ideological, value-based and knowledge content. The CC is translated from Norwegian to Northern Sámi; thus, there is no original Sámi CC.

The revitalisation project in the Sámi Administrative Areas (SAA) has been assisted by a Sámi national curriculum (L97-S), implemented in 1997 in compulsory schools in Norway as well as for pupils outside these areas who receive a Sámi education. However, its implementation has been criticised. The municipalities in the SAA did not have strategies for increasing knowledge about Sámi language and culture amongst teachers, there were not enough textbooks in Sámi, and there was not enough time to

readjust to the new plan (Hirvonen & Keskitalo, 2004; Hirvonen & Sámi, 2004). Solstad (2012) argued that the distinct focus on output in the national curriculum, the Knowledge Promotion Plan – Sámi (LK06-S), could prevent schools from putting effort into teaching about Sámi knowledges, practices and identity, because these aims were measured less on tests.

Research suggests that including local content in education is positive for pupils (Solstad & Thelin, 2006), as it can lead to including recognisable knowledge, thereby forming learning situations that improve learning processes. However, research has found that curriculum is often developed without spatial attention (Bæck, 2015; P. Roberts, 2017; Rød & Karlsen Bæck, 2020); it is often developed from majority perspectives, with few references to indigenous knowledge (Apple & Buras, 2006; Eriksen, 2018a; Gruenewald, 2003; Olsen, 2019), implying that indigenous perspectives are underdeveloped and that contextual differences are lacking. However, the Norwegian curriculum has become more sensitive towards Sámi issues (Keskitalo & Olsen, 2019; Olsen, 2019; Olsen & Andreassen, 2018).

According to the work by Kumashiro (2000) on anti-oppressive pedagogy, education can—while wanting to be inclusive—run the risk of reconstructing “us” and “them” by presenting dominant narratives. Biesta (2009) argued for enabling subjectification, the process of becoming an independent and autonomous subject, as one of three interrelated functions of education (in addition to qualification and socialisation). Article I in my research offers insights into how pupils in a coastal Sámi community negotiate personal identity. It focuses on how the Norwegian educational system enables and constrains identity-negotiations processes.

Lile (2011) found that pupils learn little about Sámi culture and history and that the quality of teaching is low. Since there seems to be a lack of knowledge concerning Sámi issues among Norwegian teachers (Folkenborg, 2008; Hirvonen & Sámi, 2004), textbooks are essential for delivering this knowledge. Norwegian social studies textbooks are influenced by nationalist ideology (Folkenborg, 2008); there is a notion of ‘Norwegian exceptionalism’, resting on the othering of the Sámi people, and to a great extent the Sámi are essentialised³ (Askeland & Aamotsbakken, 2016; Eriksen, 2018b; Folkenborg, 2008). The idea of ‘Norwegian exceptionalism’ depicts Norway as a peaceful nation with top marks in democracy, antiracism and human rights (Gullestad, 2004).

According to Hoëm (2010, p. 41), in our dynamic and changing society, people participate in socialisation processes that can weaken established identities, constitute

³ Essentialism is understood as the essence that defines the uniqueness of groups (Bjørklund, 2016). This rests upon generalisations; all belonging to a group have the same characteristics (Priour, 2002).

new/unique identities or reinforce primordial identities. Knowledge is the central content in socialisation and can be understood as actualised culture, whereas identity is the principal product in a socialisation process (p. 47). According to Biesta (2009), there is a need for value-based judgements in education that are not solitary instrumental but are based on ultimate values that emphasise the aims and purpose of education. Moreover, Biesta argued that educational strategies are not always effective, but they are necessary—and constitute good education—because they “provide opportunities for pupils to explore their own ways of thinking, doing and being, [that] can be more desirable than those that effectively proceed towards a pre-specified end” (p. 36). ‘Good education’ might be absent when education ‘lack’ an overall aim and focuses on competence and output; this lack can harm indigenous pupils in particular, as they might be given limited opportunities to explore their way of thinking, doing and being.

2.2 Individualisation and reflexive modernisation

The impact of reflexive modernisation theory has become more widespread in sociological research and debates since the 1990s, following the work of Beck et al. on social structuration (1994). *Reflexive modernity* encompasses the notion of *detraditionalisation*, which refers to processes that include the reflexive capability of individuals to determine their own identities (Beck, 1992). Nico and Caetano (2017) stated that reflexive modernity “conceptualises reflexivity as a feature and potentiality of late modernity societies, in contrast to the limited or non-existent role that this capacity played in traditional societies” (p. 676). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argued that a traditional way of life is declining and the individual “who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time” (p. 23).

Youth researchers dealing with youth culture and transition acknowledge that young people’s lives have undoubtedly changed in recent decades, with “key contexts such as education, labour market experiences and patterns of dependency having been transformed” (Furlong, 2009, p. 1). While transitions to adulthood are likelier to require reflexive deliberation on education and career choice as well as identity, they are less likely to require linear movement and transition from education to employment and dependence to independence, as might have been the case for previous generations.

In the sociology of youth, reviews have noted the development of two perspectives in the discipline: the ‘transition’ perspective and the ‘culture’ perspective (Cohen & Ainley, 2000; Furlong et al., 2011). ‘Youth culture’ perspectives are not included in this literature review, as they are outside the scope of this thesis. There is a vast amount of research in both disciplines. The amount of literature made me narrow the search to what

is presented below: secondary pupils in terms of place and gender, and young people and agency.

As mentioned above, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) suggested that researching young people's lives provides finding evidence of changes in structures among young people who are in the process of transitions. Transition studies often centre on the transition to tertiary education and work; less focus is given to initial transitions, such as that between lower and upper secondary school. Upper secondary education is not compulsory in Norway, yet most pupils continue to upper secondary school. Cohen and Ainley (2000) argued that youth studies "has an important role to play in reconstituting the problematics of identity and modernity and that it serves to focus policy debates around a strategic nexus of social contradiction" (p. 79). In his call for spatial youth sociology, Farrugia (2014) urged scholars to go beyond demonstrating that young people in different places vary to show how the dynamics of global capitalism produce various spaces in late modernity and investigate the construction of inequality through the production of space. According to MacDonald et al. (2013):

Youth culture is surrounded by international and cosmopolitan images, which speak of dynamism and opportunity, but these seductions of globalization can appear fluid or elusive without material resources (p. 2).

As argued by Archer (2000, 2003, 2007), people are born into structures not of their choosing, in a privileged or underprivileged position; thus, they must deal with constraints and enablements when reflexively defining their main concerns and engaging in life-forming projects. This includes making decisions concerning further education and work. In line with Archer, the articles that form the basis of this thesis argue that individuals are situated reflexive beings who must deal with opportunity structures, place and gender patterns, which influence their educational decision-making processes and transitions to upper secondary school.

2.2.1 Secondary pupils: Place and gender

Today, there seems to be an expectation that young people continue their education after compulsory school. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019), in 2018, on average across OECD countries, 44% of people aged 25–34 held tertiary degrees, compared to 35% in 2008, and 70% of youth aged 17–18 are enrolled in upper secondary education. Statistics Norway (SSB, 2019) reports there are geographical variations regarding completion rates in upper secondary education, with the highest degree in Sogn and Fjordane (83%) and the lowest in Finnmark (67%).

In Norway and other Nordic countries, depopulation in rural areas challenges community resources (Lind & Stjernström, 2015), which limits the possibilities for

education in terms of travelling distances to school and educational and economic resources. Researchers argue that rural young people in Europe, in comparison to their urban counterparts, live in areas where salaries and access to education are poorer and where there is a narrower range of job opportunities (Jentsch & Shucksmith, 2004; Lødding & Paulgaard, 2019; Paulgaard, 2012, 2017; Rosvall, 2020).

As noted above, although it has been claimed that social structures are less significant (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Giddens, 1991), class, gender and ethnicity remain influential when exploring young people's lives. In research regarding education, the focus has often been on pupils' educational aspirations and attainment levels. This has often been explained by family background, such as socioeconomic status (SES) and social class (Bourdieu, 2006; Bourdieu et al., 1977; Bæck, 2011; Willis, 1977). In their review of pupils with low SES following the Great Recession in Europe and the US, Jury et al. (2017) found that pupils from low-SES families face not only economic barriers but also physiological barriers to succeed in higher education. In a study from Spain, excellence gaps were found between urban and rural pupils, where urban pupils outperformed their rural counterparts (Hernández-Torrano, 2018). This focus on individual characteristics could disregard how objective structures, such as demographics and access to education and future work, constrain and/or enable individuals when trying to pursue their projects in life. Bæck (2015) argued that young people, regardless of location, have similar notions of what constitutes a 'good home place'; these notions are dominated by what she termed an *urban ethos*, that the urban lifestyle is the preferred. This places rural young people at a disadvantage, because they do not have the same possibilities to live out these preferences compared to their urban peers (Bæck, 2015).

According to Massey (1994), spaces and places are also gendered, and, as such, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood. Dahlstrom (1996), researching contexts in Northern Norway, found that while rural females regarded pursuing further education as a strategy to expand options, rural males were more traditional and less flexible and thus risked being marginalised; similar results were reported in Canada by Corbett (2007). The resistance to school has been observed in Northern Norway for decades by, for instance, Edvardsen (1996), who suggested that local imperatives, such as learning to maintain a livelihood, were difficult to align with school values. Paulgaard (2017) argued that young males in the rural north are victims of economic and structural changes in both the labour market and education, which has strengthened marginality. Kenway et al. (2006) argued that rural males negotiate powerful, conflicting local and global forces related to work and that lack of work in many rural places forces rural males to move or reinvent themselves. Article I argues that rural boys engage with globalisation (Kenway et al., 2006), but resist its

association of modernity with urban life by seeking a life in a rural setting (Stenseth & Bæck, 2021). In addition, Paulgaard (2015) suggested that resistance towards school is prominent among rural boys, and hard manual work represents masculinity, while intellectual labour is not perceived as desirable; the same is argued by Brandth and Haugen (2005). This could explain why dropout rates for secondary education are higher among rural males (see e.g., Bæck, 2012, 2019; Markussen, 2016; Paulgaard, 2015). In line with Heggen (2002), the referenced research contributes to the idea that young females have increased their educational levels. In recent years, regarding education and gender, attention has been given to boys' performances within the educational system, and terms such as 'failing boys' and the idea of boys 'lagging behind' have been used to describe gender differences (c.f. NOU 2019: 3, 2019). However, the notion of 'failing boys' is contested in articles II and III, where it is argued that (rural) boys are active agents who reflexively make decisions regarding education and future work and postpone, subordinate or abandon their expectations about objective structures, such as perceived future occupation (Stenseth & Bæck, 2021; Stenseth & Rød, upcoming).

In sociocultural theories, learning is theorised as taking place in relation to both time and place/space (Bright et al., 2013). Roberts and Green (2013) gave an insightful account of how rural deficit is constructed through the metropolitan view of policy production and argued for spatial awareness in education research. Bæck (2015) asked for research that focuses on "the intersections between location and other factors such as social class, ethnicity and gender" (p. 444); she acknowledged that such research is challenging, yet necessary. The research articles contributing to this thesis examine the interplay between structure, culture and agency to investigate how place/space and structural constraints and enablements impinge upon pupils when making decisions regarding further education and work, and to what extent they employ their agency to negotiate enablements and constraints.

2.2.2 Young people and agency

As discussed in Section 2.2, in fluid modern societies, there is a notion that individuals determine their own identities (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Bauman (2000) argued that *liquid modernity* is an individualised, privatised version of modernity in which the individual is responsible for failure. Liquidity refers to how established structures break down or lose their functions and thus fail to provide structures for individuals' lives. In addition, there is a tension between the subjective experience of freedom to choose and construct identity and the objective opportunities for individuals to realise their concerns, as the objective opportunities to realise them could be internalised as the product of 'bad choices' or personal fault (Walker, 2009, p. 542). In late modern or liquid societies, individuals are not provided with indisputable life models; they need to design them themselves. Hence, vocational development has become a life-designing

issue (Guichard et al., 2012). Giddens' and Beck's concepts of reflexive modernisation refer to the embedding of knowledge in the structures of global systems, which in turn influences people's everyday lives. Following this, the reflexive process in late modernity prioritises agency over structure. The arguments by Giddens, Beck and Baumann are contested; several authors argued that structures still have an influence on individuals' lives even though people might not perceive them as such (c.f. Archer, 2003; Furlong, 2013). This is probably more evident in young people, as the introduction of a 'youth period' after the 1960s, with its possibilities for exploring 'endless opportunities', might have left the impression that structures have less impact (see, for instance, Furlong, 2013). Moreover, as Skeggs et al. (2008) remind us, "self-reflexivity does not offer the uncoupling of agency from structure: as the individualization thesis posits, self-reflexivity *itself* depends upon access to resources and concomitant forms of capital that are classed, raced and gendered" (p. 6).

Archer (2003, 2007, 2012) aimed to operationalise the concept of reflexivity, incorporating structure, culture and agency through a morphogenetic approach. The aim was to link structure and agency without reducing or conflating them, which she argued Giddens and others do. For Giddens (1986), "structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity" (p. 26). For critical realists, the development of a particular structure depends on the previous activities of agents, as described in Section 3.2.

The concepts of agency and structure are central in addressing issues relating to people's lives, and the dualism between them is challenging. The term *agency* refers to a person's ability to act within structural contexts (O'Connor, 2014). Researchers agree that both agency and social structures shape people's lives (Archer, 1995). They differ, however, with regard to the relative importance of these two explanatory factors. In the literature on young peoples' *reflexivity*, it is often found that young people's agency operates in different ways, depending on their perceived frames for action and desires (Cairns et al., 2012; Christodoulou, 2016). Some have argued that young people have little agential power or individual agency, which, in turn, allows few real choices (Cairns et al., 2012; Walker, 2009; Willis, 1977). However, young people must be real agents in their own lives because structures offer fewer predefined frameworks (Guichard et al., 2012). Some have voiced concerns about the need for young people to become agents to overcome dominant cultural capital and oppression (Curry, 2016). In accordance with Archer (2003, 2007, 2012), articles II and III argue that young people have the power to exert agency; however, since this power is enabled or constrained by structures, where you grow up matters (Stenseth & Bæck, 2021; Stenseth & Rød, upcoming).

Young people must often make decisions with far-reaching consequences for their future lives, such as what kind of job and education to aspire to, where to live, etc. Their

decision-making is often related to how they make context-based decisions that are influenced by family, peers and social networks (Christodoulou, 2016; Dyke et al., 2008; Walker, 2009). Some studies emphasise the difficulties in decision-making processes (O'Connor, 2014) and the efforts young people must put into these processes when producing self-narratives and designing their lives (Christodoulou, 2016; Guichard et al., 2012). Young peoples' processes related to decision-making, the production of self-narratives and designing their lives are discussed in all three research articles. When exploring how young people make decisions, it seems indispensable to focus on how they understand their own circumstances and concerns and how they reflexively deliberate between concerns and opportunities.

Archer (2007) argued that the fast-changing social world requires people to become more reflexive. The need to call attention to reflexivity within social theory is found in this premise. "The subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes" (p. 5). In Archer's theory, internal conversation is presented as the way we reflexively make our way through the world. As reflexive beings, most of us involve ourselves as active agents; we develop and determine our ultimate concerns, the things we care about the most.

2.2.3 Different aspects of reflexivity within social sciences research

Reflexivity is a concept that encompasses a variety of sociological theories and is understood in different ways. Most sociologists agree (Archer, 2012; Caetano, 2015; Farrugia & Woodman, 2015) that reflexivity in its simplest form involves the mental ability to consider and reflect upon oneself in relation to one's social context (Archer, 2007; 2012). The literature on reflexivity in the social sciences reveals at least three areas that debate reflexivity (see also Elster, 2019; Shaw, 2016). The first is *researcher reflexivity*, which is understood as the processes by which researchers engage with and articulate the position of the researcher to, among other things, be transparent in the research process (cf. Barrett et al., 2020). According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018), reflexivity is a methodological matter when practicing social sciences, rather than simply an individual capacity. This issue is not a central aspect of this thesis, although the Method chapter aims to offer transparency and thus engages in reflexive processes.

The second group recognises that habitual behaviour and embodied dispositions are caused by structural features in the social world and that these move individuals to act rather than conduct reflexive deliberations. Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* is often used in the social sciences with regard to cultural conditions people hold within different positions. He argued that cultural capital is reproduced in the educational system and secures class-divided societies, because not all agents have the economic

and cultural capital to ensure their children an education beyond the minimum. Furthermore, cultural capital is related to habitus. *Habitus* can be understood as a system of dispositions that supervise an individual's actions and is in this sense relatively static (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). To Bourdieu, habitus motivates an individual's everyday actions and thus defines the 'acting subject'. That is, habitus is a set of dispositions that is structured by an individual's everyday environment; at the same time, it shapes how we act within and perceive those same structures. According to this approach, young people's decision-making processes are embedded in their everyday lives (Schmidt, 2017) rather than produced through reflexive deliberations.

The third and last group refers to reflexivity in terms of what it means to be human in current society. Reflexivity is interpreted as a *mediatory process* in which structural and cultural powers influence social action through the reflexive subject. Archer (2003; 2007; 2010a), one of the most influential proponents of this view, holds that reflexivity is an internal conversation or an inner speech. This view of reflexivity sees the individual as an active agent who is capable of navigating within contexts; this stands in opposition to the former view (by the second group), which sees it as embodied dispositions and embedding practices. To prevent a 'static' analysis, where habitus as dispositions and indirect preferences are used to guide my understanding of an individual's scope of actions or opportunity structures, I apply Archer's theory on double morphogenesis (1995, 2003) to understand the decisions individuals make regarding structures.

2.3 Remarks on the review

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the work that I found relevant to this thesis. I started by searching rural and urban education and rural and urban pupils in various ways. While studying this literature, I found there was a need for an overarching concept that could elucidate rurality/urbanity. This was found in Soja's (2009, 2013) work on spatial justice and Massey's work (1994, 1998, 2005) on youth culture and space, place and gender. The notion of space is crucial because social times and spaces are not static or neutral phenomena, but processes shaped by structures and social relationships.

The presented review further establishes that within youth sociology, young people must respond to the weakening of traditional structures and the expectations of continuing with higher education by becoming rational, autonomous individuals who are capable of actively shaping their own future. The responsibility is often placed on individuals to seize the opportunities at hand and then 'blame' themselves if they fail to do so. The individualisation thesis stresses the agents' responsibility for directing their life courses/trajectories without giving the forces of structures their rightful place in the equation. Archer's work on structure, culture and agency gives attention to all three and

does not fall into structural determinism or enable agents to direct their life courses independently of structural conditioning. Furthermore, her work on reflexivity provides tools for exploring human agency without neglecting the impact of structure.

Although space and place have received attention in education research in recent decades, there is still a lack of attention in addressing how structures impinge upon individuals and vice versa. While the focus has shifted, not much attention has been given to young peoples' or pupils' voices and how they perceive their opportunities regarding further education and work. By employing Archer's approach to structure and agency while simultaneously allowing for spatial dimensions in this regard, this thesis will contribute to youth and education research by examining the overall research question presented in Section 1.1.

3 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I begin by introducing the philosophy of science and the theories that are applied in this work. In Chapter 2, I accounted for the lack of research on space and place in education research (see, for instance Bæck, 2015; Gulson & Symes, 2007). The aim of this thesis is to include spatial notions, including location in education research, as it employs an analysis that takes structures, agency and space into account. To account for spatial aspects, this thesis addresses the differences and similarities experienced by pupils in rural and urban areas. This is achieved by employing theories that utilise space perspectives and theories on structure and agency.

As this thesis employs a naturalist and realist ontology, this chapter begins by offering an introduction to critical realism, which is associated with the philosopher Roy Bhaskar (Archer et al., 1998; Benton & Craib, 2011). Next, I introduce Archer's realist social theory, the *morphogenetic approach* (1995), before attending to her theory that addresses the problem of structure and agency (2003, 2007, 2010a, 2012). I include spatial theory, specifically Soja's theory of *spatial justice* (2009, 2013), building on, amongst others, Lefevre and David Harvey's (Soja, 2013) theories of urbanisation and justice. Soja's approach to ontology is influenced by Bhaskar's early work (Soja, 2013). In addition, I apply Fricker's (2007, 2017) philosophical perspectives on epistemic injustice to shed light on specific aspects of this study related to the coastal Sámi community.

3.1 An introduction to the philosophy of science

This section comprises an introduction to basic critical realism (CR), which is relevant to this thesis. CR emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as an alternative to both positivism and constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), through the work of Bhaskar. This has

further been elaborated by critical realists such as Archer (1995, 2003), Collier (1994) and Sayer (1992).

In the early 1960s, Thomas Kuhn popularised the idea of a paradigm (Benton & Craib, 2011). A paradigm is a general concept supported by a group of researchers having a common education and an agreement on “exemplars” of high-quality research or thinking (Benton & Craib, 2011; Johnson et al., 2007). From Kuhn’s point of view, paradigms are vital for scientists to define problems and select methods for their research.

Figure 1 *Critical Realism, a distinct way to account for the nature of reality*

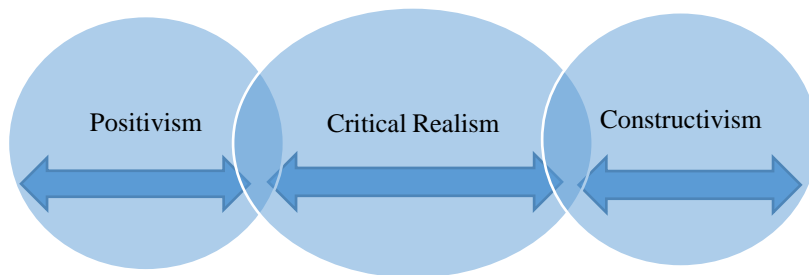


Figure 1 visualises critical realism in relation to positivism and constructivism and is included to further situate my thesis.

Critical realism is a set of philosophical positions and a metatheory in the same sphere as positivism, constructivism, realism, pragmatism and postmodernism. Each of these positions embodies different ideas about reality (ontology) and how we can gain knowledge of it (epistemology). The critical realist approach attempts to solve the problem of combining the “social practice of production of knowledge with a realist understanding of knowledge as *about* something independent of itself” (Benton & Craib, 2011, p. 57, original emphasis). Critical realism is associated with the philosopher Roy Bhaskar, who started his research by developing a philosophy of science for the natural sciences, *transcendental realism* as a critique of the positivist tradition (Archer et al., 1998). Later, Bhaskar proposed a philosophy of science for the social sciences: *critical naturalism* (Archer et al., 1998).

3.1.1 Ontological realism and epistemological relativism

A central argument in critical realism is the *transcendental argument*, which takes as its premise an undisputed description of something actual and then asks, ‘What must be the case for scientific experiments to be true?’ (Benton & Craib, 2011, p. 124). According to Benton and Craib (2011), the answer falls into two groups: on the one hand, statements about what the world must be like for experiments to be possible, and on the other, statements about what scientific researchers must be like to conduct experiments. Bhaskar used the term *intransitive dimensions* to characterise the first set of questions

and *transitive dimensions* for the second (Benton & Craib, 2011; Gorski, 2013). Following the answers to these questions, the scientist in the transitive dimension of reality has no direct access to the intransitive part of reality. Through their work as scientists, they can get a glimpse into the intransitive dimension or at least attempt to gain knowledge about it (Benton & Craib, 2011; Bhaskar, 1998). What I understand from this is that the divide into two dimensions brings critical realism out of a naïve realism and prevents what Bhaskar termed the *epistemic fallacy*, where the object of knowledge is reduced to our knowledge about it, thereby preventing a collapse of ontology and epistemology into one and separating CR from constructivist and positivist perspectives that reduce reality to human knowledge, whether knowledge functions as a lens or a container of reality (Fletcher, 2017).

Critical realism holds the ontological realist perspective that there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions and theories. The epistemological perspective is that our understanding of the world is inevitably our construction. Regarding ontology, realists, including critical realists, argue that it is possible to have knowledge of the world. Furthermore, CR acknowledges that our knowledge of the world is fallible. This is opposed to perspectivism and scepticism, which argue that it is impossible to have knowledge about the world outside consciousness and our concepts or outside experience and language. CR recognises that we can only know the world through accessible concepts and that reality can be investigated from different perspectives. In his work on spatial justice, Soja (2013) argues that Bhaskar's ontological assumptions, at least in part, erase the intrinsic privileging of time over space and history over geography, which is the premise of Soja's "persistent critique of social historicism and the call for a rebalanced ontology in which all aspects of human sociality are seen as spatio-temporally constituted" (p. 223).

CR holds that, based on our knowledge, the external world can change to some degree. Searle (1998) regarded the basic claim of external reality, namely, that there exists a real world that is totally and absolutely independent of our representations, thoughts, feelings, opinions, language and so on; thus, both knowledge and our beliefs should be corrected when we advance in our work (Benton & Craib, 2011; Searle, 1998). As stated in Benton and Craib (2011), there are "some ways of thinking about the social sciences made possible by an account of the natural sciences which is anti-positivist, but still 'realist'", namely, critical realism (p. 120). Realists in the theory of knowledge pledge the existence of the real world, which exists and acts independently of our knowledge or beliefs about it. "However, they hold that this external world is in principle knowable, and to some (discoverable) extent open to being changed on the basis of such knowledge as we are able to achieve" (p. 121).

Bhaskar (1998) stated that the philosophy of science must find a way to deal with the central paradox of science: that people in their social activity produce knowledge that is a social product and dependent on its production. This is one side of ‘knowledge’. The other is that knowledge is *of* things that are not produced by people at all, such as the force of gravity. None of these ‘objects of knowledge’ depend upon human activity. If people did not exist, sound would continue to travel, and apples would fall to the earth – even if people were not here to know it. This is what Bhaskar (1998) termed *the intransitive objects of knowledge*, while “[t]he *transitive* objects of knowledge are Aristotelian material causes. They are the raw material of science – the artificial objects fashioned into items of knowledge by science of the day” (p. 16).

As stated above, critical realism is epistemologically relativist, meaning that the production of knowledge takes place in the historical sociocultural situation of the research and the researcher (Porpora, 2015). Theories are tools that scientists, in the transitive dimension, can use when trying to understand what exists or has a relation to the intransitive dimension. Often, the scientist chooses the theories with the greatest explanatory power. As argued in CR, this is a fallible process, as one might reach better explanations in the future. The divide between ontology and epistemology, along with the acknowledgment of objective conditions for our existence, enables the possibility of improvement. Still, it further allows us to acknowledge the partly social constructions that comprise social sciences and society as such (Bråten, 2015).

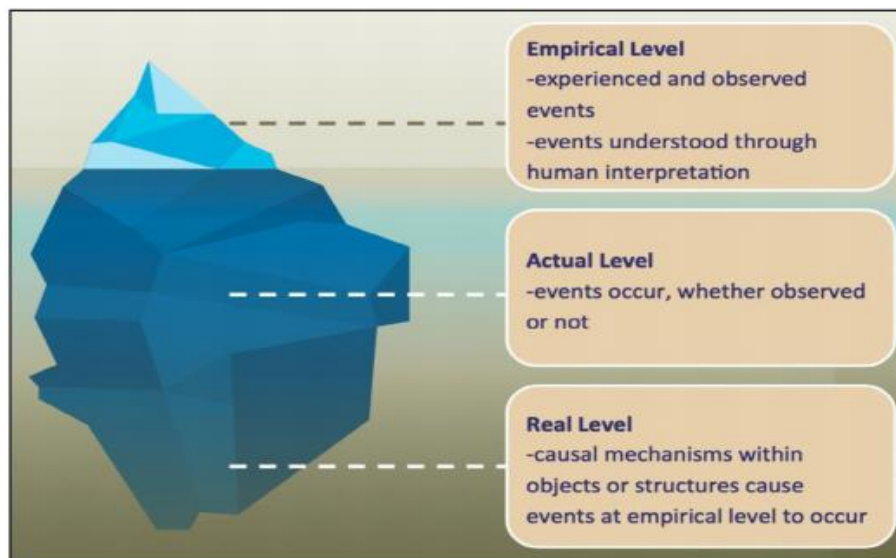
3.1.2 Reality as stratified

In CR ontology, reality is stratified into three levels or domains (Benton & Craib, 2011). The first, the *empirical level*, is the realm of events as we experience them, comprising all the “mechanisms” that have been activated and observed. The second level, the *actual*, comprises all the mechanisms that have been activated but not observed, such as the snow on Kilimanjaro. These occurrences often differ from those observed at the empirical level (Danermark et al., 2019). Finally, the third level is the *real*. This is the distinctive feature of transcendental critical realism, as it claims to demonstrate the independent reality of the ‘real’ level of mechanisms, their powers and tendencies (Benton & Craib, 2011). Here are such powers as the law of gravity, speed of light, etc. This domain comprises all the mechanisms that exist in the world (see, Figure 2). “These are the inherent properties in an object or structure that act as causal forces to produce events” (Fletcher, 2017, p. 183). In line with Fletcher (2017), I argue that the primary goal of CR is to explain social events through reference to these causal mechanisms and the effects they can have on the three levels of reality. Unlike natural reality, social reality is independent of any *particular* human mind. “Further, ‘independent of’ does not imply ‘exhausted by’” (Gorski, 2013, p. 666). In addition, social structures also include material entities and artefacts, such as ‘cities and villages’ and ‘educational

institutions'; they are not solely based on people (Gorski, 2013). Based on Archer (1995), Gorski argued that “to say that social structure is not independent on the human mind and activities is not to say ‘this mind’ or ‘that activity, ‘right here’ or ‘right now’” (p. 666). This would imply that, for instance, past events do not influence what is taking place here and now; this is not the case, as discussed above.

As scientists, at the level of the real, we try to infer through substantive investigations, as these phenomena are not directly observable. Bhaskar’s divide between underlying mechanisms and open systems requires a more complex analysis when aiming at, for instance, understanding interaction (Bråten, 2015) and how factors in society play a part in relation to individuals.

Figure 2 An iceberg metaphor for CR ontology



(Fletcher, 2017, p. 183)

According to Danermark et al. (2019), scientific work is to “investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships, respectively, between what we experience, what actually happens, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world” (p. 25). In this thesis, in line with critical realism, I hold that one level of reality cannot be reduced to the level below. As argued by Benton and Craib (2011), “reductionist interpretations of the layering of reality are opposed by critical realists” (p. 127).

3.2 The morphogenetic approach

The morphogenetic approach was developed by Archer and elucidated in her book *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (1995). This is an explanatory approach based on critical realism that can be employed within social theory; in this thesis, this approach is used to explain the relationship structure – culture – agency.

Archer's *analytical dualism* is the focal point in the morphogenetic approach and forms the basis of the framework that is centred around the "conditional and generative mechanisms operating *between* structure and agency" (p. 16). Archer proposed the concept of *conflation* to address issues surrounding the complex relationship between structure and agency. The first problem she addressed was the overly deterministic view within social theory that social structures determine agential action, naming this *downwards conflation*. The second problem is the opposite: an overly optimistic outlook that structures are just "other people" and that the agents are therefore relatively free to do as they wish if they can convince other people, *upwards conflation*. Vandenberghe (2010, p. 57) argued that Archer, through a systematic integration of a few central concepts (*analytical dualism*, the *morphogenetic approach* and the *ontological stratification of society*) and theories, showed that structuration theory collapses structure (culture, structure and social systems) into agency – instead of linking agency to structure, it is busy 'sinking' the distinction, termed *central conflation* (Archer et al., 1998, p. xii). According to Archer (2000), conflation and reduction rest on the same ontological bases. That is, *either* the 'part' *or* the 'people' are held to be the *ultimate constituents* of social reality, to which the other could be reduced.

Before I move on to the morphogenetic approach, I must introduce and define some components of Archer's approach. Archer (2000) has a specific way of dealing with people; that is, a human being sequentially becomes a self, a *person*, then a *primary agent* who can potentially develop into a *corporate agent* and finally into a personalised *actor* (p. 117).

First, there is the individual person, or primary agent, who is a reflexive being with a continuous sense of self, their own identity, concerns and projects. Individuals may be members of collectives who share the same life chances and who are equally privileged or underprivileged (Archer, 1995; 2000).

Agents are collectivists who have the power to act to make a difference (Archer, 1995; 2000). Archer drew a crucial distinction between *corporate agents* and *primary agents*. Those who know what they want, can articulate it and organise to pursue their desires are corporate agents. Primary agents are distinguished from corporate agents because they lack a say in creating structures and cultures; they do not have an articulated aim. Corporate agents' ability to act is context dependent. The coexistence of corporate agents, pushing and pulling the systemic or institutional structure in different directions, has profound effects on reshaping the context for primary agents. Or, as argued by Solnit (2016), agents possess the power to change the world to some degree, and the uncertainty and instability this creates become grounds for hope. Corporate agents include different vested interest groups, social movements and defensive associations. A collective of students might be considered corporate agents concerning their

educational institutions; however, they are primary agents in most other arenas. Although primary agents do not articulate specific aims, they “have a say”, even if only because of their sheer numbers.

The last category is actors. It is only an actor who properly exists in the singular and possesses a strict identity (Archer, 2000). Actors acquire their social identity by personifying their chosen roles; they are defined as role incumbents. Not everyone succeeds in becoming an actor who finds role(s) wherein they can invest themselves. An example of an actor is a head teacher, who holds power as a part of this role. The power held by the actor must not be mistaken as an individual power because it is as the head teacher that the actor holds power; thus, power is a structural property. Roles have emergent properties that cannot be reduced to the characteristics of their occupants (Archer, 2000).

According to Archer (2000), individuals are involuntarily situated beings assigned to a position in society’s distribution of resources, which is the result of structural and cultural conditions shaped by the actions of previous generations. However, these conditions are not entirely deterministic; individuals and corporate agents can change their circumstances. Nevertheless, individuals confronting these conditions must act within them, following the logic of pursuing the vested interests that they find possible to obtain. As agents, they have the power to change, reproduce or seek to evade the conditions they find themselves in, either intentionally, unintentionally or unknowingly (Archer, 1995, p. 277ff). Whether conditions are changed and undergo *morphogenesis* or reproduced and remain in *morphostasis* is not only up to the agent, but is the result of interactions, concessions, compromises or dominance that occur through corporate agency. This is followed by structural elaboration leading to morphogenesis or morphostasis, which structurally and culturally condition the situation for future individuals. These conditions are further elucidated in the section “The three stage model”.

This short outline has illustrated the temporal and causal differences among structure, culture and agency. Structure is the emergent result of various forms of agency and action; thus, ontologically different entities and irreducible to one another. Furthermore, structure is temporally and causally different from agency, as individuals are limited by structures made by previous generations that they may or may not transform.

Archer’s morphogenetic approach deals with the development of social structures. In morphogenetic analysis, time has a central place. In Archer’s morphogenetic approach (1995, 2000), the central argument is that “structure and agency can only be linked by examining the *interplay between them over time*, and that without the proper

incorporation of time the problem of structure and agency can never be satisfactorily resolved” (Archer, 1995, p. 65, original emphasis).

All social structures possess causal powers and liabilities. “Conditions in the open social world can prevent or facilitate the actualization of a structure’s causal power, meaning it may or may not have an observable impact at the empirical level” (Fletcher, 2017, p. 183). Within the philosophy of social science, the morphogenetic approach is a method of retrodution built on a critical realist position. The retrodution process investigates the specific social conditions under which a causal mechanism takes effect in the world. “The goal of retrodution is to constantly move between empirical and deeper levels of reality to fully understand the phenomenon under study” (p. 189). In line with Archer, this thesis acknowledges:

[R]ealism in itself is committed to an explanatory framework which acknowledges and incorporates a) *pre-existent structures* as generative mechanisms, b) their *interplay* with other objects possessing causal powers and liabilities proper to them in what is a stratified social world, and c) non-predictable but none the less explicable *outcomes* arising from interactions between the above, which take place in an open system in society (Archer, 1995, p. 159).

The potential in this framework is the inclusion of agency, structure and culture. Structures and cultures can both enable and constrain agency, which in turn interacts with and creates practices where changes and/or reproduction in structure and culture emerge over time. The ‘double morphogenesis of agency’ refers to the process by which “agency leads to structural and cultural elaboration, but is itself elaborated in the process” (Archer, 1995, p. 247). According to Wiley (2010), when individuals act, they draw on their resources, including both agency (the ability to design and complete an act) and structure (access to social rules and resources).

Figure 3 *The basic morphogenetic cycle and its three phases*

Structural conditioning

T1

Socio-cultural interaction

T2

T3

Structural elaboration

T4

In the morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995, pp. 77-79, 157), T4 in **Figure 3** illustrates a specific point in time. T4 is the result of structural elaboration, which in turn is the result of social interaction between agents in T2 and T3. This interaction is carried out

in the context of structural conditioning at T1. In establishing the interaction between agents and the mechanisms that are at work, one can find the extent to which this interaction has led to morphogenesis (process of change) and/or morphostasis (reproduction) at T4. In society, several sequences can happen simultaneously. T4 could be the start of another cycle at T1, meaning that structural elaboration at one point can be the context or structural conditioning in another cycle (Archer, 1995). The morphogenetic approach is a methodology that allows to examine what has taken place, which again gives us hope that change is possible. Solnit (2016) argues, “[h]opefulness is risky, since it is after all a form of trust, trust in the unknown and the possible, even in discontinuity” (p. 23).

Archer (1995, pp. 192-194, 307) has a similar cycle for cultural morphogenesis. The main difference is that cultural elaboration foreshadows sociocultural interaction and cultural conditioning. The link between structure and culture is the interaction of agents who must deal with both since all generative mechanisms are influential only through people. During interactions, people themselves may also be changed and hence undergo agential morphogenesis. Agential morphogenesis follows the same cycles as structural morphogenesis, where group elaboration is preceded by group interaction; this, in turn, foreshadows the sociocultural conditioning of groups. These three morphogenetic cycles have relative autonomy from one another and, therefore, may be out of synchrony. Before elaborating on the agential morphogenesis here, I must note that the reflexivity of human beings is produced within the *unavoidable relationship* individuals have with the three orders of natural reality, namely, the natural, the practical and the social (Maccarini & Prandini, 2010). These three orders of natural reality are the sources of basic *concerns* to which the individual *must* relate. The morphogenetic cycle of agency has been summarised by Maccarini and Prandini (2010, p. 90, original emphasis) and is shown below.

Figure 4 *The morphogenetic cycle of agency*

- i) *An original relation between human individuals and the world – in its natural, practical, and social dimensions – triggering relevant emotions and concerns;*
- ii) *Which generates agency as a process of engagement by human beings in each of these different environments;*
- iii) *This results in and is sustained by reflexivity, whose medium is internal conversations and which continuously engage in three kinds of activities: discernment, deliberation and dedication;*
- iv) *A singular modus vivendi and a full-blown personal and social identity are the emergent effects of this morphogenetic cycle, which works both ontogenetically and analytically.*

This thesis maintains that dualism and reflexivity are connected and that agents can only reflect on the structural conditions of their actions by distancing from them, as argued by Vandenberghe (2010):

Dualism and reflexivity are connected, because it is only if the distinction between structure and agency is maintained that one can acknowledge that agents have the capability to reflexively examine their projects and their feasibility, given the objective circumstances in which they find themselves and which they have not chosen. Thus, agents can only reflect on the structural and cultural conditions of their actions if they can distance themselves cognitively from them, be it to analyse them in a more theoretical manner or with the practical intent to change them. (p. 57)

According to Archer (1995, p. 185), at the *positional level*, the structured distribution of resources pre-groups collectives of agents into privileged and underprivileged positions. Because of their positioning, each ‘generation’ begins life in a position within a stratified reality and has vested interests in maintaining advantages or improving life. What is crucial for the outcome is whether they remain *primary agents*, unorganised and inarticulate, or become *corporate agents* with emergent powers of promotive organisation and articulation of interest, where they can negotiate societal transformation. An agent’s potential to become a corporate agent depends mutually on the conditional influences of social emergent properties and how these bind together with social factors, influencing the cohesion possible within collectives.

Morphogenesis can formulate how human beings both shape society and are shaped by it through examining the interplay of the structural, cultural and personal sets of causal powers. In addition, there is a reduction in primary agents and the emergence of corporate agents.

3.2.1 Emergent properties

Emergence is generally defined as the “situations in which the conjunction of two or more features or aspects gives rise to new phenomena, which have properties irreducible to those of their constituents, even though the latter are necessary for their existence” (Sayer, 2000, p. 12). According to Archer (1995), emergence is a phenomenon that indicates a stratification of social reality, where “different strata possess different emergent properties and powers” (p. 9). She insisted that emergence must be understood as referring to interactions between both the parts and the whole at a specific moment *in time and over time*, recognising that we ‘inherit’ a society created by previous sociocultural interactions (Archer & Elder-Vass, 2012). Archer (1995) stated that “we can talk about ‘system integration’ conditioning ‘social integration’” which necessarily confronts the former, since ‘social integration’ *always applies to the here and now*

(wherever that is situated historically), whilst ‘system integration’ is antecedent to it” (p. 183, original emphasis). This underlines that *system integration* is prior to *social integration*, exists in its own right and is created through previous structural and/or sociocultural interactions. System integration predates social integration, but the former cannot be reduced to the latter.

Archer (1995; 2000; 2003) distinguished between different emergent properties, which she divided into first-, second- and third-order emergent properties. These emergent properties exist as structural emergent properties (SEP), cultural emergent properties (CEP) and people’s emergent properties (PEP). First-order emergent properties are the direct result of the choices actors make during social interactions. These can be demographic; for example, as upper secondary schools are located in populated areas, pupils from areas lacking upper secondary schools need to move to obtain education. Pupils must then decide whether and where to move, such that reflexivity mediates the impact of social structures. Archer (2003, 2007, 2012) argued that reflexivity is exercised through people holding *internal conversations*, and the capacity to conduct inner dialogue is a PEP. All our internal conversations are context-dependent; they do not take place in a vacuum.

Reflexive internal conversation (PEP) is responsible for *mediating* the impact of SEP’s and CEP’s because it is the subjects’ objectives and internal deliberations about their external feasibility that determine *how* they confront structural and cultural circumstances whose presence they cannot avoid (Archer, 2007, p. 65).

Second-order emergent properties are the result of relations among those occurring in the first order. These include relations between institutions or organisations that create situational logics. These again reshape the situations that agents must face. Relations among institutions create a situational logic that guides the directions to agents operating within the system. Situational logic is decided by institutional configurations in the structural system (SS) and constellations of propositions in the cultural system (CS). These configurations decide whether the institutional configurations are in a complementary or contradictory relationship, that is, if they can help or hinder one another’s interests/operations, and whether they are necessarily or only contingently related. The situational logic and configuration of an SS or a CS gives directional guidance of action at the level of social interaction (SI) or sociocultural interactions (S-C), both at the level of interaction (Knio, 2018).

Table 1 below (based on Archer, 2003, p. 303; Knio, 2018, p. 406) shows how situational logics are delineated across the conditioning and interaction levels; it shows the various institutional configurations and the situational logic to which they lead. For

a thorough explanation of all potential institutional configurations and situational logics, see Archer (1995, p. 218ff).

Table 1 *Cultural and structural morphogenesis/morphostasis at the systemic and social levels*

	Contradictions		Complementarities	
	Necessary	Contingent	Necessary	Contingent
(Situational logic)	(Correction)	(Elimination)	(Protection)	(Opportunism)
CEPs				
C.S. level	Syncretism	Pluralism	Systematization	Specialization
S-C. level	Unification	Cleavage	Reproduction	Sectionalism
SEPs				
S.S. level	Compromise	Competition	Integration	Differentiation
S-I. level	Containment	Polarisation	Solidarity	Diversification

Third-order emergent properties are ‘the result of the result of the result’ of social interactions. Agential actions under structural and cultural conditioning lead to elaboration. Elaboration is a third-order emergent property that represents outcomes whose consequences are either societal morphogenesis or morphostasis of the structural/cultural conditions and/or of the agents themselves. Morphogenesis at the structural, cultural or agential level does not indicate morphogenesis in society as a whole. One part of the analysis in this thesis indicates that morphostasis (reproduction) or morphogenesis (change) are not dependent upon one particular structure; instead, they rely on the interaction among structure, culture and what individuals within groups decide to do.

As stated by Bhaskar (as cited in Archer, 1995):

The importance of distinguishing, in the most categorical way, between human action and social structure will now be apparent. For the properties possessed by social forms may be very different from those possessed by the individuals upon whose activity they depend...I want to distinguish sharply then between the genesis of human actions, lying in the reasons, intentions and plans of human beings, on the one hand; and the structures governing the reproduction and transformation of social activities, on the other” (p. 63).

Ontologically, structure and agency are different entities with different properties and powers; methodologically, it is necessary to distinguish between them to *examine their interplay* and thus explain why things are ‘so and not otherwise’ in society (Archer, 1995).

3.3 The three stage model

In critical realism, structure predates the actor. This implies that, as human beings, we are born into structures not of our own choosing. In following this, Archer's three stage model is applied as the theoretical framework in this thesis and explained below. The three stage model is, in some ways, a subpart of the morphogenetic approach; it is explanatory for individuals and how they make their way through the world as part of collectives. See Section 3.2, "The morphogenetic approach", for a recapture of **Figure 4**. Here, one can note that:

[T]he stratified conception of agency that results: reflexivity is the way it operates, internal conversation its medium, but it comprises discernment, deliberation and dedication, prioritizing and evaluating, committing individuals to some ultimate concerns, and doing this in relation to the various orders of reality [natural, practical, social] from which particular kinds of concerns emerge" (Maccarini & Prandini, 2010, p. 90).

Being an 'active agent' at an individual and social/macro level depends on the matter that "individuals can develop and define their ultimate concerns: those internal goods that they care about the most", which make them who they are (Archer, 2007, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, "no one can have an ultimate concern and fail to do something about it" (p. 7). Through reflection and deliberation, agents ponder what to do not only in their lives, but *with* their lives (Vandenberghe, 2010) to promote their concerns; in doing so, they form *projects* to advance or protect what they care about. As reflexive beings, people can design and redesign their projects in the (fallible) belief that to accomplish the project(s) is to realise one's concern (Archer, 2007). Colapietro (2010) argued that for inner dialogue to be genuine, it must be efficacious and that the deliberations individuals engage in must make an individual difference. Moreover, the different answers individuals give to their existential questions, what to do *with* their life, "have implications for the reproduction and transformation of society" (Vandenberghe, 2010, p. 58).

Reflexivity *mediates* by activating structural and cultural powers, and in doing so, there is no specific or predictable outcome. This is because individuals can exercise their reflexive powers in different ways in agreement with their specific concerns and considerations (Archer, 2007). Based on the aforementioned claims, the three stage model is advanced throughout this thesis. This model "gives both subjectivity and objectivity their due and also explicitly incorporates their interplay through the process of reflexive mediation" (p. 16).

Figure 5 *The three stage model*

1. Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and *inter alia*, possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to...
2. ...Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality.
3. Courses of action are produced through the inner *reflexive* deliberations of subjects who *subjectively* determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* circumstances (Archer, 2007, p. 17, original emphasis).

These three stages aim to capture the interplay between the objective and subjective components of the mediatory process, which influences the conditions for agential actions. "In interplay with one another they [structure and culture] determine the practical course of action adopted by agents (both Primary and Corporate), whose own interaction is ultimately responsible for the reproduction or transformation of society – or a sector of it" (Archer, 2003, p. 135). In this thesis, structure and culture are related to education and pupils' natal location.

According to Archer (2000), people interact with three orders of reality: the natural, the practical and the social. Archer (2012) argued that different types of knowledge are acquired through the experiences of the three orders of reality. They are not homogenous in kind; they emerge from different relations between the individual and the order and require variable degrees of reflexivity from individuals. In the *natural order*, some find that they enjoy hiking in the mountains, as expressed by many rural and some urban youth. The experiences in the natural order are embodied knowledge and imply a minimal degree of reflexivity. Many youths enjoyed practicing sports in the *practical order*. Some pursued an academic education that offered the possibility of practicing their sport; this commitment defines their personal identity. In the *social order*, youths consider what to seek and what to avoid by examining what others do in their role and by questioning whether the role is desirable or if it has aspects worth pursuing. The answers they give themselves indicate what to aim for when deciding upon further education. When pupils make decisions concerning further education, they draw on their experiences in these orders.

Table 2 *Types of knowledge and the three orders of natural reality*

	Natural Order	Practical Order	Social Order
Relationship	Object/Object	Subject/Object	Subject/Subject
Knowledge Type	Embodied	Practical	Discursive
Emergent From	Coordination	Compliance	Commitment
Importance of Reflexivity	Minimal	Moderate	Maximal

Table showing peoples’ relations to the three orders of reality and the types of knowledge acquired for each order (Archer, 2012, p. 78).

In line with Archer (2000, pp. 289-290), this thesis holds that pupils who are about to make their first choices concerning further education draw on their (corrigible) experiences in the natural order, which can be related to play, sport and outdoor activities. Second, they inspect their concerns in the practical order, which supplies them with positive and negative feedback about the activities they find satisfactory. Third, in their involuntary social roles, they interrogate themselves about which aspects of a role are worth having and which to turn down. A situation some pupils confront is ‘I would like to become x, but I don’t want to study y to achieve this’. As argued in Article II, this suggests that space is an active force that shapes human life (Soja, 2009), in this case by forsaking or postponing an education (and future work) because of spatial constraints; there is a risk of obtaining an education that will not necessarily provide an occupation in the place where you intend to settle down in the future.

According to Archer, people’s *internal conversations* are the way individuals reflexively make their path through the world and which make most people on the individual level ‘active agents’ who have some control in their own life, rather than ‘passive agents’ to whom things simply happen (Archer, 2000, 2007). As stated in Section 2.2.3, most sociologists agree upon the definition of reflexivity. Reflexivity is described as the internal conversation individuals employ when attempting to make sense of and act in the social world (Archer, 2007). All humans are reflexive; however, the context and concerns that individuals face lead to distinct modes of reflexivity. To Archer (2003 p. 14), “human reflexive deliberation plays a crucial role in mediating between” structure and agency.

In addition, Giddens (1991) argued that reflexivity is a general feature in late modern societies and that self-identity has become a reflexive project. Individuals must constantly revise their biographies in contexts that offer multiple options. Moreover,

according to Giddens (1991), modern states are reflexive regulating systems. King (2010) argued that Giddens' term 'structuration' refers to the active processes individuals confront, which they reproduce or change, as they are informed by virtual structures. According to King (2010):

The result of Giddens' assertions of individual freedom is a curious and unresolved oscillation between determinism and voluntarism in Giddens' work because he fails to maintain a distinction between the individual and social reality (p. 254).

Giddens (1991) stated that "[t]he self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves" (p. 75). For Giddens, in late modern society, protective frameworks of small communities and traditions are broken down and replaced with large, impersonal organisations, which rob the individual of a sense of security provided by traditional settings. Late modernity produces a situation wherein humans, in some respects, become a 'we', facing issues where there are no 'others'. This is an optimistic vision of current society, as the categorisation of 'others' persists; indigenous peoples, immigrants and, to some extent, rural dwellers are among those who are sometimes categorised as 'others'.

Archer (2012) described the historical shifts in recent decades from "contextual continuity" towards an upsurge of "contextual discontinuity", and more recently, "contextual incongruity". Contextual continuity is linked to traditional societies and contextual discontinuity to modernity. In late modernity, individuals need to prepare for new kinds of opportunities and be ready to move and reevaluate constellations of concern. Article II argues that the rural young peoples' desire to stay in a rural area is not necessarily an expression of seeking contextual continuity; their reasons for staying are inherently modern, as they seek freedom and meaning in the rural area. Moreover, rural youth engage with globalisation but resist its association with urban life by pursuing a life in rural areas (Stenseth & Bæck, 2021). Both Archer (2012) and Giddens (1991), to some extent, failed to give enough attention to spatial influences on individuals; people in different locations must engage with diverse forms of constraints and enablements that can affect their lives. Article II discusses how two different locations provide different opportunities and constraints for individuals (Stenseth & Bæck, 2021).

3.3.1 Structural and cultural properties

Structures and cultures structure the situations in which agents find themselves. *Structural properties* can be distributional, positional, organisational or institutional; *cultural properties* can be propositional, theoretical or doctrinal (Archer, 2003, p. 135). Properties that affect groups also affect individuals, although not necessarily in the same

manner (Archer, 1995). As stated by Marx (as cited in Wiley, 2010), “human beings make their own history, but not under circumstances of their own choosing” [p. 28].

Pupils face involuntary placement, as they are not in a position to choose where to live and attend lower secondary school. The significance of such involuntary placement is that agents encounter different segments of society that present them with different vested interests (Archer, 2003). Agents can, for instance, enjoy privileges or not; the extent to which they act on them can be decided according to the things they care about most.

The objective opportunity structures that constitute constraints and enablements come with costs or benefits; these are reflected in the price paid for pursuing projects representing opposing vested interests or in being rewarded for success in overcoming underprivileged or problematic positions (Archer, 2003). For example, when addressing vested interests, such as patriarchy or colonisation, decolonisation perspectives can run the risk of being “superficially adopted into education and other social sciences” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 2). According to Stein et al. (2020), within Western education institutions, “people tend to seek solutions and alternatives to colonisation within existing paradigms, regimes of property, and comfort zones” (p. 44). This can reinforce the entitlement that decolonisation perspectives aim to transgress and thus carry on colonial business as usual. Therefore, the agent’s placement and privileges mean that the same course of action is unequally costly, depending on the situation in which they find themselves. However, society may grant these circumstances; the results of opportunity cost are real, but it is the agents themselves who must decide whether the projects they undertake are worthwhile and what to do if they are (Archer, 2003).

3.3.2 Subjects’ own constellations of concerns

Stage two examines the interface between the structural factors that individuals face and their projects. The generic questions posed by a person and the answers they give can be distilled into these: “What do I want?” and “How do I get it?” (Archer, 2007). How individuals answer these questions “involves a dialectical interplay between their ‘concerns’ – as they reflexively define them – and their ‘contexts’ – as they reflexively respond to them” (Archer, 2007, pp. 19-20). They engage in internal conversation to answer the questions asked. To explain their actions, one must understand their intentions, which arrive through external “inspection” and inner dialogue.

According to Archer (2003), individuals prioritise their concerns through a process of inner dialogue, where they decide upon their main concerns and accommodate others. The process of clustering concerns constitutes an individual’s unique *personal identity* and is “the expression of her most important personal emergent power – her own

reflexivity in relation to reality” (Archer, 2003, p. 139). Archer (2000) emphasised it is not possible to achieve a stable identity until maturity, and not everyone achieves this; however, during this process, individuals entertain social projects. “Personal identity is an emergent property whose powers include the designation and design of specific projects in society” (Archer, 2003, p. 139). Furthermore, an individual’s ultimate concerns act as a sounding board for their reception and response to the objective situations they confront.

3.3.3 Courses of action

In stage three, “by virtue of their powers of reflexivity, people deliberate about their objective circumstances in relation to their subjective concerns” (Archer, 2007, p. 21). In this stage, people consider their projects to see whether they can realise them; this includes adapting, adjusting, abandoning or enlarging them during the deliberative process. This is a crucial stage that enables people to try to do, to be or to become what they care about the most in society – by virtue of their reflexivity (Archer, 2007).

Archer (2003) argued that the opportunity structures attached to different courses of action must be considered by the agents who evaluate them, because conditioning is not compelling. According to Archer (2003), building on Charles Taylor, people are strong evaluators. Agents can fail and misjudge the costs and benefits of pursuing a project, or their capacity to sustain it – in which case they must pay the objective price for misjudging (Archer, 2003). These considerations may lead the agent to revise or redefine their project. Because both the circumstances and the agent can change, there is a lifelong dialectic between objectivity and subjectivity.

Archer (2003) argued that, through reflexive deliberation, people accomplish three things. First, they delineate and prioritise their concerns. Second, they examine their circumstances and make decisions about whether the desired action is feasible. Third, through reflexive evaluation, people establish which activities express their ultimate concerns and are within their means. Internal deliberations help define their actual doings with some precision. Agents try to establish a *modus vivendi* in which their concerns play a role, even though the circumstances might be restrictive. However, they can only know their circumstances and the constraints and enablements of such under their own fallible descriptions. There are many unacknowledged conditions of actions that need not be recognised to be influential in agents’ projects, where the mechanisms need not be observed, acknowledged or realised to be effective.

According to Archer (2003, 2007), given that the agent can endorse projects and integrate them into their life satisfactorily by reflexively examining their main concerns, the project will remain within the parameters of their sociocultural context. Conversely, if the agent is dissatisfied, they might try to push back the cultural parameters in which

they are involuntarily situated. When doing either, the agent is thinking to themselves *about* society; their reflexive conclusions cannot be determined because they live in an open system.

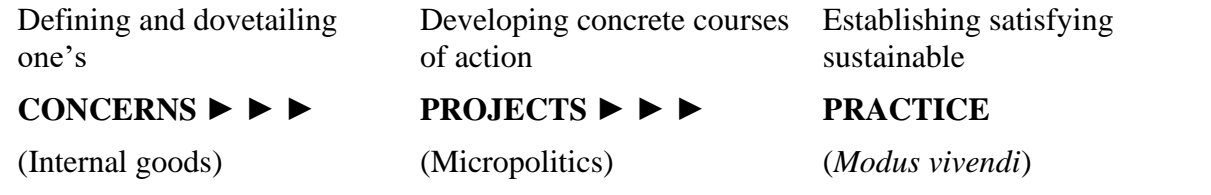
3.4 Internal conversation and establishing practices

The importance of inner dialogue is discussed by Wiley (2010), who stated that thought as well as action are exercised through inner speech; “we talk our goals, options, deliberations, plans and moves. We talk our way through our actions” (p. 17). Part of making our way through the world concerns the positions we assume in society and the particular trajectory of social mobility that individuals describe over the course of life. Through reflexive deliberations, agents prioritise their concerns and make decisions about what is realisable in practice (Archer, 2007).

When people dedicate themselves to a cluster of concerns, they take responsibility for their concerns and make them their own. Internal conversation is not inert; “one of its most important causal powers is reflexively to conceive and to conduct those courses of action by which we navigate our way through the social world” (Archer, 2007, p. 64). Reflexivity is exercised through people holding internal conversations, which are PEPs (Archer, 2003, 2007, 2012). As an emergent property, internal dialogue is a relational property derived from self-consciousness in conjunction with the acquisition of symbols through which we can question our world (Archer, 2007). The generic questions “What matters?” and “What to do about it?” and their responses have a direct influence on the position an individual desires to occupy in society; this entails a relationship to social mobility, be it immobility, upward or downward mobility or socio-occupational volatility. Furthermore, there is a relationship between patterns of social mobility and the modes of reflexivity that individuals practice. “The subject constitutes her identity as the being-with-this-constellation-of-concerns. Thus, through her internal conversation, the subject reflexively *attains a strict personal identity by virtue of her unique pattern of commitments*” (pp. 87-88, original emphasis).

When one is young, one can arrive at this position in a preliminary form; then one confronts the second generic question and decides upon a course of action to realise the main concerns. According to Archer, this is a matter of establishing a *modus vivendi*, a major preoccupation of internal conversation. The sequence is summarised in **Figure 6**, based on Archer (2007, p. 89).

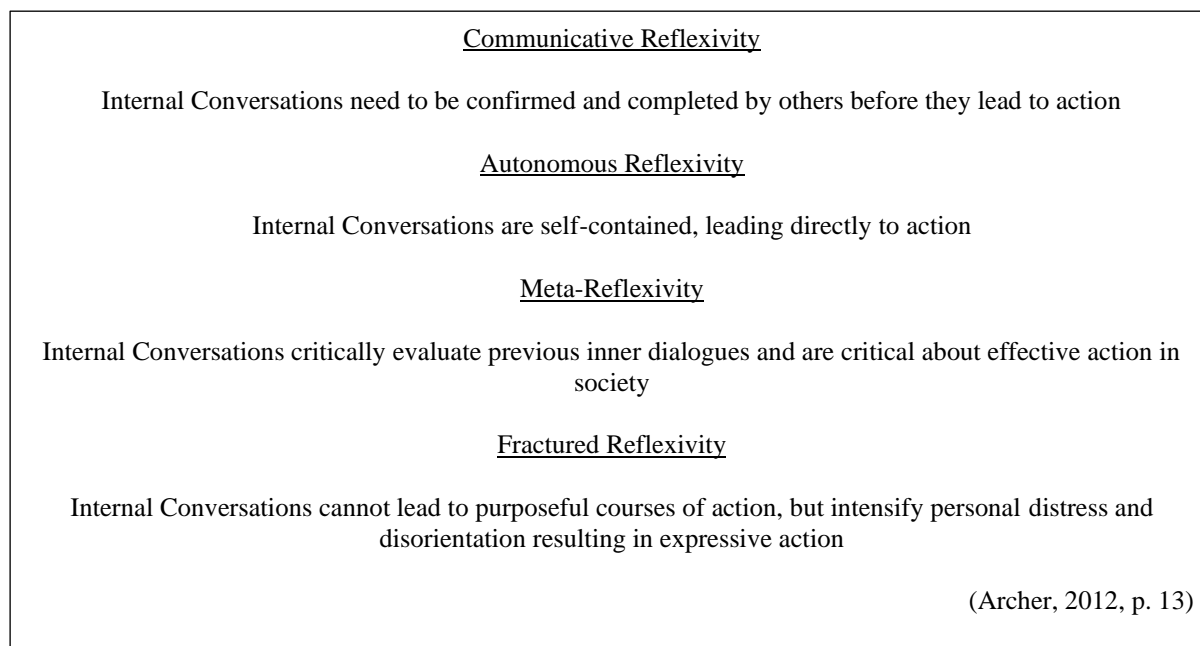
Figure 6 *Internal conversation and pursuit of the good life*



Archer (2007) argued that through establishing practices that are satisfying and sustainable in their context, a subject’s personal identity is aligned with their social identity.

Archer (2003, 2007) outlined four modes of reflexivity practiced by all individuals some of the time through internal conversation: *communicative, autonomous, meta- and fractured reflexives*. Although people use each of the four modes on different occasions and in different situations, the vast majority have a dominant mode, which is evenly distributed across the population (Archer, 2012). As shown in **Figure 7**, different modes of reflexivity form different situational logics of action. Communicative reflexives *seek confirmation and completion* of the internal conversation, while autonomous and meta-reflexives’ internal conversations are *self-contained* because they find that others do not fully understand or can relate to/know of the things they care about. In this thesis, the fractured mode is not applied to any research subjects, as the participants are young people starting to form courses of action, and although some of them appear to negotiate an identity that has traces of being fractured (and meta-reflexive), it is too early in their life course to deem them fractured reflexives.

Figure 7 *Modes of reflexivity*



3.5 The need for space

This thesis focuses on pupils' educational orientation and decision-making processes, their initial transition from lower to upper secondary school, identity negotiating processes, and the influence of space; thus, the relationship between pupils and their spatial contexts is important when these processes are examined. When applying space as an aspect of analysis in this thesis, Archer's (2003, 2007) structure and agency approach offers fruitful insights into how pupils navigate within structures. Archer considered structural constraints and enablements when examining how structures influence agency and vice versa. However, in her theory, spatial contexts are not entirely explicit; the way spatial constraints and enablements are actualised in specific structural contexts can be further developed. Moreover, Archer critiqued Giddens' structuration theory, which she claimed conflates agents with the system (see also Section 3.2) (for instance, 1995; 2010b). According to Giddens (1979), the self can only be formed through social practice, and intentions and reasons are not regarded as individual properties; rather, they are "instantiated in that activity" (p. 40). Giddens' theory on structuration states that individuals alone are responsible for negotiating and sustaining self-identity through their personal choices and decisions. In short, both Archer and Giddens seemed to regard reflexivity as emerging in the sphere of leisure and consumption, not work and class (King, 2010). One could argue that those who possess a privileged position can reflexively negotiate their way through life with more ease than those in an unprivileged position. However, neither Archer nor Giddens explicitly

engaged in these differences. In this thesis, engaging explicitly with spatial contexts when attempting to address structural constraints and enablements is vital.

In this regard, this thesis builds upon researchers such as Soja and Massey, who have contributed to a growing interest in space/spatial inequality in the social sciences. The former has worked on spatial justice in cities (2009) and the latter has argued that space is relational and asked for spatial awareness in research (2005). Massey argued that we must “understand space as an open ongoing production” (2005, p. 55); this will allow us to think about space not as a closed, fixed system, but as a system that people can influence and that in turn can affect people. This is in line with Soja (2009), who argued that space is an active force that shapes human life. According to Soja, in the broadest sense, spatial (in)justice refers to how resources and opportunities to use them are enabled or constrained by geographical or spatial aspects of justice and injustice. He argued that “[s]patial (in)justice can be seen as both outcome and process, as geographies or distributional patterns that are in themselves just/unjust and as the processes that produce these outcomes” (p. 3).

One fruitful way to conceptualise spatial injustice is by applying Fricker’s (2007) term *epistemic injustice* when trying to understand how injustice “wrongs someone in their capacity of a subject of knowledge” (p. 4). *Hermeneutical injustice*, which is always structural (Fricker, 2007), “occurs when a society lacks the interpretive resources to make sense of a speaker’s experience, because she or members of her social group have been prejudicially marginalized in meaning-making activities” (Anderson, 2012, p. 166). Fricker’s understanding of epistemic and hermeneutical injustice was applied when attempting to examine the injustice done to the Sámi people. Corporate agents can act to make changes within these colonised structures. Knowledge systems, by virtue of place, are, to some extent, disregarded in the ethnic narrative and hence become an epistemic injustice. Ahmed (2000) notes that “[t]he self-identification with the nation also involves the recognition of others as belonging to the ‘same’ community” (p. 99). The unease or unsettled notion of not entirely belonging to either the nation state or the Sámi community is articulated by the coastal Sámi pupils in this study.

Moreover, locational discrimination, created though the biases imposed on certain populations due to geographical location, both produces and reproduces spatial injustice and creates lasting spatial structures of privilege and advantage (Soja, 2009). Even though complete social–spatial equality and justice are never achievable, Soja’s aim is to pursue spatial justice legally, socially, economically and politically (Soja, 2013).

3.6 The Norwegian education system

To understand school structures, one must define what constitutes an educational system. The terms *centralised* and *decentralised* educational systems are frequently

used to define the distribution of power and governance within the system. Interestingly, there is no consensus in research as to whether the Norwegian school system is centralised or decentralised (Kvalsund, 2009; Nordkvelle & Nyhus, 2017; Skinningsrud, 2014; Volckmar & Wiborg, 2014). Skinningsrud (2014) argued that most definitions of centralised and decentralised education systems lack a description of the system as a whole. Skinningsrud (2012) based her work on Archer's analysis of state education systems and argued that this offers a more sophisticated analysis of the system. Archer's (2013) definition suggests that the education system is identified by structural characteristics as "*a nationwide and differentiated collection of institutions devoted to formal education, whose overall control and supervision is at least partly governmental, and whose components and processes are related to one another*" (p. 54, original emphasis). Based on Archer, Skinningsrud (2012) argued that the Norwegian education system is centralised, because it is *governed centrally* by politicians who initiate reforms and educational guidelines, and it has a high degree of *unification* and *systematisation*. Another property is a low degree of *differentiation* between educational institutions and other institutions, which implies a low degree of autonomy. Finally, the degree of *specialisation* offered to pupils is low because the admission requirements, processes and achieved competence are universal. Archer (2013) argued that when the demand for education increased, the state education system emerged from integration with the Church to integration with interest groups within the nation state. Skinningsrud (2012) stated that the Norwegian education system, in addition to integration with the Church, was continually integrated with the state.

In a centralised education system, funnels for exercising influence are few (Rød & Bæck, 2020). External and professional interest groups, such as teachers' organisations (corporate agents) (Archer, 2003), try to influence central politicians at the macro level. Archer (2000) argued that collectives of agents cannot just make what they will of the situations in which they operate, since their circumstances include the distribution of resources and ideas available to them. Large, well-organised groupings with clear points will meet approval for their educational policy and aims, as it is the political negotiation process that is crucial for effecting change within the system (Archer, 2013). A centralised system seldom becomes decentralised, because this would imply a loss of both power and capital for the politicians involved. Moreover, if limited privilege and autonomy are given to exert agency within the system, it is on the premise that established power is maintained. Hence, according to Archer (1984), autonomy can be considered a concession, entailing that autonomy and privilege assigned by the leading group do not alter the distribution of power.

The centralised Norwegian education system has affected rural and Sámi education in Norway. According to Solstad and Thelin (2006), prior to 1959, the laws directing rural and urban education in Norway differed. However, the two school categories were unified at that point, and in 1969, the law on obligatory primary and lower secondary

education was passed. Researchers argued that because city schools were the norm, rural schools had to adapt to this norm, which again created urban schools as the premise provider for rural schools.

When the first Sámi curriculum was introduced in 1997, some of the same mechanisms in place in the urban schools (see Solstad, 2012) seemed to play a part in developing the Sámi curriculum. Because the relation between the education system/nation state and indigenous worldviews is of genuine logical contradiction and therefore incapable of direct resolution, the corrective exercise that aims to repair the inconsistency necessarily involves redefinition (Archer, 1995). These and similar perspectives have been discussed by authors writing on decolonisation (see, for instance, Keskinen et al., 2016; Kuokkanen, 2011; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Article I mentions that until recently, the corrective exercise was carried out through colonisation. The nation-state corrected Sámi society, so that it became consistent with or indistinguishable from the Norwegian state. Coloniality can be traced in education as it reproduces knowledges that continue to depict colonised peoples' knowledges and practices as backward, inferior or non-existent (Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020). For instance, in a report on LK06-S, Solstad (2012) stated that the Committee for Upbringing, Care and Education in the Sámi Parliament found it unfavourable that Sámi schools were only able to offer opinions on specific Sámi issues and not the entire content of the national curriculum. The report further found a conflict between the Sámi Parliament and the Norwegian government, as the parliament desired parallel and not identical curriculums (2012). Moreover, Solstad emphasised that the Core Curriculum describes the Norwegian culture as a monoculture, even though the curriculum states that the Nordic countries have a responsibility to safeguard Sámi culture. In a Nordic context, the denial of the colonisation of Sápmi (and Africa and the Americas) has been upheld and avoided in education (Keskinen et al., 2016).

4 Methods, ethical considerations and the quality of the study

This study aims to capture pupils' perspectives and experiences with education in two spatial contexts to explore how their agency is constrained or enabled by structure and space. To obtain both pupils' decision-making processes and the contexts, the thesis is based on 18 qualitative, longitudinal semi-structured interviews in combination with my own experiences. The analysis draws upon my previous contextual knowledge, having been raised in a rural Sámi community. To ensure some degree of contextual difference,

eight of the interviewees are pupils from a small, rural community given the fictive name Coastal Valley,⁴ while ten are from the city of Tromsø.

This thesis is part of a larger project (RUR-ED) and has a case study design that employs multiple methods and encompasses four case municipalities. RUR-ED is managed by UiT The Arctic University of Tromsø, with partners from the University of Oulu, Finland and Acadia University, Canada. RUR-ED, Spatial Inequalities and Spatial Justice in Education, focuses on education in rural and urban areas. The aim is to ensure a spatially just education system (RUR-ED, 2018). This thesis was informed by two of the four municipalities in the RUR-ED project. According to Bartlett and Vavrus (2017a), multi-cited studies do not contrast places assumed to be unrelated; instead, they look at linkages across place, space and time. Their heuristic aim is to “develop an approach to comparison that considers similarities, differences and possible linkage across sites, across hierarchies of power/levels, and across time” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017a, p. 17).

As stated by Smith (2012), research that involves indigenous individuals or communities should strive to make positive changes for the participants. Furthermore, “the research approach also has to address seriously, the cultural ground rules of respect, of working with communities, of sharing processes and knowledge” (Smith, 2012, p. 193). In this thesis, this is a much-needed approach, as part of the research is done in a coastal Sámi environment. There exists a body of literature concerning coastal Sámi research (see, for instance, Bjerkli, 2015; Hovland, 1999; Høgmo, 2011; Johansen, 2010; Pedersen et al., 2012). However, the voices of coastal Sámi youth are not often heard. The need to share processes and knowledge with the coastal Sámi community are important aspects throughout this thesis. These aspects will be addressed in several sections in this chapter.

This chapter comprises four parts: methodological considerations, ethical considerations, data analysis and the quality of the study. First, I present the methods and data collection strategies that were used. This includes the case study, the researcher’s prior experiences and knowledge of the contexts, qualitative interviews and the convergence between the two latter. Doing research in a familiar context and utilising my prior experiences included discussions of the researcher as having to deal with reflexive challenges. This is followed by an account of the data collection for this thesis, starting with a chronological outline of the data collection process, including utilising prior experiences and contextual knowledge. The interview process is also presented and discussed. Then, ethical considerations are discussed, including a

⁴ As the place is small and easy to reveal, the fictive name is given to provide anonymity for the participants.

discussion of the asymmetric power relations between the researcher and the participants, informed consent, confidentiality and leaving a research footprint. This is followed by an overview of the analysis process. Finally, the quality of the study is discussed.

4.1 Doing case study research

As stated above (see Chapter 2), traces are found of the ‘spatial turn’ in education research that took place in the latter part of the 20th century, but only in isolated pockets (Gulson & Symes, 2007). In this thesis, space is a substantive dimension; hence, understanding space and the context of the study is paramount. A case study design, used here, is one way to do this.

In their comparative case study approach (CCS), Bartlett and Vavrus (2017a) argued for a comparison across three axes when doing case studies: *horizontal*, *vertical* and *transversal*. The horizontal traces, e.g., social actors or documents across cases, the vertical compares influences at different levels and the transversal compares over time. According to Bartlett and Vavrus, “it is essential to divorce the phenomenon of interest from the context in order to gain analytical purchase” (p. 10). Additionally, the CCS heuristics emphasise an iterative and contingent tracking of subjects “to explore the historical and contemporary processes that have produced *a sense of* shared place, purpose or identity with regard to the central phenomenon” (p. 10, original emphasis). I found that Bartlett and Vavrus’ CCS approach corresponds with Archer’s three stage model and the morphogenetic approach as applied in this thesis, as both the CCS and Archer seek to explore how people interact with structures over time. In this thesis, the *horizontal axes* traced the participating pupils over time as they made decisions about and entered upper secondary education in different locations, yet within the same education system. The *vertical axes* compare influences at different levels by looking at national (or international) policymaking to examine what locations have in common. In this thesis, this was done to some extent by considering, for instance, regional demography and corporate agents’ power to act within the system. The *transversal axes* explored how these horizontal and vertical connections were formed historically and have led to spatially differentiated effects (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017b, p. 51ff), for example, the constraints and enablements the pupils confront in the education system and the colonisation of Sápmi.

To investigate the educational orientation among pupils and their decision-making processes in one rural and one urban municipality, I contacted one rural and one urban school that I knew of and received permission to interview pupils in the tenth grade. The participants included eight pupils from the rural school and ten from the urban school. This thesis acknowledges the growing interconnections between national education and

global organisations that fund and evaluate their operations (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017b), which again influence and are influenced by local politics.

4.1.1 Selection of case studies

Case study research starts by identifying the specific case(s) that will be described and analysed. All social research is done within a context, and “no ‘place’ is unaffected by history and politics; any specific location is influenced by economic, political and social processes well beyond its physical and temporal boundaries” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017b, p. 12). Along with Bartlett and Vavrus, I hold that locations comprise social activities and social interactions, which can change (morphogenesis) or reproduce (morphostasis) social structures (Archer, 1995).

Both rural and urban municipalities were chosen for practical reasons and because they have distinct features. Today, I live and work in Tromsø, but I grew up, lived and worked in an area quite like Coastal Valley. Thus, my knowledge of education in both rural and urban areas was valuable in understanding the context. The rural school is multi-graded and comprises fewer than 100 pupils from the first to the tenth grades (ages 6–16), while the urban school is a lower secondary school with approximately 400 pupils from the eight to the tenth grades (ages 13–16).

The Coastal Valley community is rural on several measures, such as declining population, distance to the city/larger centre and services such as hospitals and upper secondary and tertiary education. These are some of the reasons for choosing this municipality. It is also rural based on geography; there are large geographic distances within the municipality and it has low population density. The municipality closed several compulsory schools due to the economy and is thus comparable to other rural municipalities. Some of the municipality’s educational results were below average (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2021). In addition, it is part of the SSA, in contrast to many Norwegian municipalities. This makes it an important and interesting case for comparison, both with the urban municipality and with other rural municipalities, in future research.

The urban municipality, Tromsø, was chosen primarily because it is not rural; even though it is small compared to global cities, it is one of the largest in Northern Norway. The other cities under consideration were smaller in size and therefore less distinct from the rural community. The urban school where this study was performed was also the first in Tromsø that agreed to participate in the project.

Both contexts contribute to this thesis and provide valuable insights into education (and future work) opportunities for young people in one rural and one urban area. While the rural area faces a declining population and relatively scarce occupational prospects, the

urban community is more prosperous with population growth and a variety of occupational prospects.

As discussed in Chapter 2, defining rurality is not always easy. The two case municipalities represent two different positions relating to the urban–rural continuum. Even though Coastal Valley is considered to be rural (SSB, 2021), this thesis (and the included articles) does not include a working taxonomy of the rural–urban continuum; instead, it concentrates on *different spatial contexts*, emphasising *contextualisation* as a way to give attention to spatial differences in education (c.f. Bæck, 2015; P. Roberts & Green, 2013; Soja, 2013).

4.1.2 Focusing on pupils in research

Pupils are at the centre of educational institutions. They can give insights into the challenges and opportunities they face concerning education and future life and work. Moreover, they can shed light on how they reflexively negotiate constraints and opportunities in the educational decision-making process. Although young people can be described as a vulnerable group, they are capable of sharing knowledge about their expectations and experiences. While designing this project, I was concerned about conducting research that would enable pupils to share their knowledge. In the social sciences, there is an aim to bring forward the voices of marginalised people and strive to make research democratic; such groups include, for instance, rural youth and indigenous peoples.

When writing a text that includes coastal Sámi perspectives, there can be a danger of representing the Sámi as the Other; researchers (belonging to a Sámi community) might have learnt to read about themselves as the Other, thus uncritically adopting these patterns of writing (see, for instance, Smith, 2012). There is also the notion of ‘who speaks for whom’. In this writing – especially in the three articles – I present the young peoples’ voices; however, I analyse their articulations and must therefore be cautious not to misrepresent them. One way to do this is through my knowledge of and experiences with the contexts.

In the education system, teachers, pupils and parents hold different yet complementary positions. In educational research, there has been a focus on pupils’ educational aspirations and attainment level (Bourdieu, 2006; Bæck, 2011), contextual factors such as low SES (Jury et al., 2017), and urban–rural differences (Beach et al., 2018; Bæck, 2019; Hernández-Torrano, 2018). In a Nordic context, it has also been argued that residing in rural areas affects how young people think about education and future work (Kåks, 2007; Svensson, 2006; Waara, 1996). However, there is a lack of research articulating pupils’ voices, to which this thesis aims to contribute. The ways pupils relate to schooling (e.g., teachers, subjects and curriculum) and their way through the

education system could make a strong case when investigating spatial inequalities in education, in particular for rural pupils. Getting to know the pupils and their experiences with the education system and, to some extent, education policy can be a good entry point when discussing these aspects.

4.2 Data collection strategies

This thesis used semi-structured interviews supplemented by prior contextual knowledge and my own experiences. In this section, I present an introduction and discussion of the chosen methods, followed by a discussion of the convergence of the two data collection strategies. This is followed by a more specific account of the data collection procedures in the respective case municipalities.

4.2.1 Doing research in a familiar context and using my own experiences

This research was carried out in a familiar context, which influenced this thesis. This represents situated knowledge, meaning the knowledge is socially situated and thus only incomplete (Haraway, 1988). As a researcher, one sees from somewhere; one investigates and writes from a position. Therefore, it is vital to be reflexive when conducting research, which means continually engaging with and articulating the researcher's position and place of research (see also Barrett et al., 2020).

There are several advantages and disadvantages to performing this type of research, especially since I am not a stranger to the field. In line with Kvalsund and Hargreaves (2014), I recognise that, as an educational researcher, I am subject to confirmation bias from the prejudices that influence my first impression. It became imperative throughout the research process to reflexively question these biases by becoming my own sociologist (Wadel et al., 2014). Against this backdrop, I deliberately used my experiences and background for my research. The knowledges and practices are familiar, and I possess a viable, positioned knowledge of the fields (see also Haraway, 1998). This helped guide me in designing the project and interview guides, and in collecting and analysing the data.

On the other hand, this familiarity with the field can be taken for granted. Whereas an outsider might be able to discover their own bias and tacit knowledge, this could remain hidden to the insider; hence, I had to be aware of the insider–outsider perspective. When doing research in familiar surroundings, the researcher is part of what Wadel et al. (2014) called “mutual knowledge”, which one can draw upon when researching familiar contexts. It is not necessarily the researcher's academic knowledge that guides their understanding of the observations made, but their mutual knowledge with the people participating in the study (Wadel et al., 2014); this required consideration. My rural upbringing could influence my research, as I have personal experiences with, for

instance, undertaking education in a rural school, geographical distance (to further education), access to services, rural demographics, and the Norwegianisation process. The hazard lay in the possibility of exaggerating my experiences and politicised topics or reducing certain points to compensate for my own biases. The same influences and familiarity applied to my teaching background. I have been a certified teacher for over 20 years in lower secondary school. My knowledge of the education system and the curriculum could be taken for granted due to my experience in this field.

Haraway (1988) argued that there is something to gain when seeing from the margins, but there also lies a danger of romanticising and/or appropriating the position of disadvantages while claiming the ability to take such position. Olive (2014) stated there is a risk of overlooking “hidden nuances, meanings, and concepts within a culture” (p.5) when the researcher takes a solely etic approach. Wadel et al. (2014) mentioned there are issues that must be considered when doing research in a familiar context; the researcher must be aware of the role they inhabit as well as the roles given them by the participants. Wadel further stated that the researcher should be capable of using themselves as an informant, hence being their own sociologist. There is also the possibility that tacit knowledge and things taken for granted within the culture might be presumed and invisible to the inside researcher (Paulgaard, 1997; Wadel et al., 2014). As an inside researcher, I had to be critical of my own role and perspectives; however, I benefitted from my inside knowledge and was able to get close enough to elicit otherwise ‘hidden’ information relevant to the topic researched. According to Smith (2012), as with outsider research, insider research needs to be ethical and respectful, as well as reflexive and critical. To consider that as an insider one’s “own experience is all that is required is arrogant” (p. 140); that I know the context validates my experiences, but certainly not the perspectives of others.

In the following sections, I will present the strategies I used to counteract different forms of conflation that might occur when the researcher is deeply familiar with the context. The strategies presented here are ways of being one’s own sociologist (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wadel et al., 2014), of employing reflexivity, of being an actor and an observer during the research (Barrett et al., 2020). Being an actor and an observer simultaneously is a difficult task, yet necessary, because it provides transparency and a way to be critical throughout the research process. Thus, it assists in discussing research ethics and the study’s strengths and weaknesses.

The first strategy focuses on an epistemic conflation that occurs within the researcher, causing a possible conflation between the empirical data and the analysis. In the data collection process, when making field notes, the researcher must distinguish between empirical data and their thoughts and analyses about what occurs (Wadel et al., 2014). This strategy was used both during the data collection and when writing up my research.

Field notes were taken during the interview days and enabled me to reflect upon mine and the participants' mutual knowledge after the interview sequences. In addition, they enabled a reinterpretation of the data at a later point in terms that a conflated form of writing would not allow. And they assisted the academic writing process, analysis and discourses, as I did not need to separate analysis from the data (see also Rød, 2021).

The second strategy focuses on another epistemic conflation that the researcher must comprehend, namely, between the emic (the informant's) and etic (the researcher's) perspectives (Olive, 2014). Before entering the field, I wrote down what I considered crucial prior experiences of growing up in a rural area and working as a teacher. I did this to sort the biases, values and experiences I brought to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and avoid mistaking them for the participants' experiences. An insider in the field of research who therefore holds an emic perspective might be at risk of not achieving enough analytic distance (Paulgaard, 1997), while an outsider might struggle to get close enough to understand what is taking place (Olive, 2014; Paulgaard, 1997). This conflation has two dimensions. First, the researcher can incorporate the participant's perspectives and thus become the participant's extension. Second, the researcher can envisage her own preconceptions as the participant's perspectives (see also Rød, 2021).

I avoided conflating emic and etic perspectives by being reflexive throughout the research project and attentive to the relations between myself as the researcher and the participants. I considered myself neither a complete insider nor an outsider, but rather on a continuum, which allowed me to benefit from the advantages and reduce the potential hurdles of one status or another. Paulgaard (1997) argued that fieldwork conducted within one's own culture does not necessarily imply a study of that culture, meaning an insider can have enough distance from the participants to conduct a study. This is also acknowledged by Smith (2012), who found herself to be both an outsider and an insider. Some things made me an outsider in the community: I attended the university and I was doing research; furthermore, I had worked as a teacher for many years and I lived in the city.

A researcher might be viewed as an official, not someone who entirely belongs, but one who can obtain certain kinds of knowledge – the knowledge the participants share. The insider can potentially access opinions, knowledges, practices and perspectives because they share a common understanding and “know the language”. This was, for instance, acknowledged by the participants, who stated that “it was easy to talk to [me] because [I] know what it is like to grow up and live in a location like this” (Eric). At the same time, the researcher must be aware of their role as a researcher, ensuring the participants do not view the researcher as one of them and therefore share information they otherwise would not have shared. Concerning my role as a researcher in relation to the participants, I was never the participants' teacher, and I was much older than them. Furthermore, I

told them they did not need to share specific thoughts with me if I saw they were hesitant. Therefore, I believe the preferred distance between researcher and informant was maintained in my project and that I did not ‘invade’ their private lives. The power relationship between the researcher and informants is a relevant topic that is discussed in the ethics chapter below.

The challenges inherent in being one’s own sociologist and measuring apparatus (Wadel et al., 2014) continue when writing the thesis because the same connotations still pertain. However, when writing academic articles, the researcher must engage with others’ writing and compare their data to that of others (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rød, 2021). In addition, within the research team (RUR-ED), we discussed the research process, our results and article ideas, thereby ensuring reflexivity throughout the research process. This process requires reflexivity, as one must engage with one’s own data in comparison to others.

By thinking with previous research and theories, and accommodating for research, I find Haraway’s (1988) point crucial, namely, that situated knowledges require that research participants be pictured as actors and agents, not as a form of resource to the researcher who can take the stance of an objective knower. On this important note, I will move on to the data collection methods, namely, interviews.

4.2.2 Qualitative interviews

Qualitative interviews are distinctive kinds of conversations or speech events used by researchers to explore informants’ experiences and interpretations (Spradley, 2016). Throughout the 20th century, qualitative interviews were used in the social sciences in varying degrees, especially in fields such as anthropology and sociology, and in pedagogy and health sciences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2010), the qualitative interview seeks to understand “the world” from the perspective of the interviewee, and it produces knowledge between the interviewer and the interviewee. The meaning structures informants use to organise their experiences and make sense of the world are often hidden from direct observations and taken for granted by participants (Hatch, 2002). Thus, “[i]f we want to find out what people know, we must get inside their head” (Spradley, 2016, p. 8).

In my research project, the main interview form is a semi-structured interview between the researcher and the interviewee. These interviews were conducted with the aim of exploring the pupils’ experiences with education and understanding how they perceived their path through the education system. However, it is important to be aware of Polanyi’s (2009) argument that “we can know more than we can tell”, acknowledging that tacit knowledge may or may not be verbalised. He argued that not all knowledge

can be expressed through speech, but must be collected through other suitable means (Polanyi & Sen, 2009). The interviews are discussed in detail in Section 4.3.

Researchers can choose from many forms of interviews, from formally structured to semi-structured to more loosely structured. For this study, semi-structured interviews were used. This means that I, the researcher, led the interviews and the time was set, although some flexibility was possible. Although semi-structured interviews are guided by initial questions, in line with Hatch (2002), the researcher may follow the informant's lead and examine areas that arise during the interview.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2010), the qualitative interview is not a dialogue taking place between equal partners; it is characterised by asymmetrical power dynamics. In this dynamic, the interviewer is 'in charge' of the interview. Hence, ethics need to be considered; this is addressed later in this chapter. Moreover, it was important to create an atmosphere in which the participants felt comfortable.

As stated in Spradley (2016), a large part of any culture comprises *tacit knowledge*. We know things we are unable to express accurately; therefore, the researcher must make inferences about what people know. Regarding the researcher's stance in relation to their informants, Spradley (2016) said:

By word and by action, in subtle ways and direct statements, they say, "I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?" (p. 34).

This is what I wanted to do in my research, and what I told the pupils: "I don't know the things you know; I want you to tell me about your experiences". When conducting interviews, the researcher is the main instrument and the interview should be regarded as a craft. This implies that the researcher is competent and has knowledge of how to perform interviews – their ability, sensitivity and knowledge are decisive factors in the quality of the knowledge that is produced (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). There are advantages and disadvantages when conducting interviews. They are less time-consuming than observations. Their main strength is their privileged access to the participant's lifeworld (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010).

Hatch (2002) argued that the researcher seeks to capture participant perspectives, so the questions asked must be open-ended. The interview often starts with *background questions*, which help the participant talk about familiar information, get used to the situation and ease their concerns regarding the interview situation. "*Essential questions* are essential because they get at the core of the research; they generate the central data of the study" (Hatch, 2002, p. 103). Based on Spradley, Hatch (2002) provided the

following taxonomy to structure the writing of essential questions: descriptive, structural and contrast questions. *Descriptive questions* are designed to get informants talking about topics they know. *Structural questions* provide tools for exploring the relations informants see in their cultural experience and studying how they make sense of the social phenomena under investigation. This study provided questions such as: “Do you feel a sense of belonging to this place?” and “How did you experience the transition from lower to upper secondary school?” *Contrast questions* explore how informants make meaning of their social world. These are examples of contrasting questions in this study: “What is the difference between lower and upper secondary school?” and “Can you describe a motivated pupil and a pupil who is not that motivated for school?”

As a teacher to pupils of the same age as the participants, I understand interactions with young people and find it easy to establish relationships with them. However, when asked for the second interview, one pupil said he did not have time. I considered whether the interview situation was uncomfortable for him because during the session he sometimes seemed uneasy, especially when talking of matters close to the heart. However, after completing the interview, he stated he felt comfortable. Nevertheless, I considered whether I somehow created a situation of unease. In reviewing the interview several times, I could not find any other reason besides the one he gave as to why he could not attend the follow-up interview.

What was especially interesting was my way of asking questions both to the pupils and to myself as a researcher. As stated in Hatch (2002), I monitored myself. I participated in the external conversation but simultaneously held an internal conversation. I sensed whether they felt uncomfortable with questions; then I would rephrase or move on and return to the questions later. I was listening for keywords that I asked them to elaborate on. When listening to and transcribing the interviews, if I observed that I had failed to ask them to elaborate on some issues, this was then done in follow-up interviews.

4.2.3 Questionnaire on modes of reflexivity

In addition to the interviews, the pupils completed a questionnaire on their mode of reflexivity. Developed and tried out by Margaret Archer (2007), the Internal Conversation Indicator (ICONI) questionnaire identifies clear practitioners of each dominant mode of reflexivity: communicative reflexives, autonomous reflexives, meta-reflexives and fractured reflexives (Archer, 2007, p. 329ff for additional information). The questionnaire comprises 13 questions with a fixed scale between the scores of 1–7. A score of 4 or above in any category assigns a subject to either the communicative, autonomous, meta or fractured category as their dominant mode of reflexivity. These scores are indicative, as the ICONI is not meant to stand alone (Archer, 2007). In

addition, pupils were asked to rank the three most important areas in life at that moment from 11 statements. The statements were made by the researcher to fit the Norwegian context and the participating age group; pupils could also fill in other main concerns themselves. Based on the ICONI, Archer's book *Making Our Way through Life* and a personal conversation with Archer, the additional 11 statements were created to make it easier for pupils to answer the questionnaire. As the ICONI was supplementary to the interviews, the interviews were the main source for analysing pupils' modes of reflexivity.

4.2.4 Methodological triangulation, qualitative interviews supplemented with contextual knowledge and own experiences

Methodological triangulation means using a combination of methods in the same study to corroborate evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Greene (2007) stated that triangulation is used to counteract biases and strengthen the validity of inquiry results. In this thesis, I focused on qualitative interviews supplemented with contextual knowledge, and I used my own experiences. In addition, I used a questionnaire on mode of reflexivity. I aimed to show how conducting longitudinal interviews and doing research in one's own culture, which provide contextual knowledge, and using one's experiences can be considered triangulation, as the researcher used several data sources to investigate the participant's perspective. The questionnaire was a supplement to the interviews and, therefore, remain in the background.

The research question for this thesis, namely, how rural pupils make their way through the Norwegian educational system and to what extent structural constraints and/or enablements frame objective structures, is closely linked to this section. I hold that some pupils' experiences and negotiations can be expressed verbally and collected through interviews and analyses. I also hold that some experiences and negotiations are tacit and can be understood using my own experiences and contextual knowledge. By interviewing pupils, I gained insight into what they shared with me. In addition, the data was shared with the research group. My own experiences from growing up and living in a rural area for many years and from working as a teacher and today living in Tromsø allow for profound spatial knowledge, this is both data and utilised when analysing the interviews.

Triangulation seeks broader, deeper and more comprehensive social understanding by using methods that touch on different aspects of the same complex phenomenon (Greene, 2007). The results from these methods serve to elaborate, enhance and deepen the analysis (Greene, 2007). An example of how the interviews converged with my own experiences and knowledge of the field occurred in Coastal Valley. Some interview

questions were related to ethnicity and local knowledge taught in schools. My contextual knowledge guided me in formulating the questions. Many of the pupils found it difficult to answer the question, and some provided incomplete answers. This was data, yet it felt incomplete. By reframing and adding similar questions in the follow-up interviews and utilising my own experiences, several opinions and answers emerged.

Combining research methods is quite common, especially interviews and observations. Because of my previous experiences and contextual knowledge and for economic reasons, I did not conduct participant observations. Greene (2007) argues that triangulation seeks enhanced validity or credibility through convergence, corroboration or correspondence. This validation was obtained through the use of follow-up interviews in combination with my own experiences and contextual knowledge (c.f. Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017b; Greene, 2007). The combination provides validation, and data from several inquiries allows for a deeper understanding.

4.3 An outline of the data collection

This section presents an outline of the data collection for this thesis, a discussion of my role as researcher and how I reflected upon my own research. The aim is to make the data collection process as transparent as possible.

This study used longitudinal, semi-structured qualitative interviews with 18 pupils. The data was collected in two periods between 2015 and 2020.⁵ The first round of interviews was conducted in two lower secondary schools. In both schools, the project leader and I had initial meetings with the principal to talk about the larger project and listen to what they wanted to gain from participating. Due to the divergent sizes of the two schools, we had to recruit informants in different ways.

One school (eight pupils) was situated in a rural area and the other (ten pupils) was situated in an urban setting. I chose to talk to pupils in tenth grade first because they were in the process of applying for upper secondary schools, and therefore had to reflect upon which school to apply to, which tracks (vocational or general education) and so on. Second, they had attended the same lower secondary school for many years; hence, they might be able to reflect upon, for instance, how the school was integrated in the local community, how they perceived curriculum related to local and national issues, relations with teachers and peers and so forth.

I began by piloting the interview with two young people to ensure the questions were understandable and interesting to answer and whether the time consumption was adequate. The first interview was conducted with a young person a few years older than

⁵ The exact years of the study were not disclosed as informants, especially in the small rural community, could be identified if too much information were revealed.

my participants. This was done because I knew they would give honest feedback on the interview guide. I had to reformulate some questions that were difficult to understand. The next person was the same age as my study participants. This young person found the questions interesting and mentioned it was helpful when having to reflect upon upper secondary education.

I interviewed 18 pupils on two (three) occasions. The first interviews took place when the pupils, aged 15–16, were in the tenth grade in compulsory school. The follow-up interviews were conducted a couple of months into the first semester of upper secondary school. Later the same year, I conducted telephone interviews with pupils from the rural municipality to have them elaborate on some of the answers they had given in the initial interviews. This was done because some of the topics they had talked about caught my attention, and I wanted to supplement my data with a more thorough understanding of their reflections.

Table 3

Overview of the research participants

Participants ⁶	Location	Parents' occupation		Upper secondary track	Reflexivity mode (<i>main/secondary</i>)
		Mother	Father		
Anja*	Coastal Valley	Farmer/service	Farmer/service	Academic	Meta/ communicative
Alan		Farmer/public sector	Farmer/service	Vocational	Autonomous
Birgitte		Teacher	Tradesman	Academic	Autonomous
Ben		Licensed nurse	Self-employed	Vocational	Autonomous
Charlotte*		Public health worker	Engineer	Academic	Autonomous/ communicative
Cody		Sixth form teacher	Tradesman	Academic	Autonomous/ meta
David		Public sector leadership	Kindergarten assistant	Vocational	Autonomous

⁶ Names of participants are fictive to ensure privacy and anonymity.

Participants ⁶	Location	Parents' occupation		Upper secondary track	Reflexivity mode (<i>main/secondary</i>)
Eric		Sixth form teacher	Tradesman	Vocational	Meta
Frida	Tromsø	Long-term sick leave	Self-employed	Vocational	Meta (f)
Fredrik		Lecturer	Service	Academic	Autonomous
Greta		Long-term sick leave	Tradesman	Vocational	Meta (f)
Glenn		Specialised licenced nurse	Private health sector	Academic	Autonomous/ communicative
Hanna*		Kindergarten assistant	Tradesman	Academic	Communicative/ autonomous
Hans		Long-term sick leave	Tradesman	Academic	Autonomous
Ida		Photographer	Tradesman	Vocational	Autonomous
Jennifer*		Accountant	Service	Academic	Autonomous/ communicative
Odin* ⁷		Public health worker	Captain	Vocational	Initial Communicative

4.3.1 Doing research in Coastal Valley

First, I must reiterate that I grew up in a context similar to Coastal Valley. Due to the connectedness between communities in the area and knowledge of the inhabitants, participating pupils probably knew me as, for instance, someone's teacher, aunt, sister, or friend. This required consideration.

Although I did not conduct fieldwork in the manner described in much of the qualitative research literature, I found inspiration and gained insight into this approach by reading what other researchers had experienced (Paulgaard, 1997; Smith, 2012; Wadel et al., 2014). I spent limited time in the community conducting the interviews. However, my

⁷ * Follow-up interviews: Odin did not participate. Anja and Charlotte, and Hanna and Jennifer decided to do it in pairs for convenience.

knowledge of the area and my experiences of growing up and teaching in a rural, coastal Sámi area provided contextual and mutual knowledge. Data collection started when I went to Coastal Valley to organise the interviews. I met with the tenth-grade teacher to discuss them and get some information about the class.

The school in Coastal Valley is situated in the middle of the community. There is access to a football field and areas to go biking and skiing. I spent three days in the community conducting the interviews. I would come to the school in the morning and chat with the teachers in the staff room before doing the first interview. While waiting for each pupil to arrive, I would take notes from the previous interview, such as the impression of the interview setting, thoughts that came to mind after the interview session, topics that caught special considerations and so forth. In addition, I would prepare for the next interview.

Before arriving in Coastal Valley, I had emailed the teacher the topics in the interview guide. The class had reviewed these topics, so they were familiar with my areas of interest. According to Archer (2003; 1995), to avoid conflating structure, culture and agency in the analysis, one must distinguish among them. The interview guide was divided into several sections to cover the three aspects. The first category was background information, including historical/generational belonging to the natal place. The subsequent sections addressed i) relations to the natal place; ii) spare-time activities; iii) friends and social network, including well-being and sense of belonging; iv) school well-being; v) relationship to teachers; vi) at school, including reflecting upon themselves as pupils, classroom environment, reflections about subjects and the local school's involvement with the community; vii) plans for further education, including family expectations; and viii) reflection on Sámi, Kven, Norwegian identity (in Coastal Valley).

When it was time to enter the class, the teacher introduced me. I told I wanted to understand their lives as young people in Coastal Valley, that they were the experts here, and that I was the one without answers. I also told them to reflect on growing up here. Finally, I told them about informed consent and what that meant. I emphasised that they had the right to withdraw their consent at any time without explanation, which they stated they understood.

I was assigned a meeting room to conduct the interviews. All the pupils confirmed they felt comfortable talking there. I walked with each participant from their classroom to the meeting room. We would chat while walking, which served as an informal way to break the ice. Once seated, I asked if they minded me recording the interview; nobody objected. We started by reviewing the informed consent, which they all signed, and other technicalities. Because I was interviewing minors, I was careful to ensure they

understood the meaning of informed consent and emphasised that nobody outside the research group would have access to our conversations, including the teachers. I conducted a debriefing with each pupil after the interview.

The interviews averaged 45 minutes to an hour. They were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed. Before we started, I reiterated that I did not have the answers to the questions I asked but that they were the experts; I wanted them to reflect upon their experiences. I felt it was necessary to state this clearly, as I believe pupils are accustomed to being asked questions to which teachers know the answers.

There was some variation in how the interviews were carried out. Some participants answered the questions, while others asked questions and reflected further with me. This meant rigour was not achieved by maintaining the same manner with all informants but by adapting to the situation and to what I found ethically justifiable in balancing involvement and distance regarding participants. When conducting interviews, I find it important to facilitate communication that feels safe and encourages understanding and reflexivity. I did this by conducting interviews in a familiar space that pupils considered safe. I took the time to talk to them before and after the interviews, building trust and mutual understanding of what we, the pupil and researcher, wanted to achieve from the interview. They were invited to ask and to stop at any time if they had questions or felt unease. This meant listening, being quiet and having time to stop and think. As stated by Ahmed (2000), “[a]n ethical communication is about a certain way of holding proximity and distance together: one gets close enough to others to be touched by that which cannot be simply got across” (p. 157). To Ahmed, careful listening is about being able to balance closeness and distance and striving for mutual understanding. Careful listening is more than hearing; it is a process that challenges the researcher’s prejudices and means learning from the interviewee. When conducting the interviews, I aimed to listen to the pupils and see their challenges and opportunities from their perspectives. I engaged in the conversation by gesturing, e.g., nodding and smiling, and by trying not to interrupt their talk. However, this was a difficult exercise and when listening to the interviews, I found that I occasionally interrupted and/or did not follow up on their line of thought. In retrospect, I think they found it exciting teaching and informing me about being young in Coastal Valley.

4.3.2 Doing research in Tromsø

I worked in lower secondary school in Tromsø for several years, and I had to keep in mind that the pupils might know me as someone’s teacher, colleague or friend. Moreover, I have knowledge of different schools in the city through meeting teachers and other staff members from all the schools during formal and informal professional events. When approaching schools to conduct research, I found it valuable that I was

known beforehand. However, the principal at the researched school told me they would have rejected participation if they had not found it interesting or found time for it. Therefore, I am confident that I, as a known teacher, did not ‘force’ the project through.

When I entered the school a few weeks after I had finished data collection in Coastal Valley, I was welcomed by the teachers and the principal. The class teacher and I followed the same procedures as in Coastal Valley. In the staff room, we discussed organising the interviews based on the schedule and set up a tentative timetable that was later presented in class. In class, I went through the same procedure as in the Coastal Valley school. I was assigned a room near the classroom for the interviews. The pupils agreed this was a good spot to talk. During the short walk to the room, we introduced ourselves and chatted. Before starting the interview, I reviewed the informed consent in the same manner as in Coastal Valley. After the interview, we conducted a debriefing. Before leaving school for the day, I wrote notes about what had happened during the day.

4.3.3 Follow-up interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted after the pupils had attended upper secondary school for several months. I had previously arranged with the relevant school principals to conduct the interviews during school hours. Some pupils wanted to do the interview after school, in which case we met either at a café or at their home. One boy from the urban area had no time to conduct the second interview; hence, there were 17 participants in the follow-up sample.

Most pupils wanted to have an individual interview, as they had in the tenth grade, although two girls from the rural area and two from the urban area wanted to do it in pairs for convenience. These interviews lasted longer, as the girls took turns when answering the questions. They supplemented each other’s answers comfortably, indicating that the interview situation felt safe and inclusive. While paired interviews could have influenced my data, I felt confident these girls stated their own opinions and thoughts in the follow-up interviews. Their conversations with me and with one another left the impression that their answers were more nuanced and provided deeper knowledge of their experiences. However, I did not urge the other participants to do paired interviews, as this was not a main intention. In future research, follow-up interviews in pairs could be considered; having some knowledge of the participants could facilitate such interviews and possibly lead to deeper discussions and nuanced perspectives.

After attending to the technicalities and informed consent, we talked about their answers in the first round of interviews. Some found this exciting, and they asked questions and discussed various topics, while others wanted to start the interview. The interview guide

was categorised to cover the aspects mentioned in Section 4.3.1: structure, culture and agency. The categories included i) general background information related to entering upper secondary school; ii) pupils' school history, including decision-making concerning tracks, school location, upper secondary school experiences, perceived differences between lower and upper secondary, reflections upon subjects, tracks and the relevance of education; iii) spare-time activities; iv) future plans; and v) their main concerns at the moment.

Before conducting the follow-up interviews, the pupils completed a questionnaire on their mode of reflexivity, ICONI. The interviews averaged 45 minutes to an hour. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim and analysed using NVivo.

When I analysed the interviews with the rural participants, it was striking how they considered themselves in relation to ethnicity. I had been cautious when asking them about their perceptions of being Sámi, Kven, Norwegian or a mixed, as I thought, based on my prior experiences that this would be a delicate topic. I was astonished by the pupils' openness and willingness to share. In retrospect, I found that the topic of being Sámi, Kven, Norwegian or mixed begged for a more thorough examination; hence, I texted the participants and asked whether they would consider participating in a third interview about this issue. All of them agreed. I therefore conducted 15–30-minute telephone interviews with them in the spring. After chatting for a few minutes, I told them what had caught my attention in their previous interviews. They agreed to discuss their 'negotiation of identity' further. After the interview, I asked them how they felt about the situation; they all stated it had been an interesting talk. One boy revealed he normally did not enjoy talking on the phone; however, he found this call interesting and fun.

From this, I learned that even though I knew the context and had prior experience, I was somewhat surprised at how the participants provided answers and reflected on the rather difficult topic of one's identity. Yet, I had the distinct impression that they did so because they perceived me as an insider who could relate to their perspectives.

4.4 Ethical considerations

According to the Norwegian Research Ethics Committees (NESH), conducting research with children and young people involves those who are often considered a vulnerable group because of their age. This required careful consideration. There are key areas for ethical consideration in doing research with children: harm and benefits, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality and payment and compensation (NESH, 2016). Ethical considerations can arise when there exists a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the participants, where the researcher normally holds the strongest position (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kvale, 2010). The interview could be considered both

a one-way dialogue with imbalanced reciprocity and a manipulative sequence; it could also contribute to “using” the participants as an end for the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, the researcher has control over how the data is presented; representation is an important responsibility. One way to address this is by doing methodologically sound research. One attempt is to be aware of and discuss the particular modes of encounter, rather than a particular Other, which, according to Ahmed (2000) is to “open the encounter up, *to fail to grasp it*” (p. 145). According to Ahmed, the researcher must reflect upon what made the encounter possible and what it makes possible (in the future). To describe the encounter and not the other is to open the encounter and the possibilities it brings.

The young people in my study might consider me a person with more knowledge and power; therefore, it was important to make them understand they were the experts in this field, as described in Section 4.3.1. Another aspect to consider is to avoid asking leading questions. Children and young people are susceptible to being led by such questions and can therefore give unreliable and misleading information. Hence, in the interview guide, I took care to avoid asking leading questions, although it is hard to state whether I succeeded. In addition, the pilot interviews helped me consider my questions reflexively; some questions were reformulated before I entered the field.

As outlined above, a competent researcher reflexively avoids the hazard of conflation. Above, it is stated that representation becomes unreliable if the researcher fails to separate the data from their own thoughts and interpretations. The representation can also be unreliable if the researcher fails to distinguish between their own and the participants’ perspectives. Representing someone without stereotyping and using insensitive labels (Creswell & Poth, 2018) is ethically indisputable and should be the standard in research.

Below, I present the ethical concepts I found to be the most relevant and challenging during the research process. First, I discuss informed consent, including the balance between consent and confidentiality concerning the research participants and research interests. I then problematise any footprint the researcher may leave.

Informed consent is a universal ethical concept in the social sciences when collecting data among people. The idea of informed consent is that the participants have the right to know what they consent to. They also need to know that they can withdraw at any time without any reason (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002; NESH, 2016). The research project RUR-ED, including my PhD project, was authorised by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD; see the Appendix for information). To meet the prerequisite for such authorisation, a written consent form and written information about

the project were included. In addition, the data was stored and treated according to NSD guidelines.

According to NESH (2016), minors aged 15 can consent to research. Since the informants were 15 years old when the research started, I did not need informed consent from parents. Nevertheless, the class teacher informed them in a parental meeting and I sent an email to inform parents of the project and their right to reject their child's participation. Before the interviews, I provided information to all the pupils about the project and its purpose. I reviewed the informed consent with the pupils and ensured they understood what they were signing. They signed the informed consent form before the interview section started.

Two important concepts in the social sciences are confidentiality and anonymisation. Confidentiality in science implies that data identifying informants cannot be disclosed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). The purpose of anonymity is to protect an individual's privacy so that the information is treated properly and identifiable data is processed by as few people as possible (NESH, 2016). The reason for considering confidentiality and anonymisation is that both I and the other researchers in the project promised the participants confidentiality while obtaining their consent.

4.4.1 Balance between confidentiality and research interests

In my PhD project, one challenge was the balance between participant confidentiality and the research interest of bringing in space as an important dimension. The balance is not easy; however, in this project, there is an apparent convergence between the participants' and the researcher's interests in giving voice to pupils. In my opinion, the ethical guidelines and literature on qualitative methods in the social sciences say little about how to solve this problem or that of handling the risk of disclosure while giving rich descriptions.

Qualitative research often contains rich descriptions of participants; "confidentiality breaches via deductive disclosure are of particular concern to qualitative researchers" (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1). Regarding confidentiality, NESH (2016) stated, "When researchers promise confidentiality to participants, the pledge implies that the information will not be passed on in ways that can identify the individuals. Both the credibility of the researchers and the participants' trust in research are closely linked to confidentiality". Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) argued it is important to protect the personal life of the informants when presenting data.

Furthermore, NESH (2016) stated that "researchers are responsible for ensuring that participants are not exposed to serious physical harm or other severe or unreasonable strain as result of research". Kaiser (2009) argued that this approach places great responsibility on the researcher and proposed an alternative understanding of

confidentiality. She argued for moving away from the assumption that every respondent wants complete confidentiality and instead recognised that a participant might want to receive recognition for contributing to a study (Kaiser, 2009). While I considered this aspect, I followed a more dominant approach. However, I discussed the individual data with the participants in the follow-up interviews, along with my concerns about confidentiality. These discussions revealed that the participants had few concerns relating to this issue.

Researchers face unique and vague ethical dilemmas when disseminating rich data in qualitative research (Kaiser, 2009). One challenge occurred in my PhD project, namely, the research interest in geographical place versus the confidentiality of the participants. This thesis focuses on spatial issues related to education; thus, there is a need to illustrate context and display locational features. Interesting aspects include geographical location, ethnicity, local history, gender, socioeconomic status, educational aspirations and local labour opportunities. A rich description of these factors can facilitate triangulation and thus compromise the place of data collection and the class cohort, gender, year of data collection and ethnicity, among other factors, leading to the identification of specific pupils. Triangulation might not even conceal the pupils' identity, even though I gave them pseudonyms, since triangulating individuals is possible because of the internet. In this thesis, I have taken some steps to address this balance.

The urban municipality, Tromsø, is disclosed due to scale. There are several lower secondary schools in the city, and the identity of the pupils remains concealed if the researched school is not disclosed. Contextual data and information about the municipality are provided; however, the pupils were granted anonymity and confidentiality.

The rural municipality, given the pseudonym 'Coastal Valley', was treated differently, as I tried to safeguard the identity of the place and the participants. A greater effort was made to disclose enough contextual information to describe the place without disclosing its identity. Disclosing too much information, such as the year of data collection, can lead to a breach of anonymity and confidentiality and might harm the pupils.

4.4.2 The researcher footprint

According to Kvalsund and Hargreaves (2014), a research footprint can be both the disturbance created by the presence of the researcher and their methods and enquiries and the lasting repercussions of the relationship between the researcher and the community. These footprints might have various effects and can be beneficial or detrimental to the community. In addition, presenting research results is a problematic intervention because it involves presenting analyses and theories. The presentation of

research can alter the participants' perceptions by situating the researcher as "the professional stranger, the stranger who is all-knowing" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 73), leaving a theoretical and analytical imprint from an external expert system (Kvalsund & Hargreaves, 2014).

The issue of leaving a researcher footprint became evident during the follow-up interviews, as the participants expressed pondering their school decisions thoroughly due to our previous encounter. Conducting interviews implies being reciprocally involved with the interviewee; one aspect of this is sharing results. Before conducting the follow-up interviews, I shared some results for discussion with the research participants (see Section 4.3.). This is ethical because it involves responding to and having a meaningful encounter with the participants (Ahmed, 2000), leaving room for them to respond to the results and to correct, alter and/or develop the research if necessary. In addition, results were shared when publishing articles for this thesis.

My intention was to share the results with the schools as well. However, this has not occurred due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Nevertheless, we agreed to pursue this objective.

4.5 Analysing the data

This section offers an overview of how the qualitative data was *thematically analysed*. In the analyses, some *themes* emerge given the scope of the projects; some are theoretically induced and others are the result of my experiences.

The interviews were conducted with few participants (N = 18); however, they accumulated a large amount of data. The interviews were guided by broad-ranging topics that were sorted into themes in the research process. When working with the empirical data, NVivo was used to transcribe the interviews and code and categorise the data.

The first set of interviews were sorted into the overall categories 'rural pupils' and 'urban pupils'. The same procedure was used in the follow-up interviews. Some overarching themes were derived from the semi-structured interview guide; these were specified/substantiated after thoroughly examining the interviews, resulting in a *category*. A theme such as decision-making processes became categories such as 'choice of upper secondary school'. This gained several subcategories related to pupils' *praxis*, such as 'vocational track', 'academic track', 'location of upper secondary school' and *reflections around praxis*, such as 'reason for choosing a particular track'. By assigning pupils' accounts to these categories, I gained an overview of what each pupil said about, for instance, 'choice of upper secondary school'. Other categories were theoretically

induced, such as ‘natural’, ‘practical’ and ‘social order’, and ‘communicative reflexive’, ‘autonomous reflexive’, ‘meta-reflexive’ and ‘fractured reflexive’.

A theme I found relevant because of my experience living in a context like that of the rural pupils was ‘ethnicity’. This theme became the category ‘being Sámi, Norwegian or a mixed’, with the subcategories ‘coastal Sámi identity’, ‘mixed identity’, ‘other identity’ ‘Sámi costume’, ‘learning the Sámi language’, ‘Sámi knowledge and practices’ and ‘real Sámi’. When analysing the data, I realised this theme needed elaboration. I asked the pupils if they would elaborate on this in a third interview, to which they agreed. These interviews gave further information on the categories above and brought about the categories ‘prejudice’, ‘constraints when learning the Sámi language’, ‘lack of resources’ and ‘discursive void’. Concerning the theme ‘ethnicity’, some categories were theoretically induced, such as ‘essentialism’, ‘transactional injustice’ and ‘hermeneutic injustice’.

4.6 Quality of the study

Using qualitative methods inspired by a case-study design that provided an in-depth understanding of cases resulted in a small sample size. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small number of young people (N = 18); nevertheless, they produced a large amount of empirical data.

The concepts of validity and reliability are controversial issues in qualitative research. In this study, I chose to use the terms, as I do acknowledge, in line with Kleven (2008), that these two concepts cannot be used in the same manner as in quantitative research. Validity is often understood as whether the research measures what it seeks to measure (Fangen, 2010). Based on Angen’s work, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the term ‘validation’, to emphasise a process rather than verification with quantitative overtones. Validation is an attempt to assess the “accuracy” of the results, which is best described by the researcher, the participants and the readers/reviewers.

This thesis aimed to investigate pupils’ paths through the education system as well as structural constraints and/or enablements. Like many small studies, this thesis did not set out to capture a wide range of pupils’ perceptions and experiences. However, the interviews allowed the participants to express themselves about a wide range of topics related to past, present and future education and work, family, peer and school relationships, self-understanding and so forth. Thus, the results supported wider-ranging conclusions, such as: the enablements and constraints to realise their projects were spatially uneven and rural young people encountered structural constraints to a greater extent than their urban peers; the way young people reflexively negotiate their ways through the education system as active agents challenges the stereotypical representation of rural marginalisation; and a spatially and ethnically unaware

curriculum and educational policy constrains pupils and teachers. I hold that the combination and cross-checking of methods were valuable when ascertaining the accuracy of the interviews and previous experiences. It is difficult to identify the exact value of this validation process, but combining different sources of data provides higher validity than using one source.

Regarding the interviews, in line with Elster (2019), I hold that when talking about identity with young people, their answers may project a story of themselves that reflects their *sense* of who they are or how they *want* to be perceived. Thus, I also agree with MacDonald and Marsh (2005) that “more goes on in an interview than telling the truth” (p. 45). However, my study aimed to understand how the participants understood themselves, their reflexive deliberations and their decision-making processes, not to uncover who they are. Yet, I found that my empirical and theoretical focus on how young people make choices and negotiate their identity enabled showing there are diverse perspectives among young people, implying diversity in the category.

It is difficult to measure the validity of my interpretations, but the method chapter provides a transparent account of the data collection procedures. In addition, the methods and ethics chapters discuss my understanding of the biases, values and experiences I brought to the study; in doing so, I systematically conducted reflexive work throughout the study. In the follow-up interviews, I shared some of the results with the participants and they agreed with the outcome. Part of this thesis has been presented at scientific conferences, one of the articles was accepted by a peer-reviewed journal and one as a chapter in a scientific anthology; these provide validity to parts of my research as it has undergone scientific scrutiny.

Reliability, or whether another researcher can achieve similar results and reach the same interpretations in the same environment, is even harder to verify than validity (Fangen, 2010). Whether my interpretations can be used in other contexts is related to reliability and precise transferability. Conducting research in two municipalities provides a comparative dimension. The potency gained by participating in a research project that involves other municipalities and several researchers provides possibilities for comparison that advance reliability (see also Rød, 2021). Furthermore, part of the analysis points to structural conditions that cause different opportunities based on location. Empirical work in other locations can investigate whether the presented analysis is transferable.

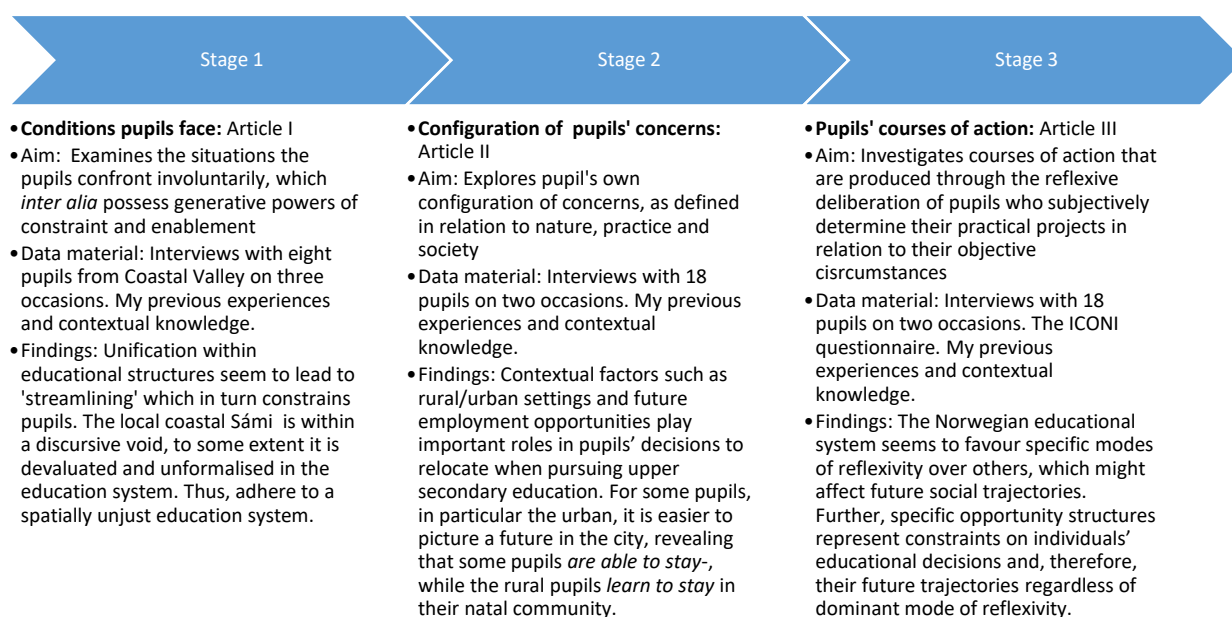
5 Empirical materials

This chapter gives an overview of the work presented in articles I–III. Collectively, the articles address the overarching research question of the thesis presented in the introduction (Section 2.1):

- 1) How do rural pupils make their way through the Norwegian educational system, and to what extent do structural constraints and enablements frame objective structures?

The order of the articles in this thesis is not coincidental. Although all the research articles addressed all the stages in Archer's (2007) three stage model, each article focused on one stage (see, Figure 8). To frame each article within this thesis, I will recapture the three stage model. In Archer's model, structural and cultural properties objectively shape situations that agents confront involuntarily. These properties possess the generative powers of constraints and enablements in relation to subjects' concerns, which are subjectively defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: the natural, the practical and the social. Courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of individuals who determine their projects in relation to context (Archer, 2007).

Figure 8 Overview of the thesis, the articles and the correspondence to the three stage model



Article I contributes mostly to the first stage, as it investigates the educational structures that pupils confront involuntarily. This article focuses on pupils in Coastal Valley and examines how coastal Sámi youths confront the education system. Article II mainly focuses on the second stage of the model, especially the boys in Coastal Valley and their negotiations concerning education and future work opportunities; it also examines the differences between the rural pupils and their urban peers. Article III mainly addresses the third stage of the model. It includes both rural and urban pupils and how they reflexively engage in educational decision-making processes.

It is worth mentioning that the numbering of the articles is altered in this thesis; Article I was written last, Article II was written second, and Article III was written first. There are two reasons for this. First, it is a narrative manoeuvre. Since articles I and II set the stage for the rural pupils, they become the focal point in this study. Article III then discusses both rural and urban pupils' experiences of educational decision-making processes. Moving from the rural to the rural–urban highlights the rural pupils' experiences. This narrative manoeuvre centres the thesis' focal point on the rural pupils and their educational experiences, which demonstrates that the Norwegian education system is unequal in terms of place and space. Second, the numbering relates to Archer's three stage model and provides an understanding of how each article contributes to the overall research question.

The articles contribute to the overall research aim by investigating the connection between structure and agency on an individual level. Article I focuses on how pupils in a small, coastal Sámi community struggle to come to terms with their identity and how the education system conditions their identity formation processes. Article II gives voice to rural boys to examine how contextual factors constrain or enable pupils' educational orientations and transitions. Article III examines pupils' reflexive decision-making processes when transitioning from lower to upper secondary education and seeks to understand how structures can influence these processes.

The author of this thesis is the sole author of Article I. Article II was co-authored with Professor Unn-Doris Bæck. Article III was co-authored with Daniel Rød.

5.1 Summary of Article I

“I am Sámi, but I am not a Sámi”: Articulating local Sámi voices—the youths' perspectives

Author Anna-Maria Stenseth

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Norwegian state, assisted by the education system, carried out an assimilation and colonisation policy in Sápmi. Article I investigates what it is like to grow up in a small community today, which was the product of assimilation policies but is now undergoing a process of revitalisation. This article's main objective is to explore pupils' perceptions of how the Norwegian education system enables and constrains teaching and learning about Sámi issues, and how the system enables or constrains pupils in the process of defining themselves.

In this article, Archer's sociological theory dealing with structure and agency (2000, 2003) is applied to investigate the structural constraints pupils must engage with when negotiating their identity while undertaking education in a coastal Sámi area. Further,

her theory on education systems (1984, 1995, 2013) is used as a backdrop to understanding the situational logic between the Norwegian state and the Sámi Parliament regarding education. In addition, Fricker's (2007, 2017) philosophical theory on epistemic injustice is applied to understand the outcomes of the Norwegianisation policy for the Sámi people. Fricker (2007, 2017) argues epistemic injustice is essentially a form of discrimination, a distributive injustice. In this article, discrimination towards the Sámi people is regarded as distributive injustice.

The methodological approach is influenced by the fact that the rural context of the research has been colonised or, as reflected in the Norwegian narrative, Norwegianised. Three groups of people have, for centuries, inhabited the community: the Sámi, the Kven and the Norwegians. Around 1900, most people in this area had Sámi as their mother tongue; today, most speak Norwegian. This is not due to the emigration of the Sámi people. This article relied on semi-structured interviews conducted on three occasions with pupils (ages 15–17) in the process of transitioning from lower to upper secondary school. The article also draws on the researcher's own experiences of growing up and teaching in a similar context.

The results indicate the pupils struggle to come to terms with their identity, as the 'real' Sámi knowledge and practices are depicted as elsewhere, in inner Finnmark. Their ambivalence about their identity is partly supported by the fact that what they learn through the Sámi curriculum does not 'match' what is found in their local community. By not including the multitude of Sámi knowledges, practices and languages in the Norwegian curriculum, the local Sámi remain devaluated and un-formalised. This leaves the local Sámi knowledge and practices in a discursive void, constraining pupils to perceive themselves as included in the Sámi community and holding a Sámi identity.

5.2 Summary of Article II

Being Able to Stay or Learning to Stay: A Study of Rural Boys' Educational Orientations and Transitions

First author Anna-Maria Stenseth, second author Unn-Doris K. Bæck

Article II (Stenseth & Bæck, 2021) explores the influence of geographical location on pupils' educational orientations and their transition from lower to upper secondary school; it pays specific attention to rural boys' voices. In addition, it investigates the interplay between gender and geographical contexts and the significance of these factors in understanding the processes associated with educational orientations. The article argues that while some pupils are able to stay in their natal community, others have to learn how to stay.

Archer's (2007) framework is used to analyse how pupils' agency is constrained and/or enabled by objective structures. To understand educational orientations and transitions, the article considers the interplay among structural factors, individual agency and experiences, encounters with social institutions, how individuals perceive opportunities and cultural imperatives.

The article builds on empirical material obtained from longitudinal interviews with 18 pupils residing in one rural municipality and one urban municipality. The results showed that rural pupils' transition to upper secondary school was more constraining than urban pupils' because of objective opportunity structures, such as educational offering and, to some degree, financial resources. Pupils, especially rural boys, did not necessarily follow their initial plans and changed their minds before entering upper secondary school. The results indicate that rural boys changed their minds because they sought what could be perceived as rural masculine values; some rural boys sought a different route that might include tertiary education. Rural girls also sought an (expected) path through tertiary education that might constrain their wish to return to a rural area after completing their education because of what they perceived as the lack of desirable job opportunities. These rural youths' routes through the education system show that there are heterogeneous ways of enacting rural emerging identities. The interplay between sociocultural properties and agential reflexivity is essential when attempting to grasp human actions. This study reveals that contextual factors, such as rural/urban settings and future employment opportunities, play important roles in pupils' decisions to relocate when pursuing upper secondary education. For some pupils, especially the urban, it is easier to picture a future in the natal municipality, revealing that some pupils *are able to stay*, while others *learn to stay* in their natal community.

5.3 Summary of Article III

Reflexivity and educational decision-making processes among secondary school pupils

First author Anna-Maria Stenseth, second author Daniel A. V. Rød

Article III (Stenseth & Rød, upcoming) investigates educational decision-making processes among young Norwegian pupils in their transition process from lower to upper secondary education. The article argues that the concept of reflexivity and different modes of reflexivity can be used to understand how pupils make their choices within existing opportunity structures. It further argues that Archer's conceptualisation of 'modes of reflexivity' can provide good insights into educational decision-making processes as they encompass culture, structure and agency and their interactions over time (Archer, 2007). This article focuses on *reflexivity* and explores how pupils make decisions concerning upper secondary education.

As in the previous article, the data is based on semi-structured interviews with 18 pupils on two occasions. This article also used a questionnaire, the Internal Conversation Indicator (ICONI). The short questionnaire, developed by Archer and colleagues (2007), aims to contribute to qualitative interviews when analysing pupils' modes of reflexivity.

The results establish that pupils employ different modes of reflexivity, which in turn direct various decision-making processes. In addition, individual agency influences pupils' educational trajectory to some degree. The opportunity structures constrain the communicative reflexives, who rely on interlocutors such as family members, friends and teachers. This is especially true when they must move to pursue their primary option in education.

The article concludes by arguing that the Norwegian education system favours specific modes of reflexivity, namely autonomous reflexives, which might affect future social trajectories. Specific opportunity structures, such as access to work and education, represent constraints on individuals' educational decisions and, therefore, their future trajectories regardless of the dominant mode of reflexivity. To some degree, the Norwegian centralised education system constructs opportunity structures, as it directs upper secondary offerings and accessibility. Where you grow up matters; rural places offer poorer access to education and various occupations, and differences between opportunity structures in different places raise the question of spatial equity.

6 Discussion

This thesis examines pupils' enablements and constraints regarding education and sheds light on spatial inequalities in education based on where pupils grow up. It explores how pupils are enabled and/or constrained by the sociocultural context in which they are situated and how they take courses of action based on their reflexive deliberations. This chapter adheres to the relatively new genre of an article-based PhD thesis. It aims to clarify how the analyses in the three articles are related and inform one another; this is done in an *extended summary* or meta-analysis. This chapter discusses the contribution of the individual articles and extends the discussion beyond their content.

In the introduction and Chapter 5, I hold that the three articles answered different aspects of the overarching research question, both empirically and analytically. The articles reveal that there are spatial inequalities in the Norwegian education system that influence rural pupils more negatively than their urban peers.

In this chapter, I focus on the overarching research question: How do rural pupils make their way through the Norwegian educational system, and to what extent do structural constraints and enablements frame objective structures?

I must emphasise that this thesis pays particular attention to rural pupils' educational experiences. 'Rural education' here refers to pupils at the local school level. However, the local school is part of the Norwegian education system, which is influenced by the general society. To answer the research question, this chapter revisits the theoretical framework of this thesis and my intention to use the framework in my analysis.

6.1 Structures and cultures causing inequalities in education for rural pupils

This chapter builds on the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 4, especially Archer's three stage model (2003, 2007), which is part of her morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995). In this thesis, Archer's work on the process of mediation between structure and agency (Archer, 1995, 2003, 2007) is used as the main theoretical approach, as it encompasses structure, culture and agency. There are several reasons for choosing Archer's theories over others. Archer's approach to the social sciences has a solid ontological foundation. First, when researching issues such as inequality in education, some degree of naturalism is necessary. This is also true in this thesis, as it deals with education and the Norwegian education system. Second, a certain degree of interpretivism is necessary to acknowledge that society and the social sciences are full of people (as well as other species), science is, after all, conducted by people. Society is largely socially constructed. Our society is formed by people's past actions. This thesis seeks to include space as an ontological object of inquiry. As discussed in Chapter 4, context is not fully developed in Archer's approach; however, there is space to include context and make structures real when investigating spatial aspects, such as educational justice as both process and output.

One of Archer's main points is the inclusion and separation of structure, culture and agency, where one is not prioritised over the other. Archer's solid ontological foundation enables the 'dividing' of social reality into layers that are irreducible to one another. The inclusion of structure and agency enables the discussion of how structures affect people, being structurally conditioned without being deterministic, and how people (in particular, corporate agents) can affect structures since they possess their own emergent powers. Archer's framework is suitable for this thesis, as it enables analysing how pupils are affected by structures and how these structures can hold unequal opportunities (constraints and enablements). Archer's framework provides for understanding what these structures are, giving us resources to determine what the structural 'shortcomings' hinge on, leading to injustice in the education system. Her framework allows for analysing the extent to which pupils exert agency within the education system and larger society.

The discussion presents the structural and cultural conditions that shape the situations the pupils must navigate, as presented in the articles; these situations lead to injustice, especially for rural pupils. Soja's (2013) approach to spatial justice is applied to explain how geographical placement, the distribution of resources and access to utilise them can have both positive and negative effects on individuals' lives. Spaces are filled with material and imagined forces that affect events and experiences, both individually and collectively. Archer (2003) argued that when people pursue a project, they generally encounter social powers in the form of constraints and enablements on which they deliberate internally. Through this internal conversation, individuals' reception of these structural and cultural influences is mediated. Soja (2013) stated that, since we construct our geographies, or they are constructed for us by more powerful individuals, it follows that people can act to change or reconstruct them to increase positive or decrease spatial justice or injustice. People's efforts to change existing spatial configurations are sources of conflict for and against the status quo. "Space is not an empty void. It is always filled with politics, ideology and other forces shaping our lives and challenging us to engage in struggles over geography" (p. 19).

As elucidated in Chapter 4, people are involuntarily situated beings operating in structures that are not of their own choosing. Hence, it is crucial to bring the interplay of sociocultural properties and the exercise of agential reflexivity into the analysis to understand the agent's project regarding the experienced context. In this thesis, this is achieved using Archer's three stage model (see Section 4.3).

6.1.1 Agents in the Norwegian education system

Before accounting for the structural and cultural properties that impinge on pupils, I must introduce the agents who influence and are influenced by these conditions. The agents presented below correspond to those in Archer's (1984) centralised education system. The theory chapter presented Archer's divide between corporate and primary agents; this still pertains. Corporate agents are collectivists who have an active, articulated interest in a certain matter. Primary agents may be dissatisfied with a situation, but if they do not articulate or organise their pursuit, they do not occupy the resources or positions that corporate agent have. Nevertheless, the lack of a say in systemic (re)organisation does not mean that primary agents do not influence it; rather, the effects are uncoordinated in action and unstated in aim (Archer, 1995). I endorse Archer's inclusion of corporate agents in her framework and their abilities to contribute to changing or making compromises within structures. Corporate agents hold the resources to commit to social action and to identify strategies to elaborate structures. As such, these agents can, according to Solnit (2016), "bring hope in the dark", because "[h]ope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act" (p. xiv).

This thesis focused on *pupils* as the main agents. In the analysis of this thesis, the structural conditions in education based on where one grows up are concerned with pupils and their perspectives. The education system provides pupils with knowledge and ‘dannelse’⁸ that can benefit the individual pupil, the shared collectives of pupils and the larger society. Some of the main objectives in Norwegian education are to prepare pupils to meet challenges in life, to master one’s life and care for others and to qualify pupils to make an effort in the world of work (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training, 2015). The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to give their opinions on issues affecting them and the right to be heard (FN, 1989). According to the Education Act (1998) and LK-06, Norwegian pupils have the right to influence their everyday school lives. Nevertheless, individual pupils state they have little influence over their everyday school life (Danielsen et al., 2009; Topland & Skaalvik, 2010). All schools must have a school council that is part of a national interest organisation for pupils, termed the pupil organisation (Norwegian: Elevorganisasjonen, EO). However, the power of the pupil organisation and the extent to which it can contribute to forming policy is minimal; school councils do not have a formal effect regarding decision-making processes (Helland & Næss, 2005). Hence, the pupil organisation is not treated as a corporate agent that influence policy.

Although pupils are the main agents in this study, they must be seen in relation to corporate agents who can act to improve pupils’ educational conditions. Pupils in this thesis are presented as *primary agents* because they largely lack a say in creating structures. Many corporate agents have an interest in education. In this thesis, only relevant corporate agents are included to analyse policy implications. For an analyses of corporate agents in the education system see also Rød (2021).

The first major corporate agent in the education system is the *central government*. The governmental departments responsible for education are the Norwegian Parliament and the Ministry of Education and Research which pass and govern educational legislation and policy. The Ministry of Education which contains the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, operationalises educational legislation and policy. Individual counties are responsible for upper secondary education, while municipalities are responsible for kindergarten and compulsory education. The state is responsible for higher education.

⁸ The Norwegian term ‘dannelse’ and the German term ‘bildung’ are related. Both terms are related to the term ‘formation’. The Norwegian term *dannelse* corresponds to bildung and edification. According to Solberg (2011), dannelse traditionally had two components: an educational dimension where the subject becomes familiar with a scholarly tradition, and an existential–ethical dimension that involves personal acquisition with different forms of knowledge.

The second such agents are the *teacher collectives*. In Norway, the teaching professions are organised into unions; the Union of Education Norway (Utdanningsforbundet) is the largest. The organisations are treated as one agent here, as they often cooperate to achieve their goals (see also Rød, 2021). Archer (1984) argued that the teaching profession is crucial in the education system, as teachers are one of the main agents who originate change within the system; this is true more in a decentralised system than in a centralised one. The teachers' relationships with pupils are discussed throughout the three articles. In particular, Article I examines the structural constraints and opportunities that both rural pupils and teachers confront when learning and teaching about Sámi issues.

Another corporate agent in the Sámi Administrative Area is the *Sámi Parliament*, which decides upon issues of particular interest to the Sámi people. As a political body, the Parliament is not subordinate to the Norwegian government (Regjeringen, 2021; Sámediggi, 2021). Formally, the Sámi Parliament has developed and approved the special Sámi curriculum for subjects that are taught in Sámi schools. The Sámi Parliament as a corporate agent is discussed in Article I. In addition, there are Sámi interest groups and political parties that have an interest in education, such as Norske Samers Riksforbund (NSR), and Sámi youth associations, such as Davvi Nuorra, that could act to improve Sámi education.

The fourth agent is a set of external interest groups that affect the policy level: *supranational* and *international organisations*. These are organisations such as the OECD, the EU and the UN. According to Skinningsrud (2014a) and Sjøberg (2014), the OECD in particular has had an impact on Norwegian education and influenced Norwegian politicians through their reports on the Norwegian education and testing system PISA. These organisations have an indirect, influential role in education as they funnel global ideas into the Norwegian education system (Solstad & Karlberg-Granlund, 2020). While their role is outside the scope of this thesis, they are included as corporate agents to point out that global ideas have an indirect effect on Norwegian education (and society in general).

The Parental Interest Organisation (*FUG*), which is the organisation for pupils in compulsory school and, to some degree, upper secondary education could be regarded a corporate agent, an external interest group. However, FUG receives funding from the Ministry of Education and Research and the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, and its members are appointed by the King-in-Council. Thus, its status as an external interest group is debatable.

Local communities are mostly considered primary agents or agents not associated with a corporation in terms of the ones mentioned above. Individual schools and

municipalities and counties as school owners are affected by policies carried out at the macro level; they have some autonomy, e.g., by deciding on funding to schools.

Figure 9 below relates to Archer's (1995) emergence and societal strata. Adapted from Rød (2021), it illustrates the agents in the education system and their location on the various social levels.

Figure 9 *Levels in the Norwegian education system*

1. Globalisation trends impact national decision makers through supranational organisations such as OECD/UN/EU.
2. The central government, the national parliament, decides on educational policy in a centralised system. The teachers' unions and external interest groups, such as the Sámi Parliament attempt to influence politicians in parliament. Policy is carried out by ministers and departments. Corporate agents in a centralised system mainly operate at this level.
3. School owners, municipalities and counties operate schools according to policies regarding funding and curriculum. This level is, to some degree, an extension of level 2, although some autonomy applies.
4. Pupils are taught within the framework set by the above levels.

Levels 1 and 2 indicate macro levels, the former being supranational and the latter being national. Since the Norwegian education system is centralised, policy is decided at the second level. Level 3 is the meso level and is closely connected to level 2 because of its bureaucratic extension in this centralised system. Level 4 is the micro level, where pupils and teachers engage and can perform agency (Rød, 2021).

6.2 Structural and cultural properties conditioning pupils' agency

The significance of agents' involuntary placement is that they encounter different segments of society that present them with different vested interests (Archer, 2003). The opportunity structures that constitute constraints and enablements come with costs for pursuing opposing vested interests or benefits for successfully overcoming underprivileged or problematic positions (Archer, 2003). As pointed out in Chapter 3, structures and cultures structure the situations in which agents find themselves. For instance, pupils are not in a position to choose where to live or which primary or lower secondary school to attend; thus, they face involuntary placement. The pupils' placement and privileges mean that the same course of action is of unequal cost, depending on the individual pupil's situation.

6.2.1 First- and second-order emergent properties conditioning pupils

According to Soja (2013), when emphasising geographical outcomes, distributional inequality is the most basic and obvious expression of spatial injustice. Some distributional inequality is inevitable, partly because of location and the frictions it creates upon actors and partly because of locational decisions made by agents producing services. This leads us to *rural–urban demography*, a prominent first-order emergent property that is relevant to spatial inequality in education. Rural–urban demography is described as the effective result of rural depopulation and urban centralisation. It indirectly constrains pupils through access to opportunity structures and influences politicians who must conduct politics that take these constraints into consideration.

According to Johansen and Foss (2009), the population of urban areas is increasing. In general, the national migration flow is from rural to urban areas, and immigration flows are directed to urban areas. We have witnessed school closures in rural areas, centralisation and a merger of schools as well as a merger of tracks in upper secondary school (see, for instance, Solstad, 2009; Solstad & Andrews, 2020). Moreover, upper secondary and tertiary education are often localised in more heavily populated areas (Lefdal, 2014), which contributes to pulling young people away from rural/peripheral areas into urban areas (Lefdal, 2014; Stein, 2019). Deindustrialisation (Stein, 2019) and changes in agriculture and fisheries (Almås & Fuglestad, 2020; Rasmussen, 2010) have affected rural demography. ‘New’ workplaces, the result of technological development and related to higher education, research, administration, finance and the tertiary sector, are often located in urban areas (Rasmussen, 2010), which also impinge on rural demography. Pupils who aim for both future work in these ‘new’ occupations and life in a rural area must handle these conflicting concerns. According to Wiborg (2009), centralisation of employment stemming from a more service-dominated society is an important factor for centralisation processes. Although rural–urban demography was not directly addressed in the articles, its emergent properties, such as access to upper secondary education and future work in a rural area, are discussed in Articles II and III.

Local opportunity structures represent another structural first-order emergent property for pupils in this study. According to Roberts (2009), “opportunity structures are formed by the inter-relationships between family origins, education, labour market processes and employers’ recruitment practices” (p. 355); place, gender, ethnicity and other factors can provide conditions that may constrain and/or enable individual opportunities. According to Bæck (2019), places provide different conditions and barriers that directly and indirectly present people with certain opportunities and constraints. Thus, places can be analysed as opportunity structures. Opportunity structures are structural emergent properties, as they are the result of results that cannot be reduced to their origin.

Opportunity structures include, amongst other, access to education and future work in relation to other emergent properties, such as rural demography and assimilation. For instance, the experience of loss of social network, educational, health and occupational offerings can be considered constraints in depopulated areas (Wiborg, 2009). In all the articles included in this thesis, opportunity structures are addressed at the micro level, where pupils confront particular educational structures. The articles address conditions at level three in the educational system, where school owners operate schools according to policies such as funding and curriculum.

Articles II and III examine *distance to educational offerings*, which represents constraints for rural pupils who must move to obtain education beyond primary and lower secondary school. Although this thesis focuses on spatial inequalities in education, access to work plays a role, since pupils relate their educational choices to future employment. The relative lack of job opportunities in rural areas represents a constraint for pupils, as many rural pupils perceive a need to choose a track that aligns with their aim to relocate to a rural area after completing further education. Young people who want to live in rural areas might have to subordinate or abandon their educational activities due to a perceived lack of work opportunities in rural areas. Although work opportunities are not the focus of this thesis, Articles II and III demonstrate that rural youth consider this when deciding on upper secondary education.

The third first-order emergent property that affects pupils is the *centralised education system*. The educational institutions are considered first-order emergent properties, while the institutional configuration that constitutes the centralised system is a second-order emergent property (see also Rød, 2021). The centralised education system existed prior to the current pupils and teachers and is the result of political negotiations among various interested parties. The centralised education system comprises a distinct institutional configuration, with distinct power relationships and asymmetries among numerous agents. The compromises, concessions, negotiations and manipulations among these agents are asymmetrical (Archer, 2013; Skinningsrud, 2012, 2014, 2019). Article I addresses the asymmetry between the different parts of the system. It notes that resources were lacking when LK06-S was implemented in the Sámi Administrative Area, which constrained both pupils and teachers.

A fourth first-order emergent property discussed in Article I is the *assimilation or colonisation of the Sámi people*, which was an official policy in Norway from mid- 1800 to mid/late1900. Because assimilation was a direct result of state policy, it was especially effective within the education system (Aikio-Puoskari, 2009; Jensen, 2005; Minde, 2003; Niemi, 1997). Article I argues that the history of assimilation or colonisation still has an impact in the rural context, where part of this study was conducted. Activating and foregrounding spatial perspectives is imperative as it makes

us aware that geographies can support oppressive forms of cultural and political domination based on, for example, ethnicity and aggravate all forms of discrimination and injustice (Soja, 2013). Nevertheless, this is a complex task, as the colonisation of Sápmi led to stigmatising the Sámi people (Johansen, 2010); as shown in Article I, identifying as Sámi, Norwegian, both or mixed is not a straightforward task for the pupils. In addition, Article I addresses the extent to which the centralised education system contributes to upholding or deconstructing the Sámi stigma through the national curriculum and textbooks. Sámi articulation is related to geography, as the colonisation of Sápmi and the revitalisation processes occurring today have different effects in various Sámi locations. The colonisation of Sápmi together with the Germans' scorched-earth tactics during World War II were especially effective for making Norwegians of the coastal Sámi people (Johansen, 2013; Olsen, 2010a; Pedersen et al., 2012). The revitalisation project has both been constraining and enabling for both primary and corporate agents (various Sámi movements) as, for instance, it has engendered pride in being Sámi, a feeling of not being completely Sámi and feeling that a rejected Sámi identity is 'reinstalled' (Johansen, 2010; Pedersen & Høgmo, 2004; Pedersen et al., 2012). Although Article I shows that many rural pupils are proud of their Sámi heritage, the colonisation and revitalisation processes have left the local Sámi in a discursive void and devaluated Sámi practices and knowledge. In addition, the 'real' Sámi people, knowledges and practices seem to exist in a different space than Coastal Valley.

A spatially and ethnically unaware curriculum represents a fifth emergent property related to the assimilation/colonisation of the Sámi. The curriculum itself is not a structural emergent property; however, it qualifies as an emergent property, as it conditions agents and individuals through social interactions. The curriculum could be considered a culturally emergent property as it puts forward ideas (see, Archer, 1995). The Ministry of Education and Research determines the national curriculum for compulsory and upper secondary education through the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training with a Core Curriculum that targets the educational systems' ideological, value-based and knowledge content. The CC elaborates on the set of values in the Education Act and the principles of general education in Norway. Furthermore, it describes the fundamental view that should characterise pedagogical practice throughout primary education. The subject-specific part of the curriculum contains competence aims. Solstad and Andrews (2020) argued that, while there was an awareness of rurality and place from the 1970s onwards, this focus shifted and decreased with the implementation of LK06. This has also continued with the new CC, which contains overarching values and principles for compulsory and upper secondary education. Solstad (2012) found that the focus on competence aims/output orientation in LK06 can result in less awareness of other areas, such as Sámi knowledges and

practices/identity. The rural pupils were taught according to the Knowledge Promotion Plan – Sámi (LK06-S) curriculum; thus, they and their teachers had to relate to LK06-S. The revitalisation process, discussed above, is assisted by the Sámi curriculum, where interest groups such as the Sámi Parliament and teachers' unions can try to influence the relevant departments through political manipulation in the centralised education system. As described in the theoretical chapter, obtaining concessions entails aggregating the demands of different groups to put pressure on the central government. However, dilution can result when different interest groups work together, leading to insufficient changes that do not satisfy any of the groups (Archer, 2013). In a report on LK06-S (Solstad, 2012), it is argued that the Committee for Upbringing, Care and Education⁹ in the Sámi Parliament found it unfavourable that Sámi schools were only able to offer opinions on specific Sámi issues and not the entire content of the national curriculum. The report further found a conflict between the Sámi Parliament and the Norwegian government, as the parliament desired parallel and not identical curriculums (2012). Article I addresses the spatially unaware curriculum and argues there is a need to focus on Sámi issues in education. There are some enablements to achieve a curriculum that is more spatially aware; however, this calls for epistemic justice (Anderson, 2012; Fricker, 2007).

Globalisation trends in education and society is the last emergent property addressed in this thesis. Cultural ideas about what education should entail have always existed. Some ideas that impact education include the ideology and ideas of globalisation (Archer, 2007). Globalisation trends have influenced the rural community in revitalising the Sámi language and culture. The Sámi revitalisation process is connected to the international indigenous movement, which has gained momentum since the 1970s. This resulted in, amongst other things, the International Labour Organisation adopting the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No 169) in 1989 (Swepston, 1990). Coastal Valley was regarded as mainly Norwegian in the 1980s due to the suppression and historical rejection connected to the Sámi stigma (Johansen, 2010; Pedersen & Viken, 2009). However, during the 1990s, the revitalisation processes gathered momentum (Høgmo, 2011; Johansen, 2013; Pedersen et al., 2012).

In coastal Sámi areas, the injustice felt by the fishing population when excluded from fisheries caused them to look for allies and new policies; the newly established Sámi Parliament became such an ally. The fishermen and the younger generation joined forces to promote common Sámi interests and arguments (Pedersen & Viken, 2009), which suggests that corporate agents joining forces is harder to dismiss than minor interest groups. Norway was the first nation to ratify International Labour Organisation (ILO)

⁹ In Norwegian: oppvekst-, omsorg- og utdanningskomiteen.

Convention No. 169 in 1990 (Swepston, 1990), which gave indigenous peoples legitimacy and argumentative force to demand increased efforts concerning Sámi language and culture (Pedersen & Viken, 2009). The indigenous perspectives became a crucial part of how the younger generations perceived themselves (Aikio-Puoskari, 2009; Hovland, 1999; Høgmo, 2011; Nystad et al., 2017; Pedersen & Viken, 2009; Sarivaara, 2016). The Sámi youth organisations have played a vital part in the revitalisation project by seeking a Sámi identity and identity clarification. The Sámi society has a clear hierarchy in which the inland Sámi knowledges and practices have been depicted as the ‘real’ Sámi knowledges and practices, giving it a hegemonic position that has caused the coastal Sámi to feel inferior (K. Olsen, 2010a; Pedersen & Viken, 2009). These aspects are discussed in Article I, where the coastal Sámi youth depict the real Sámi as being somewhere else.

6.3 Pupils’ own reflexive considerations when making decisions

Above, when illustrating sociocultural properties, agents’ abilities to act upon these powers were not considered. In the following sections, I explore the extent to which constraining and enabling powers impinge upon pupils trying to realise their initial projects, such as the transition from lower to upper secondary school. For some, this is a first step toward deciding upon future education and work. The rural youths’ negotiation of their identity is a concern in this respect. People seek to realise their concerns in society through inner dialogue, which identifies the roles through which they can be expressed. They seek to acquire the roles so that their social identities emerge from the way they adapt such roles in relation to their concerns (see Archer, 2000; 2007).

Objective situations, as shaped by sociocultural properties, are real; people cannot make what they will of them with impunity (Archer, 2003). However, effective structural and cultural conditioning always requires a reflexive agent. Objective structural influences always become mediated by agents through agential subjectivity.

The research articles investigate how individuals prioritise their concerns through a process of inner dialogue by activating their mental powers of reflexive deliberation, whereby they decide upon their main concerns and accommodate others. The process of clustering concerns constitutes an individual’s unique personal identity. An individual’s constellation of concerns is dynamic because one can modify goals in terms of their contextual feasibility and by virtue of one’s inner dialogues; people are active rather than passive because they can adapt projects to realisable practises (Archer, 2003). The articles explore pupils’ navigation through the education system and how they deal with its structural constraints and opportunities.

6.3.1 The initial process of creating concerns in relation to location

Articles II and III deal with pupils' processes of defining their educational concerns. This chapter investigates pupils' educational orientations and concerns in relation to society. It is important to remember that young people have concerns other than education, such as friendships, relationships to family, hobbies and so forth. As discussed in Section 6.2.1, young people create their concerns in different situations and in different locations, which seems to influence the trajectories they envision for themselves.

The study participants expressed that one of their most important concerns was *relationship to family and friends*. They all had close relationships with their families and peers, from whom they gained feedback on who they were and planned to become. In their process of negotiating a personal identity and establishing what they wanted to achieve, they had, for instance, by watching significant others, some initial ideas about trajectories: further education and work. As discussed in Articles II and III, where you grow up matters in terms of trajectories. While the pupils stated that they talked to family, friends and teachers about their future aspirations, this was more of a solitary project for some. The boys, especially the rural boys, told me they did not talk much about their educational choices. The rural boys' negotiations regarding upper secondary education are discussed in Article II. The article noted that rural boys stated having cross-generational relationships within the local community, which was not prominent amongst their peers. This made me wonder if this relationship, in all three realms of reality – the natural, the practical and the social – was a main reason for these boys' strong wish to return to their natal community after finishing upper secondary education. Some rural boys also forewent (temporarily) their initial thoughts about enrolling in an academic track and pursuing tertiary education. The rural boys' considerations of tracks in upper secondary education seem related to their perceived work opportunities in the rural area. Their educational considerations were linked to whether future occupation in a rural area was achievable, as to them, the feeling of belonging to Coastal Valley was imperative and worth maintaining regardless of cost.

After-school activities were a main concern for the pupils. Leisure is discussed in Article II, as it serves as a backdrop for understanding their educational choices. These youths attended many of the same supralocal activities independent of place (see e.g. Bæck, 2019), such as practising sports, doing homework and gaming. In addition, many of the rural boys were involved in more locally bound activities, such as finding the best fishing spots and working on small farms (smallholding). Some boys mentioned working after school hours, although girls did not. The availability of afterschool work opportunities plays a part in finding a job. The urban boys worked every other weekend

in service occupations, while the rural boys worked even during the week on farms and in small local enterprises.

The participants defined initial educational concerns, especially their decisions about and transitions to *upper secondary education*. After completing ten years of compulsory education and before applying to upper secondary schools, most pupils must decide whether they want an academic track or a vocational track. This thesis includes interviews with pupils before and after their initial transition to upper secondary school. Thus, my study explores the data collected in grade 10, before entering upper secondary. It includes the choices the pupils made and data from the interviews after entering upper secondary school.

In Norway, the number of pupils attending an academic track that leads to further education and the number of pupils attending a vocational track are fairly even. A growing number of pupils in vocational tracks choose to become apprentices, while some pupils eventually enter higher education after going through a specific program in upper secondary school designed for this purpose (supplementary studies qualifying for higher education) (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019).

Article II noted how structures influence young people's educational orientation and transition from lower school to upper secondary school. Article III offers insight into how pupils reflexively make decisions about secondary education. The pupils' concerns appeared to be based on reflexive deliberations of what was available to them regarding secondary education as well as future employment. These pupils considered further education a matter of course; it was perceived as the 'only route' to accessing a stable occupation. For pupils, it was crucial to have some idea about what to aim for in terms of future occupation when applying for upper secondary school; this is not easy for a 16-year-old. There are several aspects for young people to consider when making decisions for the future: in which field do they see themselves working, an academic or vocational track, location of the desired track, and so forth. As discussed in Article II, many pupils were unsure regarding future work and, therefore, which track to aim for; some had only vague ideas about their future occupation, whereas others were quite sure. Nevertheless, in the 10th grade, pupils need to apply for an upper secondary track, whether or not they feel ready to make the choice. Article III explores how pupils engaged in the educational decision-making process and how their reflexivity played a part in making choices concerning upper secondary education.

In Article I, the young people in Coastal Valley reflected upon *being Sámi, Norwegian or a mixed*. It is important to remember that young people are in the process of negotiating their identity; this process, the socialisation and subjectification process, also occurs in education (Biesta, 2009; Hoëm, 2010). One aim of education is to help

pupils strengthen their Sámi identity (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training, 2015). These aspects are addressed in Section 6.2.1 in relation to spatially unaware curriculum and globalisation trends.

Some young people in Coastal Valley had concerns regarding *Sámi topics*, including learning the Sámi language. Some participants found it important to preserve the language, and the local school offered an opportunity to do so. They stated it was important to learn about local traditions (although this was not necessarily expressed as Sámi knowledge) (see, for instance, Olsen, 2010a). They expressed pride in being Sámi, while acknowledging that ‘feeling proud’ was not necessarily easy for previous generations as they were closer (in time/space) to the Norwegianisation process. In addition, the feeling of the “real Sámi being in a different space” made them uncertain about if or to what extent they could regard themselves as Sámi. Although many expressed pride in their Sámi heritage and living in Coastal Valley, some reviled this; they noted that by wearing the *gáki* (Sámi costume) anywhere, they “could be given strange looks... and cruel comments” (Pupil E, cited in Article I). While most of these young people tried to learn the language in the lower grades, some quit Sámi lessons when entering the upper primary level (age 10–12) as it was too difficult to learn the Sámi language. Others quit studying Sámi in upper secondary school, as their school did not offer it. One pupil also stated, “You don’t need the language anywhere” (Pupil E) as an additional reason.

6.3.2 Pupils reflexively negotiate choices in two different locations

Several aspects seem to direct pupils’ choice of upper secondary education, including natal location, location of upper secondary, imagined future work and place to settle. The kinds of experiences pupils draw on in decision making are necessarily limited due to their age. Thus, to a certain extent, pupils draw on the experiences of others who attend or have attended upper secondary school. In addition, they have experiences in the natural, practical and social order that have given them some idea of what to aim for and what to avoid (see Archer, 2000; 2012); these experiences are discussed in Article II.

How young people learn and engage in navigating the three orders of reality seems to affect the choices they make. Through interactions in the natural, practical and social orders, pupils develop notions of their capabilities as human beings. However, orienting themselves to these orders does not determine their courses of action. They also employ their personal power of reflexivity. Through their reflexive considerations, they examine what they care about and begin forming concerns that might lead to a project in which they wish to invest themselves. Pupils’ concerns regarding education (and life in general) and their reflexive considerations are discussed in Articles II and III.

The research participants' courses of action through reflexive deliberations are discussed below by investigating the stratified conception of agency. As argued by Maccarini and Prandini (2010), the concept of *concerns* is multidimensional, as it comprises preoccupations and refers to what worries individuals and what they want to accomplish because they care about a topic. Reflexivity directs humans' actions in various spheres of life. The result of this is a *unifying relationship* that reconstructs the subject because the subject can say *who* they are and who they want to be, observing *what* their ultimate concerns are and *where* they are in relation to them. The individual can decide whether they are willing to pay the price required by their present *modus vivendi* or if they want to alter their project; however, "any possible decision involves a dynamic placement: heading somewhere in an oriented space" (Maccarini & Prandini, 2010, p. 91).

In Archer's (2007) study of different modes of reflexivity – communicative, autonomous, meta-reflexives and fractured (see Section 3.4) – she found that her participants have a dominant type of reflexivity and that these modes are related to different mobility patterns. As shown below, the participants in this study seemed to engage in different forms of internal conversation that included various aspects of reflexivity. Farrugia (2013b) argued that different types of reflexivity are influenced by an individual's cultural capital, their habitus, which forms the basis that young people mobilise. These arguments are in line with Nico and Caetano (2017), who argued that more educated and qualified people have broader reflexive competencies than their less educated counterparts, who "direct their reflexive capabilities towards pragmatic issues" (p. 678). However, the present study indicates that neither the level of education nor cultural capital is fundamental for young people when enforcing their reflexive capabilities.

The communicative reflexives revealed talking things over with their family and peers before deciding. They tended to follow in their parents' footsteps regarding education and, for some, future work. They were regarded as the ones upholding "contextual continuity" and could be considered to stay put in society. Nevertheless, staying put is not standing still. Young people are keenly aware of the need to pursue an education, and this demands making choices about which school and which track. Two of the communicative reflexives initially wished to attend upper secondary school in a different county, because it offered their sport. Although they were friends and wanted to enrol in the same track, they did not pursue this wish because 'it was too far away' (Jennifer). Their relational goods, that is, to sustain contact with their families, was a prime concern and could not be forgone to enrol in the desired track. The communicative reflexive is "relationally formed and needs to be relationally sustained" (Archer, 2012, p. 164).

The dominant type of reflexivity exercised by the research participants was the autonomous mode, which was prevalent among boys (see Table 3 for an overview of the participants' modes of reflexivity). This was clearly the prominent mode for some pupils, as they stated they had investigated their decisions about upper secondary education by holding an internal conversation. Although they had consulted others, such as teachers, parents and peers, their initial projects were mostly created in solitude.

What does it mean to be autonomous at this young age? As stated above, to some degree, young people's experiences rely on observing others. While doing so, the autonomous young people also participate in an activity they enjoy, such as exercising, sports, fishing or cooking. Thus, they learn how to navigate the practical order. The autonomous pupils in Tromsø (mainly boys) sought upward mobility and/or high-status jobs; this was also found by Archer (2003; 2007; 2012). These boys were attracted by the opportunity to fund an expensive lifestyle as an aim for their secondary and tertiary education and occupation. They were enrolled in an academic track, and many were enrolled in a track that offered their sport. They were concerned with being able to pursue their sport, possibly to make it a future lifestyle, and having an education that would foster a career, preferably in high-status work such as economics or the health sector (e.g., dentist, physician) and various enterprises. Although some saw themselves living in Tromsø in the future, they also considered moving to other cities that could provide even better opportunities in terms of career and higher salaries.

The autonomous boys in Coastal Valley did not follow the exact 'scheme' proposed by Archer (2007), as they did not necessarily aim for upward mobility and an expensive lifestyle in the future. These boys had mainly entered the vocational track, which would eventually generate occupations in trades such as carpentry and plumbing. These boys were concerned with getting a stable job that would enable them to continue living in a rural area. Although they were interested in earning enough to afford to buy nice cars and snowmobiles, this did not come across as their main concern; rather, it was to enjoy the freedom they experienced by living in a rural area, such as hiking, fishing and being 'unrestricted' by the city boundaries that they felt restricted their freedom to enjoy the natural sphere. They were open to living in a different rural location than their natal place if they had to, although they preferred living in a rural environment. Could rural boys be considered less geographically mobile compared to their urban peers? They certainly did not envision a future in the city, yet they moved to the city – and long distances – to attend upper secondary school. At the same time, they were willing to obtain an occupation outside their natal place if they could live in a rural area. Thus, they were geographically mobile, but not in the sense that is the norm in late modern society: moving to urban areas and seeking upward mobility.

Could rural pupils' autonomous reflexivity be due to the lack of interlocutors in their natal community? Although many autonomous individuals experience a natal background that does not supply either relational goods or normative consensus (Archer, 2012), this cannot be the whole answer, as it would be reflected by their urban peers. According to Archer (2012), the making of current young autonomous reflexives could be found in their position as 'enforced independents' because of their parents' changeable relationships. However, I do not consider these rural autonomous reflexives 'enforced independents', but rather 'prepared independents', as it seems both parents and school prepare them to make decisions that would enable them to leave the natal community to pursue education beyond lower secondary school. To achieve an education that would enable a steady income in the future, they would have to move rather long distances; this requires an individual who is prepared to be mobile, independent and self-reliant – namely, an autonomous or meta-reflexive. Nevertheless, how young people navigate in the practical order and the opportunities they have to explore various activities, seem to be spatially bound.

Meta-reflexive mode is regarded as a mode for educated individuals in more privileged positions (see, e.g., Farrugia, 2013a; Nico & Caetano, 2017). Nevertheless, and despite their young age, some research participants were meta-reflexive, as they were value-oriented, thinking about themselves in relation to society and/or questioning existing structures such as the educational system. Most of these pupils felt that others did not understand them, which made them consider themselves to be outside the peer group. They found it difficult to sort out what they wanted for the future and had not formulated an (educational) project that they would invest in, making them "fragile" regarding future trajectories. They had also experienced distressing situations, such as the loss or severe illness of a family member.

All but one of the meta-reflexives could be considered at risk of becoming fractured. These meta-reflexives, for instance, felt dissatisfied with themselves and their way of life. They stated feeling helpless and powerless when dealing with problems. In addition, they stated they were indecisive and felt they were not able to change things in life. To me, it seemed these pupils could become fractured if they did not find themselves a project with which to engage. Their concern at the time was not to find a suitable educational track offering their dream education because they saw this as a rather unattainable pursuit. Some had talked to their school counsellor about various educational options, what they enjoyed doing and where they saw themselves in the future, although they were unable to give sustainable answers to these questions. Thus, after enrolling in a track, they were still unsure if it was the right choice.

The meta-reflexives seemed to want to achieve a personal identity that would enable them to sort out who they were in relation to themselves and society; thus, they sought

to know themselves and their environment. They were uncertain whether the educational system could offer them the kind of competence and knowledge they needed in the future; hence, they were searching for different ways to obtain knowledge, for instance, on the internet. The meta-reflexives did not want to replicate their natal backgrounds, and the available opportunities were not sought because of social advantages in the future. This distinguishes them from communicative and autonomous reflexives, respectively (Archer, 2012). The meta-reflexives did not internalise or normalise the social order; rather, it was peculiarly problematised. The meta-reflexives stated they were more or less immune to group pressure and expectations. Furthermore, they were not individualistic but rather loners. “*Qua* loners, they are clear about what they do not want, which is any personal version of social reproduction” (Archer, 2012, p. 208).

The meta-reflexive participants obviously knew what they did not want, but it was harder for them to know what they wanted. They who had reflected upon society were critical of their surroundings, both consumerism and state policy. They were searching for something to commit to. The purpose for their future lives seemed to be deeply social and relational and guided by internal rather than external motivation. They might find a project they think is valuable enough to invest in, but in the process of searching for such a project, they might be vulnerable to both personal and spatial opportunities and constraints.

Why did these different modes of reflexivity in relation to spatial location advance different educational and, thus, different societal enterprises? These aspects will be explored below.

6.4 The importance of space for determining courses of action

This thesis identifies structural and cultural conditions that both provide opportunities and constrain pupils when orienting towards further education, making educational decisions and negotiating personal identities.

As shown in Sections 1.3 and 4.1.1, the young people in Coastal Valley and Tromsø have grown up in geographical locations that differ significantly from each other in several respects: population size and density, industrial structures, centrality, and location of educational offerings. In Sections 6.1 and 6.2, I introduced the agents in the Norwegian education system and discussed the structural and cultural properties that condition pupils and their way through the educational system. The agents in the Norwegian education system and the structural and cultural emergent properties will be revisited in this chapter to explore how both education and the negotiation of personal identity can be affected by corporate agents and structural and cultural emergent properties.

The pupils in Coastal Valley and Tromsø appear to be aware of the opportunities and constraints concerning their social locations through complex modes of reflexivity. In addition, their situations and social relations are experienced in various ways. Below, I will focus on Coastal Valley's pupils, as they are the ones facing pronounced structural constraints when they are forced to move away from home at a young age to pursue education after lower secondary school. In addition, growing up in Coastal Valley has provided them with a Sámi, Kven and Norwegian legacy that they find both enabling and constraining (Article I).

In different ways, articles II and III both investigate how pupils in Tromsø and Coastal Valley navigate the education system and reflexively make decisions concerning upper secondary education. Article I takes a somewhat different approach, as it explores how pupils in Coastal Valley have experienced being educated according to LK06-S in a Sámi Administrative Area and the extent to which the local school and the educational system enable and constrain their negotiations of a personal identity.

In section 6.2.1, I found that structural properties especially impinged on rural pupils. The first emergent property discussed was rural–urban demography, which impinges on pupils because upper secondary and tertiary education are often localised in more heavily populated areas (Lefdal, 2014). This forces young people to move from rural/peripheral areas into centres or urban areas to pursue education. Pupils must reflexively inform themselves in relation to these structures. As discussed above, pupils in Coastal Valley do not endorse communicative reflexivity. This may be because they need to become autonomous to be able to move. The communicative reflexives in Tromsø who wanted to pursue their sport and thus needed to move chose the second-best option for upper secondary education to stay in Tromsø. For the young people in Coastal Valley, this is not an option; the educational offerings are in more central areas, so they must become autonomous or meta-reflexive to manage life away from home.

Changes in work opportunities have affected rural areas and, thus, how young people envision local work opportunities. 'New' workplaces, resulting from technological development and related to higher education, research, administration, finance and the tertiary sector, are often located in urban areas (Rasmussen, 2010), which causes young people to move from rural areas when seeking these work opportunities. According to Wiborg (2009), centralisation of employment stemming from a more service-dominated society is an important factor for centralisation processes. Article II investigates how Coastal Valley's boys aimed for an education that would lead to a trade, which in turn would enable them to live in their natal place. This meant that David, for the time being, gave up his initial plan to become an engineer, as he perceived his chances of getting a job like that in Coastal Valley to be minimal. Thus, he enrolled in a vocational study programme that would enable him to settle in a rural area. David and the other

autonomous rural boys, devoted to mending machines and so forth in the practical sphere and enjoying the natural sphere, reflexively sought opportunities that would enable them to pursue their main concern, which was to settle in the rural area. Hence, they sought the education they needed, moved away from home and planned to move even farther away the following year to achieve their craft certificate. Local opportunity structures frame the possibilities for making choices and trajectories for individuals, both agents and actors.

The rural girls preferred an academic track. While they were not sure which occupation they wanted in the future, they knew they would pursue tertiary education. Although some of them wanted to settle in Coastal Valley, they envisioned tertiary education that they thought might not lead back to the rural area. In line with the two rural boys who were autonomous/meta-reflexive and meta-reflexive, the rural girls held their options open as to where to settle down, as “things might happen that take you elsewhere” (Cody). The pupils were young people making their first choices in locations that affected their opportunities because they i) had to move to enrol in upper secondary school and ii) perceived the local work opportunities as limited. This meant they made specific choices if they wanted to settle in Coastal Valley or pursue an education that was not needed in the local area, making a return harder or impossible.

The pupils in Coastal Valley grew up in an area with a history of assimilation and colonisation that still had an impact. This is discussed in Article I. As stated in Section 6.2.1, activating and foregrounding spatial perspective is imperative, as it makes us aware that geographies can support oppressive forms of cultural and political domination based on ethnicity and aggravate all forms of discrimination and injustice (Soja, 2013). Nevertheless, this is a complex task, as the colonisation of Sápmi led to a stigma attached to being Sámi (Johansen, 2010). As shown in Article I, the process of identifying as Sámi, Norwegian or mixed is not a straightforward task for young people.

The revitalisation of Coastal Valley is assisted by a Sámi curriculum stating that Sámi culture and language are part of the Norwegian heritage, and that “[t]his legacy must be nourished so that it can grow in schools with Sami pupils, in order to strengthen Sami identity as well as our common knowledge of Sami culture” (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training, 2015). The pupils from Coastal Valley expressed that they had both Sámi and Norwegian heritage; none of them mentioned being Kven. Some of the young people discussed the value of preserving Sámi knowledges, practices and language and saw their education as an opportunity to do so. To them, this was a personal responsibility, something they needed to ensure did not disappear. Although they talked about the Norwegianisation process their ancestors had undergone, they did not assign this to a spatially unjust system. They talked about Norwegianisation in a rather matter-of-fact way, but they acknowledged this had been hard and somewhat

devastating to local Sámi knowledges, practices and language as well as the Sámi identity.

They were proud of their Sámi heritage, although they found it difficult to express what the coastal Sámi knowledges and practices entail. It was much easier for them to present the inland Sámi person and culture. This could indicate that the centralised education system, through curriculum and textbooks, contributes to the idea that the Sámi person lives inland, as discussed in Article I. As stated in Section 6.2.1, the Sámi society has a clear hierarchy in which the inland Sámi knowledges and practices have been depicted as the ‘real’ Sámi knowledges and practices, giving it a hegemonic position that has caused the coastal Sámi to feel inferior (Olsen, 2010a; Pedersen & Viken, 2009).

Global trends, such as indigenous movements, have influenced the people in Coastal Valley in revitalising the Sámi language and culture. It has gone from being a community regarded as mainly Norwegian in the 1980s due to the suppression and historical rejection connected to the Sámi stigma (Johansen, 2010; Pedersen & Viken, 2009) to being involved in the revitalisation processes that gathered momentum during the 1990s (Høgmo, 2011; Johansen, 2013; Pedersen et al., 2012). The indigenous perspective became a crucial part of how the young generations perceived themselves. The Sámi youth organisations played a vital part in the revitalisation project by seeking a Sámi identity and identity clarification. This process of clarification has benefitted the research participants, as the Sámi stigma is not that pronounced, yet the pride of being (a real) Sámi is not that easily articulated. In the next section, I discuss the implications of the structural and cultural emergent properties faced by pupils, especially rural pupils.

6.5 Creating change in emergent properties that constrain and enable pupils

According to Archer’s morphogenetic approach (see Section 3.2), the possibilities for changing structural emergent properties that condition rural pupils imply introducing change in the ongoing interaction between agents on the national level. In the morphogenetic cycle, the interaction takes place at the level between T2 and T3, which may lead to change in a future T4. These changes can eventually improve the conditions for rural pupils and teachers/schools.

Changes in a system can occur for various reasons. For instance, towards the end of the 20th century, the rising awareness of indigenous peoples’ rights across the globe caused changes in existing structures. Amongst other things, the ILO Convention 169 gave the Sámi legitimacy and argumentative force to demand increased efforts concerning Sámi language, knowledges and practice. This had implications for the Norwegian education system through policy and curriculum. The first Sámi curriculum was implemented in

1997. These indigenous efforts also had implications for local Sámi communities (see Sections 6.4 and 6.2.1).

In the centralised Norwegian education system, the government can initiate change. However, corporate agents, such as special interest groups, possess the power to forge changes within structures. In this thesis, pupils are the main concern. Yet, as postulated above (Section 6.1.1), they are considered primary agents. Therefore, corporate agents, such as teachers' unions, can act to make changes for themselves and the pupils within the education system. These changes do not necessarily lead to complete structural morphogenesis, but rather to compromises that improve rural and Sámi education. Changes can be obtained if teachers' unions and other organisations, such as Sámi interest groups and the Sámi Parliament, cooperate to create articulated goals to improve the situation for rural and/or Sámi pupils, and Sámi education in general.

To create change for rural and/or Sámi pupils and teachers, their case must be articulated. This could be done through interest groups and organisations, such as the pupil and parent organisations. However, as argued in Section 6.1.1, the pupil organisation has little impact on policy and decision-making processes. Although the parent organisation (FUG) is considered an external interest group, their relationship is debatable due to funding (see Section 6.1.1). Even though they are large in number, the fact that FUG represents all parents can cause tensions in terms of creating unison demands that include various interests.

In addition, the Sámi Parliament and Sámi associations can put pressure on the government to initiate change within the education system that will benefit Sámi pupils and schools. These changes can occur on a structural level, such as working for decolonising education. One place to start could be by emphasising Sámi perspectives in teacher education.

In a centralised education system such as that of Norway, teacher organisations can act to make a change. This can be done in cooperation with external interest groups, such as those mentioned above, to put pressure on the government to make compromises that benefit rural and/or Sámi pupils and teachers.

6.6 Policy implications for rural and Sámi education in Norway

The aspects discussed in the three articles that constitute the basis of this thesis demonstrate that for rural pupils to succeed in the educational system, they need to be autonomous or meta-reflexive. Some crucial events occur in spaces outside Coastal Valley: i) further education takes place in more urban areas; ii) to some degree, perceived job opportunities are elsewhere (in urban areas); and iii) the coastal Sámi youth depict the 'real' Sámi as being somewhere else, namely, inland. Even though the

rural participants feel at home in their local community and thus do not feel a sense of displacement or disconnection, the idea that many things that matter take place in a different space causes what I term *dis-spacement*.¹⁰ Dis-spacement could be a helpful concept to theorise and explore young rural people's concerns, because many things that are important in their lives, that assist them in negotiating their personal identity, do not occur in their local space, but somewhere else.

The articles and the section introducing the structural emergent properties all comprise analyses of current issues and conditions that pupils face. In addition, they describe some of the main agents involved in the educational system and their interactions. The situational logic is implicit in this analysis. Due to the scope of this thesis, I have not discussed what the agents must do; for the situational logic, see Rød (2021). Below, I explicate some of the policy implications found in this thesis and the three articles.

6.6.1 Local contingencies must be dealt with centrally

In late modern societies and in the individualisation thesis, it seems people must deal with the constraints and opportunities at hand; whether one fails is up to the individual. In the centralised education system, those who must carry out the emergent properties described in section 6.2.1 are the agents introduced in section 6.1.1. To avoid blaming individuals for structural constraints and enablements, I introduced corporate agents. These agents have some power to act to address the structural and cultural conditions that cause inequalities for pupils.

The physical distance to offered educational tracks is a constraint, especially for rural pupils, but also for communicative urban pupils who must move to obtain their preferred track. The current COVID 19 pandemic has taught us it is possible to have more online instruction. Online teaching could be an addition to teaching in physical schools that could address distance from upper secondary schools. To prepare for online teaching demand, both *physical resources*, such as a stable internet, computers and teaching platforms and *time* for teachers to prepare this kind of education are required. Online teaching could be an addition that the government could investigate in cooperation with parent–teacher and pupil organisations and the Sámi Parliament.

To some extent, when pupils choose their tracks in upper secondary education, they must rely on information and experiences provided by others, such as school counsellors. A lower secondary school in an urban area provides school counsellors who are tasked with guiding pupils in choosing upper secondary education. However, the counsellors have limited time to spend on individual pupils. In a small, multi-graded rural school, the school counsellor also teaches various subjects in different classes and

¹⁰ Thank you, Anna Loppacher, for discussing these perspectives with me.

might be a class teacher as well. This creates a situation in which the counsellor must obtain knowledge in various areas. It seems too much to ask that the local school counsellor stay informed with the variety of educational tracks and the changing labour market. The Norwegian government must provide resources, in terms of time and economy, so school counsellors can get to know, guide and support pupils to make informed educational choices and to envisage local occupation opportunities if sought.

Article II indicates that rural pupils envision local occupation opportunities as limited. Some of them state, “There is a possibility to start your own company, but then you have to be rich or win the lottery” (Alan). However, there are possibilities to get assistance when opting to start an enterprise, such as business development funds; pupils need to be aware of these options. Politicians in the central government have a major responsibility to provide rural young people with available intrinsic opportunities.

In today’s society, which holds urbanised and globalised values/ideas as key suppliers of conditions, rural and localised values run the risk of becoming marginalised and hence overlooked when determining courses of action at the national level. In this thesis, and in all three articles, I have shown that young people occupy agency but that their agency is both constrained and enabled by structures; furthermore, some places and spaces offer several constraints and fewer (perceived) opportunities.

6.6.2 A need to develop a spatially and ethnically aware curriculum

As pointed out in Chapter 2, a spatially aware curriculum is critical for a spatially just education system. As presented in the section on emergent properties and in Article I, the educational policy in Norway seems to be spatially unaware. This thesis claims that rurality and issues related to the Sámi people are not an explicit part of Norwegian education policy and that corporate agents need to engage in these issues for them to be included. The educational policy that directs the Norwegian curriculum is evaluated approximately every decade. Corporate agents, such as teachers’ unions and the Sámi Parliament, can cooperate to negotiate and influence the strong agent – the central government – to create a more spatially aware curriculum that includes rural, Sámi, Kven and other minority perspectives. The rural and the Sámi population are small in number; it is crucial that their aspects and interests are heard when educational policy is executed to achieve a just education system. As the new curriculum took effect in 2020, this might be unhelpful, as the next reform cannot be anticipated until the next decade (Solstad & Andrews, 2020).

Article I demonstrates that pupils who learn about the local Sámi knowledges and practices and a local dialect of the northern Sámi language do not find information about these topics in textbooks. Their teachers provide them with self-made worksheets and pamphlets to educate them about these topics. In many ways, diverse Sámi content is

not formalised in the education system, which results in additional (curricular) work for teachers who must produce materials and teaching/learning resources. In addition, the lack of textbook resources results in a *devaluation* of local Sámi issues. If Sámi diversity and heterogeneity are not included in textbooks, are they perceived as not important enough to be taught?

The rural and the Sámi perspectives need to be valued in the education system. Within rural and Sámi spaces, there are a variety of groupings. The various perspectives need to be understood in a non-essentialised conceptualisation of the agents involved, as there are multiple *ruralities* and Sámi *multi-vocalities*. Within the education system, the rural and the Sámi are small in actual numbers and thus at risk of not being heard, which endangers epistemic injustice (Anderson, 2012; Fricker, 2007). Therefore, the agents involved in educational policy must cooperate to make a rural- and Sámi-sensitive educational policy.

One way to ensure a more just education system is to give teachers and local schools more autonomy to enact the centrally mandated curriculum and develop the local curriculum. A juxtaposition between the Norwegian and Finnish education systems is one way to envision a more spatially aware education system, as it will allow for more local autonomy. Local schools and teachers' autonomy are means to increase their leeway, not to assign more tasks to local schools. I refer to Rød (2021) for further discussion on alternatives for the organisation of the educational system.

7 Concluding remarks

This thesis sets forth to understand how pupils make their way through the Norwegian education system by focusing on how structural constraints and/or enablements frame objective structures. Through the work presented in Articles I–III, the thesis broadens our understanding of how pupils in different contexts navigate the education system. Moreover, the thesis identifies structural and cultural conditions that both constrain and/or enable such processes. The pupils are a heterogeneous group of young people who are making their way through the world, specifically through the education system. The title of the thesis postulates that context (and space) conditions pupils' agency. An assumption is implicit here that these conditions are unevenly distributed; thus, the education system is regarded as unjust, causing inequity for pupils based on where they live and their ethnicity. This thesis has pointed to structural constraints and enablements that condition pupils on a local level, as well as the agents operating within the educational system. Furthermore, these constraints and opportunities have caused unequal conditions for pupils depending on location, where rural pupils face more severe constraints than their urban peers.

The constraints and opportunities are arranged into first- and second-order emergent properties, as they are, respectively, the result of people's past actions. The emergent properties that condition the pupils in this study are *rural–urban demography, local opportunity structures, the centralised education system, the assimilation or colonisation of Sápmi* and *spatially unaware curriculum*. *Globalisation trends and ideas* in the Sámi community have also had an impact.

Reflexivity is central to both Article III and this thesis, as I point out that pupils apply different modes of reflexivity when making decisions concerning upper secondary education (and work) and in negotiating personal identity. In this thesis, I suggest that reflexive processes can be gloomy and that distinct modes of reflexivity can be difficult to achieve (at least for young people), as different modes seem to operate simultaneously. I suggest that school counsellors must be given time to get to know the individual pupil, as the communicative and meta-reflexive pupil might need more guidance than the autonomous pupil when trying to sort out their concerns.

There is a tendency to consider reflexivity as an activity that is disembodied, where the individual can detach from the social context when making reflexive considerations. The empirical material shows, however, that all modes of reflexivity involve spatial notions. The pupils participating in this research did not reflect of a blank canvas disembodied from their location. They participated in their social locations, their experiences were embedded and they shared meanings and social norms within spaces. Furthermore, the pupils' situation was also historically constituted and tied the past to the present and the future when they oriented themselves in the education system and the world. As shown in Article I and this thesis, the rural pupils' past, comprising the colonisation of Sápmi, impinged on their notion of what it entails to be Sámi and constrained their process of negotiating personal identity. The colonisation and revitalisation processes seem to devalue the local Sámi identity and culture, as the norm seems to be the inland Sámi features.

This thesis also presents a set of policy implications, which are intended to address the structural constraints and opportunities found among the first- and second-order emergent properties. Since the pupils' organisation does not hold intrinsic power, the teachers' organisations and the Sámi Parliament must cooperate with other interested organisations to promote Sámi and rural pupils' interests regarding education. Moreover, the Norwegian government must address the expensive housing situation for pupils who must move to attend upper secondary education. The thesis also suggests some means for achieving a spatially and ethically aware curriculum by providing some leeway for local schools and teachers to create and enact a local curriculum; this requires an increase in both resources and autonomy (see also Rød, 2021).

7.1 Implications for future research

Conducting this study heightened my awareness that it is impossible to provide everything of importance in one research project. This insight has implications for future research, as there are many topics I wanted to follow up on or engage in that must wait for now. What follows are some ideas I think are worth following up on in the future.

This thesis, especially the chapter on previous research, argues there is a lack of research that gives voice to young people. While this thesis fills in some of the gaps, further studies that illuminate these issues are needed. A relevant place to start would be to follow up with the young people in this study and investigate their way through life. In addition, it would be interesting to examine young people's perceptions of enablements and constraints related to education and future work in various contexts in Norway and internationally; these investigations would need to give space a dominant place in the investigations.

The results suggest that the rural young people in this study consider being in place in the local environment. However, many things that matter take place in different spaces; upper secondary and tertiary education are in a different space, many job opportunities are in different spaces and the 'real Sámi' are envisioned as somewhere else, causing dis-spacement. Future research could investigate whether these results are transferable to similar contexts in Norway and internationally. A way forward could be to include decolonising perspectives in Sámi and Norwegian research to a greater extent.

The high number of autonomous reflexives in the rural municipality indicates there might be some contextual factor that requires investigation. Do the local community, parents and school encourage autonomous reflexives? It would be of interest to explore whether autonomy could be related to dis-spacement, as these young people face several constraining structures.

The implementation of the new curriculum, LK20, requires follow-up research, particularly in terms of whether the curriculum is more spatially and ethnically just than LK06. LK20 seems to be a continuation of the impact of current globalisation trends in education, as it is oriented towards output rather than input. It would be of interest to investigate whether LK20 provides more leeway for local schools to create and enact a local curriculum. In addition, it would be interesting to research whether LK20-Sámi and textbooks produced according to the competence aims make room for Sámi multi-vocalities.

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Appendix

Unn-Doris K. Bæck

9006 TROMSØ

Vår dato: 24.10.2017

Vår ref: 56704 / 3 / STM

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

Tilråding fra NSD Personvernombudet for forskning § 7-27

Personvernombudet for forskning viser til meldeskjema mottatt 19.10.2017 for prosjektet:

56704	<i>RUR-ED Spatial inequalities and spatial justice in education</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	<i>UiT Norges arktiske universitet, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
Daglig ansvarlig	<i>Unn-Doris K. Bæck</i>

Vurdering

Etter gjennomgang av opplysningene i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon finner vi at prosjektet er unntatt konsesjonsplikt og at personopplysningene som blir samlet inn i dette prosjektet er regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. På den neste siden er vår vurdering av prosjektopplegget slik det er meldt til oss. Du kan nå gå i gang med å behandle personopplysninger.

Vilkår for vår anbefaling

Vår anbefaling forutsetter at du gjennomfører prosjektet i tråd med:

- opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon
- vår prosjektvurdering, se side 2
- eventuell korrespondanse med oss

Meld fra hvis du gjør vesentlige endringer i prosjektet

Dersom prosjektet endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å sende inn endringsmelding. På våre nettsider finner du svar på hvilke [endringer](#) du må melde, samt endringskjema.

Opplysninger om prosjektet blir lagt ut på våre nettsider og i Meldingsarkivet

Vi har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet på nettsidene våre. Alle våre institusjoner har også tilgang til egne prosjekter i [Meldingsarkivet](#).

Vi tar kontakt om status for behandling av personopplysninger ved prosjektslutt

Ved prosjektslutt 31.12.2022 vil vi ta kontakt for å avklare status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Se våre nettsider eller ta kontakt dersom du har spørsmål. Vi ønsker lykke til med prosjektet!

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Vennlig hilsen

Marianne Høgetveit Myhren

Siri Tenden Myklebust

Kontaktperson: Siri Tenden Myklebust tlf: 55 58 22 68 / Siri.Myklebust@nsd.no

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

KJÆRE ELEV I TIENDE KLASSE

Du inviteres med dette til å delta i forskningsprosjektet "RUR-ED Spatial Inequalities and Spatial Justice in Education". Hensikten med undersøkelsen er å undersøke hvordan det er å gå på skole i rurale områder. Målet er å bidra til økt kunnskap om hvorfor elever i rurale områder gjør andre utdanningsvalg enn elever i mer urbane området.

Prosjektet er finansiert av Norges forskningsråd. Prosjektet vil bli utført av forskere ved Universitetet i Tromsø.

HVORDAN DELTA?

Intervju:

Vi ønsker å rekruttere et mindre antall elever til personlige intervju. Under intervjuet vil det bli benyttet lydopptaker. Intervjuet vil ta 30 til 45 minutter og vi blir enig om tid og sted med den enkelte elev. Om intervjuet skal foregå i skoletiden vil vi avklare dette med lærer på forhånd.

GENERELL INFORMASJON

Læreren din har ingen tilgang til intervjuene, de eneste som har tilgang til disse er forskerne på prosjektet.

Det er frivillig å delta. Du kan når som helst og *uten å oppgi grunn* trekke ditt samtykke til å delta i undersøkelsen. Dette gjør du ved å sende e-post til oss: ubaooo@uit.no.

Det er ingen andre enn forskerne på prosjektet som vil få tilgang til de personidentifiserbare opplysningene. Forskerne er underlagt taushetsplikt og opplysningene vil bli behandlet strengt konfidensielt. Resultatene av studien vil bli publisert som gruppedata, uten at den enkelte kan gjenkjennes.

Forskningsprosjektet forventes å være avsluttet til jul 2022. Datamaterialet vil lagres med personidentifikasjon i ti år etter prosjektslutt i påvente av eventuelle oppfølgingsstudier. Dersom det ikke blir aktuelt med oppfølgingsstudier, vil datamaterialet være anonymisert senest innen 31.12.2032. Du vil motta ny informasjon og ny forespørsel om å delta dersom det blir aktuelt med oppfølgingsstudier.

Prosjektet er tilrådd av Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk senter for forskningsdata.

Vennlig hilsen

Unn-Doris K. Bæck
professor

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien RUR-ED Spatial Inequalities and Spatial Justice in Education

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

Sted, dato, signatur av prosjektdeltaker

ELEVINTERVJU – 10. trinn

BAKGRUNN

1. Kjønn og alder
2. Har du alltid bodd på dette stedet?
3. Kommer dine foreldre fra dette stedet? Hvis ikke, hvor kommer de fra?
4. Hva jobber foreldrene dine med?
5. Har du søsken? Hva gjør de?
6. Har du annen familie på dette stedet; for eksempel besteforeldre, tanter, onkler, søskenbarn?
7. Har du familie andre steder? Har du vært mye der?

STEDET

8. Kan du beskrive stedet der du bor for meg?
9. Hvordan synes du at det er å bo her?
10. Hva synes du er positivt og negativt med å bo her?
11. Hvor trives du aller best å være i denne bygda/på dette stedet? Hvorfor?
12. Føler du at du hører til her, hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?
13. Vil du flytte eller vil du bli?
14. Hvorfor?

FRITID

15. Hva holder du på med på fritida?
16. Hva slags fritidsmuligheter er det her?
17. Har du mulighet til å holde på med de aktivitetene du har lyst til å holde på med? Hvis ikke, hvorfor kan du ikke holde på med det?
18. Hva holder du på med på sommeren?
19. Hva holder du på med på vinteren?
20. Er det andre tilbud som du skulle ønske var her, på dette stedet?
21. Hva liker du aller best å gjøre?

VENNER/SOSIALT NETTVERK (TRIVSEL OG TILHØRIGHET)

22. Har du mange venner på skolen?
23. Har du venner på fritida?
24. Kan du fortelle litt om vennene dine?
25. Kan du fortelle litt om hva dere gjør når dere er sammen?
26. Synes du at det er lett å få venner her?
27. Hva er du og vennene dine opptatte av?

SKOLETRIVSEL

28. Hvordan synes du at det er å gå på skolen her?
29. Føler du at medelever og lærerne bryr seg om deg?
30. Hvordan mestrer du fagene?
31. Hvordan opplever du at du får brukt ferdighetene dine (det du er flink til) på skolen?

32. Vil du si at du er lik eller ulik de andre elevene på skolen, fortell.

FORHOLDET TIL LÆRERE

33. Hva synes du om lærerne på denne skolen?
34. Føler du at du kan snakke med dem?
35. Hva snakker du med dem om?
36. Er de strenge?
37. Tror du at lærerne dine har forventninger til skolearbeidet ditt?
38. Hva tror du at lærerne synes om deg som elev?
39. Tror du at han/hun synes at du jobber nok med skolearbeidet, på skolen og hjemme?

40. Treffer du noen gang lærerne utenom skolen?
41. Vet du om lærerne dine kommer fra området?
42. De som ikke kommer fra området, hvor kommer de i fra?
43. Er det mye utskifting av lærere?
44. Synes du det er vanskelig eller lett å bli kjent med dem?

45. Har dere mange vikarer? Hva synes du om det?

PÅ SKOLEN

46. Beskriv en vanlig skoletime for deg. Hva gjør du? (jobber konsentrert, skaper uro, følger med i undervisninga, snakker med medelever, deltar i klasseromsdiskusjoner)
47. Hvordan synes du at du gjør det på skolen?
48. Hva synes du om undervisninga (interessant, lærerikt, kjededelig, spennende, utfordrende, lett)
49. Hvordan du ligger du an, karaktermessig, i norsk, matte, engelsk, gym?
50. Hvilke fag liker du best og dårligst? Hvorfor?

51. Hvem er den flinke eleven? Hvorfor tror du at akkurat han/hun er flink? Hva tror du at denne eleven vil gjøre videre, mht utdanning og jobb?
52. Kan du beskrive en elev som ikke er motivert på skolen?
53. Befinner du selv deg i en av disse gruppene?
54. Hvorfor tror at noen elever er motivert og interessert i skolen, mens andre ikke er det?
55. Hva må til for å være en populær elev her?
56. Hva gjør du i friminuttene?

KLASSEMILJØET

57. Kan du fortelle om miljøet i klassen?
58. Er det sånn at alle er venner og er sammen, eller er det klikker?
59. Er jentene og guttene sammen?
60. Er du fornøyd med å gå i denne klassen, hvorfor (ikke)?

61. Gjør klassen ting sammen utenom skoletid, ev. hva?

FOKUS PÅ DET LOKALE I SKOLEN

62. Lærer du noe om hjemstedet ditt på skolen? Fortell. (Eventuelt om Nord-Norge, Troms fylke, kommunen)

63. Har dere prosjektarbeid hvor dere fokuserer på nærmiljøet? Hvordan går dere fram: drar dere noen gang ut for å samle inn informasjon? Kommer noen på besøk til skolen for å fortelle dere om ting? Kan være alt fra historie til arbeidsmarked.

64. Får dere besøk av noen som bor i lokalmiljøet i skolen?

65. Hva synes du om at det stedet der du bor blir trukket inn i undervisninga?

66. Bruker du skolen utenom skoletida? Til aktiviteter eller lignende

UTDANNINGSPLANER

67. Hva har du lyst til å bli?

68. Hva må du gjøre for å bli det?

69. Tror du at det er jobb her for deg når du er voksen?

70. Hvor vil du gå på vgs?

71. Hva slags linje vil du ta?

72. Hvorfor vil du velge dette?

73. Tror du at du kommer til å komme inn på det du vil?

74. Tror du at du vil få bruk for det du lærer på skolen, i framtida?

75. Hva ser du fram til med å begynne på videregående?

76. Hva gruer du deg til?

77. Er det noen som har hjulpet deg med å velge vg. skole? (foreldre, venner, rådgiver, lærer, andre)

78. Har dine venner omtrent de samme utdanningsplanene som du har?

79. Har du noen forbilder når det gjelder yrke?

80. Hva med etter videregående? Har du lyst til å studere?

81. Hva er drømmeutdanninga – hvor realistisk er det?

82. Hva er drømmeyrket ditt? - hvor realistisk tror du at det er?

83. Hvor ser du for deg at du bor om 10 år? Hva jobber du med?

84. Hva slags planer tror du at vennene dine har?

85. Tror du at du har de samme utdanningsmuligheten som de som bor i en by har?

86. Tror du at skolen er en forberedelse for voksenlivet? På hvilken måte? Forberedelse på det å fortsette å bo stedet?

FAMILE

87. Hva tror du at foreldrene dine tenker om din framtid og din utdanning?
88. Snakker dere om dette?
89. Tror du at de har de samme målene for deg som du selv har?

90. Hva snakker vanligvis dere om rundt middagsbordet?
91. Har du inntrykk av at dere har god råd i familien?

KJØNN

92. Tror du at det er annerledes for jenter enn for gutter å vokse opp her?
Hvorfor?
93. Vil du beskrive deg som en typisk jente/gutt?
94. Blir jenter og gutter behandlet likedan på skolen?
95. Tror du gutter og jenter velger ulik utdanning/jobb?

ETNISITET

96. I denne bygda er det jo familier som har ulik bakgrunn, det er vel noen som er samisk, noen som er kvensk og andre som er norsk. Mange sier de er litt sånn blandet. Hvordan tenker du om deg sjøl?
Tenker du på deg selv som samisk, kvensk, norsk – eller som blandet?
97. Er dette noe dere snakker om (i familien/på skolen)?
98. Tror du det har noe å si (interesser, skolemotivasjon, utdanningsvalg) om en ser på seg sjøl som samisk, kvensk eller norsk, fortell.

ELEVINTERVJU- OPPFØLGNING

Bakgrunn

1. Hvilken linje går du på, er dette ditt første valg og startet du på det du trodde at du ville begynne på i 10. klasse? (hvorfor (ikke))
2. Bor du hjemme eller på hybel (eller annet)?
3. Hvorfor bor du på hybel, og bor du sammen med noen du kjenner?
4. Hva er fordelene/ulempe ved å bo på hybel?
5. Føler du at midlene fra lånekassen/stipendet strekker til?
6. Støtter foreldre eller andre deg økonomisk – fortell.

Overgang til vg.skole

7. Hvordan gikk du fram da du skulle bestemme deg for linje/skole? Hvem snakket du med (rådgiver, foreldre, venner, andre), hvilke råd fikk du, hva var den viktigste grunnen til at du valgte som du gjorde?
8. Hvorfor valgte du å begynne på denne linja?
9. På forhånd, hvordan trodde du at det skulle være å begynne på videregående? Er det ting som er annerledes enn du hadde tenkt på forhånd?
10. Hvordan opplever du at det er å gå på videregående?
11. Hvordan trives du på skolen? Enn utenfor skolen?
12. Kjente du noen på skolen fra før av? Har du fått nye venner – hvordan synes du det eventuelt har vært å bli med kjent med nye?
13. Hva gjør du i friminutter/fritimer? Hvem er du sammen med på da? (Er du sammen med de som bor på hybel eller de som bor hjemme eller begge deler? Hvem er du mest sammen med?)
14. Føler du at du er kommet inn i det sosiale miljøet i klassen? Fortell. Er du aktiv i timene - er du komfortabel med å rekke opp hånda i timene, være med i diskusjoner etc... – dersom ikke, hvorfor ikke?

Vil du si at noen gang føler deg annerledes enn de andre elevene, f.eks. pga. at du ikke kommer fra herfra?
15. I grunnskolen var det ganske mye fokus på samisk kultur og språk – hvordan er dette ved denne skolen?
16. Hender det at du skulker skolen?
17. Hvilket forhold har du til lærerne? Føler du at du har blitt kjent med dem? Kjenner de deg? Er dette annerledes enn på ungdomsskolen?
18. Vet du om foreldrene dine har hatt foreldremøter/samtaler med de på skolen?
19. Vil du si at det er forskjell på lærerne her og de du hadde i 10. klasse?

20. Når du sammenligner ungdomsskolen med videregående, hva mener du er de største forskjellene?
21. Er det noen som hjelper deg med skolen, lekser? I tilfelle, hvem?
22. Hvordan vil du si at du ligger an faglig sammenlignet med de andre i klassen?
23. Opplever du at det du lærer på skolen er viktig, vil du få bruk for det i framtida?
24. Hvis du ikke hadde gått på skole, hva ville du gjort i stedet for og hvorfor?
25. Kjenner du noen som ikke har fullført videregående, hva gjør de?
26. Har du selv noen gang tenkt på å slutte på skolen? I så tilfelle, hvorfor? Hva ville du har gjort dersom du sluttet?

Fritidsaktiviteter

27. Hva gjør du på fritida?
28. Hvem er du sammen med på fritida og hva gjør dere sammen?
29. Driver du på med organisert fritidsaktiviteter?
30. Hvor ofte er du hjemme og hva gjør du når du er hjemme? (hybelboere)
31. Hvor mye tid bruker du på internett, og hva bruker du nettet til?

Framtidsplaner

32. Hvor vil du bo, hvor vil du ikke bo, og hvorfor? (Hva er grunnene til at du ønsker å bo her?)
33. Kan du for deg å bo på hjemmeplassen når du blir voksen? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke? Hva slags jobb ville du kunne ha der?
34. Hva vil du bli, ikke bli, hvorfor?
35. Ønsker du å ta høyere utdanning?
36. Kan du forsøke å beskrive hvordan arbeidshverdagen din vil være i framtida (teknologi, robot etc.)
37. Har du planer om å reise?

Hva syns du er det viktigste for deg akkurat nå, hvorfor?

Appended papers

Article I: “I am Sámi, but I am not a Sámi”: Articulating local Sámi voices—the youths’ perspectives

Stenseth, A-M., (in progress, 2021).

“I am Sámi, but I am not a Sámi”: Articulating local Sámi voices—the youths’ perspectives

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Abstract

This article gives voice to coastal Sámi pupils and explores their struggles over ‘being Sámi’. Through longitudinal interviews, pupils share insights on learning about Sámi issues at school and reflect upon their identity. The article demonstrates how youths negotiate personal identity, and how these identities are structured by the educational system. In order to do so, this article employs Archer’s work on educational systems together with her theory on structure and agency, Fricker’s philosophy on epistemic injustice, and decolonial perspectives. One key finding is that the educational system constrains the coastal Sámi pupils, as educational discourses seem to restrict them from identifying as ‘real’ Sámi.

In focusing on pupils’ and using the educational system as a backdrop, this article seeks to deepen the understanding of how the society and the educational system in particular condition pupil’s notions of what it entails to be Sámi and how pupils negotiate their identity.

Keywords: decolonisation, education, identity, reflexivity, youth

Introduction

This article’s focal point is pupils in Sápmi, Norway, and how they understand and negotiate their identity; more precisely, their ongoing struggle over ‘being Sámi’. As these pupils undertake education, it locates them as part of processes that unfold through cultural, political, and economic spatialities that influence identity negotiations. These spaces are full of history and are not bounded but developed in relation to the outside world, such as pupils’ natal community and the education system.

The participants were educated according to the Knowledge Promotion Plan— Sámi (LK06-S). The core curriculum in this plan states that the Sámi language and culture are part of Norway’s shared heritage; therefore, this legacy *must* be nourished to strengthen Sámi identity (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training, 2015). For this research, pupils in a coastal Sámi area were interviewed to understand whether the education system nourishes the Sámi heritage and strengthens the Sámi identity. Pupils’ voices from coastal Sámi areas are not often heard; thus, this article offers a unique and important contribution to the field.

This work is inspired by a special edition of the *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education* named *Decolonial Options in Education*, which challenges “coloniality in institutions and curriculum” by offering essential insights into the conversation on decolonising education, thus contributing to “collective knowledge creation” (Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020, p. 4). Eriksen and Svendsen (2020) remind us of decolonial perspectives as

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opportunities to move beyond traditional modes of social critique by confronting denial problems rooted in the eagerness to continue the modern-colonial habit of being. Stein et al. (2020) find that many scholars have been socialised into colonial habits of being. Hence, “we need to attend to not only the intellectual dimensions of de/colonisation, but also to its affective and relational dimensions” (p. 53). Hagatun (2020) engages in these perspectives when researching Roma pupils’ experiences in Norwegian schools. She argues that coloniality produces and upholds structures of inequality that suppress minorities within the education system. In line with Hagatun, the presented article takes pupils’ experiences into account and finds that “the curriculum and organisation of schools can be challenged in ways that go beyond superficial adjustments” (2020, p. 135), which include accommodating Sámi (and minority) perspectives.

This article provides the reader with some context about Sámi education, followed by a theoretical framework. Next, there is an account of the site and methodological approach. The discussion explores how pupils reflect upon their education regarding Sámi issues and how the Norwegian education system allows pupils to start negotiating personal identity. In the concluding remarks, I indicate that the local Sámi is within a discursive void due to unintended consequences caused by epistemic injustice and the unification in the centralised education system.

Sámi Education

The national context can be analysed to understand Sámi education in Norway. During the 1700s, structured and formalised education became common in Norway. During this period, Norwegian missionaries established schools in the Sámi areas; one important goal was to teach literacy to the Sámi people, allowing them to read the Bible (Jensen, 2005). At that time, the belief was that if Sámi people received education in Sámi, they would want to learn Norwegian to better adjust to the Norwegian culture (Jensen, 2005).

In the mid-eighteenth century, the predominant view of the Sámi changed. The will to use the Sámi languages in school decreased, and by the mid-nineteenth century, an assimilationist policy was carried out (Aikio-Puoskari, 2009; Ngai et al., 2015). For several decades, the use of Sámi languages was prohibited in school. Together, three main political and cultural trends—nationalism, social Darwinism, and security policy—impacted indigenous education in Norway (Jensen, 2005). In 1997, Niemi described the education arena as the battlefield of assimilation, where teachers acted as combatants in implementing the assimilation process initiated by the governmental authorities.

After World War II, Norwegian authorities gradually ended the assimilation policy towards minorities. In the Education Act of 1959, the ban on the Sámi language in schools was abolished, and, in 1969, the Education Act introduced the right to be taught Sámi languages (NOU 2000: 3, 2000). However, teachers were mainly Norwegian, and children and youth confronted diverging socialisation models (e.g., Sámi and Norwegian) when attending education, which differed in values and norms (Edvardsen, 1996; Hoëm, 1976).

By the end of the 1970s, the Alta conflict had resulted in a reform of the Norwegian Sámi policy. This conflict was a series of massive protests from the Sámi people and others concerning building a power dam on the Alta River in Finnmark. In the aftermath, the

Norwegian Parliament established the Samerettsutvalg (Sámi Committee), which led to the Sámi Act of 1987 and the opening of the Sámi Parliament in 1998. Since then, there has been an increasing interest in revitalising the Sámi language and culture in Norway. When Norway ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 in 1990, it was an important step to acknowledge Sámi rights: this was also emphasised in the 1995 White Paper, which stated that the education of Sámi pupils should be based on the Constitution, paragraph 110a, The Sámi Act, The Education Act, and the ILO Convention 196 (St. meld. nr. 29, 1995).

Today, the Ministry of Education and Research (MoE) is responsible for all levels of education. The Ministry determines the national curriculum for compulsory and upper secondary education through The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training with a “core curriculum” (CC) that targets the educational systems’ ideological, value-based and knowledge content. The CC elaborates on the set of values in The Education Act and the general principles for general education in Norway. Further, it describes the fundamental view that should characterise pedagogical practice throughout primary and secondary education. The CC is translated from Norwegian to northern Sámi; thus, there is no original Sámi CC.

The revitalisation project in the Sámi Administrative Areas (SAA) has been assisted by a Sámi national curriculum (L97-S), implemented in 1997 in compulsory schools in Norway and pupils outside these areas who receive a Sámi education. However, the way it was implemented has been criticised (Hirvonen & Keskitalo, 2004; Hirvonen & Sámi, 2004): municipalities in the SAA did not have strategies for increasing knowledge about Sámi language and culture amongst teachers, there were no textbooks in Sámi, and there was not enough time to readjust to the new plan.

In 2006, the curriculum known as ‘The knowledge promotion plan’ (LK06) alongside the second Sámi curriculum (LK06-S) was implemented in primary, secondary and upper secondary schools. These curricula can be looked upon as one joint curriculum, but they are widely referred to as separate yet equal and parallel curricula.

One argument for providing the same education in the Norwegian and Sámi schools is that indigenous people have the right to the school system in their nation-state; however, they should have access to an education in their own culture and language when possible (“United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” 2007). In a report based on fieldwork in five schools in the Northern Sámi area, it was found that the implementation of LK06-S was left to the individual schools and the individual teacher (Germeten, Bongo, & Eriksen, 2010).

Sámi pupils within the Norwegian Education System

Within the framework determined by the MoE, the Sámi Parliament (SP) issues regulations concerning the content of Sámi education. As stated in the Education Act § 6-4:

The Sámi Parliament issues regulations concerning curricula for instruction in the *Sámi language* in primary and secondary education and *specific Sámi subjects* in upper secondary education and training. The regulations must lie within the scope and resource allocation determined by the Ministry (Opplæringslova, 1998, italics added for emphasis).

When reading this, it is tempting to ask, “What are specific Sámi subjects?” and maybe more so, “Which subjects are not Sámi?”

In a report on LK06-S (Solstad, 2012), it is argued that the Committee for Upbringing, Care and Education² in the SP found it disadvantageous that Sámi schools solely had the opportunity to offer opinions on specific Sámi issues and not the entire content in the national curriculum. Furthermore, the report found a conflict between the SP and the Norwegian government, as the SP desired parallel and not identical curriculums (2012, p. 53).

Throughout history, Sámi perspectives, knowledges and practices have been an insignificant part of the Norwegian education system, and the Sámi people have held a disadvantaged position in Norwegian society (Askeland & Aamotsbakken, 2016; Dankertsen, 2014; Hoëm, 1976; Hovland, 1999; Niemi, 2017; Vars, 2017). Further, the assimilation policy (from mid-1800 - mid/late 1900) impacted children as they were placed in boarding schools, allowing little contact with their family and community. Moreover, Sámi languages were prohibited in official contexts; thus, children did not necessarily learn the language (Hoëm, 1976; Høgmo, 1989; Jensen, 2005). In addition, there has never been an acknowledgement of the Norwegianisation policy or any recognition of responsibility on behalf of the government (Vars, 2017).

Educational institutions play a significant role for pupils in negotiating identity, as well as when teaching and learning about minorities and indigenous people. Yet, researchers find that the curriculum is often developed from majority perspectives, with few references to indigenous knowledge (Apple & Buras, 2006; Eriksen, 2018; Gruenewald, 2003; Olsen & Andreassen, 2018). While the Norwegian curriculum has become more sensitive toward Sámi issues, from being ignorant to ambitioning towards inclusivity (Hirvonen & Keskitalo, 2004; Olsen, 2019), the authors argue that indigenous Sámi perspectives are underdeveloped and that regional and contextual diversity is lacking.

The new curriculum (LK20), which was recently implemented in Norwegian schools, states that pupils must learn about diversity and variations within Sámi culture and society (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training, 2020). However, Eriksen (2018) argues that identifying a particular person as Sámi while excluding others poses a risk. In addition, research has shown that Sámi issues are downplayed and marginalised in Norwegian textbooks (Folkenborg, 2008; Olsen, 2017), which could cause a lack of understanding of Sámi issues and a more pronounced lack of understanding of Sámi diversity among pupils (and others). Furthermore, the marginal representation of Sámi texts in textbooks signals that Sámi literature is insignificant compared to majority (Norwegian) literature (Aamotsbakken, 2015).

This article focuses on pupils’ struggles over ‘being Sámi.’ The educational system plays a significant part in the pupils’ struggle because it structures their school experiences. As there is no space to review the curriculum, I build upon others’ findings (mentioned in this section) when addressing the Norwegian education system and its role in facilitating teaching and learning about Sámi issues.

² Norwegian: oppvekst-, omsorg- og utdanningskomiteen

Theoretical positioning

In this article, Archer's sociological theory dealing with structure and agency (2000, 2003) is applied to investigate the structural constraints pupils must engage with when negotiating their identity while undertaking education in a coastal Sámi area. Further, her theory on education systems (1984, 1995, 2013) is used as a backdrop to understanding the situational logic between the Norwegian state and the Sámi Parliament regarding education. In addition, I apply Fricker's (2007, 2017) philosophical theory on epistemic injustice to understand the outcomes of the Norwegianisation policy for the Sámi people. Fricker (2007, 2017) argues epistemic injustice is essentially a form of discrimination, a distributive injustice. In this article, discrimination towards the Sámi people is regarded as distributive injustice.

To individuals, the process of negotiating personal identity involves attending to their *main concerns*: the things that matter to them (Archer, 2000, 2003). Constellating concerns through monitoring and prioritising concerns constitutes an individual's unique personal identity (Archer, 2003). Personal identity is achieved by subjects independently relating to their environment and is therefore relational (Archer, 2003).

When seeking to understand individuals' identity negotiations, the interplay between structural factors, encounters with social institutions, and cultural imperatives must be considered. Archer's analytic framework considers these issues by offering an understanding of human agency as embedded in structural and cultural properties (2000, 2003). According to Hoëm (2010), a multitude of social-cultural processes takes place in late modern societies. Through socialisation, the essential experiences gained by the individual will contribute to forming an identity. The education system is responsible for formal socialisation, which in principle means the transfer of knowledge. According to Hoëm (2010), socialisation is a relational process resulting in societies' cultural identity on a macro level and personal identity on a micro level.

To address educational structures, there is a need to define what constitutes an education system. The following definition, proposed by Archer, suggests that structural characteristics identify the educational system as "*a nationwide and differentiated collection of institutions devoted to formal education, whose overall control and supervision is at least partly governmental, and whose components and processes are related to one another*" (Archer, 2013, p. 54, original italics). Based on Archer, Skinningsrud (2012) argues that the Norwegian education system is centralised because it, amongst other things, is *governed centrally* by politicians that initiate reforms and educational guidelines and has a high degree of *unification* and *systematisation*. A high degree of unification means strong and effective government control; an increase in *intensive unification* increases top-down control, while *extensive unification* is the degree to which policy is carried out across the country (Archer, 2013, p. 174). These aspects are crucial to understanding the situational logic between the MoE and the SP.

In a centralised educational system, external and professional interest groups like teachers' organisations, termed corporate agents, try to influence central politicians at the macro level. Archer (1995, 2000, 2003) argues that corporate agents cannot make just what they will of the situations they operate in because their circumstances include the distribution of resources and ideas available to them. Large and well-organised groups with clear points will meet approval for their educational policy and aims. The political negotiation processes are crucial for changes

within the system (Archer, 2013). In this article, the SP is considered a corporate agent when promoting Sámi pupils' educational interests. The SP has the right to decide which issues are of particular interest to the Sámi people. Formally, the SP has developed and approved the special Sámi curriculum, which is for subjects taught in Sámi schools.

The relations between institutions or organisations, such as the MoE and the SP, create situational logics. These again reshape the situations agents face. Situational logic is decided by institutional configurations in the structural system (SS) and constellations of propositions in the cultural system (CS). These configurations decide whether the institutional configurations are in a complementary or contradictory relationship, that is: if they can benefit or prevent one another's interests/operations and whether they are necessarily or only contingently related (Archer, 1995; Knio, 2018).

The relative position of agents' vis-a-vis each other in institutional configurations, and the issue(s) at hand, together with the structural and cultural constraints and enablements, creates situational logics for agents, where a particular direction of actions carries a higher cost or reward than other actions. Furthermore, situational logic conditions action but never determines it (Archer, 1995). For example, Solstad implies that the SP could offer opinions exclusively on specific Sámi issues and not the entire curriculum. Their suggestion of parallel and not identical curriculums was not heard, creating a consensus of correction between the SP and the MoE, indicating that agents are conditioned toward compromise at the SS level, with containment being the dispositional tendency at the social interaction level.

Until quite recently, the corrective exercise was executed by assimilation, also known as colonisation: the nation-state sought to "correct" the Sámi society for it to be consistent with or indistinguishable from the Norwegian state. Morgan's (2003) contribution to understanding the changing phases in how Western societies approach indigenous cultures and knowledge, from appropriation to appreciation and then accommodation, is of great value. He argues there have been "only an acceptance of those knowledges that can be understood and validated in mechanistic term (...). Indigenous knowledges have been and still are actively excluded by the very nature of the dominant Western paradigm" (Morgan, 2003, p. 45). The move to understand what is understandable from the majority or Western perspectives can be termed epistemic injustice.

Fricker's (2017) term epistemic injustice is helpful in this regard as it delineates wrongdoings: "someone is ingenuously downgraded and/or disadvantaged in respect of their status as an epistemic subject" (p.53). Fricker argues that epistemic injustice is essentially a form of discrimination, a distributive injustice³ - someone receiving less than their rightful share of an epistemic good, such as, for instance, education (Fricker, 2017).

According to Fricker, there are two types of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical. Both injustices involve identity prejudice, that is, prejudice against specific speakers and someone because of their social identity (Anderson, 2012; Fricker, 2007). Testimonial injustice takes place when a hearer disregards the credibility of a person's

³ Fricker (2007) states the distinction between 'discriminatory' and 'distributive' is not an exclusive demarcation, since most cases of one will have some features of the other. If people do not get their fair share of a good, this will often be the cause and/or the result of some sort of discrimination.

statement due to prejudice against the individual's social identity (Fricker, 2007). In contrast, hermeneutical injustice is always structural and occurs when a society lacks the interpretative resources to make sense of the speaker's statement due to prejudicially marginalisation (Fricker, 2007). According to Anderson (2012), people do not know how much they are prejudiced against a speaker and, thus, do not know how much to correct this bias. Further, Anderson notes that there might be a form of testimonial injustice that is not interpersonal; rather, structural, one of the epistemic forms involves giving more credence to ingroup members over outgroup members (pp. 169-170).

An empirical example of epistemic injustice would be that the colonisation of Sápmi still has consequences today. Many coastal Sámi youths cannot envision themselves as 'real' Sámi. For example, they do not hold certain features; Reindeers, (living) Inland, Lávvu⁴, and Language (RILL) associated with 'being' Sámi. These features are put through by the education system and the mass media; hence, they become the dominant Sámi narrative.

Context and methodological approach

This article's municipality is part of the Sámi Administrative Area (SAA), implying, for instance, that public information is given in both Sámi and Norwegian languages. Further, the municipality has initiated several Sámi programs; there are language courses in the Northern Sámi language and policy is aimed at improving and strengthening the services linked to the development and safeguarding of Sámi language and culture. Given the fictive name Coastal Valley, this small, coastal community has less than 3000 inhabitants and is a couple of hours' drive from any significant larger town. As with other Northern Norwegian communities, this community has long been inhabited by three groups: the Sámi, the Kven, and the Norwegians, who lived together and married across ethnic divides (Bjerkli, 2010; Eidheim & Schjøtt, 1958). Thus, the community is regarded as a multi-ethnic community. Around 1900, most people in this area spoke the Sámi language; today, most residents speak Norwegian only (Bjerkli, 2010; Eidheim & Schjøtt, 1958; Johansen, 2010, 2013)

Through roughly one hundred years, the researched area has gone through a process from colonisation and Norwegianisation to revitalisation. These processes had and still impact the population, as will be discussed in this article. The term *revitalisation* has been used in the areas of the Sámi when addressing the resurgence of Sámi culture and language, where it has previously been suppressed (Hiss, 2015; Johansen, 2013; Nystad et al. 2017; Pedersen, Høgmo, & Solbakk, 2012; Sarivaara, 2016). Revitalising here is understood as bringing something back to life, rejuvenating, or giving a new lease of life to something. Yet, it is essential to ask whose language, practices, and knowledge is being revitalised? The education system and other societal systems, such as the mass media, put some Sámi history, culture, and language forward to recognise some areas of Norway. However, as the Sámi community is diverse and holds multiple languages and dialects, entails different ways of living and has diverse histories, this move could homogenise the Sámi world and be seen as a form of neo-colonialism.

⁴ Lávvu is a traditional Sámi tent.

The state's Norwegianisation policy led to a pervasive change in many Sami communities, including the researched area. By the end of World War II, the Germans used the scorched ground tactic, leaving Finnmark and Northern Troms in ruins, resulting in many Sámi being deprived of their physical culture. Thus, the effort to make them Norwegian was easier. Many Sami, especially those along the coast, found it hard to rebuild from such devastation, and changed both their language and their ethnic identity and 'became' Norwegians (Johansen, 2010; Keskitalo & Olsen, 2019; K. Olsen, 2010; Pedersen & Viken, 2012). Furthermore, research suggests that the language shift from Sámi to Norwegian was like a tsunami that first purged the language away from coastal Sámi areas. In contrast, inner Finnmark, the reindeer herding areas, were stroked later (Rasmussen & Nolan, 2011). As will be shown in this article, although the coastal Sámi pupils try to learn the Sámi language, the educational structures do not necessarily accommodate learning it.

The study's data collection method is semi-structured longitudinal interviews carried out on three occasions with eight pupils in one small, multi-graded school in Coastal Valley. The interviews were conducted when the pupils were in the tenth grade, with follow-up interviews in the first grade in upper secondary school. The main topics were related to learning about the local community, learning about the issues of the Sámi, learning the Sámi language, and reflecting upon identity. The interviews were conducted with the written consent of pupils, recorded electronically, transcribed, and analysed using Nvivo.

This article explores whether youth in Coastal Valley regarded themselves as mixed, Sámi, Kven, or Norwegian⁵. To be sensitive to the, possibly, difficult question, I asked the pupils: "In this area, many would say that I am Sámi, Norwegian or Kven, or that I am mixed. How do you think about yourself in this regard?" I felt an urge to be sensitive when asking the question because there still are 'scars' within the community, to define as 'Sámi', 'Kven' and/or 'Norwegian'.

The interviews were conducted in a small community where persons can be easily identified if too many details are provided; therefore, neither gender nor the exact year of the interviews is revealed.

The pupils were taught according to the curriculum "The Knowledge Promotion Plan-Sámi" (LK06-S). Thus, when referring to 'curriculum' in this study, it is to LK06-S. Most pupils (approximately 70%) are taught Sámi as their second language, S2 or S3⁶, while some choose not to learn the Sámi language. The aim of Sámi 2 is for pupils to become (functional) bilingual (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training, 2013).

I grew up and have been a teacher in a similar context as the interviewees; hence, I am an "insider," thus holding an emic perspective (Olive, 2014). The possible drawback with an emic perspective is that one might be at risk of not achieving enough analytic distance (Paulgaard, 1997); however, an outsider may struggle to get close enough to understand what is taking place

⁵ The term mixed is used as some people in this area describe themselves as such (various 'mixes' of Sámi/Kven/Norwegian), also used as North-calotte mixed/cocktail.

⁶ S2 refers to Sámi as second language, while S3 is Sámi in-depth study (samisk fordypning).

(Olive, 2014; Paulgaard, 1997). According to my informants, it was easy to talk to me because, *you understand how it is to grow up in a place like this*⁷ (Pupil F).

When researching a Sámi community, I seek to understand and contribute to decolonising the position of the Sámi. As stated by Linda T. Smith (2012), research that involves indigenous peoples should have the ambitions to make a positive change for the participants. Further, “the research approach also has to address seriously, the cultural ground rules of respect, of working with communities, of sharing processes and knowledge” (Smith, 2012, p. 193). I attempted to adhere to Smith’s suggestions by being respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic and beneficial toward my informants (Porsanger, 2004).

Being Sámi, Norwegian, or both?

The pupils self-identified using three meaningful categories: Sámi and Norwegian (Pupil A, B and C), coastal Sámi (pupil D), and other/mostly Norwegian (pupil E, F and G). These categories are by no means exhaustive, as people in the community define as, amongst other, Kven, Norwegian and with an identity from their country of origin. The three categories are used when attempting to understand my informants’ negotiations and ambivalence concerning their identity. Furthermore, pupil A, B, C and E studied Sámi 2 in lower secondary, while pupil D studied Sámi 3. Pupils F and G had not studied Sámi in lower secondary school. Pupil B, C and D entered the closest rural upper secondary school and continued studying Sámi. Those who entered a city school quit studying the language (pupils A and E).

The pupils process of ‘reflexively defining who they are’ is done within socio-cultural systems that constrain and/or enable these individuals’ main concerns, the things they define to be important to them (Archer, 2000, 2003). My research shows that the pupils struggle over identity. Negotiations concerning identity are partly done within the education system, which aims ‘at strengthening Sámi identity’ (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training, 2015). Still, also, they struggle with their histories, including family history.

Pupils’ perspectives on self-identification and learning the language

Many pupils (almost 40 %) in this study self-identified as both coastal Sámi and Norwegian. They have studied Sámi 2 in lower secondary school and stated learning about Norwegianisation, coastal Sámi and Sámi place names in their area. Yet, they still imagined and reiterated the dominant Sámi RILL narrative. This did not fit or accommodate their identity. Furthermore, they referred to the Sámi people as ‘they’, hardly ‘we’: “they do reindeer herding”, “they speak the language”, although few of them state:

I feel I’ve also learnt [about Sámi issues] through experiences. But one learnt that the Sámi are the indigenous people in Norway, we are the indigenous people in Sápmi, and we live in the North. We learnt about the Norwegianisation process; that’s what comes up when learning about history. Those who attend school outside of Coastal Valley and other places

⁷ The interviews were translated from Norwegian to English by the author.

where they do not focus that much upon Sámi issues, they do not learn much. I think they learn that the Sámi live on the plains and do reindeer herding. I will not say that we focused upon Sámi issues in every lesson, but around the 6th of February, we focused on it (Pupil A).

A couple of the pupils identified as coastal Sámi when interviewed in the 10th grade. Pupil D associated being Sámi with place and self-interest:

[I would say that I am coastal Sámi] because I live in that kind of place. I'm interested in the Sámi language, and I think it's important the language continues to be used in Norway. The Sámi settled down in coastal Sámi areas and started fishing and that sort of thing. And that's what makes one coastal Sámi. At least earlier. Now, one lives here. And one can say whatever one wants about who one is.

Pupil D was taught Sámi 3 in lower secondary school: *I can speak Sámi outside of school, but I haven't done much. In Coastal Valley, the elderly speak Sámi, so yes, I can speak Sámi to them. If we meet, we talk until I don't understand, then we speak Norwegian.*

Although pupil D could speak Sámi outside of the school context, most pupils explained being unable to or excluded from participating in conversations in the language.

Not many people at school can speak Sámi, some know some words and phrases, so there isn't much talk in Sámi. Many can't Sámi well enough to speak it. I can hardly hold a conversation going in Sámi. We don't speak Sámi well, so it is difficult (pupil B).

Pupil C too finds it difficult to speak the language:

we speak Norwegian because we don't speak Sámi well; it's too hard. We don't have the vocabulary. English is easier because I watch English television series all the time, and I have more English than Sámi at school. If I meet someone who says "buorre beaivi", who greets you in Sámi, then one can greet in Sámi and ask 'how are you?'. But I don't think I would have used it with someone who understands Norwegian.

Furthermore, there is not enough support to learn the language through other means, such as the mass media, as expressed above by pupil C. Learning English is mandatory, while learning Sámi is not. Holmarsdottir (2005) argues that in many colonised contexts, language learners do not encounter the taught language outside of school and thus do not have learning opportunities available to them. Furthermore, Olsen (2010) argues that "it is difficult for children to become fluent in the language as long as it is kept out of most public spheres in their everyday lives" (p. 153).

The *lack of sufficient Sámi language knowledge* is important when my participants attempt to define themselves. To them, the lack of Sámi language appears to be identical with the *lack of a Sámi identity*. This statement from pupil A demonstrates the notion of authenticity: *Much of being Sámi is to be able to speak Sámi*. Moreover, the reflections by some of the pupils, *how can I be Sámi if I cannot speak Sámi* (Pupil G), point in the same direction. According to Olsen

(1997, 2010), the Sámi language can be used as a symbol that can situate people along a continuum between the Sámi core, inner Finnmark, and Norwegian modernity. Moreover, it is a symbolic statement that ranks people according to authenticity. Archer (2003) argues that personal identity is achieved by individuals in relation to their environment and thus relational. Therefore, the pupils' equation between the lack of Sámi language and lack of Sámi identity needs to be addressed throughout education. This is because identifying as Sámi should not rest upon the idea of speaking the language well.

Learning the language and learning about Sámi topics in upper secondary school

When entering upper secondary school, pupils express that education barely focuses on Sámi issues, except for the 'Sámi week'. Pupil A said:

This year, in upper secondary, we haven't really learnt anything, except for one lesson in a Norwegian language class, but it wasn't really a focus upon that [Sámi]. But it came up. It was about [Norwegian] dialects. We saw a film, and there, [name] appeared. And then, it was a bit about being proud of being Sámi. So, one doesn't really learn about culture, language, and such.

Furthermore, receiving Sámi language education is constraining in some upper secondary schools. Some pupils do not have access to Sámi language teachers at school and thus must attend digital education if they want to pursue language classes. Pupil A stated not studying Sámi in an upper secondary located in the city:

I thought I had to attend classes online. They [pupils] need to attend classes at a different school. So, if Sámi was offered at my school, I would consider studying it, but I didn't because it was only an online offering.

Pupil D entered a vocational track in the rural school and said, [n]ext year I must move [further away], they do not offer Sámi at that school, so I don't know whether I will continue, because I don't like talking over the phone/internet- it's easier to talk face to face.

This study shows that studying Sámi is restricted to some schools. Yet, another perspective was offered by pupil E who quit language classes when entering upper secondary school in the city: *I don't think the Sámi language will be of any use to me in the future; I can't see the use of it.*

In addition, access to Sámi language camps is constrained by the fact that pupils 'miss' ordinary education when attending camps. Pupils B and C entered an academic track. Pupil C said:

We have Sámi classes twice a week. Some time ago, there was a language camp in Tromsø that all Sámi pupils could attend. Then, we learnt Sámi. Twice a year we attend language camps, we get money to do so. That's nice. We meet others who study Sámi and get to know them.

Pupil B expressed that it was not straightforward to attend language camps: *Recently there was a language camp in [place], but I didn't attend. Then we had a heavy workload at school, and I couldn't miss school.*

These constraints indicate that pupils must make a tremendous effort to learn the language, an effort the educational system does not sufficiently accommodate. The lack of Sámi focus in education reinforces the insignificance of Sámi history, knowledge, and practices (Hoëm, 2010). Because of this, education “downgrade” Sámi worldviews and the aim to strengthen Sámi identity, which causes an insufficient understanding of the Sámi and thus brings about a deprived feeling of being Sámi amongst coastal Sámi pupils.

The Norwegian educational system's appreciation of Sámi knowledges

The participants are educated according to LK06-S. Nevertheless, they expressed having little focus on Sámi issues during ordinary classes. Sámi topics were addressed mainly during the school camp and the Sámi week. When they were asked what they had learnt about their natal place and Sámi issues at school, they had similar responses, with some variations. Pupil C explained: *We don't learn much, sometimes there is some. . . maybe one or two weeks when the Sámi national day approaches, but otherwise there is nothing.*

Pupil F quit Sámi classes when entering lower secondary school and stated:

Yes, at least these Sámi pupils⁸ [learn about Sámi issues]. When we attend a school camp, we learn about Sámi place names, and that's interesting because they reflect how the place was used. So, we have learnt some, even though I don't learn Sámi.

The lack of Sámi focus⁹ in education is emphasised in the research arguing that that Sámi schools lack an overall purpose, an ideology and a distinct understanding of how it can contribute to the development of the Sámi community and culture (Nergård & Mathiesen, 2005).

As expected, those who studied the language stated that they learnt more about Sámi topics than those who did not receive language teaching.

When attending language classes, one learns more than the language. One learns the words through various topics that relate to Sámi ways of life and some culture. . . . The [Sámi language] teachers give us teaching material on a sheet of paper. They have produced it for many years. They have done a good job in teaching us. I feel that most of my competence about the Sámi and our area and the culture is because of them. . . . (Pupil A).

The pupils acknowledged their teachers' effort when making them instructional material. This adds to Germeten et al. (2010) who found that the implementation of LK-06S was left to the individual schools and the individual teacher. Corporate agents, such as teacher

⁸ Sámi pupils are the ones who are taught Sámi. They are not necessarily regarded as Sámi by themselves or peers.

⁹ For more on Sámi ambivalence and education see for instance Edvardsen (1996, 1997).

organisations and the SP, can offer suggestions concerning curriculum. However, as argued by Solstad (2012), the SP was not sufficiently heard in negotiations with the MoE. The SP and the MoE have an obligation to cater teaching about (coastal) Sámi knowledges and practices in schools by providing resources that contribute to diverse perspectives in the learning material. Yet, the limited Sámi focus in curriculum and textbooks can be traced in the pupils' statements. Pupil A stated:

We learn that they [Sámi people] do reindeer herding and that kind of stuff; some do it. But we also learn that not everyone does reindeer herding, and that there are coastal Sámi, and that everyone doesn't need to have reindeer to be Sámi. It was more like..., not solely the typical. We learn about how they lived [previous generations], and everything about the Norwegianisation process—we have learnt a lot about that.

Although they learnt about the Norwegianisation process, and that not all Sámi lived inland, the dominant narrative of the Sámi (RILL) still is so prominent that they did not depict themselves as 'real' Sámi. Pupil F expressed: *I don't know if I would say I'm Sámi. It depends on what kind of Sámi and what a Sámi person is. Because I'm not on the plains with reindeer and I don't live in a lávvu.*

Regarding learning about Sámi issues, the SP and the MoE could put forward Sámi diversity in the education system. To analyse the situational logic between the MoE and the SP would demand more space and is not within the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it is observed that the SP's agency seems to be restricted by the MoE; the SP's desire for a parallel curriculum was not fulfilled, and the SP could state opinions upon issues marked as the Other (specific Sámi issues and language), not upon unmarked topics targeted as Norwegian/majority perspectives. This might endanger putting forward Sámi diversity as the RILL appears to be *the* Sámi to the Norwegian majority. According to Kumashiro (2000), education can, although while wanting to be inclusive, run the risk of reconstructing "us" and "them" by presenting dominant narratives. As Sámi topics were taught in relation to the 6th of February, pupils experienced that this week was marked as the Sámi week. When attending upper secondary school, pupil B stated:

On the Sámi national day, we had a Sámi week, then we had Sámi in nearly all subjects. Then, we learnt some about Sámi culture and such things. This year, I actually wore the gákti¹⁰ on the Sámi national day. Several wore the gákti at school. And at the end of the day, everyone who wore it were asked to enter the stage to show the gákti and that sort of things.

This is what Kymlicka (2010) characterises as a feel-good celebration of ethno-cultural diversity, or what Alibhai-Brown (2001) has depicted as the "samosas, steel drums and saris" approach. Morgan (2003) terms it the appreciation of indigenous culture. The participants experienced the appreciation during the 'Sámi week', when all pupils wearing the gákti were

¹⁰ Gákti is a traditional Sámi costume.

asked to enter the stage. When schools designate specific days in which to appreciate and celebrate the Sámi culture, there could be a danger that they do not *accommodate* Sámi history, knowledges and practices, but instead initiate a feel-good celebration at a specific time of year. This could result in a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’, where ‘we’ appreciate ‘them’. This might give ‘us’ the means to supply the conditions for the Other and therefore have done our part in addressing diversity. Appreciation does not alter the situation or accommodate for teaching/learning about Sámi perspectives as an included part of the curriculum; rather, it situates the Sámi as the Other.

While the MoE apparently appreciated a set of Sámi perspectives, they did not necessarily accommodate for including Sámi knowledges per se. Thus, the dominant Sámi narrative, RILL is reproduced through education in curriculum and textbooks, as well as through the media, the SP and in the society in general. The high degree of unification in the Norwegian education system might explain the situational logic between the SP and the MoE. The MoE’s intents to keep the education system consolidated concerning, e.g., curriculum, might limit the SP’s agency. This, in turn, brings about a curriculum that, to a small extent, displays the multitude of Sámi knowledges, practices, languages, identities, and so forth, neglecting the coastal Sámi topic in schools.

The coastal Sámi in a discursive void

To most pupils, wearing the *gákti* and living in a coastal Sámi area do not seem to be enough to consider themselves as a ‘real’ Sámi. To them, there seem to be some features that must be in place to do so. Pupils who feel proud of the Sámi culture do not necessarily regard themselves as Sámi due to a ‘lack’ of what is perceived as Sámi signifiers. But also due to the national ideal of Sámi RILL. Pupil A talked about being Sámi as something distant:

I would say that I’m equally Sámi and Norwegian. But that might be because I speak Norwegian and kind of belong more to that culture. Much of being Sámi is to be able to speak Sámi. When you don’t have the language, you may lose some of the culture as well. But deep inside, one is Sámi. Or I’m both; deep inside, I’m both. That is, if I spoke to an English person, I would probably say I’m Norwegian. However, if I talk to people from Tromsø, I would say I’m equally Sámi and Norwegian. I’m Sámi¹¹, but I’m not a Sámi. I’m more Norwegian than Sámi, but I’m also Sámi.

*When wearing the *gákti* [shows being Sámi], and participating. . . for instance, on Sámi festivals shows that one cares and shows that one sort of belongs. . . that one doesn’t push it aside. I have the *gákti*, I was confirmed in it, and on the last 17th of May¹², I used it. So, I don’t shy away from displaying it.*

Q: Is this something you think of as important to display?

¹¹ Sámi (Norwegian: samisk) is an adjective, whereas Sámi (Norwegian: same) is a noun.

¹² 17th of May is the national day.

Pupil A: *One sort of must. The most important is perhaps to show that one doesn't want to hide it. One doesn't necessarily need to yell out to everyone; one must decide for oneself. But if one doesn't want to hide it—then I think it's good.*

Pupil C struggled over being Sámi, Norwegian or both:

I don't have Sámi genes. But I know that my grandma knows some Sámi. I don't know if I can say I'm a real Sámi, nor a Norwegian, so I could say I'm both. I do have some Sámi heritage, and I've lived in Coastal Valley my entire life. And here, there is Sámi culture and that sort of thing, but at the same time, all those close to me only speak Norwegian. Mum and dad can't Sámi. I'm proud of owning and being able to wear a gákti, and sort of having some Sámi background.

I don't know why I think it is right to wear the gákti when they [parents] don't speak Sámi or learnt it at school. But it has—I feel it has become more in amongst youth to learn Sámi at school. It feels more okay for us than it might have for them. It might have got to do with the Norwegianisation process and that they [my parents] were closer to those who didn't accept it—things that have got to do with Sámi and such. Now, more people seem to accept it.

Wearing the gákti and learning the Sámi language are active ways of expressing being Sámi. Yet, insufficient to hold a Sámi identity. Olsen (2010) argues that identifying as Sámi is an active expression of those living along the coast; otherwise, they are assumed to be Norwegian. Yet, undertaking a Sámi identity is an individual choice, according to these pupils.

To be able to express a Sámi identity appears to be a struggle, a demanding and an active endeavour for these youth. To Pupil E, holding a Norwegian identity is linked to disinterest in Sámi issues:

I don't feel like a real Sámi; I would say I'm Norwegian. My family is a little, like, interested in that [Sámi], but I'm not that interested in those issues. For instance, I have my gákti, so one could say I'm not 100 per cent Norwegian. [When wearing the gákti] people can give you strange looks. . . . Before, you could get cruel comments. I think that today, people might not say anything, but they would still think it. If I wore my gákti in the city, I would not have felt as comfortable as when wearing a suit.

This indicates that pupils need to actively engage in identifying as Sámi to reject a solely majority identity. They consider having to be interested in Sámi issues to take on a Sámi identity. This task is demanding, as reflected by pupil G:

I believe I'm Norwegian, I think. . . I can't be Sámi. Or does one need to speak Sámi to be Sámi? Do I have to reflect upon this? No- I think I am Norwegian.

These youths must make a tremendous effort to relate to the Sámi. The cost of being required to make such an effort is an epistemic injustice, because making this effort can marginalise youths. Due to the revitalisation process, to hold a Norwegian identity could be regarded as difficult and sometimes a ‘deficit’ and thus lead to a double stigma (Johansen, 2010); previous generations were stigmatised and marginalised for being Sámi, today you should be proud of being Sámi. Identifying as Norwegian could be regarded as a costly and stigmatised option. In addition, displaying a Sámi identity sometimes comes with a cost as expressed by pupil E, *people can give you strange looks.*

Pupils in this study find it complicated to articulate what it entails to be a costal Sámi. Yet, it seems easier to state a partial Sámi identity if you have relatives in inner Finnmark. This is articulated by pupil B:

My mum is Sámi, or she can speak Sámi fluently, and half her family lives in [place in inner Finnmark]. Her dad, my grandfather, was Sámi from [place]. I would say I’m Sámi, or maybe 50-50. Because I’ve sort of learnt Sámi, always used gákti, and been to [place] quite a lot, that’s kind of my everyday life. . . . My dad’s family isn’t Sámi like my mum’s. I live in Coastal Valley, and there is quite a lot of Sámi here. However, I don’t feel like being a real Sámi since I still don’t speak Sámi well and there are a lot of things in the Sámi culture that we don’t do, like reindeer herding—and we don’t do this and that, we do everything differently. There are quite many similarities between our culture and the Sámi culture, but there are some things that are different, which are those things we don’t do.

I would say I’m Sámi and an ordinary Norwegian. I am an ordinary Norwegian on my dad’s side and a bit Sámi on my mum’s side. [Being Sámi] it is like doing the things they do—it’s a lot of that kind of things. . . . I would say that my family is partly Sámi. . . . I’m not afraid to say that I’m actually Sámi, which some might be. I’m sort of proud of that part.

Q: *Do you think some are afraid to tell that they are Sámi?*

Pupil B: *Yes, I think so.*

Q: *Why?*

Pupil B: *Many have prejudices against Sámi, and everything related to the Norwegianisation process that went on. Many have not recovered from that.*

Thus, having family origins in inner Finnmark makes this youth partly Sámi, yet *I’m Sámi and an ordinary Norwegian*. This suggests that having roots in the inner Finnmark somehow “entitles” to be Sámi. The term *ordinary Norwegian* is interesting as it might suggest that being Sámi is not ordinary, even in this context. This is not unexpected as pupils are aware of the cost of expressing a Sámi identity. The following statement also addresses the struggle when negotiating a personal identity. Pupil F quit Sámi studies when entering upper secondary. For him, this seemed to be related to not seeing himself as Sámi arguing that: *I don’t know if I would say I’m Sámi. It depends on what kind of Sámi and what a Sámi person is. Because I’m not on the plains with reindeer and I don’t live in a lávvu.*

These statements depict ‘the Sámi’ as someone else—not them. Why this is an issue might be traced to the harsh assimilation policy. Amongst other things, the policy resulted in a

discriminatory attitude towards the Sámi people, relatively few Sámi language speakers, and many losing their identity (Vars, 2017). Through the Norwegianisation process, the Sámi had to become Norwegian, and by changing a concrete signifier, the language, they could make the shift, causing what Høgmø (2011) describes as the identity shift in the coastal Sámi areas, where the post-WWII generation learnt to be Norwegian.

In addition, it has been proposed that the Sámi in inner Finnmark had to teach the coastal Sámi to be Sámi due to the latter's perceived submissiveness to the Norwegianisation process. This burden should not be placed upon the Sámi in inner Finnmark (Nergård & Mathiesen, 2005). This contributes to the dominant Sámi narrative which understands Sámi as the ones living in inner Finnmark.

The substance within the Sámi society, such as the Sámi signifiers, RILL, is easy to define as Sámi because they are strikingly distinct. Inner Finnmark's Sámi signifiers might become the symbol of the Sámi way of being/living, which is not necessarily consistent with the Sámi people along the coast. Thus, "*those things we don't do*", such as speaking the language fluently and herding reindeers, restrict youths in Coastal Valley to define as Sámi because they do not perform what is put forward by the education system as Sámi. This could be regarded as epistemic injustice, which according to Fricker (2007) can constrain the process of negotiating identity so that a person may be "prevented from becoming who they are" (p. 4). This is expressed by the pupils, as they do not envision themselves as 'real' Sámi.

According to Gaski (2000), the criteria for defining oneself as Sámi are narrow and cause alienation among the Sámi residing outside the inner Finnmark area. Notions of what constitutes being Sámi are narrowly tailored to embody some features, such as RILL. This could leave pupils' coastal Sámi identity in a *discursive void*¹³, not because of identity-deficiency but due to encountering the dominant Sámi narrative, which seems to restrict them from being a real Sámi. Therefore, there is a need to present Sámi multi-vocalities in the curriculum and textbooks to ensure that, for instance, various Sámi knowledges, practices and identities are visualised and hence formalised and revalued. Today, coastal Sámi pupils perceive their (historical) knowledge and practices as devaluated and un-formalised in the Norwegian education system. Among other things, teaching material is presented on a sheet of paper and not in formal textbooks.

As argued by, amongst others, Hoëm (2010), socialisation (through education) and the process of negotiating personal identity are closely related. The Norwegian education system could prevent coastal Sámi ways of life from remaining in a discursive void by presenting Sámi multi-vocalities throughout education. This would also accommodate epistemic justice.

¹³ Many thanks to my colleague Anna Loppacher for contributing to the discussion.

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Article II: Being Able to Stay or Learning to Stay: A Study of Rural Boys' Educational Orientations and Transitions

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Being Able to Stay or Learning to Stay: a Study of Rural Boys' Educational Orientations and Transitions

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of geographical location on young pupils' educational orientations and their transition from lower to upper secondary school; it pays particular attention to the voices of male youths from a rural area. More specifically, it investigates the interplay between gender and geographical contexts and the significance of these factors in understanding the processes associated with educational orientations. Margaret Archer's framework is used to analyse how pupils' agency is constrained and/or enabled by objective structures. The data material consists of qualitative interviews with 18 pupils transitioning from lower to upper secondary school in Norway. Each of the pupils was interviewed twice: first when they were in their last year of lower secondary education, and then during their first year of upper secondary education. The findings show that pupils consider geographical locations when making decisions about further education and work. In addition, they believe that education beyond compulsory schooling benefits their life in the rural areas. However, unlike their urban counterparts, pupils from rural areas appear to have a more constraining transition to upper secondary education. Through the analyses in this article, it becomes clear that both geographical location and gender are key factors for understanding processes connected to education.

Keywords Educational orientation · Decision-making · Pupils · Transition · Structure and agency · Rural-urban youth

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Introduction

Choosing one's education is among the most crucial choices individuals make. It is vital for developing skills and qualifications that will significantly influence the course of one's life. The topic of this article is educational orientations and transitions among young people in Norway and how geographical location plays a part in this regard. As demonstrated by Bæck (2016, 2019), Paulgaard (2017), Lødding and Paulgaard (2019), differences between rural and urban areas can be documented on various educational measures, for example when it comes to test scores, grades and completion rates, from primary school throughout tertiary education (see also Green and Corbett 2013; Nielsen and Faber 2015 on this topic). Even so, and despite a 'spatial turn' within the social sciences at the beginning of the century (see for example Gulson and Symes 2007; Soja 2009), a focus on space has often been lacking in education research, where urban areas have stood out as the norm (for example Beach et al. 2018; Butler and Hamnett 2007; Bæck 2016; Cuervo and Wyn 2012; Farrugia 2014; Hargreaves et al. 2009).

Various factors may influence educational choices and how transitions between different levels of the education system are experienced. Numerous studies have pointed out that gender, parents' educational backgrounds, socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity are relevant factors in this regard. Analyses that take other contextual factors into consideration have, however, been rarer. Lent et al. (2000, p. 37) highlight the influence of objective and perceived contextual factors by investigating 'multiple, potentially compensatory aspects of the objective environment' to understand pupils' decision-making process. Cuervo and Wyn (2014) emphasise the importance of understanding the relationships between people, places and time for grasping youth transitions. Corbett (2007) has shown how the educational system itself makes it hard for young people to stay in rural areas. In a Nordic context, Waara (1997), Svensson (2006) and Stenseth & Rød (forthcoming) are among those who have shown that residing in rural areas affects young people's future plans, including the way they think about education.

A number of researchers have also pointed out gender differences when it comes to educational choices among young people residing in rural areas and that rural boys in northern Norway are in an especially vulnerable position regarding education, in the sense that they are underperforming within the education system compared to their urban counterparts and compared to girls (Falch et al. 2010; Markussen 2016; Paulgaard 2017). The aforementioned studies point out several explanations for boys' underperformance, such as insufficient prior knowledge, lack of educational motivation due to the fact that the jobs they aspire for do not demand formal education, with subsequent underperformance and lack of identification with school as a result.

According to Massey (1994, p. 179), spaces and places are gendered and thus reflect and affect ways in which gender is constructed and understood. This is found by Dahlstrom (1996), who in a study from North Norway argues that, while rural girls opted for higher education as a strategy to expand their future options, rural boys were more traditional and less flexible. This leaves the rural males at risk of becoming marginalised (Dahlstrom 1996). Paulgaard (2017) also argues that young males in rural North Norway are victims of economic and structural changes in the labour market and in education and thus at risk of being marginalised. In addition, globalisation puts male identities and relationships 'under the pressure *of* change and under pressure *to* change' (Kenway et al. 2006, p. 4).

Against this background, the analysis in this article pays special attention to the voices of rural boys. The analysis, which draws on data from 33 semi-structured interviews, is based on an investigation of how young people residing in a rural and an urban location in northern Norway reflect around education and how they experience the transition between lower and upper secondary education.

Conceptual Framework

In order to understand educational orientations and transitions, the interplay between structural factors, individual agency and experiences, encounters with social institutions, how individuals perceive and make sense of opportunities at hand—perceived opportunity structures—and cultural imperatives needs to be taken into consideration. Margaret Archer's analytic framework takes these issues into account by opening for understanding human agency as embedded in structural and cultural properties (2000, 2003, 2007, 2012). Archer's analytic framework therefore serves as an intake to understanding how geographical location affects young people's educational orientations and experiences, and in particular those of rural boys.

In Archer's three-stage model (2007, p. 17), structural and cultural properties objectively shape situations that agents confront involuntarily. These properties possess the generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to subjects' concerns, which are subjectively defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: the natural, the practical and the social. Finally, courses of actions are produced through the reflexive deliberations of individuals who determine their projects in relation to context. Archer (2003) argues that, if the powers of constraint and enablement take effect, they must hold in relation to an individual's 'project'. Individuals deliberate whether a project is worth pursuing within their contexts of social placement. To this effect, Archer (2007, p. 7, original italics) states '[t]he key point is that any human attempt to pursue a project entails two sets of causal power: our own and those pertaining to part of natural reality'.

According to Archer (2000, pp. 289–290), pupils make their initial choices concerning further education through drawing on their experiences in the *natural realm* that can be related to play, sports and outdoor activity, which performs a regulatory function over what is sought or shunned when considering the array of occupational roles. Secondly and similarly, pupils review concerns in the *practical order* that facilitates positive and negative feedback about activities they find satisfactory, such as for instance mending machines. Thirdly, in their *social* roles, they interrogate the aspects of a role they consider worth having or discarding, which includes inspecting the lifestyles of significant others.

Furthermore, in the last decades, there have been historical changes from what Archer describes as 'contextual continuity', towards an upsurge of 'contextual discontinuity', and recently 'contextual incongruity'. Thus, youths need to prepare for new kinds of opportunities and be ready to move and re-evaluate constellations of concerns (Archer 2012, p. 82). Moreover, Archer links 'contextual continuity to traditional societies' and 'contextual discontinuity' to modernity (2012, p. 82).

Following Archer (2007, p. 17), we understand pupils' concerns and educational projects as defined in relation to constraints and enablements that are subjectively

defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality. Moreover, the types of knowledge acquired through consulting the three orders are not homogeneous and emerge from different relations between the subject and each order (Archer 2012). As will be shown in the “Results” section, the rural boys are, through reflexive considerations, concerned with dovetailing their project in the practical and the natural order which can explain their sense of attachment to the natal place.

Methods

This study examines data from 33¹ semi-structured interviews conducted twice with 18 pupils transitioning from the lower to upper secondary school. The pupils were recruited from two lower secondary schools in two municipalities, Coastal Valley² and Tromsø, in Northern Norway. The interviews were conducted using a thematic interview guide, with a focus on relations with friends, family and places; leisure or recreational activities; future plans in terms of education, work and area of residence; and experiences when transitioning to upper secondary education.

Regional Demographics

Coastal Valley is a small, rural municipality with a declining and ageing population—a demographic trend found in many rural areas in Norway (Leknes et al. 2018). The municipality has less than 3000 inhabitants. Many residents in the municipality are employed in the public health sector, social services or service-related industries. Some work as small-scale farmers and/or fishermen, whereas others commute to the city or oil or construction installations for work. The community centre houses grocery shops, a gas station, local businesses (e.g. car repair shops, hairdressers) and local handicraft. There are occupations in the municipality that demand tertiary education, for instance, a medical centre and several primary and lower secondary schools and kindergartens, as well as the local municipal administration. These occupations can be understood as gendered in the sense that more women work as teachers and nurses (that require tertiary education), while more men are manual workers in local business or commute and work shifts on oil installations or on construction sites (that require upper secondary education).

Tromsø is one of the largest cities in Northern Norway with more than 70,000 inhabitants and an increasing population. The city houses institutions such as a hospital, a county administrative centre, considerable public sector organisations, a university and several upper secondary schools and technical colleges, where people from both Tromsø and (Northern) Norway can study and work.

An Introduction of the Norwegian Education System and the Participants

In Norway, primary and secondary education is free of cost. Primary and lower secondary education is mandatory. Pupils enrol in the first grade the year they turn 6

¹ The material consists of 33 semi-structured interviews with 18 pupils. Four pupils, two in the rural and two in the urban municipality, preferred to do the follow-up interviews in pairs.

² Coastal Valley and Grønnevik are fictive names given to protect the anonymity of the places.

and leave the tenth grade the year they turn 16. Approximately 98% of the pupils continue to upper secondary school where they can choose either a 3 years' academic track or a 3 to 4 years' vocational track (VET). There are five programmes for academic studies and eight vocational education programmes. When completing an academic track, pupils can pursue tertiary education. Women outnumber men in academic study programs, while men dominate in vocational programs (Statistics Norway 2017). In this study, all rural girls, 20% of rural boys, 40% of urban girls and 60% of rural boys attended an academic study program.

Among the urban girls, 60% attended a VET track, while 80% of the rural and 40% of the urban boys did the same.

Generally, VET pupils attend school for 1 to 2 years, followed by 1 to 3 years of on-the-job training to earn an apprenticeship diploma. This track does not qualify for tertiary education; however, pupils have the right to a 1 year's supplementary programme for general university admission after they have achieved vocational competence (with or without a trade or journeyman's certificate).

In this study, 60% of the rural boys attended the VET program 'Technical and Industrial Program' (TIP) or a similar new program 'Technical and Academic Program' (TAF). The former is a regular program entailing 2 years schooling followed by 1 year of on-the-job training, while the latter is a 4 years' study program that provides pupils with both vocational competence and a university and college admission certification.

The rural case school is multi-graded with less than 100 pupils enrolled in the first–tenth grades. All eight pupils, five boys and three girls, in the 10th grade participated in the study. Participants are given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. Regarding grades, there is a spectre from high scoring pupils to pupils with poorer grades.

The urban case school has roughly 400 pupils in the eight–tenth grade. The class teacher helped the researcher select 10 pupils for this study with the aim of ensuring diversity in socioeconomic status (SES), grades and gender. Although there is a greater variety in the urban sample, the rural and urban pupils are comparable concerning grades and to some extent SES. However, slightly more pupils in the rural area have mothers with tertiary education compared to their urban counterparts, whereas more pupils in the urban area have fathers with tertiary education compared to their rural peers.

In this article, the school in Coastal Valley is referred to as the rural school and the one in Tromsø as the urban school. The first round of interviews was conducted in the school building in both schools. The follow-up interviews were conducted when the pupils had completed 3–4 months of upper secondary education. Pupils from the urban area lived at home while attending upper secondary education. All but one pupil from the rural school moved away from home and lived in a bedsitter³. For rural pupils, the closest upper secondary school is in a rural municipality, Grønnvik, less than a 2-h bus ride from Coastal Valley. This school offers academic tracks along with several vocational tracks. Most pupils from Coastal Valley attend upper secondary school in Grønnvik while some go to Tromsø, which is more than 2 h of bus ride from their natal location.

In Grønnvik, pupils can rent a room in a dormitory that has some facilities such as shared bathroom and kitchen and a person who wakes them up in the mornings if they oversleep; however, they need to clean and make their own meals like the pupils renting bedsitters in private homes. Ben is the only pupil from Coastal Valley living in a

³ A bedsitter is a rented room that generally includes cooking facilities.

dormitory, most rent a room in private homes in Grønnavik, while Cody shares an apartment with other pupils in Tromsø. They pay approximately what they receive in grants (stipend) from the state (ca. 4600 Norwegian kroner) for a bedsitter. In Tromsø, with higher living expenses than Grønnavik, pupils from Coastal Valley rent a bedsitter or share an apartment. When living in bedsitters, pupils rely on their parents for financial support as the grant merely covers housing.

Results

This section first focuses on the context in which the participants grew up because it serves as a critical backdrop to understanding their educational choices in relation to constraints and enablements. Next, it discusses how the youths oriented themselves towards upper secondary education and their reflections around their transition from lower to upper secondary school.

During the first wave of interviews, the pupils were still living with their parents and were in the process of completing compulsory schooling and applying to upper secondary schools and the next step had gradually become more and more real to them. By March 1st, applications were off for upper secondary education, so important decisions had to be made regarding choice of school and study track for the next 3–4 years.

Participants in this study were raised in geographical contexts that significantly differ from each other in several respects. As shown above, among other things, they differ when it comes to population size and density, industrial structure, centrality and local outbids of education. When asked to describe their everyday lives in the home place, leisure activities were a central part of the informants' descriptions in both places. These activities implied use of local space when e.g. skiing, fishing and biking, but also showed how they related to more supra-local arenas (Bæck 2019), such as gaming, exercising sports or attending the local youth club. The local activities were performed in the youth's home communities, and they were not necessarily easily transferred to other spheres, while supra-local activities were independent of place. As indicated in the "[Introduction](#)" section, the rural boys have concerns related to the natural realm (skiing, fishing), which inform their choices when developing life courses (see also Archer 2000, 2012), and their desire to stay in the rural.

The study reveals certain variations in how the youths spent their after-school hours. Pupils from rural areas, especially the boys, interacted with a more diverse group of people in terms of age than their urban counterparts. In addition, the rural boys made greater use of the local environment than the youths from the urban area. These activities require access to local and practical knowledge passed down from older generations. In order to partake in these activities, local knowledge and practical know-how were of essence, and the boys accessed such knowledge through their interactions across generations. Older men would introduce them to these activities: teach them how to catch fish, show them the locations of the best fishing spots or share knowledge about where it would be safe to go skiing. This indicates that places and spaces are gendered (Massey 1994); the rural girls did not mention partaking in these public activities and, thus, were not interested in or enabled to operate in the natural realm to the same extent as the rural boys.

Several male pupils from both the rural and urban areas worked after school and during the weekends. While the urban boys worked every other weekend and mainly in stores, the rural boys worked even on weekdays on farms and for small family-owned enterprises. Some of the rural boys talked about how they had given up organised activities so they could dedicate more time to their part-time work: ‘We exercised quite a lot [football, ski, taekwondo]. I had time for it all (...) Now, I work quite a lot’ (Alan). According to Archer (2000), within the *natural and practical spheres*, activities can be sought or shunned; in the rural, this appears to be gendered and rural boys seem to enter the ‘grown-up world’ faster than their peers through local activities, and thus give up more ‘youth oriented’ activities such as sports and play for work. In current society, shifting from ‘contextual continuity’ through ‘contextual discontinuity’ to the upsurge of ‘contextual incongruity’ (Archer 2012), these rural boys reflexively determine a course of action that enables them to live in the rural, which also includes pursuing secondary (and tertiary) education. They have to pursue education (and work) outside their natal place, which implies having to be flexible. This seemingly aligns their deliberations and actions with Archer’s description of ‘contextual discontinuity’. However, their desire to stay in the rural is not necessarily an expression of seeking ‘contextual continuity’ since their reasons for staying are inherently modern as they seek freedom and meaning in the rural, as will be shown below. In addition, they engage with globalisation (Kenway et al. 2006), but resist its association of modernity with urban life by pursuing a life in the rural. According to Kenway et al. (2006, p. 72), young rural males negotiate ‘some powerful, conflicting local, state and global forces associated with the world of work and with global ecology’. Furthermore, rural masculinity is associated with work, but the lack of work in many rural places pressures rural males for instance to move or reinvent themselves. In our study, the rural boys pursue education to enable life in the rural even if this means they have to work elsewhere and ‘come home’ during weekends or when they are off duty in their shift work. As Kenway et al.’s males, ‘our’ rural boys have to become flexible in order to negotiate ‘the world of work’.

Choosing Study Programs

Shortlisting and applying to schools and programs is a major event, and schools invest considerable effort to ensure their pupils make an informed choice. In 2008, lower secondary Norwegian schools introduced ‘Choice of education’ (*Utdanningsvalg*) as an obligatory school subject. The key objectives of the subject are to create coherence between compulsory and upper secondary school and to enhance pupils’ career planning competence on the basis of their ambitions and capabilities (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training 2015). The pupils expressed different experiences when it comes to how they felt that teachers, school counsellors or this school subject had assisted them in their decision-making processes. Compared to their urban peers, Coastal Valley’s pupils were more content with the subject. They stated that the subject teacher patiently answered their questions and guided them in the right direction, which can also be attributed to the small class size. Urban pupils, however, were given more opportunities to visit schools, universities and a variety of workplaces. Because these latter opportunities are situated in the city, the rural pupils do not have access to them due to economic constraints, which creates inequalities for the rural youths.

Pupils must choose between an academic and a vocational study program when applying for upper secondary education. In general, many pupils, more girls than boys, apply to an academic study program because they have no specific plans for the future other than pursuing a tertiary education. According to the pupils, this approach was further substantiated by teachers, who would say ‘then you can become anything in the future, and you keep your options open’. The lack of clarity also impedes their decision-making processes. One of the rural boys, Cody, was pondering about whether to choose an academic study program, and possibly becoming a teacher. He had not given this a lot of thought though he was far from sure about which occupation he saw for himself. In the follow-up interview, he talked about how his ‘internal conversation’ went along when choosing upper secondary education:

First, I thought about being open to almost anything. Then, I thought about an academic study program because I didn’t know what to choose and what to become. Then, I thought about the places I would stay if I chose to attend school in Grønnvik or Tromsø. In the end, I went for Tromsø because I wouldn’t really like attending school in Grønnvik.

Thus, numerous factors influenced Cody’s decision including the opportunity to move into Tromsø where he had close relatives. Cody finally opted for an academic study program that also offered more practically oriented subjects and gave him the opportunity to complete his upper secondary education within 3 years. He would also earn a general admissions certificate for his tertiary education, which he planned for. Ben, who also had relatives in the city and had lived there prior to entering primary school, did not consider attending school in Tromsø. His view of city life can be traced in this statement:

[If I were from the city] I would be fonder of shopping and that sort of things... I don’t need to buy clothes and stuff. I don’t need it. I don’t care about travelling. Spending a lot of money going to a place for a week, I couldn’t be bothered (Ben).

This could indicate that Ben sought a more ‘traditional male’ life in the rural and shunned city life, which is discussed in Brandth and Haugen (cf. 2005), stating that rural masculinity is more desirable for males than urban masculinities, which in Ben’s view also include shopping and travelling. This notion resonates with Kenway et al. (2006, p. 104) who argue that city spaces, full of girls ‘talking and chatting’, could be perceived as feminine and thus shunned by some males who find these spaces ‘senseless: disruptive, anxiety-provoking cultural mores’.

Vocational Study Programs

Choosing a vocational study program in upper secondary education implies making a much more specific choice when it comes to future occupation, than an academic study program would do. Choosing a future occupation is difficult for any 15–16-year old, and decisions are often remade and changed later (see also Archer 2000, pp. 289–290). Most of the interviewed boys, both rural and urban as well as one urban girl, who were

applying for vocational programs knew what kind of work they would like to get into—at least they seemed to have a ‘vision’ of what to do next.

Odin, from Tromsø, states, ‘[I have applied for] maritime subjects. I’m going to work on a ship. Firstly, I think I’ll do two years as a sailor. Then, I guess I will have further education’. To become a captain on a ship, like his father, Odin would have to complete upper secondary education and then an apprenticeship before pursuing tertiary education. A few other rural male participants expressed the desire to follow in their father’s footsteps and accordingly planned their upper secondary education. Alan from Coastal Valley, for example, was certain he would apply for the vocational track, specifically, technical and industrial production (TIP), as early as in the 8th grade: ‘I will go to Grønnvik for TIP... You can apply for a mechanic program and that sort of things’. For Alan, agriculture lies close to heart since his parents run a farm. He has made an effort to inform himself when it comes to available options, and he takes into consideration future employment at the farm, even though he is aware of the constraints, ‘mum and dad don’t want me to take over the farm, it’s hard to be a smallholder these days’. In their reflexive deliberations, Odin from Tromsø and Alan from Coastal Valley have examined the lifestyles of their parents. Yet, while becoming a captain is within reach for Odin, becoming a smallholder is more constraining for Alan because ‘it is hard’ in terms of economic profit. Moreover, Alan reflects upon the possibility to start his own firm, but finds it unobtainable because ‘you would have to be rich or win the lottery to be able to do so’. Thus, the powers of constraint and enablement take effect in relation to an individual’s ‘project’ (Archer, 2003).

Ben, also from Coastal Valley, is planning to attend the TIP program, primarily because it is practically oriented. As is the case for most of the fathers of the rural boys we interviewed, Ben’s father has a practical occupation. He is a plumber who runs his own firm, and even though Ben does not plan on doing the exact same thing as his father, his father seems to be an important role model when it comes to Ben’s educational orientations, because Ben aims for manual work like his father. His mother, on the other hand, is a licenced nurse, but Ben does not seem to take her occupation into consideration when he makes his own educational plans. These rural boys might have internalised rural masculine values, such as doing manual work, and view the gains they can receive by reproducing notions of rural, working-class masculinity (Brandth and Haugen 2005) as enabling when seeking a life in the rural. In line with Cuervo and Wyn’s (2012, p. 121) rural youth, whose attachment to people and places formed a compelling and enduring point of reference, these rural boys explain their choices based on the opportunities for future occupations in their rural surroundings, which they view as more compatible with attending vocational tracks. This is opposed to Armila et al. (2018) who found that youths’ choice of vocational education was not linked to their remote home locations. In addition, Cuervo and Wyn (2012, pp. 126–127) argue that educational provision and employment opportunities in cities provide individuals with lots of options, so that the conflicts between where one lives and where one works are minimised. This conflict is present in this study as rural youths perceive restricted occupational opportunities in the rural. In accordance with Armila et al., youths in our study, to some extent, make vocational choices based on parents’ experiences. Moreover, the rural youths, in accordance with Cook and Cuervo (2020), do not feel constrained by their rural location, rather they regard returning home as one option selected from a range of choices.

Uncertainties in Decision-making

Making educational choices at an early age can be difficult. In fact, some participants changed their minds between the application deadline in March and the outbid of places at the beginning of July. Such uncertainty was particularly present among rural male pupils. Many of them (60%) applied to an academic study program. Some intended to pursue a tertiary education, while others wanted to keep their options open. The study revealed that certain rural male pupils in the 10th grade intended to apply for an academic track during the initial interview but stated that they had chosen differently as per the follow-up interview. Eric from Coastal Valley explains why he decided to apply to a vocational study program instead of following his initial plan of an academic track:

To start with, I wanted to choose an academic study program because I didn't know what kind of work I wanted to do when it was time to apply. Then I realised that I was so bored [with school].

In the 10th grade, all I learnt felt so wasted because I knew I wouldn't need it. It's the feeling of not doing anything meaningful. I know what they do at TIP. It's mending machines, using tools. It is useful to know and not only for work. I'd rather learn this than things one will never use in the future.

Clearly, Eric was unsure about the type of work he wished to pursue, but he considered tertiary education an option, albeit not a feasible one given the focus on theoretical subjects. Even so, he keeps the scenario open that he may change his mind as he grows older.

Another rural male pupil, David, wanted to combine an academic study program with an athletics program; however, he eventually applied to a vocational study program. David was well informed about the new program, but he had a hard time choosing from the options available:

I didn't want to attend an academic study program, because that meant three years of theoretical subjects. Therefore, I changed to TAF. I now have the opportunity to get a university and college admission certificate. Because I don't want to make that choice already [of further education], I can put it off until next year.

These changes from an academic to vocational tracks could be due to experiences in the natural and practical realms (Archer 2000), where the rural boys sought practical theory offered at VET and occupations known to them as masculine because of watching fathers, relatives and friends performing these roles and shunned occupations regarded as less masculine, like for instance teaching and nursing. These boys are aware that tertiary education can provide 'better' occupational options in the future, but because the powers of constraint and enablement take effect in relation to their 'project' (Archer, 2003), per now these options are postponed, subordinated or abandoned.

Although most pupils did not change their minds regarding study programs, some changed their minds concerning further education. Anja from Coastal Valley wanted to

become a lawyer in the 10th grade, but had changed her mind because, ‘you need good grades...there is so much pressure’, and Glenn from Tromsø had reconsidered becoming a dentist ‘it is such a boring occupation, I want more action.... Now I’ve figured that I want to do my education through the army- to become a pilot. I don’t see the point in pursuing further education if I can get an education for free in the army’.

Transition to Upper Secondary Education

The second interview took place after the pupils had attended their new school for some months, and for some of the pupils the transition had been quite notable. They had to familiarise themselves with the new school’s rules, schedule, teaching staff and peers.

While all the pupils were unfamiliar with the structure of upper secondary school, the adjustment was far more pronounced among pupils attending VET. VET school included theory subjects taught in standard classroom settings as well as the practical application of theoretical knowledge in the school’s garage or kitchen. The first weeks were dedicated to acquainting oneself with peers, teachers and the school, which pupils considered valuable. However, many of VET pupils found that there was little focus on school subjects and that the teachers had low academic expectations to them. They ascribed this approach to the assumption that ‘everybody who enrolls in VET is tired of school’. The VET pupils found upper secondary school to be far more relevant and interesting than what they had experienced in lower secondary school. The same is found by Mjaavatt and Frostad (2018), who state that pupils became motivated for school and felt more content after entering VET. The pupils enjoyed both the theoretical and practical content, in particular how theoretical subjects were linked with practical application.

The VET pupils also noticed the positive side of being fewer pupils in each class, which meant that the teachers made more time for the individual pupil. The pupils in the academic tracks, on the other hand, felt that the teachers dedicated the same amount of time, or even less time, to each pupil compared to their lower secondary teachers.

Future Plans

All but one of the pupils who relocated from rural areas intended to return home once they completed their education. However, for some like Eric, this was not necessarily the only route:

When I grow older, I want to settle down in Coastal Valley. In the meantime, I will try to live in different places. I’d like to see how it is to live in a city or abroad. The place where I want to end up is in the valley. As a bachelor, the valley isn’t that fun. [I will settle in Coastal Valley] when I find a partner⁴ and want to settle down, maybe at around 30.

Eric’s and also Cody’s visions of the future suggest that there are different ways of articulating rural masculinities as they both consider living in different places before

⁴ The Norwegian term ‘kjæreste’ is a gender neutral term for girlfriend/boyfriend. The term ‘partner’ is used here to indicate gender neutrality, although it is not used by the participants.

returning home as well as keeping the choice of tertiary education open. Like David's and Cody's mothers, Eric's mother has a tertiary education, but unlike Svensson's (2006) middle class girls, these rural youths regardless of class (and gender) seem inclined to stay, some after a detour through tertiary education and experimenting different ways of life in the city, as expressed by Charlotte:

I really don't want to move further away from Coastal Valley. It would have been nice to live in the valley when I grow up. If I have children, it would be nice for them to grow up here, because it's nice and safe... I certainly have to pursue further education after upper secondary, but I don't know if there are job opportunities in the valley. So maybe a larger place, cities or something like that.

Charlotte's friend Anja states, 'earlier I didn't want to live in Coastal Valley, but I've reconsidered...I don't think I'll move to Coastal Valley soon. After upper secondary I might go to Tromsø or abroad to study'.

As quoted above, these rural youths do not perceive the rural as a place to leave as the youths in Kåks' (2007) study; however, the girls and a few boys do not consider a fast return. They are also concerned about obtaining employment in the rural as Anja when reflecting upon education, where to settle down and work: 'there isn't a court in Coastal Valley'; thus, it might be convenient to shun pursuing law school, as shown in the section "Uncertainties in Decision-making". As the rural boys, the girls wish to settle in the valley, but contrary to the boys, the rural girls consider tertiary education as the route to employment. They want to stay because the natal place offers safety, freedom and meaning. Furthermore, towards an upsurge of 'contextual discontinuity', and recently 'contextual incongruity', youths need to prepare for new kinds of opportunities and be ready to move and re-evaluate constellations of concerns. The urban youths did not mention negotiating work opportunities in town; however, some of them considered moving to the capital, Oslo or abroad 'to seek better opportunities if being able to continue playing football' (Hans). The rural youths, however, were concerned about the limited opportunities in Coastal Valley. Male rural pupils also mentioned choosing an education program that would help getting work in a rural setting. David, for example, explained: 'Where I would like to live also matters. If I move to [a place further north] next year, then I'll work in shifts [apprenticeship]. Then I can live in Coastal Valley because I'm pretty fond of Coastal Valley'. David explains that he feels freer in Coastal Valley than in the city; in the valley, he can utilise the (well-known) natural realm to a greater extent than in Tromsø. In the 10th grade, David was certain about becoming an engineer, although he soon changed his mind: 'There aren't that many job opportunities in Coastal Valley; for instance, if I were to become an engineer, I couldn't live in the valley'.

Encountering Constraints and Enablements when Relocating

In Norway, enrolling in upper secondary school can be viewed as a societal expectation, and the youths in this study seem to have internalised this expectation. Bæck (2019)

⁰ The Norwegian term 'kjæreste' is a gender neutral term for girlfriend/boyfriend. The term 'partner' is used here to indicate gender neutrality, although it is not used by the participants.

suggests that pursuing secondary education is a self-evident aspect of life and the future for a majority of the youths. The present study highlights that selecting a suitable study program and planning future careers are difficult for many. While some changed their minds regarding which track to attend when applying to an upper secondary school, many believed it was too early to make decisions related to their future work. The findings confirm the existence of objective structural and cultural properties that shape the situations pupils confront, whose powers of constraints and/or enablements the pupils negotiate in the three orders of reality (see also Archer 2000, 2007).

The youths in this study are confronted with a situation wherein making educational decisions is a pressing concern. These decisions must be made under any circumstances and sometimes without complete information. Following Archer (2007), when individuals orient themselves in the world, making decisions and choices, they exert their reflexivity as agents. Archer proposes that agents subjectively determine projects in relation to their objective and sociocultural circumstances, and it is these reflexive deliberations that produce courses of action (2007, p. 17). This study focuses on how such decision-making processes are influenced by space. Furthermore, gender relations are significant factors in the structuring of space and place and these relations affect the ways in which gender is understood and constructed in our society (Massey 1994, pp. 182, 186). The relationships between agents and their spatial surroundings are therefore critical in understanding decision-making processes. When making space and place an important aspect of analysis, Archer's structure and agency approach offers fruitful insights into how individuals navigate within structures. Here, spatial emphasis opens up for investigating, e.g. gendered spatial notions (Massey 1994) that point to how spatial factors constrain and/or enable agency.

Archer (2003) maintains that it is easier to feel content if individuals manage to dovetail their concerns with all three orders. However, dovetailing also implies that concerns have to be modified, as well as subordinated and in some cases abandoned (Archer 2012, p. 109). In addition, the prioritisation of concerns is difficult for many youths as they deliberate about further education, careers and relationship as a future part of life. Some rural male pupils are primarily concerned with education programs that will enable them to return home and link their concerns in the natural, physical and social orders. Thus, for instance, David abandons, for the time being, pursuing tertiary education. Female pupils from rural areas do not express location as a key concern in the same way, since their focus lies in obtaining an education that allows them to gain employment in the distant future, as is also the case for the majority of the urban pupils. While the urban youths have a sense of security regarding employment opportunities in the city, the same cannot be said about youths residing in rural areas where the labour market opportunities are less certain. Farrugia (2015) describes how rural youths may reimagine the local through a relation to the outside and how few local options may be constraining. Our study shows that while the urban youths *are able to stay*, the rural youths must *learn how to stay* through learning the appropriate skills in their local community and in upper secondary education. They do not reject education, as for example Willis' (1977) classic study of 'the lads' showed. However, as Willis' lads, these boys mainly sought vocational study tracks, even though they first considered an academic track, and their mothers, who have tertiary education, could be important role models in this regard. This could suggest that mastering the rural masculinity norm is sought while more feminine norms are shunned.

This study highlights that young individuals are active agents and have just begun forming concerns, which, according to Archer, if successful will eventually define who they are. Even though they are involuntarily situated beings, they take action. In the case of male pupils from rural areas, this means gaining an education that will lead them back home. By contrast, most urban youths and female pupils from rural areas delay decisions regarding future work by aspiring for tertiary education. There are some rural boys who consider a detour through tertiary education before settling down in the rural in the future. These actions influence pupils' choice of track. While a majority chooses the academic track, rural male pupils sought a vocational track, even though some initially aspired for the academic track. This could indicate that rural boys seek to dovetail their concerns in the natural and practical realms enabling them to engage in outdoor life and manual work in the rural, even if this means forsaking some initial concerns. Rural male pupils choose education programs and pathways that will enable them to return home (see also Stenseth & Rød ([forthcoming](#))).

Concluding Remarks

The findings from the initial and follow-up interviews show that pupils did not necessarily follow their initial plans and changed their minds during the process. Archer (2000) states that internal conversations can be challenging for young people. When confronted with choices, such as that of upper secondary education, pupils tend to draw on previous experiences, including those gained by observing others (Archer 2000, p. 289), like parents and siblings. In other words, 'first choices' are experiments guided by nascent personal identities. Thus, the reasons underpinning a specific choice are based on the pupils' aspired academic or vocational path. It might be the case of the rural boys changing their minds that they sought what could be perceived as rural masculinity, whereas they viewed their mothers' values, including obtaining tertiary education, as feminine and shunned them. However, some rural boys, Eric and Cody, sought a different route that might include tertiary education. Also the rural girls sought an (expected) route through tertiary education that in turn might constrain their wish to return to the rural after completing education because of what they perceive as the lack of desirable job opportunities. These rural youths' routes through the educational system show that there are heterogeneous ways of enacting rural emerging identities.

This study offers a glimpse into internal conversations and decision-making processes among youths in two different contexts (see also Stenseth & Rød ([forthcoming](#))). Exploring the objective sociocultural circumstances the youths relate to is important in understanding how they define their main concerns. The influence of these circumstances was particularly prevalent among rural pupils whose educational decisions entailed moving away from home at an early age. From Archer's viewpoint, the agential reflexivity the youths demonstrate is actively mediated between structurally shaped circumstances and what is deliberately made of them (Archer, 2003, p. 130). Therefore, the interplay between sociocultural properties and agential reflexivity is essential when attempting to grasp human actions. This study reveals that contextual factors such as rural/urban settings and future employment opportunities play important roles in pupils' decisions to relocate for pursuing upper secondary education. Some pupils *are able to stay*, while others *learn to stay* in their natal community. As this

study includes few participants, further research including voices from participants in various locations could give an even more thorough explanation of how structural and cultural constraints and enablements affect youths' agency.

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All the participants have agreed to the study and signed an informed consent. Since the participants were 15–16 years old during the first phase of interviews, parents were also informed and able to withdraw their youths from of the study.

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Reflexivity and educational decision-making processes among secondary school pupils

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Abstract

In this Chapter, we discuss educational decision-making processes among Norwegian pupils in the transition from lower to upper secondary education. We argue that the concept of reflexivity and different modes of reflexivity can be used to advance the understanding of how young people make their choices within existing structures, e.g. educational options and future work opportunities. Further, Margaret Archer's work on reflexivity can give good insights into these decision-making processes, as they encompass culture, structure and agency and their interactions over time.

Data analyses for this Chapter are based on interviews with 18 pupils in two lower secondary schools in one rural and one urban municipality in Northern Norway. The first interviews were conducted during the pupils' final year of lower secondary school. Follow-up interviews were conducted when the pupils had attended upper secondary school for several months.

The analysis suggests that the school system is better suited for certain modes of reflexivity over others, which again might affect future social trajectories. We also found that certain opportunity structures represent constraints on individuals' educational decisions and therefore their future trajectories. Place matters; differences between opportunity structures in different places raise the question of spatial equity.

Introduction

This Chapter is based on data from the research project RUR-ED, funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The project employs a case study design and examines four municipalities in Northern Norway. It uses a mixed methods approach, which includes quantitative analysis, surveys and document and discourse analysis. This Chapter is based on qualitative interview data from two of the municipalities included.

This Chapter applies the concept of *reflexivity* in analysing how Norwegian lower secondary pupils, in their transition to upper secondary school, deliberate and make educational decisions that influence their futures. In late modern societies, there seem to be endless opportunities for young people to invent and reinvent themselves. The interest in reflexivity has become more widespread in sociological research and debates since the 1990s, following the work of Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994) on social change in modern societies. Scholars often draw upon Giddens and Beck when trying to describe and explain identity formation among young people in fluid modern societies (Beck 1992; Giddens and Schultz Jørgensen 1996). There also seems to be a tension between the subjective experience of freedom to choose and construct identity and the objective opportunities to realize their identity concerns, as the objective opportunities to realize it could be internalized as the product of ‘bad choices’ or personal fault (Walker 2009, 542). Giddens and Beck’s concept of reflexive modernization refers to the embedding of knowledge in the structures of global systems, which in turn has an effect on people’s everyday lives.

In liquid societies, individuals are not provided with indisputable life models; they need to design these themselves. Hence, vocational development has become a life-designing issue (Guichard et al. 2012). Bauman (2000) argues that liquid modernity is an individualized, privatized version of modernity where the individual has to carry the burden of failure. Liquidity refers to the way established structures and institutions break down or lose their functions. When losing their functions, these institutions fail to provide structures for individual’s lives. Following this, the reflexive process in late modernity prioritizes agency over structure. These points by Giddens, Beck and Bauman are contested; several authors argue that structures still impact peoples’ manoeuvring spaces even though people might not perceive them as such (Archer 2003, Furlong 2013). This is probably more evident in youth, as the introduction of a ‘youth period’ post 1960’s with its possibilities for exploring ‘ways of life’ might have left the impression that structures have less effect (see for instance Furlong 2013).

However, as argued by Stenseth and Bæck (2021), structural constraints and enablements have an effect on youths' initial transition and how they perceive local opportunity structures, as some youths are able to stay in their natal community while others have to learn how to stay.

In this Chapter, we used Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity (2003, 2007, 2012). Archer sought to operationalize the concept of reflexivity, incorporating structure, culture and agency through the morphogenetic approach. The aim was to link structure and agency without reducing or conflating agency with structure, which she maintains Giddens and others do (Archer 1995, 2003, 2007, 2012). The concepts of agency and structure have been central in addressing issues relating to people's lives, and the dualism between them has been challenging. Archer contributed to the field by discussing the interrelationships among 'culture', 'social structures' and 'agency'. She argued that rather than giving priority to one side, either structure or agency, one can seek to understand their interplay (Archer 2007).

When conceptualizing the term *agency*, there seems to be consensus that it refers to a person's ability to act within structural contexts (O'Connor 2014). Researchers seem to agree that both agency and social structures shape people's lives (Archer 1995). They differ, however, with regard to the relative importance of these two explanatory factors. In the literature on youths' *reflexivity*, it is often found that young people's agency operates in different ways, depending on their perceived frames for action and desires (Cairns, Growiec, and Smyth 2012; Christodoulou 2016). Some have argued that young people seem to have little agential power or individual agency, which in turn allows few real choices (Cairns, Growiec, and Smyth 2012; Walker 2009; Willis 1977). However, there is a need for young people to be real agents in their own lives because the structures offers less predefined frameworks; vocational choices of the past have become issues of 'life design' (Guichard et al. 2012). Some have voiced concern about the need for young people to become agents to overcome dominant cultural capital and oppression (Curry 2016).

Young people are often confronted with the need to make decisions with far-reaching consequences for their future lives, such as what kind of job and education to aspire to, where to live, etc. Young people's decision-making is often related to how they make context-based decisions that are influenced by family, peers and social networks (Christodoulou 2016; Dyke, Foskett, and Maringe 2008; Walker 2009). Some studies emphasize the difficulties in decision-making processes (O'Connor 2014) and the efforts youth must put into these processes when producing self-narratives and designing their lives (Christodoulou 2016; Guichard et al. 2012).

When seeking to explore how young people make decisions, it seems indispensable to focus on how they understand their own circumstances and concerns and how they reflexively deliberate between concerns and opportunities. Some studies explore how working-class adolescents are more reflexive in domains such as personal relationships and sports, but less reflexive in relation to future occupational ambitions (Christodoulou 2016).

Archer states that the fast-changing social world makes it necessary for all of us to become more reflexive. The need to call attention to reflexivity within social theory is found in this premise. ‘The subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes’ (Archer 2007, 5). In her theory, the internal conversation is presented as the manner in which we reflexively make our way through the world. As reflexive beings, most of us involve ourselves as *active agents*; we develop and determine our ultimate concerns, the things we care about the most.

In addition to reflexivity, this Chapter addresses spatial inequalities in education. According to the research literature, place matters; rural youths do worse than their urban counterparts in terms of educational outcomes and encounter a more restricted opportunity structure, which raises the question of spatial equity (Bæck 2016, 2019; Roberts and Green 2013; Paulgaard 2012). ‘Opportunity structures are formed primarily by the inter-relationships between family backgrounds, education, labour market processes and employers’ recruitment practices’ (Roberts 2009, 355). We found that opportunity structures, e.g. access to education and future work, constitute structural constraints on individual educational trajectories for all regardless of the dominant modes of reflexivity. This applies especially to rural youth. Hence, this Chapter discusses reflexivity in relation to both spatial inequality and opportunity structures.

This Chapter asks the following research questions: (1) can different reflexive modes inform how we understand pupils’ reflexive deliberations over their education and life projects? (2) What contextual factors constrain and/or enable these reflexive deliberations?

Theoretical framework

We have chosen to apply part of the three-stage model by Margaret Archer laid out in *Making Our Way Through the World* (2007) as a starting point to examine what is involved when youth reflect and form their own life projects. In Critical Realism, structure pre-dates the actor, a

perspective we find especially true for pupils, who have to enter an already existing educational structure. The three-stage model follows below.

Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily and inter alia possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to subjects' own constellations of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: nature, practice, and the social. Courses of action are produced through the inner *reflexive deliberations* of subjects who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances (Archer 2007, 17).

Archer defines 'reflexivity' as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa' (2007, 4). Reflexivity is described as the internal conversations individuals engage in when attempting to make sense of and operate in the social world (Archer 2007). All humans are reflexive; however, the particular context and concerns that individuals confront and hold lead to distinct modes of reflexivity. Archer considers that these specific modes of reflexivity have an impact on the ways in which individuals approach and interact with their social context; eventually, this affects social mobility. Thus, different dominant modes of reflexivity tend to produce different patterns of social mobility. Furthermore, human beings have the ability to design and redesign projects they undertake. Archer argued that:

Our personal powers are exercised through reflexive inner dialogue and that internal conversation is responsible for the delineation of our concerns, the definition of our projects and, ultimately the determination of our practices in society. (2007, 16)

As subjects, people can exercise reflexive powers in different ways; hence, there is no predictable outcome, but, nonetheless, distinctive tendencies in their courses of action. In addition, identities are not exclusively formed by our choosing. People are born in different contexts, with different opportunity structures; hence, every decision they voluntarily make includes a number of involuntary features (Archer 2007; Bæck 2016).

Based on biographical interviews, Archer (2007, 2003) derived a model of four modes of reflexivity, as presented in the table below (Archer 2007, 93).

Table 1 Modes of reflexivity

<i>Communicative reflexives</i>	Those whose internal conversations require completion and confirmation by others before resulting in course of action.
<i>Autonomous reflexives</i>	Those who sustain self-contained internal conversations, leading directly to action.
<i>Meta-reflexives</i>	Those who are critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and critical about effective action in society.
<i>Fractured reflexives</i>	Those whose internal conversations intensify their distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action.

Everyone uses all the modes of reflexivity to a certain degree, and the dominant mode can change with age and circumstances. Archer (2007) argued that the term *communicative reflexives* refers to those who complete their thoughts by engaging in communication with others to work out their problems. Individuals who mainly practice this mode have a strong concern for family and friends and close relationships with people they trust. They may reject opportunities for upward mobility. Their life in society is characterized by ‘contextual continuity’. In contrast, *autonomous reflexives* have lone inner dialogues that lead directly to action. When this is the dominant mode of reflexivity, individuals seldom need to seek confirmation or completion from others, because they mainly initiate their own inner dialogue and take responsibility for their own conclusions. These people consider work and employment to be their main concerns. Archer found that autonomous reflexives tend to become upwardly mobile and might experience, but always court, ‘contextual discontinuity’. *Meta-reflexives* are more expansive in their self-talk, and they question and answer themselves within internal conversations. Meta-reflexives are often committed to an ideal, be it religious, progressive or otherwise. Whereas the autonomous reflexives are task-oriented, the meta-reflexives are value-oriented (Archer 2007, 132). Meta-reflexives will systematically discount objective costs in their search for an ideal *modus vivendi*, sometimes at the cost of downward social mobility”. The last mode is the *fractured reflexives*, who have internal conversations that cause distress and do not enable them to deal adequately with social circumstances.

Study settings

Data for this Chapter was collected in two lower secondary schools in two municipalities that are situated above the Arctic Circle in the northernmost county in Norway. The rural school is

multi-graded and comprises less than 100 pupils from the first to the tenth grade (ages 6–16). The urban lower secondary school has approximately 400 pupils from the eight to the tenth grade (ages 13–16).

The small, rural municipality, given the fictive name *Coastal Valley*, is a couple hours' drive from any significantly bigger municipality and has a population of less than 3,000 people. The population is multi-ethnic,¹ comprising Norwegians, Sámi and Kven and people of mixed backgrounds. The municipality is a part of the Sámi administrative area; the Sámi and the Norwegian languages are equal, meaning that everyone has the right to receive answer in the Sámi language when addressing the municipal administration in these areas.

The population is in decline, skewing towards an ageing profile (Leknes et al. 2018), although it has been quite stable over the last couple of years. Most people in this municipality work in public health and social services and in service-related industries. Those who work in the private sector are mainly small-scale farmers, fishermen and small business owners.

The town of Tromsø, with over 70,000 inhabitants, is one of the administrative centres of Northern Norway. Most people work in service-related industries, followed by health and social services, and many also work in education. There is a university and a hospital in the city.

Educational structures in upper secondary education

In Norway, everyone has the right to, but is not obliged to undertake, a free upper secondary education. There are ten years of compulsory schooling before you choose upper secondary education. According to the Education Act § 3-1, pupils have the right to upper secondary education and training until age 24; following this, they have the right to change course once and will then be entitled to more time to complete their studies. Furthermore, § 3-3 states, 'Upper secondary education and training must lead to a university and college admission certificate, vocational qualifications or basic competence' (Opplæringslova 1998).

Pupils can choose either three years on an academic track or a three- to four-year vocational track (VET). Pupils attending VET usually attend school for two years, followed by one to two years of in-house company training to gain their apprenticeship diploma. Municipalities are the school owners of elementary and lower secondary (compulsory) education, and counties are the

¹ The population comprises members who identify as either Norwegian, Sámi, Kven or of mixed descent. The Sámi are the indigenous people that inhabit the Northern region of Norway bordering on Sweden, Finland and Russia. The Kven is a minority group descended from people who emigrated from Finland to Northern Norway during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

school owners of upper secondary education. Both school owners have autonomy over their school structure following the municipality reform of 1992 (Solstad and Thelin 2006; Solstad 2009).

Most pupils apply for upper secondary education within their county. However, there are some courses of study that offer nationwide programmes, to which youth can apply regardless of 'Home County'. These courses are state-financed.

Regarding the structure of upper secondary school, today there are five programmes for general studies: a) general studies itself; b) sports and physical education; c) music, dance and drama; d) art, design and architecture; and e) media and communication. There are eight vocational education programmes: 1) building and construction; 2) design, arts and crafts; 3) electricity and electronics; 4) healthcare, childhood and youth development; 5) agriculture, fishing and forestry; 6) restaurant and food processing; 7) service and transport; and 8) technical and industrial production. In addition, pupils have the right to one year of a supplementary programme for general university admission after they have achieved vocational competence (with or without a trade or journeyman's certificate) (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2020).

Methods

The data is based on semi-structured interviews with eighteen pupils, eight from the rural municipality Coastal Valley and ten from the urban municipality Tromsø.

The rural/urban continuum or dichotomy is both constructed and contested, as well as difficult to make, at least as a binary (Bæck 2016; Roberts and Green 2013; White and Corbett 2014). The subsection *Study settings* presented the two case municipalities as different. Coastal Valley represents more rural characteristics than the distinctly urban Tromsø, e.g. self-identification of the population as rural, lesser population density, ageing rural demography, distance to urban centres, access to services associated with urban areas such as hospitals and secondary and higher education. As such, there are good reasons for arguing that the two cases are rural and urban, respectively. However, this Chapter does not include a working taxonomy of the continuum, but rather uses the two cases to see how place and opportunity structures are relevant to young people's educational choices.

In both schools, we had initial meetings with the head teacher to discuss our project. In the city, the team leader, who is also class teacher for one of the classes, volunteered to participate with her class. The teacher informed the class about the project, and pupils who wanted to participate

volunteered. Of the pupils who volunteered, ten were selected by the teacher, representing varying socio-economic statuses, grades and gender. In the rural school, pupils in the tenth grade were asked to participate, and all eight volunteered. This made up a total of 18 informants.

The first interviews² were carried out when the pupils were in the tenth grade, the final year of compulsory education. Some months after they had transferred to upper secondary school, they participated in a follow-up interview. The topics in the first interview included, amongst other things, expectations of upper secondary school, what track they wanted to choose, and with whom they discussed their decision-making process. The follow-up interviews focused on, amongst other issues, how pupils experienced transition from lower to upper secondary school, if they had entered the track they wanted to attend, and how they experienced upper secondary.

Before participating in the follow-up interviews, the pupils completed 13 fixed response questions on their mode of reflexivity, ICONI, the Internal Conversation Indicator developed by Margaret Archer (Archer 2007). The final Indicator accorded individual scores on a scale from one to seven per question. In addition, pupils were asked to list the three most important areas in their life at that moment. The original ICONI were adapted by the researchers to fit the Norwegian context and the participating age group. The adaptation asked the pupils to specify their most important areas of their life, based on predefined categories like relationships to family, friend, school etc., as well as an open-ended alternative. An averaged total score of four and above in any of the four categories of questions assigned a subject to the communicative, autonomous, meta- or fractured category. The highest score over four indicated their dominant mode of reflexivity. Scores over four on fractured reflexivity ‘trumped’ scores on other modes. Scores on the index were indicative only, as the ICONI was never meant to stand alone. The ICONI results were used to supplement the qualitative interviews (Archer 2007, 330).

Stages in young pupils’ formation of their educational projects

In this section, we discuss how pupils reflect regarding educational decision-making. Data from the qualitative interviews are analysed to illustrate how youth make their educational choices. First, we present structural conditions that constrain pupils’ reflexive deliberations. We then discuss reflexive deliberations, including pupils’ educational concerns. In the end, we present the different categories of modes of reflexivity, including the different pupils’ concerns,

² The year of data collection is not presented in order to keep the identity of the research participants private.

the perceived constraints for these concerns, how pupils deliberately reflect over them and which direction they choose to take as a part of their educational project.

Structural enablement and constraints

The main structural conditions that seem to have shaped the decision-making process of our participants are related to geographical distance from home to the relevant educational institution, perceived future opportunities and relationships to family, friends and teachers/school counsellor. These are presented separately below.

Distance to school

When choosing which upper secondary school to attend, both urban and rural pupils tended to minimize the geographical distance to their home community. The choice of a school at a minimal geographical distance enabled pupils from the urban sample to live at home while attending upper secondary school, while the rural pupils would at least be able to visit their families relatively frequently. Another consideration supporting the decision by rural pupils to choose the nearest school, rather than a city school, was whether the locality of the nearest school was similar to their home community; thus, they would not have to adapt to totally unfamiliar surroundings. A few rural pupils who still opted for a school in the city relied on specific personal preferences or experiences supporting their choice, such as having a consuming interest in a specific sport or drawing on the positive experiences of a family member who had attended an upper secondary school in the city.

Most of the young pupils considered geographical distance to their new school as a constraint. Frida,³ a pupil from Tromsø who had applied for a programme in an upper secondary school outside the city but had had second thoughts, expressed a general sentiment when saying:

...I want to concentrate on my sports, but this means I have to move. If I get my first choice of school here in Tromsø, I do not think I will leave.

Although some urban pupils wanted to enrol in a school outside the city, the majority settled for attending a city school nearby, which enabled them to live at home while attending upper secondary school.

³ Names are identical to those in table 2. We refer to table 2 for an overview of reflexive mode and home community.

Likewise, for the majority of rural pupils, geographical distance constituted a constraint. Charlotte stated, 'You have to leave family and friends, and if you want to live here, you have to commute, and that is hard'. Recounting the experience of visiting the upper secondary school while still living in her natal rural setting, Charlotte said, 'I got so tired by going back and forth by bus, and you didn't get home until late in the evening. So, one could be away for almost 12 hours, and when one gets home one might not have the energy to do anything'. Few of the rural pupils considered commuting as an option since they would have to spend several hours on a bus every day.

Still, not all the rural pupils considered moving away from home to attend upper secondary school a constraint. To some, it was an enablement, and others were ambivalent. Cody revealed that it would be nice to escape their rural surroundings in Coastal Valley, 'It is exciting to "run" away from home', or rather to move and experience something different'. Some admitted that they had mixed feelings.

The rural pupils knew that to attend secondary school at all, they would have to leave their home communities. They seemed to accept this price as unavoidable. *Forsaking education to continue to live in their rural community was never mentioned as an option.*

Perceived future work opportunities

Although it is a difficult question to answer for 15- and 16-year-olds, the pupils were asked what they thought they would be doing ten years from now. Many of them thought they would be studying. Some of those who had chosen vocational tracks thought they would have an occupation. Most of them hoped they would live close to their home community. A few wanted to live in a different place.

Most of the pupils from both areas wanted to live close to their home communities in the future. There was a significant difference between the pupils from the two municipalities regarding perceived future work opportunities. Pupils from the urban area did not pay much attention to this issue. However, in the rural area, most of the pupils thought about future job opportunities, or rather the lack of opportunities, in their locality. They were uncertain about getting a job there when they had completed their education. The main concern for some of them, especially boys, was to pursue an education that would enable them to stay in the rural community. Some of them wanted to 'become something big like doctors, lawyers and engineers', but many changed their minds after a few months in upper secondary school. The pupils explained this change of plans in terms of levels of stress at school and lack of rural job opportunities: 'it

would be nice to live here, but there might not be a job for me, therefore I need to move' (Anja). For many of them, the dream was having a job they enjoyed close to their home community; but, for the rural youths, this concern was difficult to achieve as job opportunities were limited.

The introduction presented the concept of local opportunity structures. The two categories presented above, distance to school and perceived future work opportunities, were the two main ingredients in the local opportunity structure for these pupils.

Pupils' interlocutors in the educational decision-making process

The decision-making process the youths underwent regarding the transition from compulsory to upper secondary school received attention in school, at home and amongst peers. Although many of the youth in this study emphasized autonomy in choice of school, they said that this is a topic in school and at home. But many of the pupils emphasized, 'I have thought about this by myself. I know what I want to do'.

Family and friends

Pupils from both communities stated that their family was an important contributor in the decision-making process, or rather in discussing the various options. This has also been found to be the case in other studies (Bæck 2017). Ida, from Tromsø stated, 'No, they [parents] wanted me, in terms of education, to do a vocational track. They knew that if I did an academic one, I would soon get bored'. Anja from the rural community said, 'My dad has told me what to do if I want to become this or that. So, they take a lot of initiative regarding my future and care about what I want to do'. Cody revealed, 'I think my sister has helped me to sort out what is good and not that good [in terms of education]'.

Nonetheless, many of the boys, especially from the rural school, said that they did not talk much about what they intended to do with their parents, teachers or friends. Alan stated, 'We do not really talk that much [me and my parents]', while Ben laughed and stated, 'No, we do not talk about this yet, but they joke about me becoming a doctor'.

Amongst peers, the choice of education did not seem to be a major topic for discussion. This was expressed by Eric as he considered making a project a solitary effort. He said that he did not really feel close to his classmates, although he could talk to them about many things; however, they did not share interests and opinions.

The role of school personnel in pupils' decision-making processes

Many pupils reported that their class teacher or school counsellor had helped them in their decision-making process by suggesting various options regarding tracks, pointing to what subjects they should pursue or explaining the differences between the tracks.

My teacher helped me choose to become a doctor. When we spent several days in upper secondary school, I thought about doing social science, but my teacher advised me to do natural sciences, which was good. (Anja)

Pupils who said that they lacked motivation for school and theoretical subjects explained that their teachers had advised them to choose vocational tracks because they liked practical subjects in school (e.g. Arts and Crafts, Home Economics and Physical Education). They claimed, however, that they had decided what to do before talking to their teacher. In 2008, the obligatory subject 'Choice of Education' (*Utdanningsvalg* in Norwegian) was introduced in lower secondary school. The key objectives of the subject 'Choice of Education' was to establish coherence between compulsory and upper secondary school and to enhance pupils' career planning competence on the basis of their ambitions and capabilities (Norwegian Directory for Education and Training 2015). Pupils differed in how they regarded being helped by their teacher on the subject 'choice of education'. We found that some of those who opted for academic tracks in upper secondary school thought that their teachers had offered good advice.

Reflexive deliberation before and after transition to upper secondary school

The last section describes structural constraints and enablements on pupils' forming an educational project. However, a constraint does not exist nor can it be experienced as such if it does not constrain *something*; in this case, this something that is constrained is the pupils' *concern* about what they wanted to achieve in terms of education. Regardless of their mode of reflexivity, many of the pupils revealed that they were uncertain about school choice; only a few were certain. They had all applied for upper secondary school; however, many thought it was a difficult choice to make at their age. As some of them wanted to pursue higher education, their choice of academic track in upper secondary school was based on these requirements. Others applied for the vocational track, but the degree of certainty varied here as well. Their concerns are presented in the sections describing the various modes of reflexivity.

Continuous reflexive deliberations

Many of these young pupils regarded making an educational choice as an important stage in life; hence, it seemed crucial to make the right decision. They explained that it was difficult to make an educational decision, and some suggested that it was hard because of their age. Nevertheless, they had to reflexively deliberate what kind of education would be worth pursuing, and for some, what kind of occupation this would lead to, based on their concerns vis-à-vis constraints and enablements. Many of them admitted that they really did not know what to become. Some girls still had an idea of what kind of broader area they would like to study, such as working with people. One girl was the exception as she had made up her mind; she attended vocational track to become a chef.

Anja, who initially had high ambitions, had changed her mind after entering upper secondary school. ‘I wanted to become a doctor, but not anymore. Then I would need such good grades, and that will cause stress’. Those who wanted a more artistic occupation found this ambition hard to sustain. ‘I know about someone who was educated to become a photographer, and it’s quite an expensive loan and that sort of thing. And I don’t want to take out such a high loan’ (Jennifer). She found it difficult to pursue this aim due to costs. Another girl said, regarding her occupational ambitions, ‘Really nothing [in terms of occupation]. But if one has to commit, then it would be an artist (...). I would rather become a silversmith—I do not know—a sketch artist. If you have to draw and were tired of drawing, you have a deadline, you have to do it’ (Greta). She seemed to ponder whether one could have an independent occupation without being restricted; as an artist, one would still need to deal with deadlines, and certain activities, such as drawing, are things one could enjoy as a hobby, not necessarily as an occupation.

In the follow-up interview, conducted almost one year later when they had attended upper secondary school for several months, they had clearer ideas of what to become and how to achieve it; this was especially true of those who had chosen a vocational track and who had been uncertain in the tenth grade. They were able to give an account of the options that were available to them in upper secondary education.

Two of the boys who had thought about pursuing an academic track had changed their minds and followed vocational tracks, both because they wanted less theory and also because they received better information regarding the track. One of them said that he could follow a particular vocational track, which he discovered almost by accident through one of his parents’ friends, and still enter university later.

Undoubtedly, some had a well-defined project, especially some of the boys. ‘I want to become a professional football player, but if I can’t make it, I am going to become a police officer’ (Hans), or ‘My dream is to design web pages, and I think I can make it’ (Isak). One also wanted to walk in the footsteps of a parent and work in a high-status area, while another wanted to do something different from the rest of the family and work in economics. ‘All the members of my family work with people, and I want to do something different’ (Greg). He wanted this kind of job because he expected to earn a higher salary and have a ‘fancy lifestyle’, as he put it.

The quotes above show that these pupils had made a start on a life project. What is more interesting is the degree of continuing reflexive deliberation. This means that choice of upper secondary education is not an isolated decision made at one particular point in life but is part of an ongoing internal conversation and for some is a step on the way to formulating their life projects. We will now examine the modes of reflexivity and show how the pupils deliberated between their concerns and various possible projects based on how their concerns activated different structural constraints and enablements.

Categories of reflexivity and their concerns, constraints and educational projects

In following Archer’s three-step model and analysing reflexivity amongst pupils, we found it possible to categorize pupils based on their dominant modes of reflexivity. However, it is important to emphasize that each of these pupils showed some signs of every mode of reflexivity, and that these modes can operate differently within different contexts. Each person’s dominant mode of reflexivity can be subject to change with age and life events. In addition, modes of reflexivity are a sociological concept created to understand the subjective mediation of objective structures. They are not to be understood as a medical typology or diagnostic tool. We must again emphasize that these were young people trying to navigate the education system and about to start their life project; it is important to keep in mind that their reflexivity was developing (see also, Archer 2000 Ch. 8 and 9). For this reason, we have chosen not to discuss the ‘fractured’ reflexives, as it remains to be seen whether the subjects develop this dominant mode of reflexivity, and it seems difficult to use the ‘fractured’ category when the reflexivity of the subjects was developing.

Table 2 Modes of reflexivity related to decision-making and rural/urban background

Modes of reflexivity	Total	Name⁴ <i>Rural pupils in italics</i>	Modes of reflexivity related to decision-making
Communicative	3	Hanna, Jennifer, Odin	None from the rural sample (although some scored high on communicative reflexivity). Some went for ‘second best’ choice so they could stay home.
Autonomous	11	<i>Alan, Ben, Birgitte, Charlotte, Cody, David, Fredrik, Greg, Hans, Ida, Isak</i>	These pupils seemed to have found an educational project, although with varying degrees of confidence.
Meta	4	<i>Anja, Eric, Frida, Greta</i>	These pupils struggled to find a suitable educational project, some more than others.

The contents of the table will be presented and discussed further in the sections below. There are, however, some general observations and issues that need to be addressed first. We found few gender differences either in our data or in Archer’s original study (Archer 2007). These gender differences will not be further addressed in this Chapter due to their irrelevance to the main argument.

The various dominant reflexive modes are presented above, including a presentation of these pupils’ respective concerns and the structural conditions that constrained and/or enabled them. It also includes their reflexive deliberation when starting to form their educational projects and what they eventually ended up choosing.

Communicative reflexives

Those whose dominant reflexive mode is communicative normally rely on interlocutors they trust. Archer found that this group was in decline due to increases in geographical mobility,

⁴ Names are fictive to ensure privacy and anonymity for the research participants.

higher levels of education and greater cultural diversity (Archer 2012). This is in accordance with our findings, as few of the pupils were categorized as communicative reflexives. At home, all the pupils in this group seemed to have a close relationship with their parents: ‘My mum and I do a lot of things together’ or ‘I like helping mum at home’ were common sentiments.

The communicative pupils, all of whom came from the urban school, talked a lot with their parents and family when forming their *concerns* regarding to which educational track to apply. These pupils followed in their parents’ footsteps regarding education, work, hobbies or all three, like Odin, who stated, ‘I would like to become a captain [on a ship], because it seems like my dad enjoys that, and I have enjoyed it when visiting him’. Another pupil said, ‘My dad went to a “folkehøgskole” [folk high school], so I think I will do the same. They have quite a number of tracks I would like to attend’ (Hannah).

Although some communicative reflexive girls in the urban sample thought about attending a school away from home, they did not. Instead, they settled for what seemed to be the second best in terms of attending a different school without the preferred track to stay closer to home. In this case, distance to school showed itself as a *powerful constraint* on their concerns, as expressed by Jennifer:

But I have applied for secondary school in another county. It is an academic track that offers my sport. But I am very uncertain whether to go there, or if I should stay here. If I don’t get my first choice here, then I’ll move. But if I get a “yes” from both, it will be hard to decide.

In terms of the result of their *reflexive deliberation* together with their peers and families, these communicative reflexives revealed in the follow-up interview that they had chosen to attend the school closer to home and no longer perceived their choice as the second best. Instead, Hannah stated the following: ‘I thought that if I’m moving there, I have to be 100% certain that this is what I want to go for, but it wasn’t at 100%. Then it’s better to stay here so I will not regret it if I quit’. Jennifer stated, ‘I would like to go in for my sport (...) but then I have to move and all of that. I have to manage on my own’.

These girls used their interlocutors to a larger degree than the other modes of reflexives. Moreover, some of them said that they would decide which school to attend as late as possible, ‘because these schools aren’t in the same county, so I get a bit more time to decide’. Furthermore, they had not completely decided on their occupational plans or projects. When asked to talk about their dream occupation, one said, ‘Maybe I would be educated as a

photographer, but that is expensive, and I would not like to take on that much loan'. These pupils wanted to live close to home after finishing their education. As mentioned above, distance to schools seems to be an important constraint. However, this is also the case with some autonomous reflexives, as shown below. One of the differences between the autonomous and the communicative reflexives is that the latter seemed to talk more to family and friends before making a decision; some said that listening to advice from teachers/school counsellors made the choice easier.

Some pupils, categorized by their ICONI score as communicative, also scored high on autonomous and/or meta-reflexivity, making it difficult to establish what their dominant mode was. They claimed to discuss things with friends and family; however, regarding sport or school achievement, for example, and mulling it over, they seemed to rely on themselves. This could be because they were in a process of "breaking away" from their parents, feeling they needed some space to make their own decisions and think things over. But they still relied on parents to help them make important decisions. Archer (2012) discussed the *imperative of reflexivity* in societies in constant change, whereby individuals need to be reflexive in contexts that are new to them, and their former skills and habitual actions quickly become outdated. In late modernity, there might be an underlying assumption that people, to take advantage of all options, need both geographical and social mobility. Thus, youth who rely on their parents' advice on educational matters might "miss out" on some opportunities. This could be the tacit assumption of these girls quoted above. However, they are not the first generation in their families to experience such situational discontinuity. Some of their parents were the first in their family to pursue higher education.

This suggests that communicative reflexives are more vulnerable to and more constrained by the opportunity structure than other modes of reflexives when they are required to live away from home (and their interlocutors) to pursue their primary option in education. Pupils from rural places who invariably have to overcome an even larger structural barrier, in the sense of having to move from their community if they want to obtain an upper secondary education at all, are doubly constrained if they are communicative reflexives. However, those in the rural sample who seemed to be communicative when they were interviewed the first time, in the tenth grade, had become more autonomous when participating in the follow-up interviews and the ICONI survey in the first term in the first grade of upper secondary school. They were worried about not finding a relevant job close to their home communities. 'There aren't many job opportunities here' was a sentiment expressed among pupils from the rural municipality.

There are many possible explanations for this change. The obvious is the change of circumstance, as the pupils from the rural sample had to “become” autonomous in their everyday life as they moved away from home, did their own chores, attended school in a new spatial context and all with less contact with their previous interlocutors. Another contributing cause may be expectation from their families, their old school and the whole rural community that the experience of managing on their own in attending upper secondary was something they had to get used to and endure to obtain an education. This shared knowledge about the costs of getting an education may contribute to fostering an increasing degree of autonomy after the transition has been made. Further inquiry is needed to explore the possible explanations advanced above.

Autonomous reflexives

Autonomous reflexives tend to resolve issues and make decisions based on their own internal conversations and without involving others in their decision making (Archer 2007, 193). When this is the dominant mode of reflexivity, individuals seldom need to seek confirmation or completion from others, because they mainly initiate their own inner dialogue and take responsibility for their own conclusions. These people consider work and employment to be their main concerns. (Archer 2003, 213). In this study, most pupils were found to be quite autonomous in the sense that they made autonomous decisions regarding education. This is in line with Archer’s findings that the conditions in today’s society favour autonomous reflexives. Furthermore, in Archer’s study, most of the autonomous reflexives were male, which is also the case in this study.

Some pupils said that they had talked to their parents, or rather informed them, about which track they would like to follow; ‘I have talked to my parents and they think it is a pretty good plan’. These boys seemed to have resolved their concerns regarding tracks in upper secondary school. We found elements of autonomous reflexivity in the processes these pupils were undergoing. They knew in which field they would like to work and how to get there. They persistently pursued sport in which they excelled and would like to have a professional sports career. However, they looked upon this as hard to achieve and put quite an effort into doing well at school to get a good education that would lead to well-paid jobs. Some pupils, and especially boys from the urban area, claimed that they knew in which field they wanted to work. ‘I want to work with economics. (...) I want to do something different from the rest of my family’ (Greg). Another pupil had a specific work aim: ‘I’m not the kind of person who can stay in the office for many hours. I could, but as a police officer I can also be outside doing

things' (Hans). These boys seemed to seek upward social mobility. In sum, it seemed that the autonomous pupils had themselves found at least a preliminary educational concern in one way or another. Some uncertainty loomed, but the pupils had deliberately decided on a direction based on what they would like to do. Also, the perceived future work opportunities seemed to work as structural constraints, but not necessarily as deterrents.

Distance to school as a constraint seemed to bother the pupils in this group only to a certain degree. The boys who sought upward social mobility lived in the urban area and did not have to consider leaving the city to get a job that promised social advancement. In the group as a whole, there were also some autonomous girls. One of them, who came from the rural municipality, did not know exactly what to become yet, but she was determined to get higher education and do well in her sport. Birgitte related feeling distant from her home community, having few close friends and wanting to move to get an education and work. 'To live here... It is nice living close to family and all that. But for me, the environment is quite small. Maybe too small, so I am fond of travelling. (...) It is quite nice to travel from time to time'.

The boys in Coastal Valley: an interesting sub-case of autonomy

Some boys in the rural area who were autonomous reflexives had not decided on their plans for future occupations. However, they had all chosen vocational tracks. They had not yet determined which vocational specialization to choose or what to do for a living later. They did not seem to be seeking upward mobility or facing contextual discontinuity, as they had an educational project that they thought would lead to a job in a rural area. School and education did not appear to be their main concern. Their priorities were staying close to family, friends and their home community. They seemed to care about obtaining a job close to home, working in their spare time (while attending school), hanging out with friends and being close to nature. After school hours, many of these boys earned their own money working seasonal unskilled jobs in the primary sector, work which paid a good but irregular income. Some of them said they had quit leisure activities to work. They gave the impression that doing useful work was more important to them than making money. The same boys thought school was too much theory, boring and of little use, even though they acknowledged education as useful in general. Somehow, there seemed to be an ambivalence towards school here. On the one hand, they said, 'Of course, education is important', and on the other, 'I do not think many of the things we learn at school are useful in the future'. They also claimed that they liked practical subjects at school; unfortunately, in the tenth grade, mostly theoretical subjects are offered.

When doing the follow-up interview about what they actually ended up doing, these boys were about to create educational projects for themselves, which they seemed to believe in. This was not the case when interviewed in the tenth grade. These pupils worked after school and/or during weekends; they wanted a practical job and were quite determined to do fairly well in upper secondary school. Here, they enjoyed being able to learn practical work at school, and they even regarded some theoretical subjects as useful, especially those connected to their vocational track—taught in a practical way, using examples from, e.g. car maintenance. Furthermore, they had an idea of what kind of occupation they would like, but there were obstacles to achieving it. They had to deliberate as to whether it was worthwhile moving even further away from home in their second year of upper secondary school to achieve this, or whether they should settle for second best and finish their education closer to home. In the future, the most important thing for them was to earn money and have a job they enjoyed. If they had to, they would consider moving away from their home community to work, but they would prefer to stay. Individuals often have to deal with incommensurable concerns, and it is even worse to get it right without any experience at that age (Archer 2000, 289). However, at this age, a project is relatively corrigible.

Most of these boys had a father with compulsory school or upper secondary school as their highest education. Most had mothers with higher education, and a few had mothers with upper secondary school as their highest level of schooling. These boys did not want to travel, and they regarded spending money on travelling and clothes as ‘ridiculous’. They enjoyed motors, being outdoors and working. They wanted to live in the countryside and not in the city, not because the city was expensive but because they did not consider city life as attractive. In upper secondary school, they found themselves an educational project they were motivated to pursue, being able to learn practical skills.

This raises the question: were these boys autonomous? The answer seems to be yes; they did deliberate on their own and stated that they did not talk a lot with others. Furthermore, they talked about doing things, rather than thinking things over or being interested in theory. They wanted to stay close to their home communities rather than seek upward mobility or face contextual discontinuity. It would be interesting to explore whether there are different ways of being autonomous and whether this is related to context and/or gender. These boys claimed that they did not talk a lot with others about the decisions they had to make. Nor did they use much time to reflect. Instead, they did things. This could mean that they represent an additional type

of autonomous reflexivity, which is practical or pragmatic. They were not oriented towards upward social mobility.

In sum, the autonomous reflexives had all decided upon an educational project, mostly by themselves. These pupils were more willing than the communicative reflexives to overcome structural constraints, e.g. they were willing to move away, although not necessarily with pleasure. The pupils in this category seemed to adapt to the educational system better than the other modes of reflexives, whether they were in the academic or vocational tracks. The autonomous reflexives in academic tracks saw school as a step on the way to their occupational aims. The autonomous reflexives in vocational tracks were able to satisfy their concerns through the practical activities that were part of their school life.

Meta-reflexives

Archer defined the meta-reflexive as somewhat similar to the autonomous reflexive, but more oriented towards living up to ideals, and value values (Archer 2007, 230). There were some pupils in our study who seemed to be meta-reflexive as they sought to understand themselves in relation to the rest of the world or to find a deeper meaning in life. They also seemed to be vulnerable in the sense that they had experienced difficulties such as the death or serious illness of a close family member or a parental divorce. It seemed harder for these pupils to find a main *concern* to which they felt they could commit. They appeared to be seeking something they had difficulty finding in the educational system.

These pupils reported being uncertain about what to do. While in the tenth grade, one of them thought about doing the academic track. However, when applying for upper secondary school some months later, the pupil applied for a vocational track. In the follow-up interview, this pupil⁵ revealed the following:

At the start, I thought I should apply for an academic track because I didn't know what I wanted to become. When we were about to apply, I realized I was so tired and bored. I would not have survived the academic track. (...) I find it very satisfying living away from home. I thought it was about time to do things on my own. (...) I could write a book about the things I don't want to become. I don't know what to become (...). Because, working every day, and then go home doing something I like, I don't want that.

⁵ Neither name nor gender is revealed to protect this participant's anonymity.

This pupil was a ponderer and said it was better to be alone, thinking, than together with people that did not care much about you. The pupil further explained that it was hard to find real, close friends who understood you; one could find many to talk to about things they were interested in, but it was harder to find someone who would understand you.

Some of the pupils in this study could be regarded as meta-reflexives, as they reported thinking about things that were important to them while having difficulty talking to others about many of these issues. At the same time, they seemed to face challenges at school and at home. These pupils felt different from others, and few of them had close friends their own age with whom they could talk. They seemed vulnerable in terms of finding a project within the educational system, as they found it hard to fit in at school, both socially and in terms of finding a project that fit with their concerns. Some of them revealed not having close friends, as their peers did not seem to understand them. Furthermore, they were uncertain of what to make of life. Some wanted to travel and explore the world, not to have a conventional job, etc. However, they did not know whether or how they would make it.

We suggest that these pupils are meta-reflexive, as they were occupied with ideological ideas and values, scored high on meta-reflexivity in the ICONI survey and showed in the interviews that they had not yet found a suitable cause to commit to, and therefore, a fitting educational project. These pupils were mostly concerned with finding a suitable life project, which mostly centred on whether they would succeed in finding an option within the educational system and opportunity structure that would sit well with their own personal concerns. Distance and other interlocutors were not as important to them as actually finding a fitting educational track, and the “failure” to do so was what worried these pupils the most. None of the meta-reflexive pupils in our sample had found their *major* concerns in life, which might not be surprising due to their age.

Conclusion

We conclude that the current school system seems to be better suited to the autonomous reflexives and those meta-reflexives that find themselves a life project, or at least a project they are happy with. However, as stated above, the meta-reflexives in this study had not found such a project, and we suggest that those meta-reflexives whose developing life projects are incompatible with the educational system’s offerings face a harder time in it and perhaps later in the modern labour market. The communicative reflexives are also vulnerable in the transition between lower and upper secondary education, as they will prioritize closeness to their

interlocutors and home communities over their own educational concerns and are therefore more constrained by local opportunity structures and especially distance to education.

We found that there is a relatively high number of autonomous reflexives in our rural case and wondered what the cause might be. The data suggests that the reasons may be found in their change of environment, as moving away from home forces pupils to live more autonomous lives, living independently, doing their own household chores and being responsible for attending school themselves. It could be that part of the puzzle is found within the family context and in their relations with teachers, as both are cited by the pupils as important influences. It would be interesting to explore how and to what extent the school and/or family prepare and/or enable their young for their future educational project. This requires further investigation, and if parents and teachers are found to play a significant role, it will be informative for future interventions to attain spatial equity in education.

We also found that the opportunity structure, described in this Chapter in the categories *distance to school* and *perceived work opportunities*, represented barriers regardless of the dominant mode of reflexivity. This is especially true for pupils from rural areas, who have to move to get an education and possibly also move to get a job, something that their urban counterparts do not have to consider to the same degree. This is hardly surprising, but it is important to note, as educational policy does not seem to give enough attention to such structural inequalities.

Based on our findings, there is a need to consider structures when addressing youth transitions. Even though, in late modernity, young people exercise their reflexivity and make choices based on their concerns, opportunity structures, created by geographical distances and local variations in course options, still have an impact on young people's present and future lives. Place seems to matter; people from rural districts have to move to obtain education and work. The educational system seems to favour autonomous reflexives (those who can and will move).

This raises some important questions that need to be addressed when discussing spatial inequality in education. Does this lead to a scenario where work outside the dwindling primary sector and education that qualifies for higher occupations are harder to obtain if you are not autonomous and/or from an urban place? Are we demanding too much of 15–16 year olds when we ask them to be autonomous, form a life project and move significant distances to obtain education and work? If so, what can be done?

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