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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Eastern Europeans in Britain: Successfully Integrated Citizens or Alienated Migrants? A Case Study of the Lithuanian Migrant Community in London

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This article addresses issues of Eastern Europeans' integration process in Britain. The study contributes the first analysis of Lithuanian migrants' integration experience in the United Kingdom (UK) by utilising qualitative data gathered from the Lithuanian migrant community in London. The main concern of this paper is to provide an analysis of the empirical data gathered and to compare it to other Eastern European migrants' integration experience in the UK. I have critically examined personal and collective levels of integration, including the following themes: language, employment and labour unions, education, and interaction within the migrants' national community. The intention of this study is not to make generalisations about all Lithuanians or Eastern Europeans in the UK, but rather to identify and illustrate certain trends that either support or contradict the propositions developed in the literature review. Based on Lithuanian interviewees' experiences of and attitudes towards integration into British society, it can be concluded that only some of the above-explained features are similar between the five interviewed Lithuanians and other Eastern European migrants in the UK, namely education and collective action within migrants' national community.

Keywords: Eastern Europeans; Lithuanians; migration; integration; London

Introduction

Britain has a long-standing history of migration from Eastern Europe. Arguably, a stepping-stone was the early 19th century's forced migration of Ashkenazi Jews from the Russian empire's western lands that are nowadays parts of Lithuania, Poland and Latvia (Panayi, 1994, p. 19). The 1940s was a period of even greater migration to Britain due to the cataclysmic events of the Second World War. Amongst millions of migrants who came to Britain, approximately 80,000 people were from Eastern Europe (McDowell, 2003, p. 865). Furthermore, the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union gave rise to a new flow of immigration to Britain. As a result, in 2001 there were approximately 100,000 Eastern European migrants residing in the UK (Demireva, 2011, p. 638). Finally, following the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union in 2004, migration to Britain expanded dramatically. Within the first five years, over 1.4 million Eastern Europeans arrived in Britain (James and Karmowska, 2012, p. 205). The Worker Registration Scheme showed that the highest proportion of these were from Poland (66%), followed by Slovakians (11%) and Lithuanians (9%) (Parutis, 2011, p. 41). Increased migration can be attributed to the fact that Britain did not restrict migration from the new EU member states. The latest statistical data shows that there are more than 1,7 million migrants from Eastern Europe currently living in the UK (Migration Observatory, 2015, p. 3).

Immigration and integration of Eastern European migrants into British society has become a widely debated issue. Mass media has often portrayed new migrants as criminals while some British far-right political parties have claimed that Eastern Europeans are 'stealing British jobs' while simultaneously abusing the welfare system. Numerous scholarly articles produced in the last decade undoubtedly opposed these statements. As Polish nationals are the largest Eastern European Community in the UK, their experiences of integration were analysed in greater detail compared to other Eastern European nationals. Being Lithuanian, I was always interested whether experiences of integrating into British society differ between Eastern European national communities. As a result, the decision to study Lithuanian nationals was made for the two following reasons: (a) there is currently no academic literature on whether Lithuanians share similar integration experiences with other Eastern Europeans in Britain and (b) the author of this dissertation is a Lithuanian national, therefore, there is no language barrier between the principal investigator and the participants of a qualitative research.

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This study contributes the first analysis of Lithuanian migrants' integration experience by utilising data gathered from the Lithuanian migrant community in London. Five in-depth interviews covered the participants' personal experiences of being migrants in the UK. Rather than looking for objective variables that would apply to all migrants, this research focuses on individual approaches to integration in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the key factors helping migrants to become an integral part of British society. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to investigate the experience of Lithuanian migrants' integration into British society. The evidence provided within the further parts of this project suggest the following.

First of all, similarly to other Eastern Europeans that are currently residing in Britain, Lithuanian interviewees found it challenging to overcome language barriers when they first arrived in the UK. The best way, according to them, is to communicate with native English speakers as much as possible because English language courses are not helpful enough. On the other hand, while other Eastern Europeans found language as a cornerstone of integration, Lithuanian migrants did not support this statement as they claimed that migrants could be integrated to a certain extent even with poor English language skills. Secondly, all Eastern European migrants, including Lithuanians, experienced exploitative labour conditions. However, unlike other Eastern Europeans, Lithuanian migrants residing in London typically did not agree that a good job is strongly interlinked with a higher integration and turned out to be well-informed about their working rights and labour unions. Finally, Lithuanian interviewees explained that similarly to other Eastern Europeans, education played a vital role in their integration while collective action amongst their national community did not. These arguments were solely based on the empirical data I gathered from five Lithuanian migrants living in London. Information provided by the interviewees was summarised and compared to scholarly literature on other Eastern European migrant communities in Britain.

To make this study more coherent, I will first introduce the main concepts and explain social integration of Eastern Europeans in Britain (Section 1). The following chapter will describe how the evidence for the case study was collected (Section 2). The article will then proceed to the analysis of the empirical evidence on the integration process of the Lithuanian migrant community in London (Section 3). The final section will discuss the main findings and identify further questions not addressed in this project (Conclusion).

Section One: Literature Review

Social integration can be approached in many different ways, one of which is to describe it as a process when 'previously separate things become combined' (Uberoi and McGhee, 2012, p. 59). In other words, it is a mechanism to unite different groups of people in order to create a cohesive society where people feel like a community and, to a certain extent, share similar values. Analysis of how migrants understand integration suggests that the process is perceived as a one-way adaptation when migrant community has to 'fit in' the host country because it is 'self-evident and unquestionable' (Pajnik, 2014, p. 48). On the contrary, scholarly opinion suggests that both the British Government and the EU perceive integration not as a total assimilation of one group into another but as a process when migrants maintain a level of difference and diversity (Scott and Cartledge, 2009, p. 63). However, it is important to note that both Britain and the EU took the latter approach only in the early 21st century. Hence, it can be claimed that migrants have a different understanding of integration than governmental bodies.

The given definition indicates that there are two major actors in the integration process, namely immigrants and the receiving society. It is argued, however, that the latter one has a decisive role to play for the outcome of integration due to its established institutions, traditions and values (Penninx, 2010, p. 70). Therefore, having in mind that immigrants' voices are less important, a question arises – what are the key elements of a successful integration within the receiving society? To answer this question, Rinus Penninx's three levels of integration will be explored.

According to Penninx, the process of migrant integration takes place at three different levels, namely, personal, collective and institutional (2010, p. 70). Personal level includes migrants' integration in terms of job, education, housing as well as their social and cultural adaptation. Immigration also takes place at the collective level where migrants work together by mobilising their resources and ambitions. Penninx notes there can be two possible outcomes of migrant collective action – acceptance by the receiving society or total isolation (2010, p. 70). Finally, the institutional level includes general public institutions of the receiving society, including institutional arrangements in labour markets or educational system. Further paragraphs will analyse a number of different aspects of Eastern European migrants' integration process in Britain in accordance to the first two levels of integration defined by Penninx. The third level, institutional, will not be discussed in this project because the qualitative research amongst the Lithuanian migrant community in London is inconclusive. To make this literature review more consistent, the first part will discuss different aspects of integration at the individual level, more precisely the role of English language, job and education in migrants' integration process. The second part will analyse collective actions of Eastern Europeans in Britain. Finally, the last part of the literature review will provide a brief description of the Lithuanian migrant community in London.

Academic literature shows that at the level of individual immigrant, learning a new language is the cornerstone of integration (Pajnik, 2014, p. 50). Additionally, it is important for labour mobility, because improved linguistic skills lead to better employment (Parutis, 2011, p. 52). For instance, a qualitative research study conducted by Moores and Metykova demonstrated that interviewees often felt like outsiders in Britain due poor English language skills and because of their accent (2010, p. 177). Arguably, even

if migrants from Eastern Europe are capable of having basic conversations in English and understand most of what others say, their accent isolates them from the rest of the society. Although migrants perceive English language courses as an important method of adaptation, the courses are usually criticised as inefficient and poorly organised (Pajnik, 2014, p. 51). In addition, it is difficult for migrants to attend these courses because many of them experience exceptionally long and inconsistent work hours (Ciupijus, 2011, p. 546). Consequently, even though language is an important part of integration, the extents to which English courses are helpful for migrant communities in Britain are highly questionable due to difficulties attending them and poor quality.

Job-related experience of Eastern European migrants in Britain is often seen as both a tool of inclusion and exclusion. Generally, migrants from Eastern European countries tend to receive employment in low-skilled and low-paid jobs such as manufacturing and hospitality (Martsin, 2009, p. 70). Interestingly, similar tendencies can be noted in the European scale, when migrants from the newest EU states are employed in 'precarious and dangerous jobs' in many other European countries including Germany, France, Belgium, etc. (Marino, Penninx and Roosblad, 2015, p. 6). This is either because migrants want to maximise their economic capital as quickly as possible and return to their own country or because it serves as an opportunity to adapt in the new labour market and reach for better career opportunities once they feel safer (Parutis, 2011, p. 53). Noticeably, those who are not planning to stay in the UK for a long time often do not even try to integrate in the new society, whereas migrants who are willing to improve their career status find the integration process vitally important. For instance, findings made by Parutis suggest that Eastern Europeans in Britain are highly mobile in the labour market because, given they possess necessary skills, immigrants move from 'any job' to 'better job' and eventually to 'dream job' (2011, p. 36). This labour mobility, when migrants reach for new career opportunities, is strongly linked to the feeling of being fully integrated. Namely, Pajnik's qualitative case study claims that having a good job often means being an accepted part of the receiving society (2014, p. 52). Therefore, a number of scholars show that job-related experience can lead to a deeper integration.

On the contrary, other researchers claim that some features of the job market can reinforce the social and cultural exclusion of migrants from the rest of the society. In particular, Ciupijus argues that migrants are often perceived as 'hard working employees', therefore, legitimising the culture of long working hours and high intensity employment (2011, p. 546). As a result, Eastern Europeans are seen as a separate part of the society that can be used as a cheap and sufficient labour force. Arguably, this reinforces exclusion of mobile Eastern Europeans in Britain and bars them from becoming an integrated work force. So the given research shows that migrants' experience in the UK's job market can help them integrate into the British society and at the same time can exclude them from it as a cheap and hard-working labour force.

Moreover, Eastern Europeans face difficulties using their educational credentials from home countries to adapt to the new society. Since the early 1990s, the British Government has launched a number of national programmes aimed to attract more highly skilled and educated migrants (Mol and Vank, 2016, p. 38). Nevertheless, this attempt is still reflected today, numerous scholarly articles argue that highly qualified Eastern Europeans often occupy low-skilled positions in the UK labour market (Parutis, 2011, p. 36; Ciupijus, 2011, p. 544). Arguably, this is because immigrants are not able to adapt their educational background in the new social environment (Demireva, 2011, p. 640). In other words, it is suggested that education achieved in migrants' birth countries is an insignificant factor in their integration.

However, migrants who attend academic institutions in Britain are more likely to become an integral part of the British society. A qualitative analysis of Eastern European migrants living in Glasgow showed that educational qualifications achieved in Britain highly correlate with a 'greater use of local amenities and higher rates of neighbourly behaviours' as well as social integration of migrants as a whole (Kearns and Whitley, 2015, p. 2122). In addition, another academic study explains that there is a clear tendency for Lithuanian students to find a job 'compatible with their education' and remain living in the UK after they graduate from a British university (Rakauskiene and Ranceva, 2012, p. 253). In both cases, education is seen as an important part of migrants' social integration. Therefore, it can be claimed that unlike educational credentials from migrants' home countries, the ones achieved in Britain have a significant contribution to their integration.

As social integration takes place at the collective level, some scholars suggest that migrants who take an active part in ethnic civic community are more likely to integrate. More precisely, they become more politically active compared to migrants who do not interact with their ethnic minorities. For instance, a cross-country analysis conducted by Jacobs and Tillie shows that ethnic membership has a 'significant effect on political integration' (2007, pp. 424, 426). On the contrary, Pajnik's qualitative research claims that 'interaction among migrants themselves … hinders integration' because in such case they tend to socialise with their ethnic community more than with the receiving society (2014, 54). Therefore, it seems that collective action of migrant communities can be both useful and harmful for their integration. A similar conclusion was made by Penninx, a scholar who structured the three levels if integration. In one of the articles he claimed that organisations of migrants could potentially achieve two things – become an accepted part of civil society or a completely isolated body (2010, p. 70). Hence, ethnic and national communities can both foster and prevent integration of Eastern Europeans in Britain.

As empirical data for this project arises from interviews conducted with five Lithuanians living in London, it is important to provide a brief background about the Lithuanian migrant community in London. Since the

EU enlargement in 2004, London has been a major destination for all Eastern European migrants, including Lithuanians. According to the 2011 London census, there were more than 40,000 Lithuanians living in London at that time (Greater London Authority, 2012, p. 3). Although it is not clear how many Lithuanians are living in London at the moment because figures largely differ, it is most likely that there from 80,000 to 100,000 of them. Furthermore, nearly three quarters of Lithuanian migrants arrived since 2004 (Greater London Authority, 2013, p. 5). There are numerous Lithuanian organisations working in London such as newspaper agencies, shops, restaurants, schools and churches. For instance, the Lithuanian City of London Club is one of many non-profit organisations that aim to foster interaction between Lithuanians in the UK. Similarly, the Lithuanian catholic church of St Casimir, which was first established in 1899 (Cherry and Pevsner, 2005, p. 566), holds daily masses in both Lithuanian and English language. As Lithuanians have established a large and active national community in London, it was particularly helpful in finding interviewees for the further explained qualitative research.

Section Two: Methodology

Following the establishment of the theoretical outlook of the dissertation, it is now important to explain how the evidence for the case study was collected. There are numerous approaches to social research, but in order to gather complex human experience for the case study, this project used a qualitative data collection method. More precisely, five semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with Lithuanian migrants in London in order to gain qualitative information about their personal experiences. Although, five interviewees is a relatively small sample, their similar 'structural and social conditions' provide highly descriptive and reliable data for the research project (Seidman, 2013, p. 59). Furthermore, this type of qualitative research allowed participants to provide detailed and comprehensive answers because the flexible structure enabled the interviewer to explore responses and frame questions according to what the interviewee has already said (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 184). Semi-structured interviews were chosen for three major reasons: the interviewer is able to follow different paths of the conversation when the situation demands it, interviewees seem to feel more comfortable 'not having a clear set of guidelines to follow', and they can provide a full context themselves (Lichtman, 2014, p. 248). Finally, a multiple-case study research design was chosen for this project because it focuses on an in-depth investigation of the similarities and differences between several individual cases, and produces 'compelling evidence and robust implications', allowing us to fully understand the experiences of Lithuanian migrants in London (Andrew et al., 2011, p. 138).

The data was collected by the principal investigator (myself) on a face-to-face basis in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, recorded, transcribed for further analysis and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 118). Any information that could reveal participants' identities was removed, names of the interviewees were changed and original recordings are kept secure. The original audio recordings will be kept for 12 months since the day of recording for a further possible analysis and then destroyed keeping only the transcripts. Furthermore, interviewees were briefed about the purpose of the research and informed that they can withdraw their consent at any point during the interview. In addition, participants' written consent was obtained prior the start of the interviews and the signed consent forms can be made available upon request. Finally, it is important to note that the Brunel University Research Ethics Committee has approved the proposed study (reference number: 0592-MHR-Jan/2016-1168).

A non-random sampling strategy, as described by Mosley, was chosen for this research because interview subjects were selected deliberately on the basis of their nationality, city of residence, gender and age (2013, p. 19). First of all, as mentioned above, all five interviewees currently live in London. This particular location was chosen primarily because it has an extensive Lithuanian community, making it less difficult to find five participants with similar social and structural conditions. Secondly, interviewees were chosen from different age groups to increase the possibility of getting broader information – the youngest participant was 18 years old at the outset of the study, while the oldest was in his 40s. Although three out of five participants were in their 20s, they are a fairly typical and representative group because young people (aged 15–29) make up almost half of all Lithuanian migrants in the UK (Rakauskiene and Ranceva, 2012, p. 251). Thirdly, in order to maintain a gender balance, interviews were taken from 3 males and 2 females. The above-explained sampling frame was chosen in order to cover a range of people with a range of different experiences and provide unbiased and robust results.

Interviewees were asked to reflect on their personal experiences of being migrants in Britain. In order to comprehensively understand their experiences, interviewees were given the same open questions and partly different follow-up questions depending on their answers as well as being asked to clarify their words and provide certain examples to illustrate their specific cases. Conversations were conducted in Lithuanian because participants found it more convenient to express themselves in their native tongue. While the transcripts (which can be made available upon request) are thus in Lithuanian, the quotes used in the further sections of the dissertation were translated into English. Furthermore, thematic analysis was used to categorise the gathered data in order to identify and describe important topics as well as link them to the major arguments outlined in the literature review (Namey et al., 2000, p. 138). A number of different codes (themes) were created using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo and will be presented in the next part of this project.

Naturalistic generalisation, one of the three forms of generalisation identified by Kvale (1996, p. 232), will be used in this project mainly because it 'rests on personal experience' and 'leads to expectations rather than formal

predictions'. In other words, the intention of this case study is not to make generalisations about all Lithuanians or Eastern Europeans in the UK, but rather to identify and illustrate certain trends that either support or contradict the propositions developed in the literature review. According to Gerring (2007, p. 45), case study research allows one to test 'the causal implications of a theory, thus providing corroborating evidence for a causal argument'. Therefore, the aim of this research is to uncover a range of perceptions rather than general and objective results.

To sum up this part of the project, the chosen research method and design enabled the researcher to find out whether certain factors have a significant influence in the integration process of the Lithuanian migrant community in London or not. The further paragraphs will focus on topics outlined in the literature review, namely language, employment, trade unions, education and collective action.

Section Three: Analysis

Following the establishment of the project's conceptual and methodological framework, I now turn to the discussion and analysis of the qualitative interview data. The analysis is structured thematically in order to analyse the above-mentioned themes in greater depth.

Language theme

To begin with, the following section will cover the importance of English language skills in Lithuanian migrants' everyday life and compare the gathered responses to the theory described in the first part of this dissertation project. Reflecting on their arrival to Britain, all five interviewees agreed that the language barrier was one of the first challenges they had to overcome in order to familiarise themselves with their new social context. Interestingly, even those who started learning English at a young age in Lithuania and thought of themselves as proficient English speakers, struggled to understand local people and express themselves in Britain. For instance, Tomas,[1] a working university student in his 20s, remarked:

> You know, you learn to speak English without talking to British people and when you come here [to London] and hear how they speak – their accent, manner of speaking! It just blew me off my feet. During the first month I felt as if I was not able to speak English at all.

Similarly, Rasa, a full-time chef at a restaurant in London in her 20s, explained that it was very difficult to overcome the language barrier because of how British people speak. In her own words, '[d]uring the first three weeks of my arrival, I was terrified to speak to anyone because it was very difficult to understand their accent, their British slang'. So the strong British accents appeared to be an unexpected difficulty for all five interviewees. It is worth noting that such an experience is not a unique attribute of Lithuanian community in London, as a number of academic articles show that all Eastern Europeans find themselves isolated from the rest of the society because of their accents (Moores and Metykova, 2010, p. 177).

Furthermore, interviewees were asked to explain how they managed to overcome this particular issue. Generally, they all agreed that the best way to learn English and understand different British accents was by communicating with British people. Rasa even emphasised that it is particularly important to interact with those whose first language is English, and not with those who speak English as their second language. As she was studying two different undergraduate degrees in Britain in the past, namely Marketing and Fine Art, her situation is worth a greater analysis. The important difference between the two courses was that while she had many Lithuanian classmates in her Marketing course, the second course was made up entirely of British students. Reflecting on her Marketing studies she said that:

> The first time I walked into the classroom I saw that half of the students are Lithuanians. Even more than a half! I felt deeply shocked because I came here thinking that university life will help me break through the language barriers. But I come to the class and there are so many Lithuanians! Obviously, they didn't want to talk English so, you know, we were speaking Lithuanian all the time. Because of that I didn't improve my English at all. There were definitely too many Lithuanians!

However, the situation was completely different during her Fine Art studies because Rasa was the only Lithuanian student in the entire class. In her own words, she was 'dropped into a place where everyone was speaking English so I had to adapt as quickly as possible'. If we also turn to Tomas' university experience, he stated that 'my classmates helped me a lot, I mean British classmates. If I was struggling to find a word or a phrase they would always help me. You know, talking to others helped me a lot'.

A highly similar approach was taken by Lukas, a Lithuanian migrant in his 40s who moved to London a year ago and is working as a kitchen porter in a restaurant. Despite having no English language skills before coming to London, Lukas said that the best way to improve one's language is to '… always talk to your colleagues as much as possible. Especially if there is some sort of a party going on, I always try to come along and talk to others'. On the other hand, he noted that it is easier to learn English by talking to other Eastern Europeans because they do the same mistakes, therefore, as he put it, 'it is very easy to talk to them. I understand them from the very first word, it just somehow happens'. Even when asked whether there are any other ways of learning English, he stated that:

> I have been taking online language courses as well as used various dictionaries to learn English, but it was useless. You can't use this type of a language anywhere! It is better to listen carefully and by doing so learn English.

Noticeably, the fact that language courses are usually criticised as insufficient was pointed out in the literature review as a general trend between all Eastern European migrants in Britain (Pajnik, 2014, p. 51). In addition to Lukas' experience, both Tomas and Rasa said that they have never even tried to search for language courses because they did not think it would be useful. On the contrary, Rokas, an 18-year-old college student, turned out to be an exception because in his case language courses were particularly important. As Rokas moved to London when he was only 10 years old, he was not able to speak English at all. He said that:

> At first it was very difficult because I was not able to speak English language at all. I was very little when I moved here … but [my] teachers helped me a lot. [They] translated English words I did not know into Lithuanian and this is how I broke through [important to note that teachers did not speak Lithuanian, but used online translators to translate words that Lukas did not understand]. It took me a year to learn English. Eventually, I was able to communicate with anyone.

However, it has to be noted that as Rokas was very young when he moved to London, he was expected to attend language courses organised by his new school and learn English as soon as possible in order to be able to study. Interestingly, Rokas is the only interviewee who sometimes finds it difficult to use his native Lithuanian language. During the interview he said that:

> Sometimes it just happens that I think in English when someone asks a question in Lithuanian. In these cases I need to think in which language I should respond. Sometimes I feel really confused. … On rare occasions I even forget certain Lithuanian phrases.

The best way to overcome this problem, according to Rokas, is to watch Lithuanian movies, read articles and books in Lithuanian and listen to Lithuanian music.

So despite the fact that all five interviewees had a different level of English proficiency, ranging from 'none' to 'highly proficient', all of them found it challenging to overcome the language barriers and understand British accents. Also, four out of five participants agreed that talking to people whose native language is English is the most efficient way of learning English. Lukas was the only exception in this case because he believed that communicating with other Eastern Europeans makes it easier to learn English, as they do similar mistakes that one can learn from. Finally, only one interviewee, Rokas, claimed that language courses were a useful tool to overcome the linguistic barriers.

Employment and labour unions theme

One of the first concerns migrants face when they arrive in Britain is finding a source of income on which they could survive. As employment plays a vital role in migrants' lives, the following section will investigate its significance for the five Lithuanians who were interviewed for this project. The following paragraphs will examine a number of different job-related topics including (1) the importance of English language skills in a workplace, (2) Lithuanian migrants' labour conditions, (3) their working rights and trade union memberships, (4) their experience in combining full-time undergraduate studies with part-time employment.

To begin with, the importance of English language skills in adapting to a British workplace environment will be examined. Interestingly, there were some contradictions between the responses. More precisely, both Lukas and Tomas explained that it is not difficult to find a new job even if you cannot speak English. This is clearly illustrated by Lukas, who described his first job search experience in London:

> You know, when I came here my friend promised to get me a job. So he arranged everything with the manager, or whatever he is called, but when I went there on Wednesday, the guy was not there! And the next day my friend went back to Lithuania for the whole summer! So I was completely alone and was not able to speak English. So I asked another Lithuanian guy to ask the same manager if I could come and sign the contract even though I can't speak English. At the end of the day, I went there alone and it went well. I got the job, what can I say.

This illustrates Lukas' determination to work even though he was not able to communicate in English. However, it is important to note, that Lukas and Tomas are describing a similar workplace environment as both of them were working as stock controllers in different warehouses. According to Tomas, 'you do not need good language skills when the only action you need to be doing is lifting boxes'. Therefore, it can be argued that migrants who are willing to be employed in industrial jobs, such as warehouse operatives, do not need advanced English language skills. On the other hand, Rasa and Asta developed a completely different approach. A university student and a part-time worker Asta, explained that in her experience improving English language skills was a particularly important step towards her first employment:

> Yes, of course! It is vital to have great language skills when you apply for a job in here [London]. It gives you confidence and you feel a lot better. For instance when I applied to work as a waitress I was scared because I was not confident with my language. What if someone tells you that they are allergic to a certain type of food but you do not understand it? You might get someone killed. It is dangerous!

Similarly, Rasa explained that it took her more than 6 months to even apply for a job because she did not feel confident about her language skills. Unlike in the case of Lukas, she did not receive any support from other Lithuanians in finding a new job:

> I applied online. I did everything myself. I think I just opened a lot of websites of various restaurants and they had that 'Join our team' bit. So I applied and got an interview in a few days, that's pretty much it.

Despite their different testimonials about the importance of English language in finding a new job, all four interviewees (the fifth participant, Rokas, has no job related experience of his own) agreed that migrants could improve in their careers even if they do not speak English fluently. Participants provided a large number of personal examples when they or their colleagues were promoted because of their hard work and relentless efforts despite their poor English language skills. For instance, Rasa explained that 'as long as you can communicate using your hands or face [hand gestures and facial expressions] … you can surely climb the career ladder'. Similarly, Rokas, a person with very limited English language skills, managed to successfully complete Food Safety and Hygiene course in order to obtain a Food Hygiene certificate. He still remembers the examiner saying '… look everyone, he does not speak the language but passed the test on his first attempt! Others know the language but still failed'. It is important to note that this particular argument contradicts academic opinion that migrants' career progression 'is often subject to their linguistic skills' (Parutis, 2011, p. 52).

On the other hand, it shows that Lithuanians as well as other Eastern Europeans are determined and hard working. The report published by the Institute for Public Policy Research pointed out that the proportion of Eastern Europeans of working age in the UK in employment is significantly higher than the one of the British nationals (Parutis, 2011, p. 42). However, according to the scholarly literature, the perception of Eastern Europeans as 'hard working employees' legitimised the culture of extensive working hours and hazard conditions (Ciupijus, 2011, p. 546). Is this the case with the Lithuanian migrant community in London or not?

Based on my primary research, it appears that all five interviewees experienced poor, instable and even hostile work conditions. Rasa provided the foremost example as she described her careless and ignorant managers at her first workplace:

> Right before I left the job I felt really sick while I was still working on my shift. But no one wanted to let me go home. So while I was in the kitchen I felt so nauseous that I ran into the storage room and threw up on the floor. And the next day I told my manager that I am leaving this place. You know what? He did not care! He did not care at all when I was feeling sick for five days and he saw me working with my face paled. He did not let me go home.

Such a harsh experience left long-lasting consequences in Rasa's life. Although this incident took place in the beginning of 2013, she started working again only in 2015. Put differently, it took her two years to regain confidence and apply for a new part-time position while studying. What is more, it is worth noting Lukas' responses because he experienced poor work conditions in a different way.

On the very first day of employment as a kitchen porter Lukas was working for 12 hours. It should be mentioned that it was just a trial day so he was not paid for it. As I was surprised by his response, I asked if he is often working 12-hour shifts. 'Sometimes I need to work 14-hour shifts. … Over the weekends, especially Sundays, I start my shift at 10 am and finish at midnight' – Lukas replied. Furthermore, he is currently working on a zero hours contract. Although he was promised to be given a full-time contract after 6 months, he did not get it (Lukas has been working at the restaurant for more than 8 months). Interestingly, he did not seem worried about it and explained it as if it was a common practise. According to scholarly literature, there is a large number of Eastern European migrants who come to Britain to earn as much money as possible in a short period of time (Parutis, 2011, p. 42). They do not seek to integrate or learn the local language to improve in their careers and often work under extremely poor conditions. It seems that Lukas fits into this category as he said that long shifts and overtime opportunities are particularly useful for him because Lukas wants to save money and go back to Lithuania as soon as possible. On the other hand, when asked if he felt that these work conditions are fair he said:

> Not really. Not really fair … We need more people. As far as I know, other restaurants of the same network have five kitchen porters … There are only two of us [at the restaurant he is working].

In addition, Rokas provided a highly similar response. Although he has not been employed in the past, Rokas saw his parents working tirelessly since their arrival in Britain:

> … my family [his parents] was working since the very beginning. We came here [to London] and they started working immediately … It was really a hard time I can tell … Parents were working night shifts and morning shifts, often more than 12 hours. She [Rokas' mother] comes back at 4am after work and at 3pm she has to be back [at her workplace]. And this was a routine. I was able to see how exhausted my mother and dad were [Rokas was only 10 years old at that time].

It seems that Lithuanians as well as other Eastern Europeans in Britain face unpromising realities of low-wage, low-skill workplaces and are being forced to work long and irregular shifts. It should be noted that scholarly literature outlined that trade unions are considered crucial for the protection of migrant workers' rights (Cam, 2014, p. 531). Having this said, to what extent are Lithuanian migrants in London aware of this fact? What do they know about the protection of their working rights?

Three out of five interviewees, namely Rasa, Tomas and Asta, had some knowledge about trade union memberships and their working rights. However, only Tomas and Asta were trade union members. Rasa claimed that her current

workplace provides sufficient information and advice on the UK workplace rights. Additionally, according to Rasa, they give trade unions' contact details in case employees would like to become members, but she said that 'as long as I am working here, I did not need to join a trade union'. Tomas and Asta, on the other hand, had an extensive knowledge about trade unions because both of them have memberships. Reflecting on his experience as a member of a labour union Tomas said:

> I was not really doing anything there. When I received a contract at my current workplace they asked if I wanted to become a member of a trade union. I decided to join one and paid that £2 per week charge, but never really saw or heard anything from them … If something happened to you at work you would need some legal advice. One who is a member of a trade union can expect that union will stand for him … Having the [trade union] membership was simply knowing that if something happens you will get the support you need. Something like a sense of security.

Tomas further explained that his managers willingly provided a lot of information about the particular trade union they recommended and for this reason many other Lithuanians became members of the same union. By comparison, Asta, who is also a member of a trade union, explained that in her case it was her university that provided information about trade union membership. As Asta is studying Popular Music, her lecturers advised her to become a member of the Musicians Union. In her own words:

> I heard about the Musicians Union in one of the lectures at my university. Lecturers said that it could insure my instruments, support in many legal ways and that kind of stuff. Plus it was cheaper for students … So I joined the union and then received a letter with all the further information about my membership. You know, it somehow gives me confidence.

Although scholars outlined that migrant workers from Eastern Europe are most likely to be non-unionised (Cam, 2014, p. 544), the qualitative research amongst Lithuanian migrant community in London does not support this statement because two out of five participants were members of the trade unions. Having in mind that Rokas is only 18 years old and has no work experience, it can be claimed that 50% of respondents (two out of four) were unionised. However, it has to be noted that in both cases it was not because of trade unions' efforts but rather thanks to Tomas' workplace managers and Asta's lecturers that both of them became trade union members. Therefore, these examples support the statement outlined in the literature review that trade unions struggle to reach Eastern European migrants by their own means (James and Kamowska, 2012, p. 202).

Finally, as three out of five interviewees are current university students and are working at the same time, the last job-related topic will analyse the way they manage to coordinate the two. Namely, participants were asked to reflect on advantages and disadvantages of studying and working at the same time. Tomas was certain that his undergraduate studies are more important than his current job. Describing his situation he claimed that:

> Well, the most important thing for me is my studies. I always try to fit my job along with my studies, never the other way around! I did not come here to work for a minimum wage, I came to graduate from university!

Similarly to Tomas, Asta claimed that 'obviously my undergraduate studies are more important. My future depends on it'. She further noted that in the beginning it was difficult to manage both studying and working at the same time but eventually she got used to it. As Asta developed her time management and multi-tasking skills, it became easier to keep up with her studies and have a part-time sales assistant position at the same time. Noticeably, Asta explained that the major shortcoming of being a working student is that 'there is almost no time to socialise … I felt really bad when my classmates were hanging out together, but I couldn't join them because of my work'. Her answer suggests that working and studying at the same time makes it more difficult to integrate within her university's community.

On the contrary to the two given experiences, Rasa claimed that her job became more important than her studies:

> When I started working again it became very difficult to combine studies and my new job because I said that I would be working no matter what. 'No matter what' meant that I sacrificed my university time to be working. And when you start doing that your university record [attendance and grades] goes way down.

Interestingly, Rasa was the only participant who was certain that her job played a vital role in her integration as she said that 'I just felt that … I need to find a proper job and finally make this place [London] my home'. Although having a good job is strongly interlinked with integration of other Eastern Europeans in Britain (Pajnik, 2014, p. 52), Lithuanians interviewed for this project did not feel the same way because only one participant supported this argument.

Although the three described cases were different to a certain extent, it can be argued that overall, it is not an easy task to combine work and studies. Additionally, it creates negative consequences when people have to choose between work and studies as well as work and social life. All three participants agreed that this experience caused a lot of stress and sometimes made them feel like outcasts. Unfortunately, it is not possible to find out if this argument also applies to other Eastern

Europeans because there is a lack of academic research made on Eastern European migrants in Britain who are working and studying at the same time.

Some features explained in this part of the analysis are shared between the Lithuanian community in London and other Eastern European migrants in Britain. Namely, both scholarly literature and this research project outlined that Lithuanians as well as other Eastern Europeans experience harsh labour conditions. On the other hand, there were some clear contradictions between literature and a case study. Firstly, interviewees claimed that language is not a barrier to be promoted. Secondly, three out of four participants were informed about their working rights and labour unions, whereas literature suggests that it is not the case for most of Eastern Europeans. Finally, gathered responses showed that working Lithuanian migrant students find it more difficult to become a part of university community because often they have to choose between work and university social life.

Education theme

As I progressed with the data collection it became increasingly clear that education played an important role in participants' integration process. Interestingly, four out of five interviewees were either university or college students. For instance, Asta, Rasa and Tomas went to different universities in London. They all agreed that low education quality and lack of international acknowledgement of Lithuanian universities are the two major reasons for choosing British universities. As Tomas provided his reasons for choosing to study in London, he stressed that:

> … here [in London] lecturers see students as normal people, equal to themselves, they even talk to you face to face about regular things. It's not like in Lithuania where lecturers feel as if they are some kind of directors and everyone has to obey them. They can actually bully their students – it's something I've heard so many times from my friends [who are studying in Lithuania]!

In a similar way, Asta said that:

> Lithuanian universities don't have enough financial resources and the whole system is really bad. As in my case I am studying music, here [in London] I can get all the support I need. Instruments, recording studios, my university even has its own label company! I would never get these sorts of things back in Lithuania!

Noticeably, the same reasons are outlined in the scholarly literature. According to various researches, high education quality, international acknowledgement and reputation are the major factors for choosing British universities over other European academic institutions (Rakauskiene and Ranceva, 2012, p. 248; Hemsley-Brown, 2012, p. 1012). Even though all three interviewed university students outlined similar reasons for choosing London universities, it was important to ask whether higher education played an important role in their integration processes.

Indeed, participants' responses suggested that university experience was particularly important in seeing themselves as an integral part of the society. However, it should be noted that interviewees provided slightly different reasons. For example, Rasa stated that her lecturers were particularly helpful:

> … lecturers always notice that you have a different accent, that you are not British. … they know that you are not from here [Britain], thus they don't know how I will react to certain remarks or questions. It seems that they are a lot more careful with me, but at the same time always try to help. … and I think their support was very important to me.

Similarly, Tomas recalls how accepted he feels in his university. In his own words, 'I never feel like an outsider, I am one of them [his British classmates] … because lecturers do not see me as somehow different or special. It really helps'. Hence, according to both Rasa and Tomas, lecturers help to adapt to the host country because they perceive Lithuanians as well as other Eastern Europeans in a same way that they see British students.

Asta, on the other hand, did not think that lecturers have a significant role to play in her integration. She explained that:

> You know when you come here [to London] as a student it is not the same as if you come as a minimum wage worker in some kind of a warehouse. Local people simply see you as a more intelligent and motivated person. It really made me feel better about myself. I can even feel as if I am one of them [British people]!

Public perception, according to Asta, is more positive towards those who come to the UK for studying purposes. Therefore, Lithuanian students feel more confident to see themselves as integrated citizens. Asta further noted that 'every time someone asks me what I am doing here [in London], I proudly answer that I am a student. In this way I don't feel ashamed of being here'. Besides the fact that participants provided different reasoning, they all agreed that their undergraduate studies are important in their assimilation processes.

Finally, Rokas', the only participant who attended a British school, supported the argument that education plays a vital role in one's integration. As it was explained before, his teachers helped him to overcome language barriers. During the first months of his education in Britain, Rokas was not able to communicate in English, thus he said that 'back then I was able to solve only math tasks on my own. You know, there were just numbers and I understood them'. However, with the support from his teachers, Rokas was able to improve his English language skills quickly. It should be noted that this argument is supported by scholarly literature as a qualitative analysis

of migrants living and studying in Glasgow outlined that education qualifications achieved in Britain help to integrate in the British society (Kearns and Whitley, 2015, p. 2122).

Collective action theme

Although Lithuanian national community in London has established strong networks between various Lithuanian businesses, newspapers and other Lithuanian organisations, most of the participants claimed that they have never been involved in such a collective action. Tomas, for example, explained that he has never even considered being actively involved in activities of the Lithuanian community in London because, in his words, 'I didn't want it, I didn't see the purpose of that and I didn't even know anything about them'. In addition, he said that as far as he is aware none of his Lithuanian friends or co-workers was involved in Lithuanian community activities either.

Lukas, too, noted that:

> No. Somehow I am not looking for friends here [in London]. Obviously, there are a lot of us [Lithuanians] here, you can find friends if you want to. But I just don't see why I should do that. Sometimes I talk to Lithuanians but we never become friends. I work a lot, I get back home late at night and go back to work in the morning.

Rasa outlined similar experience as she said that:

> No. Actually I never wanted to … I have a cousin here in London and she once invited me to go to a Lithuanian nightclub with her friends. But, you know, I've heard that they get into serious fights so didn't want to go.

Reflecting on her job experience in East London, an area where the majority of Lithuanian migrants live, Rasa explained that Lithuanians were the most impolite and rude customers. Particularly, whenever they saw Rasa's name badge and realised that she is Lithuanian, they used to ask for a free sandwich or cheaper coffee. Although Rasa said that the best way to deal with these particular situations was to ignore the comments, in some occasions Lithuanians would start using offensive Lithuanian phrases to insult her. What is more, reflecting on her current Lithuanian co-workers, Rasa said that:

> I have two Lithuanian co-workers. … The first one is very quiet and doesn't talk much. … The second one kind of likes to fight. You know, we're both working in the same position. So we fight quite a lot. ... The only thing we have in common is that we say hello to each other every morning. That's pretty much it.

Most of the interviewees claimed that the Lithuanian community in London has no direct impact on their assimilation processes because they have not been involved in any collective activities of Lithuanians living in London. On the contrary, the only interviewee who disagreed with this statement was Rokas. To begin with, he was going to a Lithuanian evening school in London once a week:

> I was going to an English school from Monday to Friday and at the same time I attended Lithuanian school on Tuesday evenings … Mainly, we were learning Lithuanian language and history. Basically, it was the same as if I was in Lithuania. And it is very good that I did [attend Lithuanian school in London] because it helped not to forget Lithuanian language. Many of my Lithuanian friends live here for about five years and now they can't even speak Lithuanian because they communicate with English people only! It [Lithuanian school in London] was very useful, I don't regret it at all.

Furthermore, Rokas explained that he was playing basketball in a Lithuanian basketball team. More precisely, as his team was participating in a couple of different leagues, including a Lithuanian one called *Sabonis Taure*, they used to be playing two or sometimes three times a month. In Rokas' opinion 'it was great. It was really interesting because it seemed that you are back home, back in Lithuania'. It has to be noted, however, that in some rare occasions Lithuanian community was isolated because of their collective action. For instance, Rokas said that:

> It was quite weird when we were playing in a British tournament. All of us were Lithuanians so we were talking to each other in Lithuanian. British people were very unhappy about it, even said that it is against the rules because they don't understand what we are talking about. You can feel that they [British basketball players] are angry at you. We even noticed that referees weren't happy about it. … But you know, rules did not forbid speaking Lithuanian.

Interestingly, Rokas' response supports Pajnik's argument shown in her qualitative research, as she concluded that interaction between migrants isolates them from the rest of the society (2014, p. 54).

Therefore, it can be claimed that collective action does not have a direct impact on the integration process of the Lithuanian migrant community in London because of the two following reasons: (1) four out of five interviewees did not take part in Lithuanian community activities and (2) in some occasions collective action isolated Lithuanians from the rest of the society. Rokas was the only participant to explain a positive aspect of the interaction with the Lithuanian migrant community in London, which is that the Lithuanian school in London helped him to retain his Lithuanian language skills and learn more about the history of Lithuania.

Conclusion

The main concern of this study was to provide an analysis of the empirical data gathered from a qualitative research of the Lithuanian migrant community in London and to

compare it to other Eastern European migrants' integration experience in the United Kingdom. I have critically examined personal and collective levels of integration, including the following themes: language, employment and labour unions, education, and interaction within the migrants' national community.

By exploring academic literature about Eastern Europeans' integration into British society, it was explained that language plays a vital role in migrants' integration process. Noticeably, even if they were able to communicate with British people, Eastern European accent isolated migrants from the rest of the society. Furthermore, British accents made it even more problematic to assimilate because it is difficult for migrants to understand and learn them. Employment-related experience of Eastern Europeans was explained to be both a tool of inclusion and exclusion. It was argued that while some scholars claimed that migrants who have better jobs are more integrated, others showed that poor labour conditions separate Eastern Europeans from the rest of the society as a cheap labour force. Similarly, collective action within the migrant community appeared to be both useful and harmful for the integration of Eastern Europeans in Britain. More precisely, a cross-country analysis conducted by Dirk Jacobs and Hean Tillie showed that interaction with one's national community leads to a higher level of integration. On the contrary, others claimed that close connections between migrants themselves hinder integration because they socialise more with their national community than with the receiving society.

Based on Lithuanian interviewees' experiences of and attitudes towards integration into British society, it can be concluded that only some of the above-explained features are similar between them and other Eastern European migrants in the UK. To begin with, participants explained that the language barrier was one of the first challenges they had to overcome in order to familiarise themselves with their new social context. In their opinion, the most sufficient way to overcome this issue was by talking to British people as much as possible. On the other hand, Lithuanian interviewees provided a different approach from what was stated in the literature review by claiming that language is not a cornerstone of integration. Most of participants said that migrants who do not speak English well could still improve in their job careers and integrate into the receiving society. Likewise, participants explained that having a good job is not strongly interlinked with their integration. Even though Lithuanian migrants, alike other Easter Europeans, experience poor labour conditions, Lithuanians appeared to have more knowledge about their working rights. Additionally, interview data showed that Lithuanians living in London tend to be more unionised in comparison to other Eastern Europeans. Another important feature explained in the analysis was that Lithuanian migrants who were working and studying at the same time found it more difficult to integrate because they were not able to become a part of their university communities. Unfortunately, it remains unclear whether this argument applies to other Eastern Europeans in Britain or not, as there is a lack of academic research about this topic.

It is important to explain that education was perceived as a highly important feature of migrants' integration process. Interestingly, both academic literature on Eastern Europeans in Britain and the explained qualitative research supported this statement. Lithuanians who were interviewed outlined two major reasons for it: (1) university lecturers as well as British school teachers were particularly helpful in their integration and (2) public perception is more positive towards those migrants who come to the UK to study rather than work. Finally, it was described that collective action amongst Lithuanian migrant community in London does not have a direct impact on migrants' integration because (1) migrants generally do not take part in the Lithuanian community's activities and (2) collective action isolates the national community from the rest of the society.

The observations above should be read with caution, as the aim of this study was not to make generalisations about Lithuanian migrants in the UK but rather focus on individual approaches. However, there are a number of interesting issues highlighted by the collected data. Credibility and accuracy of the above-explained differences between Lithuanian and other Eastern European migrants therefore may be a fruitful topic for a future quantitative research.

Note

[1] Names of the interviewees have been changed.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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