

SCTMG 2020**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the
Context of Modern Globalism»****SOCIAL ADAPTATION OF CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN
IMMIGRANTS: REPUBLIC OF LATVIA AND IRKUTSK OBLAST**

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Abstract

Using the interdisciplinary approach, the authors discuss adaptation strategies of contemporary Ukrainian immigrants. Authors conducted qualitative research in Republic of Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast of Russia with the aim to compare the processes of adaptation of contemporary Ukrainian immigrants. Attention is paid to push-pull factors of migration, problems which immigrants face, adaptation of their children, identity change, similarities and differences. Contemporary Ukrainian immigrants do not migrate unprepared since social realities in Ukraine from one side and Latvia / Irkutsk Oblast from another are more similar than different: no one can help them financially if they are not relatives. There is no financial assistance from the Diaspora. Immigrants mostly do not regret emigration since they earn more and feel better. They need 5–6 years in average to settle in a new place and feel confident. Discrimination is a rare case, it may occur on a household level. Their children are well socialized and do not have any exceptional problems. Identity changes with obtaining citizenship / residence status because they feel recognized by authorities and become more loyal. Individual adaptation strategy among three distinguished is main in both territories since immigrants can rely on themselves only in most cases. Institutional adaptation strategy does not have any significant impact because the role of Diasporas and public authorities in immigrants' adaptation is extremely low in both territories. Social adaptation strategy is of equally great importance in both territories because immigrants need to make new social connections for settling as comfortable as possible.

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Keywords: Adaptation of migrants, adaptation strategies, Ukrainian immigrants, diaspora, Latvia, Irkutsk.

1. Introduction

Ukrainian Diasporas in Republic of Latvia and in Irkutsk Oblast are among the largest Ukrainian Diasporas in their population structure. When comparing these Ukrainian Diasporas, it should be noted that the nature of development of these two Diasporas of one nation is controversial and similar at the same time: the number of Ukrainians in both Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast steadily decreases (while the number of Ukrainians in the European Union increases, but also decreases in Russia). At the same time, Ukrainian Diasporas of Irkutsk Oblast and Latvia belong to the “oldest” Diasporas among all Ukrainian Diasporas in the world and among other ethnic Diasporas in their territories (Zavalov, 2017).

2. Problem Statement

The research of Ukrainian immigrants was conducted in Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast. These territories were selected due to the following:

1. The nature of Ukrainian immigration before 1917 is relatively similar (the core of diaspora was formed at the same time both in Latvia and in Irkutsk Oblast);

2. As of 1990, a year before Ukraine gained independence, the number and share of Ukrainians living in Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast was relatively the same (approximately 92,000 in Latvia and 97,000 in Irkutsk Oblast according to 1989 USSR Census) (Babuta, 2012; Rudenko, 2007). Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, both Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast had experienced huge immigration flow from Ukraine. However, further dynamics of migration processes had radically changed. Both Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast face a significant decrease of the number of Ukrainians (Tkachenko & Polyushkevich, 2019).

3. Research Questions

Main research questions were differentiated to the following groups: reasons for emigration, life conditions satisfaction in Ukraine, preparation for emigration (territory and society knowledge, finance, social ties, etc.), and emigration alone or with others, help from locals, discrimination issue in the host society, children’s life in a new country, life conditions satisfaction in the host society, belonging identity change.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to collect data about the reasons and process of emigration, arrival and settling in a new place, adaptation problems, decision making influencers, new network constructing, satisfaction with a new place.

Object of the Study: contemporary Ukrainian immigrants in Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast.

Subject of the Study: adaptation strategies of contemporary Ukrainian immigrants in Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast.

5. Research Methods

This research took place in the end of 2016 – the end of 2018 and is mainly based on qualitative, interpretative methods of information collection and its analysis obtained in the complex field study. The main method is the semi-structured (semi-formalized) interview. Interviewees were selected using snowball sampling (a typical sample applied to small specific group – respondents were asked to recommend one or more persons from the same specific group). We also used methods of participant and non-participant observation in the Ukrainian diaspora and its organizations in both Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast in order to interpret the obtained results correctly.

Thirty five persons participated in this qualitative research: 20 in Latvia and 15 in Irkutsk Oblast. They were interviewed with the open questions prepared in advance. The interview questionnaire consisted of 14 main questions, the answers to which were then grouped. Interviews were conducted in person, by phone or skype. Interviews lead to the primary data source formation and its analysis.

In our understanding, contemporary Ukrainian immigrants are immigrants from Ukraine of any nationality or ethnicity who emigrated from Ukraine starting from 1989 when the process of leaving Ukraine became legally allowed. The main criteria of the selection of interviewees are:

1. Legal emigration from Ukraine started from 1989;
2. The residence status (citizenship [non-citizenship], residence in Latvia or Russia) because this group of immigrants is stable and connects its future with a new country (unlike labor migrants).

The study of secondary data was also used for analysis of the nature of migration processes (Arango, 2000; Aroian & Norris, 2002; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rudenko et al., 2007; Tkachenko & Polyushkevich, 2019; Tolstokorova, 2015;)

In our research, we consider three types of adaptation strategies of Ukrainian immigrants: individual, social and institutional.

Individual adaptation strategy refers to the migrant's decision to migrate by her/himself under the influence of different factors, the process of migration and the arrival and settling in a new place. It is also about housing, employment, language learning – everything that a migrant does her/himself. Social adaptation strategy is closely intertwined with the individual strategy if an individual migrates not alone, but in a group or family – it appears in the process of resettlement and is about the development of social connections, co-operation (mainly formed among one ethnic group) and “building bridges” with the new surrounding environment. Institutional adaptation strategy is about relations with a community-diaspora and public authorities where “old” immigrants help “new” ones. Its role especially increases at the process of the effective ethnic infrastructure creation.

6. Findings

Latvia: 14 females and 6 males; 6 are in the age category of 19–29, 7 – 30–39, 4 – 40–49, 3 – 50–57; 3 are Latvian citizens, 8 are Ukrainian citizens with permanent residence in Latvia, 9 are Ukrainian citizens with temporary residence in Latvia.

The two main reasons for immigration to Latvia are economic – 8 (5 found a better-paid job in Latvia and 3 were assigned to work on companies in Latvia) and family – 8 (7 married Latvian citizens

and 1 reunified with family immigrated earlier). With regard to poor situation with job and money in Ukraine, respondents noted that most had “average or below average” earnings in Ukraine (only 4 said that they had well-paid jobs there). They worked as engineers, teachers, professors, actors, accountants, programmers, doctors, nurses, etc. Many people found a better-paid job in Latvia in the same or near-same spheres.

It is possible to divide the respondents into two unequal groups: those who immigrated to Latvia at the beginning of 1990s (3) and those who did so after 2004 (17). There are no interviews during the period of mid-1990s–2004 because the Ukrainian immigration to Latvia was extremely limited. The Ukrainian immigration resumes after Latvia joined the European Union in 2004. Many respondents specifically noted that it was important for them to stay in a European Union Member State stating that “Latvia is the best entrance to the European Union”.

The Ukrainian immigrants to Latvia are characterised by some financial preparation for immigration (saving money, selling property in Ukraine). None of the respondents immigrated spontaneously because all immigrants knew that they would not have financial assistance in Latvia if they were not friends or relatives. As some of them noted, despite the fact that many people in Latvia speak Russian and it helps to communicate with locals, the level of life and social services development is not that high as it is in Western Europe (but it is higher than in Ukraine) so it is better to be prepared. With that, Ukrainian immigrants who moved earlier do help those who moved after with advice and their social network.

Concerning Latvian language knowledge, 19 out of 20 respondents noted that they attend(ed) classes on Latvian (mostly on a free basis) organised by the Riga City Council, Employment Service, or take (took) paid classes at language schools. With that, half of respondents stated that they have enough knowledge of Latvian for communicating with locals and almost all of them have language certificates of different knowledge level of Latvian. Respondents say that these courses help them to make new connections both with locals and immigrants because courses are popular among locals as well. With that, they feel more confident because of their knowledge of the Russian language, which is widely spread in Latvia as well, so they are sure that they would be understood in any difficult situations.

No one responded that they received any financial support from the Ukrainian diaspora. Many immigrants did not even ask for such a help among its members. Furthermore, half of respondents have never had any contact with Ukrainian organisations in Latvia. Those who support contacts with organised diaspora noted that Ukrainian organisations are useful for “building bridges”, making contacts, finding supporters and friends. In our opinion, based on empirical participant observations, the level of confidence in the diaspora is low because Ukrainians who are active in the diaspora are highly politically divided and it is a great obstacle in the diaspora development. Influence of diaspora and its institutions into Ukrainian immigrants is low.

Half of respondents moved alone while another half with family or friends. From those who immigrated alone, 3 moved to their spouses. Those who immigrated with family or group of friends explain that it is simpler for them to adapt in the new country through supporting and helping each other. Moreover, adaptation through a group widens contacts because someone’s contacts will become group contacts.

The time for settling into Latvia is different for respondents: 10 of them noted that they needed 5 years to settle in Latvia (4 – 2 years, 5 – 3 years, 1 – nearly 5 years), 3 specified that they needed more than 5 years (1 – 6 years, 2 – more than 10 years). The process of settling into Latvia is ongoing for 7 respondents, despite the fact that all respondents are legalised through citizenship or residence permits and most found a worthy job (2 do not work because their spouses support them financially), 7 for whom the process continues experience some difficulties but they are on their way to psychological acceptance of the fact that they are part of Latvian social space because all of them are positive about their future in Latvia.

Discussing discrimination on ethnic or national background, 4 immigrants noted that they faced discrimination at the household level (xenophobia) in different social places (medical institutions, post offices, etc.), 8 immigrants specified that they have not faced any discrimination but they feel social tensions (“Locals are not frank”, “I wish people communicate better”) and difficulties while communicating with locals because of the language or nationality (from both Latvian and Russian communities). At the same time, 8 respondents did not state that they had any discrimination problems.

As for children, 13 respondents noted that they have children (7 respondents said that their children were born in Ukraine, 6 respondents gave birth to their children in Latvia). All respondents stressed that their children have successfully adapted in the same way as children of locals and they do not have any problems in communicating with locals. Parents prefer educational institutions with Latvian the language of instruction (8), while children of 2 respondents attend the Ukrainian secondary school of Riga and children of other 3 respondents go to institutions with Russian the language of instruction. Children are fully integrated into the Latvian society because they know the Latvian language, they are familiar with local culture and social relations. Besides, children help immigrants to adapt faster because they teach them Latvian and explain how to behave in the society from based on their experience.

Fourteen out of 20 respondents are absolutely happy with their new life in Latvia; 11 respondents do not regret emigration because they feel that they have settled and adapted in a good way, they feel safe and can travel abroad without visas or border controls. Seventeen of them travel to Ukraine often to visit relatives and friends with some helping relatives financially. Five out of 20 said that they do not know if they are happy with emigration or satisfied with their new life or not on different reasons: nostalgia, social barriers, relatively closed society (“Not enough social contacts”, “Latvia is not European enough yet”). One is unhappy and said that he does not feel at home in Latvia (“They are strangers for me”) and 4 regret emigration despite the fact that they found themselves living in their new country.

New legal status in a new country usually leads to slow identity change: in a new society people tend to change their national identity and name a new country “home”. Despite the fact that many Ukrainian immigrants feel at home in Latvia, most of them do not identify themselves with Latvia directly meaning when they answer “I am Latvian” if asking them about the national identity – only 2 respondents do (only 1 out of 3 who hold Latvian passports, another is Ukrainian citizen who stated that “Integration goes fully and successfully”). But 17 call themselves Ukrainians: “I am Ukrainian who lives in Latvia”. One respondent referred to himself as “the world citizen”. Usually children of those who identify themselves with Latvia are Latvians as well. But children of those who are “Ukrainians living in Latvia” tend to the same self-identification as their parents. It is possible to conclude that Ukrainian

immigrants become an integral part of the Latvian society quite slowly (“Social environment does not conduce to integration”).

As for the adaptation strategies, it should be noted that the vast majority of Ukrainian immigrants in Latvia pay special attention to the individual adaptation strategy. They save money, sell property, prepare themselves before emigration. On arrival, most immediately search for jobs and housing. On the one hand, it is easier for them in Latvia in terms of social realities of Ukraine and Latvia alike (similarities of social behaviour, social interaction, and Russian language) and they know how they can act in a particular situation (from the position of “I am an immigrant”). It makes them more independent. They easily use the social adaptation strategy because they make connections (create social relations) faster and they are perceived mostly in a good way (despite the household discrimination which takes place sometimes) because behavioural norms in both countries have more similarities than differences, and the Latvian society has been familiar with the Ukrainian immigrants for a long time. Concerning the institutional adaptation strategy, it is not well developed because relations with the state and diaspora are limited and diaspora does not have a strong background as it has in many other countries plus the group solidarity experience of Ukrainian immigrants is low.

Irkutsk Oblast: 6 females and 9 males; 4 are in the age category of 22–29, 3 – 30–39, 7 – 40–49, 1 – 50; 9 are Russian citizens, 6 are Ukrainian citizens with permanent residence in Russia.

Economic (7) and family (6) reasons are the main ones for emigration from Ukraine to the Irkutsk Oblast: 4 found job in the Irkutsk Oblast, 3 were offered to work under contract in Russian companies; 4 married to Russian citizens, 2 reunified with previously immigrated relatives.

New immigration is divided into two stages: until 2000 and after. Among our respondents, up to 2000, 8 people immigrated, followed by 7 people after 2000. This division into subgroups is largely conditional, but for these two “subgroups” there is one trait that distinguishes them from each other – the character of emigration. Until 2000, mainly the Siberian “repatriates” from Ukraine came to the Irkutsk Oblast (the military personnel with families returning in Siberia; Russians who were for various reasons in Ukraine; Ukrainians wishing to reunite with their families in Siberia, etc.), and the number of labour migrants was insignificant. Since 2000, there has been a slight increase of Ukrainian labour migration, and the number of “repatriates” is sharply reduced.

All respondents noted that they earn much more in the Irkutsk Oblast than they did in Ukraine, and even the severe Siberian climate cannot stop them. In Ukraine, they had an average or below-average income level; their occupation was the same as of those in Latvia now. In the Irkutsk Oblast, as they say, they were able to settle down better and began to earn more, although they noted that they would like to have a higher salary. As for the ways of emigration, all immigrants are legal (or legalised) due to the fact that Russia and Ukraine have a visa-free regime. Almost all of them got a work permit easily, many noted the favour of the authorities towards citizens of Ukraine, which is not observed in relation to citizens of, for example, Uzbekistan.

Almost no one had emigrated spontaneously. The overwhelming majority had prepared for emigration in some way (sold housing either before emigration or after a while, accumulated some capital for life at the beginning, etc.) due to the understanding that the social realities of Ukraine and Russia are similar and no one can help anyone, so for the first time an immigrant had to rely only on her/himself (or

on close relatives if they are in the Irkutsk Oblast). New immigrants got their job, found housing, acquired families; some joined the Ukrainian social life of the region. Similar to Russia social realities smooth the processes of adaptation.

All immigrants noted that they did not receive any help (except from their friends / relatives / friends) on the new land, including the diaspora. Diaspora assistance consisted only of legal consultations, translation of documents and expansion of the social contacts / network (very rarely). It is quite rare when an immigrant asks for any help from the diaspora, they prefer to help themselves. Many immigrants do not even know about the existence of Ukrainian organisations in the region. In financial terms, no one helped also, and they all solved their problems on their own. Contemporary Ukrainian immigrants in the Irkutsk Oblast establish contacts with Ukrainian national and cultural organisations of the region very rarely. Ukrainian immigrants in Russia are much more disconnected compared to other groups of immigrants (Belarusians, Moldovans, citizens of Central Asia and Transcaucasia states) (Tolstokorova, 2015), the same may be said about Irkutsk Oblast.

Only five out of fifteen respondents moved to the Irkutsk Oblast alone. The rest moved with their families or friends. They explain group moving by mutual assistance. Also, the group develops more social ties, which facilitates their existence for the first time since there is someone to rely on in a difficult situation.

Thirteen out of fifteen immigrants noted that settling in the Irkutsk Oblast took 5–6 years. The rest two needed three years. During this time they received citizenship (or permanent residence), found a decent, in their opinion and job. They are already well entrenched and have acquired a sense of stability and confidence.

Absolutely everyone noted that no one faced any signs of visible discrimination in the Irkutsk Oblast (two respondents noted that they faced household level xenophobia). There were no difficulties in obtaining a work permit and further obtaining citizenship. However, two said that before they came to the Irkutsk Oblast, they tried to settle in the European regions of Russia, where this discrimination exists. Two respondents noted that local people are sometimes surprised that they are from another country.

Eleven out of fifteen respondents have children. Almost all children were born in Russia. Parents send them to Russian kindergartens and schools without any problems, and then they enter higher or secondary professional educational institutions. In fact, children of Ukrainian immigrants are going through the same stages of socialisation as children of Russians. Most respondents noted that they speak Russian at home and their children do not speak Ukrainian. Some of respondents speak exclusively Ukrainian at home, and even teach their children Ukrainian (it is typical for immigrants after 2000, as well as for those from western and central regions of Ukraine).

Thirteen out of fifteen respondents are completely satisfied with their new life in the Irkutsk Oblast and do not regret about emigration because they got what they were aiming (perhaps in slightly different forms, but they are quite satisfied). One respondent periodically experiences nostalgia, while another respondent noted that she had nothing to regret, because in Irkutsk she feels freer and more independent. Almost all respondents go to Ukraine from time to time for visiting relatives and friends, and guests from Ukraine come to Russia to visit them.

After receiving Russian citizenship, civil identity also changes. All respondents noted that they feel themselves as an integral part of Russian society, but they still consider to be ethnic Ukrainians who are now living in Russia. This answer is typical for both Russian citizens and citizens of Ukraine holding permanent residence of Russia. Meanwhile, they do not transfer their identity to children. Almost all children, with rare exception, consider themselves Russians, even if they know the Ukrainian language and even if it is their native language. Thus, almost all Ukrainian parents grow up Russian children (with Russian ethnic consciousness) who do not associate with Ukraine, except through parents and language. Children of Ukrainians, like Ukrainians themselves, do not perceive the Russian ethnic environment as foreign. There are no conflicts between children and parents on this issue.

As for the adaptation strategies, most of the Ukrainian immigrants in the Irkutsk Oblast use the individual adaptation strategy: they prepare for emigration by saving money, selling real estate, and start searches for job and housing immediately upon arrival. On the one hand, it is easier for them in terms of the social realities of Ukraine and Russia are quite similar, and mostly they know how they can act in this or that situation independently. But, on the other hand, it is more difficult for them to preserve their language and cultural elements in everyday life in Russia. They also easily use the social adaptation strategy because it does not seem difficult for them to make any acquaintances and connections since the behavioural norms in both countries are similar. The development of social ties by a group of immigrants in Russia goes faster. As for the institutional adaptation strategy, after its revival in the 1990s in the form of non-governmental organisations and the interaction of authorities with these organisations, it just slowly develops. There is no reason to count on any help from the diaspora since there is no experience of group solidarity among Siberian Ukrainians. All three strategies of adaptation are closely intertwined and, depending on the situation, immigrants focus on a particular strategy (mainly on the individual adaptation strategy).

7. Conclusion

We compared Ukrainian Diasporas in Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast through the analysis of similarities and differences between both populations and came to the following results.

Contemporary Ukrainian immigrants do not migrate unprepared: they save money, sell property, have some finances and have already established contacts. As far as there is no financial assistance from the Diaspora, they cannot arrive with any money. Immigrants noted that their lives became better and they mostly do not regret emigration. The vast majority of them had “average or below average” salaries in Ukraine and less opportunities for self-realization. In both Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast, they earn more; they are able to translate their ideas into reality and they can afford what they could not afford in Ukraine.

There is a difference in the legal aspect of immigration as well. In Latvia, immigrants receive invitations first (for employment, education or any other reason) while in Irkutsk Oblast they are legal from the very beginning since there is a visa-free regime between two countries, and when having 90 days visa-free, they can prepare all the necessary documents for work legalization.

Contemporary Ukrainian immigrants prefer to migrate in a group (family, spouse, etc.) rather than alone. Being in a group helps them to establish new social contacts faster which facilitates the process of adaptation.

In both Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast, Ukrainian immigrants need 5–6 years in average to settle in a new place. During this time, most of them receive citizenship or permanent residence. They find well-paid jobs, make families (with locals or immigrants) and they feel stability and confidence in the future. Most are satisfied with their “new” life (dissatisfaction tends to be an exception) and they do not regret the change of residence.

Contemporary Ukrainian immigrants have different experiences in the issue of discrimination. Immigrants in Irkutsk Oblast almost never face any type of discrimination but they can face tension. Ukrainian immigrants in Latvia have a different experience: 1/4 face direct household discrimination in public places at the same time 1/3 feel social tensions because of their language or nationality, while another 1/3 do not face any discrimination.

Most of immigrants have children and their children are well socialized both in the societies of Irkutsk Oblast and Latvia. Usually contemporary Ukrainian immigrants desire to preserve their language and some elements of the Ukrainian culture. Most of the children in Latvia speak Ukrainian because it is the family language (there are exceptions). Children do not face large problems while socializing. Children of Ukrainian immigrants in Latvia tend to identify themselves in the same manner as their parents. But children of Ukrainian immigrants in the Irkutsk Oblast tend to identify themselves as Russians. However, there are no tensions between parents and children concerning this issue.

After analyzing the adaptation strategies of Ukrainian immigrants in Latvia and in Irkutsk Oblast, it is possible to conclude that the main adaptation strategy is the individual adaptation strategy. An individual makes the decision to emigrate, emigrates and then settles in a new land independently in most cases. In both Latvia and Irkutsk Oblast, the role of Diasporas and public authorities in the immigrants’ life is extremely low, so the institutional adaptation strategy is not significant. Immigrants have to address their adaptation and integration themselves using their experience and instruments. The Ukrainian diaspora, due to the fact that this social institute was absent at the Soviet times, is in infancy and cannot offer any kind of assistance. Regarding the low level of group solidarity in the Ukrainian diaspora, Ukrainian immigrants have to overcome all difficulties solely using their own forces and social connections. The institutional adaptation strategy does not play any serious role at all. With that, the role of the social adaptation strategy in both Irkutsk Oblast and Latvia is equally important because immigrants need to make new social connections for settling as comfortable as possible. If immigrants move in a group or with family, the role of social strategy of adaptation is even higher because they can rely on each other and make social cross-contacts which are used by the whole group. The social strategy of adaptation may have various forms but its content is the same in both territories.

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