

Migration aspirations: fallible impact of structural factors and incongruence of aspirations claimed by Ukrainian students at the Czech Republic

LUDĚK JIRKA

University of Hradec Králové / Czech Republic

✉ ludek.jirka@uhk.cz

ABSTRACT. Traditional approaches in migration studies are push and pull factors, neoclassical theory of migration and historical-structural approaches, however these approaches are not human-centered because self-identification, self-realization, aspirations or desires of migrants is not adopted. This article, based on qualitative research in the Czech Republic and Ukraine from 2014 until 2022, is aimed at young Ukrainian participants who throughout eight years migrated in their 15-16-years-old as students at High school in Uničov, Czech Republic, while their parents stayed in Ukraine. This article shows that aspirations, instead of objective

KEYWORDS:

young people;
West Ukraine;
migration;
aspirations;
classical
migration
approaches

To cite this article

Jirka, L. (2023). Migration aspirations: fallible impact of structural factors and incongruence of aspirations claimed by Ukrainian students at the Czech Republic. *HYBRIDA*, (6), 217–238. <https://doi.org/10.7203/HYBRIDA.6.26246>

structural factors, are more decisive for participants and it indicates that migration aspirations are strongly ambiguous and heavily affected by strong inclination to subjective goals which assess the incongruence between participants and their parents in this research.

RÉSUMÉ. *Aspirations migratoires : impact faillible des facteurs structurels et incongruité des aspirations déclarées par les étudiants ukrainiens en République tchèque.* Les approches traditionnelles dans les études sur la migration sont les facteurs d'incitation et d'attraction, la théorie néoclassique de la migration et les approches historiques et structurelles, mais ces approches ne sont pas centrées sur l'humain car l'auto-identification, la réalisation de soi, les aspirations ou les désirs des migrants ne sont pas adoptés. Cet article, basé sur une recherche qualitative en République tchèque et en Ukraine de 2014 à 2022, s'adresse aux jeunes participants ukrainiens qui, pendant huit ans, ont migré à l'âge de 15-16 ans en tant qu'étudiants au lycée à Uničov, en République tchèque, tout en leurs parents sont restés en Ukraine. Cet article montre que les aspirations, au lieu de facteurs structurels objectifs, sont plus décisives pour les participants et il indique que les aspirations sont fortement affectées par une forte propension aux convictions personnelles et aux objectifs individualistes qui évalue l'incongruité entre les participants à cette recherche.

RESUMEN. *Aspiraciones migratorias: impacto falible de los factores estructurales e incongruencia de las aspiraciones reivindicadas por los estudiantes ucranianos en la República Checa.* Los enfoques tradicionales en los estudios de migración son los factores de empuje y atracción, la teoría neoclásica de la migración y los enfoques histórico-estructurales, sin embargo, estos enfoques no están centrados en el ser humano porque no se adopta la autoidentificación, la autorrealización, las aspiraciones o los deseos de los migrantes. Este artículo, basado en una investigación cualitativa en la República Checa y Ucrania desde 2014 hasta 2022, está dirigido a jóvenes participantes ucranianos que a lo largo de ocho años emigraron en sus 15-16 años como estudiantes de secundaria en Uničov, República Checa, mientras sus padres se quedaron en Ucrania. Este artículo muestra que las aspiraciones, en lugar de los factores estructurales objetivos, son más determinantes para los participantes e indica que las aspiraciones se ven fuertemente afectadas por una fuerte inclinación a las persuasiones personales y metas individualistas, lo que evalúa la incongruencia entre los participantes de esta investigación.

MOTS-CLÉS :
jeunes ; l'ouest de l'Ukraine ; migration ; aspirations ; approches migratoires classiques

PALABRAS CLAVE:
jóvenes; Ucrania occidental; migración; aspiraciones; enfoques clásicos de migración

1. Introduction¹

Migration studies traditionally provide approaches which elaborate on structural inequalities between states. These disproportions should be the causes or determinants of migration and impetuses are usually political, economical or materialized factors, but also supply of work or degree of poverty. This should create distinctions between migrants and non-migrants, thus between those who are seen as more successful and those who are not capable to realize migration and stay in country of origin in their miserable living standards. However, this understanding stems from analysis of structural differences between states instead of analysis of human-centered perspective. Therefore critical migration studies claim that structural factors could not be analyzed as triggers of migration and emphasized should be intrinsic human-centered aspiration, desire or ability. This underlines studying of inner perspective of migrants which enables us to scrutinize differences between migrants according to their self-identification and subjectivity.

Migration aspirations of young Ukrainians from Western Ukraine (specifically from Rivne and Zhytomyr *Oblasts*)² are analyzed in this article. They are the first migrants in the Czech Republic from their family because their parents stay in Ukraine. They are suitable participants for researching migration aspirations as they migrated to Uničov, small town in the Czech Republic, in their 15-16-years-old to be enrolled at local High School. It was the Czech school which provided that opportunity to them. Its representatives decided to search for new students in Western Ukraine because their High School experienced insufficient number of enrolled Czech students. This was caused by demographic decline of Czech population and young Ukrainians should complete depleting classes.

This was a once lifetime opportunity and some young participants voluntarily decided to migrate while others were “forced” to migrate (not in term of refugees) because the decision about movement was made by their parents. After resettlement, voluntarily migrated participants decide to stay in the Czech Republic, primarily owing to positive evaluation of economic and political patterns of the Czech environment, but for “forced” participants were not the same factors reasons for stay and during or

¹ I sincerely thank to anonymous reviewers for their comments and advices which help to improve this article.

² This is Ukrainian term for region. I will rather use this term instead of word “region” because “region” could be confusing in its meaning.

after their studies they move back to country of origin. Objective factors should not be seen as the decisive determinants for migration because aspiration, self-realization and identification seem to be more reasonable for making differences between participants, but also between them and their parents. This is crucial for this article because aspirations and identifications create dispositions for inter-generational and inter-group differences. That arrangement is important for studying aspirations in the field of migration studies because it shows us that aspirations alleviate social reproductive context.

Research was conducted during years 2014-2022 and the period was accompanied with tremendous changes in Ukraine which also reach geopolitical level. First, the inclination of Ukrainians towards Western economic and political structures has been increased since 2013. Second, political and social separation from Russian influences (or Commonwealth of Independent States specifically) resulted in war in Eastern Ukraine (2014 – onwards). Afterwards, it escalated into Russian Invasion of Ukraine (2022), but the research was completed until that exacerbation. However, during the period of conducted interviews (2014-2022) was significant, especially in the Western Ukraine, progressive societal declination from orientation on Russia, also because many Ukrainians understand that Russia is the aggressor launching battles in Donetsk and Luhansk *Oblasts* since 2014.

Following parts are methodology, theoretical implications and findings. Theoretical section reveals differences between terms aspiration, desire, volition, capability and ability and shows the importance of inner human perspective for migration studies. Findings concern with division between voluntary and “forced” participants’ aspirations and introduce the migration outcomes for young participants.

2. Ukrainian migration and Student migration to the Czech Republic

Ukrainian migration to the Czech Republic started shortly after the dissolution of Soviet Union and fall of communism in Soviet satellites. In 1994, there were only 14 230 Ukrainian citizens in the Czech Republic, but in 1999 the number increased to 65 883 (CSO, 2023). Ukrainian migration to the Czech Republic is generally understood as “labor migration” or “economic migration” (Drbohlav a kol., 2008), but these terms accentuate only working perspectives. The political system, specifically the non-development of migration policy until 1999 (Barša & Baršová, 2005), allowed circular migration, but in 1999 were introduced visas for entering the Czech Republic. However, the number of Ukrainians did not diminish. In 2004, the Czech

Republic became member state of European Union and new restrictions and controls for newcomers were established. The entrance of the country to the European Union only increased its attractiveness for migrants, further exacerbated by the entrance of the Czech Republic into Schengen zone (2007). After 2008, the Czech policy aimed at attracting qualified or lower-qualified “needed” workers (to certain sectors) and introduced programs, such as “Regime Ukraine”, to allure these migrants. Ukrainian migrants started to settle permanently in the Czech Republic. In 2021 lived there 196 637 migrants with Ukrainian citizenship and created the biggest ethnic group (CSO, 2023). Since 2008 also increased migration for reunification of families and student migration.

Student migration means moving to another country for a purpose of education. Migration of Ukrainian students to the Czech Republic is heavily understudied by Czech scholars and only a few studies research this topic. They primarily analyze Ukrainians studying Czech universities (Kopecká & Leontiyeva, 2018; Jirka & Leontiyeva, 2022). Regarding to Czech Statistical Office, in 2003 were at Czech universities only 454 Ukrainian students, but in 2020 it was 4 083 (CSO, 2023).³ Their number increased, however Ukrainians are only third most numerous students in the Czech Republic (after Slovaks, Russians, Kazakhs and Belarusians; CSO, 2023) and from statistics is not able to follow the number of Ukrainian students at High Schools because Czech Statistical Office follows only migrants with long-term visas for the purpose of studying and this category encompasses university students as well as students at High Schools.

Poland seems to be the most attractive country for Ukrainian students because in this Central European country created Ukrainians 42% of all international students in 2014 (Brzozowski & Pedziwiatr, 2015; Gasińska, 2016). Some authors even estimated higher percentage of Ukrainian students Poland in 2016 (53,5%; Hrynkevych, 2016). Among the reasons of student migration is linguistic and cultural proximity, geographical closeness, possibilities of studying without tuition fees, tradition of Ukrainian migration or lower costs for living (Brzozowski & Pedziwiatr, 2015).

Studying Ukrainian students at Czech High Schools is salient because they are part of strong Ukrainian student migration to the European Union and – together with their fellows from Ukraine – created the largest ethnic minority in the Czech Republic. Most Ukrainian students at Czech universities appreciate language proximity,

³ However, many Ukrainian students in the Czech Republic could have another type of residence permit, such as permanent residency or Czech citizenship (Leontiyeva & Kopecká 2018).

lower costs of living, higher quality of education (than in Ukraine) and possibility to find suitable jobs after graduation (Leontiyeva & Kopecká, 2018) and all of this could be stated also for those studying Czech High Schools. Thus they try to find economic logic in their education abroad and quality of educational system (Kondakci, 2011), but also possibility to remain in European Union job market (Lendák-Kabók, Popov & Lendák 2020).

Studies of international student migration are mostly aimed at tertiary education and, as Christof Van Mol (2014) stated, the trajectory of student migration is in macro-, meso- and micro-level factors similar to other forms of international migration. Micro-level could clarify the exact aspirations experienced by international students, including those at High Schools, and individual preferences and other dependent factors should be put into account (Van Mol, 2014). This is an important statement, but it should be scrutinized under aspiration framework (De Haas, 2021).

3. Theoretical implications: Missing social dimension and self-consciousness in migration theories

Symptomatic for traditional approaches in migration studies, primarily push and pull factors, historical-structural theories and neoclassical theory, is portraying migration from the top (De Haas, 2021). These approaches studied migrants as passive actors, they are seen as pushed and pulled by determinative forces, performing their roles instrumentally, rationalistically and agreeably towards benefits in certain countries, and they should act for the utilization of their migration route (Carling & Collins, 2018). In addition, migrants are supposed to maximize profit pragmatically (Collins 2018) because of economic rationalization of migration (Carling & Collins, 2018). However, these classical migration approaches might fail in recognition of inner migrants' perspectives because migrants could not be reduced to objects determined by outer forces or to human beings willing to maximize profit. Missing is self-consciousness, self-identification and self-decision (De Haas, 2021).

These approaches are linked to social patterns and contextual economic, political and materialized factors (Fresnoza-Flot & Nagasaka, 2015). According to young Ukrainians, they are usually studied as determined by poor economic development of Ukraine because living standards after 1991 fell dramatically, unemployment and corruption increased and young people experienced shortage of jobs and housing which resulted in – simultaneously with the freedom and possibility of traveling after the dissolution of Soviet Union – their outmigration to more prosperous countries

(Drbohlav a kol., 2008). Economic, political or materialized implications are studied as decisive for decision-making processes of young Ukrainians, but this is more about top-down macro-level determinative outer forces anchored in structural inequalities.

For further elaboration could be given an example. The Czech Republic experienced before 24th of February 2022 strong immigration from Zakarpattia *Oblast* (Zakarpatska *Oblast*, also known as Transcarpathian Ukraine, Ruthenia or Subcarpathian Ruthenia) and researchers studying reasons of emigration from this *Oblast* usually observe poverty⁴ (Drbohlav et al., 2015) or historical ties to the Czech Republic⁵ as the decisive factors of migration (Uherek, Valášková, Bělohradská & Mušinka, 2008). The first reason is based on presumption that increase of living standards is impulse for lower emigration and vice versa. However, this rationale overlooks one essential aspect: According to data of Czech Statistical Office (2023), the immigration of Ukrainians to the Czech Republic slowly increased during economic development of Ukraine (2000-2008). More Ukrainians from Zakarpattia *Oblast* migrated to the Czech Republic during the period of economic development of their country because they had more resources which enabled movement (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Therefore, strict correlation between increasing poverty and increasing migration could not be put into consideration. Similarly, in 2018 the number of Ukrainians who wanted to migrate to European Union reached 19%, in 2019 it was 35% and in 2021 it created 45% and during strong economic development of Ukraine grew number of possible migrants (Ivashchenko, 2021). The presumption that increasing level of poverty pushed more Ukrainians to migration might fail because it is macro-level theoretical implication paying attention to structural inequalities between countries and without studying the inner human perspectives.

Top-down approaches deal with migrants as servants for optimization and allocation of human sources in regions (Faist & Kivisto, 2010) because these theories mostly emphasize economic well-being of certain territory and migrants should satisfy its demands. Primarily neoclassical theory of migration refers to restoring labor force where is needed (developed regions) because the positivistic idea of this theory is fill the labor market with sufficient number of suitable workers. This positivistic and modernistic framework of macro-level theories is also obvious in the understanding that migrants might contribute to development of poorer countries (Faist, Fauser &

⁴ This rural region is one of the poorest in Ukraine.

⁵ Zakarpattia Oblast was during interwar period (1918-1938) part of Czechoslovakia.

Kivisto, 2011). Further, historical-structural approaches about migration also provide explanations based on economic and structural inequalities between countries with usual conclusion about straightening the gaps. This is also positivistic as well as modernistic understanding.

Theories also stated that all inhabitants in certain areas are equally affected by the same conditions⁶ (Faist & Kivisto, 2010). This point regarded population in specific area as group with common collective consciousness rather than as society consisted of individuals and their selective decisions. However, proclivity to migrate is subjective and individuals recognized the possibility of migration differently even when the external stimuli are common.

Additionally, poverty level and other similar macro-level factors are not necessary reasons of migration (Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2017) but also reasons of stay (Carling, 2014). Inhabitants are not affected only by wish to leave, but decision to be sedentary is also an option (Carling, 2014). For example, affluent German society has relatively high level of emigration, while poorer Zimbabwean society, with undoubtedly harsh economic conditions in the country, has low level of emigration. Thus it means that macro-level factors in specific countries could prevent from migration and affluent society can tend to be more migratory (Carling & Schewel, 2018; De Haas & Rodríguez, 2011) and this goes behind the rationale of push and pull factors and neoclassical theory about migration from poor to rich areas. Supply of working positions in certain regions or countries and higher salaries are not necessary the reasons for migration because inhabitants could decide to stay in their own locality despite impoverishment of their place. Their decisions mostly depend on their own evaluation of expectations and circumstances.

However, critical migration studies exemplified migration as bottom-up and human-centered social process because determinants or causes of migration are usually impersonal mechanisms and only predictions about migrants' behavior, but migrants are human beings with their own self-consciousness and agency (Gasper & Thanh-Dam, 2010; Rodan & Huijsmans, 2021). Macro-level migration theories are not often sufficient as they preferably aim on positivistic and modernistic pathway instead on real acting (Carling & Collins, 2018). To sum up, explaining migration rather as bottom-up social process is more appropriate.

⁶ In addition, these approaches also forget to elaborate on borders, immigration/emigration policies and institutional constraints and this make the migration free of migration control and restrictions (Faist & Kivisto 2010).

4. Aspirations, desire, volition and drivers of migration

Determinants or causes should be rather replaced by drivers of migration. This term express mixing the forces with certain functions leading to activate migration while these forces are clustered and not standing apart in explaining mechanism of migration to concrete direction (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Collins, 2018; Rodan & Huijsmans, 2021; Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2017). More specifically, drivers are outer influences, political measures, knowledge, materialistic aspects (Carling & Collins, 2018) or socioeconomic formation (Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2017; Collins, 2018) and combination of drivers facilitates desire of migrants (Collins, 2018). This could sound similarly to above mentioned theories, but necessary is to emphasize that some drivers have a more potency than others – drivers proximate to social assemblage and mediating drivers are accompanied with interactionism and social explanation and they might be more able to create or deploy individual human agency and decision (Carling & Collins, 2018; Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2017).

Desire to migrate is thus more shaped by social forces based on social relations (Rodan & Huijsmans, 2021) which generate affections by a consciousness and sub-consciousness influences (Collins, 2018). To be exhaustive in explanation of desires, Carling and Collins (2018) also stated that drivers are a matter of socially based emotions. Migration is thus initiated as socially influenced by relation to migration and capacity to act (Carling & Collins, 2018).

Terms capability (freedom) and aspiration might sound empirically intertwined but analytically are different (De Haas, 2021). Term aspiration could be defined as relation to migration opportunities (but also to staying; Carling & Collins, 2018) when factors from social sphere are active aspirational outlets with certain impact on opening the ambitions to migrate. Aspiration has intentional potency⁷ (Cairns & Smith, 2011; Carling, 2014; De Haas, 2011) and migrants, in inceptional pre-migration phase, identify themselves with the objectives of the future or possible achievements and they work towards achieving their goals, such as education, living standards, better political environment or cultural traits, but also towards mobilizing effort to reach certain object within the social context and relations.⁸ These goals may

⁷ According to Van Mol et al. (2018), term aspiration could not be equalized with term intention because intentions refer to more concrete plans, availability of resources and legal possibilities, but term aspiration do not necessarily ends by migratory intentions.

⁸ As Carling and Talleraas (2016) stated, 'life aspirations' and 'migration aspirations' play distinct roles.

be effects of personal development and are concentrated on upward social mobility, effort to fulfill own potential (Scheilbehofer, 2017) or achieving positive self-realization. According to Beck (1986), personal development and activities aiming at building human potential is the matter of planning life pursuits (and these plans are flexible and adaptive), but they are also aiming at producing working and living situations. Migrants thus might use strategic planning (Collins, 2018) or arrange actions with the wish of achievement (Carling & Schewel, 2018) and information, perceptions and values are then used for the purpose of consideration (De Haas, 2011; Van Mol et al., 2018). However, aspiration could be evaluated ambiguously because objectives could be ambiguous. Goals of migration could differ significantly as well as the individual pathway how to achieve them.

Migration aspirations are not also stable over time but are dynamic and changeable (Scheilbehofer, 2017) and migrants should rely on their ability to migrate. The ability more denotes with the turning of aspiration into action, however necessary is to highlight that everyone with migration aspiration is not able to transform his/her aspiration to ability to migrate (Carling, 2014; Carling & Schewel, 2018) and not everyone with capability of moving has the ability to action (Carling & Schewel, 2018).⁹

Terms aspiration and desire are of different meaning, at least as defined by Francis L. Collins (2018) and Hein De Haas (2021). Term desire might be more connected with decision based on emotions and affections from social surrounding (Collins, 2018) while term aspiration can be more premeditated at future objectives, social mobility and personal development (De Haas, 2021). According to this research, both terms are suitable but aspirations more resonate with personal intentions and its ambiguity regarding future objectives provides us studying the differences between human beings on identification level.

However, it all does not mean that socialization processes do not encompass the individual traits. These processes are needed to be counted as attributes influencing people and social arrangement, but they could be desirably deployed or shifted upon choices because fully socialized person is able to self-realize himself/herself as complex human being with the possibility of choice in the social sphere around.

⁹ The position of migration management or governance is usually important, but only when policy is seen as having certain impact on aspirations and capabilities of different persons (De Haas & Rodríguez 2011).

5. Methodology

Qualitative research was realized from 2014 to 2022 in Western Ukraine (specifically in Rivne and Zhytomyr *Oblasts*) and in the Czech Republic. The long-term research was held for two main reasons. First, this research was not supported by research grant or scholarship and it was originally part of dissertation thesis. Second reason is more important: participants enrolled at High School in Uničov gradually year by a year and decisive was the saturation of research sample.

Research primarily relies on semi-structured interviews. This method provides stable questions for interviews, but possible is also to ask on additional questions emerging from the specific contexts of meetings (Fontana & Frey, 1998). The same list of question was used throughout all interviews, however with some minor changes. For example, four questions regarding origin (whether participants have Czech or Polish origin which could enable them smooth immigration to the European Union) were summed up into one question. Main purpose of interviews was to reveal self-identification processes and aspirations of participants, recognizing their identification with Czech and Ukrainians environment, unveiling affiliation to parents and socioeconomic status of parents and disclosing possibilities of overcoming Czech migration policy. However, the most salient part of interviews was to recognize aspirations, intentions and identifications of participants. This is the subjectivity which could be discovered by interviews because self-identification and self-realization might be expressed in narratives. Emphasis on narratives also means giving excessive trust to participants' voices and necessary is to be aware of limitations of spoken words. For instance, participants refer about the past with knowledge of what happened since then. Author of this research is fluent in Ukrainian language and possible misunderstandings in interviews were thus reduced.

Conducted were nineteen interviews with students (Table1), three interviews with teachers from High School and one interview with mayor of Uničov. Five interviews were conducted in Western Ukraine (Dubno and Kvasyliv) during summer holidays and in the Czech Republic were interviews realized in towns Uničov, Brno and Olomouc. Only one recording was made with each participant and interviews were not taken upon their return, but during their studies. With many participants then stayed author in contact by social media and participants were asked online for necessary clarification of their answers or their following life-course. Thus some participants were asked online on their situation after their return. Almost all participants know each other and information about the subsequent life-course of specific participants – especially of those who stopped communication with author – were also gathered from their counterparts.

All interviews were transcribed and saved in author's personal archive. Important for research was also field-diary into which were written unrecorded notices about participants. Besides that, author spend one month in Uničov to acknowledge the local social (for instance, where is possible to spend free time) and economic (for instance, whether are working opportunities) environment. This information served for deeper understanding of participants' aspirations and their own social position in migratory situation.

Table 1

Participant	Resources	Kind of migration	Where the interview was conducted	Status at the moment of interview	Date of interview
Lera	2	V	Ukraine	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic, interview held during summer holidays	01/08/2014
Julja	2	V	Ukraine	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic, interviews held during summer holidays	01/08/2014
Valeria	2	V	Ukraine	Before moving to the Czech Republic	09/07/2014
Albina	2	V	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	23/02/2015
Elena	2	F	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	23/02/2015
Nikolaj	1	F	Ukraine	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic, interview held during summer holidays	26/07/2014
Alexander	2	V	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	18/08/2017
Viktoria	1	F	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	18/08/2017
Anna	1	F	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	18/08/2017
Ivan	1	F	Czech Republic	Student at university–After moving to the Czech Republic	20/04/2018
Jana	1	V	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	27/09/2018
Lara	2	V	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	27/03/2019
Evdokia	2	V	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	27/03/2019
Vasyl	1	V	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	01/07/2021

Denis	1	F	Ukraine	Worker at company–After moving to the Czech Republic, former student, interview held during summer holidays	03/08/2021
Olena	1	V	Ukraine	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic, interview held during summer holidays	04/08/2021
Vladyslav	2	F	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	06/11/2021
Jaroslava	2	V	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	17/11/2021
Emma	2	V	Czech Republic	Student–After moving to the Czech Republic	17/11/2021

LEGEND

Resources:

1 – wealthy, affluent, with and more resources

2 – middle class or below

Kind of migration:

F – Forced instrumental migration

V – Voluntary-intrinsic instrumental migration

6. Ambiguous aspirations of Ukrainian participants

Trigger of student migration was the effort of representatives from High school in Uničov to find new students in Czech diasporic associations in Western Ukraine (from 2011 onwards), mainly due to insufficient number of enrolled Czech students. Participants were aware that this was the migration opportunity:

I liked it here, I wanted to be here and it was such an opportunity (to study in the Czech Republic). I liked it here and I needed to try it. I would regret if not. I have friends here (Ukrainian students in Uničov) and we went together (from Dubno to Uničov). If I would be alone, I am not sure about migration.¹⁰

Participants' decisions to migrate were based upon the socially driven opportunity which, once recognized, became impetus for excitements and ambitions to migrate (Collins, 2018). However, individual perception of opportunity was ambiguous. Some participants were “forced” by parents to migrate who wanted to improve their descendants' living prospects. These parents usually connect descendants' movement with presumed social mobility and this could be unproductive on account of different participants' objectives. Additionally, the higher pressure could be translated into less attachment of descendants with parental target:

¹⁰ Participant Lara, b. 2001, Uničov, Czech Republic, 27/03/2019.

We often hang around and I liked it here (in Ukraine) and I do not want to be there (in the Czech Republic). Once I came at home and said: ‘Mum, I do not want go there.’ And she said: ‘Why? We solved documents for six months and you do not want to go? No. You will go. You do not have a possibility to stay. What do you want to do here?’ Ok, so. Parents wanted it more than me. I do not want so much, then I also refused, but it was too late.¹¹

On contrary, participants who voluntarily and intrinsically migrated were under less parental pressure concerning their social mobility:

We talked with parents about Poland. That I should try education in Poland. But I said to my mother that I could not take such a huge amount of money from them (for education). I would rather learn Czech language and I will do my best to learn it. I think this is normal. And my parents agreed and the rest was just on me (...) My philosophy is weird, many people do not like it, but I do my best, I know what is needed. (After I will graduate at High School), I need to do entrance exams (at university) and then stay at university. I know what to do now.¹²

Voluntary and intrinsic migration of this participant is associated with more individualized effort while “forced” migration might be seen as obligation or obedience:

My mother arranged it (migration) thanks to her friends. She somehow arranged it and she sent me here. Honestly, she sent me here. I did not want to go to the Czech Republic, but my mother said: ‘And what do you want to do here (in Ukraine)? You do not even know. Which university you will choose?’ And I do not know. I graduated (from elementary school in Ukraine), so she sent me here and said: ‘We will try it. We will see.’ So I came here.¹³

Voluntary and intrinsic migration is related to less attainability to commands of parents:

I decided that I will go to the Czech Republic. We talked about it with my father. My parents did not want me to study in the Czech Republic, but then I decided that I will arrive there on an entrance procedure. It was one month before the entrance procedure. (...) I always argued with my parents. Again, again and again I tried to persuade them. Why did they not want me to go? Here (in the Czech Republic) it is fine to study and it is quite bad to study in Ukraine recently. (...) I had the possibility (go to the Czech Republic) and I wanted to use it.¹⁴

¹¹ Participant Nikolaj, b. 1997, Kvasyliv, Ukraine, 26.07/2014.

¹² Participant Albina, b. 1996, Uničov, Czech Republic, 23/02/2015.

¹³ Participant Ivan, b. 1995, Olomouc, Czech Republic, 20/04/2018.

¹⁴ Participant Alexander, b. 2000, Uničov, Czech Republic, 18/08/2017.

Participants could be divided into two groups – first is consisted of twelve participants who might be linked to voluntary and intrinsic migration and second is consisted of seven participants who are tied to involuntary “forced” migration (De Haas, 2021). Participants from second group usually feel deprived of their own movement because they aspire to stay in country of origin owing to familiar environment, family and friends: “But it is better also there (in Ukraine) because there are my friends and everything and being here (in the Czech Republic) is psychologically hard for me”¹⁵. However, participants from first group expected positive results from their relocation and often anticipated migration success. Their familiar environment may be lost on behalf of opportunity.

Parents usually realized the harsh economic situation of Ukraine, but were not sure about the accuracy of migration of their children. Participants with voluntary and intrinsic decision to migrate had to often persuade their parents about the suitability of migration which caused tensions in the households. As participants remembered, parents were not aware of opportunities abroad and had different objectives developed distinctly during their life-course. Social world of parents was usually dominated by attachment to region, which endured from Soviet era, and their experiences meant certain limitations of their assessments while participants wanted to use their opportunity independently on parental persuasion. Participants’ objectives – as they understood – could not be achieved locally. Parents who “forced” their children to migrate were also afraid of sending children abroad, but their objective was social mobility of descendants which was connected with persuasion that in Ukraine is no future. Those participants did not claim in narratives any tensions because they were compliant with parental authority and migration was based upon enforcing obedience.

Five participants from second group grow up in relatively wealthy and affluent families – their parents are mostly entrepreneurs and one is high-rank official – and this is important for social capital and status. These participants had advantageous dispositions for migration success, primarily thanks to financial resources of the family, however their intrinsic dimension to migrate was rather weak and they wanted to realize themselves in Ukraine. Although, some participants from second group told during interviews (on direct question: “Do you want to stay in the Czech Republic?”) that they wanted to stay in the Czech Republic, at least temporarily, but they also expressed intentions to move back to country of origin due to personal ambitions,

¹⁵ Participant Denys, b. 2002, Dubno, Ukraine, 14/02/2022.

marriage with their boyfriend, working opportunities, possibility to achieve success in their homeland or not giving up the familiar environment:

I want to go back. Not now, not in one or two years, it will take longer when I will achieve the finances. This is basis for me. Then I will come back and work on family business, this restaurant and hotel.¹⁶

These participants were also unassertive in classes, they maintained close friendship with their Ukrainian friends and were not usually able to properly do their homeworks because they often had a weak knowledge of Czech language. This was confirmed by teacher:

(In the classes) they lived in the centre of Czech speakers, they had the possibility to learn Czech language and came through it better than in some special language courses. They could speak in Czech language, be with Czechs and involved in discussions with them. But those who were less motivated were seemingly only in group of Ukrainians and spoke rather Ukrainian than Czech.¹⁷

This characteristic is not common for all participants from the second group because some did their homework properly and are fluent in Czech language, however important is less interest concerning their studies and possibilities to stay. Some reasons to return were pragmatic. Jaroslava stated: “I need to take care of my older father. He is not my biological father, but my mother married with him and now he is 70-years-old”.¹⁸

Some participants from the second group finally decided to go back to Ukraine and realized themselves in their country of origin. Jaroslava mentioned her obligation to father, but in the other cases were the decisions to return more nuanced with ambitions: “I will work in Ukraine in IT. They need specialists for development of software or applications for Western countries and I will work there”.¹⁹ These participants expressed aspirations to return despite the objective economical and political differences between Ukraine and the Czech Republic.

However, for the first group was the situation significantly different. They had intrinsic aspirations to realize migration and as many participants from this group stat-

¹⁶ Participant Denis, b. 2000, Dubno, Ukraine, 03/08/2021.

¹⁷ Participant Marek, Uničov, Czech Republic, 22/05/2022.

¹⁸ Participant Jaroslava, b. 2004, Uničov, Czech Republic, 17/11/2021.

¹⁹ Participant Ivan, b. 1995, Olomouc, Czech Republic, 20/04/2018.

ed, their summer camps, excursions, student exchanges or tourist trips in the Czech Republic were also the triggers of migration: “I saw life in the Czech Republic thanks to summer camps. We were in towns and I just saw that people have a better life. I saw it, definitely. Because I was not abroad, just at these camps”.²⁰ Another participant told: “We were on exchange (student exchange stay) and my brother liked it here. He was enthusiastic: ‘Jana, we will go. It will be very nice’”.²¹

Some participants from the first group are good students in their class, some not, however they are able to integrate smoothly into the Czech environment because of their voluntary motivations to being part of Czech social assemblage. They overcome constraints by their ambitions to be included and they emphasize that for them is better to stay in the Czech Republic owing to local economic development and living standards. The possibility of return back to Ukraine is neglected because this country is considered as backward and without any feasibility of personal and living development. Intentions to stay might be instrumental, but also intrinsic because perspective of living in their new country is evaluated in terms of excitement and enthusiasm. After finishing High School, these students are usually enrolled at Czech universities and they also evaluated Czech tertiary education in terms of enthusiasm.

The same objective structural factors are not seemingly decisive for participants’ decisions. Participants with voluntary and intrinsic ambitions to migrate have a perspective of stay in the country of immigration due to structural factors while participants from the second group do not have desire to stay despite the same factors. Aspirations, self-consciousness and volitions are primarily for accomplishment of their life course in the Czech Republic. This makes some participants asserting their interest in studying and staying in the Czech Republic while in case of others are not migration aspirations adopted.

Essential are for the first group of participants possible achievements in country of immigration. They voluntarily identify with their possibilities and work towards reaching their objectives. This is connected with personal development, self-realization and social mobility in country of immigration. On contrary, participants from the second group seek possibilities in their country of origin and they are persuaded that personal development is at their home. They connect their aspirations and future planning with familiar environment.

²⁰ Participant Albina, b. 1996, Uničov, Czech Republic, 23/02/2015.

²¹ Participant Jana, b. 2000, Uničov, Czech Republic, 27/09/2018.

Therefore, the ambiguity of aspirations, decisions, self-realizations and self-identifications might be translated into their personal welfare – whether in the country of origin or in the country of immigration – and it shows that “objective” structural factors are not the decisive moments for their choice. More important is inner perspective which generates the migration/return migration and thus differences between participants.

This article deals with interplay between aspirations, family ties and personal development and this is important for assessment of participants’ pathways and parents involved. Parents of participants are not obviously able to transmit aspirations to their children. They might be willing to project migration aspirations on their descendants, but participants did not necessarily connect their aspirations with migration success. However, the family relations and their connection to (non)migration aspirations deserve further attention. The same stands for connection of family ties, social mobility and (non)migration aspirations because social mobility in migration could be hindered or enabled by different objectives of parents and their children.

To sum up, this research shows that in this specific case of Ukrainian student migration to the Czech Republic are not structural factors decisive for participants and aspirations are ambiguous. However, they are ambiguous to the extent that migration aspirations, based on self-identification, seem to be more individualistic and could create dispositions for inter-generational and inter-group differences. This deserves further awareness, though it shows that specific participants identify themselves with distinct objectives and these objectives are also different from parental ones. It could mean lowering importance of reproductive social context at the expense of personal ambitions and development because migration aspirations – related in the article to participants and their parents from Ukraine – create rather dividing line.

7. Conclusion and discussion

In traditional approaches in migration studies (push and pull factors, neo-classical theory, historical-structural approaches) are structural factors usually considered as triggers of migration. Although, symptomatic for this assessment is analytical emphasis on structural aspects as they stand and the presumed congruency between structure and migration is seen as reason for social context of migration. For an instance, poverty in country of emigration is seen as push factor, thus starting point of analysis is the poverty and economic crises which somehow should impact migrants’ behavior. But the question is – could it catch inner perspective of migrants?

Coincidence between structural factors and migration formed understanding in migration studies, but this understanding does not match with human-centered perspective. It provides only presumption that migrants are passively determined by external forces and they should decide instrumentally, rationalistically and pragmatically about utilization of their migration route (which means maximizing of profit) because decisive is the economic logic of migration (Carling & Collins, 2018). However, this characteristic usually fails when it comes to understanding self-identification and inner perspective of migrants.

Thus necessary is to elaborate on aspiration, desire, capability, ability of migrants (or other similar terms could be developed as well) which incline to be more focused on human-centered self-identification and self-realization. Aside from the naturalizing influence of structural differences, which are usually seen as the only reasons for migration, the aspiration/desire or other similar terms could reveal how migrants themselves evaluate their migration route. Economic political or materialized circumstances could be taken into account, however not as starting point for analysis – the evaluation of these conditions should be reserved for migrants.

Orientation on human-centered perspective and self-evaluation of migration route is promising for future research in migration studies. This particular research dedicated to Ukrainian students at the Czech Republic reveals that participants could be divided into two groups along their self-identifications. First group of participants expressed voluntary and intrinsic ambitions for movement and their perspective is to stay in the country of immigration while participants from second group were usually “forced” by parents and they do not have such a strong aspiration to migrate. Participants from both groups developed different aspirations according to their positions – first group positively evaluated structural factors and environment in their new country because they aspire to stay and second group aspire to move back to country of origin in spite of objectively better structural factors in the Czech Republic.

Different migration aspirations are based on identification level and self-realization, but the distinctiveness is also between objectives of participants and their parents. Based on more human-centered perspective, the individual aim at personal achievement, development and objectives have disposition for creating inter-group and inter-generational division, thus between participants themselves and their parents. The results of this research are thus strongly associated with ambiguity of migration aspirations because these aspirations neglect social reproduction at the expense of individuality of participants, their willingness for personal development and their own goals. However, it should be also stated that it does not necessary mean conflicts

in families owing to different objectives, associated with migration aspirations, does not mean disputes in other situations. Also, it should be stated that participants were often minors and they are needed to be treated specifically and differently than adults. For example, they look less cautiously on their own future.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Barša, P. & Baršová, A. (2005). *Přistěhovalectví a liberální stát. Imigrační a integrační politiky v USA, západní Evropě a Česku*. Masaryk University.
- Beck, U. (1986). *Risk Society*. Munich.
- Benson, M. & O'Reilly, K. (2009). Migration and the search for a better way of life: a critical exploration of lifestyle migration. *The Sociological Review*, 57(4), 608–625. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2009.01864.x>
- Brzozowski, J. & Pedziwiatr, K. (2015). Student Immigration and Internalization of Polish Universities: The Case of Ukrainians at the Cracow University of Economics. In A. Surdej, & M. Kedzierski (eds.), *Economic Challenges for Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe* (pp. 214 – 240). Torun.
- Cairns, D. & Smyth, J. (2011). *I wouldn't mind moving actually*: Exploring student mobility in Northern Ireland. *International Migration*, 49(2), 135–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00533.x>
- Carling, J. (2014). *The Role of Aspirations in Migration*. Paper presented at Determinants of International Migration. International Migration Institute, University of Oxford. <https://jorgencarling.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/carling-2014-the-role-of-aspirations-in-migration-2014-07.pdf>
- Carling, J. & Talleraas, C. (2016). *Root Causes and Drivers of Migration*. PRIO Paper, Peace Research Institute Oslo. <https://www.prio.org/publications/9229>
- Carling, J. & Collins, F. (2018). Aspiration, Desire and Drivers of Migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 909–926. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134>
- Carling, J. & Schewel, K. (2018). Revisiting Aspiration and Ability in International Migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 945–963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384146>
- Collins, F. (2018). Desire as a theory for migration studies: temporality, assemblage and becoming in the narratives of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 964–980. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384147>
- Czech Statistical Office. (2023).
- De Haas, H. & Rodríguez, F. (2011). Mobility and Human Development: Introduction. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 11(2), 177–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452821003696798>
- De Haas, H. (2021). A Theory of Migration: The Aspirations–Capabilities Framework. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9(8), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4>
- Drbohlav, D. (ed.). (2015). *Ukrajinská pracovní migrace v Česku: Migrace – remittance – (rozvoj)*. Karolinum.

- Drbohlav, D. (ed.). (2008). *Nelegální ekonomické aktivity migrantů. Česko v evropském kontextu*. Karolinum.
- Faist, T. & Kivisto, P. (2010). *Beyond Border*. Sage Publication, Inc.
- Faist, T., Fauser, M. & Kivisto, P. (2011). *The Migration-Development Nexus*. Basingstoke.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (1998). Interviewing: The Art of Science. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (pp. 47-78). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Gasińska, M. (2016). Studenci z Ukrainy w Polsce. Uwarunkowania, oczekiwania i opinie w świetle badania ewaluacyjnego w AFiB Vistula. *Zeszyty Naukowe Uczelni Vistula*, 47(2), 127-147.
- Hrynkevych, O. (2017). Cross-border factor of educational migration of Ukrainian youth to Poland: social-economic opportunities and threats. *Economic Annals-XXI* 163(1-2), 26-30. <https://doi.org/10.21003/ea.V163-05>
- Jirka, L. & Leontiyeva, Y. (2022). Transnacionalismus, integrace a identifikace: Diskuze o proměnlivosti a dynamice sociálních procesů na příkladu studentské migrace z Ukrajiny. *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 58(1), 29-51. <https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2022.009>
- Kondakci, Y. (2011). Student mobility reviewed: Attraction and satisfaction of international students in Turkey. *Higher Education*, 62, 573-592. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9406-2>
- Lendák-Kabók, K., Popov, S. & Lendák, I. (2020). The Educational Migration of Sub-state Ethnic Minorities on the Outskirts of the EU: A Case Study of Serbia. *Intersections* 6(2), 130-153. <http://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v6i2.592>
- Leontiyeva, Y. & Kopecká, L. (2018). *Migrace ukrajinských studentů do České republiky. Perspektivy lidského kapitálu*. Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky. https://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/AMO_ukrainian-students-in-the-czech-republic_CZ1.pdf
- Fresnoza-Flot, A. & Nagasaka, I. (2015). *Mobile Childhoods in Filipino Transnational Families: Migrant Children with Similar Roots in Different Routes*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gasper, D. & Thanh-Dam, T. (2010). Movements of the 'We': International and Transnational Migration and the Capabilities Approach. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 11(2), 339-357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452821003677319>
- Ivashchenko, K. (2021). Dynamika Mihracijnych Nastrojiv Naselennja Ukrainy: Shcho Zminylosja za 30 Rokiv. In V. Vorona & M. Shulha (Eds.), *Ukrajinske suspilstvo: Monitorynh Socialnych Zmin 30 Rokiv Nezalezhnosti* (pp. 169-184). Kyjiv.
- Rodan, L. & Huijsmans, R. (2021). "Our generation..." Aspiration, Desire and Generation as Discourse Among Highly Educated, Portuguese, Post-austerity Migrants in London. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 33, 147-164. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00299-4>
- Scheilbehofer, E. (2017). Shifting Migration Aspirations in Second Modernity. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 999-1014. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384151>
- Uherek, Z., Valášková, N., Bělohradská, K. & Mušinka, M. (2008). *Cizinecké komunity z antropologické perspektivy: vybrané případy imigračních skupin v České republice*. Etnologický ústav AV ČR, v.v.i.

- Van Hear, N., Bakewell, O. & Long, K. (2018). Push-pull plus: reconsidering the drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44(6), 927–944. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384135>
- Van Mol, Ch., Snel, E., Hemmerechts, K. & Timmerman, Ch. (2018). Migration aspirations and migration cultures: A Case Study of Ukrainian migration towards the European Union. *Population, Space and Place*, 24(5), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2131>
- Van Mol, Ch. & Timmerman, Ch. (2014). Should I Stay or Should I Go? An Analysis of the Determinants of Intra-European Student Mobility. *Population, Space and Place*, 20(5), 465–479. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1833>

Luděk Jirka currently works at the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové. His research interests cover migration, anthropology and Ukraine. He spent study stay at Bielefeld University in Germany and at University of California, Los Angeles, in the United States.