VIEWS OF VOLUNTARY IMMIGRANTS ON LIFE IN SLOVAKIA

Daniel Markovič¹

Abstract: Slovakia is not perceived as a destination country for forced or voluntary migrants in the European Union. Nevertheless, the number of foreigners living legally in Slovakia has increased more than fourfold since Slovakia joined the European Union in 2004. The aim of this paper is to recognize the views of voluntary immigrants on their own life in Slovakia. In our research, we are interested in migrants who chose small towns in Slovakia, which are culturally and linguistically homogeneous. We have chosen a qualitative research strategy. The research design is of a biographical design and a grounded theory. As a research tool, we chose an individual structured interview (in-depth interview). For qualitative data analysis, we used coding; we set descriptive and inductive codes, subcategories and categories. The subject of research is eight voluntary immigrants to Slovakia who have been living in Slovakia for at least one year at the time of the study. Thus, they meet the long-term migration criterion. Participants were selected on a deliberate basis to cover the phenomenon of voluntary migration. Due to the chosen research design, theoretical sampling was utilized. Our research confirmed the assumptions of voluntary migration described by Pierce (1999). Not only participants from developing countries, but also participants from countries with higher HDI than Slovakia praise the work and business opportunities in Slovakia. Participants identified the following areas of life benefits in Slovakia: employment, economic and social conditions, leisure, cultural and development activities, and environmental issues. Negative aspects of life include negative administrative experiences, lower living comfort, worse social conditions and the environment.

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Introduction

Human migration is the movement of people from one place to another with the intention of settling permanently or temporarily in a new location. Emigration from Slovakia to the Czech Republic, the countries of Western Europe and America and its reasons are scientifically examined relatively well. Certain white spots in research are perceived in the study of immigration to Slovakia. The statistics of the Police Presidium (2018) after the accession of Slovakia to the European Union (EU) point to a significant increase in the number of voluntary immigrants (incomers) - foreigners, citizens of the Union and third country nationals (2011) in Slovakia. In our research, we are interested in the experiences and opinions of people who come to Slovakia voluntarily - voluntary migrants.

Literature review

A large number of migrants travel across continents every day, and large amounts of information and ideas are exchanged in culture every second. Cosmopolitan thinkers dreamed of the integration of the global community politically, economically and culturally; these tendencies are currently very clear (Zusai & Lu, 2017). The term migrant can be understood as "any person who temporarily or permanently lives in a country where he or she was not born, and in which he or she acquired some significant social ties with that country" (UNESCO). According to Cassidy (2004), involuntary and voluntary migrants represent the dichotomy of international migration. Voluntary migrants, sometimes also referred to as economic migrants, include international migrants who have moved because of their own desires and motivations (Hansen, 2003). The classical theory of international migration (Lee, 1966) is called push-pull theory. They say that people migrate in response to push factors in the country of origin and / or pull factors in the destination country. Push factors are generally negative, such as poor economic conditions, lack of opportunities, discrimination, political oppression and war. Pull factors are generally positive, for example, better economic opportunities, political freedom (Potocky, 2002). According to Bhugri and Jones (2001), the migration process can be divided into three stages. The first, before migration, is when individuals choose to migrate and plan to move. The second stage involves the migration process itself and the physical transition from one place to another, involving all the necessary psychological and social steps. The third stage, after migration, is when individuals deal with the social and cultural frameworks of the new society; they learn new roles and are interested in transforming their group.

In Slovak legislation, we do not deal with the term migrant; Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic no. 404/2011 Coll. on foreigners (2011) refers to the term foreigner, citizen of the Union and third country national. The law defines a foreigner as anyone who is not a citizen of the Slovak Republic. The issue of voluntary immigration to Slovakia is currently not systematically scientifically mapped.

¹ Faculty of Education, Catholic University in Ruzomberok, daniel.markovic@ku.sk

Extensive research related to the topic of our work was carried out in 2006 (i.e. 12 years ago!) by a team of authors Popper, Bianchi, Lukšík, Szeghy (2006). As the name suggests, the focus of interest is on the field of work. Divinský in 2005 published the book *Foreign Migration in the Slovak Republic - State, Trends, Social Context* (2005). The Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Culture prepared a manual for organizers of public events titled *Reasonably about migration* (2016).

Methods

We have chosen a qualitative research strategy. Our research design is grounded theory, we have carried out the first three steps of the grounded theory, and the compilation of a new theory is not the content of this paper. As a research tool, we chose an individual structured interview (in-depth interview). For qualitative data analysis, we used coding; we set descriptive and inductive codes, subcategories and categories. These were set based on the interviews with participants. We have identified two research questions, and looked for answers to them through 22 interview questions: 1. *What is the life story of the participants before coming to Slovakia?* 2. *What are the participants' views on their own life in Slovakia?*

As part of our research, we also used elements of biographical design. The subject of the research are voluntary migrants who moved to Slovakia and have been living in Slovakia at the time of our research (July 2018) for at least one year or longer. There are eight participants; they were selected on a deliberate basis to cover the phenomenon of voluntary migration to Slovakia. The researcher asked members of foreign communities to provide the researcher with meetings with their members, who can talk in an informed way about their experience in Slovakia and who meet the research criteria. Due to the chosen research design, the choice is in the form of theoretical sampling, a deliberate theoretical choice. In our research, it showed its typical features: changing the sample size during the research, selecting the participants with respect to the research goal and selecting special to borderline cases (differently developed countries, migration for study, work, and family reasons). All participants have experienced an immigration experience in Slovakia; they are competent to talk about the topic. Because of the research design, we can talk about them as informants. The participants come from European Union member states (Poland, United Kingdom), from another European country (Ukraine), from Asia (Turkmenistan), from North America (United States of America), and from the Caribbean (Haiti). Participants belong to all four groups of countries grouped according to the HDI Human Development Index (2018). The specificity of the informants, which was the intention of the researcher, is the education of the participants. A higher level of education develops the ability of abstract thinking, argumentation and generalization, so we expect skilled and relevant answers from participants. In the presentation of the research results, we do not give the names of the informants, their place of residence, their exact age (but the age group information), their employer or college. These data are known to the researcher but are not included in the research results as part of the anonymity and privacy of the participants. The interviews were transcribed into written texts; then we created tables with codes and categories.

Results

Participant life stories

In the profiles of the participants, their compacted characteristics generated from answers to 18 interview questions are captured. We discussed work, hobbies, volunteer activities and studies. These activities form the life experience of the participants. We present the abbreviated life stories (biographical design) of participants.

Participant 1 belongs to the age group of 16-20 years old, she is a woman, single, and her highest achieved education is secondary school - general education. She has been in Slovakia for two years; currently she is studying social work at the university. She is from Ukraine (HDI 0.751) and has Ukrainian nationality. She worked there as a photographer and as a worker in a copy centre. She left Ukraine as a seventeen-year-old. She decided to change the country because of more information about her field of study in Slovakia compared to Ukraine. She moved to Slovakia (HDI 0.855) and not to another country because of security. Before moving to Slovakia, she looked up information from the Internet and "heard a lot from a teacher of the Slovak language". She studies here because, in her words, social work is more developed in Slovakia than in Ukraine. During her stay in Slovakia, she offers

unpaid or volunteer work as a part of the study program. She often helps students from Ukraine because she knows how it feels to be alone in a foreign country.

Participant 2 belongs to the age group of 16-20 years. She is a woman and is single. Her highest achieved education is secondary school – in the field of fine arts. She is currently in her second year at university at the Faculty of Fine Arts. She likes painting, likes to draw. She is from Ukraine (HDI 0.751) and has Ukrainian nationality. She did not work in Ukraine before she left for Slovakia. The main reason for the change of country for P2 were "more options for the future" than in Ukraine. She moved to Slovakia and not to another country because of study opportunities in Slovakia. She helps her peers in Slovakia because "people needed it".

Participant 3 is a woman who belongs to the age group of 31-40 years. She is married, her highest achieved education is third, doctoral degree. She studied the teaching of Slovak language and literature and Religious education, and later the Theory of Teaching of Religious Education. She has been living in Slovakia with breaks since 1999, first for study, and since 2007 because of marriage. She works as an assistant in a facility focusing on education. She joined the workplace because she could not find another job near her home in 2009. Now she likes her work and she is doing it with pleasure. She is from Poland (HDI 0.865) and her nationality is Slovak. After studying, she returned to Poland, where she worked as a teacher. She started living in Slovakia for the second time because of marriage. She moved to Slovakia and not to another country because of university and marriage. She gained information about Slovakia before coming to Slovakia for school and in her own family. She is financially supporting the charitable and volunteer area in Slovakia.

Participant 4 is a woman who belongs to the age group of 31-40 years. She is married. She has achieved third degree, a PhD in Theology and Biblical Sciences. She works as an assistant at a college because she can use her education and knowledge there. She has been living in Slovakia for 13 years, she is from Ukraine (HDI 0.751) and, is of Ukrainian nationality. Before coming to Slovakia, she did not work, but she studied. She left her native country when she was 19 years old. After leaving Ukraine she did not come to Slovakia straight away, she came "for a husband who returned to his native country after graduation abroad". She decided to move to Slovakia and not to another country because of job opportunities for her and her husband. Before the immigration, she looked up information about Slovakia from various sources: from interviews with a future husband, from newspapers, from acquaintances who were Slovaks. In Slovakia, she did not work as a volunteer because she was very busy and gradually gained family responsibilities.

Participant 5 is a man; he belongs to the age group of 21-30 years. He is single; his highest achieved education is baccalaureate. He studied Russian language and culture. He chose the study program because he likes the Russian language. He has been in Slovakia for six years. He works as a manager at the bar. He is from Turkmenistan (HDI 0.706) and has Turkmen nationality. In his country, he worked as a manager. He left Turkmenistan in 2012. The reason for the change of the country was university studies. The choice of Slovakia and not another country was the choice of his parents. He did not have much information about this country before he arrived in Slovakia, nor did he try to find them anywhere. He worked as a volunteer in Slovakia in the organization Smile as a gift.

Participant 6 is a man; he belongs to the age group of 21-30 years. He is married; his highest achieved education will soon be a third, doctoral degree. He studied management and now is studying social work because his country currently needs many social workers because of its difficult situation. He has been living in Slovakia for seven years. He is from Haiti (HDI 0.498) and his nationality is Haitian. He studied in his own country and worked as a "help manager" for a part-time job. The main reason for moving to Slovakia was university studies. P5 chose Slovakia and not another country thanks to a Slovak friend, "with whom I met in my country and who invited me to study here in Slovakia." At the same time, this friend provided him with information about Slovakia before moving to the Slovak Republic. He helped other people in Slovakia many times, whenever they asked for it.

Participant 7 is a man belonging to the age group of 31-40 years. He is married. He has received a bachelor's degree in Corporate Governance and Finance. He has been in Slovakia for three years. He is from the United States of America (HDI 0.924). His nationality is stated as American. This is because Americans do not recognize their nationality by ethnicity but by citizenship. He was born in North Carolina, where he also graduated from college. He worked there as a regional manager of the

Evangelization Association. He left for family reasons, his wife is originally from Slovakia, and she "owns and operates a business in Slovakia". He decided for Slovakia and not for another country because "wife is from Slovakia and her business was in Slovakia". He smiles that he did not have a choice. He works as a private English teacher, owns and operates commercial property for rent. In Slovakia, he also does volunteer and unpaid work, especially for Christian communities and churches. He says his family has a heart for those who are not Christians, or who have been "hurt" by the church in the past.

Participant 8 is a man belonging to the age group of 31-40 years. He is single. During his studies, he achieved a bachelor's degree in graphic design. He has been in Slovakia for three and a half years already. He is from the United Kingdom (HDI 0.924) and is of British nationality. In his country, he graduated from college, worked as a lifeguard. The main reason for moving to Slovakia was a different lifestyle. He decided for Slovakia and not for another country because of a job opportunity. He gained information about Slovakia before his arrival from his partner. He works as a customer care agent in a facility focused on computers because he has good experience with this service himself. He does not work as a volunteer.

Opinions on Living in Slovakia

In this subchapter, answers to the research question *what are the participants' views on their own life in Slovakia?* are presented.

Benefits of Living in Slovakia

At question what are the benefits of life in Slovakia, we have received multiple answers from participants, which we analysed by coding.

Table 1: Codes, subcategories and category – Benefits of life in Slovakia				
Category	Subcategories	Inductive Code	Descriptive Code	
Benefits of life in Slovakia	Social and economic benefits	Work and business opportunities	Work	
			Working in studied field	
			Work for young people	
			Business opportunities	
		Healthcare	Cheap healthcare	
			Accessible healthcare	
		Cheap housing	Cheap housing costs	
		Close relatives in Slovakia	People	
	Leisure and self-development benefits	Freedom in Slovakia	Husband	
			Freedom	
			More opportunities for sport	Sport activities
			More leisure activities	Leisure time
		Possibility to know culture and environment	Culture and environment	
		Acquired self-reflection in relation to social, political, historical issues, homeland	A new perspective on social, political, historical issues	
		Benefit of environment	Overlook in relation to homeland	
			Climate	
Source: Author				

Participants reported the following items: climate, people, jobs, healthcare, food, the ability to do a lot of sport activities, more free time, freedom, work for young people, the opportunity to work in studied field, travel around Europe and the world, access to healthcare, option to learn Slovak and Czech culture and the environment, business opportunities, low cost of healthcare, low housing costs. For P6, the advantage of life in Slovakia is "*the possibility of a certain perspective in relation to one's own country*". As another advantage, he said "*the opportunity to get a new perspective on a number of social, political, historical issues*".

Participants' answers can be divided into groups:

- Linking to employment: employment, work in the field of study, work for young people, business opportunities,
- Linking to economic and social conditions: affordability of healthcare, low housing costs, people, husband, freedom,
- Linking to leisure, cultural and self-development activities: the ability to do lots of sport activities, more free time, the opportunity to learn Slovak and Czech culture and the environment, the

possibility to travel to Europe and the world. We also include a testimony of reflection in this area: with regard to the country of origin and to social, political and historical issues,

- The environment: the climate.

Interesting about answers of participants from countries which are in the index of human development at higher partitions as Slovakia (40th place), particularly from the United States (10th place) and Great Britain (16th place) (2016) is that they presented as benefits healthcare in Slovakia, more leisure time and business opportunities, i.e. Slovakia is seen as a place for development.

Negative Aspects of Living in Slovakia

On the question of *what the negatives of life in Slovakia are*, we have received a wide range of immigrant responses.

Table 2: Codes, subcategories and category – negative aspects of life in Slovakia			
Category	Subcategory	Inductive Code	Descriptive Code
Negatives about living in Slovakia	Inflexible administration	Unsuitable opening hours at Foreign police	Opening hours at Foreign police
		Obsolete, tedious administration without online environment	Obsolete document processing
			Impossibility of submitting documents online
			Lengthy administrative process
	Unreliable and slow public transport	Unreliable and slow public transport	Train delays
			Bus delays
			Long journey to Ukraine
	Less comfort and choice	Insufficient product selection	Lack of choice in terms of products
		Lack of comfort	Lack of comfort
	Social disadvantages	Low wages of workers	Low wages
		Inability to know other countries	Inability to travel
		Barriers in social contacts	Limited social contacts
		Environment	Perceiving climate as cold
	Sense of chemical odour		Chemical odour
Source: Author			

We divide the testimonies into groups:

- Administration: foreign police opening hours, obsolete processing of documents for state administration, inability to submit documents online, too lengthy administration process.
- Comfort: train and bus delays, lack of comfort and choice in terms of goods, products; a long way to Ukraine.
- Social conditions: low wages and the associated inability to know other countries, limited social contacts.
- Environment: cold climate, chemical odour in the air.
- No negative: no negatives (a statement not classified as negative in Slovakia).

A very specific response was provided P7 from the US: *“The lack of comfort and choice in terms of goods, products (compared to my home country).”* His answer was supported with the claim: *One particularly challenging aspect is that there are many different standards for products (namely household goods). I think this is because products are shipped from different countries that have all their own standards. He also said: “In the United States, there is a large selection of interior doors, but all have standard interior features (door handles, tongues, etc.). They are standardized. Therefore, if you buy the doors, they immediately fit into your house. In Slovakia, the interior equipment is not standard, so it takes a lot longer (and requires more skill) to do an easy job as changing the interior door.”*

What is for one participant benefit, it is the disadvantage for second (climate as positive and cool climate as a disadvantage. P2, who introduced as a disadvantage the *chemical odour in the air*, lives in the Slovak city that is nationwide known for air pollution. Subjective answer provided by P1: *long trip to Ukraine*. P3, who lives in Slovakia with a break since 1999, does not know any negative aspects associated with her life in this country.

“If I Had the Power ...”

This question is with imaginative nature: *If you had the power, what would you change in Slovakia?*

Table 3: Codes, subcategory and category - Ideas about changes in Slovakia			
Category	Subcategory	Inductive Code	Descriptive code
Wished changes in Slovakia	Feasible changes	More suitable opening hours of Foreign police	Opening hours of Foreign police
		Less and less frequent train and bus delays	Train and bus delays
		Electronization of state and public administration	online systems for government
		Change of government (Executive power)	Change of government
		Improvement of the political situation	Political situation
		Improvement of the economic situation	Economic situation
		Elimination of the incidents of xenophobia and racism	Decrease of racism
		Elimination of nepotism and acquaintances in work field	Opportunity for people to realize themselves without acquaintances at the right places
	Unfeasible changes	Joke: order all Slovaks to speak English	All Slovaks to speak English
Source: Author			

The wide range of responses was directed to the fields of information technology, administrative, economic and inter-urban improvement. We have divided the wishes into two groups:

- Feasible changes: more convenient foreign police hours, less train and bus delays, online systems for the government, changing the political and economic situation, replacing the government, increasing Slovak salaries, reducing racism. Furthermore, *"to give people the opportunity to realize their skills and knowledge, regardless of whether they have 'acquaintances' in the necessary places"*.
- Unfeasible changes: *"Order all Slovaks to speak English."* After this response, the participant smiled and said he was joking.

P2 said she could not answer the question. Answers to this question can be perceived as suggestions for improving life in Slovakia.

Discussion

All participants have confirmed in research the attribute of voluntary migration. Pierce (1999) described the assumptions of voluntary migration; we identified three of them: 1 People travel for the sake of increased wealth and well-being (social behaviourism). 2 People represent human capital and their migration, especially labour, represents a global distribution of wealth (economic behaviourism, Marxists). 3 Migration represents the expansion of family networks (cultural anthropology). Looking at the optics of Lee's classical theory of migration (Lee, 1966), they have been unambiguously brought here by the pull factors of Slovakia: the possibility of studying, the economic situation, the job, the partner. One participant stated the push factor explicitly (safety concerns) and implicitly (in answer to another question: you do not have a war in Slovakia).

Conclusion

All participants meet the long-term migration criterion by their length of stay in Slovakia, and in that time, they formed their opinion on life in Slovakia. As a home country, participants consider the country of their birth, the country they live in, but some do not see any country as their home. Participants identified the following areas of life benefits in Slovakia: the area of employment, economic and social conditions, leisure, cultural and self-development activities, and the environment. Negative aspects of life in Slovakia include negative experience with administration, lower life comfort, worse social conditions and the environment. We identify many challenges for research, for example, (quantitative) research would be needed for creating further recommendations for politicians.

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