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There and back again:

Post-return experiences of highly skilled Belarusian professionals

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Contents

List of tables and figures

Introduction

Migration management and research on it, has become one of the main priorities for many developed and developing countries. In recent decades, the attention of migration scholars has to some extent shifted from explaining migration to exploring its consequences on both the micro and macro levels. Multiple studies have been performed in order to investigate how both emigration and immigration influence national economies, labour markets, political systems, households, family relations, individual lives, etc. (e.g., Boyd 1989; Borjas 1990, 1995; Lahav 2004; Özden and Schiff 2007; Dustmann *et al.* 2008).

In this thesis, I address a narrower topic concerning socio-cultural context and consequences of highly skilled return migration in sending countries, as applied to the post-socialist Belarusian context[1]. I focus on socio-cultural aspects of highly skilled migration and view returnees as carriers of new experiences, ideas, and practices. Thus, I explore the complexities of highly skilled people's lifestyles and study in which ways they apply socio-cultural remittances to different spheres of their lives.

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1) What is the social-cultural context, in which emigration and return migration decisions mature and are actuated?

2) What personal motivations and context implications do underlie the decisions of highly skilled professionals to return to their home country?

3) What are the post-return lifestyles of highly skilled professionals?

4) What kind of socio-cultural remittances (experiences, ideas, and practices) do highly skilled migrants transfer to their home country; and how do highly skilled returnees employ these assets in their post-return lives?

Therefore, this research provides a contribution to the studies of sending countries from transnational perspective and lies at the intersection of two large social research areas—highly skilled migration and return migration, which have been extensively discussed in the existing literature but, as I show below, in most cases separately from each other.

Sending societies and the impact they experience from migration processes constitute one of the largest, albeit relatively less developed, area of migration studies (e.g.,

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[1] The post-socialist context is conceptualized not only as a descriptive category referring to a geographical region including former Soviet countries, but also as an active phenomenon producing a multiplicity of distinctive social, economic, and political outcomes (Flynn and Oldfield 2006; Pickles 2010; Meeus 2016).

Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Katseli *et al.* 2006). Yet, most research made to date has a lopsided view of this phenomenon. Basically, there are two thoroughly investigated issues regarding sending countries—the impact of monetary remittances on their economies (e.g., E. J. Taylor 1999; de Haas 2005, 2007; Ratha 2005, 2013; the World Bank 2014) and the impact of emigration on the composition of their labour market. The latter issue is of particular importance here, since it deals with such concerns as 'brain drain', 'brain gain', and 'brain circulation' (e.g., Miyagiwa 1991; Stark *et al.* 1997; Meyer 2001, 2003; Chacko 2007; Agrawal *et al.* 2011; Boeri *et al.* 2012) and has to do with the matter of highly skilled migration.

Although mobility of the highly skilled is not a new phenomenon (for example, skilled craftsmen, monks, merchants, scientists, etc. have been mobile since the early ages), it has become a topic of academic enquiry since the end of the twentieth century, as highly skilled workers have become an increasingly large component of advanced industrial economies (e.g., Lowell and Findlay 2002; Cerna 2010; Dobbs *et al.* 2012; Kofman 2014). The global race for talent (read—for money) has induced researchers to explore highly skilled migration mainly from an economic point of view and to overlook (to some extent) socio-cultural aspects of the phenomenon. What is more, albeit the dynamism of migration has been accepted for several decades, migration scholars have largely neglected the phenomenon of highly skilled return migration. Similarly, return migration scholars have paid little attention to highly skilled migrants.

Despite the fact that literature on return migration is sizable, it is still far from providing an adequate framework for its analysis. The existing research focuses mainly on the return migration of low-skilled emigrants (Cerase 1974; Reyes 1997; Wahba 2007; Sabar 2013; de Haas *et al.* 2014) and almost disregards the highly skilled returnees, who possess substantial human and/or financial capital and may be considered the main agents of not only economic, but also socio-cultural changes in sending countries (Portes 2010). Furthermore, the return migration scholarship is skewed to geographical regions such as Asia, South-Asia, and Africa (e.g., Saxenian 2002, 2006; Iredale *et al.* 2003; Tiemoko 2004; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Rother 2009). It is comprehensible, since these regions are traditional emigration countries with huge outward flows and, consequently, more substantial and visible return mobility. However, many changes have occurred in the world map of migration recently—some new regions have entered the migration arena as well as several

'classic' migration routes have in fact reversed. One of the new entries is the post-socialist region, which since the end of the 1980s' has become an important exporter of highly skilled migrants.

Migration is a dynamic process, but it is not only about physical movement in space. It also concerns networks, communications, and various cross-border practices, which do not necessarily require relocation. In recent decades, the social sciences community has increasingly recognized transnationalism as an adequate approach to study these contemporary forms of global mobility. Transmigration research investigates linkages and network structures established between a country of origin and a country of destination, thus blurring the border between receiving and sending country perspective (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Basch *et al.* 1994; Portes *et al.* 1999; Vertovec 1999; Faist 2000ab; Kivisto 2001). Extensive research has confirmed that, whilst abroad, immigrants are often involved in cross-border relationships and activities: they establish broad transnational networks, which are continuously intensified by extensive technological advancements, changes in the structure of the global market, and expanding globalization (e.g., Itzigsohn 2000; Al-Ali *et al.* 2001; Portes *et al.* 2002; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Boccagni 2009, 2012a; Portes and Yiu 2013). Nevertheless, very little is known about transnational networks and practices in cases of return migration. How do returnees manage their transnational experiences? How their lifestyles are affected once they return to their home countries? Do returnees re-arrange their transnational orientation into some new form? Another issue is—how returnees influence their home societies? I will address these issues in detail in chapter 5, demonstrating how in fact, some returnees modify their style of life considerably in terms of transnational involvement.

However, the process of return affects not only returnees themselves. As any system (either physical or social) that receives inputs from outside changes, similarly, return migration affects returnees' social environments and, to some extent, the whole society. In the past, scholars had focused nearly exclusively on socio-economic changes; recently, however, they have paid much closer attention to socio-cultural concerns. In this regard, two issues are important.

First, more attention has to be paid to the 'system' of home society that in case of return migration becomes a 'receiving' context. It is essential to know in what kind of social context returnees become involved, since it may influence considerably the consequences

and perceptions of return. In this regard, the investigation of public attitudes towards return migration (and emigration as well) in home societies may provide useful insights into understanding return migration in terms of both general knowledge and more specific policy-making. Naturally, the analysis of public opinion cannot provide the entire picture of the existing context; still, it is one of few available ways to gain at least one of its pieces. Although public attitudes toward migration issues is not a new topic for the social sciences community, it has rarely been taken into account from the perspective of sending countries (e.g., Martínez-Saldaña 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003).

Second, it is necessary to know what inputs are entering into the system—in other words, what are the social resources brought by returnees into home societies. From the end of the 1990s', the inputs have received considerable attention through a focus on social remittances—broadly defined as «ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital» moving across borders (Levitt 1998, 926). The main idea behind this concept is that, along with money transfers, many migrants convey to their home societies various non-economic assets accumulated while living abroad (e.g., ways of thinking or behaving, food or style habits, knowledge, and working practices). It is assumed that returnees transmit their new ideas to their social environments that, in turn, react to these remittances in different ways—essentially, ignore, adopt, or oppose to them. Again, studies to date have focused mainly on low-skilled remitters acting between wealthy western host countries and less developed home countries (e.g., Levitt 1998, 2001; Sabar 2008, 2013; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). On the contrary, for highly skilled people from socio-culturally developed contexts, the process of formation and transmission of socio-cultural remittances is neither obvious nor straightforward. Moreover, Belarus, located between 'the West' and 'the East' not only geographically, but also socially, culturally, economically, and politically, represents a striking example of interaction and mutual transformation between migration processes and post-socialist context, where practices, ideas, and discourses are continuously (re-) negotiated (Amin 2004; Meeus 2016).

This brief overview of the most current literature on the topic highlights the gap between knowledge on the socio-cultural impact of migration and its actual manifestations in various groups of populations and migration contexts. For instance, very little is known about socio-cultural implications of highly skilled return migration, and what peculiarities in this regard may arise in previously understudied socio-economical and socio-cultural

contexts. This research aims to fill the gap by focusing on post-return experiences of highly skilled professionals in post-socialist Belarus.

Addressing highly skilled return migration with a particular focus on socio-cultural changes is relevant for both academic and public policy debates. For instance, this research makes several theoretical and empirical contributions to the existing literature. First, it provides a ground for further conceptualizations lying at the intersection of several theoretical domains. Second, it situates highly skilled return migration into the wider post-socialism context characterized by multiple transformation processes and discusses its possible implications for regional policy-making. Third, it discusses specific issues such as cross-border membership and transnational involvement, which are becoming of particular importance in the both globalized and localized world. Finally, by focusing on socio-cultural implications of highly skilled return migration, it discusses the more general issues of interconnection between migration processes and economic, social and political development.

The study draws on qualitative content analysis of three online discussions (almost 19 thousand posts) and 43 in-depth interviews with highly skilled Belarusian returnees. Specifically, I use the first dataset to explore the public attitudes toward migration issues among Belarusians. The second dataset consisting of audio-recordings and transcripts has become the ground for description and analysis of return and post-return experiences of highly skilled professionals.

Each research sub-topic is addressed in a separate chapter, which all together provide a multidimensional picture of the phenomenon of highly-skilled return migration and its socio-cultural outcomes. Hence, I begin with setting up the theoretical framework of my research by discussing the main stream of literature relevant to the project (chapter 1). More precisely, I analyse the theories and approaches of return migration and highly skilled mobility, and examine the current debate on transnationalism trying to distil its insights into post-return experiences. Further, in chapter 2, I describe the research context (from social, economic, and political points of view) as well as the research methods and the processes of data collection and analysis. In chapter 3, I provide a description of public attitudes towards emigration, emigrants, return migration, and returnees in Belarusian society, drawing on the qualitative content analysis of several thematic forums available online. The analysis of public opinion allows to comprehend the socio-cultural context, in which return and post-

return 'acclimatization' occur. I proceed with answering my research questions by focusing in chapter 4 on return process itself. In particular, I discuss processes of decision-making, dynamics of return process, and post-return arrangements. Next, in chapter 5, I focus on investigation of both material and non-material displays of returnees' post-return lifestyles and determine several patterns in their actualization. Finally, in chapter 6, I analyse the socio-cultural remittances which highly skilled return migrants transfer to their home society and discuss conditions in which socio-cultural remittances occur and to what extent.

Chapter 1. Theoretical insights into return migration

Introduction

Humans are a mobile species. Throughout the course of the twentieth century, rapid population increase, sustained economic growth, and decolonisation have boosted international migration[2]. The movement of people and, correspondingly, of ideas, money, objects, power, and information has made mobility a defining characteristic of modern society (Urry 2000, 2007).

Sociologists have dealt with migration by focusing primarily on three research areas:

1) Why people move and how migration flows persist over time?

2) How do migrants integrate into and influence receiving societies?

3) What changes does emigration bring to sending societies?

Although my work falls squarely within the third area, it is useful to start with a summary overview of the whole field, as many concepts and tools are shared across them.

Concerning the first research area, in the past decades, social scientists have developed multiple approaches challenging the neoclassical explanation of migration[3]. The new economics of labour migration (Stark and Bloom 1985) provided an alternative socio-economic approach, centred on the assumption that people migrate seeking not so much to maximise income in absolute terms as to minimise economic risks over long periods and to reduce their relative deprivation (Stark 1991). Other scholars have promoted more historical-structural approaches, such as the dual labour market theory (Piore 1979), and the worlds systems theory (Wallerstein 1974), arguing that migration has to be seen within the context of long-term capitalist change. Both of them placed their explanations at the macro level of structural determinants—strong structural labour demand in developed countries and the dislocations brought about capitalist penetration in peripheral parts of the world respectively (Portes and Walton 1981; Sassen 1988). Later, these macro explanations have been enriched with an emphasis on socio-cultural determinants and individual decision-making. Hence,

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[2] According to the United Nations Population Division, in 2013, 232 million people, or 3.2% of the world's population, were international migrants.

[3] The main tenets of the neoclassical model were the conceptualization of migrants as rational actors at the micro-level, and 'push-pull' approach at the macro-level (Lewis 1954; Todaro 1976). The neoclassical model enjoyed a wide popularity in the 1950s and 1960s. It subsequently encountered increasingly sustained criticisms due to its difficulties to deal with the complexity of modern international migration. For extensive review of this topic, see *Worlds in Motion* by Massey *et al.* (1998).

migration networks[4] have received central attention in the explanation of migration and its perpetuation. Drawing on social capital theory[5], Massey *et al.* 1987 have argued that migration networks lower the costs and risks of migration and therefore facilitate it. Moreover, migrants' social networks determine the form, volume and direction of further movements. With reference to migration perpetuation, it is worth mentioning the migration systems approach[6] (Kritz *et al.* 1992) and the cumulative causation theory (Myrdal 1957; Massey *et al.* 1998). The latter argues that migration is self-perpetuating as each act of migration changes reality in a way that induces subsequent moves. The cumulative causation occurs due to the interaction of several mechanisms including the expansion of networks, the distribution of land and income, the development of a culture of migration, and the stigmatisation of jobs usually performed by immigrants (Massey *et al.* 1998)[7].

Despite the relatively long tradition of research on migration, there is no single theory providing an explanation for the emergence and perpetuation of migration flows. As van Hear (2010, 1535) has noted, «the appetite for searching for an overreaching theory of migration has waned along with the increasing diversity of migration flows». Contemporary migration studies, in fact, are more specialized in several directions, which include the new sending and receiving contexts; the diverse ethno-racial and socioeconomic types of migrants; and the rise of forced and/or unauthorized immigration (Lee *et al.* 2014)[8].

The second main research area in the sociology of migration concerns immigrants' integration into host societies. Research programmes in this area are historically the oldest— W. Thomas and F. Znaniecki dealt with it in *The Polish peasant in Europe and America*

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[4] Migration networks are commonly defined as sets of interpersonal relations that connect migrants, returned migrants, and non-migrants in host- and home-countries through ties of kinship, friendship, shared community origin, or through professional relationships (Massey *et al.* 1998).

[5] Social capital is defined as «a set of resources—actual or potential—which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition» (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)

[6] Migration systems are spaces characterised by the relatively stable association of a group receiving countries with a number of areas of origin—the Turkish go to Germany, the Algerian to France, and so on.

[7] In recent years, the theory of cumulative causation has been revised to account for the factors that may impede or facilitate the development of migration networks. It has been argued that cumulative causation works better for migrants from rural areas (Fussell and Massey 2004) and that it has different impacts in terms of gender (Curran *et al.* 2005). Moreover, social networks seem to be more important in the case of unauthorized migration, while they play a weaker role in presence of recruitment schemes (Fussell 2010).

[8] Another important change in current studies of migration flows has been the increasing importance given to gender. A large body of research has shown how gender roles and relations organize and substantially influence both the causes and consequences of migration producing differential outcomes for men and women (Pedraza 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 1994; Curran and Saguy 2001; Boyd and Grieco 2003; Curran *et al.* 2006; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Kraler *et al.* 2011; Paul 2015).

already in the 1920s. The Chicago school of sociology, led by Park and Burgess, was the first to provide a theoretical insight into relations between immigrants and native inhabitants of urban spaces. The so called 'assimilation theory' conceived a sequence of contact, competition, accommodation and, in the end, assimilation (Park and Burgess 1921). Along with 'assimilation theory', further insights in the process of immigrant integration have subsequently emerged. These include social psychological accounts of changing group membership by R. Taft, as well as the works of S. N. Eisenstadt, focusing on the influence immigration has on the receiving society, and M. Gordon, distinguishing between cultural and structural assimilation. Most of the models, popular until the 1950s, have subsequently received many criticisms for depicting the process of immigrant integration as linear and irreversible. Recent studies of the settlement processes focus more on the interactions occurring between host societies and incoming immigrant populations (Morawska 1985; Tribalat 1995, 1996; Alba and Nee 1997; Portes 1999; Sayad 2004). The critical re-appraisal of classical assimilation approaches has resulted in several theoretical perspectives. These include the theory of segmented assimilation by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou; networks and embeddedness by Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner; spatial assimilation by Douglas Massey, as well as the incorporation model by Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut, and the model of intergenerational integration by Hartmut Esser[9]. What distinguishes the contemporary theories from that of some decades ago is that all of them emphasize assimilation as a complex multifaceted and non-linear process.

The third main area of sociological research on migration—the changes produced by emigration in sending countries—is comparatively the least developed. Although the strong impact of emigration on sending societies has been acknowledged since the very beginning of research on migration, systematic studies of sending countries have been largely neglected until very recently (Bourdieu 2004). In addition, though sending countries have gained attention of researchers and policy-makers, only few issues have become subjects of thorough investigations. One of the main topics of interest has been the impact of monetary remittances on the economies of sending countries[10]. The classical approach to remittances viewed them as a temporary and unreliable source of income creating a sort of «remittances

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[9] For an extensive review of the modern theories of assimilation, see Alba and Nee 2003; Waters and Jiménez 2005; Lee 2009.

[10] Based on recent data released by the IMF and central bank sources, international migrant remittances to developing countries are estimated to have reached $404 billion in 2013.

dependence» in sending countries (de Haas 2005). More recently, the assessment has become less negative, as studies have highlighted both positive and negative consequences of remittances for economic development (E.J. Taylor 1999; de Haas 2007; Katseli *et al.* 2006; Özden and Schiff 2007; Ratha 2005, 2013). Similar changes are noticeable in a second traditional issue, which concerns the impact of emigration on labour market composition in sending countries. There has been a shift from highly pessimistic accounts for highly skilled migration, summarized under the label of 'brain drain', to largely more optimistic studies of 'brain gain' (Miyagiwa 1991; Mountford 1997; Stark *et al.* 1997; Hunger 2002; Solimanos 2008). The adoption of a neutral label of 'brain circulation' has signalled an increasing maturity of the studies that acknowledge the variety of emigration outcomes (Gaillard and Gaillard 1997; Saxenian 2005; Teferra 2005; Favell *et al.* 2008). Albeit growing, the literature on highly skilled migration has been focused on the emigration of highly skilled workers, and on the competition among receiving countries in the global race for talent[11]. There is, however, little or no evidence on the return migration of the highly skilled, although the phenomenon seems to be far from negligible. Although several typologies of return migration have been proposed (Cerase 1974; Gmelch 1980; King 1986), the study of return migration is still far from providing an adequate framework. The available studies focus mainly on the return migration of low-skilled emigrants (Cerase 1974; Reyes 1997; Wahba 2007; Sabar 2013; de Haas *et al.* 2014), while they largely ignore (with some exceptions)[12] the highly skilled returnees in possession of substantial human and/or financial capital. This is unfortunate, since highly skilled (and often wealthy) emigrants are more likely to be able to maintain cross-border relationships and to engage in high-impact transnational activities[13] (Portes *et al.* 1999), and therefore, potentially to become agents for social changes (Portes

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[11] It is assumed that the developed countries—e.g., Japan, some countries of Western Europe, North America—having rapidly ageing societies and declining working-age populations actively search for highly qualified experts from abroad (Münz 2014).

[12] Research on skilled return migration is geographically skewed toward Asian, South-Asian and African regions and may be subdivided into three interconnected groups. The first group includes research on specific professional groups—i.e. health professionals (e.g., Brown 1996; Ganguly 2003; Buchan *et al.* 2005; Haour-Knipe and Davis 2008), IT-sector workers (e.g., Saxenian 2002; Khadria 2004), and scientists (e.g., Jonkers and Tijssen 2008; Harvey 2009). The second group includes studies on impact of highly skilled returned migration on development of sending countries (e.g., Saxenian 2006; Chacko 2007; Gubert *et al.* 2007; Agrawal *et al.* 2011) and socio-cultural changes brought home by returnees (Tiemoko 2004; Ammassari 2004; Rother 2009). The third group embraces research on social and professional transnational networks established and maintained by highly skilled returnees with host countries (e.g., Iredale *et al.* 2003; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Saxenian 2005, 2006; Nowicka 2007; Jonkers and Cruz-Castro 2013).

[13] Although the costs of a mobile lifestyle have been significantly reduced in recent decades, frequent travelling and cross-border communication are still more accessible for wealthier people.

2010). My work provides a contribution to the studies of sending countries by focusing on causes and consequences of return migration of highly skilled professionals.

In recent years, the study of emigration has been remarkably transformed by the development of the transnational approach with its emphasis on the development of cross-border circulation of individuals, goods, and ideas[14]. It has challenged the rigid separation between the studies of receiving and sending countries and has provided a new way to see all the above-mentioned areas— remittances, brain circulation, and return migration[15]. The diffusion of the transnational approach has also implied an increasing interest towards the impact of emigration on sending countries. Traditionally, scholars had focused nearly exclusively on socio-economic changes. In recent years, also socio-cultural concerns have entered into the academic spotlight through a new focus on *social remittances*—the norms, practices, identities, and social capital—moving across the borders (Levitt 1998, 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Boccagni and Decimo 2013)[16].

Albeit cursory, this brief review of current migration studies highlights how my research is located within the research area concerning the impacts of international mobility on sending societies. In the following sections, I provide an overview of the main stream of literature relevant to my project. To begin with, I discuss the main theories and approaches in return migration (section 1). Next, I focus on the literature on highly skilled mobility and its implications for return migration (sections 2, 3 and 4). Finally, I examine the current debate on transnationalism trying to distil its insights into post-return experiences (section 5).

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[14] Transnationalism approach refers to the loosening of boundaries between countries and the intensification of interlinkages between people due to technological advancements, changes in the structure of the global market, and expanding globalization (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Portes *et al.* 1999; Vertovec 1999; Faist 2000ab; Kivisto 2001). Transnationalism is not a completely new concept—*The Polish Peasant* itself captured many of the features identified by transnational studies in the earlier Polish community in the USA. Still, as a theoretical framework, transnationalism entered the sociological agenda only in the 1990s.

[15] All these phenomena are embraced by the concept of transnational practices, which might be of economic, political, and socio- cultural nature (Portes *et al.* 1999). The combinations of practices, ties, and networks across the borders of multiple states, in turn, form particular social formations—transnational social spaces (Faist 2000b). Although transnationalism scholars have brought to light a considerable amount of research on cross–border activities (i.e. Landolt 2001; Portes *et al.* 2002; Kim 2006; Portes and Yiu 2013 for economic transnationalism; Bauböck 1994, 2002, 2003; Itzigsohn 2000; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008 for political transnationalism; and Al-Ali *et al.* 2001; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2002, 2005; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Boccagni 2009, 2012a for socio-cultural transnationalism), transnational approach has lacked attention to return migration and transnational ties existing between returnees and their ex-host countries. The latter, however, has become a focus in a few recent studies on post-return experiences in several regions (i.e. De Bree *et al.* 2010 for Morocco; Fog Olwig 2012 for the Caribbean islands; Sabar 2013 for Ghana, Vlase 2013 for Romania; and Iaria 2014 for Iraq).

[16] I will discuss the concept of social remittances further in this chapter and in chapter 6.

1. Return migration: definition and approaches

The outcomes of migration are manifold—while some immigrants settle, others move further or return home. Although the major theories have been mainly concerned with the decision to migrate, return migration is not a new concept for researchers[17]. The major streams of migrants leaving Europe and Asia for North America in the beginning of the twentieth century were not a once and for all phenomenon—thousands of migrants returned to their homelands, including an estimated one quarter of the 16 million Europeans, who had immigrated previously to the United States (Gmelch 1980). Nowadays, temporary migrations are often the rule rather than the exception—from 20% to 50% of immigrants (depending on the country of destination and the period of time considered) leave within five years after their arrival, either to return home or to move on to a third country (Dustmann 2003; Dumont and Spielvogel 2008).

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2004), return migration is *«the movement of a person returning to his/her country of origin or habitual residence usually after spending at least one year in another country. This return may or may not be voluntary. Return migration includes voluntary repatriation».* That is, migrants returning home for a short period such as vacation or business trip, even if extended, without the intention of remaining are generally not defined as return migrants (Gmelch 1980). When people emigrate a second time after being moved back home, it is re-emigration; the shuttling between two or more places is referred to as circular migration (Bovenkerk 1974). My research focuses on voluntary, rather than forced (illegal immigrants' and failed asylum-seekers' deportation etc.) migration. Consequently, I refer to a movement, which requires deliberate (at least to some extent) decision by the migrant herself.

Several classical migration theories have dealt with return migration and explained it in 'success-failure' terms. Neoclassical approaches (Lewis 1954; Todaro 1969, 1976), as they are based on the implicit assumption that migrants have full access to information on opportunities abroad prior to migration, do not predict return migration and have difficulty in explaining it—people whose expectations are satisfied would not have rationale for returning (de Haas *et al.* 2014). Therefore, the only returnees are those who have miscalculated the balance of costs and benefits and have not successfully maximized their

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[17] Already in the Ravenstein's «laws of migration» it is noted the principle of return migration: «Each main current of migration produces a compensating counter-current» (1885, 64).

expected incomes and, thus, had unsatisfactory migration experience—while 'winners' settle, 'losers' return (Cassarino 2004). In contrast to neoclassical economics, the new economics of labour migration (Stark and Bloom 1985) viewed return as the natural outcome of a 'calculated strategy', defined by the migrant's family in order to minimise the risks, and resulting from the successful experience abroad (Cassarino 2004). Put differently, a returnee is a person who has accumulated enough savings and, thus, has achieved her original goals for migrating.

Hence, the neoclassical economics of migration and the new economics of labour migration differ in their contrasting interpretations of return migration. There have been several attempts to test them simultaneously that have provided mixed support for both hypotheses, suggesting that there is no unitary process of return migration because of heterogeneity in the background and motivations of migrants (Constant and Massey 2002; Fokkema and de Haas 2011). In their fundamental research on migration processes between Mexico and the Unites States, Massey and Espinosa (1997) have tested several theoretical approaches. Their results have suggested that during period under investigation «probabilities of first, repeat, and return migration had been linked more to the forces identified by social capital theory and the new economics of migration than to the simple cost-benefit calculations assumed by the neoclassical model» (Massey and Espinosa 1997, 940). In fact, numerous researchers of international migration have concluded that (return) migration involves more complex issues than cost-benefit calculation and have begun to formulate new approaches to migration that include the socio-cultural issues involved in individual decision-making.

In this regard, the sociological life course approach has offered a promising theoretical framework, in which (return) migration decision-making is a part of individual life course embedded to wider societal, institutional, and cultural contexts (Ní Laoire 2008; Wingens *et al.* 2011). Thus, (return) migration has strong relationship with the factors concerning individual and family life course (e.g., age, household composition), the institutional factors (e.g., labour market conditions, migration policies) as well as with the timing of key life events and relative life course transitions[18] (e.g., Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999; Fischer and

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[18] The concept of life course transition refers to a discrete life change or event within a trajectory (e.g., from a single to married state), whereas a trajectory is a sequence of linked states within a conceptually defined range of behaviour or experience (e.g., education and occupational career). Transitions typically result in a change in status, social identity, and role involvement (Elder 1975; Elder *et al.* 2003).

Malmberg 2001; Brettel 2002). In other words, return migration is likely to be influenced and shaped by life course events such as education-to-labour market transition, family formation or breakdown, children's birth and their relative transitions (e.g., schooling), or ageing of parents. As I will discuss in chapter 4, the highly skilled Belarusian returnees are not an exception—the collected narratives reveal multiple intersections between return migration (and post-return) decisions and individual (and family) life course events and transitions. In particular, adult care, child rearing as well as family formation appeared to be strong motivations for return migration.

Alongside with general migration theories, some specific approaches to return migration have been advanced. Piore (1979) has considered immigrants as having temporary migration projects and wanting to return. In many cases—mainly for insufficient accumulation of savings—however, they are not able to do this. The most general approach to return migration has considered pre-emigration intentions about duration of stay abroad (Bovenkerk 1974; Gmelch 1980; King 1986). That is, four ideal types of migration have been proposed: (1) migration intended to be permanent and, in fact, permanent; (2) migration intended to be permanent with return migration; (3) migration intended to be temporary and with return migration; and (4) migration intended to be temporary, but becoming permanent. The major interest, hence, is why unplanned return migration takes place. This question has been explored since the 1990s in different world regions. For instance, studies on return migration from the United States to Mexico (Massey *et al.* 1987; Lindstrom 1996; Massey and Espinosa 1997) have suggested that the likelihood of return diminishes significantly along with accumulation of migration-specific human and social capital. Moreover, the scholars have emphasized the role of immediate relatives—the presence of a spouse and US-born children sharply lower the odd of return home. In the study of migrants returning to Jamaica, Thomas-Hope (1999, 199) argued that the decision to return relies on two sets of factors: «the characteristics of the migrants who return in terms of their skills, experience, and attitudes, and conditions of the country itself». The personal circumstances of the individual include age, stage in career, household life cycle, etc., while the perceived conditions of the country of origin include such factors as environment, level of crime, cost of living, political stability, and attitudes towards returning migrants. In fact, as I will show in chapter 4, mainly individual motivations and institutional opportunities in Belarus accounted for the return decisions. In a more recent review of the literature on return

migration, King (2000) has illustrated the basic factors influencing the decision to return and the main consequences of return migration. Whereas King argued that return is a result of a complex combination on various social (e.g., integration patterns, homesickness), economic (e.g., unemployment, desire to invest savings), political (e.g., government policy at sending and receiving end), and family (e.g., retirement, marriage) factors acting in both receiving and sending countries, he has concluded that non-economic reasons «generally weigh more heavily in the return decision than do economic factors» (King 2000, 15). Overall, this argument has been confirmed also in this research.

Similarly, in the return decision model (Fig. 1) developed by Black *et al.* (2004, 13), the factors influencing the decisions to return include both push- and pull-factors that are economic, social, personal, and political in scope.
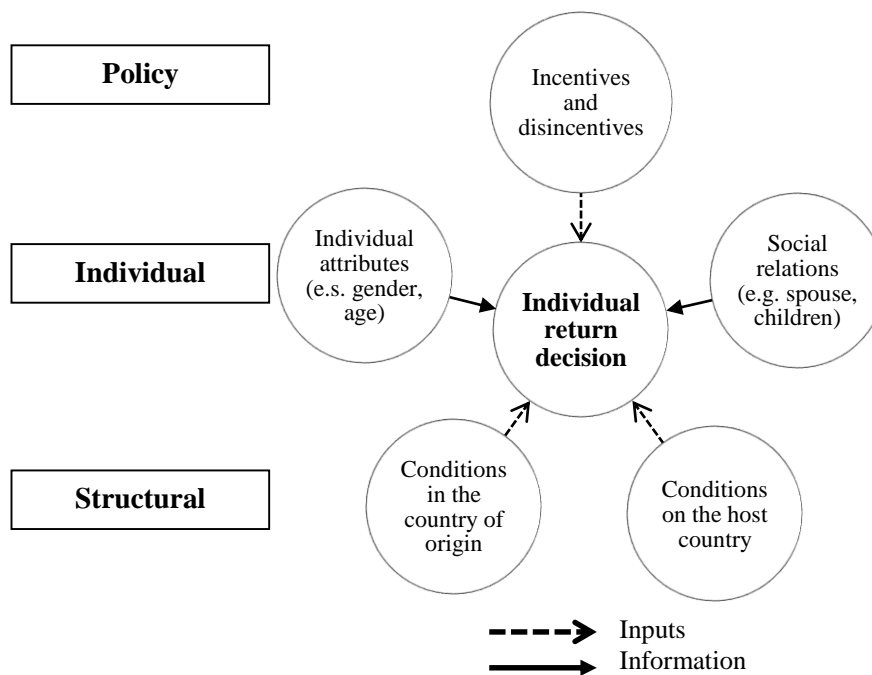
Figure 1. Factors determining the decision to return (Black *et al.* 2004, 13)

However, it has been observed that on balance, «conditions at home rather than in the host country are of primary importance» (Black *et al.* 2004, 23). In research on highly skilled return migrants in the Asian and Pacific region by Iredale *et al.* (2003), it was found that the return decisions are taken basing on combination of personal, institutional, as well as environmental factors. Several studies have emphasized the importance of family and kinship for both return decisions and post-return experience (Manuh 2002; Tiemoko 2004;

Reynolds 2011). In the recent research among British Pakistanis, Bolognani (2014) has offered a complementary perspective on how both positive and negative aspects of each country shape return migration plans. Hence, the 'push/retain–pull/repel' framework allows reasoning about return migration motivations, and in fact is used for analysis of the accounts for return migration among the participants of this research.

While the majority of approaches consider sending and receiving countries two parallel worlds, this view has been challenged by recent studies on migration networks and transnationalism. Many of them have commonly acknowledged that return does not constitute the end of migration cycle (e.g., Morawska 1991; van Hear 1998; Duval 2004; Oxfeld and Long 2004; Asiedu 2005; King *et al.* 2013; Oeppen 2013; Carling and Pettersen 2014; Iaria 2014; Mortensen 2014). Return is not a linear one-step transplantation, but a dynamic process consisting of diverse reciprocating moves[19]. Combining the transnational perspective with the mobilities paradigm (Cresswell 2006; Hannam *et al.* 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2000, 2007), King and Christou (2011) have proposed their typology of return mobilities including (a) return visits (ranging from a couple of days to some months of summer holiday)[20]; (b) return mobilities of childhood; (c) second-generation return migration as an adult; and (d) ancestral return. Hence, return is a step of a migration project, secured and sustained by transnational networks. As Cassarino has outlined, «return migration is a part and parcel of a circular system of social and economic relationships and exchanges facilitating the reintegration of migrants while conveying knowledge, information and membership» (2004, 262).

Actually, return migration need not be a permanent physical move—it is embedded into social relations established in transnational social spaces and sometimes blurs into sustained transnational mobility (Carling and Erdal 2014). For instance, in this study, I have encountered a few accounts, in which the informants had difficulties in affirming to be actually returned. Moreover, the majority of the informants admitted that they do not consider their return a permanent one. Thus, the temporality of both emigration and return migration settlements becomes a distinctive characteristic of highly skilled professionals involved into transnational mobility. What is more, transnational practices and return

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[19] Several authors consider returns as imagined, provisional, and repatriated, though these aspects need not be exclusive or sequential (Oxfeld and Long 2004).

[20] Return visits rarely lead to a long-relocation. Rather, they function as a tool for maintaining social ties (Baldassar 2001; Duval 2004; Conway *et al.* 2009).

migration are often mutually dependent—some transnational practices might in different instances make return migration more or less likely, which in turn could sustain or alter transnational practices (Sagmo 2014). In this regard, transnationalism approach links two traditions of sociology of migration focusing on the emigrants' integration into receiving societies and the impacts of emigration on sending countries. That is, settling abroad does not imply a break with the home country, as well as maintaining transnational ties does not imply a lack of integration in the host country. The relationship between integration in host society and return migration is more complex—transnationalism and integration are not necessarily substitutes, but can be also complements (Portes *et al.* 1999, Snel *et al.* 2006). While the classical immigrant assimilation model claims that immigrants assimilate gradually into receiving societies and, thus, are less likely to return, the recent Carling and Pettersen' (2014) analysis shows that it is the relative strength of integration and transnationalism that is decisive for return migration intentions[21]. Moreover, transnationalism approach permits to emphasize the existence of ongoing cross-border linkages between returnees and their former country of residence. Curiously, formalized attachment to the host country—for example, in form of citizenship—can catalyse a decision to return because it makes possible transnational mobility back to the destination country and serves as an airbag (Mortensen 2014). In fact, quite a few participants in my research called their foreign passports 'season tickets' enabling them to be mobile and flexible in their both private and professional lives[22].

Along with research on return intentions and motivations, the post-return experiences and the role of returnees in the development of sending countries have also attracted attention of migration scholars. What regards the first issue, there is a considerable lack of research on how to explain different post-return experiences. In an attempt to fill in this lacuna, Cassarino (2004, 2008) has introduced the concept of 'preparedness', which pertains to both the willingness and the readiness of migrants to return. The first aspect relates to the extent to which return is a voluntary act, the second to the extent to which the returnee is able to

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[21] The research was conducted using the data on return intentions among immigrants in Norway collected in 2005-2006. According to it, while intentions to return are most prevalent among migrants with strong transnational ties *and* weak socio-cultural integration, there is no discernible difference between the groups, in which both transnationalism and socio-cultural integration were either high or low. The lowest levels of return intentions have been found among those, who had weak transnational ties combined with strong integration into the host society (Carling and Pettersen 2014).

[22] I discuss the issue of double citizenship further in chapter 5.

mobilise adequate resources to facilitate a successful return. Drawing on these theoretical insights, van Meeteren and colleagues (2014) explored positive, negative, and neutral post-return experiences. This distinction, although important for better understanding of consequences of return migration, refers to an assessment of individual experience as such and ignores the potential socio-cultural impact of return migration on sending societies. In this regard, Cerase (1974), in his seminal study on return migration in Italy[23], has produced one of the most popular typologies of people' return, which takes into consideration the relationship between returnees and their home societies. Thus, he proposed a distinction between return of failure, return of retirement, return of innovation, and return of conservatism. The first two are self-explanatory; conservative returnees «are considered to be those who in new society remained aliens with their minds fixed on their return home» (Cerase 1974, 254), while innovative returnees are supposed to be those who intend to promote changes in the home country using what he or she has learned while abroad. There is no surprise that when migrants return to their home country they intentionally and unintentionally import ideas and values adopted in the host countries. What is more, these new ideas inform many aspects of returnees' lives and shape their post-return behaviours. This diversity of post-return attitudes is central to my study, where I distinguish between two ideal-typical ways of post-return engagement—either locally- or transnationally-oriented. This distinction differs from the Cerase's one (mainly conservative vs. innovative) in three crucial points. First, it provides a dynamic view on migrants' experiences: while a conservative (innovative) returnee is considered an unmodifiable package of experiences that either may be or may be not implemented in the home country (since the return is a single and unrepeatable event), a locally (transnationally) oriented returnee is conceived as a mutable and evolving entity. Secondly, whereas conservative (innovative) return represents *forma mentis* oriented toward either preservation of status quo or changing it; the idea of local (transnational) orientation is about centripetal (centrifugal) development (if a home country is considered a centre). Finally, and it has what to do with the previous point, both locally and transnationally oriented returnees may be considered 'innovators', since they convey socio-cultural remittances in form of new ideas and practices. Thus, the typologies are not mutually exclusive; rather, they may be considered complementary for

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[23] The study focused on return experiences of Italians from the United States of America. The majority of returnees were originally from the South of Italy, had agricultural background and had low-skilled occupations.

describing various migrants' post-return experiences. To anticipate some results from chapters 5 and 6, the highly skilled returnees considerably differ in their stances toward the home country. From my analysis results, that some returnees have 'rediscovered' their homeland and feel strong attachment to Belarus, while the others are highly mobile, participate in multiple cross-border practices and claim to be attached to more countries. In some cases of transnationally oriented engagement, I found also the evidence of cosmopolitan orientation[24]. Along with socio-cultural effects of migration experience, I discuss also the technological remittances (Nichols 2002)—knowledge, skills, and technology brought back by the returnees.

Despite the above described theoretical advancements, post-return experiences require further investigation in diverse sending/receiving contexts and in various types of migrants. Return as an analytic category cannot be seen as universal but as a situated concept—it receives its meaning from the individuals' experiences and points of view, from particular events and processes in both host and home countries. The accounts of people possessing strong human and social capitals allow deeper analysis of such larger processes as transnationalism and globalization, formation of national identity and discrimination, social and economic development. That is why I consider insights into migration experiences of highly skilled professionals particularly useful and draw my research on this type of migrants. In the next section, I discuss major theoretical and empirical advancements in highly skilled migration research.

2. The international migration of highly skilled

2.1 Defining the highly skilled

In the past decades, technology advancements and globalization processes have significantly reshaped economies around the world—a global labour market started taking shape. Although developed economies invested in labour-saving technologies and created high-wage jobs for highly skilled workers, demand for high-skill labour is now growing faster than supply (Dobbs *et al.* 2012). Because of conceptual variations in the classification

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[24] I use term 'cosmopolitan orientation' to refer to a personal stance toward people from different national, cultural, and social backgrounds based on openness, respect, and tolerance. I will discuss the cosmopolitanism perspective further in this chapter and in chapter 6.

of migrants as highly skilled, it is difficult to estimate the size of these migration flows[25]. However, the number of tertiary educated immigrants in the OECD increased by 70% in the past decade to reach 27 million in 2010-2011[26]. About 30% of all migrants in the OECD area were highly educated and one-fifth of them were originating from India, China or the Philippines, while the main destination continues to be the United States of America. The number of tertiary educated migrants originating from Africa increased to reach almost 3 million in 2010-2011. According to Vertovec (2007), these shifts seem to be structural—during the recent decades, the major receiving countries have experienced continuous 'waves' of immigration, leading to permanent changes in both economic and political sectors. In fact, a number of developed countries—of both traditional and new immigration[27]—have liberalized their policies for admission of highly skilled migrants to make themselves as competitive as possible within the global knowledge economy (Cerna 2010; Kofman 2014).

Scholars and policy-makers define the concept of the highly skilled differently. According to the Frascati and Canberra manuals[28], there are four ways to classify science and technology workers: 1) by qualification, 2) by activity, 3) by sector, and 4) by occupation. Qualification refers to formal education and corresponds to an existing and widely used classification, the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (Auriol and Sexton 2001, 14). Normally, highly skilled workers are those who have a tertiary level of education or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD SOPEMI 1997, 21), highly skilled by occupation are independent executives and senior managers, specialized technicians or trade persons, investors, business persons, 'keyworkers' and sub-contract workers. Some other categories of the highly skilled are academics, researchers and other academic staff, and students in higher education institutions.

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[25] Most national statistics are incomparable because of differences in education and classification systems, while larger data sets as, for example, visas statistics are not designed for the purpose of counting highly skilled migrants (Eich-Krohm 2013). That is why some studies focus exclusively on one or two professions or they include many occupations but set educational degree as criteria.

[26] According to the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013).

[27] Traditional immigration countries are the United States of America, Australia, the New Zealand, and Canada; new immigration countries are European ones— e.g., Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Denmark.

[28] The 1993 OECD Frascati Manual on Proposed Standard Practice for Surveys of Research and Experimental Development and the 1995 OECD Canberra Manual on the Measurement of Human Resources Devoted to Science and Technology.

In this research, I focus only on individuals who have completed at least one level of tertiary degree and/or worked as professionals.

2.2 The highly skilled typology

The definition of the highly skilled is neither universal nor internationally compatible. However, some efforts have been made in order to provide a proxy definition of a highly skilled person. The literature on highly skilled migration provides various classificatory systems for professional migrants based on different criteria.

Occupational group. Salt (1988) has proposed a twelve-stage classification including corporate transferees; technical firemen; health, education and welfare professionals; project specialists; consultant specialists; private career development/training; clergy and missionaries; entertainment, sport, art; businessmen/independent wealthy; academics, researchers and students; military; spouses and children. Mahroum (2000) has identified five types of highly skilled migrants—professional and managerial; engineers and technicians; academics and scientists; entrepreneurs; and students—driven by different push and pull factors. Many authors argue that students have to be included into highly skilled migrants' classification as it is the only group who migrate primarily in order to enhance their human capital (Balàž and Williams 2004; Nagel 2005; Ewers 2007; Boeri *et al.* 2012; She and Wotherspoon 2013). Moreover, «students and scholars represent the largest numbers of the highly skilled in global economy and where people choose to attend universities is a solid determinant of where they will settle» (Ewers 2007, 125). The advanced economies have drawn growing attention to recruiting international students and face the global talent war (OECD 2008, 2010).

Time scale. A large number of studies have made a distinction between temporary, circulatory, or permanent migration. Salt *et al.* (2001) have also distinguished among business travel (labour tourism), temporary sojourns and flexible contracts, and permanent relocation.

Geography. Gould (1988) have proposed a typology of skilled migration based on cross-tabulation of frequency and intension of migration against geographical direction of skill flows. Hence, the movement takes place between or within the core (developed) and

peripheral (developing) areas of the world economy. The migration flows between India and the Great Britain as well as those within the South-Eastern Asia region may be considered examples of this way of reasoning.

Channel or mechanism. Findlay and Garrick (1989) distinguished among internal labour markets of multinational corporations; companies with international contracts that move staff to service their offshore work; international recruitment agencies; and other channels of recruitment, e.g., Internet.

Motivation. Here the forced forms of emigration (such as the movement of German scientists in 1933 or the exodus of Soviet Jews from the USSR) are opposed to the voluntary ones where the highly skilled specialists are encouraged to move by favourable conditions offered by companies ('industry led' migration) or governments ('government induced' migration) (Iredale 2001).

In contrast to these quite technical classifications, Scott (2006) has argued, that they «fail to appreciate the everyday complexity» and «human face» of highly skilled migrants. Scott has advanced a six-faceted migrant typology structured according to three main factors: motive for migration, commitment to host country, and familial status (see Fig. 2).
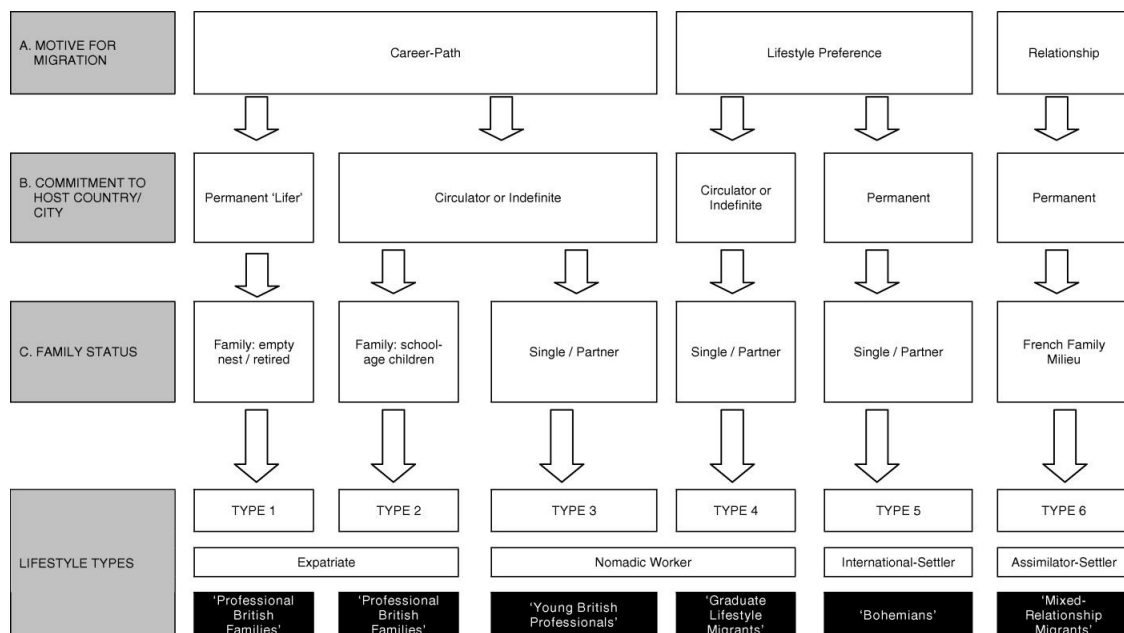
Figure 2. The social morphology of skilled migration: three dimensions of difference and six lifestyle types (Scott 2006)

Thus, Scott has distinguished between professional families of two types—newcomers and more established 'lifers', young professionals, graduate lifestyle migrants, bohemians, and

mixed-relationship migrants. The author has described relative routines and everyday practices to account for the diverse social morphology of a skilled migrant community[29]. This rich typology is a step toward understanding the complexity of highly skilled migration, which has been observed also in my own research. Although Scott has made several attempts to explore the extent to which migrants of different types were involved into transnational networks and relationships, it has not been among the primary goals of the study. Thus, a more thorough investigation of migrants' transnational involvement may contribute to and enrich the existing typology and to extend it (with some limitations regarding this research[30]) to description of post-return lifestyles too. For instance, I argue that individual post-return lifestyles of highly skilled migrants may be described in terms of both involvements into transnational social and economic practices and networks, and attachment to the home country and its social environment (see chapter 5 for further discussion). Moreover, the initial motives for return migration does not seem to be decisive in shaping post-return lifestyle. In addition, Scott has made several observations about gender-specific characteristics of some lifestyles, e.g., the so called expatriate 'trailing spouses' and naturalised foreign partners, which, though in different form, are of particular importance also for this research.

In fact, a growing number of scholars are recognizing the important gender patterns of migration. Yeoh and Willis (2005) argued that skilled international migration has tended to be «treated as highly mobile individual male careerists circulating in an intensely fluid world». Partially it is true—several studies have shown negative effects of migration on employment outcomes of highly skilled women (Man 2004; Purkayastha 2005). Although there has been little systematic research on the significance of gender in skilled migration, a significant proportion of migrants from several countries—e.g., Ireland, Australia, and the Philippines—are women (Kofman and Raghuram 2005). What is more, women and men circulate differently—men dominate movements within transnational corporations, information and communication, while women often circulate as skilled labour within the

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[29] The evidence that informs the migrant typology comes from 36 interviews carried out with the British community in Paris during 2000-2001.

[30] E.g., the temporal aspect (the return migration as observable phenomenon in Belarus is relatively young if the short history of the country's independence and of its international migration flows are taken into consideration. Surely, return migration existed in the region from much earlier, but the 'established' returnees in the post-Soviet Belarus are a kind of rarity.

reproductive sectors such as education, health, and social work (Kofman 2014). This is a further confirmation that the streams of highly skilled migration are gender sensitive.

3. Brain drain vs. brain gain debate

The early studies of highly skilled migration have mostly been dominated by a human capital paradigm which has been establishing around the same time with Schultz's reflections on the role of education and human capital in economic development (1961) and Becker's insights into human capital theoretical bases (Becker 1964). According to Becker, workers are considered to be endowed with different levels of human capital, which implies the recognition of certain market inefficiencies, which, in turn, imply as follows. Firstly, skilled individuals will be attracted to locations with high stocks of human capital and therefore higher returns to their accumulated skills. Secondly, skilled emigrants take not only their marginal product with them but also their social product. Finally, if the government finances skilled emigrants' education, then emigrants fail to repay this investment through their contribution to the tax system (Cañibano and Woolley 2012).

Thus, in the past decades, social scientists explored highly skilled migration mainly through the prism of brain drain from developing countries. The term 'brain drain' officially appeared in 1963, and its early use was in reference to the exodus of British scientists to the USA in the 1960s (US House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, 1977), apparently denoting permanent socio-economic losses suffered by the sending country in such circumstances. Therefore, what is intended is the phenomenon of abandonment of a country in favour of another by professionals or people with a high level of education, generally following an offer of better pay or living conditions (Grubel 1994), as well as improved conditions for conducting one's professional activities. The brain drain phenomenon has been usually seen as a zero-sum game in which sending countries lose as the developed world creams off the best and the brightest (Favell *et al.* 2008). According to this view, less developed countries, at their own expenses, train human capital, which instead of contributing towards national economic growth, advance that of destination countries. The negative effects of brain drain include disappearance of a critical mass in production, research, public services (notably health and education) and political institutions (Batista *et al.* 2007). It follows that the loss of skilled personnel has been seen as undermining the chances of growth of developing countries (Milio *et al.* 2012).

In recent years, the economic literature has turned its attention to the potential gains of emigration. In particular, a new 'brain gain' literature has emerged, proposing that the highly skilled migration may prompt the long-term positive effects for countries of origin in case of a return or network building processes of the emigrated knowledge elite (Miyagiwa 1991; Mountford 1997; Stark *et al.* 1997; Hunger 2002; Solimanos 2008). Generally, the positive aspects could take some forms such as remittances, creation of jobs, and creation of business networks; return migration of skilled professionals if economies of sending countries got more dynamic; decrease of un- and under-employment; and incentives to acquire higher education among immobile compatriots. However, the latter may contribute to the phenomenon of 'brain waste'—the process of deskilling, which occurs when highly skilled workers take over jobs for which they are overqualified. Bhagwati (1979) illustrates this phenomenon with the example of a Filipino doctor working as a cab driver in Manila while he waits the opportunity to pass an examination to migrate to the USA, instead of starting medical practice in his own country. Similarly, a big part of migrant care and domestic workers in Italy has secondary and tertiary education (Censis 2010).

The concept of 'brain circulation' came to prominence in the 1990s as an alternative to notions of brain drain and brain gain—the emigration of students, academics and other highly skilled professionals has increasingly turned out to be temporary rather than permanent (Gaillard and Gaillard 1997; King 2002; Teferra 2005). As Williams *et al.* claimed, «longer-term migration has increasingly been replaced by more diverse, shorter-term flows, so that it is more apposite to refer to circulation and mobility than to migration» (2004, 28). According to the results of this research, highly skilled professionals, are in fact, poorly committed with long-term plans and predictions; rather, they appear to be very responsive to the changing contexts around them. The notion of brain circulation accounts for the complex linkages between highly skilled migrants, their home countries and business relationships, which they are involved in (Saxenian 2005). As Meyer (2001, 97) has stated, «the presence of highly skilled expatriates abroad should not be seen as a loss to the country but as an asset that can be mobilized». In fact, the circulationist perspective (Meyer 2001, 2003; Meyer and Brown 1999; Barré *et al.* 2003) has offered a conceptual alternative to the orthodox 'brain drain' debate, which has largely failed to account for «the frequent back and forth movement of migrants, ideas, knowledge, information, and skill sets that is now a routine part of contemporary transnationalism» (Favell *et al.* 2008, 12). In my research, I

show that the highly skilled migrants are not simply transplanted from one professional context to another but continue to develop their professional and knowledge networks over national borders. This process does not cease after highly skilled migrants' return to the home country—they actively participate into their professional networks abroad. Thus, the utility of human capital is not necessarily delimited by the geographical location of individuals; rather it is dependent on individual's ability to negotiate the value of their qualification and skills (Csedö 2008).

4. Highly skilled return migration

Highly skilled migration is among the fastest growing migration phenomena in the world. Whereas the potential benefits of skilled migration for destination countries are generally not disputed, in recent decades, more and more scholars have documented that skilled migration benefits also origin countries in both economic and social spheres: e.g. in form of transfers of technology (e.g., Saxenian 2002; Kerr 2008), major monetary remittances (Bollard *et al.* 2011), investments into education (Lowell and Findlay 2001; Clemens and Chand 2008), etc. These positive effects on sending countries are visible even if their skilled nationals stay abroad. This is suggesting that highly skilled return migration may play an important role in the socio-economic and socio-cultural development of sending countries.

Despite a sizeable amount of literature on return migration, the area of highly skilled return migration, as I have said previously, remains fragmented and both geographically and thematically skewed. It is still not clear what factors underlie the highly skilled migrants' decision to return; what is the impact of their return upon home societies; and how is the process of return and its effects on the individuals' lives.

4.1 The determinants of highly skilled return migration

What regards the first question—what are the factors responsible for decision to return, several considerations have been proposed.

First, economic factors have been put under investigation. In their study, which focused on people with an overseas university degree and on business migrants in four Asian countries, Iredale *et al.* (2003) observed that the stronger economic growth and the more 'globalised' the economy, the greater the rate of return migration. Likewise, Saxenian (2006)

and Chacko (2007) argued that highly skilled migrants would not return to their home countries until economic growth occurs and the necessary professional opportunities are available. In fact, Harvey (2009), basing on his study of British and Indian scientists in the USA, suggested that highly skilled migrants from developing countries hold a greater desire to return to their home countries than those from developed countries because of potentially better professional opportunities (e.g., growing markets, governmental incentives, etc.). Actually, institutional conditions play a considerable role in shaping mobility flows—they may impede as well as facilitate migration and return migration in particular (Favell *et al.* 2008; King and Raghuram 2013; She and Wotherspoon 2013). In this research, labour market and legal system institutional conditions in both home and host countries have significantly influenced the return decision-making process of the majority of informants (see chapter 4 for further discussion). However, neither institutional factors are fixed and consistent across different types of activities nor the highly skilled are homogeneous in terms of adaptability and flexibility. For instance, professional profiles such as health workers (both nurses and physicians), engineers, and IT-workers are highly demanded in the international labour market, and thus appear to be facilitated in their movements by various skilled migration programmes, simplified bureaucratic procedures, favourable contract and tax conditions, etc. In different professional fields such as arts or music only a small group of the most talented and famous people may benefit of advantageous mobility conditions. Many others, though highly skilled, are not so privileged. In this research, I provide the evidence on how institutional conditions for knowledge intensive companies in Belarus have facilitated the return of some highly skilled migrants[31].

Second, besides economic and institutional factors, direct government actions may influence the highly skilled professionals' decision to return (i.e. Keren *et al.* 2003; Tsay 2003). There are several multilateral programmes for assisted return of qualified nationals designed for long-term migrants who possess skills and knowledge that could be of use to the country or region of origin (Ghosh 2000). However, it can be observed a significant shift in the approaches of sending countries to their migrants—they no longer seek to encourage permanent return migration, but are far more inclined to encourage temporary returns (Kivisto and Faist 2010). The return programmes, operating mostly in Latin America, Africa,

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[31] Almost the half of participants in this research are engaged in high technology activities (e.g., IT, engineering, and sciences).

and Asia[32], seek to match jobs and skills, and provide returnees with a series of incentives. Belarus has not adopted any return programme for the highly skilled, and, thus, represents an 'unbiased' context for research on return migration.

However, economic considerations are not the only critical factor that would influence highly skilled migrants to return. First, multiple studies report that highly-skilled (return) migration is influenced and shaped by education, labour market, and individual and significant others' life course trajectories: e.g., education and job opportunities, professional career, family status and composition, fertility and childbearing, adult care (e.g., Lee Cooke 2007; Whisler *et al.* 2008; Kelly 2015; Kõu *et al.* 2015). For instance, in this research, return to Belarus has been often articulated in terms of family formation (marriage and childbearing) and increased responsibility toward both younger and elder generations. Second, recent return migration literature has emphasized that return largely depends on such aspects as kinship relations, social ties, culture, and lifestyle. Return migration, thus, is not a final step of a journey, but a process in which countries of origin and destination are linked by social relationships existing across geographical borders. In fact, a lot of studies have emphasized the importance of transnational social networks—highly skilled migrants maintain strong social ties with family members, friends, and colleagues both in home and host countries (Guarnizo 1997; Vertovec 2002; Beaverstock 2002; Iredale *et al.* 2003; Saxenian 2006; Larner 2007; Kobayashi and Preston 2007; Khoo *et al.* 2007a; Faist 2008). Beaverstock (2005) emphasized the importance of transnational family and friendship networks as the main component of migrants' social life. Hernández-León (2004) found that social networks were so effective that they replaced formal recruitment channels for helping highly skilled industrial workers from Mexico to find work in the United States. However, the role of transnational social networks in shaping a migrant's decision to return is unclear. Faist (1999) sustained that the host country factors were critical in influencing whether people return home, while Saxenian (2006) argued that highly skilled migrants in Silicon Valley use their transnational networks in their home countries not only to keep in touch with social contacts, but also to help the process of returning there in future.

To conclude, it is impossible to think that there is one set of factors influencing return decisions. Rather, it is a complex and dynamic system of context-dependent circumstances.

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[32] I.e. the EU-funded programme for Return and Reintegration of Qualified African Nationals (RQAN), IOM's Return of Qualified Afghans (RQA) programme, and The Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals (TRQN) programme.

That is, according to few studies on highly skilled return migration in Eastern Europe (e.g., Weinar 2002; Tung and Lazarova 2006; Jackson 2012), the motivation to return to a home country goes beyond pure economic reasons and can be summarized as follows—rational and self-development motives, sentimental and nostalgia motives, and combinations of the first two. In this research, as I discuss in chapter 4, the mixed motives appear to be more frequent.

4.2 Highly skilled return migration and the changes in the origin country

Other two relatively unanswered questions about highly skilled return migration regard its effects at both the macro and micro levels.

What regards macro level, return migration of the highly skilled has been generally considered to create a 'triple-win' situation, coming to the benefit of sending country, receiving country as well as of individual migrants. Migrants contribute to the development of their home country by transferring different kinds of resources—mainly human and financial capital[33]. That is, Gmelch (1980, 1987) has defined several domains of the return migration impact including (1) the introduction of new skills; (2) the investment of capital; (3) the introduction of new ideas and attitudes; (4) changes in social structure; and (5) the influence of return migration in encouraging further emigration.

It has been often claimed that migrants acquire valuable human capital— training and work experience—during their stay abroad (Taylor 1976; Thomas-Hope 1999). New skills, ideas, and attitudes are expected to have positive effects on the development of their home countries[34]. Whereas the larger part of participants in this research were labour migrants, almost the half of them went abroad with the educational purposes (initially). That is, acquisition of new skills was the primary goal for all of them. As Li *et al.* (1996, 52-53) stated, the return migration of students (I would speak about the highly skilled in general) contributes not only to «the advancement of knowledge and technology, but their overseas experience, links and sometimes improved linguistic abilities may also mean that they are better equipped to foster further contacts with the outside world, which would be beneficial

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[33] However, according to Cassarino (2004) the propensity of migrants to become actors of change and development at home depends on their preparation for return, which requires time, mobilisation of tangible and intangible resources, and willingness on the part of the migrant.

[34] Nevertheless, various studies on lowly-skilled migration found the opposite—the returnees' new skills appeared to be non-transferable and the process of deskilling had place (Böhning 1972; Gmelch 1980; Al-Rasheed 1992).

to the development of their countries». In fact, all the returnees whom I spoke, have claimed a strong impact of migration experience on their human capital. They are confident of their new both linguistic and professional skills, which they successfully employ after return to the home country.

The second main contribution to the home country development is financial capital transfers—many migrants usually have some savings, which they may transfer to the home country upon return. While some scholars have stressed positive implications of migrants' savings, others have argued that the impact of savings generally is insignificant and sometimes even negative (King 1986; Russell 1992; McCormick and Wahba 2001; Kilic 2007). Several studies on developing countries have shown that an important proportion of migrants seek to arrange independent employment—return migrants contribute significantly to starting enterprises, investments and job creation (Mesnard 2004; Nicholson 2004; Gubert *et al.* 2007; Wahba 2007). It is also the case for the highly skilled returnees in Belarus—many informants have already started or are going to start their own businesses.

While financial and human capital transfers have received attention in the migration literature, the transfer of social capital[35] has been generally ignored[36]. Moreover, for a long time only the positive effects of social capital have been in the centre of attention—it has been generally accepted that it facilitates individuals and groups in reaching their objectives[37]. But is social capital transferrable? Social capital has been often thought to be embodied in «the structure and relations between people» (Coleman 1994) and discussed mostly in terms of participation in formally established organisations. In this sense, social capital is place-based and therefore difficult to be transferred (Da Vanzo 1981; Faist 2010). Nevertheless, for the study of social capital transfer the competences that people acquire in building and maintaining relations assume particular importance (Ammassari 2009; Lesage and Ha 2012). In terms of migration experience, access to different sources of information due to language skills, the ability to interact and work with people of different cultures, the familiarity with norms, customs, and values are among the benefits acquired by migrants

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[35] Social capital is defined as «a set of resources—actual or potential—which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition» (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Lin (2000, 786) has conceptualized social capital as «quantity and/or quality of resources an actor can access or use through its location in a social network».

[36] Migration scholars have primarily focused on so called 'migrant social capital' consisting of access to prior migrants who can provide information and/or assistance for migration thus reducing costs of moving for aspiring migrants (e.g., Massey *et al.* 1998; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Garip 2008).

[37] Yet, Portes (1998) has stressed that social capital may also have less desirable consequences.

through their social capital and that can be transferred. In some cases, personal and professional contacts forged abroad can be very useful in the pursuit of specific activities after return (Rauch and Trindade 2002). Still, social networks can assume a restrictive character in form of such consequences as «exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms» (Portes 1998, 15). In fact, studies of return migration suggest that one of the most unexpected and disillusioning aspects of homecoming is the cool welcome, if not downright hostility, that the return migrants often receive from the population that stayed behind in the homeland (Gmelch 1995; Eastmond and Öjendal 1999; Arowolo 2000; Baldassar 2001, 2007; Tsuda 2003; Mason 2004; Boccagni 2009, 2010). While it has been generally assumed that the highly skilled face fewer problems of adaptation and are effortlessly able to integrate into destination societies, in the next chapters I show that post-return experiences are not so unclouded in terms of social capital employment.

Along with the assets of social capital, also ideas, practices, and know-how circulate across borders. These notions have been combined to form the concept of social remittances[38] (Levitt 1998, 2001; Arowolo 2000, Baldassar 2001, 2007; Duval 2004; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). The concept of socio-cultural remittances emphasizes the proactive nature of returnees who not only carrier, but also rework and re-interpret practices and ideas they have experienced abroad. Social remittances have several dimensions: firstly, social remittances may have both positive and negative consequences; secondly, authors distinguished between individual and collective social remittances[39]; finally, social remittances have circular nature—the people's experiences before migrating strongly influence their lives in the host countries, which then shapes what they remit back to their home countries (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). In addition, «social remittances affect not only local-level organizational culture and practice, they can also influence regional and national changes» (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2013, 20).

Following other researchers who have focused on social remittances and integration within the process of return migration (Levitt 1998; Baldassar 2001, 2007; Duval 2004; De Haas and Fokkema 2011; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011), in this thesis, I analyse how do

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[38] Some authors argue that the concept of economic remittances could be embedded into a broader range of socio-cultural remittances (Boccagni and Decimo 2013).

[39] Social remittances exchanged and deployed by individuals and social remittances that circulate and are harnessed in collective, organizational settings (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2013)

Belarusian professionals employ their socio-cultural remittances and re-integrate into home society after return. The highly skilled returnees represent a special case of return migrants who have acquired valuable foreign professional experience, and at the same time, possess knowledge of the local context from both socio-cultural and economic point of view. Although having overall similar experience abroad, the highly skilled Belarusian returnees conduct different lifestyles after their return. As I have mentioned before, the main discrimination here is transnational orientation and involvement. In order to understand better, what transnational lifestyle consists of, in the next section, I review the main literature on transnationalism and discuss how return migration and transnational practices relate to and are influenced by each other.

5. Transnationalism and socio-cultural change

In much of the literature, the transnationalism approach is applied to the immigrants' communities and their relationships with their home societies. Much less attention has been paid to the return migrants and their attitudes toward their home and ex-host countries. This concern is particularly important for socio-cultural changes brought to home societies by highly skilled returnees.

The relationship between return migration and transnationalism is sometimes blurred and the nexus between the two is complex. Being transnational may both facilitate and hinder return, while the return may both reinforce and weaken transnational involvement. Although transnational ties are supposed to suggest flexible migration strategies, sometimes return results to be definitive and irreversible. Therefore, the question is—how returnees manage their transnational experience and in which way they incline toward one or another mode of life. While the phenomenon of return migration has been discussed in the previous sections, the concept of transnationalism requires further exploration. Below, I will briefly review the basics of transnationalism framework.

5.1 Transnationalism: origins and meaning

The term 'transnationalism' entered the lexicon of migration studies in the early 1990s', when it was presented as a novel analytic approach to understanding of contemporary migration (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Basch *et al.* 1994): «We define 'transnationalism' as the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded

social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders» (Basch *et al.* 1994, 8).

Later, there have been a number of proposals regarding transnationalism conceptual and empirical advancement. Gradually scholars have recognized that transnationalism is not a recent phenomenon. Rather, the advent of new technologies in transportation and telecommunications has facilitated rapid communication across national borders and long distances, which in turn allowed for an increasing intensity and immediacy of the linkages of the immigrant communities and their place of origin (Joppke and Morawska 2003; Foner 2005). One of the most influential scholars of transnationalism Alejandro Portes offered his most sustained articulation of the phenomenon:

> While back and forth movements by immigrants have always existed, they have not acquired until recently the critical mass and complexity necessary to speak of an emergent social field. This field is composed of a growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders (Portes *et al.* 1999, 217).

However, as Portes and other authors argued, not all the migrants are engaged into transnationalism (Portes *et al.* 1999; Kivisto 2001). Portes *et al.* (1999, 219), in particular, sustained that the study of transnationalism should only include «occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation». Although traditionally transnationalism has been viewed from the side of receiving countries and immigrants who developed social relationships with their home countries, this concept does not exclude post-return reverse process, in which returnees establish and maintain relationships and networks with their ex-host countries. In this regard, the concept of transnational social spaces (Faist 2000a) is of particular importance since it blurs (if not erases) the directivity of social ties between different countries.

Faist defined the concept as «combinations of ties, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that reach across the borders of multiple states» (2000b, 191). It is a kind of social capital distributed across the borders of different states and having its economic, political, and social consequences. In contrast to traditional societies, where people were bound to places and given communities, the contemporary transnational migration takes place within fluid social spaces. These social spaces are

constantly reworked through migrants' simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society through a number of social, economic, and political ties and practices (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Smith 2005; Kivisto and Faist 2010; Mau 2010). The notion of multiple embeddedness is closely connected with the relational-geography approach (Amin 2004; Massey 2004, 2005; Malpas 2012; Meeus 2016), which challenges methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and argues that places in general and the nation state in particular are not just 'containers' for society but are the products of the interaction between the multiplicity of social processes, flows, and networks. In this regard, individual transnational practices appear to be embedded into a wider context of social change, and acquire a particular value for studying transformation processes occurring in the post-socialist space with its own particular socio-cultural and socio-economic features.

Transnational involvement is not anchored to any geographical area and does not depend on whether one lives in her home country or abroad. Nevertheless, I claim that the forms of transnational involvement are mutable and differ considerably in periods prior to and after return. Moreover, I argue that socio-cultural changes related to the practices and ideas that highly skilled returnees import to their home country are interwoven into and interrelated with the broader post-socialist transformation.

5.2 Post-return transnationalism and socio-cultural transformation

The transnational social spaces include various forms of activity—both informal and formal—social, cultural, economic, political, and religious practices, connecting all levels of social experience (Portes *et al.* 1999; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Smith 2006). What are the transnational practices enacted by people when they are abroad and how does return shape the content and meaning of transnational activity? How these practices are situated within the wider context of socio-cultural transformation? Drawing on Portes' *et al.* (1999) typology, I will further discuss economic, political and social transnational practices before and after return within the context of interrelationship between host and home countries.

Economic transnationalism

Economic transnationalism is conceived as a combination of relatively recurrent and patterned material and ideational interactions between immigrants and their formal and informal organizations on the one hand, and the capital, labour, and consumption resources located in another country on the other (Itzigsohn 2000). Transnational economic practices include different kind of remittances and border-crossing entrepreneurship in both goods and services (Landolt 2001; Portes and Yiu 2013). When abroad, there are actually two kinds of transnational economic practices. The first is monetary remittances, which in fact have become an important part of many local economies[40]; the second is ethnic entrepreneurship, which is diffused to the less extent and is often characterized by clustering of businesses by ethnic belonging (Guarnizo *et al.* 1999; Portes *et al.* 2002; Kim 2006; Zhou and Lee 2012; Portes and Yiu 2013). Neither of these economic transnational practices were typical to the highly skilled Belarusian professionals when they were abroad. Nevertheless, after their return they have become more active in terms of economic transnationalism, which to certain extent is produced by and produces particular forms of post-socialist transformation, characterized by liberalization and internationalization of economic activity. For instance, transnational economic practices have assumed mainly three configurations: a) entrepreneurship (for example, establishment of a company in a foreign country, collaboration with foreign partners, working with foreign markets and clients, etc.), b) working in a foreign company, and c) transnational consumption.

In recent years, the researchers' interest has shifted to the returnee entrepreneurship[41]. It is argued that returnees start their businesses basing on technological, managerial and entrepreneurial expertise absorbed while abroad in developed countries. In this research, I present evidence of how the processes of marketization, liberalization, and internationalization acting in post-socialist Belarus from the early 2000s have contributed to the strong involvement of highly skilled returnees into transnational entrepreneurial practices. In addition, it is quite a common practice to be employed in a foreign company on a position, which requires communication with foreign partners and frequent travels abroad.

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[40]In 2013, remittances to India exceeded earnings from IT services, and inflows to Egypt were larger than earnings from the Suez Canal. During the same year, remittances to Bangladesh were equivalent to 84 percent of garment exports, and inflows to Nigeria amounted to about 22 percent of receipts from petroleum exports (The World Bank 2014).

[41] Mainly it is the role of returnees in the economic development of various Middle East and East Asian nations to be questioned (e.g., Wright *et al.* 2008; Wadhwa *et al.* 2011; Kenney *et al.* 2013).

Finally, spending money for commodity consumption, or simply shopping, is the third economic transnational practice in which Belarusian highly skilled returnees are largely involved.

Political transnationalism

Political transnationalism covers a wide range of political activities affecting individual identification with communities in both countries of origin and of settlement. Generally, it refers to the political involvement of migrants in their country of origin, combined with the impact of migrants' external political ties on the political institutions of the receiving country (Bauböck 2003; Guarnizo *et al.* 2003; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008; Lafleur and Martiniello 2009). In the last decades, also the concept of transnational citizenship (Soysal 1994; Bauböck 1994, 2002; Smith 2003) has attracted scholarship's attention. Transnationalism has important significance for the relationship between citizenship (as a set of rights and duties of an individual toward a certain country) and transnational identity (as attachment/connection to more than one country) (Bradatan *et al.* 2010). In this way, transnational citizenship refers to those migrants who manage to create or sustain dual or multiple national identities (Bauböck 1994).

Dual or multiple citizenship appears, thus, to be an institutionally recognized involvement into political transnationalism[42]. As Howard notes, «dual citizenship challenges one of the most stable and long-lasting assumptions of the modern era, namely that the nation-state constitutes the highest institution and the largest group of people to which an individual can affirm allegiance» (2005, 698). Just because of its 'revolutionary' meaning for nation-state ideology, dual citizenship is a highly contested concept in terms of inclusion/exclusion. While some countries have softened their demand for unilateral loyalty, thus allowing their citizens to maintain multiple ties at the state level (e.g., the majority of EU countries), others maintain more restrictive policies (e.g., Austria, Spain, Germany).

Certainly, having dual citizenship[43] is the most visible manifestation of political transnationalism among the interviewed returnees, which has also important implications for

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[42] With some exceptions. As Faist (2007) notes, not all dual citizens may be transnationals. For instance, he refers to immigrants who desire to transfer their fundamental loyalty to the country of naturalization but are not released by their country of origin; or 'passive' dual citizens—children of dual citizens living abroad.

[43] Belarus does not have an institution of dual citizenship. Nevertheless, Belarusian citizens may obtain a foreign citizenship if that country admits double citizenship. In this case, however, Belarus does not

their lifestyles[44]. However, as results from the interviews, dual citizenship plays more instrumental than ideological role in the informants' lives.

Though politics is a very important part of social life, the number of people engaged in routine and sustained transnational political activities is very limited (Guarnizo *et al.* 2003). Actually, also the participants in this research appeared to be quite passive in political terms both while abroad and after return. In this regard, several possible considerations might be made. First, several studies have reported the generally low level of political culture and participation in Belarus, e.g., low interest in politics, confused ideas about the role of political institutions, very limited participation and trust in political parties (Korosteleva 2004, 2012; IISEPS 2014; Titarenko 2003, 2016). Second, the institutional and bureaucratic norms sometimes impede the realization of such citizen's right as external voting[45]. And third, although several questions about politics have been raised during the interviews, the majority of informants have not been very willing to discuss political issues[46], which, again, are closely related to the political transformation processes poised on the demarcation between democracy and authoritarianism occurring in the post-socialist Belarusian context. That is, for multiple reasons the manifestations of political transnationalism among the Belarusian returnees have not come to the surface as one could expect.

recognize a foreign citizenship. A foreign citizen may obtain the Belarusian citizenship only after having renounced to her previous citizenship. Belarusian citizen may obtain a foreign citizenship if that country admits double citizenship.

[44] The most important implication is that related to the possibility to travel freely without visas or other permits, which facilitates considerably one's mobility and flexibility in both professional and leisure terms. For further discussion, see chapter 5.

[45] To be able to participate in national elections in a foreign country, a Belarusian citizen should be registered in any diplomatic representative office of the Republic of Belarus. In order to be registered a citizen should have declared leaving Belarus for permanent life abroad (*postoiannoe mesto zhitelstva*) and have changed her national passport from internal to 'external' one, designed specifically for Belarusian citizens living abroad. The trick is that this declaration is not compulsory—one may stay abroad with her internal passport for as long as she wishes (of course, valid visa or permit of stay are controlled by a foreign country). This bureaucratic procedure has many implications among which the passivization of political participation, and may be the most important one is the strong distortion of data on emigration and return flows.

[46] Here I would like to report an episode happened while I was getting presented to a potential informant who later became an actual one. Hence, I presented myself and briefly described the objectives of the research stressing the fact that I was mostly interested in post-return experiences. The informant seemed to be a bit embarrassed and said: «I am not going to tell how the life in Belarus is bad». It was my turn to be embarrassed. As further it turned out, the informant thought I was a representative of the opposition financed with a Western scholarship to write a dissertation about the hard life of Belarusian returnees in Lukashenko's regime.

Socio-cultural transnationalism

Socio-cultural transnationalism is in large part seen to evolve around actual social bonds and symbolic meaning that transcends these relations. It concerns the emergence of practices of sociability, mutual help, and public rituals rooted in the cultural understandings that pertain to the sense of belonging and social obligations of immigrants (Morawska 2001; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2002). Socio-cultural transnational practices include but are not limited to visiting and maintaining contacts with family and friends in the home country; participation in cross-border networks of care; joining organizations that promote cultural or social ties between home and host countries—such as ethnic social and cultural clubs or religious associations; participation in cultural activities and events, as well as cultural consumption—watching home country television or reading newspapers (Al-Ali *et al.* 2001; Morawska 2001; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2002; Snel *et al.* 2006). Among others, studies on transnational kinship and the ways in which family networks and relationships are modified in cross-boarding social spaces have received major attention. In many families living transnationally—when members live in different countries[47]—becomes the norm with their own special strategies for balancing geographic distance and familial closeness (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Dreby 2010; Dreby and Atkins 2010; Golbourne *et al.* 2010; Mazzucato and Schans 2011; Boccagni 2012a). In my research, I show that sets of socio-cultural practices enacted before and after return may differ in a significant way. While abroad, the main socio-cultural practices of the highly skilled professionals were cultural consumption and participating in various Belarusian clubs and associations. Although they maintained relationships with their relatives, the visits to Belarus, as they claim, were not frequent in the majority of cases. After return, travelling and visiting friends abroad have become the central ones.

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[47] The following are some examples of transnational families: fathers leaving families behind to work abroad and unite with wife and children later on; children and young people going to (boarding) school abroad and/or studying abroad (sometimes referred to as 'parachute kids' (Ong 1999); family member who provide care for the elderly from abroad (Baldassar 2007; Mazzucato 2007); (single) women working abroad, for instance as maids, having to leave their children behind (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2005; Boccagni 2012a), etc. The boundaries of family and kinship also change over the life-course, but whether individuals forge or maintain some kind of transnational connection at some points of their lives depends primarily on their family relations and connections back home (Levitt and Waters 2002; Espiritu 2003; Smith 2006).

The exposition of migrants to different cultural sources often lead to the development of intermediate cultures, or rather transnational culture[48]. Cultural practices transnationally influence identification by reproducing symbolic meanings in different places. As it was noted by Dwyer (2000, 475), immigrants increasingly construct identities that «cut across fixed notions of belonging». In this sense, transnational identities result from combination of migrants' origins with the identities they acquire in their host countries, and may seem to be 'double identities'. As Portes (2000, 254) states, «what common people have done, in response to the process of globalization, is to create communities that sit astride political borders and that, in a very real sense, are 'neither here nor there' but in both places simultaneously».

Migrants, thus, are viewed as able to negotiate their places in society (Cassarino 2004). However, some authors argue that transnationalism produces «refugees without home or host», as loyalty to more than one state has historically elicited negative public reaction (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). Moreover, some studies prove that the increased spatial mobility and flexibility generate counter-movements of spatial anchorage and bring negative consequences (Papastergiadis 2000; Ley 2004). Here it is worth to mention may be the earliest description of being 'transnational'—I refer here to Park's 'marginal man'[49].

> He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused. […] It is the mind of the marginal man that the moral turmoil, which new cultural contacts occasion, manifests itself in the most obvious forms. It is the mind of marginal man—where the changes and fusions of culture are going on—that we can best study the processes of civilization and of progress (Park 1928, 892-893).

One of the implications of transnational identity formation is that the 'meaning of home' has been changing and evolving. Several studies on home (Salih 2002; Mack 2004; Wiles 2008; Boccagni 2009, 2010) confirm that conceptions of home are not static but dynamic processes, «involving the acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing,

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[48] However, they do not always lead to consistent and homogeneous syntheses, but often remain fragmented and structured within themselves (Canclini 2000; Ang 2004). Literature about 'creolization' or 'hybridization' provides manifold evidence of cultural transformation processes resulting from the encounter of different culture (Baumann 1996; Hannerz 1996).

[49] The concept of 'marginal man' has not be confused with Simmel's 'stranger' (Levine 1979). The marginal man differs from the stranger because he is a cultural hybrid, «never quite willing to break […] and not quite accepted» suffering from spiritual instability (Park 1928, 892), while Simmel's stranger does not want to be assimilated and that is why he is a potential wanderer with freedom to come and go (Simmel, transl. in Wolff 1950, 402).

and moving homes» (Al-Ali and Koser 2002, 6). In fact, several scholars have challenged the view that return migration is the natural ending point of the migration cycle, or the equivalent of 'going home' (Koser and Black 1999). The imagined or real 'home' left behind might be changed upon return and the return migrants themselves are likely to have changed through their stay abroad (Ghanem 2003). In her research on home construction among highly mobile professionals, Nowicka has claimed that, «homes of transnational people are not only where they are at the moment, they are also where and when they potentially are, and they reflect and bind the past as well» (Nowicka 2007, 83). I largely confirm it in my own research—emigration and then return play a crucial role in construction of meaning of home and its further transformation. As I show in the chapter 5, the locally oriented highly skilled returnees feel at home *only* in Belarus, while the transnationally oriented ones are likely to have multiple homes and consider them both mobile and interchangeable.

Defining social and transnational identity as a fluid rather than rigid characteristic brings up the idea of a fluctuating national identity depending on multiple factors operating in different nations, such as contexts and relationships with other social actors. In this regard, many scholars link the emergence of transnational culture and diffusion of transnational cultural practices to the development of cosmopolitanism[50]. It is believed that the dissolution of borders and increase in global interdependence generate new cognitive stances, which can be used to create relationships based on openness and respect for people from different cultural backgrounds (Hannerz 1990; Nussbaum 1996; Jones 1999; Hiebert 2002; Roudometof 2005; Beck and Sznaider 2006). Already in Park we find this statement:

> Migration as a social phenomenon must be studied not merely in its grosser effects, as manifested in changes in custom and in the mores, but it may be envisaged in its subjective aspects as manifested in the changed type of personality, which it produces. When the traditional organization of society breaks down, as a result of contact and collision with a new invading culture, the effect is, so to speak, to emancipate the individual man. […] The emancipated individual invariably becomes in a certain sense and to a certain degree cosmopolitan (Park 1928, 887).

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[50] The word 'cosmopolitan' comes from a Greek word *kosmo-polite* that literally means «the citizen [politis] of the world [cosmos]» (Delanty 2000; Cheah 2006). The origins of cosmopolitanism lie in an essentially moral view of the individual as having allegiances to the wider world, while later it acquired a political significance—cosmopolitanism became linked with the universalism of modern western thought and with political designs aimed at world governance (Delanty 2006).

That is, 'cosmopolitanism' arises through cultural contact and its interior elaboration by an individual. Undoubtedly, the growth and proliferation of transnational cultures and social networks facilitate the establishment of cosmopolitan identities (Hannerz 1990; Kwok-Bun 2002). Hence, the more people have relationships with 'others' the more solid experiential basis for a cosmopolitan outlook they have. However, not every international relationship is transnational, nor every transnational experience generates cosmopolitan attitudes (Beck 2002). In order to speak about cosmopolitanism, we have to deal with a transformation in self-understanding and self-positioning in relation to the world. It is concerned with the identifying processes of self-transformation arising out of the encounter with others in the context of global concerns (Delanty and He 2008). Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish between normative and operative cosmopolitanisms (Beck and Sznaider 2006)—some practices, though transnational, may account only for its 'mundane' version[51].

In this work, transnationalism, roughly, is understood as the involvement of individuals in cross-border relationships and mobility (though the circulation of ideas, capital, and people shapes the character of life even for those who are relatively immobile) (Bernal 2004). Cosmopolitanism, in contrast, is conceived as a particular worldview characterized by the prospect of global democratization, the capacity to mediate between different cultures, and the decentring of the values (Roudometof 2005; Mau *et al.* 2008). That is, the relationship between transnationalism and cosmopolitanism is not linear. Rather, participating in various transnational practices is an indispensable but insufficient condition for being cosmopolitan. Moreover, «transnational experiences can also trigger a retreat to non-universalist values and ways of life» (Roudometof 2005, 128). Some kind of cultural re-elaboration of acquired transnational experience is required to individuals to be defined cosmopolitans. As Hall (2002, 26) has put it, «cosmopolitanism requires the ability to draw upon and enact vocabularies and discourses from a variety of cultural repertoires». Hence, I argue that there should be a sharp distinction between cross-border relationships and activities along transnational social spaces at one side, and cosmopolitan attitudes manifested in people's opinions, attitudes, and values on the other side.

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[51] According to Skrbis *et al.* (2004, 130), «indicators of mundane or unreflexive forms of cosmopolitanism include: the types of food one consumes, consumption of heavily packaged or mediated cultural and tourist experiences, and the unreflexive consumption of ethnic 'styles' in dress or music. […] Such expenditures of time and resources involve merely cursory commitment to genuine cosmopolitan attitudes».

As previously stated, in this research I focus on a mix of material and non-material assets imported by the highly skilled returnees alongside with their transnational ties with the ex-host societies. I argue, that some returnees appear to be carriers of socio-cultural remittances (practices, ideas, and norms) that contribute to the both fusion and divergence of 'Eastern' and 'Western' trajectories in the post-socialist space. Moreover, I show that in several cases, there are cosmopolitan values and attitudes to be imported and negotiated. My challenge, thus, is to discover what processes and factors underlie the emergence of socio-cultural remittances, how this phenomenon is articulated and interpreted by the returnees themselves, and to what extent transnational involvement leads to adoption of cosmopolitan values and attitudes. I discuss the issues relative to this argument in chapter 6.

Chapter 2. Research context and methods

1. Purpose of study

The aim of this thesis is to provide a contribution to the studies on sending countries by focusing on causes and socio-cultural consequences of return migration of highly skilled emigrants. In order to achieve this aim, I provide a comprehensive description of the post-return experiences of the highly skilled professionals and discuss their own vision of their identities, styles of life, and attitudes. From a methodological perspective I use the case study approach which allows me to perform an in-depth investigation of «how» return migration processes are realized and lived by highly skilled individuals and to highlight a series of real life examples that demonstrate the complexity of the phenomenon.

2. Research context

This research is based on the data collected in the Republic of Belarus (hereafter Belarus) that has been chosen as the case study for several reasons.

First, Belarus is a part of post-socialist Europe characterized by multiple transformation (rather than transition) processes resulting in rather diverse outcomes (King 2000; Flynn and Oldfield 2006; Pickles 2010; Meeus 2016). While many of the former Soviet countries have relatively successfully moved away from one-party rule and planned economies and become solid members of EU community (e.g., Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, the Baltic countries), some others (among which Belarus) have to a certain extent failed in implementing both economic and political reforms. Belarus, at the moment, is one of the closest to EU[52] post-socialist countries, and thus, is much more exposed to the influences from Western democratic and capitalist societies in terms of socio-economic and political relations as well as of considerable people's mobility. Hence, Belarus appeared to be a fertile ground for studying such dynamic phenomenon as migration and return migration in particular.

Second, Belarus has consistent flows of highly educated people to the main post-industrial regions (Yeliseyeu 2012). In Belarus, the share of persons with tertiary education is about 14% of the total population, while the share of emigrants with tertiary education is

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[52] I refer here not only to geographical proximity, but also to shared European historical and cultural heritage.

over 25% (Chubrik and Kazlou 2012; Danzer and Dietz 2013). Moreover, Belarus has not any specific return encouragement programme which may distort perception and analysis of highly skilled return migration processes.

Third, Belarus is a sociologically understudied area of the Post-Soviet region which may provide new insights on development of several theoretical concepts and approaches that were developed in other geographical contexts.

Finally, I am intimately connected with Belarus. Due to the command of the Russian language, familiarity with the social context, and extended social and professional networks I had facilitated access to the research field.

Here below I provide a brief overview of the country and its migration flows.

2.1 Socio-demographic overview

According to the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (Belstat) data, the population of Belarus in January 2016 was estimated to be about 9.5 million people. This is a decrease of about 5% (556 thousand people) compared to population in 1999, and a very small increase (about 18 thousand) compared to the beginning of 2015. The majority of the population lives in urban areas (77%). At the beginning of 2015, the population age distribution was roughly the following: 1.6 million young people under 15 years old; 5.5 million people between 15 and 64 years old; and 2.3 million people above 64 years old.

The sex ratio of the total population was 0.869 (869 males to 1000 females) which is lower than global sex ratio (approx. 1016 males to 1000 females).

In 2015, about 82 thousand marriages were registered, while almost 33 thousand families divorced. Compared with 2014, the number of registered marriages has decreased by 2.3%, while that of divorces by 5.4%.

In 2015 the natural increase was slightly negative, as the number of deaths exceeded the number of live births by 621. Reducing the number of deaths was observed in almost all regions of the country and the capital.

The majority nationality[53] in Belarus is Belarusian (83.7% of the total), while Russians, Polish, and Ukrainians are the second (8.3%), the third (3.9%), and the fourth (1.7%) respectively largest nationalities (Belstat 2009). Belarus is a bilingual country, with Russian and Belarusian being the two equal official languages. Although in the recent years

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[53] Nationality in the official statistics is referred as the self-declared membership in an ethno-national group.

Belarusian language has become popular in mass culture, still, most of the population tends to speak Russian.

2.2 Migration flows

In Belarus it is possible to identify several conceptually different migration flows—internal[54], international (including inward and outward labour migration), forced, and illegal—which are regulated by both national and international legislation on migration[55].

For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus mainly on international migration flows.

Belarus regained its independence in 1991, after the collapse of the USSR. Unlike other former Soviet countries, Belarus has passed the transformation period in a relatively smooth way and with relatively stable economic and political situation (Petrakova 2011). Although Belarus has not ever undergone to mass emigration processes as it has happened in other regions, in 1990s its migration stability has been challenged by both inward and outward flows with the vast majority of immigrants coming from former Soviet republics and kin-migration to Western countries, particularly Germany and Poland (Bara *et al.* 2013). Later, in the period of economic and political rearrangement, the trend changed toward intensifying migratory outflows (mainly to Russia) and diminishing inflows to Belarus (Chubrik and Kazlou 2012).

The quantification of migration flows in Belarus is challenged by imperfect official data regarding international migration. The National Statistical Committee uses data on arrivals/departures to/from Belarus collected by the Interior Ministry's Citizenship and Migration Department. Since the notification of either temporary or permanent departure is

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[54] The level of internal mobility in Belarus is lower than in other developed countries. According to Belstat data (2009), only 2,3% of population moved within the borders of the country. The major internal movements occurred in the late 80' and early 90' after the Chernobyl nuclear accident, when several specific resettlement programmes had been adopted and implemented (Tikhonova 1997; Petrakova 2011).

[55] In the first half of the 1990s Belarus has adopted several laws, which established the basis of the legal regulation of both inward and outward migration in accordance with international law. Nevertheless, Belarusian legislation still lacks comprehensive solutions regulating labour migration, integration of migrants and refugees as well as return and reintegration (MPC 2013). According to the European External Action Service, Belarus is covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy but no action plan is yet in place. Belarus is also a member of the Eastern Partnership but it is rather reluctant in partnership's activities since participates only in its multilateral track. However, Belarus is an active member of the EurAsEC Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Community and cooperates with the European Union states on migration issues at the bilateral level (Bara *et al.* 2013). Moreover, Belarus is state-member of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) created to bring together methods of regulating economic activity and to create favourable conditions for the development of direct economic, political, and social relations.

not compulsory, many migrants appear reluctant to inform the relevant authorities about their migratory intentions. Hence, the migrants' movements are not recorded in the official statistics (Zhakevich 2009). Moreover, the visa-free regime between CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States[56]) countries and the specific administrative and legal framework between Belarus and Russia (free labour force movement) further complicate the assessment of net migration and the impact of migration processes in Belarus (Yeliseyeu 2012; Bara *et al.* 2013).

Nevertheless, according the official Belstat data (Fig. 3), in the 2000s Belarus has experienced net positive migration balance[57].
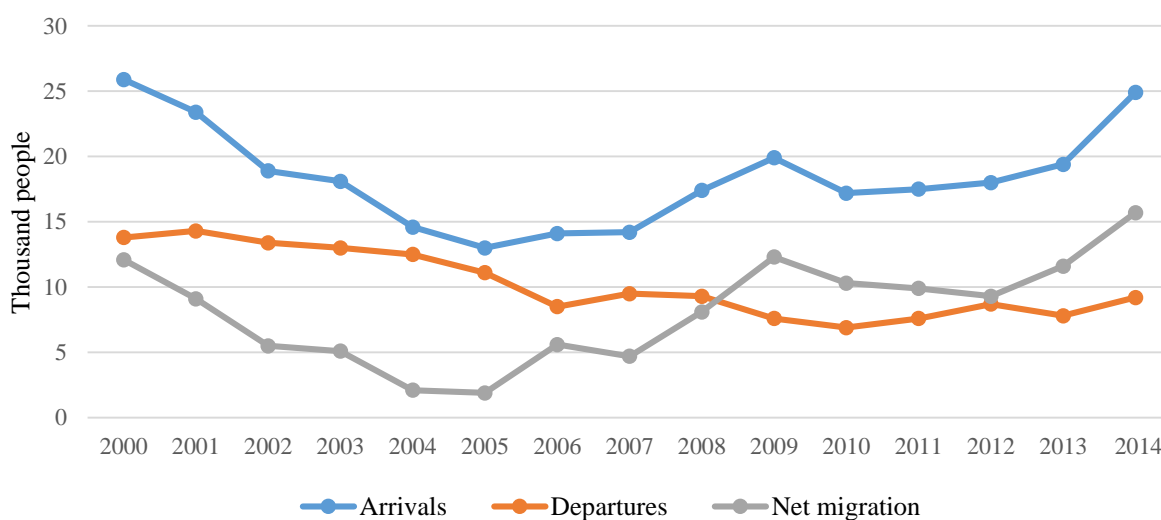
Figure 3. Inward and outward migration flows to and from Belarus, 2000-2014
Source: National Statistical Committee

Inward migration flows

In 2009, the total number of foreign-born people in Belarus was almost 927 thousand (9.8% of the total population), while the number of foreign citizens was much less—about 142 thousand (1.5% of the total population). The reason for this discrepancy lies mainly in the administrative consequences of the USSR dissolution—the majority of the foreign-born population is originating from former Soviet republics but having Belarusian citizenship (MPC 2013).

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[56] At present the CIS unites Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.

[57] Out of all post-Soviet countries Belarus and Russia were the only countries to have positive migration inflows in the 2000s (MPC 2013).

According to the official data, in the period from 2000 to 2014, Belarus received 276.5 thousand international migrants, among which 232.2 thousand (about 84%) were citizens of CIS countries. A particular increase of immigration flows occurred in 2013-2015 due to instable political situation in the Eastern regions of Ukraine, when more than 100 thousand Ukrainian citizens came to Belarus. Since Ukraine was (is) not formally in a war, migrants from Ukraine do not hold refugee status.

In the table below (Tab. 1), I provide the data on labour immigration stocks in Belarus according to gender, country of citizenship (the countries with at least 500 migrants in at least one year taken in consideration), and working position declared for the residence.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
TOTAL, among which:	*8434*	*8781*	*22 497*	*37 868*	*31770*
Gender					
Males	*7663*	*7973*	*16425*	*27503*	*23780*
Females	*771*	*808*	*1755*	*4785*	*4671*
Country of citizenship					
Ukraine	*3423*	*2854*	*6928*	*17778*	*14045*
China	*749*	*1257*	*3020*	*4765*	*7225*
Russian Federation	*n/a*	*n/a*	*n/a*	*4546*	*2209*
Uzbekistan	*574*	*646*	*1280*	*1527*	*1707*
Turkey	*557*	*544*	*1336*	*1279*	*675*
Lithuania	*848*	*904*	*1218*	*1071*	*637*
Kazakhstan	*n/a*	*n/a*	*n/a*	*1034*	*653*
Vietnam	*178*	*153*	*599*	*867*	*356*
Moldova	*412*	*491*	*511*	*459*	*297*
Georgia	*101*	*257*	*462*	*785*	*493*
Position held					
Managers and qualified specialists	*3767*	*3011*	*3504*	*5500*	*6521*
Service, retail, agriculture, construction and other workers	*4667*	*5770*	*14676*	*26288*	*21930*

Table 1. Labour immigration stocks in Belarus, 2011-2015
Source: Interior Ministry's Citizenship and Migration Department

Among labour migrants, Ukrainian, Chinese, Russian, Uzbek, Turk, and Lithuanian citizens constitute the largest groups. As it is evident from the Tab. 1, inward migration flows to Belarus are predominantly male and low-skilled—the construction, trade and agriculture sectors are the main sources of employment. According to Belstat (2009), only 23.2% of immigrants have higher education.

Outward migration flows

The official data on the number of international migrants drastically differs from the experts' estimations. That is, according to the Migration policy centre (2013), around 2012 almost 500 000 Belarusian-born people resided abroad; almost half of them resided in the European Union. However, if taken only Belarusian citizens, the numbers are much smaller—Eurostat data show that about 80 000 Belarusian citizens legally reside in the European Union.

The direction and composition of emigration flows varied during the transformation period. In early 1990s the most popular destinations were Israel (97% of all permits for departure in 1990; 32% in 1992; 37%) and the USA (1% of all permits for departure in 1989; 57% in 1992; 13% in 1996). From late 1990s also Germany became attractive for Belarusian emigrants: while in 1989 only 0.3% of all emigrants from Belarus left to Germany, the share increased from 5.8% in 1996 to 22% in 2009) (Mansoor 2007; Petrakova 2011).

The official statistics show high emigration intensity to non–CIS countries in the end of the 1990s and its stabilisation towards the end of the 2000s. In contrast, the Eurostat data indicate that the number of Belarusian citizens living in the EU increased considerably within this period, particularly in Germany, Italy, and the Czech Republic (Bobrova *et al.* 2012). According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (2015), emigrant stock amounted to 1,485.3 thousand, or almost 16% of Belarus' population in 2015. In the Fig. 4, the distribution of emigration stocks is presented according destination region (country): 4.1—the main world regions; 4.2—major destination countries aside EU and CIS; 4.3—CIS countries; and 4.4—EU countries.

The differences between various estimations might be connected to the Belarusian administrative system (mentioned previously), in which a person can contemporaneously maintain her permanent residence in Belarus and obtain a residence permit elsewhere. In this way, the data on departures and residence abroad are not completely reliable.

While in the post-Soviet transformation period the reasons to emigrate where mainly ecological and ethno-political (Petrakova 2011), during the last decades, economic motivation has become prevalent (Chubrik and Kazlou 2012). Relying on national opinion poll data, a study conducted in 2009 by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and its

partners, showed that almost 20% of Belarusian citizens would like to leave the country[58]. It also revealed that economic[59] and social[60] factors were predominant in the respondents' accounts for emigration (Haiduk *et al.* 2009). Thus, labour migration is of particular importance for Belarus.
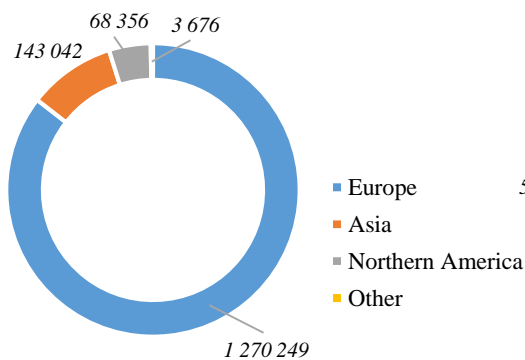
Fig. 4.1
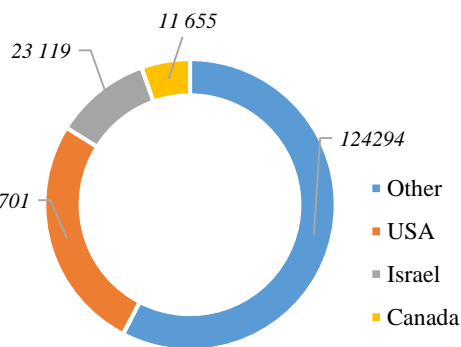
Fig. 4.2
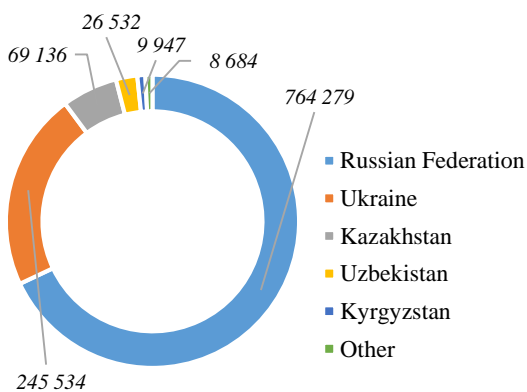
Fig. 4.3
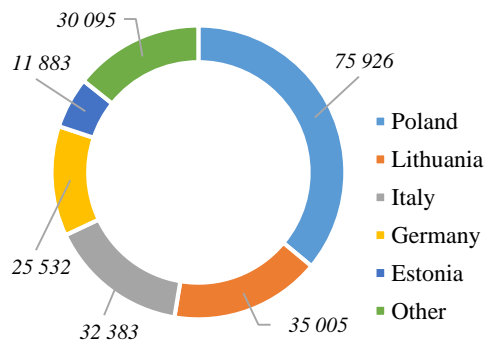
Fig. 4.4

Figure 4. Belarusian emigrants stock: destinations
Source: UN population division (2015 update).

As some researchers claim, labour emigration from Belarus is a relatively unofficial and hidden phenomenon (Chubrik and Kazlou 2012), with roughly four kinds of flows: (1) unregistered[61] labour migration to Russia; (2) international students who go abroad for study reasons, remain there also to work, and thus, are not registered as labour migrants; (3) legal and registered labour migration; and (4) illegal labour migration (for example over-staying

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[58] These results have been confirmed by research conducted by Gallup (2010-2012), according to which 17% percent of adults in Belarus desire to migrate to another country permanently.

[59] E.g., the possibility to improve own material status or to acquire better job position.

[60] E.g., better social protection, higher quality of education and health care.

[61] The freedom of labour force mobility between Belarus and Russia permits migrants not to register themselves as neither emigrants nor immigrants.

with visas for tourism) and other forms of migration (e.g., family reunification) leading to employment abroad.

According to the official records, the main recipients of the labour force from Belarus are Russia and the United States of America. The composition of labour emigration flows is presented in Tab. 2[62].

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
TOTAL, among which:	*5522*	*6534*	*5715*	*5441*	*6328*
Gender					
Males	*3914*	*4589*	*3996*	*4477*	*4856*
Females	*1608*	*1945*	*1719*	*964*	*1472*
Country of destination					
Russian Federation	*4237*	*5369*	*4916*	*4784*	*5359*
The United States of America	*828*	*452*	*303*	*281*	*382*
Poland	*224*	*341*	*189*	*106*	*150*
Germany	*68*	*225*	*192*	*118*	*92*
Lithuania	*8*	*20*	*5*	*43*	*118*
Finland	*n/a*	*n/a*	*n/a*	*35*	*102*
The United Arab Emirates	*87*	*67*	*45*	*35*	*70*
Position held					
Managers and qualified specialists	*2036*	*1616*	*692*	*524*	*202*
Service, retail, agriculture, construction and other workers	*3486*	*4918*	*5023*	*4917*	*6126*

Table 2. Labour emigration flows from Belarus, 2011-2015
Source: Interior Ministry's Citizenship and Migration Department

The emigration patterns in Belarus are sensible to both gender and level of education—men with secondary education (builders, specializes workers, etc.) prefer Eastern destinations such as Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan; the majority of migrants moving toward the European Union and North America are female with tertiary education degree. To some extent, Belarus faces the challenge of the 'highly educated brides' drain (Shakhotska 2009). Labour emigration, on average, is an option for males, but it is possible to assume that women follow other migration paths, e.g., international marriage as well as education. In this study, women account for one fourth of the participants and to some extent confirm that assumption since all of them went abroad either for study reasons or to follow their spouse.

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[62] The countries of destination with at least 50 migrants in at least one year are taken in consideration.

Generally, emigrants are more educated, better skilled and more economically active compared to immigrants (Chubrik and Kazlou 2012). The share of people with tertiary education among emigrants between 2000 and 2010 varied from 29.6 to 37.2%, and during the last five years has stayed around 36%; almost half of them choose Western destinations (Belstat 2009; Danzer and Dietz 2013). According to Bardak (2010), the brain drain contributes 2.5% of total staff outflow from research, universities and colleges; academic and teaching staff who emigrated in early 2000s settled mainly in Russia, Germany, the United States, Canada, Poland, and the United Kingdom.

Although a considerable number of Belarusians would like to emigrate (roughly one fifth of the total population according two studies cited previously), there is much less information regarding labour migrants' long-term intentions. According to the results of the project *Costs and Benefits of Labour Mobility between the EU and the Eastern Partnership Partner Countries[63]*, most people who start migration processes think of returning to Belarus one day. In fact, return migration to Belarus is growing but mostly because of return of international students completed their degrees in universities abroad. Although Belarus has already elaborated a draft version of a law for encouragement of return migration (including a set of provisions for integration support for those who have Belarusian roots), return migration to Belarus is far from being a mass phenomenon.

2.3 Socio-economic development

Belarus is a post-socialist country that after gaining its independence has built a rather complicated economic system, in which both the dominance of the state sector and the principles of liberal market coexist. This model has allowed Belarus to perform strong growth from 2001 to 2008, when, according to World Bank, Belarus's GDP grew on average by 8.3% annually, more rapidly than both the Europe and Central Asia region (5.7%) and CIS countries (7.1%). In the following period of the global economic crisis (2008–2009), the growth slowed down substantially (0.2% in 2009) mainly due to lowered export demand and reduced access to external borrowing. Although real GDP grew modestly in 2013–2014

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[63] Sponsored by European Commission DG EuropeAid and conducted under supervision of several institutional partners, such as IZA - Institute for the Study of labour, CEU - Central European University, and LSE Enterprise. The study included focus-group discussions with former labour migrants or people planning to migrate in the nearest future and expert in-depth interviews with representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations working on migration issues.

(1.6% in 2014), monetary expansion and inflation of about 16%, and significant external refinancing needs continue to contribute to the instability of macroeconomic situation in Belarus.

During the last decades, economic growth translated into significant poverty reduction—poverty rate (national poverty line) declined from 30% in 2002 to about 11% in 2006 and 5.4% in 2009. Due to high inflation rates in early 2010s, the absolute poverty rate increased up to 7.3% in 2011 but gradually improved to 5.5% in 2013 (the World Bank).

The *Human Development Index* (HDI) ranked Belarus at 50th position among 188 countries and territories and put it in the high human development category with the index 0.798 in 2014 (0.683 in 2000). The overall trend is presented in Tab. 3.

	2000	**2005**	**2010**	**2014**
Life expectancy at birth	*67.4*	*68.4*	*70.2*	*71.3*
Expected years of schooling	*13.6*	*14.7*	*15.4*	*15.7*
Mean years of schooling	*8.9*	*9.3*	*12*	*12*
GNI per capita (2011 PPP$)	*7.297*	*10.910*	*15.369*	*16.767*
HDI value	***0.683***	***0.723***	***0.786***	***0.798***

Table 3. Belarus HDI trends
Source: Human Development Report 2015

Labour market situation is an essential element in the process of economic transformation. In the past decade, Belarus has had relatively stable and high labour participation rates and very low unemployment rate[64] (see Fig. 5).
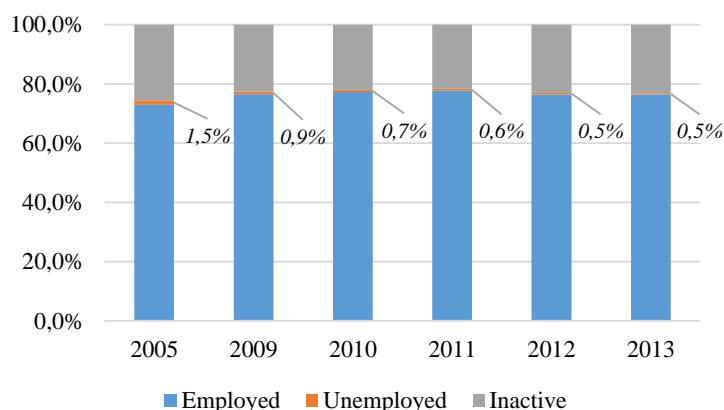
Figure 5. Structure of working age population (15+), %
Source: National Statistical Committee

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[64] Official statistics define unemployment in national terms as the number of persons registered with employment offices. For this reason, the unemployment rate is to a certain extent underestimated. According Bardan (2010), around two-thirds of unemployed people in Belarus are involved in some irregular and unrecorded activity and the rest are family-dependent.

One of the distinctive characteristics of labour market participation in Belarus is the high rate of female participation with the male-female labour force participation ratio of about 0.971 (971 males per 1000 females) in 2007, 0.909 in 2013, and 1.015 in 2014 (Belstat), which is however, common to the whole post-Soviet region (Bardak 2010).

The structure of employment by education has undergone significant changes. From 2000 to 2010 the share of employees with higher education increased by 6.6 percentage points to 25.4%, while the share of employees with primary or lower education fell by 5.4 percentage points to 2.9% (Chubrik and Kazlou 2012). According to Belarus' *Labour Market Risk Report[65],* the country's high educational standards and large highly skilled labour force are the main incentives for investors from a range of sectors. Overall, Belarus scores 59.1 out of 100 for Labour Market risks.

According to the World Bank, since 2008, Belarus has significantly improved its business regulation. In *Doing Business rankings[66]*, Belarus moved from 85th place in 2008 to 43rd in 2015, showing most progress in the areas of business and property registration, licensing, and inspections. In fact, in the last ten years Belarus has adopted several programmes for development of small and medium enterprises and have provided much support to the ICT sector. Beginning from 1996, Belarus has established six free economic zones (FEZ), namely, «Brest», «Vitebsk», «Gomel-Raton», «Grodnoinvest», «Minsk», «Mogilev», that have considerable tax preferences. By the beginning of 2014, 494 organizations were registered as residents of free economic zones in Belarus.

In September 2012, USAID (US Agency for International development) mission in Belarus jointly with United Nations Development Program launched a multi-year project to support the growth and development of private micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) through local economic development strategies in eco-tourism, funding of competitively selected local initiatives, and private sector training and informational support.

In 2005, by a special law, has been established the Hi-Tech Park aiming to support software industry. First residents were registered in 2006. Due to this legislative initiative of

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[65] By Business Monitor International a Fitch Group Company.

[66] The *Doing Business* project (by the World Bank) provides objective measures of business regulations and their enforcement across 189 economies (the data set covers 47 economies in Sub-Saharan Africa, 32 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 25 in East Asia and the Pacific, 25 in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 20 in the Middle East and North Africa and 8 in South Asia, as well as 32 OECD high-income economies). The indicators are used to analyse economic outcomes and identify what reforms have worked, where and why.

the Belarus government, by 2009 the volume of production of software by the Park's resident-companies grew tenfold compared to the whole country's software production in 2005. Currently 144 companies are registered as the Parks residents. Half of Belarus HTP resident-companies are foreign companies and joint ventures. In 2015, EPAM Systems Inc., a leading global provider of product development and software engineering solutions based in Belarus, was named to Fortune's 100 Fastest-Growing Companies for 2015.

Summing up, despite extensive state control and soviet practices and institutions entrenched into Belarusian economy, the country's economic system has made significant progress in liberalization and marketization—e.g., the private sector accounts for about 30% of the country's economy, there are independent business associations, significant legislative reforms are made. This post-social duality flourishes in the Belarusian economy and is very pronounced in its political system, which is described in the following section.

2.4 Political system

Belarus is a striking example of a 'hybrid' or 'electoral authoritarian' regime—neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian[67]—in the post-socialist region (e.g., Diamond 2002; Korosteleva 2004; Krastev 2012; Manaev 2014).

After regaining its independence in 1991, Belarus declared democracy and rule of law as its constitutional principles. According to the Constitution, Belarus is a presidential republic with a bicameral parliament; it has institutionalized elections, all-level representation, and no amendments are possible without popular consent. Nevertheless, according to various political scientists, the country is ruled by increasingly authoritarian leadership of its president—Alexander Lukashenko (e.g., Eke and Kuzio 2000; Korosteleva *et al.* 2003; Silitski 2005; Marples 2005, 2009). Lukashenko assumed the post on 20 July 1994 and re-elected four times in 2001, 2006, 2010, and 2015. In 2005, Belarus was labelled as 'Europe's last dictatorship' by the former USA Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; since then it has become a cliché perpetuated by international media and politicians.

As Silitski convincingly argues, Belarus is a case of 'pre-emptive authoritarianism', where the regime is continuously learning and adopting preventative measures to resist the

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[67] The paradigmatic 'minimalist' definition of democracy is taken into consideration. In this view, democracy is «a political method… a certain type of institutional arrangements for arriving at political—legislative and administrative—decisions» (Schumpeter 1975, 242). Thus, a regime may be defined as democratic, whether the electoral process is institutionalized to be free and fair (Diamond *et al.* 1990).

democratic contagion (2005). By deploying multiple institutional, ideological, cultural, tactical and other tools, « […] Lukashenko's regime has naturally perfected the policy of pre-emption and, more importantly, is constantly learning to survive by emulating consensus between the regime's performance and perceived societal needs» (Korosteleva 2012, 43).

The Belarusian political opposition is represented by a small number of political parties, civic movements, and initiatives, which have no representation in the National Assembly, and appear to be week, fragmented, and scarcely involved in the political process (Charnysh 2015; Freedom House 2015). As Ash (2015) argues, «rather than contesting elections out of office-seeking incentives, opposition parties stage campaigns because foreign funding is directed to successful groups within the opposition». Also according to various media, many opposition organizations get funding and other types of support (e.g., cultural events, headquarters of media organizations) from foreign countries—mainly Lithuania and Poland[68].

Various international organizations promoting democratization and freedoms criticise Belarus for the absence of democracy, the lack of political and individual freedoms and the disregard for human rights. For instance, according to the report of OSCE/ODIHR on the Presidential elections in 2015, «Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments for democratic elections» (2015). Moreover, Belarus' ranking in various indexes on political rights and freedoms is far from being optimistic: it is ranked 157 out of 180 countries in the 2015 World Press Freedom Index; 119 out of 175 countries in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2014; while Freedom House has evaluated political rights and civil liberties in Belarus with 6.5 (1 being the freest and 7 the least free). Nevertheless, all these evaluations are made mainly by using Western standards and metrics for democracy, which do not take into account historical, ideological, and social aspects of the Belarusian society and its relationship with democracy. According to multiple studies, the post-Soviet societies in general, and the Belarusian one in particular have several peculiarities (e.g., inadequate and uneven reformation of economic, political and legal spheres; the disappointment by liberalism and new democratic institutions in the mid-1990s; divergent political and social values and behaviours) that make authoritarian regimes to be

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[68] http://belarusdigest.com/story/vilnius-new-mecca-belarusian-shoppers-and-activists-13258
   https://www.rt.com/politics/poland-belarus-opposition-sponsorship-310/
   http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/06/world/europe/06iht-poland06.html?_r=0
   http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/20/belarus-opposition-music-festival-poland-basowiszcza

not only accepted but even encouraged[69] (Korosteleva 2004, 2012; Titarenko 2003, 2016; Wydra 2008).

What regards the international politics, for many years Belarus has been Russia-dependent in both political and economic terms (and consequently unwelcomed by Europe). Nevertheless, Lukashenko's criticism of Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in 2014, the hosting of diplomatic negotiations during the conflict in Ukraine, as well as the release of political prisoners (opposition leaders) in August 2015 altogether appear to be an attempt to stabilise Belarus' relations with the European Union[70]. Moreover, Belarus is a member of the United Nations (and its multiple programmes and agencies), the World Bank Group, and other international organizations as well as of the Union State of Belarus and Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States[71].

Belarus maintains diplomatic relations with 174 countries of the world and is represented today by foreign offices in 56 countries worldwide.

3. Research approach and methods

The intent of this research is to explore the complexities of highly skilled returnees' lifestyles and to understand multiple dimensions of their post-return experiences. This kind of social knowledge is achievable through research within the interpretative approach, which focuses on human experiences and the ways people employ to make sense of them (Denzin and Lincoln 2000); and thus, is «less driven by very specific hypotheses and categorical frameworks and more concerned with emergent themes and idiographic descriptions» (Cassell and Symon 1994, 4).

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[69] Some of these peculiarities, or paradoxes, I will discuss in chapter 6 in relation to socio-cultural remittances transmitted by highly skilled returnees into the political sphere.

[70] http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/10/12/belarus-election-idINL8N12B0B220151012

[71] According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus
(http://mfa.gov.by/en/organizations/membership/)

Within this research, I aim to unfold the meanings underlying the participants' experiences, feelings, and perspectives, by seeing any situation and experience as unique and focusing on its wholeness rather than its parts, and by taking in concern context-related issues. Thus, I use qualitative research methods, which permit to «study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them» (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 3). I rely, basically, on two research methods—document analysis and in-depth interviews with their subsequent qualitative analysis[72] that are described in the sections below, while the overall representation of the research methodology is provided in Fig. 6.
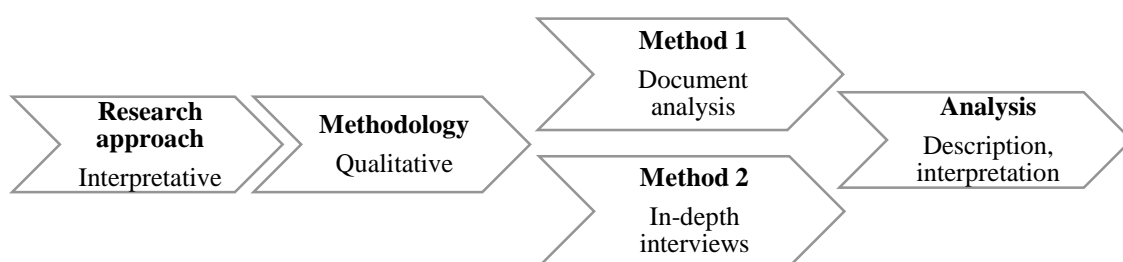
Figure 6. Research methodology

3.1 Document analysis

Qualitative document analysis method has been used to analyse the public opinion on emigration and return migration issues in Belarus (RQ1). Since there are limited (almost non-existent) official data and information about the perception of emigration and return migration processes in the Belarusian society, I have decided to use informal sources of open data such as spontaneous[73] online discussions (forums) and to qualitatively analyse them.

Qualitative document analysis is a powerful method particularly applicable to qualitative studies, in which rich descriptions of a phenomenon are needed (Stake 1995; Mayring 2000; Bowen 2009). In contrast to classical content analysis, which «comprises techniques for reducing texts to a unit-by-variable matrix and analysing that matrix quantitatively to test hypotheses» (Ryan and Bernard 2000, 785) and «concentrates on directly and clearly quantifiable aspects of text content, and as a rule on absolute and relative frequencies of words per text or surface unit» (Titscher *et al.* 2000, 55), qualitative content

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[72] Strictly speaking, both methods belong to a bigger group of qualitative content analysis that can be applied to any kind of recorded communication, e.g., transcripts of interviews, discourses, protocols of observations, video tapes, documents (Mayring 2000).

[73] I refer to forums that have been created by Internet-users without any intervention of a researcher.

analysis applied to documents permits to take account not only of content as it is, but also of its latent contexts and structures of sense (Mostyn 1985; Mayring 2000; Bryman 2004). This is of particular importance for online discussions used as objects of analysis, since they have interactional structure (hence, the context of discussion and interaction should be considered) and informal nature (the use of informal language, slang, and double senses make particularly difficult and ineffective quantitative procedures).

Online forum consists of asynchronous text interactions on a topic specified by the initiator of the forum. Usually, forums are public and any person can join the discussion after registration to the online platform. The online context is anonymous—forum-users use nicknames and rarely provide the community with their personal data[74]. Thus, forums are a source of substantial amounts of publicly available and lost-cost data (Anderson and Kanuka 1997; Mann and Stewart 2000; Im and Chee 2006; Hookway 2008). What is more, data processing in this method is simplified, since online forums have textual form by nature (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). Summing up, online forum analysis enables access to rich, descriptive and contextually situated data otherwise removed from the view of researchers.

3.2 In-depth interviews

The second part of this research (RQ 2, 3, and 4) aims to provide a comprehensive and rich description of subjective experiences of highly skilled return migrants. For this purpose, I have chosen the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore «how they understand their world, i.e. what everyday concepts and interpretation they use to make sense of it» (Blaikie 2009, 139). Face-to-face conversations permitted me to collect data, which «give an authentic insight into people's experience» (Silverman 2006, 118) about the topic under investigation.

By relying on semi-structured in-depth interviews, I examine individual experiences of highly skilled returnees and investigate what personal motivations underlie their decision to return home. Moreover, the analysis of the collected narrative talks reveals some aspects regarding their post-return styles of life and socio-cultural consequences their return has on themselves and people surrounding them.

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[74] Personal information about forum-users is often available in their own posts. For instance, gender, age, family status, material conditions, etc.

4. The data collection process

4.1 Public data collection

Online forums on return migration to Belarus are rare; the majority of online discussions are dedicated to emigration issues. However, I found three forums on return migration.

The first is called *«Would you return to Belarus and why?»* from the online information portal *Onliner* (www.onliner.by). This online forum became very popular[75] and many times appeared among hot topics on the main page of the portal. What is more, subsequently, many returnees with whom I met personally for interview mentioned this forum as familiar to them. The forum has a duration of almost three years (from 09.08.2012 to 11.01.2015) and counts 918 pages with 18360 posts from almost five hundred forum-users. I had contacted the portal *Onliner* in order to download the whole forum but it was impossible. So I had to copy each page and insert it to a text processor manually. The same technique I applied to the following online discussions.

The second forum is called *«Who came back to Belarus?»* from a portal *Virtual Ireland* (www.virtualIreland.ru). This forum is much shorter than previous one (lasted from 02.06.2014 to 09.09.2014; counted 7 pages, 105 posts and 27 authors) and relates only to the Belarusian immigrants to Ireland. Besides analysis of the posts, I tried to find some candidates for the second part of my research. For this purpose, I registered myself to the portal and wrote a message, in which I asked for help in searching highly skilled returnees (naturally, I explained who I am and what kind of research I do). Some forum-users replied, but their answers were quite surprising. Although some forum-users wrote themselves a lot of private information about their friends-returnees (names, occupation, family composition), they were very suspicious about me who was interested in them. Actually, I have been suspected of fraud (see Fig. 7) and of working for the president of Belarus (see Fig. 8). I will discuss this sort of suspiciousness in the chapter 3.

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[75] One of the top results in Google if «return to Belarus» is searched.
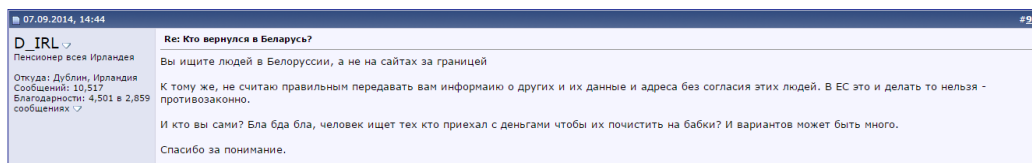
Figure 7. Comment in response to the request for help in finding respondents (1):
«*You have to look for these people in Belarus, not on the websites abroad.*
What is more, I do not think it is right to give you information about other people
without their consent. It is illegal in EU.
And who are you? Blah-blah-blah, a person is seeking for rich people to rob them.
There are many variants.
Thank you for comprehension».
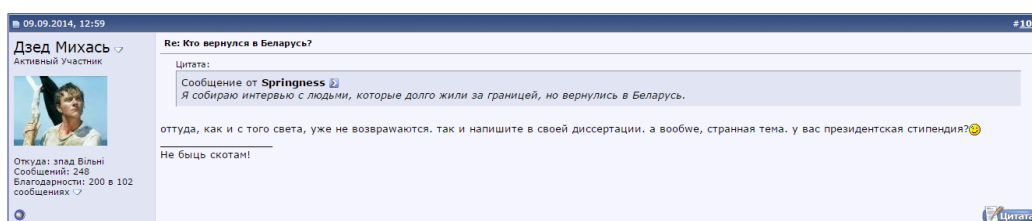
Figure 8. Comment in response to the request for help in finding respondents (2):
«*From there, as from beyond the grave, nobody returns. Just write it in your*
dissertation. In general, it is a very strange topic. Do you have a presidential
scholarship?»

The third online discussion, actually is not a forum, but the comments to the article about a highly skilled returnee, who later gave me an interview. The thread counts 161 comments. To ensure the identity privacy, I cannot reveal the source for the article. It was published on one of the most popular Belarusian online portals.

On the whole, I collected almost 19 thousand posts from hundreds of users. Since the online discussions are anonymous, I had no access to detailed information about them. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace an approximate profile of a typical internet-user basing on the recent research conducted in Belarus[76]. In general, more than a half (58,6%) of the Belarusian population use Internet every day. Among these, more than 80% of people aged from 18 to 39 consider Internet the main source of information. Generally, men use Internet more than women (57,5% and 49,4% respectively). The majority (73,4%) of Internet-users have at least one tertiary degree. Therefore, a typical Internet-user is a man in his early thirties with a tertiary degree.

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[76] By the Information and analytical centre at the administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus.

Of course, not every Internet-user is also a forum-user. The contributors to online discussions are, let say, the most active part of the population of Internet-users. According to the recent research conducted by Emor in Estonia, only 20% of Internet-users write comments. Comment-writers are young—under 35 and less educated.

4.2 Individual data collection

The larger part of my research is based on 43 in-depth semi-structured[77] interviews with highly skilled Belarusian returnees, collected from April to October 2014 in Belarus. The interviews focused on two main topics: a retrospective look on the informants' life abroad and an exploration of their return experiences—from decision-making process to the impressions, feelings and today's lifestyle. The major interest was in how these people think to be changed after having lived abroad and in which way they transmit their new knowledge and experience to other people in Belarus after their return.

Due to the nature of my research, I followed purposive sampling strategy with the expectation that each informant would provide rich information of value to the study. That is, I have used several criteria for selection of informants—a high qualification (e.g. at least one tertiary degree), the length of period spent abroad (5–years minimum), and the deliberateness of the migration decisions, both to emigrate (refugees and children excluded) and to return (illegal immigrants and asylum–seekers' deportation is excluded). Moreover, I tried to apply maximum variation method to select informants with relatively wide range of variation in dimensions of interest—namely, educational and professional background (field of study), type of migration (labour, education, etc.), and gender. The destination country has been considered irrelevant for selection process. Due to limited time frame and resources, all the suitable candidates have been interviewed.

The biggest problem was to find these people, the smaller one—to convince them to talk to me. In my personal network, I had only two potential informants. Facebook became the main channel for finding other informants. I posted several announcements about my research (see Fig. 9) and shared it with all my contacts.

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[77] An interview guide has been used (see Appendix 1).

Figure 9. Images used on Facebook for informants' search

Some of informants have been recommended to me by my friends, others, surprisingly, have been contacted me spontaneously. I managed to reach three informants through mass media—they had been already interviewed by some Internet information portals. Three potential informants refused to participate in this research for different reasons. Interestingly, an expected «snowball» has not actually happened. Only four informants gave me contacts of another four returnees. Therefore, the phenomenon of return migration appears to be rather limited.

The participants' names are substituted by random pseudonyms from a list of Russian names available online. Participants were notified that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. All the participants have signed a consent of respondent[78].

The interviews were conducted at informants' homes as well as in public places. The average length of the interviews was about two hours; the interviews have been audio–recorded. Forty interviews were conducted in Russian, three in Belarusian, one informant refused to be recorded.

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[78] The consent of respondent form has been included into the presentation letter from the supervisor. See the form in Appendix 2.

4.2.1 Informants' backgrounds overview

Education. All the informants have at least one level of tertiary education and/or work as professionals; all of them spent at least 5 years abroad.

Qualification. Distribution by qualification field is the following: six informants are qualified in sciences (mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, health, etc.), four informants have humanities qualification (arts, philosophy, etc.), 13 are specialized in IT-sphere (computer sciences and information technologies), 19 are qualified in social sciences (economics, psychology, business, marketing, political sciences, etc.).

Host countries[79]. The host countries are in total 19 and belong to various world regions: Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North America, Eastern Asia, Central Asia, and Northern Africa. The most popular destinations, however, are those of the Western Europe and North America.

Gender. Among the informants there were 12 women and 31 men aged from 25 to 57 years (34 years is the median age).

Family status. Ten informants were engaged in a sentimental relationship, 21 were married, while 12 were single.

In the table below, I provide a short descriptive summary about the people who participated in this research including the main characteristics pertinent to this research (see Tab. 4). For privacy reasons, the exact age, countries, and time spent abroad are indicated approximately. In the next section, short biographic descriptions for the participants of this research are provided.

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[79] Based on the United Nations Statistics Division geoscheme that does not imply any assumption regarding political or other affiliation of countries or territories. The geoscheme for Europe is divided into four groups: **Eastern Europe** (Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Ukraine), **Northern Europe** (Åland Islands, Channel Islands, Denmark, Estonia, Faeroe Islands, Finland, Guernsey, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Jersey, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sark, Svalbard and Jan Mayen Islands, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), **Southern Europe** (Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Gibraltar, Greece, Holy See, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and **Western Europe** (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Switzerland). Moreover, for the purposes of this research, several other regions have been taken into consideration: **Northern America** (Bermuda, Canada, Greenland, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, United States of America), **Central Asia** (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Eastern Asia (China, China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, Macao Special Administrative Region, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea), and **Northern Africa** (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Western Sahara).
Source: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm

Pseudonym	Age range	Host country region	Years abroad	Gender
Alisa	31-35	Eastern Europe	5-7	F
Anastasia	26-30	Eastern Europe	5-7	F
Arkadiy	56-60	Western Europe	5-7	M
Arseniy	31-35	Northern America	5-7	M
Artem	31-35	Northern America	8-10	M
Bogdan	36-40	Eastern Europe	5-7	M
Bronislav	46-50	Northern Europe, Eastern Europe	8-10	M
Constantin	36-40	Northern America	5-7	M
Daniil	31-35	Western Europe	8-10	M
Fedor	36-40	Western Europe, North America	5-7	M
Gennadiy	51-55	Eastern Asia	5-7	M
Georgiy	36-40	North America	5-7	M
German	31-35	Eastern Asia	5-7	M
Grigoriy	31-35	Eastern Europe	7	M
Ilya	31-35	Central Europe, Eastern Europe	5-7	M
Innokentiy	41-45	Northern Europe	11+	M
Julia	31-35	Western Europe	5-7	F
Ksenia	36-40	Northern America, Eastern Europe	5-7	F
Kuzma	31-35	Southern, Western, Northern Europe	11+	M
Leonid	46-50	Central Asia	8-10	M
Leontiy	31-35	North America	11+	M
Liubov	36-40	North America	5-7	F
Liudmila	31-35	Eastern/Northern Europe, Northern America	8-10	F
Matvey	31-35	Eastern Europe	5-7	M
Mikhail	36-40	Northern America	8-10	M
Miroslava	31-35	North America	5-7	F
Nickolay	41-45	North America, Eastern Europe	8-10	M
Nikita	36-40	Western Europe	8-10	M
Pavel	31-35	North America	5-7	M
Polina	26-30	Eastern Europe	8-10	F
Roman	26-30	North America	8-10	M
Ruslan	31-35	Western Europe	5-7	M
Sophia	26-30	Eastern Europe	5-7	F
Stepan	31-35	Eastern Europe, Northern Europe	8-10	M
Timofey	26-30	Northern Europe, Western Europe	5-7	M
Timur	26-30	Southern Europe	5-7	M
Varvara	31-35	Southern Europe	5-7	F
Veniamin	31-35	Northern America	5-7	M
Vera	36-40	Northern Africa	5-7	F
Victoria	20-25	Northern Europe	5-7	F
Vladislav	36-40	Western Europe	5-7	M
Yevgeniy	31-35	Eastern Europe	8-10	M
Yury	41-45	Eastern Europe	5-7	M

Table 4. Participants of in-depth interviews

4.2.2 Detailed informants' backgrounds[80]

Alisa. Female, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Alisa studied in Minsk, where received her tertiary degree in social sciences. For several years she has worked in Minsk; later, in her late 20s, she moved to an Eastern Europe country following her husband, native to that country. After several years of living abroad, Alisa decided to return to Belarus for personal reasons. Her husband followed her; they live in Minsk. The couple has no children.

Anastasia. Female, comes from one of the Belarus' regional cities. Anastasia started her tertiary education in Minsk, but after awhile, under some pressure from her parents, she went to continue her studies in social sciences in Eastern Europe. During her sojourn abroad, Anastasia went home fairly often. Despite a successful completion of the degree and several work experiences during the studies, Anastasia found it difficult to find a job that would satisfy her. She returned to Minsk, where actually lives and works. Anastasia has a sentimental relationship.

Arkadiy. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Being in possess of tertiary education and valuable professional experiences in the field of sciences, Arkadiy has been invited to go for work to Western Europe. Although in that period he already had a family (wife and two children), he moved abroad alone. Despite good job conditions, Arkadiy had some difficulties in terms of integration. He visited Belarus as much as it was possible for him. After a considerable period, Arkadiy decided to move his work project to Minsk, where actually lives and works.

Arseniy. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Arseniy started his university studies in Minsk, but after few years (in his early 20s) moved to Northern America for family reasons.   He obtained the degree in IT-sphere and worked in the field for several years. While abroad, he obtained a foreign citizenship. Later, Arseniy decided to look for new experiences in Belarus and returned to Minsk where had no difficulties to find a job. He is engaged into a romantic relationship.

Artem. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Artem obtained his tertiary degree in social sciences in Minsk and had extensive work experience already in the university years. In his mid 20s, Artem moved to Northern America for sentimental reasons. After an initial period, when

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[80] Considering small Belarus' population and a limited number of returnees, I provide only generalized and synthetic information about informants' background and their post-return status in order to not to reveal their identities. The post-return status is described at the moment of interview. 5 informants (Grigoriy, Ksenia, Matvey, Nickolay, Sophia) have not explicitly granted their permission for publication of summarized biographies.

language and labour market difficulties were quite serious, Artem managed to get good job position. He returned to Minsk almost occasionally, after he had sent his resume and had been selected by a foreign company for a position in Belarus. Artem is single.

Bogdan. Male, comes from one of the Belarus' regional cities. Bogdan completed his tertiary education in social sciences in Minsk and worked in his professional field. In that period, he married and got a child. Afterwards, he was invited to a job position in an Eastern European country, where he moved together with the family. While abroad Bogdan had a second child. Some years later, mainly for personal reasons, Bogdan decided to return to Minsk, where he lives and works now.

Bronislav. Male, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Bronislav obtained his tertiary degree in humanities in Minsk. In his late 20s he spent few years in Northern Europe for work reasons, but then resettled in Minsk. He was married but later divorced. In his mid 30s, he went to Northern Europe to continue his studies. After completing the degree, he remained there for work; later, however, he moved to an Eastern European country, where, again, had multiple international professional experiences. Later, Bronislav returned to Minsk for both professional and personal reasons.

Constantin. Male, native to Minsk. Constantin completed his tertiary education in sciences in Minsk and further worked in the IT-sphere. He married and after having moved to Northern America got children. Constantin worked first as an employee, later established his own business. For business reasons, Constantin spends most of his time in Belarus, while the family lives abroad.

Daniil. Male, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Daniil obtained his tertiary degree in sciences in Minsk. In his early 20s he went to Western Europe with his wife as a labour migrant but obtained further degrees too. While abroad, the couple had a child. Daniil had some difficulties in both economic and integration terms, and thus, returned to Belarus to have a better life. Now he lives in Minsk region; has various jobs in Minsk and is a demanded professional.

Fedor. Male, native to Minsk. Fedor obtained his tertiary degree in IT-sphere and worked for several years in Minsk. He went to Western Europe in his late 20s together with the wife for work reasons. After few years, he moved to Northern America where he worked for several years. After the collapse of the company he had been working for, Fedor had some difficulties in finding another suitable job. Meanwhile, the relationship with the wife led to

divorce. After return to Belarus, Fedor continues to work in his professional field. He is also engaged into a sentimental relationship.

Gennadiy. Male, native to Minsk. Gennadiy has received his tertiary degree in sciences in Minsk where worked for a couple of decades. In that period, he married and had three children. In his late 40s, Gennadiy went to Eastern Asia as a good job position was offered to him. While living abroad, Gennadiy travelled to Belarus as much as it was possible; the family left behind visited him as well. During his stay in Eastern Asia, Gennadiy improved his knowledge and experience that resulted in obtaining a job position in Belarus that corresponded to his degree and interests; thus, he returned to Minsk.

Georgiy. Male, native to Minsk. Georgiy completed his university studies in IT-sphere in Minsk. During that years, he married (Liubov in this thesis) and later the couple had a child. After some years of work in Minsk, Georgiy wanted to go permanently abroad; unexpectedly, in his mid 20s, he was offered a work contract in Northern America, that actually he accepted. The family reached him after some time had passed. After a considerable period, the family decided to return to Minsk for both personal and family reasons. Georgiy is employed in his professional field on a managerial position.

German. Male, was born and raised in Minsk. German obtained his tertiary degree in sciences in Minsk, but later, in his mid 20s, decided to continue his education abroad (in Eastern Asia). After the successful completion of the superior degree, German, for personal and economic reasons, decided to return to Belarus. In a short time, he was offered a good job position, that dissuaded him from a further migration. German is in his second marriage, is raising two children.

Grigoriy. No explicit permission.

Ilya. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Ilya obtained several tertiary degrees in social sciences from several universities in Belarus and abroad, but then, in his mid 20s, he decided to continue his education in Eastern Europe. After the successful completion of the superior degree, Ilya was offered a job position in another Eastern European country, where he worked for few years. Thereafter, for personal reasons, Ilya decided to return to Minsk, where he actually lives and work. Ilya has a sentimental relationship.

Innokentiy. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Innokentiy received his tertiary degrees in sciences in Minsk. In order to have better career opportunities, in his late 20s, he went to Northern Europe, where, in fact, reached high job positions in his field. After more than ten-

years-period, Innokentiy for both personal and professional reasons returned to Minsk, where lives and works now. Innokentiy is in his second marriage, has a child.

Julia. Female, born and raised in Minsk. Julia obtained her tertiary degree in humanities in Minsk. Thereafter, in her mid 20s, she decided to continue her studies in Western Europe. After several work experiences abroad and in Belarus, Julia is involved in several work projects in Belarus. At the moment of the interview, Julia appeared quite unsure whether she lives abroad or in Belarus, where, nevertheless, she stays for long periods.

Ksenia. No explicit permission.

Kuzma. Male, raised in Minsk. Kuzma started his tertiary education in humanities in Minsk, but completed several degrees in the same field in different universities across Southern and Western Europe. After many years spent abroad and multiple work experiences, Kuzma decided to return to Belarus in order to realize himself better in professional terms. He lives and works in Minsk. Kuzma is involved into a romantic relationship.

Leonid. Male, raised in Minsk. After having completed his secondary education in Minsk, Leonid moved to Central Asia, where he obtained a tertiary degree in sciences and married. Later, after few years of work experience the family returned to Belarus. Thereafter, Leonid went for awhile in Western Europe for work reasons, but then realized that the best option for his family would be the life in Belarus (Minsk), where they live now. Leonid runs his own company.

Leontiy. Male, born and raised in Minsk. After completion of secondary school, Leontiy moved to Northern America to obtain his tertiary degree in IT-sphere. In many years that he stayed abroad, Leontiy changed various job position and places of residence. In his early 30s, for family reasons, he decided to return to Minsk. He is employed abroad and works at distance. Leontiy is single.

Liubov. Female, born and raised in Minsk. Obtained her tertiary degree in social sciences in Minsk and worked in the field. After having married, together in her husband (Georgiy in this thesis), she wanted to emigrate. Later, however, Georgiy was offered a good job position in Northern America; Liubov followed him together with their child. Due to strong homesickness and some integration problems, Liubov aimed to return to Belarus as soon as possible. In fact, after some years she returned to Minsk with a child, while Georgiy reached them later. Liubov is a highly requested specialist in her field.

Liudmila. Female, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. In her teenage, Liudmila followed her parents who emigrated to Eastern Europe. She received several degrees in social sciences in different countries of Eastern and Northern Europe and Northern America. Together with her husband (Stepan in this thesis), whom she knew abroad, they lived for several years in different countries, but then, for both personal and family reasons, to live in Belarus. Liudmila holds a position in an international company.

Matvey. No explicit permission.

Mikhail. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Mikhail completed his tertiary degree in IT-sphere in Minsk. After having married, in his late 20s, Mikhail and his wife moved to Northern America where the couple had a child. After several years spent abroad, Mikhail divorced and experienced some difficulties on the labour market. Hence, he decided to return to Minsk, where he was offered a good job position.

Miroslava. Female, born and raised in Minsk. Miroslava completed her tertiary degree in social sciences in Minsk. During her university studies, Miroslava married and had a child. From her early 20s, she had multiple working experiences and was a highly requested professional. Nevertheless, when her husband decided to go to Northern America for work reasons, she followed him. In the period she spent abroad, Miroslava managed to build her career abroad and to give birth to another two children. Later, the couple decided to return to Belarus for both personal and professional reasons. Miroslava is a successful entrepreneur.

Nickolay. No explicit permission.

Nikita. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Nikita received his tertiary degree in IT-sphere in Minsk. Afterwards, in his early 20s, he moved to Western Europe for work reasons, where later obtained another tertiary degree. After a considerable time spent abroad, Nikita, for mainly personal and sentimental reasons, decided to return to Belarus. He is married, has two children, and runs his own business.

Pavel. Male, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Pavel was a university student when he went to Northern America for family reasons. He completed his tertiary education in social sciences and worked as professional in several organizations. During his sojourn, obtained a foreign citizenship. The decision to return to Belarus has been taken mainly for sentimental reasons that led to the marriage. Later the couple divorced. Pavel has a child. Actually, lives and works in Minsk.

Polina. Female, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Polina studied for few years at university in Minsk, but completed her tertiary degree social sciences in Eastern Europe, where, later, she obtained another degree in social sciences. For several years, Polina was employed but then, due to some difficulties in finding a satisfying job, she decided to return to Belarus. Polina lives and works in Minsk; she is single.

Roman. Male, comes from Minsk. Roman started his university studies in Belarus but obtained a degree in IT-sphere in Northern America, where he moved for work reasons. During the considerable period spent abroad (he has never visited Belarus), he returned to Minsk. Roman is single; had no problems in finding a job in Belarus and works in his professional field.

Ruslan. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Ruslan obtained his tertiary degree in sciences in Minsk. To continue his studies and to have better career possibilities, Ruslan together with his wife and a child went Western Europe. After completion of the degree and the birth of the second child, for family reasons, Ruslan stayed for a brief period in Belarus, but then moved in another Western European country where he was offered a good job position. Later, Ruslan went first to an Eastern European country to move subsequently back to Minsk, where he works on his own entrepreneurial project together with his second wife.

Sophia. No explicit permission.

Stepan. Male, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Stepan started his tertiary education in Minsk, but completed his degree in social sciences in Eastern Europe. There he got acquainted with his wife (Liudmila in this thesis) and together their moved to another Northern European country. After some years, they realized to be willing to raise their children in Belarus, where they subsequently moved. Stepan is involved in several international projects in his field as well as in an entrepreneurial project in Belarus.

Timofey. Male, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Timofey obtained his tertiary degree in sciences in Minsk. Later, in his early 20s, he went to Northern Europe to obtain further tertiary education. After the successful completion of the studies, Timofey got a job position in a Western European country, where he worked in his professional field for few years. At that time, Timofey felt being oppressed by the immigration rules for the scientific researchers, which triggered him seek for shortcuts. At some point an opportunity to develop his own entrepreneurial project in Belarus prevailed upon the other career opportunities and led his return to Minsk. Timofey is engaged into a sentimental relationship.

Timur. Male, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. In his early 20s, Timur went to Southern Europe for work reasons. While abroad, he had considerable professional experience and growth. When, for mainly family reasons, Timur decided to return to Belarus, he was offered a managerial position in a foreign company having business in Belarus. Timur has a sentimental relationship.

Varvara. Female, born and raised in Minsk. Varvara completed her tertiary degree in sciences in Minsk. Afterwards, in her early 20s, she moved to Southern Europe to continue her studies. In the years following the completion of the degree, she continued her professional career in the field in the same country. After many years spent abroad, Varvara decided to return to Belarus for both personal and professional reasons. Actually, she lives and works in Minsk. Varvara is engaged into a sentimental relationship.

Veniamin. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Veniamin completed his tertiary degree in sciences in Minsk. Afterwards, for mainly family and work reasons, he moved to Northern America, where obtained a good job position. Nevertheless, Veniamin had always a plan to return to Belarus that he realized after achieving several economic goals. After return to Minsk, Veniamin married and had a child.

Vera. Female, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Vera obtained her tertiary degree in social sciences in Minsk. After the university studies, she worked in the field for several years. Later she got acquainted with her future husband who invited her to go to his home country in Northern Africa. While living abroad, Vera made a professional career in different from her studies field. After some years, the couple divorced and Vera decided to return to Minsk, where she had no difficulties in finding a job. Vera is single.

Victoria. Female, born and raised in Minsk. Victoria, in her teenage, went abroad (Northern Europe) to obtain her tertiary degree in social sciences. During her studies, Victoria had several working experiences, which, however, had not led to a stable employment. Due to some difficulties regarding the labour market of that country, Victoria preferred to return to Minsk, where in fact, she found a good job position transformed in some time into a managerial one. Victoria has a sentimental relationship.

Vladislav. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Vladislav obtained his first tertiary degree in social sciences in Minsk. Later he decided to receive further education (in Belarus) but for various reasons completed his degree in humanities in Western Europe. Vladislav did not feel himself well in the abroad context, and thus, he returned to Minsk. Vladislav is self-employed; single.

Yevgeniy. Male, comes from one of the Belarus' regions. Yevgeniy emigrated to Eastern Europe to get tertiary education in his late teenage. After the successful completion of the degree in social sciences, for several years Yevgeniy was employed in IT sphere, associated with his professional field. Later, mainly for personal reasons, Yevgeniy returned to Belarus and subsequently, settled in Minsk for work reasons. Yevgeniy is engaged into a sentimental relationship.

Yury. Male, born and raised in Minsk. Yury obtained his tertiary degree in IT-sphere in Minsk. In the years following the completion of degree, Jury worked in various international companies and had his own business. After the birth of a child in his second marriage (in his mid 30s), the family decided to move to Eastern Europe for personal reasons. Due to the nature of his work (self-employment), Yury is not bounded with any country. Nevertheless, in the last years, Yury has spent most of his time in Minsk.

5. Data processing and analysis

5.1 Data transcription and translation

The data collected from the online forums, as I have mentioned before, had already a textual form and did not need to be transcribed. The interviews, in order to be analysed had to be transcribed. Due to time shortages, I transcribed[81] nine interviews; the rest has been analysed in its original audio format. Since all the collected data were in either Russian or Belarusian, the quotations used in the text have been translated in English. The quotes in original language may be provided on request.

5.2 Data analysis

This research assumes a holistic perspective, in which «greater attention can be given to nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context» (Patton 2002, 60). The analysis of both online discussions and interviews has been based on an inductive approach—patterns, themes, and categories of analysis came from the data and had not been imposed prior to data collection and analysis. The process of data analysis has been ongoing and iterative—it has been the cyclical process of studying the data and refining of analytical concepts until the complete comprehension of the studied phenomenon.

Following the inductive approach, I have assigned several non-exclusive labels to various segments of the texts. These labels, referred to various analytic topic emerged during the interviews, later, have been generalised up to thematic micro-codes. At successive stages, as more data were examined, micro-codes moved to a higher level of abstraction and became macro-codes[82]. Afterwards, all the codes have undergone systematic comparisons in order to establish links and logical associations within and between various interviews and their parts. In this way, general patterns of personal experiences have been individuated and analysed.

All the data have been analysed by the software for qualitative research ATLAS.ti 7.

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[81] Express Scribe software has been used.
[82] The lists of codes for both datasets are presented in Appendix 3.

Chapter 3. Public opinion toward migration issues in Belarus

Introduction

Public opinion, most generically, represents the views and attitudes of a public about matters of common interest and public concern (Perrin and McFarland 2011). However, there is no commonly accepted definition of 'public opinion' (Childs 1939, 1965; Davison 1968; Price 1992; Donsbach and Traugott 2008), since the very concept of a 'public' has received different understandings and explanations. One of the first scholars of public opinion, Lippmann (1922, 1927), argued that real public does not exist; rather there is a number of individual private concerns and opinions. In contrast, Dewey (1927), argued that public opinion emerges when people share their individual opinions about public life. This disagreement became known as the 'Lippmann–Dewey Debate'. In this research I follow the optimistic viewpoint of Dewey on people's ability to form ideas about public matters, and understand public opinion as an aggregation of shared views and attitudes about a particular topic of a group of individuals in a certain period of time[83] (de Boer and 't Hart 2007).

The relevance of public opinion is hard to be overestimated, and can be summarized in at least three issues (e.g., Shamir and Shamir 2000; Donsbach and Traugott 2008). First, being a normative force, it contributes to social integration and stability. Second, public opinion research provides access to public agenda and information regarded the relative issues. Third, the results of public opinion research may be used for identifying and evaluating public policies. Within this research, the analysis of public opinion permits to obtain information about the socio-cultural context, in which emigration and return migration occur; and even more important, about how migration behaviours are associated with social values and beliefs. The main value of the public opinion analysis, in this case, is the possibility to determine how various social contextual factors frame individual post-return experiences, lifestyles, and socio-cultural remittances. Additionally, it may provide useful insights for developing specific policies aimed at encouragement of highly-skilled return migration.

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[83] Formation of publics is not an automatic process; rather, it requires several criteria to be satisfied. First, there must be an issue and a significant number of individuals who express opinions on it; second, there must be some kind of a consensus among at least some of these opinions; and, finally, this consensus must exert influence on other groups of society (Crespi 2013). The last criterion makes of public opinion «the power of the group to sway the larger public in its attitude» (Bernays 1928).

In the era of new media and global circulation of information, it is hard to imagine an issue not having its own public opinion. Nevertheless, some topics are discussed more than others. In the last decades, and even more in the last years, the topic of immigration and relative policies practically does not leave the public arena. Public perceptions and representation of immigrants in media may have (and actually have) considerable impacts on political debates and strategies implemented to mitigate existing immigration alerts. The contemporary migration crises in the Middle East and Northern Africa, and generally irregular immigration and refugees' flows attract a lot of attention and stay at the top of public agenda. Nevertheless, these are not the only ones deserving consideration.

Public opinion on return migration is an emerging issue for many countries who are adopting special governmental programmes for returning migrants (e.g., some African countries, China, India). Also in Belarus, there is a pending intention to attract successful nationals from all over the world in order to reform and 'sanitize' the actual economic system. Although Belarusian policy-makers are working on the development of relative normative guideline, none repatriation programme has been adopted yet. What is more, may be the bigger problem Belarus is facing now is not its incapacity to attract highly skilled returnees; rather, its difficulties in dealing with consistent (highly skilled) emigration flows that definitely contribute to the country's brain drain.

Here below, I present the results of two surveys on migration intentions conducted in Belarus in early 2010s'—an official survey by Gallup and unofficial one conducted by the biggest Belarusian information online portal TUT.by.

According to Gallup data[84], seventeen percent of adults in Belarus desire to migrate to another country permanently. In Russia this value is about 14%, while in Ukraine 21%. The main reason for potential emigration is largely economic— the desire to improve standard of living (52% in all former Soviet Union countries). About 13% would like to move because of their children's future, while another 10% want to get a good job or cannot find a job in their own country. Almost in the same period (2011), TUT.by launched an online–survey on migration intentions among Belarusians with almost 25 thousand participants (residing both in Belarus and abroad). 55% of them responded that they would emigrate at the first opportunity; 15% of people claimed that they do not want to go anywhere; 10% felt

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[84] Results are based on aggregated face-to-face interviews with 41,072 adults, aged 15 and older, in 12 countries from 2010 to 2012: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

themselves too old for emigration, 4% were happy to live abroad, and 1% of the respondents intended to return to Belarus[85]. This online research has not followed any scientifically established methodology, and thus, cannot be considered a reliable source of information regarding the population. Nevertheless, the results of both surveys give an idea of the topicality of migration issues in contemporary Belarus—a considerable part of population would like to go abroad either temporarily or permanently. At the same time (though there is no official statistics regarding the return migration to Belarus), it seems that in recent years return became an option for Belarusian emigrants.

In the next sections, I provide a brief overview of international research on public attitudes and opinion toward migration issues, and show how emigrants, stayers, and returnees (as well as their opinions, decisions, and behaviours) are represented in the online public opinion in Belarus. The analysis draws on qualitative content analysis[86] of several thematic online discussions (forums): *«Would you return to Belarus and why?»* from a portal *Onliner* (www.onliner.by), *«Who came back to Belarus»* from a portal *Virtual Ireland* (www.virtualIreland.ru), and comments of several articles about people who returned to Belarus[87]. Forum–contributors cannot stand for the whole population[88] but this analysis may provide useful insights into the kind of narratives and symbols employed by people in Belarus to talk about migration processes and policies.

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[85] Other options as «My own answer» were available.

[86] First, basing on the theoretical background and my research questions, I defined three criteria determining the parts of the text to be taken into consideration: immobility, emigration, and return migration with relative issues on decision-making, dynamics, integration, etc. Afterwards, I followed the inductive approach to category development. For further details, see chapter 2, sections 3-5.

[87] I do not specify the titles of the articles for privacy reasons—some of protagonists of these articles are among the participants of this research.

[88] According to the 1% rule, for every person who posts on a forum, generally about 99 other people are viewing that forum but not posting (McConnell and Huba 2006).

1. Previous research on public attitudes toward migration

Research on public attitudes toward migration issues has a long history. Certainly, in the last decades, research on public opinion in this sphere has gained a particular importance. The development of new media has made possible the public debate on new migration flows as well as on irregular and refugee migration, which plays a significant role in the shaping of national and international migration policies. Discussions on migration policies are vehement in these days—many European countries are on alert for increasing flows of refugees from the Middle East. That is, **im**migration policies are now at the top of the political agendas of many countries. Besides new immigration waves, many countries face long-term challenges of both immigrants' integration into the host societies and internal relations with their own citizens. As a result, social scholars' attention has been turned mainly to receiving countries, which deal with multiple challenges regarding immigration issues.

There is no wonder that in many countries immigration[89] is considered a problem. This idea is sustained by considerable electoral successes of anti-immigration parties (Lubbers *et al.* 2002; Rydgren 2007; van Heerden 2014), restrictive policy initiatives (Hollifield 2000; Geddes 2003; Messina 2007; Ford *et al.* 2015) as well as multiple surveys about public opinion (e.g., Abali 2009 for Germany; Valtolina 2013 for Italy; and Blinder 2015 for Great Britain). In the past decades, social researchers have mainly focused on analysing the determinants of public attitudes toward immigration. For instance, there are roughly two vectors of opinions in determining attitudes toward immigration, which rely on factors of different nature—namely, economic and socio-cultural ones.

The dealing with the economic dimension is based on assumption that natives make their idea about immigration by considering, what is the influence of immigration on their own utility (Facchini *et al.* 2013). A big part of existing literature has focused mainly on how public attitudes toward immigration are shaped by factors relative to national labour markets—e.g., threat of competition for available jobs, and welfare systems—e.g., weight of immigrants on unemployment benefits or family allowances (e.g., Harwood 1986; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; Citrin *et al.* 1997; Fetzer 2000; Dustmann and Preston

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[89] Consistently with Ceobanu and Escandell (2010), I distinguish between attitudes toward immigrants and attitudes toward immigration, which in many cases may be incoherent. In this research, however, I make an attempt to treat both types of attitudes.

2007). Within this broad research area, particular attention has been paid to the role of education in shaping economically driven attitudes toward immigration (e.g., Hjerm 2001; Coenders and Scheepers 2003; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007).

Along with economic explanations of public attitudes toward immigration, there is a group of non-economic accounts for the phenomenon. In this perspective, the main driver of negative attitudes toward immigration is the natives' perception of cultural threats coming from immigration—threats to the maintenance of individuals' values, national group cohesion, and identity (e.g., Blumer 1958; Jackson *et al.* 2001; McLaren 2002; Scheepers *et al.* 2002; Bail 2008; Davidov *et al.* 2008; Arikan and Bloom 2013). What is more, the perception of cultural threat is not constant, rather it depends on multiple factors, among which the level of exposure of natives to immigrants, and the type[90] and size of immigrant group (Quillian 1995; Schneider 2008; Semyonov *et al.* 2008).

Although the research literature on attitudes toward immigration in receiving countries is vast, the perception and attitudes toward migration issues in sending countries have been under-researched. Some researchers focused on relations between governments and their citizens abroad in both political and economic terms, and relative policies (e.g., Guarnizo 1998; Portes 1999; Itzigsohn 2000). Others have mainly explored migration intentions and perception of emigration.

To my knowledge, there are few studies focusing on perceptions of emigrants in sending countries, which deal mainly with state policies in 'classic' labour-exporting countries. For instance, Asch (1994) argued that «emigration is widely regarded by the Irish as an almost unmitigated evil». In a similar vein, emigration is considered a problem also in Ecuador (Soruco *et al.* 2008). On the contrary, the Philippines, one of the world's largest labour exporting countries, has experienced the emergence of the 'culture of migration' (Asis 2006), in which emigration is perceived in a positive manner. Still, the attitudes toward migration issues are not fixed. Several authors showed how Mexico in its migration policies has transformed the image of labour emigrants from turncoats to a valuable part of the nation, even heroes, and ambassadors of Mexican culture (Martínez-Saldaña 2003; Varadarajan 2010). However, some scholars exploring the Mexican context showed that the attitudes toward migration issues are not so straightforward and largely depend on personal

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[90] The legality of migration is of particular importance here (e.g., Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Hood and Morris 1998; Chandler and Tsai 2001.)

experiences (Theiss-Morse and Wals 2014). In case of Turkey, as Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) reports, there is the change of semantics from 'our workers abroad' to 'our citizens abroad' who are not going to return, and may be an important economic and political resource for the home country.

While the major labour-exporting countries have gained some attention from social scientists, the Post-Soviet region is a white spot on the map of social research on public attitudes toward migration. As an exception, there is a recent survey conducted by Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) in 2014, which provided a 'portrait of a typical emigrant' based on answers of Russian citizens. According to it, a typical emigrant is young, well-educated, and with good incomes. Moreover, 78% of respondents claimed emigrants to be active, and 62%—to be strong. The perception of emigration in Ukraine has not been studied specifically. Nevertheless, according to some media[91], 27% of Ukrainians would like to emigrate; moreover, a typical emigrant from Ukraine is becoming younger and better educated. However, consistent research on this topic is not available.

What regards the perception of return migration, the available literature is scarce. While some studies investigate the feelings and moral conditions of return migrants themselves (e.g., de Bree *et al.* 2010; Sabar 2013), very few focused on public attitudes toward returnees. Among these, Tsuda's (2003) research on Japanese Brazilians in Japan who are subject to both ethnic and social prejudices; and the study by Howard (2003) who explored the transformation of overseas Dominican emigrants' image. According to Howard, while up to the 1970s Dominican emigrants to the United States enjoyed positive images and were considered pioneers of success, later emigrants and returnees were reserved an increasingly hostile reception—disparaging terms 'dominicanyork'[92] and 'cadenú'[93] appeared.

Hence, the public attitudes toward migration issues are highly heterogeneous in different socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts. What is more, they seem to be related to both national and international policies regulating migration flows. Migration is not just a personal concern. Rather, it involves multiple actors at very different levels of society. Migration processes, public opinions, and policy-making are interdependent processes and

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[91] http://kontrakty.ua/article/46352, the survey seems to be conducted by GfK Ukraine, but the references are not clear.

[92] «Refers to recent migrants who have been 'Americanized', typically suggesting an upstart or someone who has lived so long in the United States that an essential Dominicanness has evaporated» (Howard 2003, 62)

[93] «Makes jest to at the heavy gold jewellery often bought and worn by returning migrants» (ibid.)

phenomena, which may have considerable effects on each other. I study public attitudes toward stayers, emigrants, and returnees in Belarusian society to depict a social context, in which the return and re-integration into the home society occur.

2. Perception of emigration phenomenon

One man died and went to heaven. God says to him:
- You know, man, your life has been strange—neither righteous nor too sinful. You can choose where to stay—in hell or in paradise.
The man, of course, doubted, and asked:
- Can I see first?
God allowed him to go and to see.
The man went to paradise and saw boring things—all the people were calm, quiet. Ennui! Then he went to hell and saw casino, variety shows, brothels, taverns, well, very exciting life!
The man returned to God and said the he wanted to live in hell.
After his words, devils took him and put him into a boiling tar. The man began to cry:
-What are you doing? You lied to me! It is not fair!
One of the devils replied:
-Well, you are fool. Do not muddle tourism with emigration!
Russian joke

Emigration from Belarus is largely discussed in social networks, media, and online forums. Although the analysed discussions had been originally dedicated to return migration, many users have claimed that the question whether people want to return to Belarus is not correct; the correct one was supposed to be «Would you flee[94] Belarus?» Actually, roughly each tenth message on forums contains either a question about how to go abroad or an advice how to do this. Speaking about emigration often ends up in discussing various aspects of life in different countries, and exchange of personal experience in this regard. The information about living in this or that country is often presented in a sketchy way that may be confusing for a reader. Surprisingly, many opinions about living abroad are expressed by people who have never lived there[95]. The absence of first-hand information but relying on information gathered from familiars and media have often become a source for online disputes, quarrels, and sometimes even insults.

Superficially, the forum-users can be divided into 'idealists', who blacken/praise either Belarus or foreign countries (Western Europe, Northern Americas), and 'realists', who speak about both positive and negative aspects of living here and there. The latter have given to

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[94] The exact word used in Russian is 'свалить' (*svalit*); to 'flee' is the closest translation.
[95] Sometimes discussants stated that they have never lived abroad; sometimes it was clear from the context.

emigration an interesting definition—*it is as an exchange of some problems for others*. In fact, some forum-users who lived/live abroad urged not to divide the world into black and white, since people living in one place are simply not aware of challenges existing in other countries. Still, the majority of the forum-users are inclined to think that almost any country in the world is better than Belarus. Interestingly, 'any other country' usually implies the highly developed Western Europe countries, the USA, and Canada. African and Central Asian countries are usually explicitly mentioned as inopportune for comparison as 'too underdeveloped'.

In the online discussions under analysis, I found three types of accounts for emigration issues which can be labelled as 'emigration as mobility', 'emigration with a possibility to retreat', and 'emigration as point of no return'.

The first type of ideas about emigration considers it as a natural human right—a person can live wherever she wants and this place has not to be necessarily a birthplace.

> «It is undoubtedly worth to go abroad—to obtain new knowledge and invaluable experience, to discover new traits in yourself, to compare here and there, to expand your horizons» (sereginG20t, 17.08.2012, 2:18).

Mobility in this sense is a source for new experience and knowledge allowing a person to assess in a more objective way the life abroad and in Belarus. This viewpoint is strongly related with opinions and attitudes of transnationally oriented returnees that I discuss in chapters 5 and 6. Emigration as mobility is an opportunity for young people to see the world, learn new things, and acquire new experiences. What is more, emigration is seen as a source of discomfort and challenges that promote personal and professional growth, useful for future life. Emigration experience is perceived as positive and accessible. Those who want to go abroad can do it freely without asking for any permission the state (in contrast to how it was, for example, in the USSR).

> «You should understand that now it is not the wave of Jewish emigration of the 1970s. Nobody is forcing you to burn bridges and nobody takes away your Belarusian passport» (St. Patrick, 11.12.2014, 65:1).

In fact, for many the idea of emigration refers back to the political emigration of Soviet 'dissidents' started in the end of 1960s. Up to the period of *perestroika* almost half a million people left the Soviet Union—the majority emigrated as Jews; at that time, there was a

common joke: «the best means of transportation is a Jewish wife» (Ioncev 2001). That kind of emigration was a one-end journey and emigrants lost any kind of possibility to return to the Union. Indeed, I noted a kind of reluctance among the discussants to use the term 'emigration' to indicate going to live abroad. Rather, and here I refer to the second type of accounts, which is close to the first one but gives much more emphasis on maintaining relationships with the home country. For example, *navigatorr* used a term of 'reasonable migration' to articulate his view on emigration.

> «Generally, I stay for reasonable migration. Not to be confused with emigration. You go around the world, explore it, accumulate experience that is more precious than money, communicate with people, learn languages and other cultures, try yourself. It is nice to get education there, make career... But! Do not to lose your roots. While abroad, I strictly followed two rules—'do not burn bridges' and 'do not spit into the well'. That is all» (navigatorr, 14.08.2012, 1:35).

The idea of 'burning bridges' is characteristic to the 'emigration with a possibility to retreat'-accounts.

> «It is good when you go abroad with the readiness to return. Live, gain experience, get contacts for work. Only then you are ready to take a decision on permanent residence» (concepteur, 04.09.2012, 9:5).

Staying with one foot in two worlds and the possibility of retreat gives a sense of security and to a certain extent facilitate the same decision to emigrate.

The third type of accounts is opposed to the second and views emigration as a desirable and unavoidable necessity to abandon the home country and to forget about it forever. I call this type 'emigration as a point of non-return'. According to this view, the majority of people want to emigrate but are deterred by the visa regime of Western countries. Actually, in many comments the idea that Belarusians are generally willing to go abroad is recurrent. For instance, one of the forum-users told the following story:

> «Recently I was a witness of a conversation between one Belarusian and one Latvian. The Belarusian says: «I heard that in Latvia the life is impossible, that already 200 thousand people left to Europe to earn money. The Latvian replies: «yes, but we can go to any EU country, work and live there freely... If you were allowed to leave freely for any European country, how many people, you think, would left?» Belarusian scratched his head and said: «yes, probably nobody would remain in this country...» (Мизогин, 10.04.2014, 54:4).

This story had a considerable resonance in the discussion—many people agreed with the idea that only legal barriers prevent mass emigration from Belarus. That is, emigration is generally seen as a desirable event that can resolve various people's problems and give multiple opportunities. *Ivan_Terminator* put it in this way:

> «If you have an opportunity to go abroad, do it, especially if in Belarus you have nothing to lose except your chains. It will not be worse, rather, you will get a chance to become a normal person, not a slave as in Belarus» (Ivan_Terminator, 13.09.2012, 14:8).

In this statement, there are at least two interesting connotations. The first is related to «chains» and, to certain extent, refers to the mainly ideological and political emigration from the Soviet Union, where the dictatorship of the communist party was in conflict with basic human and civil rights. During the relatively short period passed after the union's dissolution, the perception of emigration as liberation from state oppression has not vanished and continues to persist also because of authoritarian regime existing in today Belarus. Second, the 'feeling normal person' mentioned by *Ivan_Terminator* refers usually to the material content of human life—money, services, cheap food and clothes, entertainment. Many note that commodities make their life easier and more comfortable and often use a phrase «Motherland is any warm place for your ass»[96] to give reason for their decision to emigrate. This kind of emigration is commonly known as 'sausage emigration'—emigration aimed to have access to 'sausages', or material goods. 'Sausage emigrants' are often blamed since their goals are mainly material, and thus, are considered of low value. In contrast, socially acceptable reasons to emigrate are those ideological and political (claiming for freedom of speech and democracy and criticizing the government in place).

What regards the reasons for emigration, there are three groups of them (in addition to above mentioned material and political issues): 'discontent about the Belarusian society', 'children's future', and 'desire for change'. The first group includes accounts referring to some negative traits of Belarusians and general discontent about the society. Here below there are few examples of this kind of accounts.

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[96] A citation from a Russian movie *«Brat 2»* (Brother 2), directed by A. Balabanov. *«Brat 2» is* concerned with Russian national identity and portrayal of a national hero. It represented the vanished euphoria caused by the openness of the country to the USA and Western countries in general, and revival of national idea and patriotism.

«I have the same reason... The society is not just rotten... It is completely rotten!!!» (KosmoStar, 23.10.2012, 22:5)

«Our *[Belarusian]* people are anxious and pissed off. This is one of many reasons to go abroad» (Чингиз-Хан, 08.04.2014, 54:2).

Interestingly, most of people speaking about 'angry people' note that there are no such people among their acquaintances. What is more, such accounts are rarely articulated; rather, they often depict reality in an over-generalized way and seem to be a facade for the material reasons lying behind.

The second group of reasons focuses on children's future. The most cited ones are those regarding the quality of education and medicine which are considered much higher abroad than in Belarus. Generally, the future of the children is considered more important than the own one.

The third group includes reasons concerning the desire for changes and for new experiences. As one forum-user noted:

«It is just the desire of changes. Who have lived in several countries understands that none of them is perfect. Different systems, different cultures» (Vasis, 12.06.2014, 64:5).

These accounts do not idealize neither destinations nor the same idea of emigration. According to this view, people are inclined toward movement and variation, and migration is just a natural phenomenon.

In the online discussions, the above-mentioned reasons for emigration have been often contrasted by the reasons to stay in Belarus. The most important reasons are those emotional—the closeness to parents and to native language are usually considered the strongest factors for staying home. Moreover, according to many stayers, the life in Belarus is very comfortable and a clever person would be always able to earn well and to afford high quality of life. This viewpoint is often supported by 'success-stories' about friends and relatives who managed to become wealthy (often through entrepreneurship); the absence of emigration in these stories is often considered a reason for pride. Interestingly, many discussants have used labels as 'clever' or 'successful' for describing both mobility and immobility scenarios. In the next section, I show what is the general image of emigrants and stayers and how these people are perceived by the forums' public.

3. Who are emigrants and stayers?

Emigrants in the online discussions are depicted in various ways. Nevertheless, there are two big types of descriptions—positive and negative ones[97]. According to the former view, emigrants are the best and the brightest representatives of the Belarusian nation.

«The problem of the Belarusian emigration is that the country is left by mainly educated, economically and socially active part of the population, which in the mass does not approve the existing order of things in the country» (Ivan_Terminator, 09.10.2013, 40:16).

Emigrants are those more educated, active, ambitious, and enterprising who, from the one side, want to develop themselves and are positively motivated; from the other side, they are constrained to do so by the Belarusian society.

«Smart and educated people are pushed out of the country and are forced to become foreigners» (taralex, 16.08.2012, 2:9).

«Many leave because they love their country and cannot see the fucking disaster that is happening here. Those who do not care, they remain» (rupar_epohi, 20.08.2012, 4:14).

This idealized view on emigrants is opposed by the negatively depicted opinions that put in question positive traits attributed to emigrants.

«The fact that a person crossed the border, does not make her automatically smart, cultural, and intellectual!!!! Even if she stays now in the country with a higher level of life. And it looks very funny when people stubbornly try to assign all three ranks to herself» (vikarika, 12.09.2013, 32:4).

What is more, in this discussion thread, emigrants are depicted as losers, adventurers, naïve, and even mentally ill people. Emigrants, thus, are people who believe to the Hollywood movies about beautiful life and are not aware of problems and difficulties they may encounter abroad. Their main goal according to some discussants is to 'fill the belly' and the term of 'sausage emigration' is broadly used in this regard. 'Sausage emigrants' are often accused to suffer from so called 'emigrant's syndrome' (also 'emigrant's complex')

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[97] Unfortunately, it is not always possible to distinguish who are the advocates of this or that view—e.g., whether 'emigrants sustain emigrants', or the attitudes are mixed up between different groups.

that consists in criticizing Belarus in order to justify the own decision to go abroad. One user made an interesting comparison:

> «The emigrant's complex is similar to the behaviour of an abandoned woman who dedicates life to prove to the ex that her life is going well even without him» (goga, 11.02.2014, 48:7).

The epithet of an abandoned woman is not the only one. Among others there is also 'refugee' used in a derogatory manner. Generally, such people are not appreciated and often become targets for insults. The main claim of stayers in this situation is that if someone stays abroad and is very happy about it, she should not participate in discussing the Belarusian internal affairs or comment the life in Belarus. Thus, it appears to be a kind of defence mechanism against emigrants who stress that stayers are losers who live in wretched conditions.

Obviously, not only emigrants are perceived in negative light—often descriptions of emigrants are followed by the opposite descriptions of stayers and vice versa. Nevertheless, the distinction between different types of stayers is usually made not on the basis of goals they pursue by staying in Belarus, rather, on the basis of their attitudes to Belarus as nation and as state. For instance, there are stayers who hate Belarus but for various reasons cannot go abroad, and there are stayers who like their life in Belarus and do not want to emigrate anywhere. The former are often criticized for their passivity and inability to take action.

> «If you do not like anything in principle, you may not remain here, nobody keeps you (except tax inspection and the army). Instead of swearing, make something for your country rather than lying on the couch and screaming how everything is going bad!» (roces, 16.08.2012, 2:8)

This appeal to go away if you are not satisfied with your life is quite common in the opinions about some stayers. In general, this type of stayers is described in terms of mental ills and idiotism. They are perceived as losers who have neither qualities nor capabilities to make their life better.

On the other side, there is a group of people who sustain that clever and successful people are not obliged and do not want to go abroad because they are satisfied with their life in Belarus. I got an impression that this type of people is criticized and insulted more than others. Moreover, these people are accused to be «in the service of the KGB (or the president

or the bloody regime)» or to have weak mental faculties as soon as they say something positive about Belarus. There is a special term for such people who are called 'zastabily'[98].

Summing up, the majority of forum-users depict stayers in negative light: those who want to emigrate but remain in Belarus are considered losers and idlers; those who do not want to emigrate are considered corrupted lackeys. Conversely, the perception of emigrants is dual and comprises both positive and negative depictions.

4. Return migration in online discussions

4.1 Perception of phenomenon of return migration

Return migration is a phenomenon arousing a wide range of reactions and emotions among participants of online discussions under analysis—there is no consensus about neither its meaning nor its public image. Nevertheless, many forum-users agreed that the return is a difficult decision that requires both physical and psychological forces and considerable willpower. According to many, *«it is much easier to leave than to go back!»* (navigatorr, 13.08.2012, 1:27). Actually, this idea has been further confirmed in the in-depth interviews (see chapter 4).

The return is stressful as concerned with the need to change the place of residence, social circles, and habits (especially in case of return after multiple years of living abroad). Nevertheless, it is supposed to be a challenging experience than can toughen people up.

> «*[Referring to the initiator of the forum]* To my opinion, you have to return to Belarus. You will gain tremendous experience, you will harden, you will become an ironman! My Motherland has tempered me, and I thank it for that!» (freedrive, 19.08.2012, 3:14)

The return in many cases implies significant changes in one's life—from dietary habits to adaptation to societal expectations. Thus, the (re-) construction of new environment requires abilities, patience, perseverance, and remarkable moral strength. In fact, the decision to return is not spontaneous and generally requires much time to appear and to

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[98] 'Zastabil' is a neologism presumably coming from the modification of the phrase «Za stabilnuiu Belarus!» (For stable Belarus!) used as a slogan in several governmental media campaigns in the 2010s. Thus, 'zastabil' is a person who supports the current government and its line of policy, watches the national Belarusian television (that supports the current government), rejects the Western type of reasoning and values. The term 'zastabil' is always used in derogatory meaning.

mature. As one of the forum-users noted, the decision to return is preceded by few stages common to all emigrants:

> The phase of euphoria. This period is also called the 'honeymoon'. The first time an immigrant does not absolutely change her behaviour and does not undertake any activity in the construction plans. Immigrants are in euphoric state, and the perception of a new life is dominated exclusively by emotions. Depending on the individual traits, different subjects have various length of the euphoric phase— from a couple of days to several months. The 'tourist' phase. The 'orientation' phase. The depressive phase. The active phase (Ми Шуткин, 17.11.2014, 58:4).

Ми Шуткин described in detail only the first phase, but the meanings of the following phases are clear enough from their names. In the tourist phase an immigrant explores her new habitat; in the orientation phase she learns everyday local things and practices; the depressive phase brings gloomy thoughts and melancholy about the life left behind; and, finally, arrives the active phase in which an immigrant takes the life in her hands and decides what to do about it. That is, the decision to either remain abroad or return home is taken during the active phase. The duration of preceding phases may vary, but the discussants agreed that the thoughts about return appear around the fifth year of living abroad.

> «Those who do not want to return are those who left from six months to 3 years ago. They have not been sated yet. But when a person left 5-10 years ago, then the situation is interesting» (HMoody, 31.08.2012, 7:10).

> «I think almost any immigrant with the experience of more than five years has such thoughts» (Одиссей Canada, 09.08.2012, 1:1).

After some years of living abroad, it is quite natural that a person questions the own situation and the past decisions. During that period an immigrant achieved (or not) some objectives, revised her views on different things, and tried on her skin the life in a new place. Then a person reaches a kind of fork where she decides whether the road was the right one.

Despite the fact that many think about return and some have actually realized these ideas, the majority of forum-users perceive return as an imaginable and impossible event. I found many incredulous comments about the idea to return and returnees in general.

> «Does anyone really have a desire to come back here?» (nrm, 11.09.2013, 32:3)

«The main conclusion that I do for myself after reading it *[forum]*—almost none of those wishing to return to live and to work in Belarus have checked in at this thread—and this is significant» (rycerz, 18.09. 2013, 35:2).

The main points of such comments are that nobody would like to return to Belarus and that the examples of returnees are invented or however inexistent. Along with doubts about the existence of people wanting to return, many users expressed their negative attitude towards the possibility of return.

«The return to the country without perspectives, steeped in marasmus can be considered as failure in life» (**Thunder***, 13.08.2012, 1:26).

«The return from a civilized formation to a century ago is evil in the worst sense of the word» (JENIK, 03.09.2012, 9:3).

That is, return is perceived as an extremely negative conclusion of migration journey and prospect for future. Moreover, according to people viewing return in pessimistic light, it is a consequence of the impossibility to remain abroad rather than of a person's free will. Usually, economic fails are supposed to be the main motivators for returning.

«I can say quite definitely that no successful expert will come back and did not come back to Belarus, only few rare exceptions» (Ivan_Terminator, 01.04.2014, 52:4).

«The only reason for his return is that he has been kicked out. All the stories about nostalgia are bullshit. Nobody returns in good faith» (gvll, 03.09.14, 63:2).

Hence, the return home is not perceived a deliberate decision but rather an expulsion from the host country that marks down any person as a loser. The «rare exceptions» mentioned by *Ivan_Terminator* regard mainly two cases: when either a forum-user personally knows a returnee and thus, is aware of reasons for her return, or a returnee is a public person whose prosperity is beyond any doubt. According to some forum-users, in addition to the stigma of loser it implies the return may have negative consequences for the returnees' families too. Consider the following quotations from some emigrants:

«*[Speaking about one returnee]* What can I say? He deprived their children of the future for the sake of momentary» (Месяц, 04.09.14, 63:10).

> «[*Ezhik_B_TYMAHE: A friend of mine will come soon to Belarus from Chicago. Her parents want her to return definitely.*] Sick people! They hate their own daughter so much!» (oppa, 08.06.2014, 58:1)

Almost every message containing an encouragement for return is commented in negative manner—an advice to return is considered almost a crime, while the returnees themselves are perceived as traitors of their own families. Surprisingly, the discussants are very aggressive and uncompromising in this regard.

On the whole, the return in majority of cases is seen as a personal tragedy that sometimes is a reason for consolation and compassion (if a person have been forced to return by any insurmountable circumstances). Yet, more often it is perceived as a manifestation of some kind of mental disease or instability. At different moments of the discussion, returnees were defined as *«fragellants»* (Yuracx, 18.08. 2012, 3:10); *«idiots»* (sabotin, 04.04.2014, 53:3); and *«dweebs»* (Stock, 04.09.2014, 63:14).

Though negative opinions about return are numerous, there is no unanimity about this topic. There is a small group of advocates of return who criticize the 'sausage emigration' and the desire to stay abroad by any means.

> «I had a possibility to remain abroad but what would I have? Had I stay there for money? To spend it on a new iPhone or a new car? And then? I prefer to have a Nokia, an old car, but to stay home» (sereginG20t, 17.08.2012, 2:17).

> «Anyone who chooses a country basing on the fact that there it will be easier to fill the stomach is not much different from the animal» (Shibalba, 15.08.2012, 2:5).

According to these people, the times when people stayed abroad because at home they had no anything to eat have already passed. The return, in this sense, is the only reasonable conclusion of migration journey for people who evaluate emotional components of life higher than material ones.

People who actually returned to Belarus are quite few on the forum but the majority of them claimed that they do not regret their decision and advised doubters to come back describing their post-return life in optimistic manner. Interestingly, any positive comment about return has been usually followed by comments including suspicion of collaboration with the secret services and 'the bloody regime'. The example that follows is provided by a person who emigrated to the USA apparently more than ten years ago.

«[Speaking to the initiator of the discussion] If you are real person, not a stooge of KGB, however they will give you a good position [referring to the secret services]» (Ivan_Terminator, 13.09.2012, 15:1).

The mere fact of speaking about intentions to return has been considered as a sign of lying and used as a pretext for accusations. What is more, the people who returned or are planning to return have been mentioned as potential victims of the regime and have been warned about the possibility to be included into 'blacklists' of the government (without specifying what kind of consequences the above mentioned blacklists would cause). Such insinuations are hard to verify; still, none forum-user claimed to have been chased. As one of commentators noted, *«the authorities do not care whether you came back or whatever. It is not 1947 anymore, when people were taken from steamers directly to GULAG»* (sap12345, 17.10.2013, 41:5). Nevertheless, the image of Stalinist repressions against international returnees is very strong among forum-users.

Another small group of oppositionists to this pessimistic view on returnees is made of those who see return migration as a source of 'brain gain'—they are convinced that returnees have good work experience that would be very useful for Belarus.

«The topic is not about whether to return or not. The point is that only our emigrants can contribute to adopting good Western things and implementing them here» (7777slavan, 20.10. 2013, 42:4).

«I think the Belarusians who live abroad could improve the lives of Belarusians here by simply returning to their homeland» (Ленский, 03.04.2014, 53:2).

The both quotes are from people actually living in Belarus. They claim that returnees may change the actual situation in better and may secure the prosperous future of the country. Actually, the returnees who participated in this research are of similar opinion (I discuss the socio-cultural remittances of the returnees in chapter 6). Interestingly, this vision of returnees as remitters of best practices is skewed by gender.

«A lot of money are invested to convince Belarusians to return from foreign countries. Many of them are narrow experts, not just brides, who found foreign princes. They [brides] are not needed» (RichCamomile, 13.09. 2012, 14:6).

Actually, the forum-users do not discuss the gender issues very much but the opinion in this regard is quite unambiguous (may be because the majority of contributors are males).

Female emigrants are seen as only willing to marry foreigners (the term 'foreign prince' is used often in derogatory meaning), while men are those who pursue, through emigration, personal and professional growth. Women, according to many commentators, are less inclined toward return because they have better abilities to adapt to new contexts abroad.

> *«[KristiVl: I am trying to understand why some want to come back, and others do not at all...]* The most important reasons are those personal or psychological/emotional. Even gender plays a big role: women adapt quickly, while men often want to come back» (freedrive, 28.08.2012, 5:5).

Along with the adaptation abilities pointed out mainly by women, the situation on 'marital market' in Belarus and abroad is crucial for the decision to return. The latter argument is one of the most used among the male forum-users.

> *«[Referring to the question of the forum's initiator]* My answer is that you should return. Here you will be out of competition. It is known that there are more women than man here. Moreover, the majority of man here drink too much» (Ergo, 12.09.2012, 14:1).

That is, *Ergo* (male) advices to another man to return to Belarus because in the actual situation in Belarus (where women are more numerous and many men are however out of competition because of bad habit of drinking) he would be in advantaged position. In the following example, by contrast, there is an account for why Belarusian females should not return home:

> «I do not like generalizations, but life examples show that our girls enjoy the attention of American and other men. Why should they return to the tough competitive environment?» (Visitant, 15.12.2014, 65:4)

Thus, while women are not supposed to have any reason to return, since competition for husbands is too high in Belarus, men return to Belarus to find a partner and to improve their family situation, since they are not appreciated by foreign women.

Although the sentimental reasons to return are considered very strong, they are not the only ones that influence people's decisions. In the next section, I show what other reasons are mentioned by forum-users as valid for return to Belarus.

4.2 Reasons for return in online discussions

While most of the reasons to go abroad from Belarus are of economic nature, in the return migration emotional reasons prevail. By emotional reasons, I understand factors related to non-material realm, for instance, kinship and sentimental relationships, and homesickness. The latter is usually described in a very approximate way, in which the most salient point is the Belarusian nature. Many forum-users are nostalgic about 'birch trees' that, actually, are a symbol of Russia but somehow refer to Belarus too. 'Birch trees' represent culture, traditions, and *«communion with that land»* (B_W, 28.08.2012, 5:10). However, the accounts for return speaking about homesickness usually are not considered true and valid ones. More often, as I noted above, this kind of accounts is perceived as an excuse hiding other, more mundane, reasons.

On the contrary, family and life course related reasons are generally recognized as adequate for taking a decision to return. Among these, the most important reason is, undoubtedly, the discourse of parents. The majority of forum-users agreed that parents are sacred and that the possibility to stay close to them is certainly worth returning. Many immigrants claim to desire to take their parents abroad (some of them actually do this), but often it is not possible because of parents' advanced age or their reluctance to move. In the latter case, the children's return is more probable but is considered as self-sacrifice and, therefore, is not criticized.

One more emotional reason for return is the desire to create one's own family. I have already noted, that Belarusian men are considered more likely to return than women since they have difficulties in finding a partner abroad. Nevertheless, the reasons for this differentiation are not clear. One of the most used accounts is that there are a lot of differences in gender expectations of Slavic men and Western women. For instance, it is claimed that Slavic men expect women to be housewives (staying home, growing up children, and dedicating their lives to husbands), while Western women are more independent and do not accept such conditions. This supposition sounds credible but needs a more thorough investigation from both male and female sides. Still, many male forum-users have mentioned the 'sentimental' factor as one of the most important. According to them, local women abroad are too emancipated and have completely different mentalities and values. In addition, it is difficult to build relationships with Belarusian girls abroad too. Some discussants claimed that Belarusian girls change a lot once they move to Western

countries, and not for the better. Hence, young Belarusian men are almost constrained to return to Belarus to find a partner for a stable relationship which is usually transforms into a marriage. However, in that case there are two possible ways: first, once created a family, an immigrant may go back abroad, and second, the family may remain in Belarus. The first option is usually considered a preferable one. The home country, in this case, is considered a 'supermarket' of brides who are always ready and very willing to emigrate (even if at a certain point of view it is true). Still, there are people who cannot imagine the future of their family and children elsewhere than in Belarus:

> «You can exist without any purpose anywhere—either in the homeland or far away from it. But when you start to think about you future partner, how you want to educate you children and so on, the situation becomes clear» (misscata, 19.08.2012).

The considerations about how to grow up children and what values to transmit to them are in strong relation with general consideration of the West (the main Western destination countries) and the East (Eastern Europe). The former is usually conceived as the 'stomach' which satisfies material needs, the latter, instead, is the 'heart' dealing with intangible and spiritual components of the life. That is, in contrast to somehow pragmatic returns, there are those who put soulfulness to the first place. One forum-user expressed a common opinion about distinction of life in Belarus and abroad:

> «The soul rests only in Belarus, while the body tends to the West, to the comfort...» (46564, 10.08. 2012, 1:18) [99].

Living abroad is often seen just as a source of material comfort, a *«manger»* (Одиссей Canada, 13.08.2012, 1:31), as the initiator of the forum referred to his stay abroad, that, however, lacks moral satisfaction, which is supposed to include such components as interesting acquaintances, intellectual development, and professional achievements. As *HMoody* noted, *«people return to Belarus not because of money but because of the spiritual wealth»* (31.08.2012, 7:11).

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[99] This way of reasoning may seem antiquated and too romantic cliché. Although the term 'Russian soul' (in Russian 'душа' (*dusha*), which later was transformed into 'Slavic soul') is relatively young and is a result of Russian nationalism of the end of the 19th century (Williams 1970), still, the topic of soul (in Russian 'душа' (*dusha*) plays an important role in the Slavic culture and imaginary. See Pesmen (2000) for an interesting ethnography on Russian soul.

In fact, some discussants have admitted that they would return to Belarus for retirement, when they would not have to work anymore. According to them, the life in Belarus is suitable for pensioners since it is calm, quiet, and stable. The return for retirement has been considered possible only in case of very good financial situation; otherwise, it is not even an option. However, the migration flows from Belarus are relatively young and it is difficult to speak about any kind of tendency in this direction. Probably, in few decades, it will be possible to say whether Belarus would have become an attractive destination for retirement period.

All the above-mentioned accounts are somehow real and to some extent possible reasons for return. Along with them, the forums under analysis are full of speculations about what has to happen to make people return to Belarus. Definitely, the most frequently mentioned if-clause is about the change of the political regime (read—the withdrawal of the actual president from the power). In contrast to these 'conditions', some discussants (who are predominately stayers) replied that it is all about money, which is the only 'real' reasons for going abroad and thus, for returning. As one of these noted:

> «[…] 90% of emigrants would agree to work in Minsk or Moscow, if you gave them a good salary, package of benefits, an apartment, a possibility to send children into an American school, covered the costs of leisure activities and so on […]. They would immediately forget their complaints about the Putin or any other bloody regime. There is nothing wrong or shameful about it—just do not be hypocritical» (St. Patrick, 11.12.2014, 65:1)

Hence, economic reasons, in the end, are considered the most strong for the actual return. While emotional factors prepare the ground for thinking about return, material assets and financial situation may become decisive in the final decision-making that, nevertheless, is quite rare.

In the next chapter, I analyse the return decision-making, reasons to return, and its perceptions as told by the highly skilled returnees who have participated in this research.

Chapter 4. Return migration: premises, dynamics, and post-return arrangements

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of how emigration as well as return migration are seen and perceived by the general public of Belarusian online forum users. Moreover, I have also discussed the reasons that are supposedly the drivers of return migration among Belarusian citizens. Although the accounts for return attributed to returnees within online discussions are undoubtedly useful for the understanding of public opinion on return migration, they do not provide the entire range of factors that influence return reasoning. Thus, in this chapter, I analyse contexts of return decisions, reasons for return, and post-return arrangements and impressions basing on 43 narratives collected from highly skilled Belarusian returnees. Before proceeding with the analysis and its discussion I provide a brief overview of previous research on return migration decision-making.

For a long time, social researchers considered immigrants as one-way travellers willing to settle permanently in a host country (Gmelch 1980). Later, however, it has been commonly acknowledged that the one-way assumption was invalid and that return does not constitute the end of the migration cycle but a part of the migration project sustained by numerous networks of relationships[100]. Moreover, return migration appears to be far from being a number of isolated cases—it is a widespread phenomenon diffused in both geographical and socio-economic terms. Depending on the country of destination and period considered, up to 50% of immigrants leave host countries within five years after arrival (Dustmann 2003; Dumont and Spielvogel 2008). Among these, highly skilled immigrants have particularly high return rates (Finn 2007; de Haas *et al.* 2014). What is more, the temporality of return migration appears to be one of its distinctive characteristics, since short-term movements seem to prevail over long-term ones (King 2002; Williams *et al.* 2004; Trippl and Maier 2010). As Engbersen (2012) put it, temporality is one of the main characteristics of modern liquid migration[101] having flexible patterns and institutional

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[100] There is an extensive research body proving this argument—e.g., Morawska 1991; van Hear 1998; Cassarino 2004; Duval 2004; Oxfeld and Long 2004; Asiedu 2005; King *et al.* 2013; Oeppen 2013; Carling and Pettersen 2014; Iaria 2014; Mortensen 2014.

[101] The concept is inspired by Z. Bauman's theory on liquid modernity, which emphasizes the processes of rapid and permanent change occurring within society (Bauman 2000).

structures. Moreover, it has strong relationship with transnational mobility (which takes place within fluid social spaces and is characterized by multiple links and networks acting across the borders) that becomes possible only with multiple temporary movements.

There is a comparatively large amount of research literature focusing on return migration, its preconditions and consequences, but the field continues to lack a comprehensive analytical framework for individual and contextual factors, which determine return migration of the highly skilled. Since multiple migration theories have failed to give an adequate interpretation of return migration and its driving forces (Constant and Massey 2002; Cassarino 2004; Fokkema and de Haas 2011), it is worth further investigation and clarification.

In accordance with numerous studies focused on determinants of return migration, decision to return is neither obvious nor compulsive. Many researchers noted that return decision-making process is compound of multiple evaluations and comparisons between conditions and outlooks in home and host countries (Koser 1998; Faist 1999; and King 2000). In a recent study focused on return imaginary among British Pakistanis, Bolognani (2014) has formulated the relative reasoning framework, which accounts for both positive and negative aspects of both home and host countries. According to this study, a person living abroad evaluates the pros and cons of both staying in a host country and returning home. In fact, when I was talking with the Belarusian highly skilled returnees, on many occasions I encountered an endless series of memories about how they had compared life 'here' and 'there', trying to choose the best solution. Many of them reported that they had been tormented by these alternatives and by the mere necessity to decide. That is, the 'push/retain–pull/repel' framework seems to be appropriate for analysing the data I gathered in Belarus. Nevertheless, as many other researchers concluded, there is no uniform process of return decision-making—multiple migration theories and frameworks might be complementary in explaining return migration decisions.

The return decision is always complex and is influenced by an eclectic mix of structural and personal factors multiplied by and anchored within return imaginaries and myths. For example, Rogers (1984) found eight factors shaping return decision, which included positive changes in the home country; families at home and patriotic feelings; changes or a disappointing situation in the host country; wars; and either satisfaction of goals or inability to achieve them. In later research it has been further confirmed that the factors

influencing return decisions regard both home and host countries and may be of a different nature—social, economic, political, personal, as well as institutional and environmental (Thomas-Hope 1999; King 2000; and Black *et al.* 2004). Several studies have emphasized the importance of family and kinship ties that influence both return decisions and post-return experience (Manuh 2002; Tiemoko 2004; and Reynolds 2011). In this research, I provide some instances supporting that all the factors explicated by Rogers (1984) but wars are valid also in relation to the highly skilled return migration among Belarusian citizens. What is more, relatives and friends appear to play a crucial role in the highly skilled professionals' return decision-making process—by both providing migrants with necessary information and affecting them emotionally. Nevertheless, this research provides some additional insights into investigation of reasons for return.

While economic factors are traditionally strong in both emigration and return decisions, they are often amplified by various emotional and sometimes 'irrational' factors, which include sentimental and homesickness motives. In this study, economic factors acted mostly as an impulse to a decision, while emotional factors served usually as a backdrop. Generally, mixed motives appeared in the case of the majority of returnees.

In contrast to previous research, I have not found evidence of political factors influencing return decisions[102], for the rest my findings are in consonance with other studies. Moreover, in accordance with Black and colleagues (2004), I observed that factors regarding the home country seemed to be more important than those in the host country were.

In the next sections, I will illustrate several aspects regarding return decision-making and return process itself. Thus, I will discuss the circumstances under which the highly skilled professionals decided to return (section 1), the main factors which influenced the return decision (section 2), the dynamics of return process and arrangements taken immediately after return (section 3), and the meaning attributed to the decision to return and to return migration in general (section 4).

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[102] Usually, political factors concern issues of security and hostilities in either home or host country. It is not the case neither for Belarus nor for any other country in this research.

1. Decision process and its context

The decision to return is informed not only by impulses that can be called 'reasons to return' but also by circumstances in which the decision is taken. Although this research is based on the narrative talks of an apparently homogeneous group—they are all middle-age Belarusians with at least one tertiary degree—the contexts, in which these people lived and had the idea of returning, vary a lot[103].

As major scholars of return migration have noted, the decision to return can be either programmed or unprogrammed in the initial migration project (Bovenkerk 1974; Gmelch 1980; and King 1986). Nevertheless, such distinction is not always applicable, since it is a quite common situation when people do not have precise plans regarding the duration of their permanence abroad. It is the case for the majority of the informants, who went abroad for different reasons but commonly without an idea for how long. What is more, many of them have articulated their migration intentions in terms of 'not remaining abroad' rather than of 'returning home'.

> «I have never planned to remain abroad—neither in [*Northern Europe*] nor in [*Eastern Europe*]. I always wanted to return. The only thing was that I did not know when I would return. I just wanted to do it and that is all» (Liudmila, Female, 8:22).

> «The IT project, which I worked on, was over and I gained the degree. Therefore, I had to decide what to do further. [...] It was very hard to decide and these thoughts tormented me for a long time. […] In the end, I took the decision to return. However, I have never had an aim to remain abroad» (Nikita, Male, 10:77).

Generally, the initial migration projects of the informants have not appeared in a clear way—many were simply unconscious of their aims since they knew that they went abroad

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[103] It is worth to mention, that this research focuses on voluntary return migration. The degree of voluntariness of return decision varies in different cases and depends on the specific circumstances in which the decision is taken. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2010), *voluntary return is based on a decision freely taken by the individual. A voluntary decision encompasses two elements: (a) freedom of choice, which is defined by the absence of any physical or psychological pressure; and (b) an informed decision, which requires the availability of enough accurate and objective information upon which to base the decision. The concept of "voluntary return" goes further than simply an absence of coercive measures. In some cases, an assessment needs to be made of the extent to which a person is mentally and physically able to take such a free, informed decision, and who, if necessary, could legally take the decision on their behalf.*

to study or to work but they had no idea what they would do afterwards. Only two informants have explicitly expressed their migration intentions.

> «Many things have been done with a vision of remaining abroad. For example, we bought a car on very bad conditions in order to have a good credit history. The motivation was to remain abroad» (Fedor, Male, 13:36).

> «I realized that I left home when I actually did it. [...] I cannot explain it but I understood immediately that I would not live there. I began to look for ways to escape. When I arrived, I began to try to convince myself that it was a temporal thing and that I would fix it back» (Liubov, Female, 17:27).

However, in the majority of cases the migration intentions were somehow blurred and relied on the course of events—these people had not planned anything but reacted on changes in their life. Innokentiy, for example, during his stay abroad, had an idea of returning to Belarus; later he changed his mind because obtained a good job offer abroad. The conversed situation occurred few years later, when a job offer came in from Belarus.

> «I had never an aim to live in [*Northern Europe*]. But it is a purely practical issue. If you have to live there, so you live there. If not, you can return. It makes no sense to go back if you have nothing there. Scientists have logical reasoning. It was not an emotional act, in no case. It was a rational act. I was offered this position and [*I accepted it, because*] it was very important for me» (Innokentiy, Male,16:29).

From this citation may seem that the decision to return is a simple and binary one, but Innokentiy himself noted that the environment in which he lived played a big role in his decision. Return decision-making process has intricate patterns and depends on many internal and external factors. The environment[104] in which person lives may be more or less friendly and in some sense may encourage or discourage a decision to return. Among the participants in this research, very few people described the environment in which they lived as unfavourable. The main determinant in those cases were work conditions, which appeared to be of two types—early termination of employment (for various reasons) and/or difficulties in finding a suitable job.

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[104] By 'environment', I understand here various conditions and circumstances that surround a person. It includes personal environment—family (parents, partner or spouse, and/or children); social environment—friendship and social integration, sharing of cultural and life values; and economic environment—work conditions, financial situation, living conditions.

«It was the period when I was searching a job. Actually, I found it... […] It was clear for me that I had to search a job in big companies because they are flexible and available with all bureaucracy questions. In few companies, I reached last step of selection but I have not passed them. Then I understood that it might be the case to return» (Polina, Female, 20:31).

«The company where I had been working closed. How does it work in [*Northern America*]? One day they just say to you that you are unemployed. That company behaved in a kind of good way—they paid some kind of compensation. Still, I had no job anymore» (Fedor, Male, 13:33).

«The situation was that I did not want to continue the studies. I was looking hard for a job. But then I understood that it had no sense—they did not want to hire me because of the documents [*difficulties with obtaining of permit for work*]. Actually, I found a job but I had to quit because it was horrible. […] I worked for a while as a waiter, enjoyed two months of permit that I had and then came back to Belarus» (Anastasia, Female, 29:26).

The difficulties in labour market have been usually interconnected with another institutional constrain related to one's legal status[105]. As some researchers put it, the highly skilled migration (no less than unskilled) is subject to institutional barriers and channelling mechanisms (e.g., Hazen and Alberts 2006; Favell *et al.* 2008; King and Raghuram 2013; She and Wotherspoon 2013). Fortunately, the maintenance of legal status was an issue only for few participants of the study. Although these people had some troubles in the labour market abroad, nobody of them had considered the possibility of illegal permanence because *«the clandestine life is too extreme. It is not worth»* (Fedor, Male, 13:37) and *«it is stupid to stay abroad illegally»* (Ilya, Male, 25:43).

Another important matter regarding working conditions abroad is the phenomenon of 'brain waste'—the process of deskilling, which occurs when highly skilled workers take over jobs for which they are overqualified (OECD 1997). Actually, very few informants had this experience, but they all agree about the psychological discomfort and disquiet it provokes. Fortunately, this experience was rare and brief. The majority of the informants were highly requested on abroad labour markets and even had job offers from third countries.

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[105] Belarusians, who went abroad for studies, lived there with a permit of stay for study reasons, which in majority of European countries does not allow performing full-time work activities. The requirements to and procedures of residence permit conversion are very complicated and time-consuming—often the efforts do not justify the result. The similar situation occurs with the American visa—it is valid until the work contract under which it was issued is valid; the green card procedure takes few years and requires, however, a work contract as a financial guarantee.

Nevertheless, for various reasons, they have decided to reject the proposals and to return to Belarus.

> «I had the possibility to continue my work abroad. I have been offered a position at one university in New York. But I thought that scientific career would make harder the life of my family. Scientists are similar to athletes. To have a normal and comfortable standard of living, you have to be in the top, you have to participate in world championships and the Olympic Games. For scientist it is a big effort that takes a lot of time. […] I decided to stop my own career and to do something that would be useful for my family» (Leonid, Male, 2:40).

> «I had a possibility to have a post-doc position in Singapore but I wanted a post-doc position somewhere in Europe. I did not want to go to Asia. They are very rigid and I wanted to be closer [*to Belarus*]» (German, Male, 5:40).

> «We had no problems to live where we wanted to live. Nobody forced us to return like when you cannot find a job or have finished your studies. I had a good job and I could transfer to any office—to Moscow, to Warsaw, to the United States—in any other country» (Liudmila, Female, 8:1).

I would like to note, that the decision to return has often been taken at a point when some kind of life course transition occurred or had to occur. Consistently with Kõu *et al.* (2015), I found that return migration decision-making was strongly related to education, employment and household trajectories of the highly skilled. For many it was a transition from a 'student' to a 'worker' life, for others it was a pause in their job career, for someone else it was the age itself and personal and social expectations about it, to create a condition in which the idea of return appeared. The people had to take a decision regarding their life in general, not simply (even if it is not simple at all) about the place they wanted to live or to work. For many the return decision has become some kind of Rubicon—the point at which their lives changed dramatically.

> «May be it was the age... I was about thirty years old. And I realized that I did not want to live there, I did not want to die there and to have a grave somewhere there. There is a period in the life when you ask yourself the question about what you want from the life» (Daniil, Male, 7:18).

> «I had this idea when my second child was born. We had an understanding that we had to take some kind of decision. Either to sell the apartment in Minsk, to buy something in [*Eastern Europe*] and remain permanently there, or to return to Minsk and live and work here» (Bogdan, Male, 21:34).

All the participants of this research spent abroad more than five years, in which they went through thick and thin—got education, acquired work experience, married, divorced, got children, etc. Although there was no lack of experiences, many participants told that at some point they felt the necessity of further movement, development and challenges.

> «At that moment, I reached all the goals I had before. To continue to stay there I had to have new goals, but I did not have them in that place» (Nikita, Male, 10:71).

> «I am not a dentist to do the same job for the whole life. I need some kind of movement, of development. It is very difficult for me to stay in the same place for a long time. I need a challenge to go ahead» (Nickolay, Male, 12:31).

This need of development is very common to the highly skilled Belarusian returnees. Many of them did not speak about this explicitly but from their decisions and actions it was clear that they were hungry for changes even before their decision to return. The words of Roman convey well this idea:

> «After 5 years of living there, I thought about why I remained there. Even not. I thought what I was still doing there. I do not regret staying there, it was very good and interesting experience, but not for so long» (Roman, Male, 14:1).

Actually, in the collected narratives there are a lot of evidences that after some years abroad people reach some kind of stasis. According to many returnees, their lives were exciting for some period but then the challenge of going abroad and relative adrenaline shock passed and left space to routine; life moved on by inertia. Then the sudden realization of necessity to change something came. However, the decision to return is far from being a simple one (the fact that some informants regretted not having returned before is indicative). Return does not mean only a physical move from one country to another—it is a big change of personal style of life including work and free time, habits, circles of friends and many other things. In a manner, the decision to return is a decision to change the future—your own and that of other people close to you. As many claimed, it was very difficult to emigrate, but it was much more difficult to return.

> «I know that I would not live through two moves alone. Because going there is... People get over it very hardly. Also the way back... is very hard» (Liubov, Female, 17:42).

«The decision to leave everything and to return home is not an easy decision. It is not easier than to decide to remain there. In no case, it is easier. Absolutely. After so many years of living there, you are scared to return to an unknown and unfamiliar country» (Roman, Male, 14:50).

«The problem of returning or not to Belarus was the most difficult among all mathematical problems I ever had to solve. Or let's say, it was the problem which required the greatest amount of time» (Veniamin, Male, 39:21).

As Veniamin noted, the decision to return generally takes a lot of time and requires a considerable mental effort—you have to tread a tricky path full of doubts to arrive to such decision. Still, whereas some returnees spent years to realize that they did not want to remain abroad, others took this decision very quickly, although their lives were apparently stable and organized.

«Once I came to Belarus...I looked around... it was the moment when I wanted to search for a new job. [...] I had to take some kind of decision. In Belarus it was spring, I saw many beautiful girls. [*And I decided*] Fuck it all away! [*I said to my flatmates*] You will take my PlayStation; you will take my bicycle. Sell my car and send me the money. That is all!» (Pavel, Male, 3:52)

«Once I came home... I did not think to remain here [*in Belarus*], I lived there, and I came just for a visit. After some time I thought to inform myself about work here. So I brought my CV to *** and in few days they hired me» (Vera, Female, 1:69).

Apparently, for many informants the return became spontaneous—in a short time they just freed from their accommodation and personal things and came to Belarus. For others, on contrary, it was crucial to organize the movement in advance and to prepare all the things for their comfortable life in Belarus. That is, many informants have bought apartments and found jobs long before the actual return[106].

«At some point, we—me and my mother—developed a strategy and our plans. While I was living there I gained the possibility to travel freely, earned some money, bought an apartment here. It was not a spontaneous decision; I was coming gradually to it» (Veniamin, Male, 39:30).

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[106] I will discuss the dynamics of return and the everyday arrangements in the section 3 of this chapter.

> «You have to prepare and to plan your return—where would you live, what would you do, and for whom you would live. I have even prepared a list of people with whom I would socialize» (Kuzma, Male, 19:55).

As one may expect, not always the predetermined plans have been fully implemented—life makes adjustments in what people desire and do. Although all the returnees have been influenced by different factors and have acted under different circumstances, they all appeared to have done everything possible to be free in their choice. This is how Georgiy explained his view:

> «We decided to apply for the green card because I wanted to decide myself whether to remain or return. I did not want some American to decide whether I deserved that country. That is why we got green cards and then decided to return» (Georgiy, Male, 40:46).

Not all the participants, in the end, were completely free in their decisions. Often their will has been mixed with their inner feelings—as love or sense of duty—and entangled with a complex environment surrounding them. The resulting mosaic is so intricate that even the returnees themselves have not been always capable to explain their thoughts and actions regarding the return. Nevertheless, in the next section I will try to unravel this puzzle and to provide a comprehensive framework for analysing return decision-process.

2. What are the accounts for return of the highly skilled?

During the interviews, I was often told that the decision to return has been taken in short time. Nevertheless, the actual decision has been always preceded by a decision-making process, in which the participants have weighed more or less carefully the pro and cons of both living abroad and returning to Belarus. At the moment of the interviews, the experience of return decision-making was not fresh to all the returnees—some had come back to Belarus few months before the interview was taken, others had been living in Belarus for many years.

The main question they were asked in these months and years was «Why did you return?»; that is, they needed to come up with an answer—fair enough for both others and themselves. Many informants confessed to have spent a lot of time to rationalize and formalize in some kind of verbal form exact motives for coming back; others have not done it yet—their accounts for returning seem to be tangles of feelings, doubts, and hopes.

In this section, I discuss what factors influenced and framed the informants' return decisions (see the summary in Tab. 5). Basing on previous research (Koser 1998; Faist 1999; and King 2000), it is possible to distinguish two big groups of accounts for return—the first relates to various factors (both positive and negative) present in host countries, while the second one comprises the factors operating in a home country. Unlike an arithmetical equation where a sum of members gives this or that result, in the return decision-making process some factors have different weight and importance for individuals. Some have been strong and acted as momentary impulses, others, although weaker, have been more persistent in time and have created the context in which the final decision has been taken. Within host- and home country related factors, the institutional constrains and opportunities appeared to be of particular importance for the informants' return decision-making process. Along with two macro—'push/retain and pull/repel' (Bolognani 2014)—account groups, I found accounts lying on a logical continuum 'emotional – rational'[107]. Rational factors often played a role of stimuli, which catalysed the idea of returning, while emotional factors crated a fertile soil for that decision. However, despite the possibility to conceptually distinguish among different types of accounts, in the majority of cases, the return decisions have been informed by complex and intricate sets of individual motivations framed by institutional conditions in both home and host countries.

	Host country factors		Home country factors	
	Push	*Retain*	*Pull*	*Repel*
Personal/ Emotional	*Loneliness; Boredom; Weak integration*	*Habit*	*Sentimental relationship; Adult care; Child rearing; Social life; Homesickness;*	*Fear of the unknown*
Institutional/ Rational	*Legal status constrains; Labour market constrains*	*Overall economic situation; Better services*	*Labour market opportunities; Higher real income*	*Climate (ecology)*

Table 5. Factors and conditions influenced the return decision of the highly skilled Belarusian professionals

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[107] I use these terms only to distinguish between emotive and intuitive from analytical and logical reasoning, where the former, roughly speaking, refers to sentimental and nostalgic reasons, and the latter to economic ones.

Further, I will describe first rational and then emotional accounts for return and discuss their institutional background.

Among rational factors, there are may be the most predictable ones—work and money. Interestingly, these groups of factors often played a role of both 'push/retain' and 'pull/repel' factors. Moreover, sometimes, it was the same person to speak about them in two meanings. For example, it was the case for Vera who was not satisfied by her job abroad and was offered a job in Belarus almost simultaneously.

As I have already mentioned in the previous section, some informants decided to return to Belarus while passing through some transitory periods of their lives. That is, education-to-labour market transition together with unfavourable institutional labour market and bureaucratic conditions in host countries appeared to account for the return of some informants. For instance, Victoria and Anastasia finished their studies abroad but found it very difficult to find a job because of both labour market structural deficit and a foreigner legal status, which I discussed earlier in this chapter.

> « [*Many people ask me*] Why did not you remain abroad? But who need us there? There is bad economics; there are few job places there. The [*Eastern Europeans*] themselves go abroad, to Great Britain, for example, even to collect strawberries. It is very difficult to find a job. Moreover, you have to speak [*Eastern European language*] to be able to work there. We knew it but not at business level. There was no sense in learning it—it is a language of a very small country, there is no use of it» (Victoria, Female, 32:18)

Another important issue regarding the labour market constrains is that of 'brain waste' addressed in several studies and discussed as a challenging phenomenon for highly skilled migration (e.g., Wanner 2001; Man 2004; Purkayastha 2005; Pecoraro 2011). For instance, Mikhail had an experience of deskilling when due to external factors his employment, adequate to his education degree, ceased. After having unsuccessfully tried to find another one and/or to do various low-skilled jobs, he decided to give up and to change things radically.

> «I did not manage to get back a good job, so I returned to Belarus. I was not interested in jobs like a loader or a taxi driver. I have a university degree after all! I tried to do that for a short period because I had to maintain myself, but then I got sick of it» (Mikhail, Male, 22:28).

As I have mentioned in the previous section, push-factors relative to unfavourable labour market conditions were rare among the participants of this research. Still, almost absurdly, I came across a diametrically opposite and in some sense extreme experience of Leontiy, who was stressed by the [*Northern American*] style of life based on working and preferred to downshift[108].

> «One of the reasons to return was to escape from that frantic pace of work. Because the life balance there is strongly biased towards work» (Leontiy, Male, 24:31).

Most commonly and consistently with previous research claiming that highly skilled return migration occurs in case of a county's economic growth and availability of professional opportunities (Saxenian 2006; Chacko 2007; Harvey 2009), favourable labour market condition in a home country have been mentioned as pull-factor—many informants have been offered a job position in Belarus[109]. For some of them it was almost an accident—for example, Vera and Artem did not plan to return but applied for those positions just for fun. Others, like Gennadiy and Innokentiy had very good jobs abroad but decided to accept the job offers from Belarus[110].

Along with employment, another rational factor accounting for being both discouraged abroad and attracted in Belarus was the country's economic situation, in which the difference between the earned and the spent was bigger if compared with host countries.

> «I realized that I had to return when I had to pay for an umpteenth document like five thousand dollars. I thought that I had to use one more credit card... [*So I thought*] So fuck you!» (Roman, Male, 14:30)

> «You work and earn good money but you spend it almost completely to pay your house rent. Furthermore, you have to pay for a car, gasoil and so on. If you look at your disposable income, it is not so much» (Leontiy, Male, 24:35).

It was a very common description of life when a person had a good job position and earned well but incurred heavy expenses for housing, taxes, and life in general. In fact,

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[108] According to the Oxford Dictionary, downshift is the act of changing to a job or style of life where you may earn less but which puts less pressure on you and involves less stress.

[109] I will discuss the topic of job searching and re-entering to the Belarusian labour market in the section 3 of this chapter.

[110] Interestingly, both Gennadiy and Innokentiy are natural scientists and have renounced to long-term and unlimited work contracts respectively.

another recurrent theme regarding money was the possibility to have the proper housing. That is, the impossibility, or better, big difficulties to have it, became a discouragement factor, while the chance to improve one's housing conditions and to buy an apartment in Belarus was a strong attraction for many informants[111].

> «Money was a decisive factor. Here [*in Belarus*] we had an opportunity to buy a dwelling at a moderate price, and we had enough money» (Daniil, Male, 7:40).

> «Initially we wanted to go to Cyprus but then changed our mind and decided to go to Minsk. There was an apartment, and we had all the stuff, we did not need to prepare the documents. So we decided that it would be easier for us to start something here. We have many friends and relatives here; we have many connections. And the most important thing was the apartment» (Ksenia, Female, 26:22).

Surprisingly for me, along with desire to make real estate investments, the possibility to earn more money in Belarus has been claimed to be a strong encouragement factor for return. Commonly, the potential financial gain has been associated with the self-employment plans and a relatively favourable legal and economic conditions in Belarus.

> «At that moment I had already two children, I had to think how to maintain them. We had no dwelling, nothing. So I started my own business» (Leonid, Male, 2:40)

> «I wanted to return to Belarus. I understood that I wanted to do something that brings money. I realized that I wanted to earn much more than I could earn in academia. I had no problems to return to Belarus because even if I did not like the politics, if you are financially independent you may not care about anything» (Timofey, Male, 35:33).

The topic of entrepreneurship is very important in case of highly skilled professionals. For many of them self-employment has become (or is going to become) a logical conclusion of their job experiences. Moreover, Belarus in recent years has been making attempts for creating a favourable climate for private business, which of course has become an attraction for the highly skilled returnees[112].

Along with rational factors, a number of emotional aspects—e.g., family relationships, friends, homesickness—have played an important role in the return decision-

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[111] The housing arrangements is one of the foci of the section 3 of this chapter.

[112] Entrepreneurship as a feature of post-return lifestyle of the highly skilled professionals is one of the central issues of chapter 5.

making process. Emotional factors seem to have greater diversity among both 'push/retain' and 'pull/repel' factors groups, but family-related factor seemed to be of crucial importance that is in line with the existing literature on the issue (e.g., Guarnizo 1997; Khoo and Mak 2000; Beaverstock 2005; Kobayashi and Preston 2007). Among these, sentimental life[113] appeared to be the strongest factor.

Many participants in the period they spent abroad have not managed to set up their private lives and complained of behaviour and lifestyle of foreign women.

> «Another reason why I went away from there is that there is a big trouble with the girls. A big trouble. They are too emancipated and look terrible. And not because they are ugly but because they do not look after themselves and do not care about their appearance» (Mikhail, Male, 22:52).

> «I understood that there are no girls in [*Northern Europe*]... there is no sex! Nobody believes me! But it is a myth [*that the Northern European girls are hot*]! So I realized that I would not have family there» (Bronislav, Male, 18:38).

> «We do not match culturally, in no way. They are very emancipated, think only about women rights. [...] Nobody managed to have a relationship with [*Northern European*] women. There were funny couples like a Polish man with a Japanese woman, but I have never seen any [*Northern European*] woman with a man from the ex-Soviet union» (Vladislav, Male, 33:38).

It is a quite common belief that Slavic men, in contrast to Slavic women, have difficulties in romantic relationships with the opposite sex. In fact, some informants, in course of time, have decided to build their sentimental life in Belarus.

> «[*It is one of the reasons for my return*] I thought it would be easier with the girls in Belarus. Later I understood that it is not true» (Timofey, Male, 35:36).

For Timofey it was a general idea, which has changed, however, after return. For others it was a real strategic plan. Two of my informants (Veniamin and Nikita) met their future wives on dating websites[114]. Both of them claimed that is was a conscious decision followed by purposeful actions. However, the frequent decision to look for a partner in Belarus does not imply that all the Belarusian men have difficulties in establishing romantic relationships abroad. Rather, some of them felt responsibility for their thoughts about returning. In words

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[113] Only male informants have mentioned the factors of sentimental nature.
[114] Neither of them did not want to disclose the name of the website.

of Veniamin (39:31), *«if I got married abroad, I would not be able to return. It would not be honest for my part».*

In some cases, sentimental factors became a kind of catalyser for their decision to return. For instance, Arseniy, Pavel, as well as Timur, took their return decisions almost immediately after being got acquainted with their girlfriends.

Besides sentimental issues, also life course family matters influenced the informants' decisions to return. These can be divided into two groups by the generation level. According to some researchers (Stockdale 2002; Ní Laoire 2008), when migrants' parents become elderly, migrants tend to become less beneficiaries and more benefactors. In fact, those migrants who were in their late 30s-40 while living abroad, had faced the necessity to help their aging parents or grandparents As Arkadiy (27:37) has noted, *«at some point you just have to be close to your parents, sometimes they just want to be listened to».*

Conversely, the younger migrants have articulated their decision to return in terms of responsibilities towards their children.

> «The main reason for return was the child. We could stay there even for more time but our son had already five years. He did not speak neither in Russian nor in Belarusian; he spoke only [*Northern European language*]. We had to decide whether to remain there forever or to return immediately. At the age of six he had to go to school, we had one year to prepare him and to teach him Russian. In [*Northern Europe*], he would go to the 'black' school[115], so he would not get any kind of education» (Daniil, Male, 7:32).

> «We had to take a decision whether to continue the school there or here. We had already our green cards so I could work and do anything. We thought about the second child but I realized that I did not want to give birth to a [*Northern American*]. I cannot explain why. But it was clear for me that if gave birth to a [*Northern American*], we would never go away from there. That is why we have only one child» (Liubov, Female, 17:54).

Some other participants who at that moment did not have children have narrated their return in similar terms—they wanted their children to speak in Russian (Belarusian), to have good education[116], and to know their motherland and relatives.

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[115] In the Northern European country under consideration, the unofficial segregation of ethnic minorities and native population in primary schools is a documented phenomenon.
[116] Belarusian system of education is generally considered very good from point of view of quality and in socialization terms.

The latter factor—communication with relatives, as well as social contacts with compatriots in general, is another very important issue in return reasoning. Only one person said that he felt lonely abroad but I am sure that every emigrant in the world has experienced this feeling at least once in his life. It is not because you are literally 'alone'. Rather, it is a sensation of being alien to everything and to everybody around you. Sometimes this feeling just passes away, in other cases a person relapses. Gradually, the general discomfort appears and increases, and often to provoke it is a country as a whole—its environment and climate, people, traditions, culture and so on. It is a kind of apathy toward life in general, which, at least in the minds of these people, was related to their staying abroad.

> «I was bored. I imagined how it would be. I would buy a house and I would be hard to pay for it. I would have a lawn. Perhaps, I would have a big mower covering the lawn, but I would have it. For sure, I would have a Labrador and stupid children. I lost any enthusiasm about that country. I could not see myself there, I wanted something more» (Pavel, Male, 3:31).

> «I understood how would be my life in [*Northern Europe*]. [...] I realized that everything was won there, everything was clear. I needed all moved» (Bronislav, Male, 18:38).

> «I liked my job, but the work has never been the most important thing for me. So at some point my life was like this—I worked and sometimes I spent my time with friends. And it was the same from day to day. Yes, we did interesting things, we went to the mountains, rode bicycles, but nothing happened in my life, it was monotonous and always the same» (Yevgeniy, Male, 11:36).

As one may note, often it is a stagnation to worsen the discomfort. Sometimes, it was the feeling to be a stranger who cannot access to all the benefits of the life. Only once I heard an explicit claim of having felt inferior. Nevertheless, I had an impression that many informants felt like Vladislav in some periods of their emigration.

> «In Belarus you feel yourself as free person. In [*Western Europe*] not. [...] It depends on your social position. In Belarus, you feel yourself as a first-class person. You can wear rags and walk around the city centre. Still, you will feel that you dominate the social landscape. In [*Western Europe*], you cannot do this. In [*Western Europe*], you will be always a second-class person» (Vladislav, Male, 33:57).

Moreover, few participants told me to have made friends abroad. It was a little bit easier for those who went abroad to study—the environment in which they lived was predisposed to acquaintances in general. Others, who emigrated for work reasons were generally constrained to communicate with colleagues and/or neighbours. Usually, these communities were made of other emigrants mainly from the former Soviet Union and all of them 'cooked in their own juice'. That is, almost all the informants kept in touch with friends at a distance—emails, skype calls, and visits were helpful to maintain the relationships.

> «I came back for friends. I realized that psychologically I would feel more comfortable in Belarus» (Polina, Female, 20:32).

> «One of the reasons of my return is that it is horrible when you cannot see your friends. Here I know that in few hours I can organize a meeting for at least some people» (Veniamin, Male, 39:71).

> «So we decided that it would be easier for us to start something here. We have friends and relatives; we have a lot of connections here» (Ksenia, Female, 26:22).

The extensive social networks and rich social life expected in Belarus were undoubtedly a strong attraction. This is not unusual; rather, many scholars have found networks of family and friends to be one of the key factors in decisions to return (e.g., Manuh 2002; Tiemoko 2004; Condon 2005; Nì Laoire 2008). In addition, what I said about foreign countries generating a kind of discomfort is true, in the opposite sense, for Belarus, seen as a safe and comfortable place.

> «Culturally I feel more comfortable here, much more comfortable. Otherwise, I would not live there, and I would not have returned here» (Leonid, Male, 2:17).

> «I had no doubts whether to return. Because anyway sometimes I felt nostalgia. There is another nature, other traditions there... and it has been accumulating inside» (Gennadiy, Male, 6:25).

> «Many life values were not satisfied there. I think that Europe is much better for me. I am sure of it. I prefer European civilization» (Mikhail, Male, 22:42).

That is, the country in general—with its people, nature, and culture—has been a strong attraction and undoubtedly influenced the emigrants' motivation for return.

Hence, although, the motivations for return among highly skilled Belarusian professionals are quite miscellaneous, accordingly to previous theoretical research (Black *et*

al. 2004; Bolognani 2014), they can be roughly divided into 'host country factors' and 'home country factors'. Moreover, there is a distinction between individual and institutional factors, and rational and emotional ones. Often these groups of accounts have been interwoven and strongly linked to each other—it was hard to find out when a defect of one country turned into a benefit of another, or to what extent institutional constrains and opportunities influenced individual motivations. For instance, should we consider a factor for return the absence of sentimental life abroad or a romantic story in Belarus? Despite the duality of these factors, I am inclined to believe that the accounts for return I was provided with were related to a larger extent to the home country factors. Moreover, there have been definitely more attractions in Belarus rather than discouragements in host countries. All in all, these people were satisfied with their lives abroad but the pros of living in Belarus, at least at that moment, have weighted more.

3. Everyday life pre- and post-return arrangements

Along with more or less complex decision-making process, return migration is also a practical issues regarding physical movement (of oneself and all the things) and post-return arrangements on where to live and what to do in terms of both work and social life. In this section, I describe how the informants managed their return process in terms of planning and preparation of their post-return lives—visiting Belarus before actual return, organization of housing issues, and re-entering the Belarusian labour market. I argue that the highly skilled returnees are more likely to be responsive to circumstances and flexible in their life arrangement process, in which many decisions and actions have been taken spontaneously.

In the return migration literature, return is usually described as a more or less smooth process of back and forth movements, return visits and preparations (Baldassar 2001; Duval 2004; Conway *et al.* 2009). In fact, the majority of informants told that they went home often—to spend the holidays. The frequency of visits varied a lot depending on the distance from host countries—those who lived in Eastern Europe visited Belarus almost every weekend, others who lived in Western Europe came two or three times per year. Even those who lived on other continent managed to go home relatively frequently—once a year or even more often.

> «We went to Minsk every summer. It was like this: in September I suffered,
> moaned and cried; in October—it was ok, because the New Year was coming; in

March I bought tickets home. And when I had the tickets, countdown began»
(Liubov, Female, 17:40).

Although the visits to Belarus were quite frequent for the majority of informants, for some of them the detachment from the home country has been more than noticeable—for example, Pavel, Mikhail and Roman came back to Belarus after several years without visiting it. The main reasons, as they claimed, were the costs of tickets and short holiday periods.

By the way, it seems to be some kind of reverse relationship between home visits and final return decision. Interestingly, the people who had not visited Belarus for a lot of time are those who described a more rapid return decision-making and actual return. Others[117], who visited Belarus relatively often, first moved to other countries Eastern European countries close to Belarus, and only after a considerable sojourn there have proceeded with the final decision to return. Actually, these movements have not been consciously preparatory, but as some of informants noted, this approach has facilitated the final decision and the post-return acclimatization[118].

What is of the primary interest here is what the returnees did immediately after coming to Belarus. Actually, I came across two relatively big topics which received particular importance in the accounts of the participants—namely, housing and job search.

What regards the first matter, there are four types of house arrangement among the informants: 1) had her own home before migration[119]; 2) had no her own home before migration, bought a flat from abroad; 3) had no her own home before migration, bought a flat after return; 4) had no her own home before migration, rents a flat after return. It is worth to note, that the major part of the informants is quite well-to-do[120] and can afford an investment in real estate. However, the investment in housing had no financial goals here. Rather, the money spent on a flat is spent on stability, security, and confidence in the future. Some of the informants had assured this kind of security when stayed abroad.

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[117] It is the case for six participants.
[118] The post-return reintegration into the home society is one of the foci of chapter 5.
[119] This last group includes those who got their flat from by right of succession and did not spend money for it.
[120] I did not ask about how much money the informants earn exactly, and none of them spoke about it spontaneously. Still, their incomes range is from some hundreds to tens of thousands of euros.

«[*Did you have a place to live when you came back to Belarus?*] I had a flat in Minsk, yes. It is a flat that I bought from [*Northern Europe*] when I was thinking to return for the first time» (Innokentiy, Male, 16:35).

What is more, Innokentiy was not the only one who bought a flat as a standby solution. Other informants noted that the buying of a flat in Minsk was as a part of return plan to Belarus too. Another big part of informants, bought a flat after their return. In fact, as I have discussed in the previous section, the dwelling or the possibility to have one, throughout the talks, appeared as a motivating factor in their migration decisions.

«I came back and after two months I registered myself on the queue for an apartment[121] under construction. I thought that if I had gone somewhere on a postdoc position I would not have earned enough money to buy an apartment. You have to spend a lot in general and for flights. I knew the levels of my expenditures abroad. All this encouraged me to remain» (German, Male, 5:45).

«It was a weighty factor. Money was a decisive factor. Here *[in Belarus]* we had an opportunity to buy a dwelling at a moderate price, and we had enough money» (Daniil, Male, 7:40).

That is, nobody of the participants, actually, had serious housing problems. A job search process, on the contrary, appeared to be more variable in the informants' narratives.

Work plays a central role on the lives of highly skilled professionals. Thus, finding a suitable job after return to Belarus became one of the main issues in pre- and post-return arrangements of the informants. Some of them had worked in Belarus before, others did not, but all of them had to face an unknown labour market—in more-than-five-years absence almost all of them became unfamiliar with the Belarusian labour market reality[122]. Surprisingly, often the employment seeking was preceded by a more or less long rest period.

«When I returned, I did not look for a job. I stayed at home for almost one year. I did anything I wanted... I helped my brother to build the house. After that I started to seek for a job» (Yevgeniy, Male, 11:45).

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[121] The administrative queue for an apartment assumes the form of a list of people who intent and are eligible for buying an apartment on preferential terms.

[122] Although some returnees visited Belarus frequently, these visits regarded mainly their social life. Their main activity (either studies or work) was abroad, so they could not participate directly in the Belarusian labour market.

«I had no expectations that it would be good here. I knew how it had to be, but I knew that the situation was bad. For two months I simply relaxed» (German, Male, 5:41).

This period of relax is a characteristic of the life stories of the locally oriented informants. For some of them it was an opportunity to spend time with their families, for others—a moment to catch a breath after the experience abroad. Almost all of them spoke about their return, as it was a load off their minds. At the same time, the remaining part of the returnees can be divided into two groups—those who had carefully planned their actions and those who had acted spontaneously or even relied on chance.

«It would be much harder for me to return if I had not had a job. One should not return rashly as I did twice. You have to prepare a basement of some kind, at least for the initial period» (Kuzma, Male, 19:55).

«Now I have my second job here. The first one was temporary, just to enter the labour market. The salary was...I mean I was not even interested in the salary, I could work for one dollar» (Veniamin, Male, 39:63).

Although Kuzma has managed to get a job from abroad, while Veniamin has planned his employment seeking already from Belarus, both of them have planned their return accurately. They had a strategy for living in Belarus and they followed it in all its aspects—from house arrangement to private life. Conversely, there is a part of returnees who emphasized the role of accident in their decision making process.

«I got a good job. It did not last for a long, but it was not my fault. I started to look for job from abroad but not actively. The job found me itself. It took little time for me to move back to Belarus because by accident that job found me». (Polina, Female, 20:33)

«I have not been to Minsk for four years. In these years, I got very serious experience in IT sector, product management, business analytics and so on. It is very strong experience. I heard about Minsk that there is a boom in the IT sector... Whatever. I had two hours before my flight, I opened my notebook and I saw the dev.by site—it is the biggest online resource about the It sector in Belarus. I checked the open job positions out through idle curiosity—what could I do there with my experience. [...] I saw a position that fitted perfectly all my experiences. I wrote them an email proposing just to talk. When I landed in Minsk I had already their reply. Then we met and after several interviews I got that position» (Artem, Male, 37:44).

Many other informants noticed that their looking for a job was not active but for some unexpected turn of events, they have been employed. However, people who stressed that the course of events was accidental are mostly those who found a job when were still abroad. Others, on the contrary, returned to Belarus without a precise idea of what kind of job they wanted to do. For instance, such uncertainty often becomes a reason for not-return—a person is not sure of her own capabilities and employability in the local labour market. It is comprehensible that after several years in a foreign cultural, economic, and political system, your home society becomes alien or even hazardous. It was the case for Varvara, who *«feared not to be able to be useful anywhere»* (31:57), as also for some other informants and their acquaintances. But if for someone these were just fears, others had real difficulties in finding a job. It regards mostly those who went abroad to get their first tertiary degree.

> «I wanted to do what I studied [*political science*]. I looked for a job in all the parties both in Belarus and [*other Eastern European countries*]. Then I sent my Curriculum Vitae to various administrative institutions. I had courses of constitutional and administrative right I could do a job of clerk. [...] But it did not work out. Someone wanted this, another wanted that. So I decided to do what I had already done before/sales and promotion. Even because... I saw that state machinery, I do not like this kind of clerk career anymore» (Matvey, Male, 4:25).

Matvey is among others who struggled for being employed but in the end managed to find a job. However, as in many other cases, his social network has been more efficient than the formal recruitment channels. It is hard to overestimate the importance of personal social networks for the probability to find a job among the highly skilled—the 'acquaintances' became the primary channel for the labour-market re-entry.

> «My friend knew that they would start a new project and suggested me. It works as if you suggest somebody and she is going to be hired, you receive some bonus. So he suggested me» (Varvara, Female, 31:55).

> «After a month or two after my return home I began to work here. At that time [*person's description*] had been working here and she hired me» (Alisa, Female, 23:12).

> «Of course, you look for a job, communicate with people. When you work in commerce, you have many acquaintances. So you call one, then another, and so on, and in the end I was contacted to send my CV. I sent my CV and in five

minutes I was contacted again. That person was already in Belarus and he asked
to meet me» (Timur, Male, 43:37).

It is a common story among the informants about a person from the 'previous life'[123]—a friend, an ex-colleague, or a relative—who plays a decisive role in job finding. Nevertheless, the social networks are often mentioned not only as a job search tool, but as a general benefit facilitating the working life of the people[124].

Still, many returnees used a classical approach to job search—they sent their Curricula vitae to several companies and sustained job interviews. Roman told me a joke that describes the situation in the IT segment of Belarusian labour market.

«An IT-worker in Belarus finds a job on the second day of search because on the
first one he parties» (Roman, Male, 14:39).

This joke is typical to many stories, as almost one third of my informants are employed in the IT sector. Most of them claimed that it was very easy to find a job in Belarus and that they were tired of the number of interviews they were invited to[125]. That is, the candidates had the possibility not to be chosen but to choose where and on what conditions they would work. The international experience is highly appreciated by the employers in Belarus so even those who had no IT qualification and operated in another sector generally had no problems with finding a job. Surprisingly, the knowledge of foreign language is still one of the most valuable skills[126].

«Ninety percent of all IT companies are outsourcing. Product companies are very
few. So it is very important the knowledge of English. [Is it still a problem?]
Many people in Belarus speak English but their level is from basic to intermediate
at best. Nobody has speaking practice. They can read and write but speaking is a
real trouble» (Roman, Male, 14:40).

In addition to linguistic skills, the returnees in their abroad experience have learned a lot and acquired many specific and general skills and competences useful for (re)-entry into

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[123] The life before migration is intended.
[124] Belarus is often described as a country full of opportunities where the 'acquaintances' play a crucial role.
[125] Several operators of the IT-sector have confirmed that it is facing a heavy staff shortage. The companies are constrained to hire the second-year students of the specialized departments in order to provide themselves with labour force.
[126] I would like to note here that the informants know from three to seven languages (including two official languages in Belarus—Belarusian and Russian). Most of them studied English at school and/or university; while subsequent languages (if there are such) were studied generally while abroad.

Belarusian labour market. The latter, as many noted, has become a sort of a gate to the society, which, in the end, permitted them a smooth reintegration into it.

> «After having lived in [*Southern Europe*] you have greater social capital—you speak better, you know foreign languages, and you behave better. So it is very easy [*to work and live in Belarus*]» (Kuzma, Male, 19:32).

As one might guess, some informants are quite confident of their skills and abilities that they developed abroad. They are conscious about their value on the labour market and the prospects they have. Overall, the informants managed their everyday life issues in a quite smooth way due to their capabilities to both plan their actions in advance and use unexpected opportunities in different domains of their lives.

Although the informants evaluate their abroad experience mainly as positive and useful, the opinions and feelings regarding the emigration and return experiences differ a lot. In the next section, I will analyse post-return perception of return and the meaning of return for the people who have decided to both emigrate and come back.

4. Perception and meaning of return

People may have many reasons to emigrate and to return, they may even be totally convinced about their decision, but the real experience of these movements is often unknown and is hard to be predicted. The perception of actual return is closely connected with the 'imagined return'—an image of return ('what it would be like') that a potential returnee has while still living abroad based sometimes erroneous memories and nostalgic emotions (Oxfeld and Long 2004). Moreover, the connotations of return depend of the social context a returnee encounter in her home country. In this section, I investigate how the informants have experienced and perceived the return process and what meaning do they attach to the return as an event in their lives. I show that although the return itself is often considered a stressful and emotionally-consuming event, the overall perception of return among the informants is positive due to two main factors—experience acquired abroad and applied in Belarus, and the home atmosphere the informants have encountered. Moreover, the understanding of return is closely related to the concept of temporality—not only emigration movements are becoming shorter-term (King 2002; Williams *et al.* 2004), but also return migration appears to acquire the characteristics of fluidity and mobility.

Although the emigration was not in the focus of this research, these two events—emigration and return—have been often mentioned together. These decisions are difficult and require an immense effort from moral and psychological forces to cope with the stress linked with such a drastic change.

«It is very difficult to emigrate. It is a very big stress to emigrate, but it was very stressful also to return. Psychologists say that after loss of a child and divorce, migration is on the third place by the level of stress»[127] (Mikhail, Male, 22:18).

«It is very difficult to live there with another mentality. Because you remain alone. It is an important decision to go abroad, but the decision to return is very serious too. For us it was a little bit easier because we have never gone abroad forever» (Arkadiy, Male, 27:39).

It is burdensome to decide and to compute, but also the post-return period may be stressful. In fact, after coming back, a person has to start a new life where she is surrounded by an unknown environment and has to deal with unknown things. Some of the informants have experienced such condition and described it is traumatic and anxious.

«My wife was very stressed by the return. She slimmed down and felt bad. She felt as she was thrown away» (Daniil, Male, 7:60).

«It was scary and unclear what would happen next. I felt very uncertain while there was no soil on which lean» (Varvara, Female, 31:42).

«It is very difficult to move. You have to start all over again and to look for emotional attachments. It was very difficult to return» (Anastasia, Female, 29:26).

Although many informants spoke about their anxieties regarding return, not everybody considered return as difficult as emigration because, by definition, the home country is supposed to be more familiar and friendly than a host country. For example, Georgiy has reasoned his opinion in the following way:

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[127] The best-known scale of stressful life events is the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, developed in 1967 by psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe. The first three position are the death of a spouse, divorce, and marital separation, followed by going to prison and the death of a close family member. Emigration does not feature on the list. The closest is a change in living conditions at the 28th place. Nevertheless, later studies questioned the reliability of the scale. Although it is not clear whether movement itself or other associated factors are the drivers of stress, according to many scholars, there is a strong relationship between migration and stress (Ben-Sira 1997).

«The formula is actually very simple—going back is much easier than going there. Because when you arrive there, you do not know anything and you try to open the doors that you do not know and you hurt yourself. When you return, you know how to open these doors and how to get through the doors without hurting yourself. I did not experience any shock, nothing, because I knew all the doors» (Georgiy, Male, 40:64).

In fact, although for many return represented a big stress, the most frequently used word to describe the post-return state of mind was *«euphoria»*. Almost all the returnees described their first impression from coming back to Belarus as a very strong positive emotion, which, in majority of cases, has not vanished off yet.

«When I went abroad, I could not believe that I went to [*Northern America*]. When I came back to Belarus, I could not believe that I returned. [...] It is already two years that I have lived in Minsk and this positive feeling of being returned home has not disappeared» (Veniamin, Male, 39:36).

When I asked the informants to describe their current feelings about the return, all of them defined it as positive with various shades of meaning. There are some, who do not regret returning to Belarus but articulate their feelings in antithesis to their ex-host country:

«I do not regret that I returned. Simply, I know that the life is not better there. What you see in the Hollywood movies is not true, it does not exist» (Roman, Male, 14:65).

«Why sit there and waste your time. I left on time. There is a heavy recession; there is nothing to do anymore» (Daniil, Male, 7:38).

Others, on the contrary, explain their pleasant feelings through such benefits of living in Belarus as closeness to nature and to the green, presence of their families and friends, and overwhelming comfort of staying home—a warm, cosy, and safe place.

«I am blissed out; I like very much to stay here. I do not even care that there no good shops here. You can always go shopping to Europe, it is not so far. And, the older you get, the more you realize how important are the family ties» (Miroslava, Female, 30:78).

«It is wonderful to live in Belarus. Psychologically it is very comfortable, because this environment is familiar. I feel home here» (Liudmila, Female, 8:34).

Some of my informants feel good after return and do not regret about it but admit that sometimes they feel lack of some small everyday things, which they had abroad, like services or the possibility to travel freely.

> «After two years here, I can say that everything is going ok. I was lucky in the majority of things. Of course, there are small things to improve, but on the whole, my return paid off» (Veniamin, male, 39:76).

> «In general, I have no regrets. There are some points that I would like that they 'did not exist. For example, a 'season ticket'. I would gladly sit on the train Minsk-Vilnius and would go to Vilnius. Just to cheer myself up. But to do this, I have to get the fucking visa and to prove that I would come back from there. If I had a travel document in the form of a [*Northern American*] passport, perhaps it would slightly improve my comfort. But it is all the little things» (Georgiy, Male, 40:73).

All but one informants described their post-return emotions as positive. However, even Timofey, who feels discomfort about his decision to return, points out how every experience is important and overall, his decision has been beneficial from some point of view.

> «I do not feel comfortable here. It was bad experience, but it is still an experience. In fact, I needed it to get rid of illusions. Every experience is good, but if I should to evaluate it somehow, I would put a minus sign. On the other side, there are many pros. I tried many things, lived three different lives—as unemployed, in consulting and in IT sphere. I tasted all at once» (Timofey, Male, 35:55).

The topic of experience is very strong in the returnees' accounts. Actually, it is hard to imagine that some years of life do not bring any kind of experience; but when we deal with experience of life abroad, it becomes even more precious. It does not really matter what kind of experience it was—both positive and negative experiential value changes people in terms of personal growth and accumulated wisdom. It was Georgiy to express the common opinion on this regard:

> «Any experience is necessary. It is good when it is positive. I cannot say that I had a negative experience of emigration. I cannot find a bad side in my life there. I can see only advantages. I grew up from those little panties, which I used before to the big [*Northern American*] pants. This size allows me now to live in the way I live» (Georgiy, Male, 40:77).

Many informants have recognized that it was very helpful to live for some time abroad not only to acquire new skills and knowledge, but also to develop personal independence, to broaden horizons and to open the mind.

«I am very grateful, because I learned a lot, my horizons widened. I has never been a good communicator but thanks to this experience, I overcame this barrier. And in general it was worth being seen» (Fedor, Male, 13:63).

«It was a very big experience in my life. I learned to live alone from when I was 19. You are alone, so you cannot rely on anybody, only on yourself» (Timur, Male, 43:49).

Interestingly, it was mentioned many times that experience abroad is very useful not only for personal development but also for national self-determination and social evolution.

«I see more after such experience. It is very useful. It is necessary to go abroad for a couple of years, not for so long as I did. It is very good to widen your horizons. Even to understand better the Western civilization, to look at it in a distanced and ironic way. This experience is very useful to understand better your own country and to appreciate it» (Kuzma, Male, 19:58).

Fedor, in turn, expressed this thought metaphorically: *«If you compare an insincere [Northern American] barbeque and our shashlyki[128], I prefer shashlyki—it is much sincerer, honest and intimate»* (13:69). That is, thanks to the experience of living abroad, at least one thirds of informants claimed to have (re)-discovered where their home[129] and motherland are, and have made some steps toward the realization of their national identity and belonging. Although these people do not doubt about usefulness of their abroad experience, they also agree that the return to the home country is a necessary step in a migration journey, since «if you were born and grew here, your place is here».

For all these people the decision to return was a conscious and thoughtful one. Most of them are still convinced about it and demonstrate a considerable psychological and material well-being. Nevertheless, the re-integration and re-adaptation to the Belarusian reality, society and everyday life have not been always fluid and painless. In a sense, like

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[128] Shashlyk (in Russian 'шашлык') is a form of Shish kebab popular throughout the former Soviet Union, Caucasus, and Central Asia. Shashlik is generally either beef, pork, or lamb skewers cooked on a grill called a 'mangal'.

[129] The meaning of 'home' and relative considerations are discussed in chapter 5.

Leontiy noted, it was a useful experience in order to acclimatize in a new environment and to have antibodies necessary for, let say, 'social health'.

> «I expected my life to become more interesting. In fact, it became more interesting. For example, Sweden has a very high suicide rate. Why? Some psychologists say that the life there is too comfortable. A person should have problems in order to solve them and to feel herself alive. Drugs and all that stuff are the first world problems. When the life is too comfortable, people start to invent problems. In this sense, it is much easier to live in Belarus because you have problems. It is enough to have political ideas that differ from the official ones» (Leontiy, Male, 24:51).

The immediate post-return experience differed a lot. For some informants the process of re-integration was mainly concerned with the everyday things and practices, which differed a lot from those they had abroad. However, everyday trivia was just a question of time and personal will.

While some returnees (like Artem) reacted to small problems philosophically:

> «When I came back I had many troubles with my bank card, and with my mobile phone. I thought, fuck! But then I realized that it is the same in everywhere. You just do not have to pay attention to such trivia. It just happens!» (Artem, Male, 37:50)

> «Some things caused much stress for the first three months. Then I mentally resigned. The worst things are the lack of electronic payments and internet banking. But now I take it easy, I perceive it as a part of the reality» (Miroslava, Female, 30:72).

Sometimes the returnees got into funny situations caused by their lack of knowledge about the local context and habits obtained abroad.

> «When I came back to Belarus, once I put a hundred thousand roubles banknote into a coffee vending machine. I thought it would give me the change. Instead, it 'ate' the money. Everybody laughed at me. I had even called a police officer. He laughed too» (Matvey, Male, 4:45).

Although such stories sound anecdotal, it is clear that the episodes of this kind have been unpleasant. In fact, some returnees have passed the process of re-integration into the Belarusian society in a less smother way and experienced heavy stress. Consistently with several researchers who claim that return migration may challenge and disrupt the feelings

about the 'imagined' homeland (e.g., Tsuda 2003; Oxfeld and Long 2004), I suppose that post-return stress may be, to some extent, a result of their 'unsuccessful' imagination of both homeland and return. Before actual return, emigrants anticipate, plan, and actually, 'imagine' their life in the country they would like to return to. Naturally, sometimes the imagined situation is different from the reality. The realization of difference between what has been imagined and expected and what is happening for real may become a shocking experience.

> «When I returned, I had a shock. Unfortunately, while I was abroad, I had little contact with my friends because of the time difference. I stayed abroad for 10 years. For me the people I left in Belarus continued to be my friends, but when I returned I saw that all of them were busy with their families, homes, children, and so on. I was broken off about this. It was very difficult» (Mikhail, Male, 22:45).

> «After my return everything *[social life]* has died. Some contexts have changed—someone went abroad, someone got married. Everything collapsed» (Vladislav, Male, 33:42).

What is more, the complexity of the situation was compounded by the fact that the home society has not always been comprehensive about their decision. Of course, close relatives and friends were and are happy about their return, but many returnees have faced some incomprehension in both ex-host countries and Belarus.

> «My friends in Belarus could not understand why I was still there. In [*Southern Europe*], on the contrary, nobody understood my decision. They think that I had an emotional breakdown» (Kuzma, Male, 19:54).

> «People often ask me why I have come back. But it is a strange question for me. It is more strange for me when a person feels bad and suffers abroad but does not return because wants to earn more money. I cannot understand this» (Polina, Female, 20:55).

In many cases, such incomprehension appears because people who condemn or simply do not understand the decision to return have never been abroad and do not have similar experiences.

> «There were some people who thought that we would not return. And when we met after our return the reaction was «Are you a fool»? However, it was a reaction of those who have never lived or worked abroad. They think that abroad there is

a land that flows with milk and honey. But there is no paradise there!» (Arkadiy, Male, 27:33)

In the Belarusian, and may be generally, in the former Soviet society, the reasoning about foreign countries as about heaven is still popular. As I have discussed in the previous chapter on public opinion regarding migration issues, there is a tendency to see and to describe their own country, people, goods, etc. in a negative light. Some of the returnees admitted to have reasoned in a similar way before going abroad but to have changed their mind after return. Moreover, I had an impression that they do not want (or are tired) to explain or to justify their decision to return. The overall perception of return can be summarized in words of Georgiy:

> «I never regret what I did, because any decision I took was determined by worldview and experience I had and the circumstances in which I was. If I made that decision, so it was only right» (Georgiy, Male, 40:79).

In the similar vein, many returnees have told that they do not consider the current return to Belarus as a final step in their migration journey—they do not exclude the possibility to migrate further if the circumstances of their lives will be favourable for that kind of decision. As Fedor notes, *I have some kind of 'gestalt' about [Northern America]—I would return there some day—but I do not feel that I had done something wrong* (13:65). There are various factors influencing their ideas to keep on moving. Someone would like to have an active mundane life and to move to a metropolis; others would like to change climate to a better one; some others just follow their instincts and think to stay in Belarus until they feel good about this. Some of the informants were thinking about moving elsewhere, and as I discovered after more than one year after the interviews, some of them actually had moved on. That is, the life of many returnees is a mobile life, where being mobile, reactive, and adaptable becomes of increasingly growing importance. The return experiences of highly skilled Belarusian professionals provide an additional support to the idea of dynamism of migration processes.

Chapter 5. Post-return lifestyles and transnational involvement

Introduction

Lifestyle is usually conceived as a composition of relatively stable patterns of individual or collective everyday practices (Bourdieu 1984; Di Maggio 1994; Bögenhold 2001; Shields 2003; Binkley 2007). It refers to opinions, behaviours, and interests that are reflected in allocation of time and money; leisure activities; cultural tastes—preferences in food and clothing, music, art, and media; and choices in consumption goods and services. That is, lifestyle is a combination of material and symbolic processes that shape personal lives and their relations with the lives of others. In fact, lifestyle is a result of a personal choice, but also of socialization in certain socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts, which frame the patterns of consumption. On the one hand, lifestyle allows differentiation from others, and thus, at the individual level, lifestyle is a symbolic expression of one's identity and sense of self (Featherstone 1991). On the other hand, lifestyle implies choices within a plurality of possible options, which is not endless. Rather, there is a limited number of possible combinations that result in 'styles', which at the collective level, allow people to distinguish among different social groups, which by following certain lifestyle practices reproduce and differentiate themselves from others (Weber 1978; Rojek 1985; Edgar and Sedgwick 1999; Bögenhold 2001; Katz-Gerro 2004). Already Simmel, by stating that «style is the general form of the particular» (1978, 473) has stressed the ambivalent nature of lifestyles consisting in coexistence of standardization and differentiation processes within them.

Lifestyles are related to patterns of people's actions and consumption and to all associated products, objects, and infrastructures (Shove 2005). What is more, lifestyles are influenced by such concerns as education, values, and experiences. The latter, especially migration experiences, play a big role in establishing one's lifestyle. When people migrate, they have to adapt their previous lifestyles to new contexts; in cases of return migration, we may deal with complex lifestyles composed of personal attitudes mixed with the patterns appraised in the home country and those learnt in host countries. After having had several experiences a person chooses what 'style' to adopt. As I have noted previously, the number of possible combinations of practices is limited; however, it is not limited enough for

analytical reasoning. In this study, I have been told various stories regarding multiple lifestyles and, for the purposes of this research, I have generalized them into two ideal-typical styles of life—locally oriented and transnationally oriented. Moreover, I argue that post-return lifestyles are strongly shaped by (along with socio-cultural background) international migration and various experiences acquired in host countries. While living abroad, all the interviewed highly skilled Belarusian professionals reported to have consistently participated in various transnational activities. Nevertheless, their attitudes towards their homeland and their transnational ties have forked after return. For the locally oriented returnees, Belarus constitutes the centre of their lives—they stay predominantly inside the national borders, are concerned with domestic (national) issues, and are involved mostly in local relationships. Conversely, transnationally oriented returnees have decentred their personal universes—they are highly mobile, are members of various transnational social and professional networks, and are active in the international economic arena. After their return, some people with new hybrid lifestyles have encountered difficulties in integrating into the home society as some practices have been reshaped or even blocked by the limited availability of products or infrastructure.

In this chapter, I describe both material and non-material displays of the highly skilled returnees' lifestyles. I discuss in which ways and by what means the highly skilled Belarusian returnees manifest different types of transnational involvement. My analysis begins by discussing such topics as home belonging and national identity (sections 1 and 2), and then continues with post-return re-elaboration of family and sentimental relations (section 3). I analyse components of returnees' everyday lives such as material consumption (section 4), labour relations, and entrepreneurship (section 5). The analysis of these thematic sections provides a multidimensional picture of post-return experiences and lifestyles characteristic of highly skilled Belarusian professionals.

1. Perception of home

In the contemporary era of mobility, the concept of home became ambiguous[130]. While traditionally it was used to conceptualize 'home' as a fixed place—being at home means «being stationary, bounded, engaged, and grounded» (Rapport and Dawson 1998, 27); in recent years, scholars have begun to problematize the view on home as a fixed site by stressing the capacity of home to be mutable and flexible (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Brettel 2006; Ralph and Staeheli 2011). The processes of modernization (especially the development of technology and bureaucracies) brought the transformation of human consciousness toward the sense of «homelessness», which has multiple manifestations such as uncertainty about different aspects of one's life, crisis of identity, and «the collective and individual loss of integrative meanings» (Berger *et al.* 1973, 158). This 'homelessness' has to do also with 'place' and actually, with 'home'.

The existing literature reveals the modification of 'meaning of home', in which the concept of home is not static anymore but dynamic—home may involve both attachment and movement, and homes are not necessarily fixed in a single location (Naficy 1999; Ahmed *et al.* 2003; Nowicka 2006, 2007). During the person's life, the meaning of home evolves—'homes' are moved and changed, lost and obtained, imagined and remembered. Moreover, 'home' means not only a physical place or territory; it also refers to symbolic spaces and values—the warmth and cosiness of the family, the culture and traditions of the homeland[131].

In the context of transnational migration, the connection between 'home' and 'place' becomes even more problematic. Some authors argue that transnational migrants develop new understanding of 'home' that becomes multi-sited, or as Rouse calls it «plurilocal» (1991). This happens with people who emigrated from their homeland and stay abroad. Often they are nostalgic and idealize their 'previous' home, many of them aspire to return to a 'homeland'. But when (and if) this return happen, what do these people think about their home? What and where is it? Do this people find 'home' they were dreaming about while stayed abroad?

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[130] For an extensive review of theoretical debates and insights into the meaning of home see, for example, Mallet 2004.

[131] While in Russian the word '*dom*' means both between 'home' and 'house', in English this duality is seen better where this linguistic distinction exists.

In my research, I found that often 'home' is (re-)discovered just after return. The locally oriented returnees feel at home in Belarus, but it does not mean those transnationally oriented do not. The difference is that the former feel at home *only* in Belarus, while the latter feel at home *also* in Belarus. The transnationally oriented returnees are likely to have multiple homes and consider them both mobile and interchangeable. Here below I present some evidence for this claim.

Similarly to Al-Ali and Koser (2002), 'home' is often defined by its relation to the outside—we understand better what is 'not home' by having to deal with alien places and traditions, unfamiliar faces and habits, fear of unknown and exotic. Roman who emigrated by himself and left his immediate family behind, provided me with the following description of home:

> «You live in a kind of... You have as few things as possible because you move often. You have a bed and a table. That is all! Every place there has a built-in closet so you have not to have it. You live out of suitcase. What home are you speaking about? No home at all. And you understand that you are alone. You never lose the feeling that you are very alone» (Roman, Male, 14:49).

Roman defines 'home' by 'not home' that lacks of familiar objects and things, stability, and close relations. Roman mentioned many people surrounding him abroad, but the loneliness in his claim became a synonym of 'not home'. However, what is more striking about the concepts of 'home' and 'not home' is that it is not natural knowledge perceived from personal experience in a smooth way. Rather, as it is shown in the following quotations, it is intuited under the stress-factors of either emigration (1), or return (2).

> (1) «Most of all I was sorry about leaving my home. I was going to my husband, as many women do, but I was leaving home. I realized this break only when I made it *[went abroad]*. I would never expected such a thing from myself» (Liubov, Female, 17:26).
> (2) «I returned home. I did not feel me at home in [*Eastern Europe*] in these years, never. Home... After I had come back, I understood what it is. I grew up here. There is my yard, and now my daughter plays here. All the neighbours know me, they always remember about me, greet me. Home is my memories of the childhood. I am here, and it is my fortress. I feel good here. I am a mistress here» (Ksenia, Female, 26:68).

Interestingly, not only home country is discovered as home. Artem, for instance, told how his perception of foreign country had changed after return to Belarus:

«I did not feel home there until I have not come back to Minsk. Once I am here, I understood that I do not feel the logistics of the life here. While I understand very well the logistics of the life there. The most popular question was «Where the life is better, here or there?» I always answer «Whom do you love more, your mom or your dad?» (Artem, Male, 37:59)

That is, the passage from 'here' to 'there' and from 'there' to 'here' seems to play a crucial role in the definition of the concept of home. The meaning attributed to home often is not concrete; rather it is just a sensation like feeling good or comfortable. However, the analysis of the interviews indicates that home is made of at least four components: (1) relational—family and friends; (2) material, as house ownership and having furniture and belongings there; (3) practical, as Artem calls it, 'logistics' of the life, when you know how to solve problems, where to go and whom to speak; (4) territorial, as being born in the country or a strong attachment to the country nature and landscape. All these 'ingredients' are mixed in different proportions in the recipes of home. As expected, I found quite a strong distinction between locally and transnationally oriented returnees. Almost all of them were highly transnational while were living abroad, but after return some of them changed their way of relating to the ex-host-countries (foreign countries in general) and realized their strong attachment to the country of origin.

«My first return to Minsk was a disaster[132]. I clearly understood where I would live and I planned my life in a very precise way. It is my place; it is my home. [...] It is my home. I do not understand, do not know and do not want to have another one» (Liubov, Female, 17:41).

Liubov moved to Northern America because of the husband's professional engagement (Georgiy in this thesis). She reached the husband together with their little child, so the family was close to her. Nevertheless, the family, as an emotional centre, has not been enough to feel at home. As Lam and Yeoh note, «while notions of 'home' become understood as mobile and non-place specific concepts, it must be noted that they continue to be gendered terms, where the idea of the portability of 'home' is construed to fit better with male rather than female pursuits» (2004, 143). Similar are the stories of other female

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[132] Liubov calls her visit to Belarus a 'disaster' because in that occasion she realized her desire to return but knew it was impossible since her husband worked abroad. This internal conflict caused strong sense of stress and discomfort for her.

returnees who stayed abroad for sentimental reasons. For instance, Alisa affirmed that it was hard to feel home.

> «*[Did you feel at home when you were living abroad?]* It was a very rare feeling. Everything but my husband was alien to me. Everything. [...] I had an inner feeling to be always a guest there» (Alisa, Female, 23:54).

These returnees were very excited speaking about their home, the city, and the country in general. I felt their happiness about the return in Belarus almost physically. Of course, not only women embody such 'localism' once returned. Take the case of Daniil (1) who moved abroad with his wife and Arkadiy (2) who stayed abroad by himself.

> (1) «*[Did you feel at home abroad?]* There was a period when I simply got used. It is like children who get used to a summer camp. They even cry when go away... But it lasts until someone says you that you are nobody. […] Now I feel at home. I have a feeling of togetherness here. I did not have it there» (Daniil, Male, 7:48).
> (2) «I feel better here. I do not speak about economic situation or something like that. It is better here than in [*Northern America*]. May be the economy is better and the people are richer in [*Northern America*], but it is better here, because it is the homeland» (Arkadiy, Male, 27:31).

Although Daniil and Arkadiy differ a lot in their migratory experiences (while Daniil had some difficulties in finding a job and maintaining the family, Arkadiy had stable job and financial situation), both of them experienced discomfort in living abroad. For instance, both told to have had difficulties in integration into local societies and in establishment of social ties. In addition, they have felt discriminated in job conditions. Kuzma, who stayed for many years abroad as a student, illustrates this feeling of hardship:

> «I felt now what does it mean to be at home. There you fight your way with your head through the wall. You have to work hard to make the basic things. Here it is very easy. You are local, you know how it is working here, and you are perceived well, often you are even overestimated» (Kuzma, Male, 19:33).

That is, many returnees have 'found' their home in Belarus. Nevertheless, the realization of where is the home is not directly related to the level of mobility—while Arkadiy and Kuzma travel a lot for the work reasons, Daniil does not want to go abroad even for the holidays. Thus, the extent to which a person is engaged in any transnational practice is not necessarily related to the realization where (and whether) the home is. Feeling at home

in Belarus does not impede to be transnational, but many of informants confirmed my own thoughts and feelings about transformation of home among transnational migrants. On the one hand, there are those who feel home both in Belarus and abroad. Look at the words of Veniamin:

> «*[Did you have the feeling of being home there?]* I think yes, at least, when I moved there I could not believe that I was in [*Northern America*]; when I came here I could not believe that I returned. I would say that I lived there keeping one foot here―I read news and so on, because it was interesting; now I am here but I still keep one foot there» (Veniamin, Male, 39:35).

Veniamin maintained ties with Belarus while abroad, and continues to do so after return. He lives in two worlds and is satisfied with living in both of them. On the other hand, there are those who have lost the bonds with both 'old' and 'new' homes—their home is nowhere, they are aliens:

> «*[Do you feel at home now?]* Last weekend I went to the concert of Lavon Volski[133] in Vilnius. He released a new album, and there is a song called "Čuźy"[134]. The lyrics is very similar to me. It is like «lived in apartments on different continents, there you are alien and here you are alien». I have this thing too. It is like you are not completely there―you read news, try to follow Belarus―but after return you understand that neither here you at home» (Leontiy, Male, 24:66).

Notice how these two men (both stayed in [*Northern America*]) almost with the same words described completely different conception of home. Although both of them have acquired official belonging to the society (have got foreign citizenship), their symbolic belonging have developed in different ways. While Veniamin obtained two homes, Leontiy—involved in a mix of transnational practices—ended up in some kind of marginality in both settings. One of the possible accounts for this difference is the proximity of the immediate family and its role in the transformation of dwelling into home[135].

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[133] Lavon Volski is a Belarusian musician, writer, painter, and founder of the Belarusian rock groups Mroja, N.R.M., and Krambambula which gained popularity in the 90' and early 2000' thanks to use of Belarusian language and nationalistic texts. 'Čuźy' (from album 'Hramadaznaustva', 2014) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNL_oKM_OkM

[134] Čuźy (from Belarusian―*alien, foreigner*)

[135] Veniamin, once in Belarus, created his own family, which probably constituted a focal point for him.

Although mobility is one of the crucial characteristics of transnationally oriented people, it has often been considered a danger to personal well-being—mobile people are thought to be rootless, have no bond to any particular place, and their identity is apparently de-territorialized (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Nevertheless, while speaking with my informants, I got an impression that they do not lose one home and take another or have two or more homes in different places; rather they carry their home as a tent, always ready to pitch it and live inside in any place in the world.

> «I have never had a sensation that I was far from home. Home is always somewhere close to me. May be because the world for me is small, and movement is possible within it. So I have never had that feeling» (Nickolay, Male, 12:42).

The notion that people are mobile and home is portable can be a liberating thought, so liberating that one may think about constructing it by herself. In words of Naficy, «home is anyplace; it is temporary and it is moveable; it can be built, rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination» (1999, 6). In fact, Artem confirms: *«I am at home everywhere. I find and create it for me everywhere»* (37:61). Also Ruslan conveys the same idea:

> «*[Did you feel at home abroad?]* As for animal, it was very good there, it was very comfortable, but as for social animal... However, you organize your home yourself. You and only you» (Ruslan, Male, 38:31).

As Nowicka observes, «home is something that one constructs, not a particular place, not a location but an entity in becoming» (2007, 77). In fact, Ruslan and Artem describe their attitude toward 'home' exactly in these terms. Thus, 'home' becomes self-constructed. Moreover, the concept of freedom is of extreme importance here—transnational migrants feel free from expectations of societies, from bonds of certain places, countries, and even languages. While speaking with Grigoriy I was provided with a very interesting vision of home:

> «It is like with the languages. Many people ask me in what language I think. It depends on situation. Sometimes I think in [*Eastern European language*], sometimes in Russian. Sometimes in Belarusian. I switch between these languages freely; they are all equal. The same is with home. Now I feel at home here in [*Belarus*], but when I go to [*Eastern Europe*] […]—I feel at home too. May be because these places are similar in architecture and design, but anyway, I feel at home both there and here» (Grigoriy, Male, 42:36).

Grigoriy used the metaphor of languages to describe his understanding of homes that are multiple, independent, and interchangeable. Home has also a functional meaning—according to situation a person can just choose a home that fits better.

As I have mentioned above, one of the components of home is its material representation—in form of either rented or owned flat or house and its decor. In the process of settling in a new place objects may play a considerable role in transformation of «'spaces', such as houses, into 'places' of home» (Philipp and Ho 2010; Boccagni 2014). Many participants in this research told that while abroad they tried to 'create' their home abroad by adding things such as furniture, decorations, etc. Others, on the contrary, perceived their life abroad temporal and thus, not worthy of 'home-decor'.

It is hard to say what has happened with the material representations of their homes after return (I visited only few places). Still, I have an impression that international experience can make a great impact on the material content of home. For instance, I visited the house of Liudmila and Stepan located in Minsk region[136], that symbolically represents its hosts' transnational orientation and attitudes.

The owners have defined the style of their house as «Scandinavian style with Mediterranean and Belarusian classics elements»—it combines the simplicity of forms and natural materials of the Northern countries with Mediterranean colours and décor (see Fig. 10-13). As Stepan notes, *«this house is not just a place where to live, it is a lifestyle»*.

Figure 10. Liudmila and Stepan's house: outside view.

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[136] All the pictures have been taken from the online magazine about Minsk «CityDog.by».

Figure 11. Liudmila and Stepan's house: part of the living room.

Figure 12. Liudmila and Stepan's house: kitchen.

Figure 13. Liudmila and Stepan's house: bathroom.

In fact, they did not put any fence to be open to the nature and to people; all the objects in that house represent values and thoughts of their owners who live in Belarus but in ambience that make them feel also elsewhere—in places that had become their homes too.

As I have shown, the concept of home is not fixed neither in place nor in time. It is mutable and transformable. Moreover, migratory experience (return as well as emigration) may have various impacts on people. While some of them have (re-)discovered the one and only one home they have in Belarus; others have multiplied their homes and use them interchangeably.

The concept of home is to some extent close to those of motherland and national identity. Similarly to the meaning of home, the meanings of motherland and of nationality have been profoundly influenced by the migratory experience of the participants in this research. In the next section, I discuss findings on national self-identification of the highly skilled returnees.

2. Motherland[137], national identity, and citizenship

Motherland is a concept having a long history and a great value in the Belarusian culture, that refers to a symbolic relationship between an individual and a country conceived as an expression of culture, traditions, values, and personal relations. Conversely, nationality refers to an official right of an individual to belong to a certain nation, and thus may be multiple. The attachment to Motherland is to some extent amenable to be defined through the concept of national identity. Nevertheless, 'Motherland' is a concept much more rooted in the Belarusian culture than that of national identity. Motherland is something that counts more than an individual life. The welfare and safety of the Motherland are cultivated in people from the early childhood. In fact, the concept of Motherland (along with that of home) plays a very important role in the returnees' discourses. After return they became more confident about their ideas and feelings about their origins and belongings. Thus, it is a somehow anecdotal situation, where the people coming from abroad glorify Motherland, remit the national values, and become builders and promoters of the national identity.

What regards the definition of Motherland, all the participants in this research converged in non-material and non-state meaning of the concept. For some of the returnees it represents the past:

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[137] I use the term 'Motherland' instead of 'homeland' to underline the importance of this concept in the Belarusian culture. The exact word in Russian is *'Родина'* ('rodina') (in Belarusian *'Радзіма'* ('radzima') that is usually written with the capital letter and often is symbolically linked to the concept of 'mother'. Motherland is supposed to grow up and to take care of its 'children'.

«Motherland is family, relatives, and friends. Motherland is people and non-material environment. Going through the city, you see these buildings, and with each of it you have a story. Here you rode a bicycle; there you walked with a girlfriend. Such things capture you» (Nikita, Male, 10:67).

For others, Motherland represents the future and the possibility of changes:

«Motherland is a country where you are the master, where you can change something and where you can command. [..] A woman's rear is a man; the man's rear is only Motherland» (Ruslan, Male, 38:29, 38:8).

These definitions may seem too poetic and sometimes pathetic. Nevertheless, for the majority of the returnees, the (re-)discovery of Motherland had deep symbolic significance—they realized who they were.

«After living abroad I changed a lot. First, I understood who I am. Before going abroad, I did not know where my motherland is and what is important for me» (Liubov, Female, 17:79)

«After return I had a sense of motherland. I realized that our nature is beautiful, and that our people are good» (Ksenia, Female, 26:35).

While for somebody, the sense of Motherland has been somehow new, for others the importance of the Motherland has been out of the question even when they lived abroad. Nevertheless, among the returnees there are also those, who do not attach big value to the concept of Motherland.

«Motherland and patriotism are distorted concepts. It is a symbol of propaganda. In the globalized world, a concept of motherland is drivel. You have a place, where you were born and grew up. It is dear only because of it. Full stop» (Roman, Male, 14:55).

In this case the concept of Motherland is equated to that of nationality and criticized as ineffective or even harmful way of labelling people. The most important thing, instead, is the personality and human qualities that are independent from place of birth. There are few evidences of this point view below:

«I do not see any sense to classify people by nationality. It may be useful to classify them by some personal features. Nationality is just a cliché; it does not help to understand a person» (Leonid, Male, 2:29).

«For me the world is not big, you can move around it. I think that people created all divisions artificially. They are much lesser than one might think. It is a lack of experience, lack of knowledge» (Nickolay, Male, 12:42).

«I have friends from Morocco, Cuba, Puerto Rico, France. I met both good and bad people. In Belarus and in Africa you can meet both good and bad people. The race has nothing to do with it» (Timur, Male, 43:50)

You can see how by expressing their opinions toward the Motherland and other nationalities the informants have claimed their national, transnational, and to some extent cosmopolitan attitudes. These concepts do not contradict each other; rather, for different people they have different weights and importance in everyday life. For example, Innokentiy claimed to feel himself cosmopolitan only in part—«*you have not to be a full cosmopolitan. You have to have your country, and to perceive it as your motherland. Because if everybody will be cosmopolitans, there will be no diversity in the world. [...] What is a country? Genetically, we are all relatives. Yes, in Belarus we are all relatives. A country is not a number of random people. That is why there is kinship between people of the same nation»* (16:47, 16:51).

In fact, as some scholars have shown, globalisation processes are constantly contrasted by tendencies of separation and exclusion (Bauman 1992, 1998; Norris 2005). According to this view, the process of globalisation can result in a counter reaction expressed in a «stronger inclination toward the local or national context» (Bekhuis *et al.* 2013, 1040) and a more assertive articulation of local identities. As Eriksen claims, «it [globalization] *standardizes, modernizes, deterritorializes*, and, by dialectical negation, *localizes* people, since it is only after having been globalized that people may become obsessed with the uniqueness of their locality» (2014, 17). In this regard, the concept of identity[138] and, especially, of national identity[139] is becoming salient.

Speaking about the latter in Belarus is not an easy thing. According to Smith (1991) the Western model of nation includes «historic territory, legal-political community and

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[138] The concept of social identity broadly refers to the psychological links between individuals and the social groups or communities they belong (Abrams and Hogg 1990). One of the most common definitions is that provided by Tajfel (1981, 255), who describes social identity as «[…] that part of an individual's self-concept, which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership».

[139] According to Smith (1991, 14), a nation is «a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members». Thus, national identity is a psychological bond between fellow nationals based on a sense of belonging and fellow feeling (Geertz 1963; Connor 1978).

equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology» (1991, 11). Historic territory, in case of Belarus, appears one of the most problematic issues. As Snyder argues, modern national identity in this area of the Eastern Europe is unintelligible without reference to the interaction between «titular nationalities» (Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine)[140] and other ethnic groups such as Jews, Russians, and Germans (2003, 8). The limited usage of Belarusian language is another weak point in the definition of the Belarusian identity. However, Belarus shows that national identity may be formed without reference to the ethno-cultural core but through various social and cultural practices having as point of reference the nation-state (Bekus 2014ab). In this regard, one of the informants told me an episode happened to him several years before. «*Once I have been invited to a conference organized by CIA. I was among other activists of alternative Belarusian academic culture. My thesis was that Lukashenko, the president for 20 years, is building the Belarusian nation. There is ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism... Thanks to his politics and various mechanisms, the Belarusian nation is built. It is different from the Russian or the Polish one. It is does not matter that it is not Belarusian-speaking. The people began to throw rotten tomatoes to me. One Ukrainian publicist shouted that we live in feudalism and not in a civic nation. So, it is acceptable to speak only about how in Belarus the situation is bad. And this kind of ideas are financed well. But I do not trade motherland*» (Vladislav, Male, 33:15). Unfortunately, the discourses on nation and national identity are too often mixed up with the value judgements of actual political situation. Nevertheless, politics play a considerable role in the processes of formation of national identity.

In the contemporary context, when Belarus is heavily dependent on Russia in both economic and political issues, the distinction from the 'Russians' is one of the primary concerns of being 'Belarusian'. Yet, there is a strong relationship between individual and collective, internal and external—nation as well as national identity exist if there are boundaries separating them from other nations and identities; the distinction between 'self'

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[140] For many centuries the territories of modern Belarus constituted the core of the Great Duchy of Lithuania; later they became the part of the Polish-Lithuanian (*Res Publica*) state. In the 18th century the Belarusian territories were annexed to the Russian Empire. After a brief independence during the Russian civil war (1917-1918), it was divided again by Poland and the Soviet Union. In the end of World War Two it was reconstituted as a Soviet Republic and existed in this form until 1991 when the republic of Belarus was proclaimed. That is, Belarusian culture flourished in 14-17th centuries in the Great Duchy of Lithuania which had Belarussian chancellors, its national Belarusian army, the country's own laws (Statutes of The Great Duchy of Lithuania were written in Old Belarusian), and its national currency (the Belarusian taler). In later periods, Belarusian culture has undergone strong Polonisation and Russification processes, in which the national identity of Belarusians have been to some extent lost.

and 'other' is crucial (Edensor 2002). Russia (and other neighbouring countries), in this sense, became «relevant national 'others'» (Connor 1978) that reinforce the Belarusian national identity. For instance, many returnees noted that while they were living abroad it was very important for them to differentiate themselves from other neighbouring nations and to stress that they were Belarusians.

> «When my husband presented me, people asked him whether I was Russian. Nooo! I am Belarusian. We are different. Both men and women, well, we are a different nation. Whatever people say» (Vera, Female, 1:99).

> «I feel Belarusian. When I lived abroad, people asked me whether I was Russian. No, I am not Russian, I am Belarusian. Russians are different. Belarusians are calmer, less emotional» (Gennadiy, Male, 6:38).

There is a common belief—feed mostly by politicians—that Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are 'Slavic brothers' that share common history and culture[141]. The Belarusian returnees have confidently denied this claim although admitted that it is not easy to see the difference.

> «The common opinion that Russians and Belarusians are brothers is not true. Visually and linguistically, they are similar, but in terms of character and mentality, we are very different. You do not see this from a distance. But when you live among them, you see this difference. Russians are much closer, they do not take of barriers for long time in communication. [...] In Russians' behaviour, the oscillation of amplitude is much higher. They rush from one extreme to another. One day you are the best friends, the next day you are enemies» (Bogdan, Male, 21:22).

> «There is the difference between Belarusians and Russians. I did not feel this difference before. In the Soviet Union, there was the feeling that everyone was Russian[142]. Uzbeks, Tatars... They were Russians. Nevertheless, after having lived there I understood that the difference exists» (Ksenia, Female, 26:54).

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[141] According to several researchers, it is incorrect to speak about the historical, cultural, and even genetic closeness of the Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians that are three absolutely different ethnic communities (e.g., Balanovskiy and Balanovskaya 2007). Considering the contentious nature of the topic, a more profound and interdisciplinary (combining historical, anthropological, genetic, and sociological aspects) approach should be applied to the future studies.

[142] Ksenia does not refer to the imperialist attitudes of Russians toward other nations of the Soviet Union; rather, she claims that in the Union (at least at interpersonal level) there was strong promotion of equality between nations.

In the talks of the informants there is a necessity to distinguish themselves from 'others' who are not evidently other. Especially in the eyes of foreigners who do not see much difference between Russia and Ukraine, and can hardly find Belarus in the geographical map.

In the Soviet period there was a Soviet identity, Soviet values, and Soviet outlook[143]. The most separated nations were the Baltic ones, and in fact, they left the Union among the first. The process of reacquisition of national Belarusian identity has begun comparatively recently, and the distinction from 'others' in this sense is a very important step in the identity formation. It is an exclusive—through opposition to others—identification but it is an essential part of national self-consciousness.

Along with the distinction from Russian and Ukrainian peoples, the Belarusian returnees claim their closeness to Europe, to the European culture and mentality[144]. This view was typical to transnationally oriented returnees.

> «We are closer to the West, and we have different education. We are different»
> (Vera, Female, 1:99).

> «Here we are much closer to the European mentality. I mean, that the difference
> between European and Belarusian mentalities is lesser that between American
> and Belarusian» (Leonid, Male, 2:27).

Nobody of the informants was able to provide me with a definition of European mentality, but the word 'European' has been frequently used to describe Belarusians and Belarus—'Europeans', 'European country', 'European city'—as a synonym to modern, civilized, and rich. A very strong voice among the informants was the comparison with the 'West'[145]—the majority of them has lived with the consciousness that there is nothing wrong

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[143] One popular song in the 70s said «my address is not a house, nor a street; my address is the Soviet Union».

[144] According to Belarusian historian and writer Uladzimir Arlou, «Belarusians are Europeans both historically and mentally. People are surprised that the Belarusian cities had the Magdeburg Law and Belarus had its own Renaissance. We have always belonged to the European culture; we have always been the border between Europe and Asia. We lived in the Empire—the Great Duchy of Lithuania—which stretched from the Baltic to the Black Sea, but it was not an empire. There were completely different principles of the state, where all one people were tolerant and patient. In the squares of Belarusian cities Orthodox, Catholic and Uniate churches, synagogues and mosques coexisted peacefully. In this we differ from Western Europe—we have never had religious clashes» (From the interview on http://bolshoi.by/culture/belorusy-eto-russkie/). Certainly, it is an idealistic view on the origins of Belarusian culture. Nevertheless, it has considerable repercussion in the society.

[145] This term symbolically delimits the developed countries of Western Europe and Northern America.

or shameful in being Belarusian[146]. Here below I provide few instances showing how almost in the same terms the informants conveyed this idea.

> «Belarusians have in their head an ideology that anybody else are better than they» (Innokentiy, Male, 16:49).

> «There is a cultural setting, especially among *intelligentsia*, that here everything is bad, and in the West everything is good. This setting is imaginary. They have an idea that in the West everybody lives as C.C. Capwell[147]. People are deaf to such things as the cost of living. And many others things» (Vladislav, Male, 33:59).

> «Belarus is much cooler than Belarusians think. Belarusians suffer from a complex of inferiority—like 'we are poor and miserable'. From 2011 the mass liberalization of market relations has occurred. If you want to work, you can work and earn a lot. But the people does not understand this» (Artem, Male, 37:49).

> «For our people, any foreigner is better than they. But it does not exist among those who live abroad. Completely» (Kuzma, Male, 19:51)

That is, the international experience has made many returnees to lose their illusions about foreign countries and to appreciate Belarus. Surprisingly, this new consciousness of not being worse than others is typical to both locally and transnationally oriented returnees. They all admit that the life abroad is a very useful experience and often have claimed that every Belarusian has to spend some time abroad to be able to love and to appreciate her own country. This idea acts in two directions: first, it modifies in some way migration practices—stayers are encouraged to go abroad, migrants are encouraged to return; second—it functions as a stimulus for personal and national self-confidence.

The returnees, in their own words, learnt to understand better other people and to see various situations in broader way. Many participants have admitted that their attitude toward Belarus changed after having lived abroad.

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[146] This issue is strongly related to the public opinion on emigration discussed in chapter 3. In this view, Belarus is considered a dead-end place with the rotten society—the best option is to escape from the country and not to tell to anybody about being Belarusian.

[147] Channing Creighton "C.C." Capwell is a fictional character on the American soap opera Santa Barbara, most notably portrayed by Jed Allan. C.C. is the town's patriarch and a wealthy businessman. In Russia, the show was the first American program to air there after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It aired on RTR from 1992 to 1999 and from 2000 to 2002.

«Overall, my attitude toward Belarus has changed. It is easy to criticize and say that here everything is shit, and there everything is fine. No, it is not so. West is the traditional place where new technologies are born... Historically we are a little farther away, so we get them later. But people are working on it» (Matvey, Male, 4:30).

«After living abroad I feel trembling emotions toward Belarus. Abroad experience has opened my eyes toward some nuances in Belarus that are not so bad» (Veniamin, Male, 39:74)

Almost all the returnees have modified their vision of national identity after the migratory experience. Their national identity has been broadened—on the one hand they became more confident about their national identity, recognized to be Belarusian and to love their country; on the other hand, they have undergone considerable changes in their outlook toward other countries and cultures.

«My motherland is Belarus. I was born here and I grew up here. It defines me originally. I am a Belarusian who lived in other countries and who has more visions. My vision has not changed, it but it has broadened» (Artem, Male, 37:58).

«We are happy to live but not to get bogged down in the wilderness, you need to move, you need to travel, and you need to maintain contacts with the world. We feel ourselves here as a part of Europe. We are in Europe, in our house. It is very different when you feel yourself as a European who lives in Belarus» (Liudmila, Female, 8:42).

That is, the experience of living abroad has contributed to the personal growth of some returnees and helped them to broaden their outlook. However, this change occurred not only in the cognitive and emotional spheres, but also influenced the official status of some returnees—their citizenship.

The dynamics of international migration and transnational mobilities challenge traditional frameworks of citizenship and modify the relationship between a documented status of citizen (with its set of rights and duties toward a certain country) and transnational identity (Bradatan *et al.* 2010). Thus, the societies have faced the phenomenon of multiple citizenships that transcend the territorial and political boundaries of states (Bauböck 1994; Portes *et al.* 1999; Itzigsohn 2000; Bloemraad 2004).

Roughly one fifth of the participants in this research has obtained dual citizenship during their life abroad. The ways they followed to do this were different—one of the returnees obtained the citizenship from her parents (immigrants too), two people won the Green Card Lottery, and then made a request for citizenship, others followed the standard procedure of foreign citizenship obtainment. For some of them it was a natural event on the course of living abroad, others (for example, Veniamin) considered it a strategic step for return—the foreign citizenship would have allowed him going abroad again if the return to home country had failed. Few informants noted that while abroad they thought about the possibility to get a foreign passport but then decided that it would not be worthy of all the bureaucratic difficulties and possible fiscal consequences.

As I have mentioned previously, the 'dual citizens' perceive their foreign passport as an authorization ('season ticket' in terms of Georgiy) that permits them to be mobile and free to go in almost any country in the world. The lack of necessity to ask visas has been mentioned as the most important advantage of the dual citizenship. What is more, the foreign citizenship is considered a part of 'plan B'—if something goes wrong in Belarus they will have always the possibility to use their second nationality. Hence, following Bloemgaard (2004), I argue that the traditional framework for citizenship (the single and exclusive link between an individual and a sovereign nation-state) is still relevant since the dual citizenship has mainly an instrumental role rather than the value of multiple national (or transnational) identities.

Hence, the attachment to place, both actual and symbolic, has a considerable importance in the post-return lifestyles. The majority of returnees who participated in this research claimed that Motherland and national identity are the elements having a big value for their life. As I have noted above, Motherland is often defined through concepts of traditions, links between generations, kinship ties, and simply as family. In fact, family is one of the central nodes of returnees' lives that influence and shape the multiplicity of decisions, attitudes, and behaviours. In the following section, I discuss how gender roles and family relationships are influenced and shaped by migratory experience.

3. Gender roles and family relationships

Family relations are not fixed in time, and they are not homogeneous, since different members perceive them in different ways (Thorne 1992; Parreñas 2005). The boundaries of family and kinship change over the life-course, but whether individuals forge or maintain any kind of transnational connections at some points of their lives depends primarily on their family relations and connections back home (Levitt and Waters 2002; Espiritu 2003; Smith 2006). Increasingly, transnational migration scholars look at how gender configures and, in turn, is reconfigured by, international migration (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 1994, 2001; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Mahler 1999; Hirsch 2003; Vianello 2013). For instance, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) questions the 'household strategy' for understanding migration and settlement processes and emphasizes the importance of family and community relations as gendered institutions. During the migration experiences, the roles played by women are modified since they gain more personal autonomy, independence, and influence in family decision-making. Similarly, Hirsch (2003) argues that sexual relationships and the perception of marriage in Mexico have undergone significant changes in terms of gender roles due to transnational networks and broader cultural influence of the USA on the Mexican society. In particular, she claims that in contrast to older and tradition-oriented women the younger generations of women have an active role in choosing suitors and perceive the success of marriage as a question of individual action. In her study on social remittances transferred by Ukrainian women to their families left behind, Vianello (2013) argues that migrant women become more independent, and acquire and remit a gender identity, which is oriented more on self-care and self-realisation. Hence, these studies discuss the transformation of female and, in general, gender roles in both internal and external family issues that is occurring to great extent due to various migration processes and experiences.

Family relations are considered one of the most important factors influencing the decision to return (King 2000; Black *et al.* 2004). This claim is largely confirmed in my research—in many cases family ties create a background facilitating the final return decision. Nevertheless, the return has been rarely related to family reunification.

Actually, living separately is not typical to highly skilled Belarusian migrants—they either stay home or migrate together with their immediate family. Only three participants in this research have experienced 'partnership- and parenting-at-a-distance'[148].

> «I had everything I wanted—I bought an apartment, I got a job. But when I was going to sleep it hurt a lot [*not to have the husband close*]. He has not been with us for two years. He came here few times for business. We quarrelled and squabbled. It was horrible. Some superior force made us to stay together. Also our child and the responsibility for him. […] He did not know what to expect. I stayed here alone for 2 years. Of course, we talked on the phone but we talked only about the child. For the child his father has been always his father who was in a long business trip. [...] I was completely sure that he would return. If I had had any doubt about this, I would never have returned alone» (Liubov, female, 17:60, 17:62).

> «It is difficult to stay far from the child. Couple of years ago he came here. Also this summer he stayed with me. We have good relationship. We talk on skype always. Moreover, there is a good technology—we watch movies together by sharing the desktop on skype» (Mikhail, Male, 22:66).

Consistently with the existing literature (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2005; Mazzucato and Schans 2008; Boccagni 2012a), living at a distance appeared to be a very difficult experience, which may subject conjugal and parental relationship to risk. The modern technologies (mobile phones, Skype, etc.) make the situation much easier—the distance at least for some minutes or hours becomes shorter. However, having dear people far away is a source of considerable stress.

Although family is held in high esteem in Belarus (as actually, in other European countries) and despite many studies have emphasized the importance of family and kinship in return decision-making (Boyd 1989; Massey and Espinoza 1997; Manuh 2002; Tiemoko 2004; Reynolds 2011), immediate relatives do not seem to play a significant role in the migration decision-making process in case of highly skilled Belarusians. The majority of returnees spoke about their migration decisions as about personal ones; some of them took decisions together with their partners but never with their parents. Similarly, nobody of the participants in this research was involved in transnational economic relations in form of remittances. Some of them had a small financial support from their families in the beginning

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[148] Liubov returned to Belarus with the child two years before her husband and Mikhail who while abroad divorced and returned to Belarus leaving his son with the mother.

of their migration experience, but in general, all of them were financially independent from their parents in both directions—neither support, nor remittances. There are multiple factors explaining this fact. First, the large part of the highly skilled migrants is quite young—in their twenties-thirties. Considering the age at birth in Belarus, their parents are quite young too—in their forties-fifties, thus of working age. Second, almost all the returnees come from *intelligentsia* families—e.g., teachers, doctors, engineers, and scientists, who in the end of career earn enough to have a good standard of living and to cope without financial support from their children. Third, Belarus, being a socially-oriented country, provides elderly people with necessary medical services, pensions, and assistance. Thus, even elder people do not need external financial help. Rather, what is much more important is the emotional support and closeness, which, in fact, played a great role in the professionals' decision to return. Moreover, their intentions regarding remigration are to a certain extent shaped by the presence of elder relatives.

> «At least for the next three years I will not move anywhere. My father died, and my mother is alone. We have to decide what to do and to make some arrangements. So I cannot go anywhere in this period» (Bogdan, Male, 21:43).

Similarly, also Yury's plans are shaped by some family issues: *«My father is disabled and it is one of the reasons because I cannot go away from Belarus forever»* (9:31). Children feel their responsibility for the care of the older generation; they realize that rather than provide care at distance, they have to stay close and to provide them with material and emotional assistance. The possibility to stay closer to dear people is often seen as a strong benefit of living in Belarus, which in many cases influenced the decision to return and to stay in Belarus.

> «My grandmother[149] is here. She is very old. I am very happy to have the possibility to see her almost every day. It is very important for me» (Ksenia, Female, 26:51)

> «Until my daughter is small we will not go anywhere. We could go to [*Northern America*] but here she has her grandmothers. And this is an important point. I

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[149] The relationships with grandparents are often very special for Belarusians due to the fact that children spend considerable amount of time with them: if grandparents live in the same town/city they literally participate in growing up a child; if grandparents live in a village, it is a common practice to send children there for three months of summer holidays. That is, grandparents and their grandchildren often have strong intimate relationships.

think that it is better for her to have the possibility to stay closer to grandmothers, uncles, godparents and so on» (Veniamin, Male, 39:75).

While the considerations about elder generations were uniform among returnees' talks, the opinions about private sentimental[150] life appeared extremely influenced by gender. For instance, as I have discussed in chapter 4, many male returnees had decided to return to Belarus because of and considering their sentimental relationships—some had great difficulties in setting up their private life abroad, the others were pulled by the beginning sentimental relationships at home. It was very common to hear from the men the complaints about foreign women's emancipation and masculinity. In fact, many acknowledged that their return had been a largely rational decision to find a partner with their own similar mentality in Belarus. As Nikita, put it: «*I was more inclined toward a Slavic soul*» (10:23). In a similar way thinks also Mikhail: «*For 75% I am sure that my next relationship I will build with a Belarusian or a Russian girl*» (22:55). It seems that gender expectations from Slavic women have a lot of differences in comparison with that from foreign women. From my personal observations, the main problem is the female social and financial independence, which is not appreciated by Slavic men who want their wives to be family- and husband-oriented and concentrated. Moreover, as some explained it, the communication with the opposite sex in Belarus is smoother and to some extent easier because of many places where people can know each other.

> It is easier to start a conversation, to have a contact. It does not matter whether it would be something serious. They see you as a man at first. And there is an eye contact. In [*Northern America*], everybody stays online. Here it is still possible to know a girl in a bar. I think it is a good thing. Because why do we need bars and restaurants if we cannot know anybody there? (Arseniy, Male, 41:38).

Timofey has advanced once more explanation for the preference of Belarusian girls: «*it is easier to stay with [Belarusian] girls because of the cultural similarity—they watched the same cartoons, the same films and so on*» (35:41). Actually, the sharing of cultural codes is extremely important in establishment of any kind relationships. The generations of the 1980s in former Soviet countries have their own symbolic 'code of conduct' that sets out what cultural products are 'must-have' of a decent person. For instance, a person must know and like a long list of Soviet cartoons and movies, songs and books. Quotations from these

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[150] Sentimental refers to the private relationships not executed officially.

creations are often used in everyday conversations and serve as an indicator of a person's level of culture. In this regard, I remember an anecdote about one my friend, who had a foreign girlfriend and was very disappointed by their cultural difference. His claim was «*She does not know who is Cheburashka*[151]!»

The perception of the opposite sex by the informants is quite homogeneous if seen from the point of view of men and women separately. The majority of the male returnees seemed to be enchanted by the local women and spoke about them in superlative terms. More often, they paid more attention to such external features as beauty and personal grooming, but also tenderness and femininity have been highlighted. Roman is very happy about his private life: «*The private life is going very well here. There are many beautiful and clever girls for every taste. [...] I have not chosen yet. I am not in a hurry. Why should I? Here there are many beautiful girls and few normal men; there it is the opposite*» (14:46). Another informant describes his impressions in terms of big choice too: «*In Minsk the number of beautiful girls and their style is five times greater than there. You can enter any bar and you will be impressed. [...] It is much easier to fall in love in Minsk because the choice is much bigger here*» (Artem, 37:26, 37:31).

Despite the euphoria about Belarusian women is prevalent, it is not uniform. Some male returnees have noted that many Belarusian girls have a consumerist vision of life—they would like to 'sell' themselves at a high price and desperately rush the men in the pursuit of marriage. Many of them associate these new female attitudes with the influence of the West and strongly disapprove them.

On the other side, there are female returnees who are mostly dissatisfied with Belarusian men and their attitudes towards women. During the talks, Belarusian men have been depicted as lacking of initiative and sluggish. Ksenia, married with a foreigner, told: «*After return, I can see it better. The men in Belarus are passive. I would like to see masculinity in men, they do not have it*» (26:58). In fact, the women's attitudes toward choosing a partner have been modified—an ideal spouse is not a Belarusian man, but an active and resolute foreigner.

> «After returning I felt myself flawed. I mean, I am not flawed, I live in harmony
> with myself. But abroad men always said compliments to me. Here they do not.

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[151] *Cheburashka* (Russian: Чебурашка) is an iconic Russian classic cartoon character from a 1966 story by Soviet writer Eduard Uspensky.

[…] I think that to marry a worthy person I have to go abroad. I do not see anybody here» (Valeria, 1:92, 1:98).

Summing up, the family and sentimental relationships play a significant role in the post-return lifestyles of highly skilled returnees. The return has set priorities in which parents and elder generations are on the first place. Sentimental life is important as well. However, the post-return behaviour towards the opposite sex has strong gender differences. Whereas male returnees reconfirm patriarchal and traditional roles and orient themselves toward Belarusian women; female returnees, in their post-return experience distance themselves from Belarusian men and tend to prefer foreign partners.

4. Material consumption

The way a person spends money can tell a lot about her style of life. Still, money has always been an uncomfortable topic in social research. This study is not an exception—the informants have quite inhibited while speaking about how they earn and spend their money[152]. Nevertheless, I found some common patterns in their discourses that I describe in this section. In brief, I argue that the transnationally oriented returnees follow «consumerist» style of life that takes advantage of Belarus (its relatively low prices goods and services, nature, etc.). Conversely, the locally oriented informants seem to have more passive and relaxed consumer attitudes.

Some of the participants in this research were labour migrants, and for many of them the quality of life had been a primary reason for emigration. Meanwhile, others went abroad for education purposes and, in majority of case, relied on scholarships. Interestingly, their thoughts regarding money converge in how Kuzma described:

> «Someone says that it is a backwater here *[in Belarus]*. I am sorry, but [*Southern Europe*] is much more a morass than Belarus. You do not fight for anything, do not compete. The scholarship corrupts you. You get used to this parasitic attitude. It is as a pension. You get used to the fact that you do not have to do anything to get it. It is not Britain, even less America. You just live with this relaxed mood and get the money—little but always sufficient. When you return it is easy to be transformed in a total wreck. My discipline fell, I became lazier. I would behave myself differently in business if I returned ten years ago» (Kuzma, Male, 19:59).

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[152] Women spoke about money more freely, while men always tried to avoid this topic.

Neither of the informants regrets about the period they stayed abroad, Kuzma included. However, many of them claimed that now they would have lived better if they had not emigrated. These returnees rely on the experiences of their mates from University who have bought several apartments, set up own businesses, created families, etc. In more general terms, their life-course events have considerably shifted in time due their decision to migrate. Their life conditions worsened (from their words) because of different reasons—someone went to a country or a city where the quality of life could be maintained only with a huge amount of money; others spoke about years they had spent on education abroad while their mates in Belarus started to work and made a career for themselves. In general, almost all of them told me that the cost of life abroad is much higher than in Belarus.

> «It is very hard to live here with our salary. But people who dream to go abroad do not think that it is very hard to live abroad, too. The utilities costs are very high. It is unreal to buy your own flat because it costs an arm and a leg! Yes, you are paid better there, but sometimes after you have paid all the bills you remain with the same amount of money as here» (Alisa, Female, 23:39).

> «I came here to see how the things are going. Abroad there are other defects. Here you pay 30 dollars for the flat *[utilities]* if you have one. There you pay 1000 or even 1200» (Arseniy, Male, 41:35).

These are only two of many other similar calculations I was provided with. Nevertheless, while the locally oriented informants stressed the costliness of life abroad, those transnationally oriented were excited about the cheapness they found in Belarus.

> «In our country is much cheaper to live. Our expenses, I mean housing, food, transport, petrol, mobile phones, everything, it all costs about 500 euros for all of us. It is peanuts in confront with Europe! We had already forgot about the Belarusian prices! 500 euros are enough for four people! So we can afford to travel a lot. […] As we live in a country that permits to pay so little for the life, we can afford to add something interesting to our lives!» (Liudmila, Female, 8:7)

> «I pay even less attention to any everyday inconveniences here, because it easy and cheap to travel. Some people criticize Belavia[153] because it is expensive... They have not travelled in [*Northern America*]!» (Miroslava, Female, 30:76)

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[153] Belavia Belarusian Airlines is the national airline company of Belarus.

In fact, the prices for many goods and services in Belarus are actually lower than in European countries. Moreover, the absolute majority of my informants told that after return they earn as much as abroad or sometimes even more if real income is considered.

«The salary I have now is absolutely comparable with that which I would get there. [...] I do not have obstacles for reasonable expenses» (Pavel, Male, 3:53).

«I spent the money I earned for flight tickets. Now I do not buy flight tickets and I have the same» (Gennadiy, Male, 6:27).

«I am not a person who seeks money. It is clear that money is always little but for me it is enough. I have a good salary here, even higher than there» (Yevgeniy, Male, 11:58).

Interestingly, the returnees who have higher incomes are more likely to conduct transnationally oriented lifestyle. Economic success may be an interpretive key for adopting either locally or transnationally oriented lifestyle (since, for example, mobility and travelling require a certain level of material well-being), but, definitely, it fails to explain the differentiation to a decent extent. Moreover, economic success is an endogenous variable since it may be both source and consequence of participation in transnational practices.

Notwithstanding different financial conditions, both transnationally and locally oriented informants stressed that it was very difficult if not impossible to buy their own dwelling abroad and that they could not even think about such option because of very high prices and relatively low incomes. In fact, one of the main expenditures the highly skilled returnees did in Belarus is buying a flat[154]. While for many the investment in housing was a somehow planned and predicted action, there are those who do not prearrange even such important (as for someone) event as buying a home.

«One summer we came here just to buy a house. We did not know that we would live here. We just wanted to buy one because houses costed peanuts that time. We paid 500 bucks for the old house here. We bought it as a summer house but then we decided that our home has to be here» (Stepan, Male, 15:11).

«A dwelling is not a problem, you can go and buy it. But I am not sure if I need it. I do not know how much time I will spend here. If everything will be ok with

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[154] Only four of my informants live in their own houses in the periphery of Minsk or out of it. All the others live in either their own or rented flats (see chapter 4).

the project I am going to start here, I will stay here for some period. In that case I will need to settle somehow» (Nickolay, Male, 12:34).

In their statements, the transnationally oriented returnees showed themselves as quick off the mark and enterprising people. Moreover, while speaking with them, I had a feeling that they have some kind of 'consumerist' attitude towards Belarus. I do not attach any negative connotation to this concept, I only mean that they explicit their taking advantage of living in Belarus. Their incomes are high, the prices are low—they make the most of it. Interestingly, even Belarusian nature and the possibility to live close to green is often perceived as any other good which makes the life better and which can be bought.

> «In Belarus it is good to have a family if you have a lot of money. I mean, if you are rich enough to afford living out of town, it is cool, because there is more nature here. You can find a place where your family will be safe» (Timofey, Male, 35:40).

While transnationally oriented returnees are happy about the possibility to spend money and to get maximum returns, those locally oriented are more indifferent toward money—they can spend but prefer not to. They seem to be 'tired' of spending. Their style of life is more passive and relaxed. This apathy may concern both earning and spending. Note how Vladislav is indifferent toward money in general.

> «What concerns money—there will be something for sure. I will work somewhere; I will earn something. I have money… Let say, I have money to burn. [...] From the point of view of an administrator, I have a lot of money. From the point of view of the guys who come here[155], I have little money. But money is not simply money. It depends on what you need from life in the next ten years. For what I am going to do, I have the money airbag. I do not need a car, because everything I need is at walking distance from me. I do not need a flat...» (Vladislav, Male, 33:56)

Similarly, Georgiy and Daniil have expressed this idea speaking about their leisure time. Both of them have changed their habits concerning travelling after having returned to Belarus.

> «I do not want to spend wittingly my money for sitting in the plane and going somewhere. I do not need it. I understand that I can afford it, but I do not need it.

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[155] Vladislav is referring to sons of the rich who are usual clients in the bar we were speaking.

> In [*Northern America*] we travelled a lot, we did not consider 1000 km a long journey. I understood that my family needed some entertainment and I did not know whether we would have such opportunity again. Now I understand that my family can... If my wife wants to go to see fjords, she just goes there. I do not» (Georgiy, Male, 40:68).

> «Here you just take your car, go to a lake which is distant 30 km and enjoy it. I do not want to go to the airport where they will lose your luggage and all that stuff. I do not need it» (Daniil, Male, 7:65)

That is. in some cases, the abroad experience has caused some kind of aversion to movement. While abroad, they felt almost obliged to travel and to see as much as possible. After return, they can afford themselves, let say, to stop and relax. Nevertheless, it does not mean that locally oriented returnees are immobile. As you have seen, the informants speak a lot about travelling. Both locally and transnationally oriented spend a considerable part of their incomes for going abroad. However, the 'moods' of their trips have different nuances. For example, Liubov who is locally oriented told me that once she got a passion for travel:

> «I began to travel a lot. I visited all the Europe from the North to the South, from the East to the West. [...] I did not like my first trip but the feeling of a journey became attractive. I go to a country for a long time, like for couple of weeks. So I spend all the year income for my summer trips, in September I am at zero» (Liubov, Female, 17:67).

Liubov saves her money for the whole year and spend them for one trip she accurately prepares and expects. It is a big and important event, which is supposed to bring many positive emotions. In fact, as other informants noted, *«it is better to live in Belarus and to travel abroad. When you go abroad twice a year you enjoy it much more than when you live there»* (Fedor, Male, 13:61).

As an opposite case, there is transnationally oriented Liudmila who has a completely different attitude toward travelling.

> «I am in parental leave now. Every month I go somewhere so as not to be bored here. I went to *xxx* to Helsinki, now I am going to go to Copenhagen to see my friends, and then we will go to the sea or somewhere else. So you see, every month I go somewhere. And I spend about 500 euro for each trip» (Liudmila, Female, 8:7).

Liudmila goes abroad for a weekend or for few days during the workweek just «not to be bored here». Travelling became a routine, an everyday activity for her. Taking a plane is as easy as to take a car; any world city is just around the corner. Actually, the geographical position of Belarus makes it very comfortable in terms of travelling. In fact, many people go to the countries of the Western Europe[156] just to blow away the cobwebs.

> «There are not enough good services *[in Belarus]* but you can go to Europe. [*Northern America*] is always the same. The climate may differ but you will see the same shops, the same restaurants, the same hotels. After coming back, realized how I like travelling and appreciate diversity. This year I travelled very much, may be it was the hottest period in my life, in terms of travelling» (Miroslava, Female, 30:75, 30:76).

Of course, these considerations are valid for those who can afford to travel. At the same time there are those who would like to travel more, but as Alisa and Anastasia (both locally oriented) note, their incomes do not permit them to travel as much as they want.

> «I would like to earn more. I am thinking about my own business because now I have to look for some extra jobs. I would like to...For example, if I decide to go somewhere, let say to Madrid, I want to be able to go there. I do not have any steep demand. I can live in a hostel or use couch surfing services, it is not important for me. But for me it is important to feel that I can do it, that I can afford to go to Madrid» (Anastasia, Female, 29:38)

That is, the perception of travel is in large part symbolic. It is not a trip per se that attracts, but the possibility to do it. In this regard, it is worth to note, that travelling for Belarusian citizens is obstacle by both money and visa regime with the majority of world countries. The situation with the latter, however is changing[157]—while in the 1990s and 2000s it was very hard to obtain Schengen visa (the most requested in Belarus), from late 2000s more and more Belarusian citizens have the possibility to go abroad and try to use every opportunity to simplify all the bureaucratic concerns.

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[156] The Western Europe is usually called simply 'Europe'. This concept, however, refers only to highly developed (or presumably highly developed) countries.

[157] The number of short-term Schengen visas issued for Belarusian citizens is growing every year. According to European Commission, in 2010 Schengen countries issued more than 496 thousand visas, in 2014—more than 880 thousand. Belarus has the highest number of Schengen visas per capita among all countries with visa regime —about 93 Schengen visas per 1,000 inhabitants. For comparison, in Ukraine—32, in Russia—39. The revised data show that Belarus has the lowest percentage of the Schengen visa denials. This is one of the best indicators among all countries with visa regime. In 2014 it amounted to 0.26% (Russia—0.94%, Ucraine—1.97%, Turkey—4.44%, Morocco—12.62%, Algeria—25.69%).

«I have a Schengen visa but it is expiring now. I am going to request *Karta Polaka*[158]. I will try to get it because it is very stressful to renew the visas» (Victoria, Female, 32:45).

In some sense, travelling is (re)-confirmed as a surrogate of economic and social well-being and of transnational lifestyle, which exists in a strong relation with another consumption practice—shopping.

Shopping in Belarus has often been considered a tricky phenomenon. During the Soviet era, everything was centralized, light industry included. Mass fashion (in the form in which it exists now) was almost inexistent[159]—everybody had to wear a typical set of clothes of typical colour from a typical '*Univermag*'[160]. The strictly regulated fashion was not only an instrument of propaganda of hard work attitudes, but also a convenient way of production, which did not require frequent modifications and, therefore, was relatively inexpensive to maintain. Nevertheless, the stocks of consumer goods in the stores was often very limited. By the 1970-1980s (in big cities even earlier), with a small inclination of the Union to the West, the tastes of customers have changed and, expectations about their appearance have raised (Chernyshova 2013). While the Soviet industries were not capable to adjust their productions to the changes, individual entrepreneurs—'*farcovshiki*'[161]—began to carry out this function by importing to the Union fashionable clothes and shoes from abroad. The things were very expensive and extremely hard to find. Some items, as jeans labelled «Levi Strauss» or «Wrangler», became status items—the price could be of 2-3 month salaries and those who possessed them were both envied and respected. People desired more personality in their clothes but the distribution system at country level continued to lack. Although the situation changed in the past decades and there is a huge number of manufacturers, designers, shops and boutiques, the stereotype that 'in Belarus there is nothing to buy' persists. As I

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[158] Karta Polaka, literally meaning Pole's Card, is a document confirming belonging to the Polish nation, which may be given to individuals who cannot obtain dual citizenship in their own countries while belonging to the Polish nation according to conditions defined by a law. Karta Polaka allows to its owner to move freely in the Schengen zone.

[159] In the Soviet society fashion in its contemporary meaning was available to the richest people who had access to private dressmakers or had the possibility to travel abroad. The lower classes, instead, had at their disposal 'hand-made fashion'. Girls were supposed to know how to sew since housekeeping lessons were included into the scholastic programme and were compulsory for attending.

[160] From Russian '**unive**rsalniy **mag**azin'—multipurpose shop.

[161] *Farcovshik*—from Russian, speculator, comes from warped 'for sale'. These people had large networks of foreigners (or Soviet citizens who could travel abroad) who brought various consumer goods to the Soviet Union. The resale was underground as was considered a criminal offense.

noted before, the money issues are gendered—the women spoke more easily about their incomes and expenditures. In addition, shopping became a completely female matter.

> «I cannot buy neither clothes nor shoes in Belarus, because it is very expensive. It is expensive and the assortment is very small. So I do shopping mainly when I go to visit my friends in [*Eastern Europe*]» (Polina, Female, 20:37).

> «Honestly, in Belarus it is very rare that I buy something here. I would prefer to go to a stock and find something there rather than to go to a shop and buy a dress for 300 bucks. Sometimes I go abroad so I do shopping there» (Victoria, Female, 32:46).

Almost all the female informants mentioned that they shop abroad, mainly in Vilnius[162]. Shopping abroad is a mass phenomenon that does not make distinction between locally and transnationally oriented returnees. This is what I mean by saying that shopping is symbolic as travelling. There is no real necessity to go abroad for shopping since the distribution channels in the contemporary Belarus offer a wide variety of goods. Nevertheless, by doing shopping abroad, people acquire some kind of status of 'thosewhomakeshoppingabroad' that is welcomed and appreciated by the society. However, even those who shop abroad have admitted that Belarus is developing in this direction—*«Belarus is «europeazing». During the last year many new places and good shops appeared»* (Victoria, Female, 32:40).

As I have shown above, locally and transnationally oriented returnees follow different patterns of allocation of their financial resources. While locally oriented returnees are quite passive in spending money, those transnationally oriented seem to be euphoric about the possibility to get goods and services at good price and take advantage of it.

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[162] Distant only 180 km from Minsk and reachable in 3 hours by train, Vilnius became a kind of Mecca for shopping-lovers from Belarus. It is interesting that something like fifteen years ago there were no Russian-speaking employees in Vilnius shopping malls. Now, as the main clients in Vilnius are Belarusians, the knowledge of Russian is one of the main requirements to the shop assistants and managers.

5. Entrepreneurship

Employment and work play a central role in the lives of highly skilled migrants. Traditionally, transnational participation in professional sphere has been studied mainly from the point of view of immigrant entrepreneurship, which, however, is characterized by limited involvement and relative lop-sidedness from point of view of both ethnic belonging and low qualification of actors (Guarnizo *et al.* 1999; Portes *et al.* 2002; Kim 2006; Zhou and Lee 2012; Portes and Yiu 2013). Recently, nevertheless, researches have shifted their attention to (highly skilled) return migration and the relative transnational practices.

Many both sociological and economic studies suggest that the return of emigrants, especially of those highly skilled, can be beneficial for economic and social development in home countries. Returning migrants are supposed to be carriers of both financial and human capital, which are often seen as resources for promoting growth and development (OECD 2008, 2009). What is more, human and social capitals in form of new skills, practices, and networks can be seen in the light of socio-cultural remittances capable to contribute to socio-cultural change and development in home countries. According to Iredale *et al.* (2003), the experience of skilled returnees has a strong impact on business climate and social transformation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Recent research on occupational choice has highlighted that return migrants often have better employment possibilities and have higher chances to become self-employed (Ilahi 1999; McCormick and Wahba 2001; Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002; Ma 2002; Mesnard 2004; Piracha and Vadean 2010; Borodak and Piracha 2011; Wahba and Zenou 2012). For instance, it is argued that the abroad working experience and human capital—i.e. business processes, practices, and skills—in addition to social and financial resources accumulated abroad enable returnees to be proactive on the home country labour market. Still, there is an ongoing discussion on the role of education degree in the preference for self-employment. Some researchers (Ilahi 1999; McCormick and Wahba 2001) showed that skilled returnees who command higher wages in the labour market are more inclined to be waged workers. At the same time, Piracha and Vadean (2010) have distinguished between relatively lower skilled own-account business owners who hire household members, and higher skilled (with secondary and tertiary education) entrepreneurs who hire workers from outside their households. This distinction fits well the evidence from highly skilled Belarusian professionals—many of them are self-employed as entrepreneurs with only external

collaborators. Others (with few exceptions) are employed as high-paid wageworkers. As I have discussed in the chapter 4, the participants in this research hardly have had difficulties in finding a job upon their return. First, because of the highly valued human and professional capital they brought back; second, because of strong support from their local social networks.

In addition to active position on labour market, highly skilled returnees are characterized by strong transnational involvement and participation in professional transnational networks established with host countries (e.g., Iredale *et al.* 2003; Saxenian 2005, 2006; Nowicka 2007; Jonkers and Cruz-Castro 2013). Within this section, I discuss post-return professional transnational involvement and practices. I argue that labour-related transnationalism is one of the most prominent in the lifestyles of Belarusian highly skilled returnees. In fact, a big part of participants in this research work either in international organizations or with foreign markets, are engaged in border-crossing entrepreneurship or, at least, are usual business travellers. Their transnational involvement—both pre- and post-return—plays an important role in their work routines and attitudes.

As I have noted previously, there are two types of employment among highly skilled Belarusian professionals—contract employees and self-employed. Only three people are unemployed (either in phase of job change or maternity leave), while, roughly, one fourth of all informants are entrepreneurs that to a large extent confirms the results of previous studies on the returnees' propensity to be self-employed (Ilahi 1999; Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002; Piracha and Vadean 2010; Wahba and Zenou 2012). Actually, some of those who work for wage now told me that in the past they wanted to start up their own business, but have not managed to implement this idea. Nevertheless, such thoughts are still valid for most of them and some day or another they are going to move into entrepreneurship. On the other side, there are those who even in their pre-migration lives have been businesspersons. In fact, their professional experience allowed them to reach a new level of business and to operate in multiple international markets.

> «I do not have any business in Belarus anymore. I brought away all the assets. But I have few international partners. In addition, I have some investment projects abroad. […] Actually, for me, it does not matter where I stay geographically» (Yury, Male, 9:35, 9:36).

> «I started my own business abroad and this company is active now. We help Belarusian companies to enter foreign markets. I only coordinate its activity and I do it from here» (Miroslava, Female, 30:60).

«We work on the Belarusian market; it is the best option. I have the company there and some partners here. […] I have already organized everything abroad so I do not have to spend much time there» (Grigoriy, Male, 42:21, 42:23).

These people stress their freedom from being place-bounded and, in fact, claim their transnational approach to work—they do not need to stay in one country to make their business efficient. With the help of modern technologies, they can stay everywhere in any moment of the time, so they prefer to be 'local' with their families, but 'global' in their business affairs. Actually, international entrepreneurs are may be the most highly involved into transnational activities of any kind—they do business with foreign partners, travel more frequently; they have better financial situation and, consequently, have real estate abroad and spent a lot of time there. So, in a certain way, it is a vicious circle where the most transnationally active manage to establish strong international businesses, which in turn, reinforce and amplify transnational involvement of entrepreneurs themselves. To some extent, it explains why contract employees generally conduct more locally oriented style of life. Still, being transnational is not a prerogative of only veteran businesspersons. The majority of actual entrepreneurs are those who established their businesses after return and are transnational on professional arena too.

It is commonly known that any market is not national anymore—even small firms operate on international or even global levels. Belarus is not an exception. Some of my informants run IT outsourcing companies—they work on foreign projects and are paid by foreign customers. The similar situation is for various manufacturing and service companies—many of them have foreign capital and/or at least foreign investors, and/or foreign customers. That is, the half of people participated in this research work in international companies and/or have to deal with foreign partners every day.

Interestingly, all self-employed participants agreed that institutional conditions in Belarus appeared to them to be favourable for starting business and entrepreneurship[163]. For many Belarus is the place, where «*interesting*» things can be done with relatively little efforts and resources. Sometimes, it is a somehow objective judgement. As Nickolay notes, *«I see the market and opportunities here»* (12:36). But more often the favourable business

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[163] The percentage of the economically active population engaged in the business sector in Belarus is approximately 13% and is very low if compared with USA (50%) or Germany (70%); nevertheless, the role of small business in the overall results of economic activity in Belarus is constantly growing (Akulava 2012). See the overview of recent policies in regard in chapter 2.

environment in Belarus is juxtaposed to that in other countries. It is understandable since these people lived in developed Western countries with saturated markets of whatever they were. Belarus, with its young and developing economy and several reforms facilitating small and medium businesses, in fact represents a plum market.

«You can work here and you can earn here. In Europe, they cannot even imagine how it is possible. I brought some brands here and they are developing now. I go often in TV; I am a media person» (Daniil, Male, 7:30)

«I hope that everything will be ok here. […] There is very strong competition in [*Eastern Europe*], people are spoiled, and you cannot surprise them. Here there is less offer so maybe it will be easier» (Ksenia, Female, 26:42, 26:52).

«Professionally I am really euphoric. Because on the Belarusian market there is very small competition, and it lags behind the [*Northern American*] one by about 15 years. I see many things to do and I know how to move here. I see very big prospective here» (Miroslava, Female, 30:71).

That is, both structural and institutional factors facilitate entrepreneurship in Belarus. Nevertheless, what emerges from professionals' accounts is that for running a business it is essential to have several requisites. The first is a considerable social capital and extended social networks. Naturally, it is much easier to have them in a home country and some returnees have highly appreciated this advantage.

«My wife is starting her own project now and in fact her desire to move abroad has diminished. She understands that it would be impossible to start a project like this in [*Western Europe*]. Not only because of cultural or linguistic problems, but also because of contacts and relationships. Now we reached a degree when through our friends and peers and their links we can reach any person of any level. In little time you can create something interesting» (Nikita, Male, 10:44)

«Here you can enter into the circles that you could not imagine abroad. People say that in [*Northern America*] you have to work for 15 years to reach the people that in Minsk you can reach in one day» (Kuzma, Male, 19:32)

Besides the social capital, which is to some extent naturally facilitated by the professionals' social environment, most of the returnees have mentioned another important element for success in contemporary globalized economy—some kind of involvement and sharing of meanings with foreigners and foreign cultures. Leonid has articulated this idea in an interesting way:

«Language plays a great role. Someone said that «as many languages you know as many times you are a human being»[164]. It is fair because language forms the person's way of thinking. When you analyse the same problem by thinking in different languages you see it differently. […] I mainly work as a cultural interpreter. I have customers from various cultures, and I have engineers from another culture. Although they know the language and speak in it, they do not understand each other. The same words are interpreted in different ways. You have to understand how people think, and only then you can try to translate, what the one wants and to explain it to the other» (Leonid, Male, 2:30).

That is, the abilities to comprehend and to be comprehended are essential to the labour world. However, the role of cultural mediator is often preceded by long time of hard work—such abilities are not immediate, but once reached this level a person who covers this role becomes crucial in international business affairs. Moreover, the role of cultural interpreter is by definition transnational—it transcends national borders and creates new transnational social space of action. Living and working abroad enrich social, cultural, and professional spheres of a person. During the interviews, the highly skilled returnees repeated many times that they are very thankful to destiny for having had the opportunity to have an abroad experience. They mentioned many motives and benefits, but I would say that for many the professional development has become the central one.

«Undoubtedly, experience abroad is essential for professional development because you have an opportunity to get new knowledge in good research centres. Professional development has to be related with movement. In the past, there was an ideology for scientists that every 10 years they had to change their place of living and work. They had to develop themselves» (Innokentiy, Male, 16:50)

«I am known here with a profession I got abroad [*in Northern Europe*]. For all 10 years up to this moment, [*Eastern Europe*] has not given me more knowledge than I got there. The technology, consistency and tranquillity I learnt there are worth of two years of suffering in the university» (Bronislav, Male, 18:40).

Therefore, international experience has played an important role for the professional development of the highly skilled Belarusian migrants. Moreover, it has largely shaped their professional self-confidence and aspirations as well as their current working positions. The majority of the returnees are involved into extended transnational professional networks that make their lives both highly mobile and transnationally intensive.

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[164]It is attributed to either A. Chekhov or J.W. Goethe, or claimed to be British or Czech popular proverb.

Chapter 6. Socio-cultural remittances and transnational involvement[165]

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the socio-cultural remittances of highly skilled return migrants. I rely on the idea that through experiences abroad people increase the complexity of their attitudes. Through emigration, they learn new ways of thinking and behaving that enrich their social outlooks and allow a greater choice of alternatives. Once returned to home society, people apply their new visions and attitudes to local contexts and by doing so transmit them to people surrounding them—'socio-cultural remittances' occur.

'Social remittances' are broadly defined as «ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital» moving across the borders (Levitt 1998, 926). The main idea behind this concept is that along with money transfers, many migrants convey non-economic assets accumulated while living abroad to their home societies. Consistently with Boccagni and Decimo (2013), I consider economic remittances embedded into a broader socio-cultural context and will use a term of 'socio-cultural remittances' for all non-material assets imported by migrants to their home societies. Often these new assets represent 'Western-style' values, ideas, and ways of life that gradually spread in less developed societies through migration and more general globalisation processes (Levitt 1998, 2001; Arowolo 2000; Baldassar 2001, 2007; Duval 2004; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011, 2013).

After almost 20 years of theoretical and empirical refinements, scholars generally agree on the typology of socio-cultural remittances including normative structures—ideas, beliefs, and values; systems of practice—actions and activities shaped by normative structures; and social capital (Levitt 1998). In this research, I focus, basically, on the first two types of socio-cultural remittances. Moreover, socio-cultural remittances have several descriptive dimensions, which in part have been mentioned in chapter 1. First, socio-cultural remittances may have both positive and negative consequences; second, socio-cultural remittances may be either individual or collective; third, socio-cultural remittances may scale up and scale out by moving through different levels and domains (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). That is, socio-cultural remittances appear to have a transgressive nature: when

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[165] Some parts of this chapter, in its preliminary version, have been revised and resubmitted as a journal article *«The Complexity of Return: Socio-Cultural Remittances of Highly Skilled Belarusians»* to the Central and Eastern European Migration Review.

a person learns 'new' ideas, practices, and values, she can apply this knowledge to different spheres of her life. For instance, in this research, the values of tolerance and equity apprehended abroad are then applied to different contexts from racial or sexual diversity to family gender relationships; or the capacity of being flexible and responsive to the circumstances, which is used both in everyday and professional life. Finally, socio-cultural remittances have a circular character: people's experiences before migrating strongly influence their lives in host countries, which then shape what they remit back to their home countries (Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011, 2013).

Considering the circularity of socio-cultural remittances, the prior- and post-migration intellectual, social, and cultural resources play a crucial role in the adoption and subsequent transmission of new ideas and behaviours. That is, highly skilled migrants represent a very important component in the mosaic of socio-cultural remitters. This study focuses specifically on highly skilled return migration, since «home visits, and especially return on a more or less permanent basis, provide a privileged setting where the 'baggage' they *[migrants]* bring back can be appreciated» (Boccagni and Decimo 2013, 8). Returnees come back to their home societies and remit the adopted ideas and attitudes not only through verbal communication, but also by sharing their experience with, and setting an example for, people surrounding them. The new ideas brought from abroad inform many aspects of returnees' lives. Thus, the study of post-return experiences in combination with the focus on highly skilled migrants may provide useful insights into content and meaning, as well as processes of formation and transmission of socio-cultural remittances. In her seminal article on social remittances, Levitt (1998, 944) makes an appeal for further research on social remittances «in cases involving urban-to-urban migration, lower levels of economic dependence, or countries that are geographically and culturally farther apart», which have been largely ignored by social researchers. Studies to date have focused mainly on low-skilled remitters acting between wealthy Western host countries and less developed home countries[166]. In such conditions, the transmission of socio-cultural remittances seems to occur mostly in the form of mirroring Western values, ideas and behaviours, that results in (to some extent) homogeneous distribution of newly adopted views throughout various life spheres. On the

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[166] To my knowledge, previously have been studied the social remittances between the United States and the Dominican Republic (Levitt 1998, 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011); West African countries and Europe and North America (Tiemoko 2003, 2004); the Netherlands and Thailand (Suksomboon 2008); Sub-Saharan African countries and Israel (Sabar 2008, 2013); Ecuador and the US and Spain (Mata-Codesal 2013); Ukraine and European countries (Vianello 2013; Kubal 2014).

contrary, for highly skilled people from socio-culturally developed contexts, the process of formation and transmission of socio-cultural remittances is neither obvious nor straightforward. The transfer of new attitudes is a highly selective process that manifests to different degrees and in different forms throughout different spheres of people's lives. While in some contexts people tend to apply values and ideas adopted abroad, in others, they are reluctant to do the same or even devalue the newly learnt norms.

Furthermore, international experience, involvement into transnational practices, and more general globalisation processes all together create conditions for «cosmopolitanisation»—a globalization «in the head» (Robertson 1992) characterized by the view of the world as a whole, and of distant places as essentially reachable (Spybey 1996). The 'cosmopolitising' socio-cultural remittances concern values and norms such as the prospect of global democratization and justice, the capacity to mediate between different cultures and the affinity to dialogue, the tolerance and the respect, the awareness of diversity and difference, and the decentring of the values (Beck 2002; Roudometof 2005; Appiah 2006; Mau *et al.* 2008). Cosmopolitanism, however, is primarily a European phenomenon[167]; that is why I will refer to these values as the Western ones. Thus, I argue that highly skilled returnees, through several socio-cultural remittances, promote cosmopolitan culture conceived as «a cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of 'openness' towards people, places, and experiences from different cultures, especially those from different 'nations'» (Szerszinski and Urry 2002, 468).

On the whole, I argue that, first, socio-cultural remittances are heterogeneous in how they are manifested through some spheres of private and public lives; second, socio-cultural remittances are transgressive (or 'scale out' in terms of Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011) as ideas and norms learnt in one sphere of life are applied to others; third, in some cases family-related socio-cultural remittances have strong gender differences—e.g., views on, and behaviours regarding marriage and parenting; fourth, socio-cultural remittances are not always well accepted, rather various levels of resistance to novelties are present with regard to different spheres of their application; and, finally, sometimes (in number of isolated cases) socio-cultural remittances assume a 'reactive' form, in which they negate or devalue norms and ideas learnt abroad.

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[167] According to the European Value Study, solidarity, tolerance, and appreciation of democracy are typical European values that are appreciated to a much lesser extent in former Soviet countries.

1. Socio-cultural remittances into private life

1.1 Personal change

Migrants' exposition to different cultural sources gives rise to emergence of intermediate 'hybridised' cultures (Baumann 1996; Hannerz 1996; Pieterse 1996) and adoption of several values and norms under a common label of cosmopolitanism (Roudometof 2005; Appiah 2006; Norris and Inglehart 2009). The adoption of cosmopolitan values requires a profound transformation of self-understanding and self-positioning in relation to the world and to the people.

According to Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011), people who travelled and lived abroad have a different general attitude and 'outlook' on life. Also in this research, most of the people claimed to have undergone significant changes in their attitudes toward various aspects of life and to have developed their human qualities. The returnees are conscious about the role of migration experience in their personal evolution:

> «Many things have changed but only in better. [...] I think that if a person sees many good things, she becomes better. I know both advantages and disadvantages of living there and here, so I can borrow the best things from each of them» (Veniamin, Male, 39:71).

Throughout the interviews I often encountered the evidences of internal change occurred in the highly skilled returnees during their life abroad. Naturally, all of them noted that the possibility to live abroad is a very good and valuable experience in terms of personal and professional growth.

> «When you live abroad, your independence is developed very much. You know that your mom will not come to help you. You know you have to do this and that, you have to prepare the documents, you have to study, and you want to have fun. So you start to do time-management. The same is about money. You know that you have only this, and you plan your expenses» (Victoria, Female, 32:42).

Many returnees acknowledged that their abroad experience has contributed to the changes in their everyday practices in terms of independence and efficiency. However, while for someone the life abroad became just a useful adventure, for others the contact with foreign cultures meant deep changes in their attitudes toward the life and people in general. Many informants have commonly acknowledged that while abroad they became more both

self-confident and tolerant. Certainly, tolerance, being one of the central values of cosmopolitanism (Beck 2002; Roudometof 2005; Appiah 2006; Mau *et al.* 2008), appeared to be the main component of cosmopolitan views remitted by the highly skilled Belarusian returnees. Many of them claimed to have become more tolerant to diversity, less prone to stereotypes, and to be more balanced in judgements and flexible in relations with others. As Varvara puts it:

> «I would not say that I changed a lot—I like the same things I liked before. Nevertheless, I saw many people from other cultures, of other orientations. I became more open-minded in terms of any difference in human behaviour. Probably, I was more ignorant; I had some stereotypes. […] I learnt to have a calm attitude toward the differences between people and to appreciate them» (Varvara, 31:46).

Many other informants have expressed similar ideas about their tolerance and appreciation toward different kinds of diversity—from sexual orientation and physical disability to race, religion, and cultural particularities. Also Artem thinks that the international experience has allowed him to develop the cosmopolitan values and attitudes. He has conveyed this idea in a very clear way:

> «I am not changed. What I had before has developed. I have not changed my opinions, but they became wider and more global. I am not sure that I would have developed differently, if I had lived only here. However, abroad I received an understanding about different countries. There live people from all over the world. Different countries, different cultures, but we are the children of one planet. This idea has not changed; it has just become closer to me. I understood there is a kind of chauvinism inside us. No, we are all children of one planet. [...] You see, I said this thing about the children of the planet, but it is one more label. I think that such labels do not exist. We put them on us ourselves. It is just a limitation. Yes, other people may have another accent or may have seen other cartoons when they were children. People can be girls and boys, and from being one or another, they do not become less people. It is the same» (Artem, 37:55).

The cosmopolitan values of equity and diversity are not manifested only through attitudes toward other nations and cultures. Equally important are other types of diversity, which sometimes are neglected. Liubov (17:80) told me to have learnt in the USA to be tolerant toward ill and disable people who have to be integrated into society and respected

as any its member. It is a very important thing for Belarus, where both physical and social disabilities tend to be concentrated and hidden from the eyes of 'normal' people[168].

It is hard to say exactly what mechanism underlies this interior evolution. These people spent abroad many years—they became older and wiser (or least more experienced), and of course the more discreet attitude to people may be the result of growing up. Nevertheless, as they themselves claimed, the international experience and the contacts with other cultures and traditions have played a huge role in the formation of their attitudes toward other countries and peoples. The respect (as well as disdain) toward other cultures cannot appear in a closed environment—the more people communicate with 'others', the better they can form an opinion about them. As Ruslan noted, *«my attitude toward foreign people has not changed, it appeared. How should we relate to them? We have to learn their experience in order to take good things and to leave bad things»* (38:41). Expectedly, the most active remitters of cosmopolitan values seem to be those who have multiple cross-border relationships with people from other countries. The majority of returnees have maintained relations with their foreign friends also after coming back to Belarus—they visit each other and constantly stay in touch through modern communication technologies. As Liudmila noted, *«all the people with whom I like to spend time live abroad. Even my best friend is a foreigner»* (8:36). It is not a single case and many people have very broad geographical circles of friends.

In fact, the more people are transnational the more active they are as socio-cultural remitters. Still, the socio-cultural change cannot begin from the nation or from any other group. The socio-cultural change starts from a person, from an individual life and experience. Only then, if the conditions are favourable, this small change may scale up.

1.2 Couple and family relationships

Whereas adoption of cosmopolitan attitudes in general interpersonal contexts is quite common for both men and women, the socio-cultural remittances into sentimental and family relationships are sharply gendered. The female returnees actively manifest Western attitudes and promote them among their relatives and friends; the men, conversely, appear to devalue gender roles and sentimental relationships promoted by Western culture. This result is particularly interesting in the Belarusian context, where families usually represent relations

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[168] I refer here to nursing homes and other specialized centres that usually are close and isolated institutions.

of partnership, in which both husbands and wives have equal rights and obligations[169]. Historically, women and men in Belarus enjoyed equality in both public and private issues[170]; one of the returnees is very confident about the matter:

« […] The behaviour model is somehow patriarchal but it is not so wildly patriarchal as in some other countries. In Belarus, there is an androgenic understanding of family, as also in Russia. In Ukraine it is different. In other countries, they struggled actively for women rights. In Belarus, woman has never been undermined in the family management. That is why the feminism has never had any background here and had no sense. From 1917 women worked here. They would have preferred not to work! All these things [feminism, emancipation] are imposed and do not match our contexts. So I like Belarusian women because they are both feminine and on an equal footing with you. They do not have these stupid liberal-feminist ideas. Mostly they are not even consumerist. There are many consumerists among them but they are not in my surroundings» (Kuzma, 19:47).

Notwithstanding the general gender equity in Belarusian families and the absence of dramatic changes in gender and family roles described in the literature (e.g., Levitt 1998; Vianello 2013; Nowicka E. 2015), the Western values concerning relationships with the opposite sex have entered into agenda of the highly skilled female returnees. Some women told me that after their return to Belarus they felt freer from society obligations and expectations about sentimental relationships. Moreover, in some cases, the attitude toward marriage has been reappraised. Among others, the following opinion has been expressed in the clearest way:

«I changed my attitude towards relationships. In [*Eastern Europe*], a man and a woman may be just friends. A man can treat you to a drink without any consequence. In Belarus, there is a feeling of duty toward the other, a fear about what he said. For example, I heard this from many people. 'You stay together for

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[169] OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) is reported as «very low». The SIGI quantify discriminatory social institutions, spanning major socio-economic areas that affect women's lives: discriminatory family code, restricted physical integrity, son bias, restricted resources and assets, and restricted civil liberties.

[170] According to the recent report «The Urban Disadvantage. State of the world's mothers 2015» by the Save the children, Belarus is on the 25th place in the «Mother's index» assessing the wellbeing of mothers and children in 179 countries by 5 criteria: lifetime risk of maternal death, under-5 mortality rate, expected number of years of formal schooling, gross national income per capita, and participation of women in national government (% seats held by women).

a year and he does not marry you? Leave him and find you another one!' It is very strange for me» (Polina, 20:63).

The marriage has a great social value in the Belarusian society[171]. A girl is supposed to be married in her early twenties just after finishing her degree (which is one more social expectation). The marriage in a woman's thirties or later is socially discouraged—a woman is stigmatized as a bluestocking and each her action may be interpreted as the 'hunt for a husband'. Experts note that in recent years the population of Belarus has acquired features of the so-called 'European' reproductive behaviour. The average age at first marriage has increased considerably—from 22.8 years for women and 25 years for men in 2000 to 25 years for women and 27.1 years for men in 2013. Although the mean age at first birth is increasing too (from 24.9 years in 2010 to 25.7 years in 2014), these indicators are still much lower than in other European countries[172]. According to demographers of the Resource Centre of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, Belarus), people in Belarus are becoming more inclined to self-realization and career development. Moreover, Belarusian women actively participate in both economic and political life of the country. For instance, women count for almost 50% of economically active national labour force and the proportion of women among the heads of organizations is about 47% (Belstat 2014); the proportion of women in the national government is about 29% (Save the children 2015). That is, the attitudes of the female returnees toward having children fit perfectly the actual Belarusian context. Liudmila, who spent many years abroad, has derived her formula in this regard.

«By today's standards, 28 years it is too early to have children. I think that you have to have children after 30 and before 40. Because the life with children is completely different, you cannot return your time, and you cannot leave your children anywhere» (Liudmila, 8:40).

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[171] The public opinion on marriage as a socially desirable value is very strong in Belarus (as well as In Russia and Ukraine). Among various TV-shows there is one very popular called *Let's marry*. It promotes the marriage as the most important goal in a female life. In the popular culture, the wedding is considered the most important day of any girl, so it happens that people take loans to organize a big wedding party. In addition, recently among various *how to do* seminars *How to be a happy woman seminar* became popular. Some people who participated in this seminar told that marriage, during the seminar, was claimed the main requisite for happiness.

[172] According to the United Nations Economic Commission, the mean age at first marriage in 2012 was much higher in many European countries. For instance, Germany (30.7 years for women, 33.5 years for men), Italy (30.8 and 33.8), Denmark (32.2 and 34.8). The mean age at first birth in Europe in 2013 was higher too: e.g., EU28—28.7 years, United Kingdom—28.3, Germany—29.3, and Italy—30.6.

Similarly, the experience abroad has affected the reasoning about motherhood and parents' roles in children's raising. Albeit the equality of spouses within marriage in Belarus is protected by both the Constitution and the Code on Marriage and the Family, within the public consciousness, the mother is considered the primary person in children raising and mothers get custody of children more frequently. In contrast to these established ideas, Polina told how her perception of family roles has been changed:

> «In [*Eastern Europe*], fathers have different attitude to their children. And for me it became a norm. In Belarus, sometimes my friends say me 'My husband is so wonderful! This evening he went out with the baby!' It is shocking for me! It is his child! Why is he wonderful? It is a normal thing!» (Polina, 20:64)

That is, Polina began to question the existing status quo in family relations, claiming the gender equity in child rearing.

On the other side, there are male returnees, who, as discussed in detail in chapter 5, disapprove the Western-style emancipation and masculinity, and appreciate beauty, tenderness, and femininity of local women. In their accounts, they actively promote the traditional family values and norms, in which the main role played by a woman is that of 'a keeper of the hearth'. For example, Vladislav is disappointed by the new consumerist attitudes that he sees in Belarusian women:

> «The private life is going bad. The age is coming, I would like to create a family. But there is nobody to do this. I do not see serious women. By serious I mean those who are disposed to have definite roles in a family. I see many families where the attention is replaced by money. I think it is not right. […] I would like a woman to live for family, for children, for home. […] My friend invites me to know girls but they have other interests. They want to know rich men. Lights of a big city beckon» (Vladislav, 33:53, 33:54).

Interestingly enough, Vladislav articulates his opinion also in terms of social expectations regarding the age—*«the age is coming»* (he was in his late 30s at the moment of the interview)—that, again, refers to the traditional patterns in family relationships.

That is, there is a kind of clash of female and male values about sentimental and family relationships. Whereas the women remit newly adopted Western values and attitudes toward family-making and female roles based on independence and equality, the men transmit reactive socio-cultural remittances that valorise traditional views on gender roles, and strongly disapprove and devalue the Western ideas of feminism and emancipation.

1.3 Professional life

Highly skilled Belarusian returnees, being active participants of both national and international labour markets, appear to be strong remitters of best practices—i.e. attitudes toward work as well as working practices, technologies, and workflow management techniques. By general attitudes toward work I mean the sense of responsibility for the own duties and professionalism that sometimes lack to workers. Actually, many returnees pointed out that after their return they began to see the idleness among Belarusian people.

> «I understood that I did not want and could not work in any state organization. Even in commercial organizations I saw many times that people went to work just to wear out their pants and to kill their time. I was very afraid of being like them» (Anastasia, Female, 29:27).

> «For me it is the human factor. I changed many firms and saw much staff. I was serious about the work, but many came just to kill the time, it is in the best case. At worst, they are also harmful. No politician can do anything about this» (Matvey, Male, 4:43).

> «There is a big problem with staff in Belarus. A priori you have more experience and you have to invest in their knowledge» (Liudmila, Female, 8:32).

The general attitude to work among compatriots is often described as passive and non-efficient and, even if not always explicitly, is contra posed to the way of working abroad.

> «Belarus is a normal country. May be one of the main problems is that people do not know how to work efficiently. There is more slackness, especially among scientists. They have some projects but they do not know how to organize them, how to set up the objectives. They do not have money but even if they had they would not know how to spend them in a right way» (Arkadiy, Male, 27:41).

First step in solving any problem is recognizing there is one. This is may be the most generalized but not less important social norm brought back by highly skilled professionals from abroad. Working hard is a value that has to be shared and implemented by everybody—only in this way the progress can be made. In fact, some informants would like to change the situation but often meet such obstacles as ignorance or poor judgement.

> «When I arrived two years ago, I was used that in [*Eastern Europe*] in public transports you just threw a coin and an automatic machine gave you a ticket. Here I saw old women to do this. They both sold and validated tickets. I proposed to

do this. I knew producers of this stuff in [*Eastern Europe*], so I suggested—«let us purchase them and go to the Minsk city executive committee»—we could equip with that stuff all bus and trolley parks. I understood that it would happen anyway. But those who lived here permanently, they said it was unrealistic and to stay out of there. You see, after 2 years these validators are everywhere» (Matvey, Male, 4:44).

This may be the demonstration of the situation described by Cerase (1974), when «innovative» returnees encountered difficulties in importing changes into their home societies. Hence, the transmission (and adoption) of socio-cultural remittances is not an automatic and smooth process, in which a remitter is always welcome. Even though the attempts to remit new practices are valuable, sometimes the institutional environment is not ready for modernization. What is more, often it is also social environment to be not ready to accept novelties. That is, socio-cultural remittances into a contradictory context such as post-socialist Belarusian one may encounter some problems in being accepted. The main reason, according to the informants, is that along with the processes of economic liberalization and human capital modernization, the managerial area in the public sector is suffering from some residues of rigid age and professional Soviet hierarchy.

«People here are so unqualified, especially elder ones, that...They are very ambitious, they say: 'you are too young and you do not understand anything', but they are zero. Sometimes I want to send them to hell. For example, how it is possible to break a 15-ton press?!» (German, Male, 5:49)

The highly skilled informants strongly criticize old Soviet-style[173] management based on totalitarianism and authority. This kind of management system does not correspond to the reality anymore and need to be reformed and modernised.

«You cannot go far with 'red directors'[174]. It is necessary to change the management structure of organizations and companies. But all the professionals went abroad, so it is difficult to replace them» (Nickolay, Male, 12:15).

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[173] Often informants used the term 'soviet' in a negative sense—as a synonym for old-style, slow, intricate, and bureaucratic machine.

[174] Director of enterprises appointed to senior positions in the Soviet era and remained at their posts until the present time. The term is used to describe a style of leadership that emerged in the Soviet period and is characterized by such features as authoritarianism, incompetence in legal and financial matters, unwillingness to work in the conditions of the market.

> «The heads give right instructions but below there is just cotton wool *[lower administrative layers are unstructured and disorganized]*» (Ruslan, Male, 38:49).

Actually, by complaining about 'red directors' or inefficient business processes, the returnees already make their contribution to the social change. These are, let say, 'passive' socio-cultural remittances, which transform public views and opinions indirectly. Along with passive remittances, there is a bulk of more 'active' measures implemented the returnees in both purposeful and unconscious way.

To begin with, the highly skilled returnees bring back new business ideas, which can contribute to the economic growth and social development even on national level. For instance, Ruslan, is already working on such a project.

> «For a year I have been developing a start-up. It regards cows, or better, it regards the determination of cows' rut to impregnate them in time and consequently to have more milk. It is a very urgent topic in agriculture now» (Ruslan, Male, 38:12).

The introduction of new ideas requires efficient business processes, which in many cases are almost inexistent in Belarusian companies due to its relatively young business culture. Many informants noted that more than once they had to do with people who do not know how to work. Here the returnees-social remitters play a crucial role—they can implement the knowledge and practices learnt abroad in the home country. Miroslava, while living abroad, had close relationships with various professional associations. Once returned home, she decided that this kind of non-governmental organization might be useful for Belarusian professionals and the labour market as a whole.

> «There is no enough professional communication here. So I began to set up a professional association and soon it will be registered. We have already organized several seminars» (Miroslava, Female, 30:74).

For others, on the other side, the working process itself has to be innovated and improved.

> «What is different there… Business processes are organized better there. They use set up schemes for a lot of time. You do not have to think about anything else

but work. Here it is not organized; it is a little bit '*kolkhoz*'[175]. But in the IT sector everything develops very quickly, you can take online courses, seminars» (Yevgeniy, Male, 11:53).

«What has changed [while I was abroad] is my attitude to work and the ability to work. When I worked here before going abroad… And I continue to see it now… Scientists are heated for two months because have to write a report! We wrote 3-4 reports per week and it was ok. There is a technology for all this stuff, you just have to use it» (Arkadiy, Male, 27:28).

Therefore, there are business processes and practices that already exist. There is no need to invent them, to test them, or to do anything else—they exist and they work. The returnees in this sense are a kind of coaches who have to pass their experience to a young team—talented by badly equipped. Therefore, highly skilled returnees can be hardly considered innovators because, in in the strict sense of the word, they do not innovate nothing; they transfer (remit) best operative practices from one place to another. Moreover, these best practices include not only techniques; they refer to some skills that in modern world became essential and inevitable. Unfortunately, some people in Belarus continue to lack of basic communication skills. Note, how the returnees articulate these problems.

«I am very grateful for my university [*abroad*] is that I learnt not to be afraid to express my opinions and to be misunderstood or something like this. Here even people older than me twice cannot say to the manager that they unhappy about something. They just suffer in silence. Or come to me with their problems» (Victoria, Female, 32:42).

«I am always in touch. In this sense, I am not Belarusian. Definitely, there are many problems with communication skills here. In a broad sense. For example, with presentation of scientific materials or how to reply to emails…» (Ruslan, Male, 38:74).

For sure, this problem has socio-political and socio-cultural roots. For hundreds of years Belarusians lived in wars and have been surrounded by enemies—the wisest strategy was to hide themselves. Neither in Soviet period the things were different—to stand out meant to risk. That is, Belarusian people are not used to express their opinion because, first, nobody has ever asked for it, and, second, it is the safest option. The times changed, but the

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[175] A *kolkhoz* was a form of collective farm in the Soviet Union. The word is a contraction of 'коллекти́вное хозя́йство' (kollektivnoye khozyaystvo), suggesting collective ownership. In modern Russian language, an adjective 'kolkhozniy' refers to something old-fashioned and inappropriate.

post-socialist Belarusian society has not adapted yet to the new reality of general openness and freedom—«*People do not understand that Minsk is a part of the global market. Do not complain! We are a part of the global market!*» (Artem, Male, 37:48). The role of 'trailblazers' who remit new ideas here is again played by people who travelled, who lived abroad, and who adopted these new values in order to pass them to others.

Naturally, it is almost impossible to know what these people say in their everyday interactions with relatives, friends, colleagues, etc. Nevertheless, many of them are media people—they speak about their experience in TV and online interviews. By telling about their lives and experiences, they act as agents of social change—to a certain extent they contribute to changes in migration practices. While in the past the main emigration goal was to settle abroad, these returnees promote emigration, yes, but they also promote coming back. Their experience is the evidence of successful professional development—they went abroad, got the best from there, and implemented their knowledge in the home country. Definitely, not all experiences are rosy, and not everybody is satisfied with her post-return professional experience. As Mikhail auto defined, *«I am like a microscope used for hammering nails»* (22:59). In fact, already during our talk he told me that he was thinking about further movement to a third country. Although some of the returnees feel unsatisfied with their actual situation, all of them have agreed in opinion that mobility plays a great role in improvement of personal and professional qualities that may scale up into human, technological, and economic development on local, national, and international levels.

1.4 Everyday life and consumption practices

Lifestyle and material consumption in post-socialist Belarus have undergone important changes during the years of independence and relative openness to the global economic processes. The Soviet standardization and closeness have been replaced by the processes of globalization—relatively free mobility together with multinational companies and media have brought their products, brands, labels, fashions, and styles. Importantly, also travelling people and returnees bring new habits and tastes of different nature.

Among these, there is a new view on material consumption, which in Belarus is given more importance than it actually has.

«I distanced myself from the materialism. Because of multiple movements all my stuff can be put in two suitcases. I like very much a phrase «We have been forced

for too long to buy things we do not need with the money we do not have to impress people we do not care about». I look at my father. He is an old man. He has so many things. But it is not even the matter of quantity. It is about the power these things have over him» (Leontiy, Male, 24:57).

This new value of minimalism is only on its early stage of developed in Belarus, where the Soviet culture was based on accumulation of any available resources. In some sense, also Liubov has imported this value by doing repair in the apartment in [*Northern American*] style—«*flat walls, minimalism*» (17:87).

Similarly, the returnees are more likely to promote sustainable practices and, generally, civil attitudes, which sometimes are hardly appraised.

«I look like a Belarusian but after seven years my mentality has changed. Starting from parking and finishing with... Many Belarusians irritate me; it is difficult to communicate with them. I do not speak about my friends who travel, but many others. It happens that I say something but they do not understand, and vice versa. You know, regarding recycling or something else. Or for example, that you have not to park on a crosswalk because you block the view and someone may hurt other people. They do not understand such simple things. I get irritated by this» (Arseniy, Male, 41:39)

In fact, the environmentalist movement in Belarus is on its initial stage of development. For this reason, many topics that are urgent in Europe are only beginning to be discussed in Belarus. That is why recycling, green transport, sustainable water consumption and others, which require considerable efforts and changes also from institutional point of view—for instance, not only massive informative campaigns, but above all extensive investments into infrastructure and industrial processes, are not in agenda of the Belarusians. On the contrary, the returnees, while living abroad, were exposed to ideas and ways of doing completely different from those existing in Belarus. Among these new (for Belarus) remitted practice here are also hobbies. While some of them are let say classical in post-Soviet region—for instance, reading or photography[176], others are not so popular yet. For example, Vladislav bought a bicycle in [*Western Europe*], brought it to Belarus and each year goes to excursions with his friends. Miroslava, in turn, has not only adopted an 'exotic' hobby but also remitted it in Belarus.

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[176] In the Soviet Union, photography was a very popular hobby. In schools and colleges, there were many photographic circles; since there were no services of photo printing, many people created their own 'dark rooms' in bathrooms. The photo albums are carefully preserved and showed with pride.

«In Belarus I completed my 'gestalt' about ginger houses. I organized a big festival of ginger houses and I was in the jury this time. It was a lovely city party and people enjoyed it very much» (Miroslava, Female, 30:45).

Some socio-cultural practices, however, are not so simple to remit in Belarus. As I have noted in the discussion of remitted working practices, often it is the ideological Soviet 'heritage' to impede the adoption of progressive and efficient practices. In other cases, as with environment-friendly practices, it is the lack of institutional support and participation to aliment the public indifference in the topic. Surprisingly, also private lifestyle socio-cultural remittances are slowed down by some social obstacles. For instance, several health lifestyle practices have difficulties in being promoted. According to Innokentiy, one of these concerns the physical culture, which is not popular in Belarus.

«[…] in Belarus there are no good fitness centres. Nobody knows what is a gym and do not understand that ideology. That is why there are only 'kachalki'[177]. The state finances various ice rinks, but it should promote physical culture instead» (Innokentiy, Male, 16:37).

Secondly, there are multiple new eating practices, which are appreciated in the Western societies but are hardly accepted by people in Belarus.

«Health, health lifestyle and eating are not developed in Belarus at all. I mean vegetarianism and so on. It does not exist in Belarus. I was a rawfoodist but it is very hard in Belarus. In [*Northern America*], it was much easier. I cannot eat anywhere here. [...] I gave up a little bit veganism because it is socially unacceptable here—each time I have to explain why I do like this. When other drink vodka and I eat salads, it is socially unacceptable. What is more, I cannot ask anything in the restaurants, so instead of enjoying the communication with my friends I just wait the moment in which I can go home to eat something» (Mikhail, Male, 22:61).

Similarly to Mikhail, also Victoria had to modify her lifestyle and leisure behaviour because of social expectations relative to it. She referred to going to disco, which in Belarus, is usually considered a place where a girl may find a rich man.

«I do not go to the clubs here. Because here you have to be dressed and made up as a doll. Everything is expensive. In [*Northern Europe*] you could go there with

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[177] Gyms with only training apparatus used to increase muscle mass. Usually, such gyms are used by men.

188

jeans and sneakers, you just went there to have fun. Here it is more similar to a show in which you trade yourself» (Victoria, Female, 32:47).

Hance, it is not only personal matter—the difficulties in conducting the habitual lifestyle may cause some problems within social relations and reintegration into the society. Some of the returnees adjust their habits, while other insist and try to «re-educate» Belarusian people, as they believe that they can bring some small but useful changes in way of thinking of Belarusians. For example, Arseniy told me the anecdote showing his attitude.

«I prefer to have prepaid plans for mobile phone. I do not like to do something on credit. It is Western mentality! For instance, our people do not read contracts. You see, I read everything *[referring to the privacy disclaimer]*. Here they look at me like a fool. Once I went to subscribe for Internet at home. I was reading the contract, when the woman asked «When are you going to sign?» I replied that I had to read the contract to know its conditions and tricks. She was very surprised!» (Arseniy, Male, 41:17)

Another sensitive subject relative to consumption practices and attitudes is service, which is considered very low in Belarus. Generally, the returnees complained about restaurants and bars but it can be also extended to all services where human contact is supposed to happen—shops, banks, postal offices, etc. The most common comment is that often personnel are not polite and treat people as doing a favour. In many cases, it is true and deserves an additional research, but interestingly, the returnees are angry with people who just tolerate this situation.

«It never ceases to amaze me the level of service. In any place, the staff may be rude to you. People perceive it as a normal thing. If a person is served badly, she will not even rebel. The places *[restaurants, bars]* do not care about their clients. When a person spends some time abroad, she sees it very well and it is horrible» (Roman, Male, 14:34).

Of course, there is no one recipe how to change the lifestyle practices or to contribute to social development. All these are complex socio-cultural constructs that exist in this or that form for centuries and of course cannot be modified in short time. Nevertheless, the people who lived abroad and learnt new ways of living act as promoters of social change. They are not many and may be act in little but any small and apparently insignificant step is important. While speaking about the use of plastic bags in supermarkets, Leontiy conveyed a very important idea, which should be the basis for any kind of human development.

«It is a shame that in Belarus they do not learn from the others. Jump over the experience of the others, learn from others' mistakes! Admit that we do not understand something yet! Do not invent a bicycle, just skip unnecessary steps! In [*Northern America*] it is prohibited to use plastic bags in supermarkets, and for a paper one you have to pay. It is a small thing but do it! Skip the situation when everything is covered by plastic bags!» (Leontiy, Male, 24:58)

This appeal to nation fellows to use the experience of other countries and to borrow the better practices is very common in the talks of the highly skilled returnees. There is no idealization of the Western way of living, rather the realization that Belarus has a potential and resources to develop both socially and economically.

Although some of imported ideas and practices are well-accepted and even inherited by the local people, other socio-cultural novelties brought by the returnees meet resistance in the home country society. In this regard, I think that the 'easiest-to-be-accepted' remittances are those related to the individual worldview (for example, tolerance of diversity) that do not require any external structure or support. The 'ideological' socio-cultural remittances (for example, the ideas that younger people may be more professional) encounter some resistance but only from the advocates of the opposite ideology. The 'hardest' to be transmitted are the remittances that affect two different types of structures. First, the norms and practices requiring material infrastructures (as with environment issues) are hard to take roots in absence of institutional support from the government and other organizations and agencies. Second, the novelties affecting profound socio-cultural structures and systems of values as for example social norms of conduct or gender relations, are resisted by society as well.

That is, the process of transmission and adoption of socio-cultural remittances in private life is neither homogeneous nor smooth. In the next section, I show that neither socio-cultural remittances into public life have a straightforward character.

2. Socio-cultural remittances into public life

Socio-cultural remittances transmitted by the highly skilled returnees do not concern only private sphere. During their life abroad, the returnees have learnt new ideas about public institutions and have adopted new behaviours with regard to them. Further, I discuss the transmission of Western values into two sectors of public sphere—namely, education and politics, and show how these socio-cultural remittances are heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory.

2.1 Education

Belarusian system of education includes primary, basic, and secondary schools; professional technical education; and tertiary education. Secondary school lasts for 11 years, most university courses run for four-five years. That is, in general, a person with tertiary degree is ready to enter the labour market at the age of 22-23 years (many students start to work from the third year of university).

Although there are no available studies aimed at evaluation of the overall quality of education in Belarus, it is possible to rely on several unsystematic indicators. Among these the standard of literacy which is 99.8% among adult population. About 98% of population have at least basic education, while almost 25% of people aged 25-64 years have at least one tertiary degree. Every year, more than 80% of young people graduated from secondary schools start their university studies. In 2009 the Belarusian Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) began to draw up and implement the Systems of Quality Assurance Management (SQAM). Belarusian HEI participate in the EU cooperation programmes such as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. Within the Belarusian education system there are two official languages: Belarusian and Russian. In 2015, Belarus accessed to the European Higher Education Area and to the Bologna Process. Moreover, in 2015 two Belarusian universities entered the QS University Rankings: EECA 2015—a dedicated ranking of the top universities in Emerging Europe and Central Asia[178]. Although many positive changes have occurred in the Belarusian education system in recent years, it still presents multiple drawbacks. For instance, some media have reported that the quality of secondary and tertiary

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[178] Belarusian State University is on the 36th place in the ranking, while Belarusian National Technical University is on the 72nd place.

education is constantly decreasing[179]. Belarus is one of the few European countries that does not use international assessment systems – TIMSS and PISA to assess students' progress. Moreover, vocational and tertiary education sometimes have difficulties in meeting the needs of the labour market.

The public opinion about education in Belarus is twofold. Whereas one part of people thinks that the Belarusian system of education has inherited the best features of the Soviet system and is of very high quality, the other part criticises it inconsistency and conservativeness. The majority of the highly skilled returnees I interviewed are closer to the second viewpoint and some of them have precise ideas about how the Belarusian education system has to be changed. Constantin, for instance, is convinced that the old system will die soon as centred only on rational thinking and does not take in consideration the emotional sphere. For this reason, in his family and among his friends is becoming popular home schooling, which takes into account the emotional side of children's development. On the contrary, Matvey thinks that the Belarusian education system has not enough emphasis on entrepreneurship and economical thinking.

> «After having studied in [*Eastern Europe*]—they have the European standards and all that stuff, I understood that we need to change the system of education in Belarus. I think that it has to be changed even in the primary school. Recently I was walking with my friend and I said to him 'You know, we have studied abroad, I have two degrees. We were good students. Why do we have so little money? If we were taught the basics of business, the basics of accounting in primary school, we would be already rich!' And he replied 'Well, but you know a lot of rhymes!' You see, there is a cultural bias, which is not so useful in the real life. It is just a bonus, which does not help in real life, where you have to earn money. In Europe, in my opinion, they understand it» (Matvey, 4:9).

In many aspects, the Belarusian system of education is quite cumbersome and clumsy—albeit recently many macro changes have been made, many educational programs and courses have been developed decades ago and, thus, do not correspond to the modern requirements. The system is very rigid, bureaucratic and hardly subjected to reforms. In fact,

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[179] E.g., «The quality of Belarusian schooling is falling» (http://afn.by/news/i/140343), «Centralized testing is improved every year, but the level of education falls» (http://news.tut.by/society/233096.html); «Overloaded children, teachers' salaries, the lack of hours: what is the weak point of the modern school?» (http://news.tut.by/society/349837.html).

the main claim among the highly skilled returnees was that the education system has to become more flexible in order to be capable to respond to the market demands.

> «Abroad there are many different scholarships. People study something for few years, then leave it and start to study something new. In the end, you have only one degree but a bulk of knowledge in many fields of study. People become multi-skilled. It makes the work force more flexible. Sooner or later we will have to do it» (Nickolay, 12:51).

The most highly skilled returnees have an education experience abroad, during which they learnt more efficient modern education technologies and reassessed the value of education in general. However, they do not limit themselves by just communicating the new attitudes to people surrounding them. Rather, many returnees actively transmit the new values through concrete actions aimed at their children—studies of foreign languages are the most prominent form of such remittances. For instance, Liudmila sent her elder son to an English-speaking kindergarten, because *in this way, he will get used to the foreign language and it will not be a problem for him in adulthood* (8:6). All Miroslava's children go to English-speaking school, too. Another informant speaking six foreign languages prefers to help teach his daughter himself and considers the knowledge of foreign languages as one of the most important skills:

> «I teach my daughter English. Because the level of teaching in the school is low.
> The same story with Chinese. We chose that school because they teach Chinese.
> I went to the Chinese classes together with my daughter to be able to help her»
> (Yury, 9:33).

However, foreign languages are not the end of the story. Many returnees obtained their degrees in universities abroad; they consider this experience as very valuable and useful one. Consequently, a big part of them does not question the necessity to provide their children with foreign tertiary degree. Even more, they consider it their parental duty and in majority of it is an already taken decision, which cannot be discussed. Grigoriy, for example, «*[does] not see any sense to study here if there is a possibility to study abroad*» (42:44). Similarly, Liudmila «*would like [her] children to have very good international education. Then they will choose themselves where to live*» (8:44). Hence, there is a strong tendency to internationalisation of education among the highly skilled returnees. Along with generic attitudes, they remit and implement specific strategies based on the Western values and

norms they adopted in host countries. The situation is completely different in the case of political views.

2.2 Political views

As I have mentioned in chapter 2, political issues were not among the salient topics within this research—while some informants have referred to it as to an undesirable topic; the majority of the informants have not touched the subject at all. For this reason, I am conscious that the results discussed below are biased to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the opinions of four informants about politics have provided me with interesting insights on socio-cultural remittances in this public sphere[180]. Actually, their central point has concerned one of the central values of Western culture— the concept of democracy.

Despite the term 'democracy' has been in use from ancient times, there are a lot of debates on its meaning and applicability to different modern regimes. The most influential definitions appear to be centred on the practice of institutionalized elections and surrounding freedoms that allow citizens choosing a government of their preference (Schumpeter 1975; Diamond *et al*. 1990; Huntington 1991). Nevertheless, multiple modern regimes suggest, that institutionalized elections and extensive voting rights itself do no guarantee the development of liberal democracy, which requires, for instance, also political participation, civil rights, and horizontal accountability (Merkel 2004). The lack of above mentioned components results in emergence of 'hybrid regimes' (Diamond 2002) known also as 'competitive or electoral authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way 2002), and 'defective democracies' (Merkel 2004). That is, Belarus (together with other post-socialist countries) represents an example of 'quasi-democratic' regime «having institutionalized elections and certain freedoms, all-level representation and constitutional rule, when formally all are subject to law, and no amendments are possible without popular consent. The legal system, however, works not to protect the agency—that is 'legal, sensible and responsible individuals'—but to legitimize the leadership» (Korosteleva 2004, 128). Hence, the institutional political system in Belarus does not provide ground for development of liberal democratic values. However, neither the Belarusian society is consistent in its political views and behaviours. Although, according to several surveys, people in Belarus consider

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[180] Further, by referring to 'the informants' I mean four people who expressed their opinion about politics in an explicit way.

democracy important for the development of the country and see elections as the best way to obtain democratic government (e.g., Korosteleva 2004; Gallup 2007[181]), their conduct does not seem to be coherent with the claimed attitudes. For instance, as some studies report (Korosteleva 2004; IISEPS 2009; Titarenko 2016), the population has no clear ideas about the meaning of democracy, which is very rarely associated with collective decision-making, participation and responsibility, but is perceived as economic well-being, freedoms of expression and association, and often as 'crisis and anarchy'. In a survey conducted in Minsk (Belarus) in 2006[182], liberal political values received the lowest scores in the basic values system of the city dwellers. According IISEPS data (2011), almost one third of the population supported a 'strong hand' rather than democracy, while more than the half believed they could not impact the situation in the country. Hence, the institutional and cognitive attitudes toward democracy in the Belarusian society represents a highly contradictive and confused domain, where the citizens are both incompetent and inactive in terms of politics, and, thus, are subject to manipulation by their government (Silitski 2005; Korosteleva 2012).

In this context of overall poor political culture, there is no surprise that the informants, after having lived abroad, have changed their opinions about the meaning of democracy and its applicability to the Belarusian context. One of them, for instance, realized that the Belarusian political oppositionists do not have a precise idea about what the democracy actually is. She stressed that the idea of democracy, on which the opposition relies, is distorted and needs to be improved and implemented through real and practical steps.

> «I think that my civil position became more active. Before I went to [*Eastern Europe*], I had participated in manifestations in squares and had shouted something about democracy but I did not know what it is. I think that a big part of our oppositionists do not know what is it too. [...] They do not understand what they say, they just dream. On the contrary, I know how it works. [..] They have open town hall meetings; all the documents are online. These are small but very important things» (Anastasia, 29:41).

In a similar vein, others spoke about their disappointment in the Western democracy, which had not appeared to them as they expected to see it. As in opinion of one of the

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[181] http://www.gallup.com/poll/106930/former-soviet-populations-value-democracy.aspx
[182] Минчане в начале XXI века: социально-экономический и психологический портрет [Minsk dwellers in the beginning of the 21st century: social-economic and psychological portrait], Minsk, Institute of social and political research, 2006.

informants, the Western countries are depicted as the countries of freedom in Belarus, but in practice the personal freedoms there are as limited as in Belarus.

> «I was disappointed in the Western [political] models and all that democracy stuff. Especially in [*Northern America*] I consider it zilch. It permits me to take easy our situation, because the difference is not so big. Moreover, when I saw young people in Belarus or in Ukraine to shout about democracy... It is not so simple and straightforward» (Fedor, 13:64).

What is more, as in the case of sentimental and family relationships, the socio-cultural remittances are not always transmitted linearly following the scheme 'learn new values–adopt new values–transmit new values'. Rather, the returnees learnt the Western ideas while living among the people who generally shared these viewpoints, but the next steps were somehow reversed—they not only did not blindly internalise the new ideas, but also did an analytical and interpretative work resulting in devaluation of perceived ideas and practices, and in transmission of reactive socio-cultural remittances.

> «I cannot tolerate all these people [oppositionists]. I think that the existing system is what we need. It was a long journey to this understanding, 10 years, but it is impossible otherwise. I do not want to say that this is the best solution; I do not want to say that I do not sympathize with the wives of political prisoners; and I do not want to say that I do not mind about ruined potential of huge number of young people. Nevertheless, I understand that it is much the lesser evil for a Slavic country. Again, there are some rules of the game here. Do not go into politics, pay taxes, you will be young and rich. [...] Now if we go to the polls, and there will be Alexander Grigoryevich [Lukashenko] and a Democratic candidate, I would vote for Alexander Grigoryevich. I used to spit on people like me. Now I can afford me to speak in this way; I came to this by myself. I did not read it in the newspapers or in books. It is my own experience» (Pavel, 3:34).

That is, the returnees question the value of democracy promoted by the Western cultures and in some cases even negate it. Not the value per se—the returnees have not doubted about the democracy's importance. Rather, these people are aware of, and feel disappointed by, the inconsistency between the expected and perceived status quo in terms of democracy in the Western societies. In response to this cognitive dissonance, they began to transmit reactive socio-cultural remittances that devalue originally learnt ideas and behaviours. It is not the point of positivity or negativity of social remittances discussed in sociological migration literature (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). In the latter case, the

process of remittances is anyway linear but is given a moral—either positive or negative—judgement by individuals. In the case of reactive socio-cultural remittances, the new value (or idea, or practice, or whatever) is not transmitted at all; what is transmitted is its devaluation or even the opposite value.

As I have mentioned before, the phenomenon of transformation of returnees' political views into reactive socio-cultural remittances is not wide-spread—four returnees have provided me with accounts for these attitudes. The majority of participants in this research has not expressed herself in regard to the political views and attitudes, thus the prevailing opinion is not clear. This may be a sign of the lack of civic freedoms, which induces people to keep silent on their political preferences. Hence, further research on the topic is required to both explore socio-cultural remittances into political sphere and to test the incidence of their reactiveness.

Conclusion

The study was set out to explore the post-return experiences of highly skilled professionals and has identified the characteristics of 'receiving' socio-cultural context as well as patterns of returnees' relocation and reintegration into home society, lifestyle types, and socio-cultural resources employed by returnees in their post-return lives. By focusing on these elements, the study aimed to investigate whether highly skilled return migration may be considered a driver for socio-cultural change in home societies. The theoretical literature on this subject is scattered and unsystematic in considering the crucial points of this research—return migration, highly skilled migration, and socio-cultural changes in sending countries—taken all together.

Thus, this research sought to answer the following questions:

1) What is the social context and the public opinion on migration issues (return migration in particular) in a home society?

2) What are the reasons and dynamics of return of the highly skilled?

3) What are the lifestyles of highly skilled returnees?

4) What kind of socio-cultural remittances (experiences, ideas, and practices) do highly skilled migrants transfer to their home country?

The main empirical findings, albeit directly connected with the general topic of the thesis, are chapter-specific. In this section, I synthesize the empirical findings to answer the study's four research questions, provide the analysis of their implications for both the body of knowledge in the field and policy-making, describe the limitations of the study, and make some suggestions for future research.

In Chapter 3, I focused on the analysis of public attitudes toward migration issues in Belarus, thus contributing to the under-researched topic of public opinion on migration in sending countries. In my analysis, I relied on the experience of several researchers who investigated the issue in various regional contexts (Asch 1994 in Ireland; Howard 2003 in Dominican republic: Østergaard-Nielsen 2003 in Turkey; Tsuda 2003 in Japan; Asis 2006 in the Philippines; Soruco *et al.* 2008 in Ecuador; Martínez-Saldaña 2003; Varadarajan 2010; Theiss-Morse and Wals 2014 in Mexico) and addressed it mainly in terms of negative or positive perception and meanings attached to various phenomena.

I studied public attitudes towards both emigration and return migration, emigrants and returnees in Belarusian society based on qualitative content analysis of several thematic online forums.

The analysis of public attitudes towards migration issues in Belarus has revealed a division of opinions on regard. A smaller part of the community under investigation considers emigration a part of modern mobile life and, as such, an opportunity to gain new knowledge and experiences. Among these people, the perception of return migration is overall positive—it is appreciated and even exalted; the returnees are perceived to be among the major drivers of the national economy and development. The largest part of the community, however, has showed almost the opposite attitude to both emigrants and returnees. They view emigrants as some of the best and brightest elements in Belarusian society, who have managed to 'flee' Belarus, and thus, are worthy of admiration. Emigration is highly appreciated and encouraged, that, in fact, is translated into high rates of emigration intentions among people in Belarus. Conversely, return migration is perceived as failure, while returnees are losers who have not been capable to remain abroad and, therefore, deserve public reproof. Such polarity in public attitudes toward migration issues is quite uncommon within the existing research literature. In this regard, I argue that it is related to the several consequences of post-socialist transformation and ideology. First, the Belarusian migration system is relatively young if compared with established migration systems—e.g., Ireland, Mexico, and Philippines—that are more homogeneous in their perception of emigration (Asch 1994; Asis 2006; Soruco *et al.* 2008; Theiss-Morse and Wals 2014). Second, for decades, people on the Soviet Union have been used to the idea of ideological emigration caused by repressions of Soviet authorities and, thus, considered an act of courage and liberation. Although, the ideas of overall mobility are beginning to gain strength and to receive public approval, it is still in its rudimentary state. Moreover, public opinion on emigration and return migration among Belarusians has some peculiarities, which appear in gender differences within- and strong politicization of discourses about migration. For instance, it is believed that emigration 'suites' better to women, while return migration is more convenient for men. This contrast is associated to differences in the marriage market demands in the Western countries and in Belarus. Whereas Belarusian women are highly appreciated in quality of brides, Belarusian men are deprived of this advantage and, thus, are more inclined to return. This discrepancy may be linked to a kind of clash of gender

expectations from both male and female sides and have deeper socio-cultural roots. Nevertheless, this argument has to be addressed in a more focused and systematic manner in further research. The politicization of public discourses on migration issues is another characteristic of Belarusian context. The perception of both emigrants and returnees is often seen with regards to the actual political situation in Belarus. For instance, in the online discussions, emigrants are depicted as supporters of democratic views, while returnees are often perceived as allies of the 'bloody regime'. Since the President in Belarus has been re-elected for the fourth time, it is impossible test the political influence in Belarus. A solution may be this kind of research in another context with a similar political system. Moreover, further research might address issues of dynamics of public opinion on migration issues in long-period, since, as some scholars have shown (Martínez-Saldaña 2003; Varadarajan 2010), public attitudes toward emigrants and returnees are not fixed in time but influenced by various (non) institutional factors.

The following empirical results are based on the analysis of 43 semi-structured in-depth interviews with highly skilled Belarusian returnees.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the main reasons for return among highly skilled professionals and the conditions, in which these decisions had been taken. Moreover, I explored the dynamics of the return process, and the actual attitudes towards the decision to return and return migration in general. The investigation of reasons for return has led to conclusions which are in line with previous research on this issue (Rogers 1984; Thomas-Hope 1999; King 2000; Black *et al.* 2004). It has been confirmed that the reasons at home are more important than those in the host country (Black *et al.* 2004). Moreover, the 'pull/repel–push/retain' framework (Bolognani 2014) has resulted adequate for analysis of return migration of the highly skilled. Within this framework, roughly two groups of factors have been identified: personal/emotional and institutional/rational. Often emotional factors of personal nature (e.g., homesickness, sentimental relationships, family issues, psychological discomfort, etc.) contributed to the creation of return-enabling conditions, while rational factors framed by several institutional constrains (e.g., higher incomes, job position, housing, entrepreneurship environment, etc.) acted mostly as the catalysers of final decision to return. Moreover, consistently with previous research (e.g., Ní Laoire 2008; Whisler *et al.* 2008; Wingens *et al.* 2011 Kelly 2015; Kõu *et al.* 2015), return migration decision-making appeared to be strongly related to individual and significant others' life

course events lying along family, education, and labour market trajectories. Among these, one of the main reasons for return among highly skilled males was the desire to find a partner in Belarus (Belarusian or Slavic girl) independently from their 'success' with the opposite sex in host countries. On the contrary, Belarusian female returnees are quite sceptical about Belarusian men and sentimental relationships with them. As I have noted above, this issue requires further systematic exploration.

The analysis of the dynamics of return has shown some discrepancies with the existing literature. Despite many studies having suggested that actual return is often preceded by multiple and long-term evaluations of pros and cons (Koser 1998; Faist 1999; King 2000; Oxfeld and Long 2004), such a course of events is not typical to Belarusian highly skilled returnees. Rather, it is the absence of clear return projects to characterize the highly skilled Belarusian professionals. For instance, two patterns have been observed in this regard: return through approximation and lightening return. In the first case, some returnees moved to neighbouring countries and lived there for awhile before taking the final decision to return to Belarus. In the second case, instead, the returnees' decision-making process was transient—in many narratives the whole process from idea to actual movement took few months. This quickness of decision-making and its realisation is definitely a characteristic of the highly skilled professionals who promptly respond to the demands of extremely mobile contemporary life. In fact, another important characteristic of highly skilled (return) migration is its temporality discussed also in the existing literature (Dustmann 2003; King 2002; Williams *et al.* 2004; Dumont and Spielvogel 2008 Trippl and Maier 2010; Engbersen 2012). Already during the interviews and also in later periods, the informants claimed to not consider their return as a full stop in their journeys. Rather, they were absolutely conscious about the multiplicity of possibilities that would pushed them to move further. Interestingly, none of the informants regrets about returning. Although many of them have experienced incomprehension from other people (which is not surprising, considering the public attitudes toward returnees that are predominately negative), all of the participants in this research claimed the conviction in the choice they made. Their life has changed—in different spheres and to different extents. But what these changes have in common is the dimension—transnational involvement—in which the returnees' lifestyles have practically diverged.

That is, in Chapter 5, I described both material and non-material displays of the highly skilled returnees' lifestyles and discussed in which ways and by what means the highly

skilled Belarusian returnees manifest different types of transnational involvement. Almost all the participants in this research described their styles of life while abroad as highly mobile and transnational. After their return, however, the styles of life they told to conduct have become, to some extent, polarized. Among the interviewed returnees, I observed two ideal-typical styles of life—locally oriented and transnationally oriented. These ideal types of post-return lifestyle take in consideration, among others, several topics discussed by social researchers as relevant for migrants' lifestyle such as mobility (e.g., Massey *et al.* 1998; Urry 2000, 2007; Favell *et al.* 2008), attitudes toward home (e.g., Rouse 1991; Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Brettel 2006; Nowicka 2006, 2007), family relationships (Manuh 2002; Hirsch 2003; Tiemoko 2004; Vianello 2013), and type of employment (Ilahi 1999; Iredale *et al.* 2003; Wadhwa *et al.* 2011). Hence, locally oriented returnees seem to be less mobile (stay predominately within the national borders), feel themselves strongly attached to their homes, are more passive in spending money, and tend to occupy contract employee positions. On the contrast, transnationally oriented returnees travel a lot for both leisure and work reasons, claim to have multiple and interchangeable homes, are active consumers of various goods and services, and often are inclined toward entrepreneurship. The major orientation toward self-employment seems to be a result of interaction between their personal characteristics, work experiences they had abroad, and several institutional opportunities available in post-socialist Belarus, which all together have created a favourable environment for entrepreneurship. What is more, locally and transnationally oriented returnees seem to differ in their attitudes towards Belarus in socio-political terms. That is, the majority of transnationally oriented returnees perceive Belarus as a part of European civilization that shares European culture and values. At the same time, the locally oriented returnees tend to see Belarus as a separate and distinctive socio-cultural entity. However, almost all the participants in this research noticed that their attitudes towards Belarus changed in a positive way after living abroad and they sustain these ideas with people surrounding them. Thus, interestingly, the returnees who spent many years abroad become builders and promoters of the national identity. The distinction between locally and transnationally oriented, nevertheless, does not work for both genders. While the majority of the male returnees seemed to be enchanted by the local women and euphoric about their private life, the females claimed to be mostly dissatisfied with Belarusian men and oriented toward foreigners. Therefore, international experience of living abroad seems to have a substantial effect on

individual styles of life in terms of transnational orientation. However, it is heterogeneous and has evident gender differences in its manifestations. Therefore, further exploration of post-return lifestyles in other groups (e.g., returnees with less international experience or lower skilled returnees) and in more systematic way may provide interesting contributions to the existing knowledge on the issue.

In Chapter 6, I focused on some normative structures and systems of practice transmitted by the highly skilled Belarusian returnees in both private and public life. Consistently with previous research on social remittances (e.g., Levitt 1998, 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011, 2013; Tiemoko 2003, 2004; Sabar 2008, 2013; Vianello 2013) the international experience appeared to have had a strong influence on returnees' personalities, their ideas about- and attitudes towards other people and countries. In accordance with some conclusions made in Chapter 4, international mobility is seen by the returnees as a source of multiple useful experiences, knowledge, and skills. I showed that although the adoption of Western socio-cultural norms and ideas sometimes leads to their transmission (in several interpersonal relationships and in the sphere of education), while in other contexts it appears to be a highly heterogeneous and transgressive process. In other words, values or ideas imported from abroad differ in different life contexts; and values and ideas learnt in one sphere may be applied to other life contexts. The socio-cultural remittances into family and sentimental life have appeared to have a strongly gendered character and represent two opposed currents, in which women adopt Western points of view, while men reinforce their traditionalist attitudes and values. In the political realm, some returnees have criticized and have questioned the Western understanding of democracy—their opinions and attitudes underwent a reactive transformation. Certainly, the formation and transmission of reactive socio-cultural remittances is neither a common nor uniform process; its mechanisms and conditions under which it develops are far from being clear and require further exploration.

This research, by focusing on socio-cultural consequences of highly skilled return migration, provides a contribution to the studies of both highly skilled migration and return migration from the perspective of sending countries and makes several theoretical and empirical enhancements to the existing literature.

First, it lies at the intersection of several research domains, and thus, provides an example of complexity characterizing migration journeys of highly skilled professionals. By doing that, this study claims revisiting of the theoretical framework for analysis of dynamics

of return due to highly skilled return migration' dynamic, speedy, and transient character. Moreover, a challenge to previous theoretical findings is posed by several context-specific issues regarding gender roles expectations and relations existing in the Belarusian society. As it has been discussed, gender differences are highly visible in both reasons for- and consequences of return. In accordance with previous research on gender implications for migration issues (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Mahler 1999; Hirsch 2003; Mahler and Pessar 2006; Vianello 2013; and, in particular, Vlase 2013), this study provides an additional confirmation that gender is a factor of primary importance for the studies of migration and its socio-cultural consequences. That is, a deeper understanding of socio-cultural roots and processes underlying the actual situation is needed.

Second, this study discusses post-return lifestyles and socio-cultural remittances and adds a piece to the puzzle of both cross-national belonging and socio-cultural changes brought by migration that appears to be a relatively innovative contribution to the studies of sending societies. Along with recent studies on post-return experiences in Morocco (De Bree *et al.* 2010), the Caribbean islands (Fog Olwig 2012), Ghana (Sabar 2013), and Iraq (Iaria 2014), this study conceptualizes return in relation to the transnational involvement of returnees, by introducing the concepts of 'locally oriented'- and 'transnationally oriented style of life'. Furthermore, it falls in with the current debate on multiple belongings and simultaneous orientation towards different countries and cultures (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Christou 2006; De Bree *et al.* 2010). By discussing socio-cultural remittances conveyed by highly skilled returnees, this research provides a reply to Levitt's (1998, 944) appeal to study social remittances «in cases involving urban-to-urban migration, lower levels of economic dependence, or countries that are geographically and culturally farther apart». As a result, I argue that the conceptual framework for analysis of socio-cultural remittances should be re-elaborated in accordance with new findings about their heterogeneous, transgressive, and sometimes reactive character.

Third, this research situates highly skilled return migration into the wider social, economic, and political context characterized by multiple post-socialist transformation processes. By discussing some distinctive features of Belarusian post-socialist context (e.g., mixed state and market economy, hybrid political regime, sometimes contradictory socio-cultural reasoning), this study has shown that in some cases it appears to be the fertile ground for social and economic innovations, while the sphere of politics remains a grey zone in

terms of liberal democratization in its Western understanding. Moreover, the analysis of trajectories and dynamics of highly skilled migration in a previously under-studied context might have significant implications for regional policy-making. Although Belarus has not yet adopted any legal framework for return migration management, the public opinion on emigrants and returnees may impede to successful realization of any policy in this field. Thus, there is a need of action in two directions. First, relevant agencies should contribute to the modification of public image of both emigrants and returnees. Second, it is required a policy, aimed at establishment of collaboration between Belarusian emigrants and economic and political entities operating inside the country, and encouragement of temporary and long-term returns of highly skilled professionals.

Finally, by focusing on socio-cultural implications of highly skilled return migration, this research discusses the more general issues of interconnection between migration processes and economic, social and political development. Evidence from several studies (Tiemoko 2004; Ammassari 2004; Rother 2009) and this thesis, seems to point to the fact that returnees may provide considerable contribution to the economic as well as socio-cultural development of the country by importing efficient professional practices (thus contributing to the development of business culture), progressive ideas regarding sustainable economy and everyday life as well as cosmopolitan values of tolerance and equity.

The study has offered a descriptive perspective on premises and socio-cultural consequences of highly skilled return migration, and was conducted in both public and individual contexts—natural interactions within thematic online forums and semi-structured in-depth interviews with highly skilled returnees. Although this research has been informed by the contemporary guidelines for a qualitative sociological research, it encountered a number of limitations, which need to be considered. Further, I illustrate these limitations in the order of respective empirical parts.

First, the use of online discussions to explore the public opinion is problematic to the extent that, of course, it does not provide a complete picture of the public sphere. Forum–users cannot stand for the whole population[1], thus, the analysed public opinion refers only to the restricted group of active Internet commentators. Still, since this group may partly coincide with the people active in migration terms, this analysis may provide useful insights

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[1] According to the 1% rule, for every person who posts on a forum, generally about 99 other people are viewing that forum but not posting (McConnell and Huba 2006).

into the study of public opinion on migration processes and policies. Moreover, online discussions appeared to be potentially rich sources of information since they are natural human interactions (not forced by any research intervention), they cover a large variety of topics, and count considerable number of participants. Thus, this type of data may be extensively used for both preliminary and core research.

Second, in the analysis of socio-cultural consequences of return migration I rely only on the information received from the returnees without taking into consideration experiences of either emigrants or stayers. This may be considered a conceptual bias for my findings, which, of course, cannot be considered definitive. Further research has to include other groups of migrants (and non-migrants) in order to establish convergences and discrepancies between their life experiences.

Third, the number of in-depth interviews used for the analysis is modest, and the sample is not representative and, thus, inadequate for generalizations. However, the generalization was not among the aims of this research. Rather, it opted for the deep and rich description of some individual experiences, which may provide an insight into the processes return migration among the highly-skilled resulting into the preliminary distinction between two ideal-typical styles of post-return life and identification of several types of socio-cultural remittances conveyed by returnees to their home country.

Third, I am reasonably aware of a potential bias some of my personal characteristics may create. Primarily, I refer to my immigration status (an immigrant with more-than-five-year experience of living abroad), qualification (a tertiary degree), and socio-economic conditions, which might influence the objectivity with respect to the informants. However, these characteristics have certainly helped me to have empathy for other people's stories.

The results of this study, although preliminary, present a fertile ground for further research, which has to address the conceptual and methodological limitations encountered till now. Therefore, this research project may evolve through the following investigations:

- Measurement (definition of dimensions) of the phenomena of both highly skilled emigration and highly skilled return migration in Belarus (e.g., by using data of foreign embassies, consulates, and ministries of internal affairs);
- Standardized investigation of public opinion on emigration and return migration issues (e.g., inclusion of a set of questions into questionnaires of ordinary surveys conducted by the Ministry of statistics and other public and/or private research centres);

- Systematic analysis of socio-cultural consequences of highly skilled return migration based on representative samples of highly skilled emigrants and stayers as well as returnees.

By performing these steps, research will acquire necessary levels of reliability and validity, and will be able to give further descriptions and accounts for a multifaceted phenomenon of highly skilled return migration.

Besides what is often reported about the benefits of return migration in terms of economic growth and development, this study showed that highly skilled return migration may potentially transform both individual and collective styles of living and reasoning. Although socio-cultural consequences of highly skilled return migration are neither linear nor homogeneous, the changes brought by returnees appear to be an important contribution into a sending country's socio-cultural and socio-economic development.

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215

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Appendix 1. In-depth interview guide

I. Pre-emigration
1. Basic information and childhood
   1) Family (composition, relationships)
   Could you tell me something about your family? What job do (did) your parents do??
   Have your parents ever changed their place of residence? How would you describe
   your inside family relationships
   2) Lifestyle (hobbies, places, habits)
   How did you pass your free time? What hobbies did you have? Did you travel? If yes,
   where, with whom, for how much time?
2. Education
   1) School (kind of school, classmates, achievement)
   What kind of school did you go to? Have you ever changed school? How were you
   going at school?
   2) University (choice of the faculty, student life, relationships, achievement)
   How did you choose the faculty where to study? Was it your personal decision?
   Could you describe me your student life? Have you ever participated in any exchange
   program?
   What projects did you have during your university studies? What were your priorities?
   What do you thing is the main result of your university studies?
3. Working life
   First job (how, where) + further jobs
   When did you start to work? What type of job it was?
   In what other places did you work? Did you enjoy your job?
4. Private life (partner, children, parents)
   Could you describe your sentimental life during your university studies? How many
   relationships did you have? What was the longest one? Had you a stable relationship?
   What kind of projects did you have? Were you going to create a family? Did you want
   to marry? Did you think about having children?
   What where relations with your parents? Did you live together? What was their
   concern about your private life? How it was going the private life of your peers?
5. Decision to migrate
   1) Idea to migrate
   When did you start to think about going abroad? How did you have this idea? Was it
   difficult to realize it? How much time did it get?
   2) Information gathering
   Did you have friends or relatives abroad before your emigration? Who were they?
   Did you get in touch with them to get some information about the places they lived in?
   Did you ask for opinion to your parents? Your partner? How much weight had their
   opinions for your decision?

3) Reaction

How did your parents react to your decision? And your partner? Your friends? Did you have conflicts with anybody regarding your decision?

II. Migration period

1. Education (scholarship, colleagues, achievement)

How did you decide to go in that place precisely? Did you have any kind of scholarship? Did you like your new environment? What kind of relationships did you have with your colleagues? Did you make friends? Who were they?

2. Job (company, position, economic conditions, career)

What kind of job did you have? How did you find it? What kind of relationships did you have with your colleagues? How could you define your economic conditions in that period? What career projects did you have? Did you feel yourself motivated?

3. Lifestyle (hobbies, consumption, habits)

Where did you live? What kind of lodging it was? Could you describe me your house? Did you décor it yourself?

What was your everyday life? What where your habits? How did you pass your free time? How did you spend your money? What kind of media did you use (Internet, TV, radio, journals)? Were they of the host country? Did you inform yourself about your native country?

Could you describe a typical working day? Could you describe me a typical rest-day? In what language did you speak mainly? How many times per year did you go to Belarus?

4. Private life

Could you tell me something about your partner? Who was it? What did she/he? Did she/he like her/his job? How did you get acquainted? How could you describe your relationship? Did you want to marry? Did you want to have children? (Did you have children?) Did your parents know your partner?

What joint projects did you have? What were you dreaming about?

Did you make any close friendships? Who was your best friend?

Did you attend any cultural or religious association related to your native country? What kind of activity did you do there? Did you do it alone?

What kind of contacts did you maintain with your family of origin (emails, skype, telephone, ecc.)? Did you send money back home? Did your parents (relatives? friends) come to visit you? Were you thinking about bringing your parents abroad?

5. Decision to return

1) Idea to return

When did you start to think about coming back? How did you have this idea?

2) Information gathering, decision

Did you know somebody with similar experience before coming back? Did you speak to them? Who were these people?

How did you make this decision? Did you ask for any advice? To whom? What were the pro and con?

3) Reaction

What was the reaction of your partner? And of your parents? Friends? Had you to defend your idea or you were comprehended?

III.   Post-return period

1. Job (company, position, economic conditions, career)

Where do you work? How did you find this job? Do you enjoy it? What are the differences between working abroad and in Belarus? How do you evaluate your career prospects? How would you define your economic conditions?

2. Lifestyle (hobbies, consumption, habits)

Where do you live? Could you describe your house?

How did you change after coming back from abroad?

What positive things do you see in your coming back? Negative?

How do you pass your free time? How do you spend your money? Are you pleased by you decision to come back? Would you advice to your Belarusian friends abroad to come back? How do you see the future of Belarus?

3. Private life

What are the relations with your parents? Are they happy about your decision? What are relationships with your pre-emigration friends? Do you maintain relations with your friends from abroad?

What has been changed in your private life since coming back? Are you still together? How did you (your couple) lived the coming back? Do you think your requirements for a partner have been changed after being abroad? What are you dreaming about? What are you family projects for the next 5-7 years? Do you want to marry? To have children? What is the best age for making family?

4. Perception of return

How do you think to be changed after living abroad? Do you regret being returned? Do your think your return is permanent?

Appendix 2. The presentation letter with a consent of respondent form

Trento, date

Nadya Bobova is enrolled in the second year of the 28th cycle of the Doctoral School in Sociology and Social Research at the University of Trento.

Nadya Bobova is preparing her doctoral dissertation on the Belarusian highly skilled professionals. The research focuses in particular on their motivations, careers and international experience.

For this reason, Nadya Bobova will ask your availability for an interview on this subject. The interview, unless you prefer otherwise, will be recorded.

The goal of sociological research is not to collect personal information but to collect observations and meanings that can be generalized. For this reason, the identity of the person being interviewed will be covered by anonymity. All information provided by you will be treated in according to the principles and ethics of social research.

If you need any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me to addresses in the footer of this letter.

Nadya Bobova will leave you a copy of this letter. I ask you to sign the second one as acknowledgment and confirmation of your collaboration. The signed letter will be kept with other research documents.

Thank you very much for collaboration and time that you dedicate to us. If you want to have information on the research results, please inform Nadya about it. She will provide you with a copy of her dissertation as soon as it will be completed.

Best regards,

Prof. Giuseppe Sciortino
Director of the Department of
Sociology and Social Research

CONSENT OF RESPONDENT

I acknowledge receipt of the information referred to in Legislative Decree 30 June 2003, n. 196 (Privacy Code), the full text of which, including the rights of the interested person under art. 7 - can be found on www.garanteprivacy.it and www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/03196dl.htm, and **I consent** to process and to communicate information voluntarily given by me to for the reasons of research mentioned above. **I consent** to use collected information for educational purposes and to communicate it in scientific papers, in conferences and academic seminars.

Should be understood that such consent is conditional to compliance with the existing legislation.

Place and date
Respondent's name and surname
Born in   on
Signature

Appendix 3. List of codes for data analysis

1. The list of codes used for forums' data analysis

Intentions to emigrate
Intentions to return
Money
Perception of Belarus
Perception of emigrants
Perception of emigration
Perception of research
Perception of return
Perception of returnees
Perception of stayers
Politics
Reason to remain abroad
Reason to go abroad
Reason to return to Belarus
Reason to stay in Belarus
Return visits

2. The list of codes used for interviews' data analysis

(Re)migration intentions
*After return & Job search
*Lifestyle & After return
*Private life & After return
Abroad
After return
Army
Auto-description/state of mind
Before migration
Belarus
Belarus has complex of inferiority
Belarus has everything
Belarus image abroad
Belarus is better than people think
Belarus is not independent from foreign countries
Belarus problems_cultural life
Belarus problems_manpower
Belarus problems_service
Belarus problems_working practices
Belarusian people
Belarusians do not want to change
Change/opportunities
Children
Communication
Context of decision to return
Cosmopolitanism_culture
Cosmopolitanism_division is artificial
Cosmopolitanism_identity
Cosmopolitanism_life
Cultural shock
Decision process
Decision to return

Distinction from Russians
Divorce
Documents/bureaucracy
Duration of decision process
Education
Entrepreneurship
European mentality
Experience_perception of return
Family background
Family_anchor
Fatherland
First impression
First impression_perception of return
Food
Free time: no
Friends
Gender roles
Habits
Home Bel
Home both
Home def
Home Everywhere
Home nowhere
Hosting
House arrangement
In general
Inside migration
Integration
International experience
International experience for work
International surroundings
Job change
Job description
Job search
Labour market re-entry
Language
Leisure behavior
Lifestyle
Local
Localism-cosmopolitanism
Localism_culture
Localism_family
Localism_home
Localism_identity
Localism_leisure
Localism_life
Localism_work
Localism_your place is here
Loneliness
Manpower problem
Marriage
Meaning of return
Media
Migration context
Money-making
Money-saving
Money-spending
Nation feature

National identity
Nationalism-transnationalism
Nationalism_family
Nationalism_life
Nationalism_money
Negative perception of return
No home
Nobody wants us there_perception of return
Nostalgia
Not regret_perception od return
Opinions
Others_perception of return
Participants of decision to return
Partner
Patriotism
Perception of Belarus/the compatriots
Perception of home
Perception of labour market
Perception of money
Perception of return by others
Perception of the host-country/local people
Perception of work
Perception of work: emotions
Perception of work: skills
Place of work
Plans for future
Political view
Politics
Positive perception of return
Possibility to return
Professional update
Pull factor_children
Pull factor_country
Pull factor_family matters
Pull factor_friends
Pull factor_money
Pull factor_sentimental life
Pull factor_social position
Pull factor_work
Push factor_apathy
Push factor_country
Push factor_discomfort
Push factor_illness
Push factor_instability
Push factor_loneliness
Push factor_money
Push factor_people
Push factor_sentimental life
Push factor_work
Reason to migrate
Reason to return
Relationships with Belarus while abroad
Relationships with the ex-host-country
Remittances
Return dynamics
Sentimental relationship
Social class
Social remittances

Social remittances_communication
Social remittances_consumption culture
Social remittances_culture
Social remittances_education
Social remittances_family
Social remittances_gender roles
Social remittances_languages
Social remittances_migration practice
Social remittances_national value
Social remittances_new business ideas
Social remittances_open-mindness
Social remittances_personal change
Social remittances_personal responsability
Social remittances_politics
Social remittances_professionalism
Social remittances_social change
Social remittances_traditions
Social remittances_working practice
Soviet mantality
Temporality_perception of return
Transnationalism_culture
Transnationalism_family
Transnationalism_life
Transnationalism_social contacts
Transnationalism_tourism
Transnationalism_work
Travel
Values
Values: career
Vision of the future of Belarus
Visits home
Willingness to return
Work
Work aspirations