

# Experience of Lithuanian migrants: the social construction of networks and identities

JURGA BUČAITĖ-VILKĖ

University of Vytautas Magnus, K. Donelaičio Str. 52, LT-44248 Kaunas, Lithuania  
E-mail: j.bucaite@smf.vdu.lt

VIKINTA ROSINAITĖ

The American University of the Middle East, Block 3, Building 1, Egaila Area, Kuwait  
E-mail: vikinta.rosinaite@aum.edu.kw

ETSUO YOSHINO

Hokkaido University, Graduate School of Economics, Kita-9, Nishi-7, Kita-ku, Sapporo, 060-0809 Japan  
E-mail: eyoshino@pop.econ.hokudai.ac.jp

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The article deals with the role of social networks in facilitating migration and maintaining ties of information, emotional support and financial assistance among emigrants' host and origin countries. The aim of the study has been to analyze and identify how the emigrants' social relationships and identities are constructed at the foundation of social networks, how the participation in networks shape the individual decision of migrants. The main analytical argument refers to the theory of migration networks, which argues that emigration networks are mbedded in the social rules, norms and social context of the host and destination country. Based on the results of the qualitative research of Lithuanian emigration in European countries, the article concludes that the migration networking is based on the mutual interdependence and the nature of the social ties which shape the individual emigration strategies and opportunities in decision-making, community formation and settlement processes.

**Key words:** migration networking, construction of social networks, emigration strategies

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## INTRODUCTION

The article focuses on the maintenance and construction of social ties inside emigrants' communities as well as between the origin / destination countries. The main question is what connects people together and what divides them in decision-making towards emigration intentions. Individual emigrants rarely make decisions to leave their country of origin without the influence of the social context. In other words, the direction and motivation of the individual to choose the emigration country is also shaped by the intentions of the household or family (Brettell, Hollifield 2000: 9). We emphasize the importance of the social networks which could be analyzed as the causal and consequential factor influencing the emigration process.

The social networks and relationships of migrants depend on human capital criteria which include the socio-demographic factors, such as schooling, education, occupational status, professional career, language proficiency and professional skills. This dimension influences significantly the process of migrants' integration into the destination country's labor market, social and cultural life.

Furthermore, the network approach to migration studies provides the analytical framework to bring structure and agency into the meso-level of analysis through the integration of structural and individual factors (Boyd 1989). These factors shape the mechanisms of emigration and influence the complexity of decision-making on both the subjective and group levels. The meso-level of analysis is partially helpful in minimizing the structuralism and neoclassical thinking on emigration (Ferro, Wallner 2006: 17). Following Boyd's arguments on network significance in emigration studies, it is important that, on the one hand, network analysis deals with the structural factors that provide the context for migration decision-making. On the other hand, on the micro-level of analysis, "the decision to migrate is influenced by the existence of and participation in networks which connect people across space" (Boyd 1989: 645). The migration network literature focuses on households as units of analysis, which are viewed as complex configurations of people groups, decisions, expectations and beliefs. These particular units of analysis reflect the dynamic character of global society, the changing gender and marital relations, professional status, career expectations. As Ferro and Wallner argue in recent emigration studies, "households become the sites of the play of power, of negotiation and decision making" (Ferro, Wallner 2006: 17).

In the Lithuanian academic discourse, studies on establishing and maintaining emigration networks and social ties are quite fragmental. The analytical issue of emigration networking is usually analyzed among the other issues of emigration motivation or intentions, emigration integration or cultural / socioeconomic assimilation processes (see, for instance, Sipavičienė 2006; Maslauskaitė ir Stankūnienė 2007; Kuzmickaitė 2008, Gečienė 2009 and many others).

The aim of the study was to analyze and identify how the emigrants' social relationships and identities are constructed at the foundation of social networks, how the participation in networks shapes the migrants' identity. The main focus is given to the issues of how migration networks facilitate the process of adaptation and settlement in immigration society, how the social networks create the conditions to migrate, the main advantages and disadvantages of establishing emigrants' networks, the role of weak and strong ties, including family, kinship, friendship and acquaintances' interrelationships. We are following the theory of migration networks within the main argument that migration networks are embedded in the social rules, norms and social context of the core and destination country. Formation of high-skilled migration networks increases the opportunities of professional mobility as well as enables the exchange of diverse resources in these networks. Migration networks also provide the financial resources, personal contacts or emotional support in settlement, housing or job-searching in the migrants' destination country (Granovetter 1973; Boyd 1989; Palloni et al. 2001; Tilly 2007, etc.). In this paper, we analyze a few dimensions of migration network, including risk diversification strategy, joint decision-making and participation / membership in networks.

This analysis of migration networks is based on an empirical research on Lithuanian and Polish workforce migration to Western European countries. The qualitative research was conducted in 2008–2010 in several European countries with the highest migration rates of Lithuanians, including United Kingdom (London), Germany (Hamburg), Spain (Valencia and Barcelona) and Denmark (Copenhagen). The empirical results from more than 80 semi-depth interviews not only show the outputs of households' decisions which influence the flow of emigrants from Lithuania to other European countries, but also the subjective experiences and reflections of emigrants and how migration networks facilitate and encourage the integration process in a foreign country's labor market.

## CONCEPTUALIZING INTERPERSONAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL TIES

At the metaphorical level, the idea of social network underlines the fact that the links among individuals spread through society. In this paper, the analytical focus is given to strategies and personal experiences of how migrants construct their social networks, what actors (for instance, family members, friends, acquaintances, workmates, etc.) are involved in their networks, what type of ties they are using to enable the adaptability to the migration country's cultural and socio-economic contexts.

The network approach as a methodological framework in migration analysis is useful for a few reasons. Firstly, the concept of social network provides a powerful model of the social structure based on social relationships. As Wasserman and Faust (1993) argue, social network analysis rejects the structure composed of normatively guided individuals and bound groups. Secondly, social networks aren't isolated structures but have always a changing dynamic character; they are the most flexible and adaptable form of organization. Social networks are perceived as having an open-ended character with no real coherence (Wasserman, Faust 1993; cited by Mufune 1991: 100). Thirdly, we emphasize the rejection of hierarchical patterns. This means that a social network has no dominating center; rather, direct and indirect social relations are formatted around a few centered persons. Networks are polycentric within a non-hierarchical structure and are analyzed as a complex system within heterogeneous and multiplex ties (Wellman 1999: 16).

Granovetter (1973) in his study of professional mobility firstly pointed the relational aspect of weak and strong ties in networks. He has suggested that market and hierarchical actions are typically embedded in social relations, and their social nature has a crucial influence on the whole structure. These relations can limit the actor's options and influence his choice, also "provide ego opportunities to further his interests and influence others" (Granovetter 1973: 1361). Furthermore, Galaskiewicz and Wasserman emphasize the significance of the social context which provides norms governing relations with others and the meanings attached to this interaction, (Galaskiewicz, Wasserman 1993: 14–15). Analyzing the dual aspects of ties in networks, Granovetter shows that the extensive weak ties of acquaintanceship and informational flows are particularly central for a successful integration into society (Granovetter 1973: 1361). Granovetter refers to strong ties, defining them as a combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy and reciprocal services. Strong ties give people some leverage in their relationships with each other and imply a significant support in future. On the contrary, weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups that tend to concentrate within particular groups. Weak ties allow reaching a larger number of people and traversing a greater social distance. Such network is more flexible, changeable and heterogeneous. Extensive weak ties of acquaintanceship and informational flows are particularly central for a successful integration into society (Granovetter 1973: 1361–1364). The actor's strong ties have the same information in his personal ego environment, and vice versa: his weak ties should contain more information (Galaskiewicz, Wasserman 1993: 13).

In this paper, we employ the approach of networks for a migrants' communities' analysis which could be conceptualized as a set of various social ties. Developing the idea of relational social network analysis, Granovetter (1973) and Coleman (1988) have focused on the crucial theoretical issue of how social networks could be viewed as social capital used by actors to pursue their own goals or interests. Depending on the theoretical perspective, the conceptual strategy of bringing all structural parts together could be analyzed in the light of such concepts as trust, culture, social exchange, social resources, embeddedness, social networks,

relational contracts, etc. (Adler 2002: 25). Contrary to Wellman's (1999) formalistic vision that social capital is the result of interactions within the social structure, other authors reveal the importance of the content of social ties in determining the social capital embeddedness in social networks (Granovetter 1973; Coleman 1988; Emirbayer, Goodwin 1994).

To sum up, the network approach in migration studies could be fruitful in two different ways. First of all, the relation nature of networks underlines the construction of self-sustaining migrants' relationships and ties which enable the flows of various resources among the countries of origin and of destination. Secondly, the network approach implies the importance of social capital, embeddedness and community building. The strength of social exchange among migrants' communities and their kinship, groups of acquaintances and workmates or employers correlate with the migrants' social and cultural capital and their ability to maintain and strengthen the communitarian ties.

### **MIGRANTS' SOCIAL NETWORKING: MAINTENANCE AND ADAPTABILITY**

Recently, the network nature of migrants' communities has become one of the most inspiring research objects which underline the social construction, maintenance and integration of migrants' communities in destination countries. Several significant migration studies based on the network approach were published, invoking a theoretical discussion on how migration is shaped by local, regional and international factors such as ethnicity, kinship, social status, family structure and household strategies.

Generally, the network approach enables to analyze the micro-level of migration, including personal decisions and intentions to migrate and the macro-level of analysis, such as institutional, legal, political and economic factors. For instance, Massey defines the migration networks as "sets of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination countries through the bonds of kinship, friendship and shared community origin" (Massey 1988: 396). One of the most important arguments emphasizes the risk and costs of migration, which might be reduced by using different social networks. The migration process is identified as a mechanism within particular flows of minimizing costs, including financial losses, psychological trauma, social and cultural barriers. In this sense, maintaining weak and strong ties in networks is defined as one of the most important aspects to encourage decisions on migration and facilitate adaptation in the destination country. Social networks play an intermediate role in fostering macrostructural and microstructural changes and perpetuate migration as a "self-sustaining process" (Grasmuck, Pessar 1991: 15; cited by Brettell 2008: 125).

The migration networks approach is closely related to the concept of *transnationalism* widely used in sociological and anthropological studies. As Margolis argues, this concept emerged as an analytical tool to explain how migrants maintain their ties with the origin country, "making home and host society a single arena of social action" (Margolis 1995: 29, cited by Brettell 2008: 120). Following the transnationalistic approach, the migration flows are analyzed as de-localized communities which transgress the international borders and maintain the different relations within the origin and destination countries (for further discussion, see, for instance, Schiller et al. 1992).

**Networks as risk diversification strategy.** In this paper, we focus not on the localized migrant communities and their ethnical identity formation, but on expanding the significance of networks and kinship in building communities. In turn, migration networks could be analyzed as a risk diversification strategy which is useful in terms of resource flows and

interdependence among and within migrants' communities. Contrary to the approach of economic labor migration, which analyzes the strategies of minimizing risk in terms of income and allocation of labor force, the network approach underlines the importance of means of risk diversification and minimization of financial, emotional and other losses. In well-developed networks, the destination job is available for migrant community members. It makes the migration a "relatively risk-free resource" (Palloni et al. 2001: 1266–1267).

For example, Light, Bhachu and Karageorgis discuss the migrants' networks in terms of economic benefit, entrepreneurship and creation of migrants' business (Light et al. 2004: 38). The networks provide several support resources needed for integration into the labor market of the destination country, for example, information on legal documentation, business methods, pricing, providers and customers dealing with local bureaucracies. In this sense, Webner argues that "the migration network is a frequently used channel of communication along which all kinds of messages easily and inexpensively flow" (Webner 1990: 12, cited by Light et al. 2004: 38). The most important aspect here is that information in networks is credible enough to create mutual trust and recognition among the network actors.

**Networks as joint decision-making.** The other important aspect of migration networks is related to the joint decision-making which formulates the strategy of the households to choose the appropriate destination country. The most important aspect is that the migration network approach analyzes the migration process as embedded in social networks that fit individual decision makers with groups and communities and enables the analysis of micro-factors (Light, Bhachu, Karageorgis 2004: 25–26). Following the concept of minimizing risk, the household members formulate the strategy to earn the family income using the most accessible ways, such as strong kinship ties or weak acquaintance relations. In other words, the individual decision to migrate shapes the allocation of resources in a family. It is more likely that the optimal individual decision would encourage the "chain migration effect" (Palloni, Massey, and others 2001: 1265–1266).

Recent findings have shown that a personal decision to migrate or to stay in the country of origin correlates with the ethnic groups, kinship, workmates, friendships and other networks in which the individuals are deeply involved. As Boyd argues, migration networks are helpful in creating self-sustaining flows of resources between the origin and destination countries, enabling flows of useful information, money, moral support and legal advice. Migration could be understood as a social product which involves individual decisions, the role of economic and political factors and household strategies (Boyd 1989: 640–642). In other words, both the sending and the receiving countries are embedded in migration networks through persistent social relations.

**Networks as a membership strategy.** According to the network approach, membership in networks depends on relational aspects which bring different actors together. Membership in networks could be explained using different social and economic variables, such as age, family and occupational status, institutional context, dynamics in labor market, etc. (Palloni et al. 2001: 1267). For instance, diversification of economic sectors may encourage migration flows to specific regions. Furthermore, we underline that migration networks are based on individual choices which allow analyzing friendship or kinship networks, as well as focusing on migrant communities based on ethnicity. The most important aspect of membership in networks underlines the trust-based ties among migrants. As Tilly argues, in long-distance migration the trust networks create solidarity and provide long-term rights and obligations

among migrants. Trust in migration networks inhibits assimilation in the destination country, but, on the other hand, it may narrow the opportunities of migrants for employment, housing, social benefits or cultural activities (Tilly 2007: 5–6).

In the discussion on migration networks, cultural and ethnical influences provide a “new” vision of network membership as a product of beliefs and ideologies. The network based on ethnicity shares the same cultural patterns and social norms and could be regarded as an advantageous resource in the settling-down process in the destination country. Migrants, especially in the early stage of settlement, try to maintain close relations with other migrants of the same ethnicity to ensure their safety.

### CASE STUDY OF CONSTRUCTING LITHUANIAN MIGRANTS' SOCIAL NETWORKS

We illustrate the theoretical insights by empirical data from the research of economic migration of Lithuanians and Poles, administered by School of Economics, Hokkaido University, Japan<sup>1</sup>. The qualitative research was conducted in 2008–2010 in different European countries with the highest migrants' population of Lithuanians and Polish target groups, including Scandinavian countries, UK, Ireland, Germany, Spain and France. The main research questions explore the decision-making of migrants and their motivation to settle down in the destination country, the reaction of family members, the role of social networks in the process of adaptation in the migration country, including the job-searching strategies, housing policies and social welfare.

The general bulk of the data comes from semi-structured interviews with more than 80 respondents (migrants from Lithuania<sup>2</sup>) with different socio-demographic characteristics including gender, education, age, professional experience and family status. The majority of respondents were aged between 26 and 40 (73 percent), had a higher education (66.3 percent); 20.2 percent of respondents had lived in the migration country for 1–3 years, 28.1 percent for 4–6 years, 20.2 for 7–9 years and 19.1 for 10–12 years. The majority of respondents (78.7 percent) migrated from five largest cities of Lithuania (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Panevėžys, Šiauliai).

The main empirical results indicate that the formal and informal nature of migration networks becomes one of the main social, economic and cultural resources for a successful integration in the destination country, especially in the labour market, but also it creates new challenges and social or cultural tensions between locals and migrants. The empirical analysis in this paper focuses on the following issues: how migration networks encourage the individual decision or household decision to migrate, what are the main advantages and disadvantages of creating migrants' networks, how these strategies are related to weak and strong ties used by migrants, who provide migrants with financial assistance, basic information on accommodation and labor market.

In this paper, we do not discuss the structural differences in migration policies of European countries. Rather, we focus on subjective reflections of different migrants' experiences in destination countries, involving the aspects of migration networks and family relations.

<sup>1</sup> The qualitative research on Lithuanian and Polish migration, performed in 2008–2010, was granted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technologies of Japan.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, we analyze the results of more than 80 semi-structured interviews with Lithuanian migrants, performed in London (Great Britain, January 2008), Valencia and Barselona (Spain, March 2009), Copenhagen (Denmark, March 2010) and Hamburg (Germany, September 2010). Due to ethical requirements, the names of respondents are changed.

## EMPIRICAL ASPECTS: CONSTRUCTION OF MIGRANTS' COMMUNITIES AS SOCIAL NETWORKS

### Household relations and decision-making

In this part, we analyze the role of family and kinship networks in facilitating and encouraging the process of migration. As we have argued in the previous part, the role of networks for newly arriving migrants is considered as one of the most important resources of job-searching, housing, foreign language skills or moral support. The networks, conceptualized in loose ties which involve the number of friends, acquaintances or workmates, provide all practical and emotional support needed in the "host" country. On the contrary, the strong ties, which characterize the nature of family and kinship relationships, are crucial in the initial phase of decision-making to migrate (see, for instance, Portes et al. 1999). Portes et al. use the concept of multiplex ties which ensure the complexity of social relationships. Multiplex ties may represent strong and dense relationships, but may equally indicate a lack of weak ties and an over-reliance on a small network (Coleman 1990, cited from Ryan et al. 2009: 152). In other words, the variety of ties in networks may provide different support. Migrants cannot rely only on family or kinship networks since this would reduce their opportunities for a new job or accommodation.

One of the study issues indicates the reaction of family members to the decision of our respondents to migrate from Lithuania. Almost two thirds of our respondents' families were positive enough as regards the decision to emigrate, and this encouraged to change the life course very much. This indicates the positive attitudes towards migration within the aim to ensure the economic and social welfare in a "host" country. Many respondents argue that their family members were satisfied with their decision to move to a destination country, regarding it as an opportunity to "begin a new life":

*"... My mother, how to put it, always wants to keep her children nearby, but she wasn't arguing a lot because she knew the reasons for my decision and wished me all the best. My sister encouraged me a lot, because she has already moved to America ... she motivated me a lot. She was telling me: don't be afraid, go... And I left the country without knowing anybody, not having seen the country before..."* (Renata, 38 years, Copenhagen).

The experience of another respondent, an accountant living in London, indicates the weak ties between family members, which may be characterized in terms of distrust, individualization and alienation:

*"... The reaction was very simple. I didn't even ask if I can leave, or anything. I said when I'm leaving and when I need money, and that's it. I'm leaving... I didn't feel any worried reaction or anything unexpected..."* (Neris, 27 years, London).

Other respondents said that their families approved their decision to move but at the same time discouraged them a lot. One of the main reasons is related to the nature of strong kinship ties and the reciprocity of family relationships. Typically, because of the small number of household members, the family is facing the risk to interrupt close ties and to lose the practical or moral support. The geographic distance between the family members is also considered as one of the most consequential threats for changing kinship relations. Some of the respondents were facing significant changes in their family status, such as a divorce or even passing away of their family members. Vaida, a sales-girl from London, took her decision to emigrate not because of complicated or tense family relations, but because the economic

benefit and higher salaries in London were the most stimulating reasons to leave the country of origin. Her experience not only reveals the need of family support and advice in decision-making, but also indicates the individualization of life-planning strategies.

*“... My parents live peacefully, nicely, so I thought that it wouldn't be a problem if I' leave. But they were not satisfied, because they think that Lithuania is the best country to live in. But they supported me, it means they understood that this is my decision and I'm already an independent person and this is my way...”* (Vaida, 33 years, London).

The negative reaction of family members, typically of parents or grandparents, to the decision to emigrate was indicated only by a few respondents. The vulnerability of tight kinship networks is also related to the risk to lose the emotional support or advice:

*“... Of course, my parents saw me off in my trip, my mother was crying because I was leaving my city, but... I'm doing it for myself; I don't have anything against them. I just wanted my parents to understand me...”* (Aurelija, 28 years, Barcelona)

Consequently, the decision to migrate is shaped by individual motives as well as by the nature of family relations. Remigija, a physician living in Copenhagen, was dealing with the negative reaction of her elder parents who didn't want to lose the close emotional support and caring:

*“... Well, the external reaction of my parents was very negative, but inside, I don't know what they were thinking about. My father is very patriotic, he doesn't want Lithuania to fall apart, so he wasn't very happy...”* (Remigija, 48 years, Copenhagen).

The other aspect which underlies the strategies of decision-making as regards emigration is related to the dispersion and dynamism of close family ties through geographical boundaries. As Portes argues, rather than being rooted in particular geographic settings, migrants' networks are dispersed over a wide geographic area (Portes 1995). The majority of our respondents have indicated that they have members of their family also living in emigration, mainly in the European Union countries such as the UK, Ireland, Germany, Scandinavian countries, and in the United States. These countries are considered as the most popular destination areas for most of Lithuanian emigrants. The experience of family members or close friends in their “host” countries encouraged the decision of our respondents a lot. In this sense, the transnational networks influence significantly the migration flows and at the same time support the durability of family relations.

## **MAINTENANCE AND PARTICIPATION IN NETWORKS**

The other aspect of migration networks is related to the maintenance and participation in the networks that may provide assistance in employment, housing or social welfare. The nature of weak and strong ties underlines the different advantages in maintaining the emigration networks. On the one hand, the strong kinship or family-based ties could provide a significant moral or psychological support and minimise the emotional risk of emigration. On the other hand, the weak ties are advantageous as job-searching or accommodation strategies which are based on the flows of information, financial assistance or legal advice. Maintenance and participation in networks means also the implementation of different risk diversification strategies and thus the creation of linkages between emigrants' origin and destination countries



(Palloni et al. 2001; Boyd 1989). In other words, the flow of migrants enables the exchange of goods, services and information and ensures the reciprocal and interdependent ties among households, communities and acquaintances.

For many respondents, emigration was facilitated by networks already established in “host” countries. Lithuanian friends or acquaintances were an important source of information for newly arriving migrants, especially in providing assistance in job-searching, housing, practical information or social benefits. New relationships, mainly with Lithuanians, were considered as an alternative source of practical or financial support and advice. The personal experience of respondents shows that networks based on old and new social contacts helps to cope up effectively with emigration difficulties.

*“... From the beginning there were a lot of friends, non-locals... but they are not your friends, they are not including you into their circle ... and when you don't know their language well enough you come and burrow to your people, you know, who are in a similar situation...”* (Aurelija, 28 years, Barcelona)

Daiva, a 28-year-old waitress and receptionist from London, trusted a lot her friends and acquaintances of the same ethnicity and nationality. They helped with the settlement and other important information in her first days in London.

*“... You know who helped me, know who ... the locals from my childhood from Anykščiai, my friends ... we've got each other's telephone number. I don't remember how we got it... And I said, I was looking for a job, do you know something?...”* (Daiva, 28 years, London)

The story of Daiva shows the high level of bonding with her Lithuanian friends and acquaintances. The respondents were choosing different strategies of job-searching and accommodation because of their limited possibilities and interdependence in tightly-knitted migration networks. All practical, informational and psychological support was received through relations with other Lithuanians. In this case, trust networks are used as a risk diversification strategy, but they may also limit the opportunities for professional mobility or entrance to the other social groups.

*“... We came with a Lithuanian friend. Her friend was working in Birmingham and we knew this person... We knew that we would stay in his place and would find a job. We tried to find a job over the distance (interviewer: using the internet), but it was very difficult. You write a lot, but nobody is giving you attention. Then we thought that we had to move and find a job there...”* (Rima, 28 years, London)

The story of Rima is typical of most of the migrants who are coping with different job-searching strategies, including informal and formal contacting. The formal ways of job-searching strategies are usually considered as less efficient as compared with the informal social contacting of friends or acquaintances. The most popular formal ways used by our respondents were specialized advertisements in local newspapers or universities, local employment agencies and specialized internet websites for recruitment.

*“... It was very difficult to find a job, because everybody was asking for Danish. I don't have here any acquaintances...so I took my CV and was walking in the streets, coming into restaurants, asking maybe they needed employees...but the most effective way is to ask your acquaintances...”* (Rūta, 28 years, Copenhagen).

*"... No agencies! You're establishing contacts with one person, with other persons who are of the same nationality or Russian-speaking people. They know information about job places...when we were able to speak the local language we tried to look for a job ourselves..."* (Tadas, 40 years, Valencia).

The results of interviews suggest that the migrants who migrated through family or close friend networks faced less challenges concerning foreign language, accommodation or social benefits. The marital or very close relations with foreigners provide the diverse recourses needful in a "host" country and typically guarantee the minimal risk of settlement. Inga, a 28-year-old waitress living in Copenhagen, told that close relationships with her Danish boyfriend were one of the most important stimuli to move to the foreign country. The host family was helpful enough for a young couple to settle down in Norway and later in Denmark.

*"... He (interviewer: boyfriend) helped me a lot, because he knows everything. Also his family helped a lot, they were looking for advertisements and sending requests about apartment and so on. When we came, they picked us up, helped to pack, and so on... the family helped a lot..."* (Inga, 28 years, Copenhagen).

Close ties facilitated a lot the initial phase of settlement but were not sufficient for getting information on job opportunities. The respondents developed new relationships, not only with people of the same nationality or ethnicity, but also established weak ties with migrants from other countries or with locals. Typically, less educated respondents with low qualifications were facing much more difficulties as compared with more educated migrants. Because of a good knowledge of foreign languages or a higher social / cultural capital, educated migrants relied much more on contacts with foreigners or locals.

*"... Well, I have many friends, but not Lithuanians. I haven't been keeping relationships with Lithuanians for a long time (laughs)...I have some friends, she is my German friend, and her husband is British. So when I come to London, I always stay at their place..."* (Eglė, 27 years, London).

*"... Danish, only Danish, we don't want contacts with Lithuanians. I don't know why it is so...maybe we're more closed, maybe we don't trust each other... but we find our jobs using contacts with local acquaintances..."* (Laura, 40 years, Copenhagen).

Renata, a 28-year-old assistant manager living in Copenhagen, relied much on the Danish family's help in her integration and first job-search. Networks within local inhabitants provide the emotional support and are useful as a source of practical information.

*"... The help came from my family (a Danish family, the respondent was working as an au-pair babysitter), because I didn't know where to go, what to do, my knowledge of English was absolutely minimal, I didn't know Danish at all..."* (Renata, 38 years, Copenhagen).

The absence of networks was not a problem to the migrants that arrived to study or were highly-educated professionals keeping contacts with their colleagues or employers. For instance, the experience of Marius, an IT engineer from Copenhagen, demonstrates a successful cooperation with the future employer and the outright direction of his professional career.

*"... Well, it was on my last year of my studies at the university. In a newspaper I found the advertisement in which an insurance company from Denmark was looking for IT specialists in Lithuania. I sent them my CV. Then there was a competition... I passed all the levels of recruitment and was hired. I wasn't even a graduate student, but signed a contract..."* (Marius, 31 years, Copenhagen).

The emigration strategies of professionals are different as compared with those of migrants with a lower social status or education. Professional migrants tend to develop useful contacts with a wide range of other social groups, including workplaces, employers, communities or institutions, such as employment agencies, chambers of commerce, universities, labour unions. This group of respondents extend the scope of their social ties and transgress the boundaries of closely-knit ethnic networks. Tomas, a road engineer, came to Denmark to study at the university. He spoke fluent English which helped him to establish useful contacts with other students and staff. With the help of a Danish company branch in Lithuania, he found his first job:

*"... I guess I found the job with the help of acquaintances. It was an opportunity to seek for help in a Danish company working in Lithuania in finding a job in Copenhagen... acquaintances from the Lithuanian company helped me..."* (Tomas, 23 years, Copenhagen).

Subjective experiences of respondents indicate the existence and importance of different types of emigration networks. The ability to use weak or strong ties of networks is related directly to the socio-economic status of emigrants, their social and cultural capital, education and other important aspects. Participation in networks of weak ties provide access to a wide range of social groups or individuals who are considered as one of the most important and effective recourses in emigration. On the contrary, migrants with limited education or a lower social status rely more on a strong kinship or friendship ties which provide moral support or practical information but may limit social or professional mobility.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The nature of migration networks provides not only the analytical frameworks for analyzing the variety of social roles and content of social ties among different social groups of migrants, such as communication ties, financial flows or psychological support. The ambiguity of social relations in migration networks helps to examine the dynamics of relationships among diverse social groups, including individual households, kinship or friendship networks, the formation of ties among acquaintances.

Migrants' experiences indicate different strategies in establishing access to needful resources through networks. Results of an empirical research show that respondents who are less educated and have a less social or cultural capital are typically involved in tightly-knitted networks of kinship and close friendships, which could be useful in the initial phase of settlement in the immigration country. Networks of close ties are useful in providing assistance in foreign language, accommodation or practical advice. At the further stages of settlement in a "host" country, the nature of strong kinship ties may be regarded as a limiting factor for the further integration. On the contrary, the nature of weak ties may open access to useful social contacts and needful informational resources, especially in the job-searching process. The answer how migrants establish and maintain networks may differ in terms of their socio-demographic factors, such as educational background or social capital, but may depend also on the institutional context of the destination country. Furthermore, a combination of weak and strong ties in networks and the transnational character of modern migration could become one of the analytical explanations for differences in life strategies used by migrants.

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JURGA BUČAITĖ-VILKĖ, VIKINTA ROSINAITĖ, ETSUO YOSHINO

## Lietuvių migrantų patirtys: socialinis tinklų ir tapatybių konstravimas

### *Santrauka*

Straipsnyje analizuojamas socialinių tinklų vaidmuo migracijoje daugiausia dėmesio skiriant socialinių ryšių palaikymo strategijoms – informacijos, emocinės paramos ar finansinės pagalbos tinklų tarp migrantų kilmės ir tikslo šalies kūrimui. Straipsnio tikslas – išanalizuoti, kaip konstruojami migrantų socialiniai ryšiai išnaudojant buvimo socialiniame tinkle teikiamus privalumus bei galimybes, kaip dalyvavimas ir išitraukimas į socialinius migrantų tinklus lemia individualius migracinius sprendimus. Pagrindinis analitinis straipsnio argumentas paremtas migracijos tinklų teorijos prielaida, kad migracijos tinklai yra formuojami atsižvelgiant į tikslo bei kilmės šalies socialinių normų ir taisyklių kontekstą. Remiantis kokybinio lietuvių migrantų Europos šalyse tyrimo rezultatais, daromos išvados, kad migracijos tinklų pagrindas yra abipusė tinklo narių priklausomybė ir socialinių ryšių kilmė, lemianti migracinius sprendimus bei migrantų galimybes kurti bendruomenes ar įsikurti bei adaptuotis tikslo šalyje.

**Raktažodžiai:** migrantų tinklai, socialinių tinklų konstravimas, migracijos sprendimų strategijos