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The Lived Experiences of Migration: Individual Strategies, Institutional Settings and Destination Effects in the European Mobility Process

Editors

Neli Demireva and Fabio Quassoli

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Academic Editors
Neli Demireva (University of Essex, UK)
Fabio Quassoli (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy)

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Editorial

The Lived Experiences of Migration: An Introduction

Neli Demireva [1,*] and Fabio Quassoli [2]

[1] Department of Sociology, Essex University, CO4 3SQ, Colchester, UK; E-Mail: nvdem@essex.ac.uk
[2] Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Milano-Bicocca, 20126 Milan, Italy; E-Mail: fabio.quassoli@unimib.it

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
This editorial presents a general overview of the thematic issue "The Lived Experiences of Migration: Individual Strategies, Institutional Settings and Destination Effects in the European Mobility Process," based on the rich qualitative data produced in the Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets (GEMM) project. The qualitative component of the project focused on the 'lived' experiences of migration. The main contribution of the articles in this issue is to demonstrate the multiplicity of actors and structures involved in the migration process, and to recognize the important role that space plays in the life-trajectories of people on the move. Perceiving the migration process as a learning experience allows for a deeper look into the complex renegotiation of cultural and political boundaries that migrants experience in the destination.

Keywords
Central-Eastern Europe; cosmopolitanism; EU mobility; identity change; language; migrant motivations; migrant recruitment practices; social capital; social imagination; social networks; prospective migrants; Southern Europe

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "The Lived Experiences of Migration: Individual Strategies, Institutional Settings and Destination Effects in the European Mobility Process" edited by Neli Demireva (University of Essex, UK) and Fabio Quassoli (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy).

1. Introduction and Overview of the Qualitative Part of the GEMM Project

This thematic issue is based on the rich qualitative data produced in the GEMM (Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets) project. The focus of GEMM has been the understanding of the individual and structural barriers that might prevent migrants from realizing their human capital potential. The qualitative component of the GEMM project focused on the 'lived' experiences of migration. It builds upon the understanding that mobility is a complex and dynamic process starting with the decisions that are made before and along the journey, and proceeding with examination of the challenges to migrants' early adaptation, work and social integration, and the changes in their feelings of belonging and citizenship status.

The research examined the impact of cross-cutting factors such as gender, nationality, skill level and occupational sector. Using qualitative methodology, primarily in-depth interviews, the team collected a rich set of data that provides invaluable insights into the motivations of migrants and the mobility channels they use. Furthermore, the interviews reflect well upon the complex interplay between push and pull factors that migrants experience and on their relationship to the sending and receiving contexts. Thus, the interviews cover a wide range of themes including: the climate of reception and levels of discrimination by employers; the transferability of migrants' own human capital; and the success with which they view their own journeys.

1.1. Main Research Questions of the GEMM Study and Overall Approach

Several research questions shaped the analysis in the GEMM study and are well reflected within this thematic issue. In particular, the submissions in this thematic issue have focused on the varying motivations for mobility on the part of different groups of people and on the factors that explain their choice of destination country; on the myriad of ways in which those who are about to leave prepare for the radical change in their life circumstances that migration represents; and finally on the formal and informal channels for mobility that have been used in the migration process.

The contributions in this thematic issue draw on the understanding of migration as a complex and dynamic process of mobility which starts with the initial aspirations and hopes of the migrant, and is never quite over even when the desired destination has been reached successfully. We considered migration as influenced by a wide range of individual, institutional and contextual factors. While many studies based on large-scale survey data have examined the profiles of mobile Europeans and the influence of gender, education, family situation on migration (Arslan, Effenberger, Luecke, & Omar Mahmoud, 2009; Cangiano, 2015; Cummings, Pacitto, Lauro, & Foresti, 2015; Kogan, 2006; Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2014), this thematic issue considers the multilayered nature of the individual decision-making, and captures the human story at the centre of the migration process through the analysis of the cultural values, meaning making and identity development of the mobile individuals. Thus, our approach differs from those of neoclassical economic studies but also from research in the ethnography of migrant communities, which usually focuses on networks and mechanisms for cultural transmission but ignore the impact of the economic and political context of the increasingly interrelated European societies. While being aware of the broader debates in the migration literature (Czaika & de Haas, 2014; King, 2012; O'Reilly & Benson, 2009) the main contribution of this thematic issue lies in portraying the variety of life experiences of people on the move, and in exposing the complex interplay between their individual agency and the structural opportunities available to them.

1.2. Fieldwork and Sampling Design of the GEMM Study

With the view to capture the dynamics of the process of mobility, the design of the sample focused on two types of migrants: 'potential,' that is, people who plan to migrate in the near future (not longer than one year), and 'actual,' that is, people who are already living in a foreign country (for at least two years). Moreover, we selected three groups of countries for conducting the fieldwork: countries traditionally receiving migrants such as Germany and the UK; countries traditionally sending migrants such as Bulgaria and Romania; and countries which at present are both receiving and sending migrants such as Italy and Spain. The selection allows us to examine a range of regional and national contexts in which migrants are embedded and to give due diligence to the pan-European policy debates and regulations that might shape the migration process.

The interviews were designed to examine the motivation for migration and the process of decision making and preparation, as well as to cover the actual migration steps and finally to track down the process of adaptation, work and life in the new country, the changes in migrant's identity and expectations for the future. We also took into consideration the public debates and policy regulations in the sending and receiving countries, the economic, political, cultural trends that might influence the decision to migrate and the choice of the destination country, which might largely be conceptualized as institutional and contextual factors of migration. The fieldwork of six country teams from Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, Spain, Germany and the UK resulted in 236 in-depth interviews in total. Of these, 154 were conducted with 'actual migrants', that is, people who had migrated from four sending countries Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, and Spain and who lived in four receiving EU countries—UK, Germany, Spain and Italy. In the group of actual migrants there were 16 interviews conducted with non-EU migrants from China and the USA in Germany and the UK in order for us to be able to examine differences between EU and non-EU highly-skilled migrants. Additionally, 42 'prospective' migrants were interviewed at home in Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, and Spain about their plans to migrate in less than 12 months to an EU country. Furthermore, the collection contains 40 interviews with experts from public and private recruitment agencies. More information on the data can be seen at the online page of the UK Data Service (n.d.) where the data has been deposited.

2. Common Themes Emerging in the Thematic issue

This section reflects on several very important themes that this thematic issue brings to the fore.

2.1. Sources of Support and Local Contexts

Fischer-Souan (2019), Demireva (2019) and Popivanov and Kovacheva (2019) illustrate that migrants rely heavily on informal channels of support for the first and most uncertain steps of their adaptation in the host countries. Our observations in this sense are in line with a dominant trend in the literature on the informal pathways chosen by specifically low-qualified migrants (Giulietti, Schluter, & Wahba, 2013; Maeva, 2017). All three studies stress the importance of informal social connections which can play significant role in job search and house hunting. Crucially, co-nationals are important brokers of information and can provide interpretation and translation services to the newly arrived migrants. Informal sources of support are also prevalent among Italian mi-

grants when administrative issues are concerned (such as the opening of a bank account or registration with professional bodies).

As the article by Coletto and Fullin (2019) points out, social media is an ubiquitous source of information, and many interviewees claimed that Facebook groups or blogs have been a major factor facilitating their adaptation. Employers also played a role, and Spanish interviewees in particular and medical professionals in general suggested that they have been assisted in their initial steps by respective employers in Germany or the UK. Such practices were rarer in other sectors although there was evidence of existing provisions in engineering, finance and digital commerce.

2.2. Recruitment Agencies and Prospective Migrants

Both the contributions of Kovacheva, Popivanov, and Burcea (2019) and of Demireva (2019) highlight the important role that recruitment agencies play in facilitating the mobility process. Dominant in the discourse of private recruiters was the personal link they maintained with jobseekers and employers, as well as the psychological support they felt they provided to emigrants. Moreover, there were also important first 'sieve' of candidates that guaranteed to host country employers the presence of workers who not only had the right skills but also exhibited high levels of commitment and work ethic. Migrants were sometimes ambivalent however of the positive role of recruitment agencies (see Demireva, 2019). Some felt that these institutions guarded the rights of employers rather than those of the migrants; and many preferred to directly approach employers once they became more established.

2.3. The Cultural Dimension of Intra-EU Mobility: Identity and Belonging beyond National Borders

In the last two decades, people on the move have been categorized in various way, from migrants and economic migrants, mobile people and guest workers, to expatriate, transnational people, lifestyle migrants, mobile gentrifiers, and more (Barbulescu, 2017; Bauman, 2000; Benson & O'Reilly, 2016; Conradson & Latham, 2005; Engbersen, 2018; Favell, 2008; Florida, 2002; Glick Schiller, 2003). These categories are central in the process of identity reconfiguration that always characterized life-trajectories of people on the move. As it is the case for other types of labels, such as those that concern gender or ethnicity, they are used to implicitly generate a distinction between those who have the power to impose such labels and those who have to deal with them (Gallissot, Rivera, & Kilani, 1997). Several contributions in this thematic issue, in particular Quassoli and Dimitriadis (2019) comment on the malleability of labels and on the political aspects of mobility noted in other studies as well (Conradson & Latham, 2005; Parutis, 2011). Fischer-Souan (2019), comparing mobility trajectories of Southern European and Eastern European interviewees, discussed an often drawn distinction between economic and lifestyle migrants. Whereas the former are often seen as defined through their economic needs and career trajectories, the focus in the latter is the aspiration for better lifestyles, new and exciting cultural experiences (see also O'Reilly & Benson, 2009). Our evidence is however much more nuanced, and the lifestyle migrants in our sample also aspire to escape the dire job prospects of the sending country and the economic hardship they face at home, while economic migrants embrace the move away and the search for self-fulfilment.

To further complicate the picture that the submissions in this thematic issue are painting, we need to consider the local context in which the immigrants have become embedded as it has an impact upon their sense of belonging and perceived class position. As we can see in Quassoli and Dimitriadis (2019), there is a very specific cosmopolitan identity to which migrants living in London or Berlin subscribe, and of which exceptionalism in relation to the UK and Germany they are very aware.

Perceiving and narrating oneself in a certain fashion involves the activation of social imagery. The ways in which a given group of people imagines and narrates the social reality of their situation (Castoriadis, 1997; O'Reilly, 2014) can create shared meanings and moral values, and generates a sense of both common belonging and fate (Benson, 2012). The contribution of Coletto and Fullin (2019) convincingly highlights that social imagination plays a relevant role in the migration decision, in the choice of city/country of destination and in the way mobility is represented and narrated. Thus, the authors stress that it is not the careful consideration of the costs and benefits of the mobility process (Benson, 2012; Salazar, 2011) that propels migrants into their journeys but rather the image of London and Berlin as lively, dynamic and attractive global cities, together with the perception of intra-EU mobility as smooth and free.

Identity reconfiguration and the emergence of a new a sense of belonging is another crucial aspect of the mobility process. Again, Quassoli and Dimitriadis (2019) explore in a comparative manner the identity formation among Italian and Spanish people living in London and Berlin. The authors propose three types of identity with which migrants end up: the development of a stronger cultural attachment to the country of origin; the internalization of the national culture of the host society, together with the development of a more critical vision of the society of origin than the one previously held; and a downplaying of the national cultural model and the development of cosmopolitan/European identity. The latter identity can indeed be seen as the founding pillar of supranational political communities (Goulahsen, 2017). Thus, identity is hardly static, and research should allow for the formation of multiplicity of identities that can be further moulded by positive as well as negative interactions with the receiving and sending societies (Quassoli & Dimitriadis, 2019).

2.4. Ethnic Niches and Language

Preparation before departure for many of the migrants in the GEMM study involved learning the language of the destination country. Both politicians and academics frequently focus on the linguistic competence of the migrant as the main factor facilitating their integration both in terms of labour market and cultural adaptation (see Cameron, 2011; Koopmans, 2015). In this thematic issue, Demireva (2019), Coletto and Fullin (2019) and Fischer-Souan (2019) speak of the important role of language for integration moderated by the skill levels of the migrants as well as the specificities in certain industries. Healthcare professionals reported the highest level of pre-migration host country language proficiency or language school enrolment immediately after arrival, because they were directly blocked from becoming registered practitioners without sufficient local linguistic capacity. There was clear evidence however of the existence of powerful transnational elites (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014) in finance for example who did not necessarily embed themselves linguistically in their new environment and instead fully embraced the cosmopolitan aspect of their migration journey.

Ethnic niches were both feared and greatly appreciated. On the one hand, they could contribute to linguistic isolation from the mainstream (see Demireva, 2019), however, they also guaranteed some sense of comfort and protection especially for newly arriving immigrants (Demireva, 2019; Popivanov & Kovacheva, 2019). Thus, the evidence of the role of ethnic niches remains ambivalent. It is worth noting that for many migrants the experience of ethnic niches was transitory—they may reside in one, in the beginning, but settlement usually meant residential and job mobility away from the ethnic economy. This was the case however for the highly and medium-skilled migrants rather than the low-qualified ones.

3. Conclusion

This thematic issue highlights that any analytical categories that we use to study human mobility—class, gender, ethnicity, generation, or lifestyle—must be grounded in some local context. Moreover, researchers should expect that these categories can operate in very peculiar and unexpected ways. The main contribution of the articles in this thematic issue is to demonstrate the multiplicity of actors and structures involved in the migration process, and to recognize the important role that space plays in the life-trajectories of people on the move. Perceiving the migration process as a learning experience allows for a deeper look into the complex renegotiation of cultural and political boundaries that migrants experience in their destination countries. The development of multiple spaces and communities of belonging should be recognized as a positive outcome of the migratory process, and the narrow focus on linguistic and host country cultural identification should be avoided. Given the uncertain future of European integration, it is important to highlight the link between early experiences of international mobility and the formation of supra-national identifications. Our Southern European interviewees frequently had enriching academic experiences abroad as young adults prior to the observed migration moment in the interviews, and that made them appreciative of their European identity—a trend that was less visible among the Eastern European interviewees (see Coletto & Fullin, 2019; Fischer-Souan, 2019; Quassoli & Dimitriadis, 2019).

Indeed, we would recommend that EU policy-makers address the issue of unequal access and/or differing levels of 'demand' for youth mobility across the EU in order to encourage the flow of information, transferability of skills and degrees, and most importantly a strong identification with Europe. This thematic issue demonstrates that deep ties have been formed between European countries that should be celebrated; yet, much more can be done to smooth the migration process on the part of governments in both the receiving and sending contexts.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Neli Demireva (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Essex University. Her research interests include migration, inter-ethnic ties, social cohesion, ethnic penalties and multiculturalism.

Fabio Quassoli (PhD) is an associate professor at the University of Milan-Bicocca where he teaches Qualitative Research and Intercultural Relations. In recent years, he has worked on immigration control policies, criminalisation of migrants, discrimination, multiculturalism and intercultural communication. He is currently coordinating the Milano Bicocca team as part of a national project on media, terrorism and security. He is also participating in the WHIG project, an international research network on the governance of large metropolitan areas.

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Article

Between 'Labour Migration' and 'New European Mobilities': Motivations for Migration of Southern and Eastern Europeans in the EU

Maricia Fischer-Souan

Department of Social Sciences, University Carlos III de Madrid, 28903 Getafe, Spain; E-Mail: msouanfi@clio.uc3m.es

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Abstract
This article investigates in comparative perspective different accounts of the motivations for migration offered by Bulgarian, Romanian, Italian and Spanish nationals living in another EU country, or planning to move. In-depth interviews yield a range of accounts for the decision to leave the home-country, from narrowly defined economic motivations, professional and 'qualitative' labour market considerations, to desires for cultural/lifestyle exploration. Both individual and country-level factors are mobilised in motivational accounts, which are also set against the backdrop of major external shocks, such as the 2007 enlargement of the European Union and the 2008 global financial crisis. Findings highlight the need to consider the interplay between macro and individual-level factors—that is, perceptions of cultural, economic, political and societal structures as well as individual characteristics—in studying migratory behaviour. Moreover, the findings to a certain extent support the distinction between the 'classic' labour migration behaviour of Bulgarian and Romanian respondents and the 'new European mobilities' of Italian and Spanish participants, who emphasise more the overlapping professional, affective, cultural and quality of life considerations that shape the decision to move. However, convergence across groups may be expected in the future as East-West movers become more socialised into 'new' cultures of European mobility and as South–North migration patterns increasingly reinforce some of the 'periphery-core' dynamics of contemporary intra-EU mobility.

Keywords
economic crisis; European Union; mobility; motivations for migration; Central and Eastern Europe; Southern Europe

Issue
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1. Introduction

This article provides a comparative analysis of accounts of motivations for migration across different country-cases and individual profiles: both higher-and lower-skilled workers originating from Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and Spain. The literature on contemporary intra-EU mobility trends underscores broad differences in reasons for migration from Central and Eastern European (CEE) societies compared to Southern European (SE) ones. On the one hand, migrants from the more recent EU-accession CEE states seem to be driven overwhelmingly by 'classical' economic considerations, ranging from economic hardship to a desire to increase purchasing power or investment capacity (Recchi, 2015; Santacreu, Baldoni, & Albert, 2009). Citizens of SE countries, on the other hand, have enjoyed unrestricted access to European labour markets over a longer period as well as comparatively higher standards of living. In spite of high unemployment rates, especially in the aftermath of 2008 economic crisis, individuals from SE countries tend to display multiple and overlapping work-related, affective and lifestyle motivations for migration to Northern European destinations (Santacreu et al., 2009; Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2014).

Nevertheless, specific macro-level shocks have triggered sudden increases in migration flows from both regions, highlighting how external opportunities and constraints shape any migration decision, however econom-

ically or personally motivated. These are the 2004 and 2007 CEE countries' accession to the European Union, on the one hand, and the particularly severe impact of the 2008 global financial crisis on the labour markets and societies of Southern Europe and Ireland, on the other. Both of these events are at the root of recent transformations in the nature and patterns of EU mobility (King & Williams, 2018; Stanek, 2009; Williams, Jephcote, Janta, & Gang, 2018) and have had an objective impact on individuals' life plans and propensity to migrate. While we take into consideration these macro-level conditions, we are mindful of de Haas' (2011) distinction between macro-level determinants and individual-level motivations that shape migration flows. Therefore, our investigation focuses on in-depth individual accounts of the migration decision, setting these against informants' subjective experiences of external constraints and opportunities that may trigger migration behaviour. The aim of this study is to explore some similarities and differences across sending-country cases and migrant profiles.

2. Exploring Motivations and Aspirations for Migration across Multiple Contexts

2.1. Country-Level Perspectives

Several studies based on large-scale surveys, including the Eurobarometer, have presented in comparative perspective the willingness and aspirations to migrate across youth and general populations of a number of European countries in recent years (Hadler, 2006; Otrachshenko & Popova, 2014; van Mol, 2016; Williams et al., 2018). Though migration aspirations are not equivalent to actual migration behaviour, such research is a useful starting point from which to compare the different national and social contexts in which migration decision-making processes occur, particularly in the under-researched comparison of the SE and CEE populations of Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and Spain. One interesting result from this strand of migration research is that young people from Bulgaria and Romania seem to display some of the highest intentions for future migration across Europe, with over 60% of people under the age of 30 in each country claiming to have international migration aspirations in 2014 (van Mol, 2016). Though the migration aspirations of Italian and Spanish youth that same year were not far behind (just under 60%), there is less convergence when it comes to country-level contexts in which these aspirations take shape, for instance, if we take into account the different rates of registered youth unemployment in the CEE and SE contexts. Indeed, van Mol (2016) shows that though the migration aspirations of youth in the four countries were averaging at 60%, there was significant variation in CEE and SE figures of youth unemployment: approximately 24% in both Bulgaria and Romania, 42.7% in Italy and 53.2% in Spain. Moreover, young people in Greece, a country with a comparable youth unemployment rate in 2014 (52.4%) as Spain's, displayed considerably lower migration aspirations in 2014, with 44.6% of youth claiming they wanted to move abroad.

Indeed, for van Mol (2016), while country-level factors such as high youth unemployment may be important in conditioning the migration aspirations of youth, other macro and micro-level factors should also be considered. In addition, he echoes Hadler (2006) and de Haas (2011) in arguing that neoclassical economic and functionalist theories of migration based on actors' rational responses to labour market disequilibria and incentives do not sufficiently account for intra-European mobility trends. In fact, many researchers stress the significance of individual and behavioural characteristics in predicting migration propensity. They underscore the high correlation between previous international mobility experiences as well as being young and male with having aspirations/intentions related to future European mobility (Hadler, 2006; van Mol, 2016). Moreover, in his in-depth study of 'Eurostars,' Favell (2008a) demonstrates that even among highly-skilled and mobile professionals the extent to which mobility decision-making follows anything like the abstract notions of rational-actor models can range considerably: from 'classic' calculations of cost-benefit to spontaneous 'shot in the dark' behaviour.

Nevertheless, even in conditions of freedom of movement and increasing economic integration across EU member states, one should not lose sight of the core-periphery dynamics at play in contemporary intra-EU mobility. Individuals from less economically developed parts of Europe's southern, eastern and western 'periphery' account for much of EU mobility toward the central 'core,' responding to social and political transformations related to the fall of the Iron Curtain, the accession of Eastern member states to the EU and the 2008 financial crisis (King, 2018).

2.2. Individual-Level Perspectives

Classic theories of the drivers of international mobility, whether premised on rational-actor models or on structuralist approaches that grant little individual agency to migrants are increasingly seen as insufficient to account for the 'new forms' of intra-European mobility. King (2018) considers how the diversification of migrant sending and receiving countries as well the profiles of migrants themselves should be set against the context of interdependent European and global economies and societies that are fostering more individualised and 'flexible' life-course strategies. These 'new forms' of international mobility indeed display features of classic economic migration, with labour-market conditions in sending and receiving countries at the heart of the phenomenon. Equally important, however, is how the mental maps of citizens—both mobile and sedentary—become increasingly marked by multiple processes of globalisation, resulting in "a widening cognitive and geopolitical space of free movement" (King, 2018, p. 5). As a result, I argue that the diverse drivers of intra-EU mobility can be

conceived as simultaneously 'rooted' in two processes. On the one hand, in processes of international migration captured by traditional labour migration paradigms, while on the other, increasingly resembling forms of 'internal' migration, characterised by overlapping work-related, quality of life, educational and affective dimensions (King, 2012; Santacreu et al., 2009).

Indeed, taking into account the economic and material dimensions of migratory behaviour from periphery to core countries should not preclude an analysis of its cultural aspects, notably where the increased individualization and Europeanization of migration strategies is concerned. Thus, understanding contemporary EU mobilities as 'mixed-mode' migration in terms of the mixed nature of migration flows and the mixed motivations in many individuals' accounts of the decision to move (King, 2012) is appropriate on several levels. On the one hand, it allows for the integration of classic and more recent paradigms discussed above and for the bridging between multiple levels of analysis, including national contexts and individual trajectories.

A mixed approach to migration decision-making can also make sense of some of the contradictory evidence about the characteristics and motivations of CEE migrants in the literature. For instance, in some cases, young Romanian migrants have been found to be the most 'economically-driven' of young European migrants (Williams et al., 2018) while in others, to offer similar lifestyle and quality of life reasons for their migration decision as other EU migrants from more affluent countries (Sandu, Toth, & Tudor, 2018). To be sure, there is evidence that individual characteristics linked to the skills and life-course of migrants may transcend country- and region-specific distinctions when it comes to motivations and aspirations for migration.

As a result, accounts of motivations for migration vary according to migrant profiles (e.g., age at migration, education) and occupational sector (e.g., healthcare compared to financial services professionals) as much, if not more, than according to region of origin. As Favell (2008b) remarks in his overview of the new forms of East-West European mobility sparked by the last waves of EU enlargement, both higher- and lower-status migrants from the East are attracted by the West. Moreover, a study on the mobility of Polish and Bulgarian scientists (Guth & Gill, 2008) suggests that although many CEE researchers are motivated by broadly economic considerations to pursue doctoral studies in the UK and Germany, these motivations are not articulated in narrowly economic terms. Rather, the professional motivations expressed by these scientists resemble those of mobile researchers from other countries. It is easy to imagine how other highly-skilled migrants from CEE countries may also frame the desire for mobility in more than just monetary terms. As a result, there is reason to believe that CEE university-educated professionals resemble highly-skilled SEs who are driven to migrate by more than the possibility of earning higher wages, but also by "qualitative labour market incentives such as skills' utilisation or involvement in research and development" as well as quality of life factors (Bartolini, Gropas, & Triandafyllidou, 2016).

Specifically, some converging accounts of the motivations for migration across younger informants in the study is expected, as suggested by the literature on flexible youth transitions and the rise in individualised life narratives in 'second modernity' (King, 2018). To be sure, new precarious forms of work and transitions to adulthood concern the market economies of both Southern Europe and post-Communist states. Kovacheva (2001) shows, for instance, how post-Communist market reforms coincided with new forms of youth transition in Eastern European societies at the turn of the 21st century. In the wake of liberal economic reforms, rising unemployment and the introduction of atypical forms of work, young people adopt flexible strategies that include further education, informal work as well as emigration abroad (Kovacheva, 2001). Similar strategies are observed among SE youth in the wake of the Great Recession. Compared to Eastern European societies, however, in which "family relations are becoming strained" (Kovacheva, 2001, p. 43), the SE familialist model may have demonstrated a great deal of resilience in the wake of recent and past economic crises, effectively absorbing a great deal of the shocks of unemployment and austerity and potentially curbing the emigration numbers (King & Williams, 2018; Rodríguez, 2009). There is evidence, however, that Eastern European household structures are increasingly similar to SE ones in the face of economic hardship, as departure from the parental home is delayed in the absence of the state support that used to facilitate youth transitions in the socialist era (Castiglioni, Hărăguş, Faludi, & Hărăguş, 2016). Thus, both the sudden reactivation of the South-North migration route as well as the rising East-West migration flows in recent years coincide with increasingly precarious forms of employment and delayed youth transitions. As a result, both Eastern and SEs may be driven toward more individualised life and work strategies involving moving abroad.

3. Research Design and Sample

This article draws on data collected in the framework of a larger study on *The Lived Experience of Migration* (Work Package 4 of the *Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets* project). An international team of migration researchers based in Bulgaria, Romania, Italy and Spain coordinated and conducted in-depth interviews with migrants originating from these countries who were living in different EU national contexts. Fieldwork on Italian and Spanish migrants was conducted in Britain and Germany (mainly London and Berlin) while fieldwork on Bulgarian and Romanian migrants was conducted in Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain. Fieldwork sites were selected based on the significant presence of the relevant migration populations under study. In

addition, in-depth interviews with prospective migrants were conducted in each sending-country. Interview topics included experiences and perceptions of different stages of the migratory process (among others, the migration decision-making process) as well as perceptions of sending and receiving societies. A total of 154 migrants and 42 prospective migrants from all sending countries were interviewed, one-third of whom were experienced and/or trained in lower-skilled occupations (mainly construction, domestic care, hospitality and transport) and two-thirds of whom were experienced and/or trained in higher-skilled work (mainly ICT, finance, healthcare and architecture). The sampling frame ensured a roughly equal number of men and women were interviewed. The cross-country sample includes more high-skilled workers (between 62% and 70% of the sample, depending on the national group) than lower-skilled workers (between 29% and 34% of the sample, depending on the national group). 70% of interviewees were below the age of 39 and all 'actual migrants' had been living outside of their country of origin for a minimum of two years. Quotes presented in the findings have been translated into English by the relevant country-teams.

4. Findings

4.1. Material Accounts: Standard of Living Versus Working Conditions

Italian and Spanish respondents, many of whom were growing up and reaching adulthood during times of relative economic prosperity in the early 2000s do not report having faced severe economic hardship in their home country, even during economic recession. With respect to Bulgarian and Romanian respondents, however, financial difficulties—even the inability to meet basic needs—were cited repeatedly as a reason for migration. For example, respondents from Romania, especially lower-skilled individuals, migrated as a way to achieve a better income and standard of living:

> The answer [to the question of why we left is simple]…[to make] a better living, because in our country we [had] nothing to do. We were working in our kitchen garden, money [was] scarce, there were no available jobs….It was very hard, at least for me. Prices were high as compared to my income. We could not afford to buy the minimum necessary things….I cannot say [any] good things about Romania. (Romanian woman in Spain, aged 40)

> In our country [Romania] we haven't had the possibility to work, neither me nor my husband, and we could not achieve anything. (Romanian woman in Spain, aged 47)

It is notable that compared to their Romanian counterparts, lower-skilled Italian and Spanish respondents, especially in construction and other trades, reflected more on the lack of quality jobs in their field than on the lack of jobs altogether. Thus, they frequently remarked on the severe wage reductions and precarious employment in the wake of the demise of the construction industry in 2008. However, the work-related dissatisfaction tended to be more connected to the degradation in working conditions than to the inability to find employment.

An Italian plumber explains his difficult working life during the crisis years as follows:

> From 2007 to 2011…these were tragic years for me, because I was working for thirty euros a day. I changed my job every two, three months….I always found work…but they [employers] were always exploiting [me]. To the point [that I left] Italy. (Italian man in Germany, aged 28)

Similarly, a Spanish construction worker suggests:

> There were several motives that combined together and that led me to come here [Berlin]. One was the financial crisis in Spain. Then there was the fact that although you could find some kind of work, it was excessively precarious. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 35)

Indeed, these examples of economic motivations of SE migrants diverge from the emphasis on material deprivation made by several Romanian and Bulgarian respondents in lower-skilled work. Though the Italian and Spaniard cited above can be considered as labour migrants in the traditional sense, responding to labour market pressures in the country of origin and opportunities in the country of destination, reports of severe economic hardship were absent in Italian and Spanish informants' accounts of the migration decision.

In addition, while issues such as unemployment or underemployment as well as workplace or salary dissatisfaction shaped the motivational accounts of informants in the Italian and Spanish cases, mainly in construction and healthcare-related professions, it should be noted that most SE respondents were in some form of employment or had recently been in studies at the time of migration. This is consistent with survey findings from Triandafyllidou and Gropas (2014): Though unemployment as a motivation for migration increased following the economic crisis, it is not the most important motive for migration among SE professionals.

It is notable that many CEE participants' accounts of the material considerations that led to the migration decision are often framed in conjunction with long-term structural problems at the level of the country of origin. Indeed, for some Bulgarian respondents over the age of 39, depictions of economic hardship, such as food shortages, financial losses and unemployment, particularly in the context of the 1996–1997 financial crisis in Bulgaria, are intertwined with societal and political considerations. For instance, the decision to leave Bulgaria while she was

"still young, strong and able to succeed abroad" is expressed by a 54-year old Bulgarian woman living in Italy in reference to both economic and political desperation:

> Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine…these were the darkest, worst times in Bulgaria…times of queuing with nylon bags in our hands in front of the shops….I had to make sure that my…[family] was fed…I was desperate from the politics, desperate from the situation in Bulgaria at the time. (Bulgarian woman in Italy, aged 54)

Thus, personal economic hardship was understood in the context of broader state-level transformations. Several respondents made references to the economic reforms during the market liberalisation period that restricted employment in traditional sectors of the economy and were seen as leading to both poverty and collective moral decline in Bulgaria and Romania:

> Unemployment. People don't have jobs. They can't put food on the table. There is no work and the agriculture sector 'died'….Ten years ago, it was chiefly [in] tobacco [that] they worked. [When] there was tobacco—people worked…They had respect for each other. Now they have it no more. (Bulgarian man in Germany, aged 40)

> In Romania everything began to break-down [following economic restructuring]; factories stopped existing; nothing, nothing was left, nothing was running [anymore], including the agriculture [sector]. (Romanian woman in Spain, aged 47)

Therefore, though both Eastern and SE (mainly lower-skilled) migrants provide economic explanations for their migration decisions, the articulation of the material dimension occurs differently across groups. On the one hand, because SE respondents develop accounts related to the quality of employment, whereas CEE respondents are more inclined to reflect on starker forms of economic hardship. On the other, because the contextual background through which respondents make sense of their hardship is different. Indeed, CEE respondents identify their difficulties in making ends meet in terms of longer-term historical processes, whereas SE participants experienced a more sudden and recent decline in the quality of jobs as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. The latter therefore have less (long-term) experience with the kind of 'moral' and socio-economic decline that CEE participants alluded to and therefore may offer more individualized accounts of seeking better work opportunities elsewhere. Our findings therefore may reinforce the research by Williams et al. (2018) that Romanians who report a comfortable financial situation are less likely to leave their home country than their SE counterparts. They also support Bygnes and Flipo's (2017) comparative research on Spanish and Romanian emigrants that find a higher emphasis on economic considerations as core motivations in Romanian migration narratives, compared to the accounts of Spaniards.

Before shifting the focus to the more explicitly non-economic motivations informants provided for the migration decision, the next section explores the 'qualitative' labour-market incentives that stress the long-term career orientations and professional identities that are central to the migration decisions of highly-skilled professionals, as highlighted by Bartolini et al. (2016).

4.2. Career Opportunities and Professional Challenges

Many respondents framed the migration decision as a means to take advantage of better career opportunities in specific sectors of dynamic foreign labour markets. Indeed, they appear driven less by material considerations such as financial problems and job instability than by clearly articulated professional identities and goals. These 'qualitative' aspects of professional advancement take different shapes across highly-skilled respondents, ranging from the drive to achieve a higher professional status through insertion in specific foreign labour markets (especially Germany and Britain) to the pursuit of human capital and career development perceived as achievable only through international experience.

For example, career development appears as a motivation for migration for high-skilled individuals across national groups and is articulated in terms of the difficulty of achieving professional goals in the country of origin. For instance, an Italian nurse in London believes:

> You have opportunities that do not exist in Italy…especially [when you consider] the career that you can [make for yourself] here in England as a nurse. The ability to decide in which [clinical] department you want to work, decide when you want to move. You can decide for yourself, it's not others who decide for you. (Italian woman in the UK, aged 25)

Similarly, a Romanian physician doing his residency in Germany remarks that his core motivation for migration had to do with:

> Professional fulfilment; when [studying for] six years and achieving a profession one wants to practice it in the best conditions. (Romanian man in Germany, aged 31)

Respondents in the sample who cited professional-development motivations for migration (and who had stable jobs prior to migration) emphasise being drawn to particularly dynamic sectors of country of destination economies. They often suggest that their professional identity is crucial to their self-understanding and life goals. The following quotes from Bulgarian and Spanish professionals are strikingly similar in this respect:

> England is a challenge that is interesting for me and for us because here [in London] is where the market [for IT] is. (Bulgarian woman in the UK, aged 38)

> Germany for an engineer is a very attractive destination. [Even] before coming [to Germany on Erasmus exchange], it seemed like the ideal destination for an engineer. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 34)

According to a Spanish investment-fund manager who is increasingly orienting his career toward becoming an international entrepreneur,

> Since a very young age, I have wanted to be an entrepreneur…and for me, being a good entrepreneur in today's world goes hand in hand with being global. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 32)

Many of these individuals show a highly pragmatic disposition, to a certain extent reinforcing the rational actor strands in the migration decision-making literature. To be sure, such informants tend to echo the traits of the most ambitious and 'rational' of Favell's (2008a) 'Eurostars.' The previous informants who articulate migration motivations through goals related to increasing competitive edge on home country and international labour markets seem to embody particularly well his depictions of a "fearless, focused, overachieving and hypermobile" (Favell, 2008a, p. 64) group of EU movers.

In this regard it is worth mentioning the international nature of some sectors, primarily finance, that explain the strong motivations to migrate of some of our respondents. Often, their deep-seated professional and personal aspirations can only be fulfilled through international career mobility. Two young financial services professionals, one Spanish and the other Bulgarian, are similar in this respect:

> I wanted to pursue [a career in finance] and I wanted to move to a place that was centred on attracting international talent…where I could work on international projects. I had always liked financial markets and I wanted to come to London. (Spanish woman in the UK, aged 29)

> Always since I was in the third grade in primary school I wanted to study abroad, and when the time came to apply for studies abroad, I chose Britain, first, because British universities are the best, then with my English I could easily find work there. (Bulgarian woman in the UK, aged 27)

4.3. Reactions to Social, Political and Cultural Norms in the Country of Origin

A range of motivations for migration are articulated by informants across skill-levels and country of origin that do not fit into narrowly defined understandings of economic and career-related migration. Firstly, this section covers a broad category of motivations that spring from discontent with political, labour market and social institutions and norms of sending-countries. Secondly, it focuses on migration decisions as individual strategies to 'break-free' from what are perceived as conservative local/national societies and family structures. The latter type of accounts is notably presented by young single and/or homosexual respondents, as a vehicle to achieve independence and/or self-liberation in absence of opportunities for 'alternative lifestyles' in sending countries. Indeed, such orientations have been documented in the literature on motivations for intra-EU mobility (Favell, 2008a; Favell & Recchi, 2009).

With respect to the first set of 'non-economic' motivations, individual aversion to conditions broadly related to politics, culture and society are often directly or indirectly cited as motivations for migration across the cross-national sample. In spite of the different socio-political and economic environments of post-communist CEE societies compared to Italy and Spain in the wake of the Great Recession, it is notable how widespread dissatisfaction with the political and economic system was among participants from all four countries.

Discontent with the state system and access to social services is emphasised as a motivation for migration by several Bulgarian and Romanian respondents. A young woman who is planning on migrating in spite of being content with her work, income, family and social life expresses her disillusionment with Bulgarian social, political and economic institutions:

> What I [and my social circle] believe in is in absolute contrast with everything else I see around me as a state and society, as functioning systems and so on….All these aspects, socio-political, economic and so on, of public life, they are in my opinion in a very bad state. (Bulgarian woman, prospective migrant, aged 32)

Similarly, for a young Romanian pharmacist planning on moving to the UK:

> I like the natural landscape of my country; but I don't like the laws. I don't like the policy there…[What] I've seen in Romania [is] that things are based on the connections one has, including at the hospital [where she works] and other places where I went. This is unfair. (Romanian woman, prospective migrant, aged 24)

Italian and Spanish respondents resemble Bulgarian and Romanian informants in this respect. Although less inclined to target state institutions as a reason to leave as their CEE counterparts, they nevertheless also display strong negative reactions to deeply engrained traits of the home society and labour market that are seen as predating the effects of the economic crisis. Indeed, there is a great deal of convergence across country-cases when

it comes to perceptions of widespread nepotism and discrimination in sending-country labour markets, as the three following examples illustrate:

> [In Italy, effort or talent] is not recognised. I do not know why. In the end, those who make progress are the friends, the brothers of that guy, the friend of the other, the cousin of the other….It is a pity, because in Italy there are intelligent people, people of great value who no longer want to live there. And, it is very sad. (Italian woman in Germany, aged 28)

> But alas, we are after all in Bulgaria, after all everything gets down to this: either connections or money if you want to succeed in your career. Nobody cares if you could do it well or not. Individual qualities are not praised but rather things such as whose son you are, whom do you know and who is able to promote you. (Bulgarian man, prospective migrant, aged 21)

> Access to employment in Spain has nothing to do with meritocracy. There's constant wheeling and dealing, the boss hiring his cousin, the cousin hiring his friend. Whenever you propose a good idea, if it's not endorsed by one of the bosses, it will go nowhere. That is not the kind of [work] environment I want to dedicate my life to. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 32)

Non-identification with behaviours and mentalities of the political elite and national societies in general are also often articulated by respondents, both from CEE and SE countries. For instance, a Spaniard active in leftist Spanish expatriate circles in Berlin makes multiple references to his non-identification with the political class in Spain as well as with the citizens who sustain it:

> Spain is a disaster of a country. No, I didn't leave for political reasons, but for thinking differently [than others], yes. The fact that people think it's OK to vote for corrupt politicians makes me feel terrible as a citizen of this country [Spain]. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 50)

Similarly, for a Romanian man planning on emigrating in the near future:

> We are going to have a baby…and we would prefer that he live in a much more open environment, more democratic and more civilised as compared to what we foresee will exist in Romania in the next five, ten years. (Romanian man, prospective migrant, aged 35)

Bygnes and Flipo (2017) noted a great deal of distrust in Romania's politicians and institutions in their research on Romanian emigrants in Spain. Disillusionment may also be grounded in a long-term dissatisfaction in the direction of the post-communist transition, as a 2017 report by the Romanian Institute for Quality of Life Research (2017) confirms in its findings that 61% of Romanians believed their country was embarked in the wrong direction following the transition period.

By contrast, disillusionment about the future of crisis-stricken SE countries tends to be expressed in more specific terms by Spanish and Italian respondents. This tendency has also been identified by researchers of Spanish crisis-era migration, underscoring that Spaniards targeted specific political actors, parties and policies as bearing responsibility for the poor management of the economic crisis (Díaz-Hernández & Parreño Castellano, 2017). In their comparative study of the political motivations of Romanian and Spanish emigrants, Bygnes and Flipo (2017) have also emphasised that Spanish citizens benefit from stronger political outlets to express their discontent, even while abroad, compared to Romanian emigrants. Through groups that emerged around the so-called *Indignados* movement, self-declared 'political exiles' of the economic crisis period have become highly vocal in Spanish public debate (Padilla Estrada & Bienzobas, 2013). The fact that the Romanian political arena has remained permeable to economic and social justice grievances of its citizens until relatively recently leads Bygnes and Flipo (2017) to conclude that Romanian emigrants may be less inclined to clearly articulate the political dimension of their migration decision than Spaniards are.

This Spanish nurse's account of a political shift that shaped his decision to look for work in his profession in Germany is particularly telling in this respect:

> In 2011, the Partido Popular came to power…that's when I was looking for work….When Rajoy was elected, I told myself that I would have to leave, running, because I knew what was in store: more social cuts. Before, I had only been thinking about leaving Spain whereas after the election, I started thinking about it more seriously. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 26)

A second dimension I address in this section on 'non-economic' accounts has more to do with the search for individualised or 'alternative' lifestyles that are difficult to achieve in the local contexts of origin. As mentioned at the outset of this section, these overwhelmingly concerned young and single people as well as those who disclosed being homosexuals during interviews. Regardless of the form that the desired independence and 'self-liberation' would take, it was generally articulated in terms of perceived traditional local environments and family structures in the sending-country.

In terms of feeling 'trapped' in stifling and conservative societies, there are similar accounts from Bulgarian and Spanish individuals:

> It wasn't so much that I was attracted to the British capital but more that I wanted to escape from Bulgaria….I liked the freedom, everything….And

> I had accumulated so much disappointment toward Bulgaria….It turns out you cannot change anything….Actually, for me, the biggest thing that pushed me out of Bulgaria was this type of *mutra-chalgagian* [low-brow] culture. (Bulgarian woman in the UK, aged 47)

> I've known from the age of eighteen that I wanted to leave Seville. It's a beautiful city…but if you want to see the world, Seville isn't the place to [be]. Also, the mentality there is very closed, very conservative. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 28)

Several SE respondents specifically detail their frustrations at not being able to achieve desired levels of independence due to traditional Mediterranean family structures combined with the effects of the economic crisis. Indeed, they allude to a 'double curse' related to traditional structures in which parents deter children from leaving the family home before marriage (Reher, 1998) and not being able to achieve financial independence as a result of the shrinking job opportunities and increasingly precarious work arrangements in their home countries. It is notable that CEE respondents do not mention the desire for independence from the family to the extent that several informants from Italy and Spain, although, as mentioned earlier, the number of Romanian and Bulgarian youth living in the parental home has increased in recent years as a result of growing youth unemployment and the decline in state measures to facilitate the transition into adulthood (Castiglioni et al., 2016).

Finally, several respondents reinforce Favell's (2008a, p. 164) observations that homosexuals may "use free movement in Europe as a way of making sense of their own personal life choices—indeed, as their own way of 'coming out' of the mainstream". In the Bulgarian case, intolerance to homosexuals was mentioned once as a motivation for migration to the UK, expressed through the individual's belief that British society is much more open-minded than the Bulgarian one:

> Well, I am gay. Generally, I don't like the attitude to gay people [in Bulgaria]. Discrimination, inequality in general….Oh yes. [I] definitely [felt discriminated against in Bulgaria]…so, these were the biggest reasons [why I moved to London]: professional development and tolerance. (Bulgarian man in the UK, aged 36)

In contrast to the case of Bulgaria, Spanish homosexual respondents tend to praise the generally high levels of tolerance toward homosexuality and same-sex partnerships and marriages in their country of origin. Still, Catholicism and the lack of opportunities to explore personal life-choices in the midst of tight-knit Mediterranean family structures is seen as a considerable obstacle in the case of a woman from Southern Spain:

> I needed to 'find myself'….I actually came out of the closet while I was here [Great Britain]….But I came here already questioning [my sexual identity]….I needed to know what I was and where I was [in my life] without all the morality. I come from a very Catholic family, which, although they have supported me a great deal and they haven't had any problems [with my homosexuality], [there was this understanding] that I should do what one is supposed to do. This means getting married, have children, etcetera. So, this is what I needed, to find myself, I mean, what I needed was to stop and say: where am I and where am I going and what do I want to do with my life, because I was twenty-eight and I still had my life in front of me. (Spanish woman in the UK, aged 33)

4.4. Previous Mobility Experiences and the Desire for Renewed Cultural Exploration

This section concludes the discussion of the findings by shedding some light on an additional 'motivational type' that may be particularly relevant to the rise of 'new' European mobilities. These are accounts that are articulated with strong agentic tones emphasising the search for self-realisation in new cultural environments. In contrast to the frequent negative framing of accounts developed above (e.g., getting away from or reacting to certain situations and environments in the sending-country), the self-realisation and cultural exploration frame is articulated as a positive action (with or without the existence of unpleasant 'push' factors).

Though the desire to experience different cultural environments was more frequent across SE cases than Eastern European ones, the desire for change and novelty, expressed more as an 'end' than as a means was not altogether absent among CEE respondents, especially those under the age of 40. Perhaps a clue to better understanding the higher prevalence of these 'adventure' narratives among Italians and Spanish respondents has to do with their prolonged EU freedom of movement rights compared to their Bulgarian and Romanian counterparts. Specifically, a striking number of SE informants drew on positive experiences of past international mobility, through the Erasmus exchange programme or leisure tourism when reflecting on their recent migration decision. Thus, respondents who reached adulthood as part of the 'Erasmus generation' may have become socialised in a culture of European mobility at a relatively young age, providing the basis for future migration aspirations. The following quotes from Italian and Spanish participants are good illustrations of the 'adventure' motif connected to the culture of European mobility and subsequent migration decisions:

> I was born, grew up and studied in Trento, so I wanted to change environment a little, to see something new; and, the participation in Erasmus gave me that possibility…of leaving home and seeing another country,

> another city, so I seized both of them, let's say. (Italian man in Germany, aged 29)
>
> And also, there was the 'adventure' factor [in my decision to leave Spain]. I've always wanted to live abroad, to really get to know other cultures. Even though I've travelled a lot, you don't really learn about a culture and its people through tourism. (Spanish man in Germany, aged 35)
>
> [To understand why I moved to Berlin,] we have to go back to 2003, [when I went on Erasmus Exchange], because I didn't get enough [of Berlin] over one year of Erasmus, I wanted to extend [the experience of living there]. (Spanish woman in Germany, aged 35)

By contrast, there are remarkably few references to the influence of previous academic mobility, such as through the Erasmus programme in shaping the more recent migration decision among informants from CEE countries, with the exception of individuals who became migrants directly following graduation from a foreign university. This aspect of the findings can be better understood if considered against the fact that Italian and Spanish students have had some of the highest Erasmus programme participation rates in the EU for several years, while students from post-socialist CEE countries have some of the lowest participation rates in the exchange programme (Bothwell, 2016; Dabasi-Halász et al., 2019). That such a significant proportion of SE research participants had previous experiences of international mobility (whether student exchange or travel) on the one hand, and that many of them explicitly connected positive past experiences of international mobility with the desire for renewed mobility is not surprising given that previous mobility experience has been identified in the literature as one of the major determining factors in future or current individual mobility behaviour (van Mol, 2016).

The absence of a 'previous mobility' frame in CEE respondents' narratives, along with the stronger emphasis on economic and material motivations among lower-skilled Bulgarian and Romanian interviewees over the age of forty (compared to lower-skilled SE participants) is the basis of the most significant regional (CEE versus SE) divergence observed in the study. I proceed to take stock of the diverging and converging accounts discussed in the above sections both from a regional/national and individual-level perspective.

5. Conclusion

This article has emphasised the diversity of motivations that both Eastern and Southern EU migrants mobilise to account for their decision to move. It specifically seeks to connect these justifications to broader socio-economic and political contexts as well as individual-level factors. Though the findings are organized in separate sections on 'motivational types' in order to better illustrate the variation in the accounts obtained in the study, it is important not to lose sight of the relevance of 'mixed-mode' migration in contemporary EU mobility dynamics. For example, though the desire to experience new cultural environments, especially on the part of young migrants, was seldom expressed as a stand-alone reason for moving, it was often articulated in conjunction with one or more of the motivational categories related to economic, political and societal discontent or to specific professional aspirations as discussed in the findings. Indeed, even individuals whose reasons for moving had more to do with the inability to make ends meet or with the frustration with declining wages and quality of employment frequently offered multi-dimensional accounts of the migration decision.

In terms of the regional and national-level comparison, we find a stronger emphasis on narrowly defined economic motivations among CEE respondents compared to SE participants, even where the latter were in precarious work or unemployment at the time of migration. These differences may be related to the class position and support networks of our CEE and SE respondents, or to differences in the 'selection' patterns of migrants in the different regional contexts. On the other extreme, we find a stronger emphasis on cultural motives for migration, including individual, lifestyle and existential considerations among SE respondents, articulated in conjunction with other motivations discussed in the findings. While it could have been reasonable to expect that the Great Recession and record levels of unemployment that hit SE countries particularly hard might have led to more converging economic motivations for migration among SE and CEE respondents, this was not the case. By contrast to media portrayals across Europe that represent young SE migrants as 'desperately escaping' the lack of jobs and prospects in their countries, few SE respondents seemed to identify with these images, though they certainly expressed discontent with the labour markets in their societies of origin.

A significant common pattern across both regions, however, is connecting the desire to leave the country of origin with an individual's societal and political discontent. Interestingly, the narratives of Bulgarian and Romanian interviewees indicate a long-term/historical basis for discontent related to the post-socialist transition, whereas SE respondents were more inclined to develop accounts that blamed specific political parties, policies and events as contributing to the societal, economic and political decline in a relatively recent time-frame (often connected to the economic crisis). As a result, one way of understanding this difference may be through the more 'extended' experiences of deprivation in the CEE context and through the concept of relative deprivation in the SE context.

In terms of the individual-level comparison, we find the most converging accounts across younger professionals from the two regions, whose desire for career development is either frustrated by country of origin pro-

fessional structures and labour markets or whose professional identities and goals rest on acquiring international experience. With respect to the relative lack of previous international mobility experience of CEE respondents prior to migration compared to SE individuals, for whom migration was often an opportunity to 'relive' a positive experience of cultural exploration, it is notable just how different the nature of the migration decision is from each perspective. Indeed, the stronger emphasis on cultural motivations on the part of SE participants may not be altogether surprising given that the latter group could more clearly imagine and articulate what the 'lived experience' of migration would entail.

Together, these findings reinforce our understanding that country-level contexts such as high unemployment rates on their own cannot sufficiently explain aspirations for mobility and actual migration behaviour. Though both cases of migration can be understood in terms of current core-periphery dynamics in the EU, it appears that SE migrants, socialised to a larger extent in European cultures of mobility, evoke multiple and intersecting desires and aspirations that span a range of labour-market, professional, as well political, societal and quality of life considerations to a greater extent than CEE respondents. However, as East-West mobility processes become more integrated in broader cultures of European mobility (including travel and academic/training exchanges), more overlapping and diverse considerations are likely to shape the migration decision-making processes of CEE movers and potential movers.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Maricia Fischer-Souan is a PhD Candidate in Social Sciences at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. Her dissertation, *Framing Migration Experiences in Europe: Motives, Meanings and Identity Formation*, studies migration-related experiences from the perspective of both intra-EU movers and post-colonial migrants in several European contexts. Her background is in European studies (MSc, London School of Economics and Sciences Po Paris) and political science (BA Hons., Carleton University).

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Article

Receiving Country Investments and Acquisitions: How Migrants Negotiate the Adaptation to Their Destination

Neli Demireva

Department of Sociology, Essex University, CO4 3SQ, Colchester, UK; E-Mail: nvdem@essex.ac.uk

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Abstract
This article looks at the adaptation patterns of EU migrants—Bulgarian, Romanian, Italian and Spanish—in European markets, and uses several interviews of overseas non-EU migrants in the UK and Germany. The interaction of migrants with the receiving context is being considered. Drawing on several interviews with actual migrants and recruitment agents collected in the GEMM (Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets) project in four major immigrant societies (Germany, UK, Spain and Italy), this article focuses on the receiving country acquisitions that facilitate the adaptation of migrants along their journeys. EU migrants have very different adaptation strategies to non-EU migrants, and this article comments on the differences observed as well as on the differences between them according to skill levels. Migrant adaptation challenges are acknowledged and studied dynamically. Thus, this unique data brings forward a multi-layered picture of the migrant adaptation process in Europe.

Keywords
adaptation; EU migrants; migrant motivations; non-EU migrants; receiving society; skills

Issue
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1. Introduction

European receiving societies have experienced a huge rise in migration scepticism calling the migration governance and the successful operation and implementation of migration policies into question. In particular, fears have been voiced that EU and non-EU migrants, encouraged by generous welfare regimes are similarly uncommitted to integration and fail in their adaptation efforts (Kaufmann & Harris, 2015). Successive European governments have tightened their migration schemes to favour "net contributors," defined as migrants who bring a range of fiscal benefits while having good social integration prospects (OECD, 2017). Yet, little is known about the different integration strategies of migrants and the numerous challenges they face on the path to adaptation. Indeed, integration is often perceived as the successful outcome of the overall adaptation of the migrant and the final stages of their journey (see Koopmans, 2016). Before various European receiving societies prepare to further punish migrants who fail to 'invest' in their destination, it is important to hear migrant voices and understand better the barriers that they may face in implementing an adaptation strategy. Using a unique dataset of qualitative interviews with migrants of various nationalities, different skill levels, and a variety of motivations in four major migration destinations in Europe—Germany, the UK, Italy and Spain—this article is well-placed to bring some innovative perspectives to the fore and challenge well-established migration tropes. The respondents in the interviews gathered by the GEMM (Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets) study have employed a variety of adaptation techniques (for example, several other contributions in this thematic issue focus on social ties and acculturation), but the focus of this article are investments in human capital, degree translation and citizenship that allow migrants to navigate the mainstream receiving context.

2. Thematic Framework

Migrants are generally considered to arrive with knowledge and skillsets which are not particularly tailored to the needs of employers of the receiving society. In addition, they may not be fully prepared to be embedded in the social milieu in their destination (Friedberg, 2000). Overtime, they are expected to have made several investments in the destination country that further their integration efforts, which are the focus of this article.

Migrants are not likely to make uniform investments in the destination country. The acquisition and adaptation strategies they adopt will depend upon their own motivations and time horizons, the challenges they face in the migration journey, the different skillsets they bring, and finally the professional constraints imposed by the occupations and industries in which they are embedded.

The literature hypothesizes that there are large differences in adaptation strategies of migrants according to their motivations, with sharp distinction between economic migrants and migrants who arrive for reasons of family reunification and study. While some studies claim that the initial motivation leaves a lasting impact (Cangiano, 2015; Kogan, Kalter, Liebau, & Cohen, 2011), some other studies claim that for many migrants, especially within-European migrants a variety of reasons can be observed (Corluy, Marx, & Verbist, 2011). Due to our sampling frame, we primarily observe economic migrants. Economic migrants are considered to have made the conscious choice to migrate to a specific country with the purpose of work and generally match the economic conditions in the receiving country well. In many cases, their adaptation strategies are thought to be clearly defined and shaped by interaction with different receiving society institutions (Duleep & Regets, 1999). This article argues however that there might be significant differences depending on the migrant skillset.

Apart from having different starting points, migrants with varying qualification are also hypothesized to have differing integration patterns (Kogan & Shen, 2019; Kogan, Shen, & Siegert, 2018). Economic migrants who come with an already secured job or with strong intention to work can have incentives to improve their position which non-economic migrants or unskilled migrants may not share (Cortes, 2004a). At the same time, a short term time horizon in the host country may encourage circular migration and in practice might mean having less time to invest in language courses and knowledge about the receiving society (Luthra, Platt, & Salamońska, 2016). The interviews collected during the GEMM project allow us to get a unique glimpse in the strategic decision-making process of migrants.

2.1. Human Capital Acquisitions: Language and the Ethnic Niches

One of the most important receiving society acquisitions is language. Speaking the language of the destination country well is often considered crucial for sustained integration and is a main requirement for finding good employment, making use of public services and becoming part of the social fabric of the destination. It therefore brings considerable returns in the social and economic sphere (Campbell, 2014; Cebulla et al., 2010; Cheung & Phillimore, 2013; Cortes, 2004b; de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2010; Dustmann, Frattini, & Halls, 2010).

Economic migrants unlike family migrants may not receive state-funded and institutional support in the form of integration courses, language courses and career support (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2014; Cangiano, 2015; de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2010). It is quite likely however that already highly-skilled individuals will engage in the positive practice of acquiring further human capital (Duleep & Regets, 1999).

2.2. Translation of Credentials

Many migrants struggle with the translation of their degrees to those of the receiving society. The process of translation can take considerable time and effort, and usually starts before the arrival of the migrants in their destination. There are a variety of brokers who assist in this process. Employment agencies and institutions in the origin country may play a very important role, especially for medical professionals. Frequently, arrangements may vary depending on the destination of interest and employers are thought to carry great responsibilities in assisting the process. In practice, however, the burden of adaptation usually falls on the migrant as receiving society employers often insist on language competence, and the migrant who is unable to perform a task to the optimal level risks de-skilling. The most common solution adopted is to offer migrants language courses that will facilitate degree translation (CEDEFOP, 2011). However, provisions for such courses vary across countries. In Britain, for example, the cost of language courses offered as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is covered by employers (Department for Business, 2010).

In Germany, language courses for migrants are less related to the employment sphere but are part of broader integration courses in which foreign-born people can take 60-hour classes in German culture and politics, and 600 hours of language tuition. Unlike the structured integration courses for the foreign-born population in Germany, there are no similar regulated language courses as part of employment and integration in Italy and Spain. In Italy, migrants are expected to access the information on the job market via local employment offices, and these offices might suggest migrant language courses in their local areas. In Spain, there are Spanish language preparatory courses for foreign-born people, yet these courses are not regulated by authorities, and are not embedded into pathways of informal or formal training. Thus, in many cases, the language preparatory courses do not lead to official qualifications (CEDEFOP, 2011) and fail migrants in the preparation for the main-

stream labour market. Indeed, the countries in our sample the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain rely much more on the ad-hoc practices adopted by migrants rather than on structured translation of degrees. Examples of the latter can be found in Norway where language courses are mostly part of individualized employment plans and are integrated into job training (CEDEFOP, 2011).

2.3. Citizenship

Naturalization is sometimes considered to be the end point in the integration process. Various restrictions on years of residence mean that migrants cannot expect to achieve citizenship in the first few years of their migration journey but at a later stage when they have settled. Nevertheless, naturalization can be part of the integration strategy—it sends strong signals of belonging, of established connections with the receiving society. Thus, employers may also see it as a strong signal, both in terms of permanence of a job candidate and of cultural and linguistic integration. Importantly, the cost of hiring naturalized individuals for receiving society employers can be generally lower as there is no need for checking work permits. The European literature on this topic tends to find small positive 'naturalization premiums' on labour market outcomes, although the effect tends to be heterogeneous and mainly accrues to the most disadvantaged groups (Corluy et al., 2011; Helgertz, Bevelander, & Tegunimataka, 2014; Jarreau, 2015). Jarreau (2015) studies the effect of naturalization on earnings in France and finds a positive effect due to migrants moving to better-matched jobs after naturalization—an important adaptation strategy for migrants that want to avoid the race to the bottom and improve their positions in general. Previous studies found that migrants that have more to lose are more likely to naturalise (Vink, Prokic-Breuer, & Dronkers, 2013)—that is to say, highly-skilled migrants who are secure in their positions may find it less of an imperative to naturalize. However, it is likely that adverse climate of reception in the destination, for example Brexit, can give rise to fears of precarity and encourage migrants to undertake steps to regulate their status.

3. Dataset and Methods

The GEMM study referenced in this special issue employed a quota design, in some cases oversampling actual migrants with a specific focus on highly skilled migrants to include IT professionals and medical practitioners as well as recruitment agencies personnel. The GEMM sample focused on EU migrants but small sub-set of interviews with US and Chinese highly-skilled migrants in Germany and the UK were included too. More information about the study and its design has been given in the Introduction to this thematic issue.

4. Findings

4.1. Language, Ethnic Niches, and Interactions with 'the Locals'

The migrants in the GEMM study recognized the importance of language as facilitator of integration however, there were important differences by skill level and occupation of our respondents. Not speaking the language of the receiving society presents a barrier to access of its institutions and to seeking help and support from majority members. Moreover, towards achieving better well-paid positions may depend upon acquiring fluency. In our sample, the medical professionals who are highly-skilled have made a conscious investment in proficiency courses before they embarked on their respective journeys. They reported the highest levels of pre-migration language competence. This investment in the receiving societies' language is often seen as "absolutely fundamental" and "necessary" in their case as medical professionals can be blocked from practice if they do not have good command of the language of the receiving society. Medical professionals who chose UK as their destination reported having much easier time in terms of language, as English has become the standard second language in many countries around the world. In contrast, medical practitioners migrating to Germany, Italy and Spain had to rely on the help of intermediaries such as employment agencies who would facilitate their enrolment in language training schemes. For example, an Italian recruiter from a private employment agency for health professionals in Naples explained the process:

> In the best German university polyclinics, we are forced to offer standards of language higher than others, which we can only achieve by having an intensive language course directly in Germany with board and lodging, where the 8-hour daily study program is accompanied by a daily integration with the German people (attendance of local centres, daily life immersion, shopping). Only in this way can we achieve satisfactory results in terms of language which is always very difficult for Italians. All these costs are financed by the hospitals that at their discretion can give this program completely for free to the candidate or request a 50% refinancing from the moment that work has started. It is the hospitals that choose the candidates directly through a real contest with an oral interview that takes place "face to face" in our Neapolitan office. (Italian recruiter in a private recruitment agency in Naples)

Not all highly-skilled individuals in our sample however felt the imperative to achieve fluency in the language of the receiving society. Moreover, they did not consider it particularly important in order to be successfully integrated. There are a variety of studies which focus on transnational elites (Beaverstock, 2005; Ryan &

Mulholland, 2014) and find that highly-skilled individuals working in the finance sector can secure a very well-paid position in a receiving society while having limited interactions in its language. Similarly, in this study, we find that respondents in the IT and finance sector in Germany do not necessarily use German but rely on English for their socialization and job practice. This can however be very much a Berlin effect (our main data collection site in Germany). Respondents were however well-aware of this exceptionalism. Some respondents however regretted living in such linguistic isolation that provides little opportunity for mastering another language:

> After two years of being here…the thing that I regret the most is, I should have tried immediately…personally not having learned German, because in our work we speak only English, which was enough for me. (Italian, banker in Berlin)

In contrast, many of the low-skilled workers did not have any language training or preparation before they set on their respective journeys. Sometimes this was because the migrants did not consider language fluency to be an essential requirement in the sector in which they were seeking employment (particularly in the domestic sector or construction in which a worker can perform tasks under the supervision of a co-national). Often, the migrant has stated that they think learning the language is a good idea but did not receive any help from institutions they considered important gatekeepers or facilitators in their integration journey in the destination. Examples of such facilitators which are failing them are consulates and embassies which many of the migrants in our sample considered almost irrelevant to the migration process (although some respondents will still seek affiliation with such institutions for cultural events and opportunities to mix with co-nationals). Usually the low-skilled migrants depend upon immersing themselves linguistically once they reach their destination even though this may come with challenges as the previous sections showed:

> If they offer me [a job], right, I repeat myself, something secure, I shall learn it. It's not something impossible. (Bulgarian in Spain, working in an electronic factory)

> I was hired without knowing the language, a Bulgarian woman recommended me. If someone who is sure of you, recommends you, they will hire you. Otherwise, no one will take you directly from the street. They will not even run the risk of talking to an agency. Where I am it is all like that. (Bulgarian domestic cleaner in Spain who shared that she does not use Spanish very often but for when she goes to the school meetings of her children where she is always assisted by other Bulgarian mothers)

Our interviews highlight the importance of the ethnic niche especially for first time arrivals. The literature is almost always split on whether the ethnic economy has positive or negative effects on migrants' incorporation in their destination (Koopmans, 2016; Portes, 1995; Zhou, 1999). On the one hand, seeking employment in a Spanish or Italian café or restaurant in which the manager is a co-national may ensure that the migrant is kept active and employed, and duration of unemployment is minimized (Portes & DeWind, 2008). Migrants in our sample often relied upon co-ethnics especially in the low-skilled sector in the initial months and years of arrival and spoke openly of the invaluable support provided by the co-ethnic community. Both set of migrants, EU and non-EU, highly and low-skilled sought to embed themselves in various circles of support and make the migration journey less individualistic especially in the first few months. In fact, many migrants said that they moved to a location because of "friends," or "relatives" that could help them find a job:

> The first months you don't know the language until you learn it. Well, I came across these two Bulgarian women where I went to the language school and I sat next to them. I constantly asked them questions: How do you pronounce this word and that? And they were explaining everything to me, these two women. And gradually, gradually, with the textbook which I bought in Bulgaria…gradually I got used to the new language. But I was just so stressed. You don't know anything at first. Everybody only speaks Spanish. You don't understand anything at first. (Bulgarian carer, Spain)

> I had this conversation with a friend from my hometown working here in Madrid. After some time, I asked him, "Is it possible for me to come to work at this company where you work as a driver?" and he replied, first, "you go through construction, you have to move sacks of garbage, etc." But he helped me, this acquaintance from my hometown, and for several years, two, three years, I worked in construction. And then I went to an interview and started working as a truck driver. (Bulgarian driver in Spain)

At the same time, migrants feared the linguistic isolation from the mainstream that the niche imposes—a frequently cited negative effect (Koopmans, 2016)—as well as a future confined to low-skilled low-paid jobs with great turnover and potential loss of social standing (Favell, 2001; King & Lulle, 2016). A Romanian programmer in Spain below reflects poignantly on feeling as an outsider both among co-ethnics and among co-workers—a very difficult situation that he felt he could not overcome until he gained fluency in Spanish because then he had more options to choose from:

> It was quite difficult at first, because I did not even know any Spanish when I got there, I could barely

> say hola to greet the world. They speak almost exclusively in Spanish, they do not use English [at his place of work], only in discussions with external clients, which was my responsibility, and it was quite difficult for me to get used to and integrate myself in the first four, six months until I started talking, not because they were cold people, but simply because they did not understand me….Like most migrants in Spain, we all socialize the most with our people, with the Romanians there. There was a lot of trouble because, from the point of view of my education and the way I am, I did not like to mix, as it were, with the other Romanians. Most of the Romanians who are in Spain are working and working in fields that do not require very high knowledge or very extensive training in any field, work on planting, working in agriculture very much. Therefore, the kind of people were simple people with whom one could not talk too much. Not that I had something against them, we simply did not have many points of common interest and discussion in general, and then this was a very difficult period for me….I could not speak to the Spaniards very well because I did not know the language or the ones like me because I did not have much to say to them. So, until I started learning it was a bit difficult. I did not have much trouble because of this, I was not in any way discriminated either by my employers or by my fellow men, by my co-nationals, but it was a hard period for me. (Romanian programmer in Spain)

Furthermore, negative interactions with local mainstream institutions can be prevalent especially in the initial stages of the migration process, and the role of the co-ethnic community in minimizing these can be significant. Many migrants in our sample worried that even when they spoke the local language, they had a strong accent that would immediately mark them as outsiders. There was fear that the mainstream officials would respond to their requests for information in a condescending manner, and although local municipalities were considered efficient brokers of information, they were also largely approached with apprehension, especially during unemployment spells:

> Here [in Berlin] I feel a little bit more breath on the neck from the state. This, yes. Then however, from a human point of view, it is not nice—you can expect little empathy from them. (Italian in Germany, an accountant)

Highly-skilled migrants will be more likely to directly approach employers, and for both low and highly-skilled job seekers the next step on the employment ladder involved direct application especially after some years spent in the destination country when it was felt they had become less dependent upon predatory agencies and institutions.

> I really think that in an agency you are exploited, that you show, you do not trust your own strength. How do you think I found my job—I have been to hundreds of interviews of course until I've found a job, and I learned next time they will ask me I can tell them myself, that's what I'm interested in and these are the courses I am doing. (Romanian construction worker in the UK)

Sometimes, the mainstream institutions that migrants, especially lower skilled migrants will approach would have a charitable mission such as CARITAS—the charity focusing on combating poverty around the world or churches (contacted by a Bulgarian migrant in the initial stage of the migration process) both of which will be expected to be staffed with caring and understanding locals or with co-nationals (defined broadly sometimes even regional allegiances were mentioned) who would be less likely to judge and patronize. A Bulgarian nurse in the UK described a well-established network revolving around the local parish church which will have Central and Eastern Europeans helping others from the region, especially older migrants who would have difficulties accessing the internet.

Often migrants that could speak the language of the receiving society described a great cultural shock emanating from the perceived lack of care from locals, and perceived lack of empathy towards the migrant who had not yet acquired the insider knowledge and felt disorientated. These points of view are particularly important when we consider integration as a two-way process for which members of the receiving society are as responsible as migrants themselves.

> I was waiting for the bus. I was in Leipzig and I was waiting for the bus to return to Berlin. Since there is no real bus station, there are buses lined up along the sidewalk. There is obviously the manager of Flixbus. I go there and tell her, "Excuse me, I have to take the bus to Berlin", and she says, "Okay, you have to stay here." But I see that my bus does not arrive or, in any case, I don't seem to see any bus with the words "Berlin." After a while, a lot, I go to her and I say, "Excuse me, but where is my bus?" And she says, "Eh, didn't you see that it left?" So…I'm angry. "But, sorry, if I showed you my ticket, I told you I have to go to Berlin and you're in front of me and there's a bus in front of you, why don't you tell me: look, this is your bus, even though it says Karlstadt?" An Italian would have told you, that is, an Italian would have even asked you, "What are you going to do in Berlin? Do you have relatives? Do you have friends?" That is, he would have talked to you but really talked. (Italian accountant in Germany)

In contrast, the experience of non-EU migrants was qualitatively different from that of EU migrants. The non-EU migrants in our sample, by sampling design, were

more likely to be highly-educated (medical professionals, IT and financial sector professionals—with language requirements more relaxed in the case of the latter). In general, they seemed less engaged with the ethnic niche, while still having a variety of experiences of trying to 'make it' in the receiving context—through mainstream school groups, professional bodies that will facilitate the migration and adaptation process. Usually the role of co-nationals was mentioned last—in many cases, they were potential customers rather than gate keepers and brokers of information. Our sample of non-EU nationals is however very small. Since they are predominantly from the US or Chinese, the geographical distance from the home country can also reinforce potential isolation from co-nationals:

> As a translator, the resources I used were just [I relied on myself]….Obviously, I had an office set up with computer, paper and all that. That was just a matter in touch with translation agencies and having them to send me work. And that was never ending. I didn't have to join any associations or anything. In my practice, the most difficult thing was passing the Heilpraktiker exam because it is in German and I had to relearn everything in German and I haven't….I mean I had been out of school since the end of the sixties. So, I had to organize schooling. It took me going to two different schools before I found one good enough to get me through the test. And for the bureaucracy, that wasn't all that bad. It just costs quite a bit of money to get the licensing. Here in the city I live, it is pretty expensive. And, you know, I just started in January. I just joined the…a couple unions, the Heilpraktiker union, I joined the chiropractic association and I am starting to make some contact with other chiropractors and making contact with the Americans here. And…I guess organizing it and getting it going is just a matter of finding office space and being able to afford all the start-up costs, but bureaucracy there wasn't really much of a problem. I just had to send a letter and say that I was opening a practice on a certain date and time and pay the fees. (US nurse in Germany working as a chiropractor)

4.2. The Translation of Degrees and Educational Credentials

In the cases of the medical professionals in our sample, almost invariably some translation of degrees has happened prior to the arrival. Several stages are involved in the process of acquiring the right certification. In the first instance, the authority that has issued the degree is contacted (usually a Ministry of Education or a professional association), and bi-lateral agreements with the destination country for the recognition of credentials are discussed. The right of free practice involves sometimes not a small feat of obtaining a variety of documents certifying that the individual does not have a criminal record and has not been charged for misconduct. Only upon obtaining these documents the migrant can register with professional bodies in the destination. These barriers can easily result in deskilling for the migrants as found in other studies (King & Lulle, 2016) since eager to work individuals without the means to wait may start working at any job to pay off the cost of the migration journey. Employment agency experts are sometimes important brokers in these exchanges, and although they may claim a fee that is considered to be an important step in the migrant adaptation and for securing a good job. Some migrants really fear the bureaucracy in their country of origin, the system of bribes (see other articles in this special issue) that frequently bring dissatisfaction with the country of origin and sets them on the migration journey in the first place:

> The procedure in Italy before leaving was scary. There have been many problems. Nobody knew how to help me; what the steps I had to take [were]. Basically, I had to translate my degree certificate into English. [I had to get] someone to translate it in a legal way. And then this translation had to be recognized, so the prefect had to put a stamp. For these two, three steps it took a couple of months….I went around the various offices [to understand what I had to do]. (Italian midwife in the UK)

> I had to wait for the validation of my health practitioner title from a [Medical Board], which would be a sort of institute which would give me the validation, could certify the fact that I was eligible to work abroad in London. The only problem was that I prepared all the papers I needed for the validation of the title, and then tried to validate them in Italy, spending money on translations and all else, notary translations and so on, the fact is that once I arrived in London the documents however, they were not valid, they had found problems with my notary translation. So initially I worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant to be able to support myself and not ask for anything at home, after three months, I looked for and waited for post to arrive from home with my documents, but they were not sent. I decide to go directly to the office [back in Italy], and in the office they tell me that my documents had not been processed. Nothing [you can do]—I make sure to receive them again so that they can be validated in London, then I turned to an agency spending more money to have the translations certified again, I send them back [to the UK]. It took more than three months. (Italian health care professional working in Germany who has originally found a job in the UK)

A Bulgarian worker described what he thinks of the Bulgarian authorities abroad when he was asked whether he contacted any (he had indeed been wanting to renew a driver's license needed for his work):

> [In Spain] everything happens faster. Now if you go to our embassy [it is much slower]. That's what we, Bulgarians, are. Doesn't matter where we are, we behave as Bulgarians….They simply don't know how they should interact with people. They are always cold; they don't explain [things] to you, you have to guess. (Bulgarian construction worker in Spain)

Decisions to take any work may have considerable impact upon the individual's work trajectory as tenure is a strong signal to employers about the skill and potential of employees. Moreover, a migrant who has already started work may not necessarily have time to prepare for the exams which are part of obtaining the right to work in the UK, Italy and Spain, a further set back in terms of their professional realization and personal life (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010; Stirling, 2015). The following quotes are from a construction worker and a nurse who have experienced difficulties and talk of the stress of working long hours:

> At the beginning I didn't know German at all! The job does not allow you to learn, you know the times that I keep from seven am to four pm, you have to go home, and I also helped my family. My wife did the German school in the evening. (Italian construction worker in Germany)

> In my current job situation, I have no problem at all. But if you say "previous job," in which I worked in ward, and worked twelve hours a shift, there is conflict...hum, not from me, but I do observe in other colleagues. Maybe, due to long hour[s]? The workload? People are very tired. Maybe family? Yeah. There is tension, conflict occurring in work more often. (non-EU nurse based in the UK that started as a nurse in an emergency ward)

4.3. Citizenship

Unlike previous research (Graeber, 2016) which has suggested that EU migrants from less well-to-do European countries might strive to acquire the citizenship of more well-off countries, there is little in our data to support such a conclusion, even for less skilled migrants who should be in more precarious positions:

> I've been asked this a lot, why I haven't taken up German nationality. But why would I? I'm in the European Union and I don't feel German. (Spanish accountant in Germany)

> I've never felt the urge [to get foreign citizenship]. For what? At one time, some people…it was the fashion to come here [Italy], you have researched the conditions for Italian citizenship, the more advantages you have [if you had one]. I have, since we entered the European Union, the benefits for all. Why should I need the superfluous Italian citizenship? Dual citizenship—I don't need it, I have Italian documents for my stay in Italy while sitting here, I can give you an ID card and that's it. I don't want an Italian passport. What's wrong with mine? I have a Bulgarian passport. End of story. (Bulgarian driver in Italy)

In countries, perceived to be in crisis however there were conflicting views. Brexit did scare some and in particular put into question their ability to vote and participate in the social life of the country, thus becoming a turning point for many (Finotelli, La Barbera, & Echeverría, 2018):

> Yes, yes, why not? Especially if they [Britain] leave Europe, it is useful. (Italian Investment banker in the UK)

> I think it is the right thing to do, to get the citizenship of the country where you pay taxes, so you can participate in the national elections. I have an interest in the political life here, and yes, I think that there comes a time when dual citizenship is such a natural development of things when you have lived for many years in one place. (Bulgarian IT specialist in the UK)

Citizenship can be considered strategically useful in an increasingly hostile environment where many feared direct attacks although perceived increase in negative feelings brought about a sense of despondency and pessimism:

> [When prompted about the impact of Brexit] It depends on what will be negotiated. Depending on their negotiations, you know that racial attacks against Romanians and other Europeans have increased. Even yesterday there was a case, a Polish [guy] was attacked on the subway. (Romanian dentist in the UK)

> We talked about Brexit. Even at work, there were some people who just spoke very negatively [about foreigners], you know, telling you—just a passport won't make you that nationality and probably you will never be [British]. (Bulgarian construction worker describing some of the disadvantages of living in the UK)

Non-EU nationals also had mixed feelings towards citizenship and the need of acquiring citizenship. Compared to EU nationals, they also perceived a much greater need of brokers that will facilitate the process for them:

> I have only one citizenship, and that's American, I probably will get my British citizenship though, I am eligible for it, I just need to fill in the paperwork or hire a law firm to do it. (US software company employee working in the UK)

5. Discussion

This study highlighted the variety of adaptation strategies of migrants in the four countries of destination.

Similarly to previous studies we note that highly-skilled migrants are much more likely to invest in acquiring human capital typical for the receiving society that will guarantee them freedom to work. However, our interviews show that eventually most migrants do catch up. Working long and unsociable hours does not encourage low-skill workers to integrate socially and they are on average confined to ethnic niches and to jobs with little prospects of professional development for longer periods of time.

Many migrants, especially professionals start the process of acclimatization long before they set on their respective migration journeys. They can seek further assistance from agencies such as EURES which facilitate the exchange of ideas at the inter-European level however all the voices in our interviews point to insufficient or ineffective institutional support. The non-EU migrants in our sample also depend on a variety of professional bodies that aid highly-skilled foreign workers but in general had the confidence and resources to approach directly a variety of different institutions and employers. It appears that there is much need for a unified system that assist migrants with their work requirements and the translation of credentials.

Although low-skilled migrants may not have the desire to remain in linguistic isolation, some of them are forced to do so by the nature of their employment in ethnic niches. Migrants also physically concentrate in less desirable areas as they are cheaper, and they can afford the housing. Whereas studies differ on whether they are pushed in such areas out of their own choice (e.g., Semyonov & Glikman, 2009), or because of housing discrimination (e.g., Boeri, De Philippis, Patacchini, & Pellizzari, 2015), the result is the same—a set of limited opportunities for acquiring skilled jobs and professional development of which disadvantage migrants are painfully aware. Indeed more work should be done on whether ethnic niches shield migrants from potential discrimination (see, e.g., Bécares et al., 2011; Nandi & Platt, 2015). The provision of ethnic goods and positive social and cultural connections at the ethnic enclave, as well as labour advice should not be underestimated (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 2005). Yet, areas that are often more deprived also offer fewer opportunities (Feng, Flowerdew, & Feng, 2015). The migrants in our sample harbour dreams of better jobs and moving to nicer areas that might however take some years to be realized if ever. Linguistic English bubbles were also common among transnational elites working in the finance and IT sector. Importantly, citizenship was something that not all migrants considered, and the rates of reported naturalization were relatively low among EU migrants even with Brexit looming.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Neli Demireva (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Essex University. Her research interests include migration, inter-ethnic ties, social cohesion, ethnic penalties and multiculturalism.

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Article

Patterns of Social Integration Strategies: Mobilising 'Strong' and 'Weak' Ties of the New European Migrants

Boris Popivanov [1,2,*] and Siyka Kovacheva [2,3]

[1] Department of Political Science, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia 1504, Bulgaria; E-Mail: bpopivanov@phls.uni-sofia.bg
[2] New Europe Centre for Regional Studies, Plovdiv 4002, Bulgaria; E-Mail: skovacheva@neweurope-research.eu (S.K.)
[3] Department of Applied Sociology, Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski, 4000 Plovdiv, Bulgaria

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
The European mobility processes raise the issue of the integration strategies of new European migrants in their host societies. Taking stock of 154 in-depth interviews with migrants in the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain, we examine the social ties which they mobilise in order to adapt in a different social environment. The division between 'strong' and 'weak' ties established in the literature is particularly useful to assess migrants' experiences in appropriation and transformation of social capital and the variety of their pathways in the labour market. Then we critically study the relative weight of social ties and skill levels in their choice of integration strategies. At the end, four types of strategies corresponding to the types of migrants' interactions with the home and host contexts are outlined.

Keywords
European mobility; migration; social capital; social integration; social ties

Issue
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1. Introduction: Theoretical and Conceptual Perspective

The European Union (EU) has established a framework in which the traditional—and analytically rather well-developed—difference between internal and international migration becomes blurred. This changing permeability of borders has pushed forward the concept of (intra-)European mobility as different from migration by non-EU nationals (in both policy documents and academic research Boswell & Geddes, 2011; King, 2002). It denotes cross-border movement within Europe, whose importance is theoretically acknowledged in terms of the very possibility of post-national integration at the individual level and is empirically recognised in surveys as a core benefit of EU citizenship by Europeans themselves (Favell & Recchi, 2009).

Mobility processes across Europe are assumed to represent one of the important pillars of the overall European integration project. They should guarantee that all EU citizens are entitled to equal chances and equal access to the labour markets of each member state. Legal provisions, at the same time, need practical substantiation. That is why research attention has to be focused on the concrete reality of migrants' integration in host societies, and particularly to the subjective meanings, strategies and experiences with which mobility is related. As migration is not a one-time move but a dynamic multi-sided and multi-sited effort, it affects not only the migrants themselves but also their social and cultural en-

vironments and the networks they are involved in (see Castles, 2000, pp. 15–16).

Granovetter (1973, 1983) points at the importance of the strength of interpersonal ties in network analysis. His well-known theory examines them in relation to diffusion, social mobility, political organisation and social cohesion. Social ties, in Granovetter's sense, reveal interactions in small groups, which, in turn, construct the individual's networks. On this basis, a key differentiation is made between strong ties (our close entourage) and weak ties (our more distant acquaintances). Mobilising social ties therefore stands out as a process differing from just specifying kinship and friendship circles; it is about the importance of networks providing social support. Close relatives may be out, geographically distant or even not quite familiar people may be in.

Social ties are subject to additional scrutiny in the light of the development of the social capital theories. Thus, Coleman (1990, Chapter 12) examines social capital as a set of resources found in the social relations in the family and community based on trustworthiness, mutual obligations and expectations. Numerous authors bring this kind of approach to the field of migration studies. Importance of kin and friendship networks is emphasised as a factor in shaping and sustaining migration. Through these forms, migrant communities and ethnic suburbs in large cities often emerge as an outcome (Boyd, 1989; Fawcett, 1989; Massey & García España, 1987). The heuristic potential of examining social networks for understanding migration has often been underlined (Arango, 2004; Boyd & Nowak, 2012). While quantitative studies have measured the size and intensity of the networks (see, for example, Luthra, Platt, & Salamońska, 2014; Richter, Ruspini, Michajlov, Mintchev, & Nollert, 2017), qualitative studies have analysed the cultural meanings and migrants' agency usually focusing on one migrant group or one life domain: family or friendship ties (Heath, McGhee, & Trevena, 2015; Maeva, 2017; Malyutina, 2018). We attempt to capture the content of migrants' social relationships in several life domains bearing in mind that a "given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others" (Coleman, 1990, p. 302). In research literature, it should also be added, 'social ties,' 'social networks' and 'social relationships' are often used interchangeably. Our study acknowledges the conceptual differences but does not elaborate on them as it goes beyond the purposes which we have set out.

Information infrastructure is further regarded as a basis for actual accomplishment of migratory integration. One should explicitly underline the growing criticism against the so-called 'integration research' agenda in the migration studies. The very use of the concept 'integration' according to these views suggests forms of knowledge which tend to favour government approaches as opposed to lived experiences; it privileges the viewpoint of the host-country administration and hegemonic culture types over the mutual encounters. Following this shed of disagreement, integration is believed to define a certain state of the individual vis-à-vis a static society, personal responsibility of the former for the benefit of the latter. The discourse of migratory integration thus simultaneously moves us away from migrants' actual belongings and memberships and overshadows the genuine in-depth troubles of host societies. The main problem with the concept is found to be with the erratic vision of the society as an abstract benchmark of normatively posed conditions against which the migrant's success (or failure) is measured (Korteweg, 2017; Schinkel, 2017). In our case, however, integration is attentively viewed as a process of interaction between newcomers and the host society, which is framed by social ties rather than predetermined ideal types of settlement. We choose the term integration as more value-neutral, recognising interaction rather than the terms 'assimilation,' 'acculturation' and 'naturalisation' (Triandafyllidou, 2016). The transnational perspective, moreover, identifies how migrants establish and maintain social ties that link their societies of origin and settlement, and deepens the concept of integration. Migrants' experience and identity-transformations seem to be shaped by both concepts and this process is considered to be on the rise through the intense uses of technology, travel and financial mechanisms (Portes & DeWind, 2007; Schiller, Basch, & Blank-Szanton, 1992). Further, the framework of the European mobility promotes the opportunity of seeing migratory integration as a substantial feature of the complex phenomenon of 'horizontal Europeanisation.' This latter concept, in the sense of intra-European transferability of knowledge, skills and education qualifications, claimed importance in European studies not so long ago (Koopmans & Erbe, 2004), then was successfully appropriated in the field of migration studies (Büttner & Mau, 2010), and then further discussed and tested as an essential mechanism for formation of a post-national European society (Carlson, 2018).

The role of strong and weak ties in access to, and construction of, migrant networks in host societies is studied by Ryan (2011) through the prism of the flow of information. Strong ties are established to open up towards weak ties because of migrants' need of diverse resources and that is exactly the process by which social capital is accumulated. Skill levels are another variable attached to the issue of successful integration. Highly-skilled migrants, surveys suggest, tend to rely on weak ties in their integration strategies (Ooka & Wellman, 2003). An interesting warning is provided by Harvey (2008) in relation to the inequalities in the labour market: highly skilled migrants do not focus on family and friends since they do not hold key job information in specialised employment sectors. It comes to denote a specific trend in current research promoting information issues as factors of primary significance for labour market. Social ties are prescribed different functions.

Migration has influenced social processes in Europe for quite a long time. The term 'new European migra-

tion' is usually employed to outline the internal EU mobility of 'new' European citizens (those coming from the East and Central European countries acceding to the EU during the so-called Fifth Enlargement; McDowell, 2008). But this very term could have a larger connotation encompassing various mobility processes inside Europe in the aftermath of the Great Recession in the late 2000s (Lafleur & Stanek, 2017). It is precisely this meaning that we are oriented to.

In this article, we are interested in the ways that new European migrants mobilise their strong and weak ties in their integration strategies once mobility to the host society has been accomplished. We try to find how these social ties shape the patterns of migrants' integration and determine the results of inclusion in the host society.

To this aim, we examined the diverse social networking strategies of migrants drawing upon data from a qualitative study under the framework of GEMM (Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration & Markets) project. We used the rich data set of in-depth interviews with 154 migrants coming from two countries (Bulgaria and Romania) traditionally sending migrants, two countries (the UK and Germany) that are traditionally migrants' destination contexts and two countries (Italy and Spain) that have become both sending and receiving contexts of migration. Besides the specific migration contexts, the selection of the interviewed migrants took into consideration their gender, qualifications and occupational sector. The migrants who had lived in the host country for at least two years, were equally divided between men and women. Two thirds were highly skilled and worked in the sectors of finance, ICT and health and one third were lower-skilled and employed in construction, domestic care and transport. We aimed at maximum diversity for the individual characteristics of the interviewees, such as age, family status, housing situation and years of migration experience.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in the first half of 2017 by trained interviewers after receiving ethical approval from local ethical boards at universities or national research associations (in the cases of Bulgaria and Romania). The interview guides had several fixed themes commonly discussed and decided by the research teams following the stages of the migration process from the migration decision when in the home country through the actual move to the first adaptation experiences, current challenges and future plans. In the actual interaction, however, both sides had a high degree of freedom about the length of discussing those themes and including other issues, significant for the interviewee. We were fully aware that the success of such interviews depended heavily on the time, effort and respect that the interviewers invested in the relationship. Migrants were approached by advertising the project on social network sites, through professional, religious and political associations, by joining online groups on Facebook or LinkedIn and through personal contacts, and gave their consent after being informed about the objectives, methods and dissemination forms of the research. Most interviewees wished to tell their stories and justified their choices at length. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were held at a place chosen by the interviewees themselves: homes, workplaces, cafes and restaurants, fitness clubs and art galleries. All interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed in the national language and each transcript was read several times by two researchers to produce open codes and related categories, following the approach developed by Corbin and Strauss (1990). The comparative analysis is built upon three-page summaries of each interview, written in English, and on the six national reports. The resulting analytical frames aimed at capturing the main points of the similarity and difference (Ragin, 1987) in migratory experiences, as shaped by different sending and receiving contexts, as well as the impact that social inequalities (in terms of migrants' educational and skill level, age, gender and family status) might have on them.

2. Ties with Family Members in the Country of Departure

Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and Spain are known to represent family-centred social models. Ties with one's families are predictably important in shaping new migrants' considerations. Relatives left abroad do not only engage a large share of the migrant's thoughts and emotions but appear as a reference point and an ultimate target of their personal activities and strategies once they embark on the host country. Data allow for at least three intertwined perspectives emerging from migrants' relations to their families. In this sense, family abroad presents itself as a structure, which is often in need of (financial and other) support; an environment with which ties should be kept close; and a nostalgically coloured reality in which (short) reunions are stimulating and desirable although sometimes frustrating.

Concern for the family well-being was a very common explanation for the mobility decision of many migrants from Bulgaria and Romania. Rarely did they give economic reasons for migration alone without linking it with the care for other family members. This justification may have made their motivation more socially acceptable in societies where traditional family values are strong. In particular, those who planned to work abroad for a few years often cited that they would stay till they saved money to buy a new flat or house at home or to pay for their children's education or similar. For example, a 58-year-old Bulgarian construction worker in London mixed economic difficulties with the desire to finance his children's education and did this already in his self-presentation in the beginning of the interview:

> [I am] a Bulgarian, who has several higher education diplomas, who worked in Bulgaria, but ultimately the economic situation forced him to emigrate to the

> West to save his family and finance the education of his children.

The motivation to provide better opportunities for the family was common not only among those following a traditional model of the male breadwinner. Many women migrants in their mid-age years from the two new EU member states had taken the move alone with the aspiration to save money for the family while working abroad. Thus, two of the Bulgarian nurses whom we interviewed in Milan and London had started working as care-givers in the beginning and their children joined them later after they managed to achieve some financial stability in the new place.

Sending back money was another practice largely shared among migrants, exclusively those from Bulgaria and Romania. Clearly, this strategy was common for adult migrants, often continuing after reaching the age of retirement, while it was rare among young migrants from both countries. Our findings suggested that Italian and Spanish migrants seemed to be more motivated for personal realisation and in many cases were financially supported by their relatives rather than the other way around. In the narratives of migrants from Spain and Italy it was more often the emotional ties that were pointed at as the content of family links. The Southern European migrants in London and Berlin were often with higher educational credentials trying to succeed in desired professions while among Bulgarian and Romanian migrants there were people working below their educational level on low-skilled jobs being motivated by the higher income they secured abroad. It was not so much the education of the migrant than the qualification level of the job that impacted upon such personal strategies oriented towards the family well-being. Relatives (most often parents, children, siblings) back home in Bulgaria and Romania were the main recipients of financial support. Many interviewees had either done so in the past or continued to send money at present and considered this to be their duty framed as a "natural obligation." In the words of a 35-year-old rental manager in Milan:

> All the time, permanently, I give [money] to close relatives, friends—financial support in the sense of not giving large sums, small sums, but how can I tell you, that to me [these] are trifle sums, [but] to my uncle they are a [monthly] pension and a half, for example. They actually receive support [not for luxuries but] because they have to buy firewood for the winter, which is somehow upsetting—a person who has worked for 40 years to have to ask a 30 years younger relative for 50 euros to buy firewood, which is offensive, but that is their situation, so if I can help, it's okay.

The new technologies facilitated communication with family members abroad and many migrants used Skype, WhatsApp, and social networks such as Facebook. The dominant discourse among Italian migrants were the emotional ties and they often emphasised the value of making video calls home as the best way to keep in touch with their loved ones. This created the feeling of sharing everyday joys and activities with family members at home which was recognised by Bulgarian migrants as well:

> We have a WhatsApp group and we talk every day with my parents and once every three to four days with my grandmother.…Now I talk almost every day with them or read about what they do every day. (29-year-old Italian, programmer in Berlin)

> Since I moved to London, FaceTime was my salvation. I have virtually seen my nephew grow for 5 years on that iPhone. (37-year-old Italian, clinic receptionist in London)

Cheap flights provide another way to maintain contacts with family members left behind and many migrants travel back home with different frequency and duration of stay. However, financial and logistic considerations actually stratified answers on a home country context. Italian migrants in our sample compared the trips with low-cost airlines to the cost of a restaurant dinner. Many of them were coming back to Italy about three to five times a year and identified the pace of work as the main obstacle for more visits. For Romanians and Bulgarians, the longer flights and bad roads inside the home country placed additional difficulties to the regular visits, and thus visits were often concentrated during holidays. In addition, financial considerations were also mentioned by migrants in low-paid jobs. While the new technologies were used equally by all migrants to ease communication with relatives and friends in the home country, trips home showed to be more impacted by income inequalities among migrants.

Being reunited with the family of origin was the main goal of visiting their home country for all respondents. Having children provided an additional reason for strengthening contacts. It was often about creating joy for grandparents. Nostalgic feelings—when visits resembled a "return to the past"—played a significant role as well. The journeys proved, however, limited sometimes just to the family and not to the whole experience of the home society. For instance, a 54-year-old Bulgarian respondent, social care worker in Italy, clearly differentiated the joy of meeting family members from the emotion of coming in touch again with the socio-economic and political reality:

> I can even say that if I did not have a daughter, I would not go back to Bulgaria....I'm so angry with Bulgaria, I'm so offended, for example, by our government—the present, the former, to whichever it is now, I do not remember how many years have passed, they separated me from my own home, my daughter, my parents, my friends, the life I lived. Because we were forced to leave for our survival. No one asks us how

> we live, how we have survived and what we have been through in Europe. No one.

In the majority of accounts, being together with family meant coming home. Reverse cases were to be observed much less frequently. Migrants' parents perceived it as 'natural' that their children should come back home rather than the parents visiting their children. Most parents of the Bulgarian interviewees had never visited them abroad or had done that on 'major' occasions—for example, the wedding ceremony in London of their son (IT consultant) with an English woman. A 23-year-old migrant from Italy working as a bartender in Berlin explained how unusual it was for his mother not to have him coming home for Christmas:

> I didn't go back to Italy at Christmas because for us it's high season. When I told it to my mom she was traumatised by the upsetting news, she did not talk to me for a week. At the end of the week she called me and told me: "If the mountain won't come to Mohammed, then Mohammed has to go to the mountain." She decided to come here and I bought a flight ticket for her.

To sum up, for more adult migrants and those from the EU new member states ties with people in their home countries were both financial and emotional, including even money transfers, while for the younger migrants and those from Southern Europe the accent fell on emotional relations as parents and relatives who remained in the home country claimed that the young should reaffirm these relations regardless of busyness. Highly-skilled and well-paid jobs made face-to-face family visits easier although time constraints acted in the opposite direction.

3. Family Ties as Experienced in the Host Country

The interviews in GEMM provide insights into the family relations of those migrants who were living together with family members in the host country. While we did not include focused prompts in the interview guide about the partners living together with the migrants, all interviewees talked about them when discussing life 'here and now' and some did so already in the part on their self-presentation. Not only partnerships formed before migration, but also most of those created since the move involved compatriots. Nevertheless, from a fifth to a third of the migrants were in a relationship with people born in the country of destination or in rarer cases—from other countries.

Upon arrival, migrants meet a cultural environment diverging from what they had experienced in their home countries. It thoroughly affects their everyday practices and relationships. Family ties of this kind are challenged from at least three perspectives: institutional (as reflected by family policies); cultural (as impact of behavioural and stereotypical differences between nationalities); and economic (as difficulties arising from the necessity of combining family life and job responsibilities).

Family-friendly policies constitute a key comparative advantage of life in some Western European countries for those coming from the European South. Regardless of limited infrastructure and inadequate funding, Eastern Europeans were more prone to acknowledge the beneficial role of the state in their home contexts. Unlike them, many Spanish migrants commonly identified the family policies in Germany as providing better support for working parents than what the Spanish welfare state offered them. For instance, a 35-year-old lightning-rod installer working in Germany stated:

> I, especially, can't imagine a future [in Spain] now that we're expecting a child. If my girlfriend and I had been living in Spain, I would have told her, "No way! No way," [with respect to having a baby] because we wouldn't have the financial capacity to go ahead with it. Even by killing ourselves at work in order to make ends meet, I would never be able to spend time with my child. Here, in Germany, thanks to all the social benefits and the support for parenthood, it is possible [to raise a child].

Cultural diversity also matters in terms of both chance and risk for children. Spanish migrants, again, compared the family orientation of the Spanish culture to that in the UK and Germany and were divided between those who preferred the transmission of culturally diverse values to their children and those who insisted that their children should be raised in line with Spanish cultural values. Many interviewees pointed at the opportunities for personal enrichment by exposing children to diverse cultures. Thus, telecommunication engineers who left Madrid with their young daughters expressed their conviction that living in London would widen their children's personal and professional horizons:

> We want them [our daughters] to understand from this very young age [by living in Great Britain] that in this life, you can live in a different country, you can do different things. We want them to have that curiosity that will allow them to work somewhere else one day, get a degree somewhere else….These kinds of experiences can help make you more open-minded and share other cultures…seeing that in your classroom, not all the children are Spanish like you and that there are children from all over the world….We want to give this opportunity to our daughters.

Among the Italian interviewees, some, particularly those living in London, were worried that their children could not experience the freedom of playing in the open air that they themselves had during their childhood in Italian cities. We should state here that the value of cultural diversity and the excellent opportunities for career development in the social context in the North of Europe

was recognised by many interviewees from all four countries sending migrants. This was valid even for those who wished their children to know the language and culture of the home country of their parents.

Cultural understandings of gender roles appeared to be an important differentiating factor when migrants discussed the alleged greater openness of Western and Northern European cultures. Some migrants commented upon cultural differences in the 'proper' gender roles when speaking about their romantic relationships. A 44-year-old media expert in London made the observation that Bulgarian women more often married British partners while the opposite practice—Bulgarian men to marry British women—was much rarer:

> Bulgarian women are very flexible, very open to new influences and new things to learn. That is why they marry Englishmen. While Bulgarian men are less flexible, full of stereotypes and if they marry English women, they feel insecure, [they feel] their manhood is lost.

He attributed this to the norms of masculinity and femininity in Bulgaria and the gender stereotype that the male partner should take the lead position in the family, which was easier done when he was from the national majority, while it was acceptable for the woman to be in a subordinate position linked to her migrant status. However, we had cases of exactly the opposite family pattern with the informants describing their relationships as equal rather than hierarchical. A young man who emigrated from Bulgaria five years ago and was now working as a financial expert in London considered that they shared domestic responsibilities with his British wife on an equal basis and took important life decisions after negotiations between the partners. Examples of sharing power in the family were also the two same-sex couples among our samples. A Bulgarian IT designer who was living with his male British partner in London reported that his desire to have a family and children had made him immigrate to a place where the tolerance towards such relationships was much higher than in Sofia. The partnership between a woman from Southern Spain and a British female care-worker led them to set up a home in a small Hertfordshire town, leading a very "quiet English" lifestyle with English cooking and mealtimes. In these cases, it could be that migration not only provided greater freedom from family ties and responsibilities in relation to the parental generation (Heath et al., 2015), but also from the partnership norms, as set in the traditional family patterns.

Difficulties in work-family balance were commonly reported by migrants. They seemed on the rise when a migrant had a partner of the same nationality (and often the same social position) sharing a household in the new country. Many explained this with the high intensity of the work of both partners (in comparison with the situation in the home country where support from the extended family was more available) and the tension it caused in their relationship. A Romanian migrant who had had his own construction business in Romania and was now working as an employee in Berlin pointed at the conflicts with his partner. His low-status work and long working hours changed his family life: "In Romania, in 15 years, I argued with my wife only once….Here, over the past two years, we argued [every evening] for about six months." Such stories were not only typical for the low-skilled and low-paid migrants but were also common among the highly-skilled dual-earner families as well. A Bulgarian woman, working as a strategic analyst in London and married to a Bulgarian man, a financial expert, explained that the high intensity of life in the first years of adaptation "almost ruined their relationship" and it took a lot of time to find the work–family balance that suited them both. Spanish migrants in Berlin emphasised their impression that being in a relationship with a co-national could be an obstacle to improving linguistic knowledge and establishing contacts with German people, in other words, a barrier to accumulating social capital.

The theme about children was present in our informants' narratives when speaking about their family life, even among people who had not yet become parents. How to balance work and care for young children is a crucial question for all working parents, not only for labour migrants. While only a third were already parents, many of our informants commented on it. We already saw that a common practice among Bulgarian and Romanian migrants was to emigrate alone and the responsibility for childcare fell on the partner remaining in the home country who received support from the network of relatives, most importantly grandparents, and from the relatively dense network of public childcare centres. For the young families where both partners lived abroad, another widespread pattern was to make use of the free care provided by their own parents for some period of time. For example, the strategic analyst in London had two four-month paid parental leaves for each of her two children and then relied on long visits from the babies' two grandmothers and one of the grandfathers to take turns to live with the young family in London. She and her husband came to the UK in 2008 after working for a few years in the USA. She compared the working cultures in the two countries, clearly appreciating the one in Europe:

> Here I have again more than forty [hours per week] but not as many as in the USA and I have some control over the working time…and also, I should mention the completely different culture. The culture in the company is such that they understand—I can always ask to go out when necessary or work from home for a few hours.

4. Migrants' Weak Ties

Friendship ties represented another way, besides kinship, for migrants to construct notions of belonging, as well as

for getting accustomed and integrated in the new social context (Conradson & Latham, 2005; Malyutina, 2018). Friendship networks played an important role not only in the initial period of adaptation during the search for housing and jobs but also for exploring new career opportunities, cultural experiences and personal development.

Among our interviewees, many migrants kept in touch with their friends at home and met with them during visits back home. Yet, compared to the family ties, friendship ties seemed to wane more quickly and there were more narratives about losing touch with friends who had remained in the home country.

While varying in strength and density, ties were created in the new social context as well and were of great significance for migrants' wellbeing and insertion in the host societies. Composition of migrants' networks tended to be complex. Generally, variations could be outlined along several distinct dimensions of migrants' positioning in the host society: where they live, where they work and where they spend their leisure. These dimensions contributed to different kinds of friendship ties, usually dependent on the types of settlements, perceptions of dominating culture and attitudes to nationalities. Diversification occurred as well, based on the ethnic background of both migrants and 'the locals,' and our study provided evidence for ethnicity networks, such as those of low-skilled Bulgarians from Turkish ethnicity working in 'Turkish' businesses in Germany or Romanians joining Roma networks in Italy and Spain. Religious affiliation did not figure out prominently as a factor for social inclusion or exclusion in the narratives of our interviewees and it was mainly Romanian migrants who identified churches in Spain and Italy as a source of support upon arrival.

Neighbourhood ties proved to be contingent on the specific urban context. The interviews were predominantly taken in big cities, providing numerous opportunities for contacts. While migrants living in Berlin and London often pointed at the cultural richness of these 'global cities,' which was always challenging with new experiences and people, residents of Madrid and Milan chose to speak more about the premises for good relations with neighbours. For instance, a 45-year-old Bulgarian driver in Spain concluded:

> With the utmost confidence I can leave the keys to the apartment to my neighbours. And in Bulgaria just...I would not leave the keys. The apartment we have in Bulgaria is locked. Even my relatives…I would not give [them] the keys…let alone to a neighbour.

Good relationships with neighbours were reported in London and Berlin as well but in the two Southern European cities the focus was clearly placed more on visiting each other at home rather than going out.

The workplace is the other common site of forming friendship ties for migrants. There were many stories of socialising with colleagues in all contexts. A 28-year-old Italian architect in Berlin described his leisure in the following way: "In my free time, which is really little, I often go to events that concern architecture with colleagues and friends. I do many things with my colleagues. I also go horseback-riding."

In his interview, a Romanian doctor almost repeated those words, only instead of horseback-riding, he regularly played tennis with his colleague friends.

Ethnic composition of migrants' networks was indicative of both cultural perceptions and integration strategies. Preferences to co-nationals, other non-locals and non-migrants revealed much of the motivation but also of the levels and forms of social capital accumulation characterising the new migrants.

The analysis of the interviews established that the dominant practice was to create new contacts with co-nationals. It was particularly true for Bulgarians and Romanians in both the Northern and Southern countries of reception: "We usually move in a circle of Bulgarians," said a 47-year-old Bulgarian dentist in Barcelona; "We hang out with Romanians because we are friends, they come to us, we go to them….With the Spanish we only meet on the stairs", said a 47-year-old Romanian housekeeper in Madrid; "We talk with people we know, most of them Romanians, but not Britons….After 6 years here, I cannot say I have English friends", said a 25-year-old Romanian information system developer in London.

Having few contacts with the local population in Spain and Italy was common for migrants who claimed that they had chosen one or the other of these Southern European countries largely due to their perception that there was a similar culture to that prevailing in their own homeland.

Italian and Spanish migrants cited as channels for creating new ties with co-nationals experiencing common Erasmus exchange programs abroad and mostly sharing the first difficulties of adaptation with new migrants and co-workers from the same nationality with whom they spent time after working hours. Some of the co-national ties involved fully new acquaintances while more often friendship ties were created from former distant contacts, made possible due to the mobility of co-nationals. Such 'revived' ties were defined 'best friends' as in the example of a 34-year-old Italian investment analyst in London:

> Currently the person I meet most is a university colleague that, before our new meeting, I have not seen for six years. He moved to London when I moved on, more or less, we met again, and now we are basically always together.

When discussing their ties with co-nationals, the interviewees did not differentiate among ethnic minorities inside the home-country populations. Vis-à-vis the new cultural realities, previous 'internal' distancing seemed less significant. The analysis discerned anti-Roma stereotypes in some of the Bulgarian and Romanian interviews.

Apart from co-nationals, migrants made new social ties with migrants from other nationalities at the workplace or the neighbourhood in which they lived. It differed from self-closing in compatriot communities but anyway maintained the 'border' between 'us' (newcomers) and 'them' (locals). A former graduate from an IT university in Sofia, who worked as a cleaner in an office building in London, listed as friends of him his colleagues from Romania, Nigeria and Ghana. A 29-year-old café manager from Italy described his new friends in the following way:

> I have two best friends, but both are not Italian: one is Korean—she is my colleague—and the other is Finnish, who is my old manager. Friendships are made within the workplace, this stuff is quite normal. I do not think I've known people out of the job yet.

There were also a number of migrants who developed a wide range of friendships with people of any ethnic group, gender and profession. This type of migrants sharing a culture of multiculturalism was open to diversity and easily created new social ties. These were more common among Italians and Spaniards than among Bulgarians and Romanians. In terms of occupational sector, the highly-skilled professionals in finance and ICT had more open and mixed networks but there were examples among the low qualified migrants as well. Sufficient knowledge of the local language and adequate representations of the local cultural landscape greatly facilitated eagerness for establishing new social ties inside the host society population.

For this group of migrants forming ties with people from different nationalities, ethnicities and cultures were seen as a valuable social capital and they invested time and efforts in raising such contacts. In contrast, some migrants employed a strategy to establish and maintain ties with 'purely local' people and avoided contacts with migrants. Although much rarer, it was justified with arguments for 'true integration' in the context of reception which was now considered 'home.' A 44-year-old media expert from Bulgaria, who had had experience from short spells of working in other EU countries before arriving in London, clarified his choice providing a comparison with his parents' life experiences:

> [My parents] moved to Sofia to study at the university when they were teenagers. They have been living in the capital for more than 30 years now, but they still keep their family house in [the village] where they were born. They still live in-between two worlds, split between the city and the village. Many migrants do the same, having houses here and flats in Bulgaria. I don't want to live like this.

He made concerted efforts to establish contacts with British people, 'true Britons.' At first, he shared a flat with a colleague, a British national and mimicked his choices for brands of food and drink in the shopping mall or the pub. Making a career in his job, he moved to live in a separate house, choosing the "most conservative part of London with the oldest average age of population." He goes to the pub most evenings and to the church on Sunday "because it is there that you meet the local people.''

It was common for migrants to distinguish between 'true' or 'pure' local and other local ethnicities. Many migrants from the two Eastern European countries and some from the two Southern European countries in London, for example, spoke about "people from former colonies" being more discriminating towards recent migrants than the 'real' British. This 'mirror' effect of distrust and prejudice clearly diminished the value of migrant social capital.

5. Emerging Patterns of Social Integration Strategies

Based on the observations above, it is possible for us to highlight several types of personal agency for social integration that the migrants adopted, drawing upon the social ties they established in the process. Various typologies of integration strategies could emerge—for instance, ones related to local education, well-paid labour or political and communal participation—but we restrain ourselves here to the patterns resulting from mobilising social ties. We are also informed by the viewpoint that social integration does not necessarily involve the development of social ties with the host country population (for a recent evidence, see Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). At the same time, the transnational perspective suggests the various degrees to which migrants maintain social ties in both sending and receiving contexts as crucial to their experience and transformative potential for both themselves and their societies. Across this article, we demonstrated (and illustrated) that, in the context of the opportunity structures created by the climate and institutions of reception, some migrants developed their own active inclusion strategies and formed friendship, community and family ties with the majority of the population, as well as with diverse ethnicities while others were also active in maintaining borders and limited their ties to kinship and co-nationals, envisioning a return to their homeland in the future. Yet, others remained in-between reacting to the changing circumstances of everyday life in a foreign society in a more passive way. Therefore, we can distinguish among the following patterns of integration strategies:

1. Isolation from both worlds as a type of life strategy is argued as a way of coping with overwhelming difficulties in both contexts—sending and receiving. Some migrants stuck to the bonding ties of their immediate family and limited their contacts even with co-nationals. They often felt being "no longer there but not yet here" or as a Bulgarian migrant in Madrid put it—"a tree without roots." They also claimed not to have any spare time. This type was

not widely spread and was found among low-skilled migrants, men in mid-adulthood who tended to live in mixed ethnic suburbs of the big cities.

2. One-dimensional (limited) integration represents a more active life strategy than the previous one but very restricted in terms of building social capital. The migrants employing it stayed in close contact with neighbours and friends in the country of origin while in the host country they invested little in creating new social ties with the local people. This strategy was typical for the low-skilled workers who had more or less stable jobs and income but still planned to earn money to spend it for a life in the home country. They saved on spending for leisure activities and their quality of life was rather low. This approach to forming social ties was found among all age groups, including youth, but was more typical for those in late adulthood who did not wish to open their worldview to new cultural influences.
3. In what we call multi-dimensional integration migrants tried to take part in various life domains in the local society, established social contacts with people from different nationalities, including local friends and colleagues. This type of strategy, outlined by transnationalists, was common among the interviewed migrants who were mostly highly skilled but was also practiced by many in low-skilled jobs with similar ambitions. They kept contacts with friends and relatives in their home countries, but also accumulated social ties where they lived. This cluster consisted of those individuals who consciously struggled to achieve the best of 'both worlds.' The most prominent group employing this strategy were young migrants, highly-educated women and men who deserved the definition of Eurostars (Favell, 2008). Without claiming statistical representativeness, our data suggest that the majority of the interviewed migrants in different age groups and occupational sectors aspired to such type of social inclusion.
4. Total integration was displayed by a few of the highly-educated migrants but not always working in highly-skilled jobs who limited their contacts with their home country and purposefully avoided forming ties with co-nationals abroad. They lived in typically local suburbs, without ethnic neighbours and tried to follow the cultural norms of the national majority as they understood them. Often such exclusionary practices were linked to ethnic stereotypes against those outside of their limited social network and reflected social divisions in the context of the host country.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In the course of the study, we observed a wide variety in manifestations, development and the relative importance of strong and weak social ties among the new European migrants.

Strong ties appeared to be very strong in all four sending countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, Spain), which was perhaps no surprise, given the family-centred models these societies represent. Most migrants invested time and resources in maintaining and developing the strong ties within the family. Even when they formed a new family in the context of the host country, they struggled to keep their contacts with family members in the sending country. Emotional ties were clearly strengthened in cases of young children in the migrant family. Besides emotional ties, migrants from Eastern Europe (unlike those from Italy and Spain) provided financial support to elderly relatives in difficult economic situations. Reciprocity went both ways and often parents of migrants travelled to their offspring's home to provide childcare or help with house repairs. It was accepted as the norm that migrants from both East and South Europe should visit their relatives in the country of departure rather than vice versa. Both sides ('here' and 'beyond') perceived that the homeland should be the 'natural' place that family members separated by distance and economic necessity could meet together. Thus, strong ties functioned as bonds of affection rather than transferable social capital since their contribution to successful social and labour market integration in the host society was rather limited.

We can also infer that migration, although negotiated and decided within the family, was an individual strategy. In the case of Bulgarian and Romanian migrants, family responsibilities to partners and offspring were a significant factor for maintaining the ties that 'bind us together.' Individualism was much more pronounced in the mobility of Italian and Spanish migrants. Apart from the few individuals who migrated with their partners, informants always described the migration decision as a personal choice and more often exchanged view and information with friends than with parents. In all four countries, in the case of representatives of the younger generation, the family ties thrived upon the understanding that the young had the right to explore opportunities for better careers, adventures and self-expression. Practical dimensions of migration were more often than not related to functioning of weak ties. Colleagues and friends were relied upon more heavily in access to labour market, community initiatives and free time spending while strong ties were made use mostly in terms of moral support.

Integration outcomes were no single products of the availability and exploitation of social ties, either strong or weak. Skill levels largely determined both desirability and effectiveness of the process. Gender and family status contextualised to a great extent the difficulties of the integration experience while educational and skill status were rather more about the varieties of outcome. Motivation to integrate fully into the new social and labour context usually had a lot to do with one's degrees

of education, existing competences, language mastery and record of previous jobs. Cultural distances and prejudices were easier to be bridged over in cases of higher social capital accumulated before departure though, of course, achievements could not be reduced to it. Age and the biographical timing of the migratory move—whether it occurred in the youth life stage, before or after forming a family, as a first or repeated international mobility experience—also had a significant impact on the width and composition of migrants' networks, as shown elsewhere (Kovacheva & Hristozova, 2019).

The article shows that social ties were important not only as a motivation for migration and a channel for mobility but also, and probably more so, for following stages of this dynamical process—for the early adaptation and further social integration of migrants. 'Old' and 'new' social ties connected migrants in networks of various strength and composition across national borders. Our study confirms that they played a facilitating role for the labour market and community incorporation, family formation and development of feelings of belonging and citizenship. Mobile individuals could mobilise kinship, ethnic, friendship and collegial bonds as social capital, reducing the risks and uncertainty in the new social context of the accepting country. 'Horizontal Europeanisation' could build on this soil. Yet, we do not intend to overemphasise the positive role of migration ties. The analysis of the types of social integration strategies demonstrates that social ties could also be used by migrants in an 'exclusionary' way (King, 2012) by creating small circles of strong ties, isolated from the new cultural milieu. The transnationalist trend is confirmed but hardly all-encompassing.

To put it shortly and perhaps not quite precisely, the dynamical relationship of strong and weak ties among the new European migrants represent the complex move from motivation to strategy in the integration process while skill levels serve as the crucial mediating factor.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Boris Popivanov is Associate Professor in Political Science at Sofia University and researcher at New Europe Research Centre in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. He works in the areas of youth studies, migration policies as well as the history of political ideas in Europe and Bulgaria, and has participated in international research projects covering these issues.

Siyka Kovacheva is Associate Professor in Sociology at the University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. She is the Head of New Europe Research Centre in the same city. Her research interests are in the field of youth transitions, mobilities and civic participation. She has experience in conducting qualitative and quantitative research in cross-national perspective and has been the national coordinator of more than 10 international comparative research projects.

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Article

Before Landing: How Do New European Emigrants Prepare Their Departure and Imagine Their Destinations?

Diego Coletto * and Giovanna Fullin

Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Milano-Bicocca, 20126 Milano, Italy;
E-Mails: diego.coletto@unimib.it (D.C.), giovanna.fullin@unimib.it (G.F.)

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
In migration studies, the preparation for the departure of people who decide to migrate has seldom been addressed as a distinct topic. This article aims at investigating how European migrants who moved or plan to move to another European country prepare their departure. It analyses stories of migrants who move from Italy, Spain, Romania, and Bulgaria. More specifically, attention is focused on departure preparation in order to investigate what migrants do before they depart and how the free mobility of work is perceived by Europeans and applied to their migration plans. Different from general statements about European integration and belonging or about obstacles to intra-EU mobility, the analysis of what individuals do in order to get ready to leave their country of origin provides a very realistic idea of how people perceive European Union and the mobility within it.

Keywords
European Union; imaginaries; integration; migration; social media

Issue
This article is part of the issue "The Lived Experiences of Migration: Individual Strategies, Institutional Settings and Destination Effects in the European Mobility Process" edited by Neli Demireva (University of Essex, UK) and Fabio Quassoli (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy).

1. Introduction

In migration studies, the preparation for the departure of people who decide to migrate has seldom been addressed as a distinct topic. Scholars' attention focused more, on the one hand, on factors explaining the decision to migrate and, on the other, on the outcomes of migration in terms of settlement in the destination country, integration/segregation in the labour market and so on. Both of these topics are addressed by other articles on this issue, investigating the motivations of the decision to migrate, which precedes the preparation phase, and the consequences of that decision, i.e., the arrival in the destination country, the search for accommodation and a job, and the integration process. Our contribution aims at providing an explorative analysis of the phase that is between these two.

The preparation phase, which includes all the activities that migrants put in place before leaving their country in order to move abroad, is worth investigating as it can provide an interesting insight into the lived experiences of migration. What people do (and what they do not) once they have decided to migrate in order to get ready to leave their origin country can highlight how they imagine the migration process and what difficulties they expect to meet. Moreover, we believe that this specific phase—during which prospective migrants start to face their decision to migrate—can be an interesting 'policy field.' Indeed, policies can intervene in order both to ease the processes of information collection and to support prospective migrants to fill possible gaps in terms of competences or skills. Besides the focus on the particular phase of preparation to migrate, our analysis differs from the existing literature for another reason. It takes into

consideration European migrants who moved or plan to move to another European country, while the few pieces of literature concerning the preparation for departure mainly refer to migrants moving without regular documents and the channels through which migration is perpetuated (for instance, King, 2012; Massey et al., 1998; Menjìvar, 2000; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993).

Actually, there has been less attention on the preparation of migrants who move without constraints arising from their legal status, as Europeans moving within the European Union (EU). Intra-EU mobility has been often depicted as very different from traditional migration: easier, fluid, and easily reversible thanks to the geographical proximity and the freedom of movement across European countries. The preparation process for departure is worth studying, particularly with regard to this type of migration. Different from general statements about European integration and belonging or about obstacles to intra-EU mobility, the analysis of how people who decided to move abroad prepare their departure provides a very realistic idea of how the free mobility of work is perceived by Europeans and how it is applied to their migration plans. The research analyses the stories of migrants who moved or planned to move from Italy, Spain, Romania and Bulgaria. Given that all the four countries have been deeply hit by the 2008 economic crisis and saw an increasing number of young people moving abroad, a better understanding of these migrations is crucial and can provide suggestions for policies.

After having presented the theoretical framework (Section 2) and research questions and method (Section 3), we will show findings concerning preparation to migrate (Section 4). Some concluding remarks and policy implications will close the article.

2. The Theoretical Background

Given the lack of studies on the specific phase of preparation to migrate, we built our theoretical background by referring to the literature on intra-EU migrations and on the factors affecting the decision to move abroad, focusing on those that can help to explain the preparatory steps.

The recent intra-EU migrations have been depicted by some scholars as a form of geographical mobility that is quite different from traditional migrations. Some pieces of research show a quite enthusiastic approach and depict the migration of high-skilled workers as a part of the contemporary globalisation process, whereby highly-educated people can move across interconnected societies to pursue better careers, personal aspirations and lifestyle choices (Favell, 2008; Favell & Recchi, 2009). According to King (2018), this literature approach is often characterised by a too-celebratory, self-referential rhetoric of the 'Erasmus generation.' Beyond the literature debate, it is true that the new geographical mobility across European countries have some features that both the past intra-EU migratory movements and the recent international migrations did not have (Favell & Recchi, 2009; Recchi, 2013; Smith & Favell, 2006). First, European citizens are free to move across EU member countries: They do not need permits to stay or work (with some exceptions concerning new member states in the entry phase). This undoubtedly makes their geographical mobility much easier compared to the mobility of other migrants. Second, besides economic migrants, intra-EU mobility also concerns people moving for other reasons, such as professional self-fulfilment and country reputation, especially regarding labour market prospects in terms of openness and meritocracy (Bartolini, Gropas, & Triandafyllidou, 2017). Third, people moving across Europe are often highly educated and their decisions to migrate entail fewer risks than for their non-EU counterparts concerning the trip, border crossing, and segregation in ethnic niches and informal low-skilled jobs upon arrival in the destination country (Recchi, 2013). Fourth, social media offers access to information about the destination country at little cost, through the revival of latent ties or the creation of new contacts (Dekker & Engbersen, 2012; Haythornthwaite, 2002).

A literature stream has developed the idea of fluid or 'liquid migration,' applying Bauman's (2000) idea of liquidity to the new migration processes. In particular, new intra-European youth mobility is often perceived and described by migrants as 'reversible' short-term mobility (Engbersen, 2012). However, there is a harsher, darker side to the new intra-European youth migration. Indeed, within the European area, some differences between countries are worth considering, in particular after 2004, when eight Central and Eastern European countries joined the EU, followed by Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 and Croatia in 2013.

With the EU becoming bigger, the divide between dependent and escalator regions becomes clearer and mobility across them has confirmed these internal differences. Some cities—such as Berlin and London—have attracted huge migratory inflows from other European countries (and from outside EU) and East–West migrations have been strongly increasing. Our research, considering migrants going to Germany and the UK from Italy, Spain, Bulgaria and Romania and from the latter two countries to Italy and Spain, focuses exactly on such flows. According to the literature, for many workers from the East European countries, far from the life-style motivations just highlighted, migratory life in the 'West' has basically become practices of pure human survival, living on low wages, and doing tough jobs in degrading conditions (Castellani, 2018; King, 2018).

Furthermore, the 2008 economic crisis has pushed job seekers leaving South European countries to face their rising unemployment (Bartolini et al., 2017; Dimitriadis, Fullin, & Fischer-Souan, 2019). The research focusing on these intra-EU movements reminds us of their similarities with traditional economic migrations. Castellani (2018), for instance, investigated the conditions of Italians and Spaniards in Berlin and showed

that they often have low-skilled jobs even if they have a medium/high level of education. Several obstacles made their integration in the destination labour market difficult and explain downgrading trajectories: from the recognition of education titles and the requirements of specific professional bodies that regulate several high and low-skill occupations, to the inadequate knowledge of the local language.

Dimitriadis et al. (2019) found similar results. Moreover, national welfare systems can leave people coming from other European countries without some basic social protections, despite their European citizenship (Lillie & Simola, 2016). What was seldom investigated is whether new intra-EU migrants are aware of the difficulties they have to face and try to prepare their departure accordingly or, on the contrary, whether they perceive their migration as a smooth process that does not require any special groundwork.

Once people decide to migrate, they also have to define where to go. Expectations and social imaginaries about the destination countries play a relevant role in this regard (Pessar & Mahler, 2002). When analysing the preparation for the departure of migrants it is worth referring to the literature that investigated the social imaginaries and, in particular, that focused on those concerning places of departure/destination.

The concept of social imaginary has been widely debated in sociology. Various authors have referred to social imaginary as the way in which a given group of people imagines and narrates their life and the social reality in which they live (Castoriadis, 1997; O'Reilly, 2014). Social imaginary operates through the construction of meanings and, in particular, of myths, legends and shared narratives. According to this perspective, it can only exist if it is socially shared. Moreover, social imaginary is not necessarily a reflection of reality, nor is it totally the result of imagination, but rather it is a set of meanings shared by a community. The construction of social imaginaries is thus closely linked to institutions, to the set of shared values, to the cultural aspects that characterise a particular community and that contribute to defining how individuals perceive and understand the society they belong to (Taylor, 2004) and how they act (Benson, 2012). The approach of Appadurai (1996) is instead different, interpreting social imagination as an everyday practice that is constantly 'at work.' This approach highlights the role that the imaginary plays in consolidating and strengthening the agency of each individual. According to Appadurai, it is only thanks to the ability to imagine alternative futures that individuals become capable of making decisions and changing their lives. Hence, from literature emerges a tension between institutional factors, cultural framework and individual agency in the construction processes of social imaginaries that contribute to the social construction of reality.

In the migration studies domain, some authors have analysed how the interaction between shared social representations and individual imaginations has become an important factor in the processes concerning migration decisions at the global level (Benson, 2012). These processes of collective imaginaries' construction, although strongly 'embedded' in specific socio-economic contexts, are often 'enhanced' and conveyed by multiple communication channels, allowing a transnational diffusion. In this regard, Abrutyn and Mueller (2014) have revisited the social theories of Gabriel Tarde (2010)—who provided a first analysis of the spread of emotions, attitudes, and behaviour in society—highlighting how the concept of contagion could be relevant in order to explain migrations. Specifically, the concept of contagion was used to highlight how decisions to migrate could be affected by the fact that 'other people' migrated or by media's discourse about people leaving their home country. Indeed, the increasing use of social media seems to have widened the 'contagion' effect. New technologies mediate social life and migrants take advantage of them to shorten distances and build new ways of relating, both with the destination community and with their community of origin after leaving their home country. As Mapelli (2019, p. 14) wrote, social media "become virtual spaces in which some groups can create a feeling of community belonging." Salazar (2011) has instead highlighted how collective imaginaries related to migratory processes can become 'creative acts,' capable of improving the mobility capacities of people who live in disadvantaged situations in economic and power terms. These creative actions, which allow people to imagine themselves abroad, testify to the presence of individual agency even in situations characterised by evident institutional constraints and socio-economic disadvantages.

As far as social imaginaries relevantly affect the decision to migrate, they can also play a relevant role in the preparation phase, when people take (or should take) the first steps to approach their destination. Some research has highlighted how specific social imaginaries contribute to making a particular place a desirable destination for some social groups (Benson, 2012; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014). In this case, we are dealing with collective imaginaries that derive from a variable articulation of cultural factors, narratives, shared meanings and contingent aspects. These factors interact with individual factors, i.e., the experience of those who have already completed the migration process, which helps to strengthen or modify the prevailing imaginaries. The appropriation of these kinds of collective imaginary thus becomes an important element to explain the selection of a specific destination and how people approach it.

Concerning the latter point, some collective imaginaries are focused on specific cities, which are represented as places where, for various reasons, migrants can 'easily' achieve better working and life conditions (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Moreover, as Maile and Griffiths (2012, p. 31) showed in their empirical research on Berlin, "the idea of quality of life is also overlaid by an array of imaginary and emotional investments which are rooted in individual biography and personal experi-

ence." More generally, the two authors pointed out that both Berlin and London—cities that are lived in but also 'imagined'—become:

> The repositories for a range of ambiguous emotional states. The issue…is what a city represents, or comes to represent, for individuals at particular points in time. Economic factors play a role but are mediated by an imaginative engagement with the city in which relationships and change in lifestyle are particularly significant. (Maile & Griffiths, 2012, p. 48)

3. Research Aims and Method

This article investigates how European migrants, who moved or plan to move to another European country, prepare their departure. It draws on data from a Horizon 2020-funded research project on intra-EU mobility that aimed to explore migrants' lived experiences (Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets [GEMM] project). The analysis is based on 240 in-depth interviews carried out between November 2016 and June 2017 by national research teams based in Italy, Spain, Bulgaria and Romania. As explained by the introduction of this thematic issue, the fieldwork included 160 interviews with Italian and Spanish migrants in the UK and Germany and with Bulgarian and Romanian migrants in the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain; 40 interviews concerned potential migrants, i.e., people who decided to move abroad from the four countries. Another 40 interviews involved experts working in employment agencies (either public or private).

Respondents who have already migrated were asked to describe how they had prepared their departure, while prospective migrants explained what they were doing in order to get ready to leave their country in the near future. The interviews have been recorded, transcribed and analysed using MAXQDA software for qualitative analysis. The respondents were equally divided between men and women. One-third was low-skilled working (or willing to work) in construction, domestic care, retail and services; two-thirds were high-skilled working in finance, ICT, construction and health. Nurses can be considered medium-skilled and, in our analysis, were taken into consideration together with the low-skilled migrants. The sample is quite large, but it is distributed among four countries of origin/destination and differentiated by gender, industry and skill level. Given the lack of literature on the preparation for migration, our analysis had mainly an explorative goal. In some cases, we compared the experiences of migrants, highlighting differences linked to the home country or the skill level, and stressing industry specificities. In other cases, results cannot be differentiated along such dimensions and were analysed from a more general perspective. For more details about the methodology and the sample, see the introduction of the thematic issue and the research project website (http://gemm2020.eu).

4. Lived Experiences of Preparation for Departure

As mentioned, the article has shed light on the migrants' lived experiences of the preparation phase, i.e., how they prepared for the departure after having decided to move abroad. In some cases, tools and preparation strategies of high-skilled people seemed to be very different from those of medium and low-skilled ones. In other cases, similar tools are used by high and low-skilled people in different ways. Some other differences are linked to the country of origin or to the industry. On the other hand, as we will describe in the last section, there are also some issues that seem common to our respondents, independent from the skill level, the country of origin and the industry. Notwithstanding some overlapping, from an analytical point of view, it seemed helpful to start presenting our findings, stressing the differences between medium/low and high-skilled respondents (the distinction between high and medium/low-skilled respondents is based on the GEMM research design and refers to their occupations, or to the jobs they are looking for). The last subsection will highlight the characteristics of the preparation phase that do not differ by skill level.

4.1. Medium and Low-Skilled People Preparing to Move Abroad

The interviews highlighted that, during the preparation phase, it is quite common among medium and low-skilled people to use social networks in order to gather information on the destination. This practice was predominantly recurrent among Romanian and Bulgarian low-skilled workers of our sample, mainly employed in the construction or domestic sectors in Italy and Spain. They usually refer to their strong social ties such as family members, kin, and friends (Granovetter, 1974). These people represent an important source of social capital (Coleman, 1990) that migrant workers can also 'activate' as a protective net in case of difficulties upon arrival. New Intra-EU migrants, as other migrants, opt to move to places where they already have social ties or they think that it is easier to build social ties (for instance, in cities where the national community is numerous; Massey et al., 1998). Moreover, social networks play an increasing role in specific sectors (for instance, the construction sector) where recruitment is often based on networks and informal working practices.

Weak social ties are also an important source of information for medium and low-skilled people. Different from the previously cited low-skilled workers moving from Romania and Bulgaria to Italy and Spain, Italians and Spaniards working as clerks and in the hospitality sector explained that information before arrival was mainly collected through social media (for instance, Facebook groups) or by activating weak ties (for instance, ex-colleagues) in the destination country. A possible explanation of this difference among our respondents is linked to the industry's specifics: Finding employment as a bar-

tender or clerk may not depend on network-based hiring, and job seekers may apply for a job by either going directly to the workplace or responding to (online) advertisements. Social media can thus provide very useful information to people who want to migrate and enable them to create new social ties.

Moreover, for prospective migrants, reading stories or collecting lived experiences of migration through social media strengthens their confidence. Life fragments of those who have already emigrated shared on social media reinforce the idea that there are 'real' opportunities for success and that the choice to migrate can be easier than expected:

> I visited webpages or web-communities concerning Italians in London, where you can find very useful information or where it is possible to help each other, to find somebody who can give you a hand. You can find job advertisements too….This kind of information is a benefit for people who decide to go abroad. (Italian, waiter/electrician in London, male)

Another dimension that plays an important role has to do with the continuity over time of specific national groups' migration flows. Intra-EU migration flows from Central and East European countries started from the early 1990s onward, after the fall of the Iron Curtain (King, 2018). Thus, it can be argued that the continuity of these flows during almost the last two decades may imply the perpetuation of migrant networks; and vice versa. With regard to migration flows of Italians and Spaniards though, there was a discontinuity and, as a result, migrant networks have become considerably weaker, if not dissolved in many cases (Dimitriadis et al., 2019).

Preparation before departure usually includes learning the language of the destination country. Linguistic preparation allows not only a smooth entry into the labour market, but also constitutes a factor facilitating integration in the receiving society. Notwithstanding its importance, learning the language of the destination country before departure was not considered an important action by the medium/low-skilled people we interviewed. Specifically, language competencies tend to be considered as non-essential skills for low-skilled Romanian and Bulgarian job seekers in the construction or domestic sectors. In these cases, many respondents entered the labour market of the destination country with limited knowledge of the local language:

> If they offer me [a job], right, I repeat myself I shall learn to speak Spanish. It's not something impossible. (Bulgarian, IT specialist planning to move to Spain, male)

Similar findings concern Italian and Spanish migrants who found employment in the hospitality sector in London and Berlin. Generally, most who had limited knowledge of the local language found jobs in Italian/Spanish style restaurants or cafes owned or managed by fellow nationals (see also, Lulle, Morosanu, & King, 2018). In this case, they were able to find employment and learn the local language or improve their linguistic skills at work. At the same time, however, several respondents were aware of the risks of working among co-nationals, as it frequently limits progress in local language acquisition and social and cultural integration in the destination.

The empirical research highlighted some important aspects concerning the administrative procedures that migrants can complete before departure. These include applying for recognition of education titles as well as the procedures to open a bank account or to acquire a tax number and health insurance. Notwithstanding, the lived experiences of migrants showed that these procedures might take a long time and constitute a barrier to access job opportunities when migrants arrive in the host country, the medium and low-skilled people we interviewed rarely spent time on these issues before departure. In all four national cases, respondents often claimed that they collected all necessary documents after arrival. However, an interesting difference regards Romanian and Bulgarian low-skilled workers migrating to Italy and Spain: after their arrival, they usually relied on their migrant network to complete all of the required documentation. As said previously, since their migration is perpetuated through migration networks, newcomers from Bulgaria and Romania seem to resort more to the support of relatives and friends, whereas Italians and Spanish migrants reported doing so less frequently. A Romanian respondent, for instance, pointed out that his relatives working in Italy carried out all the administrative arrangements he needed. Consequently, he did not personally undertake any administrative measures, nor did he use any official channels to find a job once arrived in Italy.

Moreover, the interviews with Bulgarian and Romanian medium or low-skilled people highlighted a certain scepticism vis-à-vis public institutions, which deterred them from contacting public offices before departure. The generally negative perceptions of public authorities seemed to urge some interviewed Bulgarian low-skilled workers to postpone administrative procedures after arrival in order to avoid dealing with the Bulgarian bureaucracy:

> I have a passport, an identity card. What should I look for there? Am I a criminal to go signing there? [In Italy] everything happens faster. Now if you go to our embassy [it is much slower]. That's what we Bulgarians are. Doesn't matter where we are, it is as Bulgarians….They simply don't know how they should contact with people. They are always cold; they don't explain to you, you have to guess. (Bulgarian construction worker in Madrid, male)

This general trend concerning the preparation of medium and low-skilled people did not concern people working or looking for a job in the health sector. In this

case, both the recruitment process and the preparation phase were very structured thanks to the role of some institutional actors as private employment agencies. Indeed, they did not only match the work demand and supply of health professionals, but they also provided information and services to prospective migrants. Such information regarded employment conditions in the destination country, the workplaces' organisational culture, and advice concerning the settlement in the new context. Moreover, health professionals who moved abroad through labour intermediaries took specific preparatory steps that include language courses, support for bureaucratic and administrative procedures and, in some cases, housing services:

> There was a fair in Rome where all these German companies had job offers. Whoever was interested could take part in a meeting in Rome: Basically, it was a cognitive interview where all companies came and offered jobs, showing and explaining what they wanted. They talked with the candidates and they decided if the candidate was more appropriate for caring services at home, or in hospital, etc. I did this interview for the hospital where I currently work. I was chosen in short by the two representatives of the hospital who were present during the meeting in Rome, so once I was chosen I started the German course, and during the course I had already signed the contract that provided six months of trial; after those six months the contract became open-ended. (Italian nurse in Hamburg, female)

4.2. High Skilled People Facing the Preparation Phase

The fieldwork has highlighted a perception of a 'smooth' mobility across European countries, more for high-skilled people than for the low-skilled ones: In several cases, high-skilled respondents working or seeking a job in finance, IT, health and construction did not seem to be worried about possible obstacles in their migration paths. Anyway, this category of respondents also prepared their departure, even if, in many cases, during the interviews, they put in the background what they really took as preparatory steps.

During the preparation phase, high-skilled people seemed to use 'weak ties' or the internet in a more extensive and 'targeted' way in comparison to the low-skilled respondents. What is of great relevance here is the use of social media such as Facebook, which allows the reactivation of 'latent' ties (old friends or ex-colleagues), or the developing of new contacts among users. Such contacts circulate information that helps potential migrants to know what they may expect upon arrival: how to find a job but also where to find accommodation or the living costs in the new context. For instance, the majority of highly skilled respondents claimed that they contacted acquaintances, who had emigrated recently, through social media or collected information through Facebook groups such as 'Italians in London,' or more employment-oriented, such as 'Spanish Doctors in the UK.'

With regard to the language, a basic knowledge of English is quite widespread in all the four countries we considered, but we found several cases of high-skilled workers who moved to Germany without any preparation concerning the German language, relying only on their English knowledge. In this respect, of great relevance is the sector in which these migrants are employed (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014) as well as the particularity of Berlin as a global city. More precisely, high-skilled workers in IT or finance may work exclusively in English and, more generally, many respondents consider Berlin as an international city in which one can 'get by' without speaking German:

> I have been living here for five and a half years…and I do not speak German. I understand I know a few words….But I don't need it! That's the problem and the advantage of this city: the language is not needed. There are no problems in my sector. At the supermarket all speak English, that is to say in Berlin, English is widely spoken. (Italian IT technician in Berlin, male)

This attitude was also confirmed after some years spent in Germany. With this regard, some respondents were aware of the cost of working in English-language 'bubbles' when it came to social integration. For instance, a Spanish investment fund manager in Berlin regretted that:

> I speak very bad German, I mean, I can't even say that I speak German. I can order a coffee; I can understand a few things, but no….It's very difficult with my job to practice the language because I spend my days working in English. My work is focused on the English-speaking world. Also, [it doesn't help] that whenever I try to speak to someone in German, they switch to English. (Spanish finance analyst in Berlin, male)

Besides the positive perceptions of the high-skilled respondents about the freedom and the easiness of intra-EU mobility, the research also highlighted some obstacles our respondents faced when they dealt with some bureaucratic procedures. They referred, for instance, to the recognition procedures of educational titles they attained in the departure country. In general, the process of recognition takes time, whether it is done before leaving or afterwards. As regards people working in the health sector, highly skilled as well as medium/low-skilled ones, the fieldwork highlighted that the role of employment agencies, which operate as intermediaries, can be crucial in order to make these procedures faster and smoother.

4.3. When the Preparation Phase Is 'Squeezed'

Some respondents, both high and low-skilled, did not report being 'prepared' before their departure. They col-

lected little information on their destination, they did not make any effort in improving their knowledge of the local language and they did not seek a job before migrating. They often recounted that they had no idea of where to go while they considered leaving their home country. For instance, Romanians and Bulgarians who aimed to work as construction or domestic workers, when asked about the steps they have already taken preparing for departure, answered: "I bought the airplane tickets." According to an employment agency's counsellor, many Bulgarian people, after their country's admission into the EU, assumed that the identity card is all one needs to come and start working in another country.

The study sheds light on some factors that can help to explain this 'shortening' of the preparation phase. First, participation in some exchange programs—such as Erasmus for university students—had a significant impact on the attitudes of respondents concerning the preparation phase. Indeed, the idea of freedom of movement across European countries, which these programs convey, is not only formal: People have the opportunity to spend periods of their lives in other countries and therefore to know them better than when travelling as tourists. Many Italian and Spanish respondents had lived in various European countries, mainly through European exchange programmes. This was most common for the high-skilled workers of our sample, such as doctors and financial experts. Romanian and Bulgarian graduates participate less frequently to the Erasmus program, but they often 'compensated' for the lack of international mobility programs with their networks of already emigrated co-nationals. For instance, it was common among Romanians to visit relatives and friends already residing in the destination country before they decided to migrate. Only a few Italians or Spaniards reported similar stories. This difference is explained by the already mentioned different migration history of these countries.

Another factor that can explain why our respondents faced the decision to migrate with little preparation is the spatial proximity between home and destination country. This element makes the decision to emigrate more easily reversible:

> Two young guys from my town told me: "We are going to London to look for work, if you want, you can come with us." And so, I had money saved and I told myself: "They know English….And, look, I've visited London twice, so I know the city a bit, although I've only been on holidays….I'll go, I'll see how it goes for a month and if I don't find anything [a job], I'll just come back [to Spain]." (Spanish construction worker in London, male)

Finally, the analysis of interviews showed the presence of some shared social imaginaries that may have contributed to 'squeeze' the preparation phase. They are over-simplified representations of both countries of departure and destination. With regard to the latter point, they refer to some countries but, more specifically, to two big cities: Berlin and London. The meanings connected to these imaginaries—which are extremely positive for the destination and very negative for the countries of departure—reinforced the prevalent perception of smooth mobility across European countries, discarding the need for any specific preparation.

Concerning the destination places, the fieldwork showed that some stereotyped images of Italy, Spain and the UK seemed to be still significant factors that can affect the preparation phase of Bulgarians and Romanian migrants. Specifically, these representations strengthened the perception of cultural proximities or similar attitudes, which can justify less attention to the preparation phase. Moreover, in these cases, common imaginaries are built on elements that frequently derive from old movies and 'old-fashioned' representations of the countries of destination. For instance, several Bulgarian respondents—who arrived in Italy in the 1990s or early 2000s—claimed that what they knew about Italy was based on Fellini's movies; for them, Italians were people who talk loudly and gesture and who hang laundry to dry from balconies. In the same way, perceptions of the UK directly referred to romantic and Victorian novels which Bulgarian respondents became familiar with through English-language textbooks. These imaginaries seemed a sort of 'crystallisation' of those shared by prospective migrants of previous decades when access to more practical and in-depth information on countries of destination was less readily available.

For this reason, we would have expected a lower diffusion of stereotyped images among current prospective migrants and among migrants from countries with a migration history characterised by a discontinuity in recent years, like Italy and Spain. However, the fieldwork did not confirm our expectations. Indeed, many respondents seemed to be enchanted by 'myths' and common positive narratives mainly concerning Berlin and London. This idea resonates not only with migrants already resident abroad but also with those who are planning to move. The two cities have been often stated as urban areas with dynamic labour markets, in which talent and ability are recognised and valued, but also as cities with a vibrant cultural life:

> Apart from architects, if we are talking about other graduates with a higher secondary school or technical degree and not a university degree, then we are talking about England, there is always the myth of London, even if I [will be working] as a pizza [delivery] man; but I want to go to London. (Italian receptionist in London, female)

> Because Berlin is a trendy city. It is so fashionable now….How can I explain? It's an amazing city. (Italian civil engineer in Berlin, male)

> England is a challenge that is interesting for me and for us because here is the market, everybody wants to be in London, everyone wants to do business there. (Bulgarian marketing representative in London, female)

The study showed that the role of social media in sharing over-simplified representations of the destination places and common imaginaries was relevant. For instance, many respondents drew attention to the fact that 'so many' of their classmates or work colleagues had applied to foreign universities or been hired by foreign employers and that this had encouraged them to follow their example. These factors seem to operate almost at the margins of consciousness. A Spanish respondent, who moved to Berlin, referring to his short preparation phase highlighted that he had friends and family members living in different European countries:

> I think that all of that was 'in the air.' My sister had also left [Spain] a year and a half before me…for London….So, obviously, I was thinking [in terms of] "my sister has left and she is doing well." That was also an incentive to [leave]. (Spain housekeeper in Berlin, male)

In this case, the respondent did not follow his sister to London, he did not use his 'strong tie' to collect information about London, but he 'used' the migration experience of his sister on a more symbolic level in order to better translate his idea of moving to Berlin into a concrete plan. Similarly, several Italian respondents expressed their interest in specific destinations in ways that evoked more the role of 'contagion' than some economic rationality (Abrutyn & Mueller, 2014). Indeed, they talked of London as a 'cool' destination and referred to the fact that 'so many Italians have flocked there':

> Basically, I was curious, because everyone speaks of the English model and everyone tries to take it as an example because it seems to work because it is efficient….Everyone went to London and so I do too. (Italian cook in London, male)

The shrinking of the preparation steps was also due to some (negative) shared representations of the departure countries. They seemed to contribute to the spreading of the perception of the exit option as a matter of urgency and as a not-too-risky choice. Indeed, the recent economic crisis has increased the negative perceptions of the departure countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and Spain), in terms of job opportunities, working conditions, salaries, meritocracy and the diffusion of corruption. The majority of respondents showed few—or no—expectations for the future of their country, both in economic and social terms. In this case, public and media discourse played an important role in building and sharing some prevalent narratives. The topic of emigration has been sensationalised in all four countries and has sparked disproportionately high levels of press, television and social media coverage (Bygnes & Flipo, 2017; Caneva, 2016). Notwithstanding, the direct consequences of the crisis were not always lived as personal experiences of unemployment. Our respondents were indirectly, yet constantly reminded through images and reports in the media of the deep economic problems in their countries. For instance, a low-skilled Spanish respondent—fed-up of working in the informal sector and recently dropped out of his professional training programme—was asked whether he had considered exploring employment options in other parts of the country instead of directly searching abroad and he answered:

> No, because Spain is hopeless. I could see how things were going on TV. It [Spain] was in very bad shape three years ago. (Spanish receptionist in London, male)

In the Bulgarian and Romanian cases, a general feeling of disillusion, often targeting rather abstract notions of 'the state,' 'the mentality,' and 'moral breakdown,' seemed to be prevalent, emphasising the 'need' to emigrate. Bygnes and Flipo (2017), in their research on Romanian emigrants in Spain, highlighted similar findings, noting a great deal of distrust in Romania's politicians and institutions. In general, the level of media saturation may have had a catalysing effect for the translation of aspirations for migration to concrete decisions.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the preparation phase, which stays between the decision to migrate and the departure, highlighted some relevant aspects of the lived experiences and the perceptions that migrants and prospective migrants have of intra-EU mobility. The steps they decide to take, and the expectations they have, reveal how they decide to convert the decision to depart into empirical actions and strategies and how they approach the migration. For instance, as the analysis of the empirical data has shown, important actions in terms of the improvement of language skills and the fulfilment of administrative procedures can be taken before leaving the country of origin; but, in several cases, people do not consider them necessary, even if this decision can delay or even impede the search for a job and the settlement in the destination country.

The fieldwork has shed light on some relevant differences between high and medium/low-skilled migrants in terms of actions, tools, and attitudes. These differences were explained not only by their human capital but also by some specific social factors. According to the skill level, social networks were used in different ways, as they can play a different role in collecting information. Experiences abroad helped in facing the preparation phase: Highly-educated people had them thanks to university exchange programs, while transnational social networks played a particularly relevant role for less-

educated migrants from Bulgaria and Romania who were used to visiting friends and relatives that live in other European countries. Migration history of the country of origin, therefore, matters in this regard and explains some differences between Bulgarian and Romanian migrants, on the one hand, and Spanish and Italian migrants on the other.

Social media arose as a very important tool to collect information on the destination countries, but it is used in different ways by high-skilled migrants—where a more functional use prevailed—and by medium and low-skilled ones. In general, informal ways to collect information were predominant, except for people working or looking for a job in the health sector, where private employment agencies had a relevant role in the preparation phase. This specific case put to the fore the possibilities of action for institutional actors, either public or private, supporting prospective migrants and guiding their preparation for departure.

With small differences linked to the skill level, the study showed that most of the respondents, while preparing their departure, perceived the EU as a space where they are free to move. The fragments of life we collected about the preparation steps to migrate highlighted that this process is characterised by some aspects of 'smoothness' or 'fluidity,' at least in the migrants' perceptions. The idea of freedom of movement within the EU seems thus strongly embedded among the respondents who, in some cases, under-evaluated the difficulties and the obstacles to mobility and decided to leave their home country more light-heartedly than expected. Moreover, the analysis put to the fore the pivotal role of social imaginaries about the origin and destination countries. Focusing on the preparation phase, we highlighted in particular how some positive myths about Berlin and London affected the perceptions of the destination and how the 'contagion' effect can take place in this regard. At the same time, over-simplified representations of studied countries of origin can contribute to squeezing the preparation phase, emphasising the urgency to migrate and the migrants' bewilderment facing the first steps of their choice.

Some policy implications can be listed very briefly in conclusion. First, empirical evidence suggests that policymakers should focus on the city factors that may attract European migrants. On the other hand, they need to be aware of the consequences that negative expectations concerning the economic and political situation of a country can have in terms of migration outflows. Second, the fieldwork has shown that investment in foreign language teaching in public schools and long-life learning programs could limit the difficulties that new migrants may face in the European labour market. A third implication concerns the need for homogenisation of professional training across European countries. It could further facilitate mobility since bureaucratic requirements within specific sectors currently represent a barrier to European migrants' insertion in the European labour markets.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Diego Coletto is Associate Professor of Economic Sociology and Sociology of Work at the Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan (Italy). He holds a degree in Political Sciences and a PhD in Economic Sociology. His main research interests are the informal economy, street-level bureaucracy, urban ethnography, and employment relations. He has participated in several national and international research projects. He published two books and various articles in national and international journals among which the *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *Review of Economics and Institutions*, *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*.

Giovanna Fullin is Associate Professor in Economic Sociology at the University of Milan-Bicocca. She holds a degree in Economics and a PhD in Economic Sociology. Her main interests cover the labour market structure and trends, work conditions in the service sector, retail work, and immigrants in the labour market. She has participated in several international research projects. She has published several articles in national and international journals, among which *Work, Employment & Society*, *International Migration*, *Work and Occupations*, *European Journal of Employment Relations*, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*.

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Article

(Self-)Reflecting on International Recruitment: Views on the Role of Recruiting Agencies in Bulgaria and Romania

Siyka Kovacheva [1,2,*], Boris Popivanov [2,3] and Marin Burcea [4,5]

[1] Department of Applied Sociology, Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski, 4000 Plovdiv, Bulgaria
[2] New Europe Centre for Regional Studies, 4002 Plovdiv, Bulgaria; E-Mail: skovacheva@neweurope-research.eu (S.K.)
[3] Department of Political Science, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, 1504 Sofia, Bulgaria;
E-Mail: bpopivanov@phls.uni-sofia.bg
[4] Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology, 011038 Bucharest, Romania
[5] Department of Economic and Administrative Sciences, University of Bucharest, 030018 Bucharest, Romania;
E-Mail: marin.burcea@faa.unibuc.ro

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
This article focuses on the recruiting practices of public and private agencies dealing with international labour mediation in Bulgaria and Romania. Based on interpretative analysis of 20 in-depth interviews with professionals working in migrant recruiting agencies in the two countries, we aim to understand their views on the advantages and disadvantages of their services in comparison with other mobility channels: such as informal networks, direct contacts with employers, or unofficial Internet sites. The article examines the ways in which international labour mediation practitioners construct their target group—migrants—in terms of motivation, human capital, and/or challenges of their adaptation to the new context. We then look at intermediaries' perceptions of employers' needs and expectations. We finish with uncovering recruiters' underlying assessment of the national and European mobility policies and the outcomes they see for individual migrants, employers and the countries of departure and destination.

Keywords
Bulgaria; European Union; labour market; labour mediation; migration; mobility; recruiting agencies; recruitment; Romania

Issue
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1. Introduction

Emigration has had a prominent presence in public debates in the two European Union (EU) member states—Bulgaria and Romania—ever since 1989 when the two countries experienced a regime change from communism to multiparty democracies (Valsan, Druica, & Ianole, 2015). Both countries opened their state borders and introduced the right to free movement together with many other human rights that had been suppressed during the communist regime. Media discourses, however, do not welcome the expansion of mobility rights so much but rather focus on the negative consequences of emigration. The dominant construction in Bulgaria is that emigration is contributing to the depopulation of the country (Belcheva, 2011; Mintchev et al., 2012) while in Romania it is generally seen as destroying family relations when migrants leave their children and elderly parents behind

(Tyldum, 2015). Among the economic costs, the most featured are labour shortages in certain sectors, such as healthcare (Druica & Ianole-Calin, in press), ageing of the workforce, and the 'brain drain' (Alexe et al., 2011; Beleva & Dimitrov, 2016; Ionescu, 2015). From a political perspective, emigration is weighted to lean toward the negative side of the equation reducing the protest 'voice' inside the country (Krastev, 2014). Less attention is paid to research arguments for the positive effects, such as remittances sent home by migrants (Goschin, 2014; Open Society Institute [OSI], 2010) or the rise in skills (Kostadinova, 2007) and enriched identities (Zeleva & Draganova, 2015).

In the public debate in the two countries, the organisations regulating migration flows remain invisible. Academic research commonly emphasises the role of informal channels for migration (Markova, 2006; OSI, 2010) showing that Bulgarian and Romanian diasporas' (family social capital) 'weak' ties act as recruiting channels trusted by prospective migrants. In this article we examine the role of public and private organisations specialising in international labour mediation. We draw upon qualitative interviews with experts and practitioners on different organizational levels inside such institutions which were explored as part of GEMM (Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration & Markets) project featured in this issue. Applying interpretative analysis, we look at how the professionals perceive the needs and expectations of prospective migrants and foreign employers, and how they construct the advantages of their own recruiting styles in trying to sell their services to both sides. Finally, we highlight the underlying assumptions about the implications of the EU free movement policies that the agency workers see for individual migrants and the countries of departure and acceptance.

2. Legal and Institutional Context of Mobility in Bulgaria and Romania

The process of migration is situated in a particular social time and place, rendering specific features to the migration flows. The level of the flow, the motivations and channels used by the migrants are grounded in both the sending and receiving context. In the 1990s, there was a high emigration flow from Bulgaria and Romania. It was linked to the economic difficulties in the first decade of transition from the centrally planned to a market economy characterised by privatization and closure of many state-owned enterprises and a steep rise of unemployment. While the former communist countries opened their state borders for those wishing to leave, in a shift from maximum control to a liberal emigration policy, the borders of the EU countries remained largely closed and the former's citizens needed visas even for short-term tourism. So, this first emigration wave used mostly informal channels of migration and illegal work was the main form of migrants' integration in the receiving labour market. The key sectors incorporating migrants were hospitality, cleaning, construction and trade (OSI, 2010). After 2000, with the improvement of the economic prospects, the emigration wave started to decline and migration became mostly temporary, in comparison with previous stages when many young people left for good (Atoyan et al., 2016; Stanchev, 2005). The composition of the flow diversified, increasing the shares of skilled migrants and middle-aged women. Students became a significant group among migrants, seeking undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in Western universities, and many stayed after graduation in more or less qualified jobs (Mintchev et al., 2012). The economic crisis of 2008 did not lead to the expected mass return of emigrants, but rather slowed down the emigration flows (Krasteva, 2014).

The present post-2014 stage started with another policy change when the last EU countries, including the UK, lifted the restrictions to the internal market for Bulgarians and Romanians. It was marked with a new increase in emigration. With the new refugee influx in Europe, many state institutions in Romania and Bulgaria focused on dealing with immigrants and the regulation of their entry, work and social integration, and paid less attention to outmigration, which was still much higher than the inflow of immigrants.

In the last period, unlike earlier ones, the state has become increasingly involved in labour mediation. As significant policy actors in the two countries are established, the public employment agencies which are members of the European Job Mobility Network (EURES) have specialised EURES advisors among their employees to provide services to job seekers and employers in the EU. There are also labour and social policy offices at some of the diplomatic missions in EU countries. Further, bilateral agreements foster mobility abroad—both within and beyond the EU. However, these practices are criticised for providing unequal opportunities through selective and hierarchical immigration policies (Blitz, 2014).

Since lifting barriers, private mediating agencies also became increasingly active in the field of recruitment of potential emigrants. They are obliged to register officially but some are not licensed and recruit people for low-qualified jobs and no decent working and living conditions. In this way, these 'migration industry' actors in Bulgaria and Romania reflect both processes of expansion of intermediaries in international labour migration (known in Europe and beyond) and deficiencies in control, equal treatment and respect for migrants' rights characteristic for their functioning (cf. van den Broek, Harvey, & Groutsis, 2015). Many internet sites also offer work placements under the heading 'Directly from Employer' and recruit care workers. Ethnic businesses in the receiving country (jobs created by co-nationals for co-nationals) offer short-term opportunities but might act as a trap in the longer run as they reduce opportunities for growth and integration in the host society (Bloch & McKay, 2015). Characteristically, despite the huge variety of opportunities for labour mobility, the intermediaries

sector takes advantage mostly of the basic premise of free EU movement and rights to work in the EU member states. This is also the focus of our study.

3. The Agency of Intermediaries as a Research Area

This article builds upon a body of research that examines the role of recruiting agencies for matching the demand and supply of skills on a global scale (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2013; Martin, 2005; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016). Fewer studies have concentrated on mobility mediation practices in the European labour market (Green, Atfield, Staniewicz, Baldauf, & Adam, 2014; Rolfe & Hudson-Sharp, 2016) where public and private agencies are expected to facilitate the allocation and utilisation of human resources in the European labour market and foster economic growth. A bulk of this research has been investigating agencies recruiting Eastern European migrants to the regional markets in the more developed Western economies which experience shortages of specific skills (Friberg & Eldring, 2013; Jones, 2014). As a rule, most of the studied agencies are registered in the West and often act as employers themselves, offering flexible forms of employment to recent migrants from Eastern Europe. There is a scarcity of literature throwing light upon the practices of agencies registered and functioning in Bulgaria and Romania that send migrants to other EU countries. These agencies became more visible after 2007, the year of both countries' EU accession, in a (rather unfavourable) context: when the boom of Eastern European migrants had already started to decline (Jones, 2014), and the economic recession had begun to shrink the demand of foreign labour in the Western markets while Southern European countries (such as Italy, Spain and Greece) started sending migrants to the North. For some time, immigration restrictions for Bulgarians and Romanians were still in force in several EU countries (for e.g., in Germany and in the UK), and such controls officially regulated the number of incoming migrants and were also used to channel new migrants into unskilled and precarious employment (Anderson, 2010; Sporton, 2013).

Cross-border mobility involves high-transaction costs both for workers and employers, so recruiting agencies seek to gain profit by offering services and brokerage to both sides. With the increasing global flows, they became actors in a new area of commercial profit named 'migration industry' (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg-Sørensen, 2013; Salt & Stein, 1997) or 'migrant recruitment industry' (ILO, 2017). The industry is very diverse—from small firms and individual brokers to large multinational corporations. In fact, it is viewed by scholars as a complex ensemble of actors and actions in the field of international migration which should not be reduced to business and infrastructure, although both play a substantial role. Migration industries and labour markets are found to be mutually constitutive as the former develop together with the moves for migration management procedures within the latter (Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012). In such a perspective, intermediaries do not just intermediate. Migration industries appear to produce a need for themselves in the migration processes through the knowledge they claim to possess. Labour market is not a given reality but rather actively produced arena in which intermediating actors execute transformative and not simply facilitating, structuring and controlling functions (Coe, Johns, & Ward, 2010; Cranston, 2018).

Seeking profit is not valid for the public agencies, which, instead, serve policy objectives established by the EU. Yet, the efficiency of their work is measured by similar quantitative criteria as those of private brokers: the number of matches between workers with employers. While ILO Convention no. 97 (ILO, 1949) recommended the mobility over borders only with the help of no-fee charging public employment agencies, the later Convention no. 181 (ILO, 1997) endorsed the legitimacy of services offered by private, for-profit employment agencies. The European Commission has consistently seen both types of the recruitment services as means to remove barriers to the free movement of labour. Recruitment agencies have now become embedded as important actors in transnational labour mobility.

Migration brokers act in a triangular set of relationships, mediating between workers and employers on meeting their needs and aspirations. But this relationship is not symmetrical, as employers exert more power and control than the potential employees and recruiters (Sporton, 2013). The main asset of recruiting agencies is their knowledge of workers willing to migrate and contacts with employers looking for workers to fill the labour shortages (Martin, 2005). The agencies claim to possess knowledge on both sides—supply and demand—being aware of the qualities of potential migrants and the structure of the labour market. They compete for clients in order to generate profits and seek to develop growth strategies (Grey, 2002). Their success depends on the speed with which they can provide suitable workers to the employers' demands. Yet, there is a high level of uncertainty in the process, so trustworthiness and good reputation are very important for the intermediaries (Friberg & Eldring, 2013). Current research extends to the issue of reputation of migratory destinations and the increasing role of intermediaries in shaping it (Harvey, Groutsis, & van den Broek, 2018) but rarely treats the reputation of the mobility framework in general, particularly of the EU.

The act of matching demand and supply is not neutral (Jones, 2014). The biggest advantage of migrants from less developed economies is that they are employees who are unlikely to complain about working conditions (Burawoy, 1976). At the same time, it should be noted that perceptions about needed workers are socially constructed and may vary. In previous research, it is extensively demonstrated that intermediaries are actively in-

volved in the process, apart from employers. Recruiters provide categorisation of the desirability of some forms of migration, thus influencing the labour market structure in the destination country, and engage in calculations about which migrants fit into existing national cultures, thus discriminating on ethnic basis (Kofman, 2008). Images of the 'ideal worker' and the 'good migrant' emerge through the work of recruiters whose motivation, after all, is to supply a desirable product. In this way, intermediaries produce embodied imaginaries of international migration by applying social and cultural and not just economic decisions of recruitment. Bodily appearance, self-discipline, realistic expectations are regularly included. Sex, age, nationality do matter, despite legal provisions. The 'ideal worker' corresponds to elusive requirements of employers, therefore it is accomplished only in the imaginary where the agency of recruiting agents is vital (Findlay, McCollum, Shubin, Apsite, & Krisjane, 2013; Shubin, Findlay, & McCollum, 2014). Academic debate in these directions has been increasingly occupied with cases of Central and Eastern migrants, and against this background, the scarcity of research on Bulgarian and Romanian examples becomes even more striking.

4. Data and Methods

This article contributes to the debate on recruiting agencies by examining the practices of those situated in the specific context of Bulgaria and Romania after the dropping of formal restrictions to the free movement of their nationals in Europe. In addition, our research adds to the debate the views and self-reflection of the recruiters themselves, highlighting the agency of the practitioners working in the agencies. We look into the ways they explain their actions and approaches and the meanings they attribute to them.

The analysis here draws upon qualitative interviews with experts from recruiting agencies conducted in Bulgaria and Romania during the period from November 2016 to April 2017 as part of the GEMM project. The research combined quantitative and qualitative methods to study the barriers to European mobility, the factors for the successful incorporation of migrants in the receiving societies and how the multi-dimensional process of migration can be managed to increase the potential for EU competitiveness and growth. One of the project strands focused on the 'lived' experiences of mobility, captured by in-depth interviews with different groups involved in the process: 'prospective' migrants (people who plan to move for work to a foreign country in less than a year); 'actual' migrants (who have lived for at least two years in a foreign country); and 'experts' from recruiting agencies (professionals in public and private agencies dealing with international labour mediation).

The project explored the latter group in Italy, Spain, Romania and Bulgaria, and each national team conducted about ten interviews with representatives of mediation services. Here we focus on the two Eastern European countries, which represent a rather similar context of 'migrant sending' countries, while the flow from the two Southern European ones has higher specificity to be dealt with in one article. The common situation with the sector of migrant recruiting agencies in both countries, the similar political and economic framework, and the common methodology of the study allowed us to present the findings in Bulgaria and Romania together.

We aimed to include equal numbers of representatives of private and public agencies and to achieve maximum diversity beyond this indicator (see Table 1). While public employment services and their EURES advisors were easily identifiable, the private companies were more difficult to find. They were selected from the official lists of registered organisations in both countries, but some did no longer exist or no longer dealt with international labour mediation. The private agencies that took part in our study were much smaller than the network of the regional and local employment agencies and reported having one to three employees. Most were independent agencies, while a a few were members of ADECCO (one of the world largest human resources-providing company) or of (bigger and older) Polish private recruiting agencies. Most of them recruited workers for both high- and low-skilled sectors of the economy and in a wide range of countries, with those in Romania having a broader transnational span.

The interviewees (one from each organisation) were employees on different levels of the organisational hierarchy: half of them were managers and one was the owner of a private agency. The professionals working in the public agencies agreed to be interviewed after being assured of the anonymity of their responses. Those working in the private companies, in addition to anonymity, insisted that no financial details would be discussed. In some cases, two and more meetings were necessary to establish trust with the interviewees (managers and employees) before getting final permission for the interview. During the fieldwork, we managed to establish contacts with key experts who knew how their companies started and changed in the course of development. All had post-

Table 1. Selection of recruiting agencies in the GEMM study.

	Type of agency		Sector			Destination countries			
	Private	Public	Any	High-skilled	Low-skilled	United Kingdom	Germany	EU	Any
Bulgaria	6	4	6	1	3	1	2	4	3
Romania	5	5	5	3	2	1	0	1	8

secondary education with a third holding MA degrees. Most were women in mid- to late-career stages. Many of the interviewees had spent some time in a foreign country, had created links with employers there, and had some knowledge of the local labour market and business culture.

We adopted a qualitative approach in constructing the interview guide and stimulated the interviewees to tell their stories of what it was like to work in such organisations before covering the more specific topics about the policies and practices of cross-border mediation in the EU. The fieldwork started after receiving ethical approval from academic bodies in the two countries and interviewees were informed in detail about the aims and methods of the study. All interviews, lasting between 45 minutes to two hours, were audio recorded with the consent of the respondents and then fully transcribed with some details removed in respect of the anonymity of the participants and their organisations. Two researchers coded each of the narratives respecting the original language of the interviewees, making reference to the questions but also allowing room for specific terms and associations in the discourse of the interviewee and then derived emerging categories by identifying common themes and explanations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We do not claim representativeness of our findings for the recruiting sector as a whole but tried to cover a wide range of recruiters' views and perspectives and developed understandings through accessing the meanings the interviewed migration intermediaries assigned to them.

5. Self-Positioning and Target-Group Construction

Since state and private migrant recruiting agencies act as mediators between foreign employers and local workers—candidates for jobs abroad—it is interesting to see how they assess their own role and construct their target groups. In this section we explore the perceptions of the labour mediators of themselves, the 'ideal applicant' and the 'ideal employer.'

Our study showed that in the triangular relationship the mediators considered that the applicants were the more problematic target group. Many of the interviewed professionals declared that they received more demands for employees coming from foreign employers than they could provide candidates for. This asymmetry did not make visible the privileged position of the employers who set up the number of openings and provided the fixed requirements for the qualities of the applicants. In the discourse of the experts from the public employment agencies—most of them heads of departments for international cooperation and EURES advisors—the role of the mediators was neutral, a mere 'connecting demand and supply.' In addition, they spoke about policy restrictions and the right of each EU member state to individually decide whether, how many, and what kind of labour immigrants it could accept. The figure of the employer remained in the backstage. In contrast, the managers of the private employment agencies stated they worked upon request by employers and were fully aware of the fact that their profit was coming from the fees which employers paid for each suitable applicant.

In the views of the recruiters from both types of agencies, the main difficulty in filling the vacancies was the 'language barrier.' Many depicted potential migrants as having high occupational skills but lacking knowledge of the local language. According to them, employers' requirements for the fluency of the candidates had increased significantly in the past ten years. Previously, many employers allowed exceptions, but the requirements in this regard had now increased. The interviewees also presented the candidates as not concerned and often negligent about this requirement. A low-level employee of a public recruiting agency in Romania, a man in his forties, explained: "Many people think that without the language they can go and work. And they do, but problems arise from lack of communication between the worker and the employer. So, this is, in my view, the main obstacle to labour mobility." Some recruiters considered that for low-skilled workers in agriculture language knowledge was not essential because the employer usually provided a supervisor or manager who knew Bulgarian or Romanian and helped in the communication. However, for highly-skilled jobs in health care, finance, and IT, good knowledge was seen as a must.

In the views of the recruiters, job seekers paid even less attention to the challenges of working and living in a 'foreign culture,' even though the need to adapt to a foreign cultural milieu was another serious obstacle to labour mobility. As a high-level expert from a public agency in Bulgaria, a middle-aged woman, summarised it: "The failure to accept cultural differences between the countries…also creates conflicts and collisions....The clash of cultures actually leads to the employee's frustration. This is also one aspect that many people do not think about or underestimate." Very often this was portrayed as a contrast between the 'coldness' of the Western culture and the 'warmness' of 'our people.' The coldness was explained with 'the profit logic' in the country of arrival which was 'very quickly' accepted by Bulgarian and Romanian emigrants once in the new place. A young woman, EURES advisor from Bulgaria, stated:

> We are used to helping and relying on each other here, while there everything is paid for. No one will come to pick you up, even from the airport, if you do not pay them. Here you can just show up at your friend's door and you will be invited to the table and given dinner, you'll talk and drink. You cannot see such a thing in the UK.

Among the negative images that often the recruiters conveyed about the applicants were their 'greediness': Many mediators constructed the motivation of migrants to go abroad as purely 'money'; applicants were looking only

for the higher pay, did not want to spend time for training or learning the language. As an owner of a private agency in Bulgaria put it: "They never ask: 'Will I do the job, will I cope?' No, they only ask: 'What will I get, what is free?" Such 'greediness' was reported to lead some to engage in dishonest practices. A woman-manager in a private company in Romania pointed at attempts to unfair competition between women she recruited to work in nursing homes in the UK: Since their pay depended on the number of working hours, some of them took up to 80–90 hours a week, and disliked newcomers 'for fear not to have those extra hours reduced.'

These negative imaginaries were used to present the hard work that cross-border mediation entailed. The interviewees also offered descriptions of the 'ideal migrant' who was industrious, hardworking and determined to succeed. Some recruiters voiced the opinion that the success of those who had gone abroad to work was linked to their agency and hard work. A high-level expert from a public agency in Romania defined more clearly 'the personal qualities desired' of the applicants:

> The successful emigrant is one who responds adequately to the situation, to the place. He searches for the opportunities in a particular situation…is not inclined to complain, not looking only at the negatives. These are just people who use the opportunities they currently have and wish to have, and are tolerant to others.

A EURES counsellor in Bulgaria, recently graduated from an MA course in Sofia, insisted that personal intelligence was a major factor for success. According to her, the migrants who managed to adapt successfully in the foreign country were intelligent people who had high professional and language skills and who "take into account the cultural differences, and, even when they cannot fit easily into the foreign cultural environment, they accept it, do not reject it, or do not complain about it." Such a fragmented view of the applicants largely corresponds to widespread discourses of the 'good worker' amid the recruitment practices in other Central and Eastern European countries. Research on Latvian migrants in the UK, for instance (Findlay et al., 2013; Shubin et al., 2014), finds similar representations of ability to work strenuously, to behave well, to accept the rules, and to adapt to the environment. Unlike Latvian cases, however, Bulgarian and Romanian recruiters do not mention bodily appearance as a crucial element of migrant success: The labour mediators in our study devoted less attention to the image of the employers in their interviews.

All interviewees claimed to work only with 'honest employers' who would not deceive migrants unlike the situation with informal recruiters. The experts and practitioners in both public and private agencies accepted that the motivation for employers was to find cheaper labour for their business but considered this motif fully legitimate. In their narratives they often spoke about the 'rights' of the employers to insist upon this or on the quality of the candidates, and did not question their requirements. Besides being honest, the 'ideal' employer, according to some of the practitioners in the private agencies, was the one who cared for the living conditions of the migrants and provided decent housing. A female recruiter from Romania stated that such a practice would attract more applicants and would act as an incentive for them to stay longer. A high-level manager from the public employment agency in Bulgaria added to the image of the 'good' employer a concern for the language training of the newcomers. According to him, foreign employers should invest more money into language courses if they wished to have more choice of skilled labour migrants. Under the rules of a 'migration industry,' it was perhaps natural to find intermediaries keen on providing the service rather than questioning the client preferences.

6. Recruitment Practices

Recruiters' perceptions of the target groups impacted their practices of cross-border labour mediation. The interviewed agency experts readily listed some similar procedures: information campaigns, consultations, selection of potential candidates, help for the preparation of documents and information about the country in which candidates wish to work, organising interviews between employers and job seekers, or doing the interviews themselves. Yet, there were some distinctive features that differentiated the activities of the two types of labour mediators.

The practitioners from public agencies received information about job vacancies mostly through the network of EURES advisers in the EU. They had a lot of printed advertising materials and used the well-developed national EURES sites in the two countries which made job openings visible to all interested candidates who could apply in their local employment office. They expected greater agency on the part of the job seekers, while the recruiters' role was more instrumental.

The official discourse in the public agencies was dominated by 'professionalism.' The interviewees explained in length that they offered sound advice by well-trained professionals and relied on the wide professional network of EURES offices in other European countries and a wider pool of vacancies: "We have EURES advisors, EURES assistants, psychologists, lawyers….We provide real professional help before people leave….And then, if anything goes wrong, we can always get in contact with the EURES office in the other country."

The EURES advisors perceived their activities as completed after the contract between the employer and the candidate was signed, while subsequent stages in the migration process—such as adaptation and integration in the country of arrival—were not seen as their responsibility and were expected from employer's own discretion.

In contrast, maintaining relations with foreign employers were much more important for the private agen-

cies and the mediators invested a lot in this activity, often working with only one employer or one economic sector. Thus, one agency was dealing with IT specialists only, another agency offered jobs in health care and another one in manufacturing. Few had their own websites and more often posted adverts on different job search sites. In addition, the private recruiters were more actively involved in searching for suitable candidates: instead of waiting for the applicants to contact them personally, they phoned potentially interested people. One female manager defined such personal activities of the mediators as 'network marketing': "We have neither a flyer, nor a website. We generally rely on the so-called network marketing—from person to person. Someone has gone abroad, is happy, he says this to 10 people, they start looking for us." This kind of semi-formal practice made the private mediators very flexible and allowed them to bypass some legal regulations which would otherwise limit their activities; for example, applying selection criteria that would be declared discriminatory if published. In the words of another mediator from Bulgaria:

> Every employer has their own criterion. Some look for students, for example, for the summer only, for June–July–August. Other employers want people for longer—they, for example, want people who are not students and choose non-students. Some employers only want women. Others want only men. Others want people to come in couples. Every employer has different criteria that, in general, as a supervisor, I should meet, without officially declaring them.

The private agencies also invested more efforts in creating and maintaining profiles of the job seekers than the state experts, most of whom considered that this was the responsibility of the potential emigrants themselves. The recruiters had to provide the required number of candidates as fast as they could and, in the words of the interviewed owner of one agency, they often had to bring many more people to the interview than the required number. The manager of a public agency in Bulgaria admitted that the private agencies did a more rigorous selection than the public employment offices. For sure, private agencies were interested in sending more people to work and made more efforts to meet the demands of the employers, but they also recognised that they should not compromise on the selection of candidates because it would then create problems in their relationship with the employer. Moreover, growing negative prejudices against Eastern Europeans made recruiters stress the 'personal qualities' of applicants, such as being tolerant toward others and not inclined to instigate conflicts. One interviewee explained:

> For example, there are—although we can never be sure—people who come here, and everything seemed fine, I found the skills appropriate….But going there and starting drinking alcohol in the evenings and then fights with knives even….I have judged, it may be very subjective, but if there is such a threat, I tell them the job is not suitable and send them away dissatisfied, but that's part of the work that I have to do.

The services of the private agencies, unlike the public ones, did not end with the signing of contracts but continued in the subsequent stages of migration. The recruiters often arranged transport, accommodation, and sometimes help with administrative procedures in the country of arrival. They kept contact with their clients after migration and received feedback on a more regular basis. All EURES counsellors admitted that they did not usually get feedback except in cases when a problem had arisen. In contrast, the private mediators claimed to keep regular contacts and boasted about the souvenirs they received from satisfied clients.

The leitmotif in the interviews of private recruiters was the 'personal engagement,' both with employers' demands and with the job seekers' applications. A private agency employee claimed that the people in the state employment agency were 'very passive' and worked only for salaries, while she was personally engaged and interested in what she did:

> We have a direct relationship with the particular employer and the particular worker. We have had many candidates who have gone to work in Europe through the Labour Offices, where the selection is very general. There is no individuality, no individual approach to each candidate, like a conveyor belt. People are not given detailed explanations about the conditions there for pay, for accommodation, for food. And they go abroad with quite different expectations and then come back dissatisfied.

Personal commitment to migrants, as advocated by private recruiters, can be compared to practices of corporate expatriate management across the world (Cranston, 2018). Corporate mobility is found to be exercised with the view of not only the technical (managing different steps of migration) but also the empathetic knowledge of recruiters. The latter denotes personal acquaintance with the conditions in the destination country, the ability to 'feel what it is like,' the upgrade of know-how with experience in order to thwart possible failure of the migratory move. Lacking the enormous capacities of multinational corporations, Bulgarian and Romanian private intermediaries tried to advertise themselves with a similar added value to the recruitment process. Many of the private recruiters pointed at the psychological labour they did in overcoming job seekers' hesitation and fears and reassuring them to deal with the unknown. A female manager from Bulgaria, who registered her own agency after a failed attempt at emigrating personally, offered the following explanation:

> A trip abroad—especially if the person has never been outside the country—is associated with a lot of stress, a lot of strain, a lot of nerves, and therefore, how to say, there is a lot of uncertainty, ignorance. And if the person does not know the language of the country, for example, then it is really scary. Accordingly, we are not only giving information and advising them about the work, etc., we are kind of helping them psychologically, too.

This reliance on personal emotional help contrasts with the discourse of the public mediators who stressed the existence of professional support in their organisations, provided to their clients, by trained psychologists.

7. Perceptions of EU Mobility Policies

The interpretative analysis of the narratives of the interviewees allowed us to highlight the underlying understandings by migration intermediaries of the mobility policy in the EU. When asked directly about their stance on the the current EU policy framework, all practitioners viewed its goals and effects positively. Those working in public agencies more often defined the free movement as a fundamental freedom of EU citizenship following the official policy discourse. All mediators cited the higher income that a foreign employment entailed as beneficial. The manager of one private agency insisted that this was a mutually useful exchange: cheap labour for employers abroad and saved money for emigrants upon return. Then he added some subtler effects:

> Let me summarise: I think it's good and useful for everybody to at least try out what it is like working abroad—even for a shorter period of time—because they can learn a lot about it…in the sense that work abroad is based on completely different principles, and, as I said, the pay is better, in multiples. Everyone can try it. Most people are affected positively and come back with a good impression.

Rarely did the experts speak about the contribution of mobility within the EU to the economic growth in the EU as a whole. Some of them stated that their services contributed to the European integration but saw the effect again in individual terms—enriching experiences from living in another country, which made people more tolerant and open minded.

After initially declaring their positive attitude, several of the experts (both from public and private agencies in the two countries) expressed their scepticism and pointed at the negative effects of mobility. In their view, these were linked first to the labour shortages in the countries of departure, particularly in sectors such as health care. Some also added the losses of not using the skills and knowledge of emigrants that affect society as a whole, although none specifically used the term 'brain drain.' Others spoke about the negative consequences on migrant families caused by the separation of family members. As one mediator from Romania explained:

> Social relations suffer, children suffer….Generations of children who grow up only with grandparents because parents are abroad—and I am speaking about massive numbers….This, then, has a negative impact on their relationships, in general, with people and also on their health—emotionally and psychologically….So, the effect is very large, very deep and very unpleasant.

Given that many mediators expressed concerns that their home countries were deprived of labour and skilled workers it was understandable that both private and public agency experts found it difficult to suggest any policy recommendations for better managing the European mobility. One EURES counsellor considered that their services needed an 'improved feedback,' without being able to identify a means to achieve it. Another public agency expert spoke about the need to employ more people as administrative staff working on European mobility and 'increase their potential' through more training. A manager from the employment agency in Bulgaria considered that the state should improve the conditions in the country, so that people stay there. She went even further, proposing that the Bulgarian state should discourage people from leaving the country while encouraging others to come and settle down in the country. This should be limited to people with ethnic links to Bulgaria, in particular:

> Maybe I'm backward, but I'm not really a person of that world. It is good to create conditions in Bulgaria so that young people in particular stay here and provide their knowledge here, not to work abroad….I do not want much…to make it even easier to go out because Bulgaria will be left without specialists. And from…third countries, I am for a relaxed regime, their workers already have the option for seasonal employment…and the state makes it easier to hire people….Moldova, the Bessarabian Bulgarians, even Ukraine, we had a lot of people who…wish to come to work here, but it is still difficult. And…the Bessarabian Bulgarians really come and…have a desire to work, they learn the language very quickly, we have…to get them back. So, the conditions for specialists from Moldova and from…Ukraine should be relaxed.

The experts from private agencies made more concrete recommendations. One suggested to improve cooperation between state and private recruiters but was not optimistic about such prospects. The manager of a private company thought that foreign employers should improve the living conditions they provided for the migrants and stop the practice of placing people in caravans or boarding houses where 4–5 people share a single room. Other recommendations were also directed to-

wards foreign employers: lowering the requirements for mastering the local language or offering free language courses. A manager expressed the opinion that the successful integration was not a matter of policy, but of hard individual efforts—both from the emigrant and the agency recruiter. Overall, proposals ran on avoiding existing bumps on the path rather than redirecting the process or questioning its basic premises.

8. Conclusion

In this article we examined the self-reflected practices of labour mediation in the EU by recruiters working in Bulgaria and Romania. The analysis aimed at contributing to a more differentiated understanding of practices from mediators working in public and private agencies in the less-known context of the two countries. The gradual lifting of EU barriers saw a 'migrant industry' emerging with increasingly diversified supply mechanisms. Our interviews with experts and low-level professionals provided a wealth of information about the recent policies and practices applied in the process of transnational labour mediation.

The main line of distinction went along the division between public and private recruiters: we could distinguish between them based on their functions and reflections, not so much on socio-demographic criteria. The personal characteristics of the interviewed professionals—such as gender and age and their similar educational level—did not make a consistent difference in the voiced opinions, quite probably due to the small number in our sample. It was clear that age mattered in the organisational hierarchy in the public agencies, with managers being above forty in both countries, while gender seemed more important in the private companies, with men more visible among the owners and managers.

In the academic literature, 'migration industries' are generally related to terms such as 'commercialisation' and 'commodification' and indicate profit-based facilitation of mobility (Salt & Stein, 1997). Although the role of public actors in the process is acknowledged (Faist, 2014), less attention is paid in recent research on European and state institutional actors. We addressed this gap in the article by outlining the importance of these public intermediaries in Bulgaria and Romania and comparing them to their private counterparts. The experts in public agencies relied on a wide pool of employers' offers, greater security against fraud, and professionalism, as the focus of their discourse. Dominant in the discourse of private recruiters was the personal link they maintained with job seekers and employers, and the psychological support they provided to emigrants. In addition, private recruiters did a more thorough selection of candidates to provide employers with workers with the right skills but also with high commitment and work ethics. Public actors insisted on impartial mediation while private ones favoured network marketing. While the former defended 'neutrality' of their job, the latter openly aimed at urging and shaping migration. In both cases, however, migrants' success was often related to mediators' assistance. In this sense, their self-reflection went beyond representations of a mere mediation.

All mediators considered that their partners on both sides had one dominant 'mirror' motivation—money. While migrants looked for higher income, employers sought cheaper labour. Our findings suggest that the recruiters overwhelmingly perceived the 'triangle' employees–intermediaries–employers as asymmetrically structured and employers were acknowledged to have the right to set requirements. While 'good worker' and 'ideal migrant' are increasingly researched in migration literature as social constructs, images of employers are rarely visible. Our interviews indicated that 'honesty' and 'correctness' stood out as employers' most valued characteristics. In other words, 'ideal employers' were possibly imagined as the ones who stuck to their own rules. Further research in this direction is by all means necessary.

The public and private mediators declared a positive evaluation of mobility in the EU. This was, however, focused on the individual benefits, rather than on the contribution to EU's objectives and economic development. The framework of EU mobility and labour market conditions were generally taken for granted and subject to just technical and infrastructural proposals for improvement. At the same time, there were shared concerns about the negative consequences of mobility—such as shortages on the labour market at home and strained relations in migrants' families. It was more likely so in the case of public agents who did not depend on the market conjuncture and sometimes felt free to express views diverging from the official statements.

Observations and conclusions, like those cited above, eventually refer to a developing professional sector (an 'industry') which lacks long established traditions. While it is still early to expect fundamental reassessments of their activities by participants, still recruitment practices in Bulgaria and Romania are embedded enough to allow for (self-)reflections. These are close to official discourses but already attentively expanding beyond them. Intermediaries' views are never neutral and their perceptions of their own interests in the process shape their understandings of the role of agencies, employers and migrants and have an impact on the EU mobility policy implementation. Recruiters in both countries have already become influential actors in the European mobility process and their views and practices deserve further research.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Siyka Kovacheva is Associate Professor in Sociology at the University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. She is the Head of New Europe Research Centre in the same city. Her research interests are in the field of youth transitions, mobilities and civic participation. She has experience in conducting qualitative and quantitative research in cross-national perspective and has been the national coordinator of more than 10 international comparative research projects.

Boris Popivanov is Associate Professor in Political Science at Sofia University and researcher at New Europe Research Centre in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. He works in the areas of youth studies, migration policies as well as the history of political ideas in Europe and Bulgaria, and has participated in international research projects covering these issues.

Marin Burcea is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Business and Administration, University of Bucharest, and Researcher at Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS). Some areas covered by his projects, that reflect his large expertise, are corporate social responsibility, labour market, national identity and applied work in the area of health. He also worked on policy making in healthcare.

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Article

"Here, There, in between, beyond…": Identity Negotiation and Sense of Belonging among Southern Europeans in the UK and Germany

Fabio Quassoli [1,*] and Iraklis Dimitriadis [2]

[1] Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Milano-Bicocca, 20126 Milan, Italy; E-Mail: fabio.quassoli@unimib.it
[2] Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, 20122 Milan, Italy; E-Mail: iraklis.dimitriadis@unimi.it

* Corresponding author

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Abstract
Whilst most of the research on intra-EU mobility has mainly focused on the reasons behind young Southern Europeans leaving their home countries, and secondly on their experiences within the new context, little is known about their sense of belonging and identities. This article aims to fill this gap by exploring Italian and Spanish migrants' social identity repositioning and the cultural change characterising their existential trajectories. Drawing on 69 semi-structured interviews with Italians and Spaniards living in London and Berlin, this article shows that the sense of belonging to one or more political communities and boundary work are related to individual experiences and can change due to structural eventualities such as the Brexit referendum. While identification with the host society is rare, attachment to the home country is quite common as a result of people's everyday experiences. Cultural changes and European/cosmopolitan identification are linked to exposure to new environments and interaction with new cultures, mostly concerning those with previous mobility experience, as well as to a sentiment of non-acceptance in the UK. However, such categories are not rigid, but many times self-identification and attachments are rather blurred also due to the uncertainty around the duration of the mobility project. This makes individual factors (gender, age, family status, employment, education) that are often considered as determinants of identification patterns all but relevant.

Keywords
belonging; identity; Italians; migration; Southern Europe; Spaniards

Issue
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1. Introduction

The study of mobility within the European Union has been gaining momentum since the year 2000 (Sacchetto, Vianello, & Andrijasevic, 2016). Initially, most investigations focused on people coming from Eastern European countries. However, once the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis started to spread throughout Europe, the focus has shifted to the new migratory flows from Southern Europe, in particular from Italy, Spain and Greece. As far as the latter wave of studies is concerned, scholars have paid greater attention to the socio-demographic characteristics of new movers and reasons behind their decision to move towards Northern European countries (Caneva, 2016; King, Lulle, Conti, & Mueller, 2016; Recchi, Barone, & Assirelli, 2016; Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2014). Up until now, very few works have been devoted to questions relating to the reconfiguration of both social identity and belonging, the process of adaptation to new socio-cultural environments and transnational ties accompanying the existential trajectories of intra-European mobile people.

Moreover, they mainly focused on people coming from Eastern-European countries (Goulahsen, 2017; Kennedy, 2008; Ranta & Nancheva, 2019; Ryan, 2018).

Our article firstly aims to explore identity redefinition processes among Italian and Spanish people as they settle in another EU country. Drawing on 69 semi-structured interviews with Italians and Spaniards living in London and Berlin, we try to illustrate both identity repositioning and the cultural change characterising their existential trajectories.[1] We also analyse their sense of belonging to one or more political communities (Anthias, 2006; Antonsich, 2010), as well as the (inter)cultural horizon within which they make sense of everyday experiences. Lastly, we aim to highlight how a close link between territory and culture may not be so important and how cultural references may be of a composite, opportunistic, negotiated and, above all, deterritorialised nature (Glick Schiller, 2003).

2. Identity, Belonging and Migration

In our article, we use the term 'identity' to refer to the social dimension of the concept itself: a feeling of belonging to specific social categories (Stryker, 2008). In this sense, social identity is not unique, but multiple. Each individual, in fact, identifies him/herself in multiple culturally defined categories, each of which incorporate a precise cultural horizon of reference: age, gender, lifestyle, football or religious faith, nationality, etc. (Burke & Stets, 2009). Furthermore, these identifications are activated in relation to the type of solicitations that come from the variety of contexts of daily experience: If at the stadium we tend to define ourselves in terms of football faith, during a multicultural public event, a definition of both oneself and others in terms of nationality/ethnicity could be more likely and salient. Moving to a new country makes the reference to a cultural horizon defined in terms of nationality/ethnicity more relevant whether we insist on stressing its importance or we try to downplay it. Asserting a social identity implies that people draw a symbolic distinction between their own category of belonging and the one to which, in their opinion, others belong (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010). Social identity, as we will see later, is usually asserted in essentialised terms: an individual recognises oneself as a certain type of person and automatically alters somebody else in opposition (Baumann, 1999). However, it has also a constitutively positional nature: The way we draw a symbolic line that defines in-group and out-group borders, in fact, is always contingent and linked to each particular context of interaction (Hall, 1990).

As previously mentioned, social scientists have paid very little attention to identity transformation processes among intra-EU people on the move thus far. Exceptions include recent survey-based research (Rother & Nebe, 2009; van Mol, 2013) investigating mainly the presence and relevance of a European identity among European migrants in various EU countries. This research commonly shows that mobile Europeans form a stronger European identity compared to non-mobile ones, and that there are significant differences between countries regarding the degree of identification with Europe. For instance, van Mol (2013) argues that people coming from Austria, Belgium, Italy and Poland seem to be more pro-European, whereas their British and Norwegian counterparts tend to share a certain Euroscepticism. Furthermore, attachment to European identity is reinforced over time and is stronger for those having experienced Erasmus mobility (Cocorullo & Pisacane, 2017).

On the other hand, qualitative studies on intra-European mobility provide some insight into subjective identification by studying how people adapt and settle into their host society, as well as their socialisation patterns and transnational ties (Goulahsen, 2017; Kennedy, 2008; Ryan, 2018). For example, empirical evidence from interviews with high-skilled workers in the UK (Goulahsen, 2017; Kennedy, 2008) showed that migratory experiences may transform or destabilise a sense of belonging to specific national cultures or help create new identities. Kennedy (2008) stated that attachment to 'original' national identities weakens over time and frequent interactions with other cultures within the host society result in a blurred sense of belonging and cultural attachment to a specific country. In the same way, Goulahsen (2017, p. 158) argued that identities "are a ground of negotiation, contestation, deconstruction and reconstruction." The author proposes the concept of "transculturality," which is migrant identification with different (hybrid) cultures (home and/or host society or cosmopolitan identity), the acquisition of new traits and/or loss of original cultural traits, as well as strategic cultural identity rearrangement.

Shifts in self-identification are also confirmed in a recent mixed-method study on European nationals in the UK (Ranta & Nancheva, 2019). Although four distinct identification categories have emerged: disidentification with country of origin; identities detached from bounded belongings; identification with both country of origin and destination; and attachment to the country of origin. It is argued that parameters determining these patterns can shift, mainly due to events that can unsettle foreigners' status and rights, such as the Brexit referendum result in

[1] This article draws on data from a Horizon 2020-funded research project on intra-EU mobility that aimed to explore migrants' lived experiences (Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets [GEMM] project). Between November 2016 and June 2017, 160 in-depth interviews were carried out with Italian and Spanish migrants in the UK and Germany and with Bulgarian and Romanian migrants in the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain. The interviewed migrants were equally divided between men and women. One third were low-skilled working (or willing to work) in construction, domestic care, retail and services; two thirds were high-skilled working in the sectors of finance, ICT, construction and health. For more details, see the research project website (http://gemm2020.eu). The vast majority of our interviewees migrated during the 2010s (only nine out of 69 migrated between 2002 and 2009). Our analysis focusses almost only on Italian and Spanish interviewees, although on some specific issues that will be dealt with in the following paragraphs, we also draw on the other two case-studies.

2016 (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2017; Marino & D'Onofrio, 2017).

Typically, more recent studies show that the sense of belonging of intra-EU mobile persons in the UK has been disrupted by the uncertainty surrounding the UK withdrawal procedure, and the feeling of exclusion from British society (Botterill & Hancock, 2019; McCarthy, 2019; Ranta & Nancheva, 2019). Their possible attachment to the UK, developed in previous years, has been challenged. This often generates uncertainty about the future or thoughts about a return to the country of origin (McCarthy, 2019); yet, the economic situation and labour market conditions in Spain and Italy are often perceived as deterrents (Bygnes, 2017; Dimitriadis, Fullin, & Fischer-Souan, 2019). At the same time, the Brexit referendum result could trigger a new sense of 'Europeanness' (Ranta & Nancheva, 2019), or the rediscovering of a sense of belonging to the EU in order to mitigate any fears linked to the future of EU residents in the UK.

3. A Typology of 'Belonging' and Identities

Now, let us see how interviewees living in the UK and Germany define their identity and express feelings of attachment to different territorial and cultural entities. Our focus is on the country of origin, host society (at a local-city and/or national-country level), as well as at a supranational EU level.

Overall, we found three patterns of cultural identification/sense of belonging that were very similar to those proposed by Goulahsen (2017): firstly, a renewed and strengthened identification with the country of origin; secondly, an assimilation of the civic culture of the country of immigration—subjectively experienced also in terms of "acculturation" (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003) and similar to the "disidentification" process highlighted by King et al. (2016); thirdly, a cosmopolitan attitude that could be related either to a transnational dimension (the feeling of being European) or the multicultural landscape characterising everyday experiences in global cities such as London and Berlin.

Naturally, we are well aware that identity formation processes are dynamic, as they are subject to changes in the host society and depend on personal experience. However, we believe that these three patterns of identity change are ideal-types, necessary to shed light on different types of belonging to (and relationships with) the home-host society, as well as to/with the supranational dimension. Both can change over time, outlining a sort of standard path of identity reconfiguration, and be tactically enacted in different everyday life situations, enabling people to position themselves towards those who are recognised as their interlocutors.

3.1. "German? Never!"

A common subjective self-identification pattern among respondents is a cultural attachment to their country of origin. The majority of respondents in all four case studies expressed, first and foremost, their sense of rootedness to the cultural tradition of their home country. Expressions such as "I still feel Spanish" or "I will never stop feeling Italian" were common in their narratives. Of particular interest is the fact that a strong national cultural identity does not seem to correlate with the socio-demographic characteristics of informants, that is their age, level of education, profession, length of stay, citizenship status and gender.

For example, some of our Italian respondents seek to identify more with the cultural traditions of Italy ('Italianity'), rediscovered via contacts with the new cultural context/model. In particular, they may reassess the identity of their home country, dispelling common myths about the superiority and efficiency of other countries and highlighting the positive values of the cultural space they previously underestimated. An Italian architect living in London told us:

> I feel Italian, and now I appreciate many things I've always had before. I appreciate most things that before, having them every day, I didn't; you realise how important they are. (Italian, architect in London, female)

We find similar evaluations in our Spanish case studies:

> I feel very Spanish in general….I simply feel Spanish because I've lived in so many places in Spain that I can't say I'm from Málaga or Cáceres or…and here, in Germany, I feel Spanish….Maybe more Spanish than before, yes…I'm more conscious of the cultural differences [between Germany and Spain], in general, and of the different characters, which somehow makes me prefer [the Spanish character and culture]. (Spaniard, physician in Berlin, female)

Similarly, another Italian architect in London, after saying that Italians tend to idealise people from other nations because their economies are more efficient, states that after many years abroad (China, Netherlands and UK) he now appreciates Italian cultural characteristics, implying that all cultures have both negative and positive traits. Taking into account the example of these high-skilled interviewees as well as those of many others of high education level working in prestigious work sectors (e.g., finance, engineering, health) on the one hand, and other examples of low-skilled informants on the other, we suggest that a renewed or strengthened identification with Italy or Spain has little to do with education level or type of work, which is in contrast to what literature suggests:

> As I move around, I really appreciate the "Italian" in me. [Italians tend to] idealise others, but then one realises that with the civility of the Dutch comes "dullness" and with the kindness and good manners of the English come "fake" and unanimated conversations. (Italian, architect in London, male)

Strong identification with Italian and Spanish culture is often considered to be in contrast with the local cultural model of the host society. The following quotes are suggestive of static self-images—as if culture works as a type of DNA—and are steeped in cultural stereotypes. One strategy that individuals adopt when under external pressure to assimilate a "different" culture may be that of reaffirming their "identity" and "culture" of origin. The following are excerpts from our Italian interviews:

> [My identity] has absolutely not changed....I mean it has not changed so much in me....In fact, I feel maybe even more Italian, since when I arrived here, there was no identity. Now that I'm here, I make comparisons all the time….In short, I feel more Italian now (Italian, physician in London, female)

> German never! However, not because I hate the Germans, but possibly because I still see them as very different from me. I see myself as Italian (Italian, nurse in Hamburg, male)

Similarly, some Spaniards strongly identified with the cultural traits of Spain, especially in the case of those living in Germany. They express their attachment in terms of a desire to transmit Spanish cultural values to their children, as well as the belief that Spanish culture is incompatible with the German one. A Spanish nurse clearly displays this tendency:

> I would prefer to return to Spain, especially for the future of my [hypothetical] child, thinking of him. He would be better off there. At least he would be in my culture, dammit! I would like him to become integrated into Spanish culture, whereas, if he is here [in Berlin], he will learn German culture, whether we like it or not. Obviously, our culture would be in the home, but his friends, other children and classmates, his day-to-day routine would be German. And even though you can try and maintain your culture in a foreign country, it is very, very difficult to transmit. (Spaniard, nurse in Berlin, male)

An investment analyst from Barcelona also expresses similar concerns about raising children in Germany despite his extensive international educational and professional experience:

> The values I would like to transmit are very common in my family and circle of friends [in Spain]. It would be far easier for me to raise my children according to those values if they could see them in the people that surround them [by returning to Spain]….For example, my grandmother lived with us for a long period of time [in Spain]. That would be inconceivable for a German. (Spaniard, financial services consultant in Berlin, male)

Even though having a family might imply a deeper attachment to the culture of the country of origin, other research suggested that feeling at home in the destination country is more common among those who have long-term migration projects, that is those with families (McCarthy, 2019). As we argue below though, those in families equally fall into other identification categories both in the UK and Germany, thus making the link between family situation and sense of belonging all but clear.

The cultural distance between national identity and the cultural environment in which they live strongly influences the interviewee's attitude towards acquiring dual nationality. In fact, they would not be willing to apply for British or German citizenship because they do not feel culturally—and do not want to be perceived—as British or German. They feel that dual nationality would make them definitely German or British, and therefore would not be happy with such an evolution of their cultural identity and traits. A young Italian in Berlin, who does not intend to apply for naturalisation, links the acquisition of citizenship with his feelings as regards the cultural traits of German people: "I feel far from the Germans [Germans' cultural traits], too far. And I don't even want to get too close" (Italian, nurse in Berlin, male)

The idea that citizenship is intrinsically linked to national identity, especially in the absence of barriers to free movement, has been highlighted by several respondents. In contrast to other studies suggesting that non-EU residents may cope with the ban on dual citizenship by downplaying the effect of new citizenship on their identity (Yanasmayan, 2015), some of our interviewees place a high symbolic value on their own nationality (which they often equate with identity). They also tend to view another citizenship, and therefore, another identity, as (symbolically) incompatible with their self-understanding:

> Basically, I'm Italian. I'm not interested at all (Italian, cook in London, male)

> I don't think so [apply for German citizenship]. I would like to return to Italy, but actually, I don't feel German. I've remained very much attached to Italy (Italian, financial services consultant in Berlin, male)

In the case of the UK, being opposed to naturalisation seems also to be an outcome of the referendum on Brexit, thus confirming recent research results (McCarthy, 2019; Ranta & Nancheva, 2019). Although feeling vulnerable to the changing climate in the UK and worrying about the implications of Brexit for his status (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2017; Marino & D'Onofrio, 2017), a Spanish construction worker mentioned:

> If they don't want me here, then I don't [getting British citizenship]. If they don't want me [now], they won't want me with or without [British] citizenship,

> so I'll leave. I don't want to be where I'm not wanted (Spaniard, carpenter in London, male)

3.2. "Now I Am a Better Person!"

A second identity pattern regards those informants who tend to internalise the national culture of the host society while developing a more critical view of their society of origin than they had in the past.

Identities are challenged and transformed as individuals become gradually embedded into a new context. In fact, we noticed several instances where interviewees presented themselves as increasingly "detached" from what they perceived as predominant mentalities in their home cultures.

Italians' and Spaniards' acculturation may be interpreted as a desire to share new cultural habits that permit individual growth; or, in other cases, it may be seen as a way of assimilating the typical traits of a cultural model that is considered more civilized and evolved. A 40-year old Italian software designer and a 28-year-old architect echo this sentiment:

> I cannot stand certain things about it [Italy] anymore….In some places, you are looked at from head to toe because you're dressed in a certain way. The myopia of the typical Italian, in the sense of this parochialism….Italy is going nowhere; our mentality is overly defensive. I would like things to work in another way in an evolving world….Yes, because I have met different people, I have seen different things—for better or for worse—I have had many more experiences. The first year I spent here could be compared to having spent ten years in Italy....We are far behind, far less civilized. (Italian, computer scientist in London, male)

> I have definitely changed a lot, especially since I started working. It's been two years. When one lives and grows up in [the same] country…your vision of the world is limited. When one lives in the same country, it seems as though you are living in a parallel reality….So, there is a "provincial" mentality, in which people know everything about everyone [around them], but are not interested in what happens [outside]….In my opinion, it [migration] completely changes your way of thinking. (Italian, architect in Berlin, female)

The following quotes from Spanish respondents suggest a strong similarity with Italians who are proud to be distancing themselves from "parochial" societies while becoming integrated into new local and even more "European" environments:

> I feel more…solidarity with other immigrants, for example. Before, I had no…I knew nothing about the rest of Europe. We were "confined" to Spain and very often got the sense we were living in a bubble. We see only Spain and we care only about Spain and we don't see anything beyond the borders. I think we need to break that [tendency]. (Spaniard, engineer in London, female)

> When I go home [to Barcelona], all of my friends have the same job as before, no one has changed their job…I would say this is a negative…as they complain, all of them moan but they don't change anything. Whereas I….When I [started] moaning about my job at the bar [first job in London], I changed. And now, I'm happy, but if I start moaning again, I can change. In Spain, everyone complains but no one does anything, they always stay the same. (Spaniard, receptionist in London, male)

Although participants with different family status, duration of migration project and working sector might be equally disidentified with Italy or Spain, it seems that those having experienced poor work conditions in the home-country labour market or unemployment during the economic crisis tended to distance themselves from some cultural traits (Dimitriadis et al., 2019). In the following excerpt, an Italian café manager who moved to London with his girlfriend due to poor employment opportunities in Italy criticised Italian clients' behaviour. In addition, achieving a good command of the language becomes both a way of feeling at ease in everyday situations and a symbol of positive change in the way they think and express their own ideas:

> I work in a cafeteria, which has an Italian name, and many Italians come in here…I can tell you that the average Italian customer…apart from the fact that they cannot speak English; they absolutely cannot say a word. You speak English and they answer in Italian! Not knowing that you are Italian, but they pretend that you understand their language and if you don't understand it, they raise their voices or try to punctuate the words. (Italian, bar tender/manager in London, male)

The passages above illustrate how many of our Southern European respondents display a great sense of pride in what they have achieved within the new context while providing a negative view of "backward" Mediterranean societies. Moreover, they express a rather pessimistic vision of their countries' future prospects. These subjects perceive and describe themselves in positive and idealised terms, resilient people able to overcome deeply internalised cultural habits, whereas those who "stayed behind" are described in reified terms, "cultural-dopes," unable to free themselves from the bonds of their national culture.

"Acculturation" seems linked to a positive attitude towards naturalisation as a British or German citizen. These interviewees not only consider new citizenship as the natural result of a long road to socio-economic integration within the host society but also, in line with a ne-

oliberal concept of citizenship, something that has to be deserved and that they definitely deserve (Monforte, Bassel, & Khan, 2019):

> I see it [naturalisation] as one more thing. I wouldn't say it should be so [laughs], but at least it would be consistent with the pathway undertaken in eight years. (Italian, computer scientist in Berlin, male)

Lastly, and in line with the concept that citizenship is a privilege kings and governments bestow to an increasingly larger proportion of the population living on a territory, these interviewees see British or German citizenship as a status symbol. As an Italian IT entrepreneur in London clearly states: "I would be better represented if I had a British passport rather than an Italian one" (Italian, computer scientist in London, male).

3.3. Uprooted and Happy

The third type of identity pattern we encountered in this study was of a cosmopolitan and European nature. Attitudes held by individuals who simultaneously evaluate the national cultural references of their country of origin while adapting easily to new lifestyles. These people not only embrace new cultural environments but also tend to define their new identities as being between two or three "worlds": their country of origin, their destination and a supranational European and/or cosmopolitan identity. Before studying the cosmopolitan and European identities of our two national groups, it is worth highlighting the relevance of our interviewees' previous migratory experiences as well as the duration of EU membership of those countries of origin in question. Typically, individuals that have more experience in mobility (mainly through student exchange programmes) and a longer history of EU membership are more likely to identify with this category (Cocorullo & Pisacane, 2017).

New experiences have stimulated in many Italians and Spaniards a sense of belonging to a wider cultural context accompanied by a cosmopolitan attitude towards national cultural models, marked by a constant openness to new experiences and a positive attitude to being uprooted. Moreover, cosmopolitan values are linked to previous mobility experiences through Erasmus or internship programmes within Europe (Cocorullo & Pisacane, 2017) and coincide with a greater European identity. It could also be argued that this pattern was more common among high-skilled workers:

> I am a real pro-European. I was bewildered by the Brexit vote; I was seriously thinking of leaving a country that does not want you, I feel very European because I grew up in the Erasmus culture, Europe etc. Then, having lived the university environment with young people of various nationalities, in my opinion multiculturalism is of great value. (Italian, financial services consultant in London, male)

> [As a result of an Erasmus exchange and Masters programme in] Maastricht and Denmark…I've ended up feeling more European and also more removed from the "standard" of what is considered Spanish culture…I didn't have many expectations when I came to Berlin. The only minimum expectation was that in terms of job experience and the experience of living abroad. However, I have found much more than that. I have found friends, I have found…I don't know, values that I didn't have before, I have developed a much broader view of the world. (Spaniard, computer scientist in Berlin, male)

Deeper identification with the European identity was also a result of the Brexit vote (Ranta & Nancheva, 2019):

> After Brexit, I feel more European. It was an incredible disappointment. I respect British people's decision, however, to be honest, in my opinion, they are in the wrong way. I do not know what will happen, if they treat us as commodities, and make our life difficult here. I think we have an opportunity elsewhere: in our country or other countries, but they will pass a very difficult time. (Italian, nurse in London, male)

It is interesting how for some individuals, cosmopolitan values seem to have existed prior to the international experience:

> I've never felt Spanish, I mean…neither Valencian, nor Catalan, none of those. I have always considered myself a citizen of the universe….I like to move around. (Spaniard, electrician in Berlin, male)

All respondents view multiple identities as highly compatible, endorsing the idea of fluid and hybrid identities, whether they believed or not that their cosmopolitan values and European identity were the result of migratory/previous international experiences. When asked if he felt somewhat less Spanish than before as a result of living in London, this nurse replied:

> The point of living abroad is to "add" new things, not to lose them. I don't feel less Spanish. Now, I feel more things. I feel more English, more European. (Spaniard, nurse in London, male)

A telecommunications engineer who moved to a small city outside London with her husband and two young daughters echoed this sense of satisfaction, having acquired "multiple" identities as a result of migration:

> I definitely feel more European [now]. I feel more like a citizen "of the world," you feel…you still feel Spanish…you're still Spanish but you can now see that your main objective is not living in Spain and being Spanish….So, I feel more international, in general. Not exactly more European, but more interna-

> tional…that's how I feel. (Spaniard, customer service representative in London, female)

Identifying with two or more cultures, a "mix or hybrid of cultures and identities developed by migrants" (Goulahsen, 2017, p. 162), involves the notion of transculturality. According to Benessaieh (2010, p. 21) transcultural subjects have learnt multiple cultural habits, and, as a result, their identity seems multiple and complex, rather than static. In the words of an Italian participant:

> To tell you the truth, I don't think I've ever had roots…I'd like to feel a little English. I bought the book to apply for citizenship many years ago and I've not finished it yet, I don't know whether, on an unconscious level, I want to finish it or not. I definitely feel Italian, I feel part of my community and I'd like to give back what I was given in my country. Perhaps I'd like to live in a country that is situated between the two [Italy and UK]. (Italian, midwife in Oxford, female)

3.4. Urban Cosmopolitanism

As Coletto and Fullin (2019) highlight, social imageries concerning places of destination deeply influence the way people moving from Italy or Spain to London and Berlin think about themselves and define their intra-European mobility (Pessar & Mahler, 2002). The two cities are perceived by our informants—by both those who are going to leave and those who already live there—as lively, dynamic, attractive and global. Most of them confirmed it was easy to feel included within urban contexts that are very international and open to integrating foreigners. Moreover, some of them specifically retraced their cosmopolitan attitudes as being shaped or strengthened by the metropolitan/multicultural and globalised contexts where they live rather than drawing on the general experience of mobility and migration. In these cases, both London and Berlin are seen as different from the national context in which they are located, since they are much more European, globalised and multicultural:

> Living in London puts you in touch with the world. For example, I work on a team consisting of an Italian, myself, a Spaniard, a Frenchman, a girl from Hong Kong, my American boss and a Lebanese. There are four English people and one German. (Italian, financial services consultant in London, male)

> What I really love about London at this moment in time, and the reason why I don't want to go back to Spain, is because my best friend is German and my other best friend is French and half Russian….Our group of friends includes a guy from Zimbabwe, a Chinese girl, a Brazilian girl….My male friends are Italian, Irish, British….I mean…it's super international. That is what I was looking for when I came here, that is what I've achieved: to be able to access such diversity which is so enriching, both professionally and personally. (Spaniard, financial services consultant in London, female)

Several informants who live in Berlin and London say these two capitals are very different from other parts of Germany or the UK. This distinction often regards the international and cosmopolitan nature of these cities, resulting in opportunities to socialise with new people and live without being judged by anyone:

> Berliner society is not the same as German society. Berlin is a very international city…it's hard to find "real" Berliners….It's an international environment, with people who come and go. (Italian, tourist guide in Berlin, female)

> [When asked if he ever felt like a Berliner] Yes. Not like a German, but I sometimes feel like a Berliner….I feel very comfortable in Berlin. (Spaniard, computer scientist in Berlin, male)

Looking comparatively at our participants living in Berlin and London, it could be argued that, even though interaction with German or British people was not common, many Italians and Spaniards in Berlin did not speak German at all, thus limiting the possibility to socialise with locals. This has been the case either for high-skilled people working in international environments where English was the spoken language or for low-skilled workers employed by Italian or Spanish employers. When reflecting on German culture traits, some of these participants tended to reproduce stereotypes cultivated in the home country.

4. Further Considerations

Before outlining some conclusive remarks, we would like to point out four additional aspects.

Firstly, looking comparatively on the analysis of the four case-studies (Italy, Spain, Romania, and Bulgaria) from the GEMM project, one can underline the importance of historical, political and socio-economic contexts in shaping mobile people identities. As far as an attachment to home country is concerned, we can trace a clear distinction between Eastern and Southern Europeans. Whereas Italians and Spaniards seem to 'rediscover' certain traits of their home society that they were less aware of previous to migration, encouraging them to reaffirm their attachment to lifestyles and values in the country of origin they perceive as absent from the country of residence, the attachment of Bulgarians and Romanians to their home country seems to be more shaped by problematic reception in the receiving society (see also Donatiello, 2013; Fox, Moroşanu, & Szilassy, 2012).

Also in this case of the second type we identified, it is important to point out a fundamental difference with

respect to the interviewees from Eastern Europe. Indeed, the latter seems to undertake a path of cultural assimilation and rejection of the culture of origin because they want to strongly dissociate themselves from negative images of Eastern Europeans residing abroad. They felt rejection and alienation on the part the host society either because they worked in positions that did not reflect their qualifications (de-skilling) or because they encountered obstacles in socialising with locals. Furthermore, they want to avoid being stigmatised as 'lazy' or 'criminals' (Donatiello, 2013), and they even rejected the idea that they should be considered as 'migrants,' a category which they associated with poor unsuccessful compatriots abroad.

In addition, cosmopolitan attitudes were mainly presented among highly-skilled Bulgarian interviewees, who tended to associate them with their sense of a European identity. Attachment to the European sphere was common for Bulgarians who recognised the benefits of Bulgaria's membership in the EU, such as the right to free mobility and access to better education opportunities. Bulgarian cosmopolites may take part in local life and socialize with people from any nationality. The cosmopolitan and European orientations tended to be most prevalent among those interviewees who were young, coming from big cities, and with higher education.

Secondly, the possibility to easily maintain daily contact with their country of origin and experiential and relational contexts they have left behind thanks to social networks such as WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook, etc., and the low cost of flights, making it possible to return to Italy and Spain practically every time work commitments allow it and thus minimise the difficulty/need to unequivocally define their cultural identity help develop a sense of multiple belonging to the various places in which they have lived, live and will live (perhaps) in a more or less near future and reduce homesickness:

> We have a WhatsApp group and we talk every day. I also talk on the phone with my grandmother and parents once every three to four days. Now, practically, I talk almost every day with them, or I read about what they do. (Italian, computer scientist in Berlin, male)

> I speak to them mainly on WhatsApp every other day, sometimes on Skype, if we want to see each other. Being able to send one or two photos a day of where you are, what you are doing, if you have cut your hair, the fact that communication does not cost you any effort, does not cost money, keeps a sense of intimacy alive. It's amazing how there is always that feeling of never having left when I actually come home. (Italian, architect in London, male)

Thirdly, it would seem that the two figures—strangers and homecomers—introduced by Alfred Schütz (1944, 1945) have not lost all of their relevance. 'Strangers,' with their trajectory of increasing cultural integration (understood as acquisition of social knowledge, interpersonal skills and ontological security as regards their position within the country of immigration), as well as 'returnees,' who have distanced themselves from the cultural model of origin and, above all, lost contact with the changes underway in their country of origin continue to constitute a good interpretation of the cognitive changes that mark the condition and trajectory of our interviewees:

> I do not know. It's actually a mixed feeling because I'm not Italian anymore or English. I'm Italian as a spirit, but sometimes I realise that after living here, I'm used to a way of life I would not find in Italy. So it's a bit of a limbo, I feel like I have two lives, two cultures, or actually I don't even have one. (Italian, architect in London, female)

> I feel 100% Italian, but I'm extremely angry with the people of my country, and I don't know if I could live in Italy. So, I'm in a rather special situation, that is, when I return to Italy I'm pleased because it's still my country, but I would not be there for more than ten days, two weeks, because it makes me nervous. The same thing when I arrive in London. I'm happy to be in my house, but I never feel English. In fact, I could have a British passport, but have not yet done so; I've not thought about it yet. (Italian, financial services consultant in London, male)

While acknowledging that these respondents have become different people, having lost a set of culturally defined habits as they have adapted to their new contexts, they provide a strongly stereotyped reading of their cultural backgrounds. They basically claim that a new cultural model cannot really be internalised to the extent that the original one continues to be associated with a number of positive elements that have been abandoned. At the same time, they no longer recognise themselves in the old overall model, as its failings and limits are too evident.

Fourthly, some narratives we collected highlight the fundamentally positional nature of identity (Hall, Held, Hubert, & Thompson, 1995). In fact, our interviewees are aware they have acquired a variety of cultural references as well as a cross-cultural communicative (Gudykunst, 2003) competence that enable them to cope with many different everyday life situations, deliberately and consciously staging a multiplicity of dramatis personae (Goffman, 1956). In the words of an Italian informant:

> I feel like a foreigner when I go to a pub on Sunday to have lunch because there are only English people in the pubs on Sundays. When I go to work I feel English, when I go to the bank I feel English. When I go to the airport I feel English. When I go shopping I feel Italian. When I go out to dinner I feel Italian. When I come home I feel a bit of both. When I meet someone who comes from Europe, such as France, Spain, I feel English. (Italian, midwife in Oxford, female)

5. Conclusion

This article has explored how Italian and Spanish people in the UK and Germany define their identities and belongings. Our analysis into the subjective and rather intangible outcomes of mobility processes within the EU context have shown that different kinds of boundary work emerge, reflecting changes in personal identity and attachment to different/multiple cultural and territorial spaces through migratory experiences.

First, the renegotiation of cultural belonging cements previous understandings of national or group identification or sets new boundaries as a result of both positive and negative experiences within the host society. Exposure to negative images of 'undesirable' migrants and stigma associated with certain migrant groups can be an incentive to distance oneself from these popular images, rather than actively challenge them. Construction of boundary lines also emerges due to structural changes such as the Brexit vote, in the sense that it reinforces the attachment to Italy and Spain and increases the distance from the host society. In this respect, the economic crisis did not seem relevant.

Second, more positive experiences within the host society may also lead individuals to 'disidentify' with the society of origin, as some describe the migration process as a learning experience leading to levels of personal and cultural development that would have been unattainable or even discouraged in their home countries. Structural changes also determine this pattern as mobile people with negative working experiences in the home country during the economic recession tend to distance themselves from their home countries.

Third, blurring or extending pre-existing boundaries is a somewhat more harmonious identification process, as it often involves understanding multiple spaces of belonging as entirely compatible and commonly expressed by our interviewees as feelings of "being European" and/or "cosmopolitan." This is mainly orientated by previous experiences of European mobility as well as of integration into the cultural and social environments of the host society. Once again, the outcome of the Brexit referendum triggered a deeper attachment to the European identity as a reaction to xenophobic or anti-European attitudes of British people.

Considering how individual characteristics shape identity formation processes and types within the context of EU mobility, we suggest that age, gender, family status, education level, and employment sector do not seem relevant for any of the three identification patterns we discussed. No significant differences emerged from the comparison between Italians and Spaniards, confirming previous research that indicated common mobility patterns among these national groups. Regarding the comparison between the two cities, we argue that the possibility to live and work in Berlin without the necessity of speaking the local language can be a determinant of low attachment to Germany and German culture and tend to reinforce identification with the home country.

All in all, our findings are more relevant to the dynamic work of setting new boundaries, for instance, between 'movers' and 'stayers,' or between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' migrants (with regards, for instance, to people coming from eastern Europe) as well as blurring previously established ones, e.g., by enriching one's cultural identity to include a more cosmopolitan orientation rather than the question of changing the intensity of belonging (e.g., feeling "more or less" Spanish or German). Future research should adopt a longitudinal qualitative approach to grasp the shifts in intra-EU movers, while comparisons among European people characterised by different mobility patterns would contribute to better understanding around identity process formation within intra-EU countries.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Fabio Quassoli is an Associate Professor at the University of Milano–Bicocca where he teaches Qualitative Research and Intercultural Relations. In recent years, he has worked on immigration control policies, criminalisation of migrants, discrimination, multiculturalism and intercultural communication. He is currently coordinating the Milano–Bicocca team as part of a national project on media, terrorism and security. He is also participating in the WHIG project, an international research network on the governance of large metropolitan areas.

Iraklis Dimitriadis is a Research Fellow at the Department of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Milan. He obtained his PhD in Sociology and Methodology of Social Research from the University of Milan and the University of Torino with the distinction of *Doctor Europaeus*. His current research focuses on migration governance and asylum crisis within the Horizon 2020 MAGYC project, while in recent years he has developed research on labour migration and integration, informal employment, citizenship, identity, and religion and immigration.

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