



The Main Motivations of Ukrainian Students Who Choose to Study in Poland

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Abstract: *Students' educational migration is one of the phenomena characteristic of the globalization processes. It has been growing dynamically since the 1970s. A number of young people studying abroad has grown globally from 0.8m in 1975 to almost 5m in 2014. It comes therefore as no surprise that educational migration has become a subject of many sociological and economic studies. Their authors usually use the push-pull factors model i.e. they investigate the factors that "push" students out of their own countries and those that "pull" them to the new place of study. Our research on foreign students in Poland has been approached from a similar angle. In fact, we set out to find an answer to the question "What made foreign students from Ukraine leave their country and why did they choose to study in Poland?" To find our answers we conducted questionnaire interviews on a random purposive sample of foreign students from Ukraine (N=83). In addition, to avoid the risk that the resulting correlations were accidental and the knowledge yielded in this way false, we also used the triangulation procedure – a supporting, in-depth qualitative study involving a focus group. We altogether managed to hold 4 sessions. The results obtained in the questionnaire study and in the focus group sessions were sorted and analyzed statistically (quantitative and qualitative analysis), which allowed us to find out about the main motives influencing students' migration decisions as well as the factors "pushing" them out of Ukraine and attracting them to Poland.*

Keywords: student migration, push-pull model, Ukrainian students, Poland

Introduction

The educational migration of students is one of the characteristic phenomena of the globalization process (McCabe, 2001; Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut & Klute, 2012). It has been increasing dynamically since the mid-1970s. During this time, the number of young people studying outside of their own countries increased from 0.8m in 1975 to 5m in 2014 (Education..., 2014:342-344). As many as three quarters of all foreigners study in the OECD countries, mostly in the USA, Great Britain, Germany, France and Australia (Education..., 2014:342-346).

Many different factors affected international mobility of students at the end of the 20th century, among them the fall of the Iron Curtain and the related social and economic transformations, the launch of the European educational programmes (Erasmus, Socrates), altered attitudes of governments which began to see educational migration as an opportunity for economic development¹, as well as the changed approach of universities now actively recruiting foreign candidates so as to increase the prestige of their institution (Hut & Jaroszewska, 2011).

Research on educational migration, which has been conducted for a number of years, demonstrates that studying abroad brings a number of advantages to students (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Carlson, 1990; Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut & Klute, 2012), not only in raising their language competences (Williams, 2005; Langley & Breese, 2005; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012) and learning how to build interpersonal relations and social networks (Dewey, Ring, Gardner & Belnap, 2013) but also in expanding on their intellectual competences, broadly interpreted (Lee, Therriault & Linderholm, 2012). Studying abroad increases students' understanding of global problems and makes them more sensitive to issues of multiculturalism (McCabe, 2001; Lee, Therriault & Linderholm, 2012). Experiences gained by students during their studies abroad also have a significant impact on their later careers (Rahikainen & Hakkarainen, 2013; Kelleher, 2013).

It comes therefore as no surprise, given its importance, that educational migration has been for many years a subject of sociological and economic investigation. Various authors most commonly use the push-pull model, i.e. they investigate the factors that push students out of their own countries and pull them to another (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Li & Bray, 2007; Wilkins, Balakrishnan & Huisman, 2012). Often the conclusion is that the most common push factors are low admissions in the mother country, poor career prospects, an unsatisfactory quality of teaching at local universities, the preferences of future employers, and specific courses missing from the local curricula as well as the political and economic problems experienced in the country of origin.

What pulls students away, on the other hand, are a high quality of teaching, good reputation of the country and its universities, a high place of the university in the rankings, being offered good employment opportunities in the future, and improving their knowledge of the language

¹ It is estimated that on the global scale the market for international studies brings approximately USD 100 billion to the countries hosting foreign students (Study in Poland, 2015).

and culture. Personal and individual motives are also important when deciding on the choice of the university and courses, such as religious motivation and the need to be safe. Migration decisions seem to be also affected by opinions expressed by parents, friends, teachers and various other representatives of educational organizations (Cubillo, Sánchez & Cerviño, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Chen, 2008; Bodycott, 2009; Abubakar, Shanka & Muuka, 2010; Wilkins, Balakrishnan & Huisman, 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2013).

The process of educational migration has also affected Poland, especially since the fall of the Iron Curtain at the beginning of the 1990s, and accession to the European Union in 2004 and the Schengen Zone in 2007, and finally Poland's joining the European educational programmes (Socrates, Erasmus). Whereas in the academic year 1990/91 Poland hosted 4,026 foreign students (Central Statistical Office, 2009), in 2014/15 their number had increased over tenfold to a little over 46,000 of students from 158 countries (Study in Poland, 2015). Europeans lead the way here, comprising almost 83% of all foreign students in the country; among them in 2014/15 there were mostly Ukrainians (50.6%), Belarussians (9%), Norwegians (3.3%), Swedes (2.8%) and Spaniards (2.6%) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014; Study in Poland, 2015). Altogether two thirds of all European students who studied in Poland came from these countries (Study in Poland, 2015). Moreover, in recent years we have observed the 'Ukrainization' of some Polish universities and of the whole educational system. Since 2005, the number of Ukrainian students in Poland has increased fivefold. In 2014/15 there were 23,330 Ukrainian students at the Polish universities, meaning that every second foreign student in Poland came from Ukraine (Study in Poland, 2015). In many universities students from Ukraine are the largest and most dominant national group among foreign students, sometimes even the only one (Central Statistical Office, 2013).

While Polish students seek education at American, British, German or French universities², Poland has become a target for students from behind the Eastern border, especially from Ukraine, Belarus and other former Soviet countries (Central Statistical Office, 2013).

Another interesting phenomenon relating to educational migration to Poland is the number of incoming students of Polish origin, especially from the former Soviet bloc (Hut & Jaroszewska, 2011). Among all foreign students in Poland (46,000), in 2013/14 there were approximately 5,160 students of Polish origin, comprising 18% of the entire population of foreign students (Central Statistical Office, 2013). They came to the country of their forefathers mainly from the former Soviet countries (Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Russia and Georgia), together making up 81% of all students of Polish origin studying in Poland (Central Statistical Office, 2013).

The situation is certainly influenced by a number of factors, including the political and economic transformations in this part of the world since 1989. With new, more relaxed border regulations, it has become much

² According to the latest research by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development almost 50,000 Poland have left to study in those countries (Education..., 2014).

easier to travel to Poland. Its economic success and growing prosperity have made the country more attractive, especially in the eyes of the population from the former Soviet countries, still mired in deep economic crisis. Also, since degrees awarded by Polish universities are recognized in the EU and educational provision in the country is increasingly varied, Polish higher education institutions have begun to attract more foreign students. New scholarship programmes, especially Polish government's scholarships for students of Polish origin who come from the former Soviet republics, are also of key relevance; consequently, the number of foreign students in Poland whose ancestors are Polish has increased considerably (Hut & Jaroszevska, 2011).

Objective

The objective of this study is to capture the basic set of motivations influencing the decisions of young Ukrainians to migrate to Poland for educational purposes; that is, to indicate the main factors that 'push' Ukrainian students away from Ukraine and 'pull' them to Poland.

Material and methods

While researching foreign students in Poland we have adopted the push-pull factors models mentioned before, trying to find the reasons that push students from their own countries, pulling them to a foreign place of study. We have asked this question: *What made the young Ukrainians leave their country and why is it that they have chosen Poland as their place of study?*

In order to find an answer to this question, a number of questionnaire interviews were conducted among Ukrainian students at two Rzeszów universities: University of Rzeszów (UR), and the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów (WSIiZ) with a random-purposive sample (N=83). Students participated on a voluntary and anonymous basis. The surveys were conducted in April 2014, after the annexation of Crimea and before the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The Limesurvey on-line questionnaire was used for data collection, and the collected material was statistically analysed with the use of SPSS.18 software. In addition, to avoid the risk of the resulting correlations being accidental and the knowledge yielded in this way false, we used the triangulation procedure – a supporting, in-depth qualitative study involving focus groups. Altogether, we held 4 sessions between 15 May and 15 June 2014, chaired by qualified moderators, during which students discussed the issues previously mentioned in the questionnaire interviews. The meetings were held in Rzeszów.

The results of the questionnaire research and focus group study were then sorted and analysed statistically (qualitatively and quantitatively), which allowed for the isolation of the basic motives that affected migration decisions, pushing students from Ukraine and pulling them to Poland.

Preliminary results

Our sample involved 83 Ukrainian students (95.2% Ukrainian nationals and 4.8% Polish) who studied in Poland at two universities, UR and WSIiZ. 40 (48.2%) of them were women. Most of the students were under 20 years of age (81.9%), with the oldest being 39, and the average age in the group being 19.8 years old.

93.7% of our respondents studied for a BA degree, with 64.6% being first year students. 6.3% of students in our sample studied for an MA degree.

Among the most frequently chosen courses were information technology (19%) and economics (17.7%), followed by journalism and social communication (13.9%), tourism and recreation (11.4%), internal security (8.9%) and logistics (7.6%).

Our analysis showed that 4 out of 5 Ukrainians studying in Poland came from urban areas (approximately 82%), and on average 2 out of 5 respondents came from cities of 100,000 to 500,000 residents, whereas every fifth person came from a town with between 50,000 and 100,000 residents. Approximately 8% came from rural areas.

A definite majority of students came from families in which at least one of the parents had a degree (72.8%), and half (49.4%) came from families in which both parents were educated to the higher education level

Almost two thirds (63%) of all respondents came from families in which there was enough money for everyday expenditure but savings had to be made for more expensive items such as a washing machine, fridge or TV set. 23.4% of respondents grew up in families with a higher standard of living.

To summarize this simple analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of our sample, both sexes were represented by a similar number of students, who were mostly under 20 and came from cities/towns. Most of our respondents came from families of average standard of living and were first year students of BA courses. The three most frequently chosen courses were information technology, economics and journalism and social communication.

Discussion of results

In order to find the reasons behind our respondents' decisions to study abroad we asked them to answer the question: *Why did you decide to study abroad?* The respondents answered the question by indicating three of the 12 possible answers: (1) *I wish to experience an adventure abroad;* (2) *I wish for my parents to be proud that I have decided to study abroad;* (3) *Studying abroad looks good on my CV, employers are happier to hire graduates of foreign universities;* (4) *It is good to have contacts with another culture and language;* (5) *When studying abroad it is easier to decide to live and work there for a longer period of time;* (6) *Foreign universities offer higher educational standards;* (7) *Studying*

abroad helps to get to know the language of the country better; (8) Studying abroad gives me an opportunity to continue my interests in sport or culture; (9) A foreign university gives me a chance to study a course which is unavailable in my country; (10) I see no perspectives for myself in my country; (11) I wanted to check how well I can cope studying at a good foreign university (12) Other reasons. The respondents had to choose the three most accurate answers that referred to their motivation. Two of the most frequently circled answers referred to the student's wish to have a better chance on the job market, i.e. (6) *Foreign universities offer higher educational standards* (59%) and (3) *Studying abroad looks good on my CV, employers are happier to hire graduates of foreign universities* (44.6%). For our group of students studying abroad carried an element of getting prepared for leaving the country (10) *I see no perspectives for myself in my country* – 39.8%).

Other non-categorized answers included spontaneous decisions, a wish to be geographically distant from a family home, being sick and tired with the corruption in the country of origin and a strong wish for a higher standard of living.

The results of the test of independence indicate statistically significant correlations between students' wish to get to know another culture and language and taking advantage of a higher teaching standards offered at foreign universities with their fathers' level of education ($p=0.021$ $df=1$, $\chi^2=5.343$; $p=0,006$, $df=1$, $\chi^2=7.448$ respectively). Respondents from families in which fathers were educated to the higher education level were more often motivated by their wish to get to know another culture and language and less frequently indicated differences in the quality of teaching.

It has been also noted that people who were more advanced in their studies (3rd year of a BA course or 1st year of MA studies) more often indicated that the reason behind their decision was the lack of prospects for the future in their own country ($p=0,035$, $df=2$, $\chi^2=6,708$).

For most of our respondents Poland was the only country they considered when thinking about studying abroad (83.1%). Others also thought of Germany, USA, UK, Czech Republic, Sweden, France, Slovakia, Italy and Austria.

The decision about studying abroad was most frequently made in the last year of secondary school (62.7%). One in three respondents made the decision earlier, while still in secondary school. Only 3.6% of our respondents knew that they would study abroad when they finished their primary school.

Almost half of the students were motivated by the idea that studying in Poland would make it easier for them to find a job (48.2%). This answer was considered to be the most important in 21.7% of all cases. What was also taken into consideration was the recognisability of Polish degrees abroad (42.2%), economic issues (cost of living/tuition fees, 38.6%), the geographic proximity of Poland (37.2%) and the quality of education (33.7%). Geographic proximity was the second most frequently indicated reason for choosing a Polish university, as was knowing people who already study in Poland (21.7%).

37.3% of respondents made their decision to study in Poland independently. Out of the remaining 62.7% more than a half sought the

advice of their friends and parents/carers (57.5% respectively). For 21.2% the advice came from close family (with the exception of parents/carers) and 4.8% of respondents were advised by a teacher. One person mentioned her husband, who had graduated from a Polish university, as a source of advice for studying in Poland. People who lived in rural areas were more often encouraged to study in Poland ($p=0.023$, $df=2$, $\chi^2=7.515$).

In most cases our respondents came to Poland with friends who also began their studies in the same town (68.7%).

Our data analysis also allows for a conclusion that there is a statistically relevant correlation between the age of respondents, education of their mothers and length of their studies with some of the above decisions. People over 20 years old decided to study in Poland less often because of the international recognisability of Polish degrees ($p=0.44$, $df=3$, $\chi^2=8.082$) but more often because they had family in Poland ($p=0.021$, $df=3$, $\chi^2=9.716$). There is a statistically relevant correlation between having family in Poland and the length of the period of study abroad. Those of our respondents who were further on in their education admitted to taking this aspect under consideration ($p=0.000$, $df=2$, $\chi^2=42.994$).

This could be interpreted as a proposition that to begin with our responders took the feeling of safety and the ease that having family in a new place provided to be more important than the renown of a foreign university or the advantage of having a recognizable diploma.

People whose mothers were educated to a higher degree level were less motivated by economic reasons ($p=0.028$, $df=1$, $\chi^2=4.811$), and the respondents who had recently started studying in Poland (first year of BA studies) were more often motivated by the high quality of teaching offered by Polish schools ($p=0.038$, $df=2$, $\chi^2=6.551$).

Because the quantitative research is not representative of general populations, the socio-demographic characteristics of the participating group were being considered. As the results of the four focus group sessions, with 40 participating Ukrainian students from Rzeszów universities, are partly compliant with the results of the qualitative research, the triangulation method has been used to present the results of both types.

Ukrainians who chose Poland as their place of study first of all decided to study in Poland and then chose a university in Poland. Much more rarely they chose the specific university (based on advertising, hearsay or internet searches). It is relevant that most of the students participating in the focus groups never planned to study in another country. In qualitative research other countries were also indicated as a potential place of study in the EU (mostly Germany) and also in the USA. Several people decided to study in Poland as advised by their family members of Polish origin or those who were in some way in contact with Poland (e.g. for example working here) or even as decided by them.

Now I understand that my parents' choice was very good, because I have a chance for a better job; even for a job in the EU, and I will also get the kind of knowledge that counts in the world. What we are offered at our Ukrainian universities is not very well respected in the world [...]. Well, if you want to know why I have chosen Poland:

my parents chose it for me but I am very proud of the fact that they did.

A long time ago my father used to go to Poland to work. I have Polish roots and my parents wanted me to get involved in the Polish culture, also to go and see the world outside of Ukraine. But unfortunately, I still don't have the residency card or any other documents [as they got lost].

During the focus group sessions, students were also asked for their reasons for studying in Poland. They most often mentioned their concerns relating to the quality of teaching and building their future career. The weak infrastructure and ageing resources available at Ukrainian universities were mentioned, as was the low practicality of the courses offered, small number of contact hours and poor teacher-student relations; finally, old-fashioned teaching methods were also mentioned. Ukrainian students found corruption at Ukrainian universities, especially as regards admission exams and other exams.

I chose Poland because I knew that back in Ukraine education is not the same as in the EU countries, and that there is much more practice here. In Ukraine you have to study too many unnecessary subjects. This is why I chose Poland.

One of the reasons for undertaking studies in Poland was the career-building it offered. Our respondents said that a degree, knowledge and skills gained at a Polish university would help them find a job in Ukraine, Poland or Europe. Ukrainian diplomas, on the other hand, which require a long validation process, hardly open such prospects for students.

If you finish your degree in Ukraine you can only work in Ukraine, and earn about 400 zloty a month [c.a. 100 Euro]. It just doesn't make sense.

This view is closely related with the evaluation of the socio-economic situation in Ukraine. All respondents were in agreement that there were no prospects for them in their country of getting a well-paid job and achieving the quality of life they wanted.

It is also worth mentioning that none of our respondents linked their decision with the current political Russian-Ukrainian conflict (the annexation of Crimea). Some students appreciated the fact that in Poland they could study courses that were not offered in Ukraine and that the quality of teaching in Poland was higher (particularly in logistics and information technology). This also means that students' employment prospects are better when they return with a degree from a Polish university. Our respondents thought that a diploma from a Polish university was not only well received in Ukraine but also in the EU employment area.

Among other reasons for studying in Poland our respondents mentioned the wish to experience something new, new countries and cultures (this aspect was particularly important to students who came from Central and Eastern Ukraine). Students from Western Ukraine who

participated in the focus groups were especially appreciative of the cultural and linguistic proximity of the two countries:

Poland is only a short distance from Ukraine and the culture is very similar. It seems to me that if I went to another country [...] I wouldn't feel as good as I do [in Poland]. I feel at home here.

The issue of students' origin is certainly worthy of attention. Some of them declared that they came from mixed Polish-Ukrainian families or at least had partly Polish roots, which made them determined to study in the country of their ancestors.

Our respondents also expressed opinions that they were persuaded to study in Poland by their friends or colleagues, or were pressurized into it by family. Some felt the need to become independent, as if to cut the umbilical cord of the family home. In a few individual cases a decision was made after a visit to Poland:

When I decided to study abroad, my brother had already studied at WSiIZ and I knew what courses it offered, and that I also wanted to study journalism there.

I was advised by my friend a few years ago. I immediately knew that I would try to go and study at WSiIZ because she was there. [...] So I had known for a year and a half before I actually came that I wanted to study here.

What happened was that after secondary school I went to Poland for the summer and I decided that I wanted to study here; that I wanted to live here, [in Poland].

A few students also noted the importance of Poland's status as an EU country, with all its opportunities to access the European funds and programmes.

However, it seems that the reasons mentioned here are in certain respects secondary to the reasons discussed earlier on. When comparing Poland to Ukraine in respect of the quality of life, prospects in life and quality of education, Poland usually wins; yet while almost everyone said that Poland offered "more opportunities", they could rarely specify what it meant.

Choosing the right university seems a separate issue. Three main reasons were mentioned for choosing a university: firstly access to information about studying at a given university; in this case the advertising campaigns and promotion in Ukraine. In the western regions WSiIZ has a particularly strong presence in this respect. Secondly, the tuition fees/overall cost of studying; our responders said that the cost of studying at the Podkarpacie universities was much lower than in Warsaw or Krakow - even quite comparable to the official or unofficial (e.g. bribes) costs of studying in Ukrainian universities.

Initially, I chose Poland and then I looked at various universities [...] e.g. in Warsaw, but it is much more expensive there, two-, three- or even fivefold. Studying at the Warsaw University costs two thousand Euro a year and at the Jagiellonian two thousand and two hundred, which is why I chose a university in the Podkarpacie

Province, because it costs much less [?]; this is why I finally chose WSiZ.

Thirdly, the choice of a university was often linked with a choice of a specific course of study. This aspect is strongly linked with the two previously mentioned, i.e. WSiZ getting their information directly to their target groups and the cost of studying. The courses that students mentioned can in fact be studied at almost every university in Poland and the Podkarpacie schools hardly offer any specialisms or faculties that other universities do not. Moreover, in the case of WSiZ, as opposed to the University of Rzeszów, students did not have to pass the Polish language exams at the recruitment stages, which made the whole project much more attractive.

There are difficulties with these exams, for example if I went to another university I would have to pass exams in Polish, which would be a very hard thing to do. That's a big advantage of WSiZ, that you don't have to pass exams in the Polish language.

According to the students participating in the focus groups one of the encouraging factors for Ukrainian youth to study in Poland is the scholarship packages offered by Polish universities, associations and organizations and by the European Union. This kind of help is usually enough to pay tuition fees. Polish citizens and students who hold *Karta Polaka*³ (Pole's Card) are completely exempt from tuition fees. The scholarships students are awarded are usually associated with their economic situation, origin, place of residency or academic achievements. There were beneficiaries of such scholarships among our respondents in the focus groups.

Conclusions

Being interested in the world, wanting to have international friendships or improve language skills – there are many reasons which push young people out to the world and pull them towards foreign universities. Young people are increasingly aware of the attractiveness and advantages of studying abroad. Such an awareness is also growing in university structures, so universities think of their educational provision in a more deliberate way, take good care of their PR, and prepare attractive scholarship packages to encourage foreign students.

As far as educational migration is concerned, the reasons for studying abroad mentioned by our Ukrainian respondents were consistent with global trends. Among the factors that made them leave their countries (push factors) were socio-economic reasons, e.g. not seeing any prospects in the country of origin, both in the context of getting a good education but also of future employment; and omnipresent corruption or badly

³ *Karta Polaka* (Pole's Card) is a document confirming belonging to the Polish nation, which may be given to individuals who cannot obtain dual citizenship in their own countries while belonging to the Polish nation according to conditions defined by a law; and, who do not have prior Polish citizenship or permission to reside in Poland.

developed university infrastructure. Also other aspects, such as the advice of family and friends, were taken into consideration, as was the fact of the geographic and cultural proximity of Poland.

When it comes to the pull factors most significant in attracting Ukrainian neighbours to study in Poland issues relating to the high level of education, and the prestige and professional opportunities offered by a degree obtained at a Polish university. Social determinants were also important, among them having family or acquaintances in Poland. Economic issues had a considerable influence on the decisions made by our Ukrainian respondents. When choosing Rzeszów they particularly thought of the low costs of studying and living in the city, and the attractive scholarship packages offered. Moreover, students said that studying in Poland might make them eligible to use European Funds in the future.

The sample we studied focused, to a large extent, on the advantages of specific universities, seen from the perspective of their own needs and expectations. Young Ukrainians particularly appreciated the teaching and academic resources offered by Rzeszów universities and good student-teacher relations.

We found our respondents very aware of the socio-economic situation in Ukraine. They saw the failures of the Ukrainian educational system and realized the difficulties they would experience in the local job market. They thought it important that Poland is Ukraine's neighbour. The geographic proximity and the related cultural and historic ties often determined their choices when it came to a place of study.

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