

Student's social ties as a Knowledge Resource in the Process of Migration

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Abstract The article examines social ties as a source of knowledge enabling an individual to create a network of interpersonal and institutionalized relationships. These are particularly relevant to the examination of student migration in the contexts of employment searching and learning strategies. Findings of the research revealed that students of Lithuanian higher schools named the interpersonal ties as the most important ones representing emotional, intellectual and material support and aid when striving for personal goals and benefits.

Key words – social ties, knowledge resources, students of higher schools, migration.

I. INTRODUCTION

As economics, politics and other domains of the social sphere change unconditionally, knowledge, penetrating all spheres of individual life and supplanting the production factors and means considered as values in industrial society, remains the major force determining the integrity of the contemporary society. Knowledge is fast becoming the key resource of the new global society, while the latter is quite often described as the knowledge society. By creating the knowledge society, individuals are allowed to apply the accumulated knowledge and acquired skills, to become equal members of global society and competent participants of international labour market. This requires from the individuals instantaneous adaptation, quick reaction and the ability to recognize as well as use the knowledge in job-related and social activities.

Knowledge and searching for it, the ability to find accurate and relevant information using different sources represent important features characterizing the knowledge society. In contemporary social life, individuals base themselves upon knowledge and reflective knowing that is constantly built upon and updated; all social actions of an individual are constantly analyzed and modified as appropriate subject to information and knowledge received [1]. In this context, the following knowledge components gain importance: theoretical knowledge, experience, behaviour and links between them [2, 3]. Theoretical knowledge is acquired through teaching/learning, and experience – in activities. Behaviour comprises behavioural information, i.e., behaviour characteristics, which allow application of experience and theoretical knowledge and are reflected

in interpersonal relationships of an individual [2].

Hence, the knowing how to use knowledge is one of the key abilities of every member of knowledge society, because knowledge possessed by individuals permit performing intellectual or physical actions.

In knowledge society, individuals are generally evaluated according to measurable criteria, which reflect the knowledge level and skills possessed.

When analyzing the structure of knowledge, knowledge dichotomy is often cited: explicit and tacit knowledge [4, 5]; however, a different knowledge typology is also referred to: individual, social, procedural, declarative knowledge etc [3]. As noted by authors [3, 6], knowledge types are inter-related and this causes interpretation difficulties; however, tacit knowledge is more valuable than explicit knowledge; this is tantamount to equating an inability to articulate knowledge with its worth.

In the analysis of migration phenomenon, explicit as well as tacit personal knowledge are important, which are associated with individual experience and behaviour, and sharing them [2]. This kind of knowledge is important when examining social ties between migrating individuals (in this case, students). Ties maintained by an individual may be interpersonal (informal) and institutionalized (formal), based on mutual trust. Institutionalized ties include relationships in public space, which are 'invisible', but significant in individual's life: they can provide access to various materials, informative and other resources. Capital created through social ties enables an individual participating in migration process to create a network of interpersonal social ties: with family, relatives, friends and colleagues who help them attain economic and social objectives.

The concept of social ties (network) is frequent in theory and practice of social sciences; however, it is increasingly more often based upon in the capacity of methodological approach in migration studies, when raising problem issues: why migrants move, where to and how this is affected by interpersonal and institutionalized ties.

An important determinant attracting migration to a target country is interpersonal relationships of a migrant, based on family, friendship or descent. Ties based on marriage or family help the migrant to solve everyday problems; however, the key role of such networks is to reduce different costs (not only monetary, but psychological and others, too) and to mitigate the risk associated with migration as well as to facilitate the movement of migrants between descent and target countries. Furthermore, social ties comprise capital, which can be used by the migrants to attain their economic objectives or increase financial capital: foreign labour

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markets, high salaries, saving opportunities, money transfers to native countries, etc. [7, 8].

Recently in Lithuania and scientific literature there have been an increasing number of discussions about discontent with the social, economic and simultaneously political and cultural conditions of the country of residence, which promote the intensification of migration flows. Emigration of young people, students of higher education institutions in particular, is a matter of especially great concern, *defined in detail by the following problem questions: did ties maintained with family, relatives, friends, colleagues/acquaintances and institutions functioning in descent and target countries have any influence to migration experience of the students? How are interpersonal and institutionalized ties approached with respect to method for searching for employment/learning, information on the location of the job sought/ place of residence or studies?* That is a very acute and manifold problem and its solution draws both researchers and practitioners to look for its causes and means to control it.

Object of research – social ties of students of Lithuanian higher schools in migration processes.

The research aims at revealing students' social ties as the source of knowledge in migration processes while invoking a case study of Lithuanian higher schools.

Methods of research: scientific literature analysis, questionnaire survey, statistical data analysis.

II. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH DESIGN

When seeking to identify the social ties of Lithuanian higher school students in migration processes, *methods* for the assessment of migration experience of academic youth were worked up comprising two diagnostic blocks (internal and external migration experience). In both diagnostic blocks, similar criteria were selected (employment searching and learning strategies), with the aid of which the experience of academic youth was identified in searching for employment and learning opportunities in the countries of target and descent.

The main method used to collect the research data was *written survey*; *survey tool* – questionnaire to the students of Lithuanian higher schools was prepared in line with the studies carried out by scientists and published findings [9, 10].

The article is based upon the findings of the pilot empirical study “Research of attitudes of higher school students representing the migration experience” conducted in March – April 2011. The study involved students of Lithuanian higher schools having international and/or domestic migration experience. A probabilistic method for selection of surveyed groups was chosen – *random selection*. Study sample N = 1187.

Quantitative mathematical statistical analysis of questionnaire survey data was carried out using SPSS 19 for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). When analyzing the findings of quantitative survey, *descriptive statistics* were applied.

Social – demographic characteristics of students. The research included 69 % of women and 31 % of men. The majority of respondents (80 %) were students aged 22-27, 12 % – aged 17-21. It was determined that the majority were single (80%), had no children (87 %). Only a small number of students (11 %) described their marital status as ‘married and having children’ (13 %).

Familial (or personal) material status is an important social indicator explaining the migration activity of the majority of students. It was determined that monthly income of the majority of students (41 %) was low, up to LTL 800 (EU currency equivalent of 230 €), moreover, the majority (64 %) were unemployed.

Research findings revealed that men had more experience of migrating abroad than women, and their purpose was getting a job abroad.

When analyzing the students' age it was determined that older students (aged 22-27 and 28-32), who had been working in descent country in service (sales, education, construction, hotels and restaurants) sector, tended more to go working abroad. According to the information of Statistics Lithuania of 2010, minimal monthly salary is paid in these sectors (LTL 800, equivalent in EU currency of 230 €), and the predominant low salary acts as economic incentive for students to go to target countries.

III. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

Employment searching strategy. Social ties between migrants help finding a job, place of residence, obtaining information, contacts, psychological assistance or advice [11]. The importance of these ties is particularly high for employees of lower qualification or education, who are noted for lower adaptation resources. Information on employment opportunities abroad obtained via social connections is particularly important to students when making a decision to emigrate, and the ties with those living in the other country make students more mobile.

After examining the social ties of Lithuanian higher school students in migration processes, it was determined that students' choice to go working abroad was mostly affected by informal ties: family and friends. In the meantime, students who went abroad found employment invoking formal as well as informal ties: through employment agencies in Lithuania (20 %), family members (20 %) or friends living/working abroad (18 %). Analysis of the method of employment revealed that younger respondents (aged 17-21) maintained strong interpersonal ties with friends abroad (50 %), older respondents (aged 22-27) – with family members (22 %) and friends abroad (11 %). When making assessments by gender, it was noted that men maintained close friendly relationships with friends abroad (30 %), in the meantime women – with family members (37 %). Generally the students selected such target countries as the USA, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and Spain, where they worked from 3 months to 1 year. Although strong or friendship-based ties are considered to be a less effective means when searching for employment [12], the research findings nonetheless show that respondents

searched for information about desired jobs in target countries among friends (33 %) and family members (24 %). Internet was noted by respondents as an important source of information when searching for employment. This resource was equally significant to older students (33 %), men and women (30 % and 27 % respectively). Information about places to live in target countries was sought via the interpersonal network (family, friends), characterized by strong relationships, based on trust, informality, security, sentiments of helping and friendship.

When analyzing the migration experience of students in the country of descent, it was established that family, friends, relatives, colleagues and acquaintances (each knowledge source respectively – 30 %) had little influence on their decision to go working to another city and/or district of Lithuania. Such choices were determined by economic considerations such as material conditions of living and salary.

It was determined that students were helped to find employment in the country of descent by local employment agencies (35 %). Although family members have some influence to student mobility (30 %), as many as 25 % of respondents (100 % women) went other cities or districts of Lithuania hoping to get a job. The majority of students (67 %) went to search for employment to the capital city – Vilnius for the period from 6 months to 2 years.

Students, particularly older ones (22-27) sought information about desired jobs on the Internet and enquired of family members; however, information about places to live was sought among friends. The research distinguished the importance of an employer able to provide a place to live; this was noted by respondents of older age (22-27) and men (33 % respectively).

Learning strategy. European Union propagates the lifelong learning idea, enhancement of social dialogue, implementation of active measures of labour market and creation of modern welfare state while focusing on the mobility of highly qualified specialists, particularly academic youth [13].

After examining the social ties of Lithuanian higher school students in migration processes it noted that although a small number (only 19 %) left to study abroad, the majority of them in 2009 and 2010 went to the countries of European Union (UK, Ireland, Sweden, Germany) and non-EU states (Turkey, USA, Canada).

The decision of students to go to study in the target countries was determined by economic and professional factors: salary (70 %), career potential (65 %) and possibility to find employment according to profession (60 %).

The majority of students went for short-time studies (from 5 to 10 months) according to student exchange programmes; they studied in universities and obtained qualification certificates.

When assessing the academic mobility of students, ties providing information on professional opportunities and

fulfilling professional interests are particularly relevant [12, 14]. The research revealed that respondents who went to study abroad used formal ties of the social network: Internet, press, information and aid provided by science institutions and study exchange program coordinator. The last ties were particularly important to the students of older age (22-27 years, 75 %). In the meantime, students did not use the information obtained through informal ties (family, friends and acquaintances) as well as assistance for studies abroad.

The majority of respondents (64 %) sought information about the desired educational institution abroad invoking the Internet – the most broadly used knowledge resource. Information about the place to live abroad while studying was sought in a few sources of knowledge, i.e., Internet (46 %) and among acquaintances (36 %), while 48 % of students were provided accommodation by the schools.

When analyzing the migration experience of students who studied in the country of descent, it was determined that the majority went to study to the higher schools pooling in the largest cities of Lithuania (Vilnius, Kaunas).

The students were motivated to go to study in another city and/or district of Lithuania mostly by professional factors: better career potential (60 %), possibility to find employment according to profession (58 %) and the need for personal freedom (50 %).

In the country of descent, students generally obtained information on the desired educational institution from the formal sources of knowledge: Internet (44 %), fairs/exhibitions/open door events of higher schools (22 %) and in student admission departments (18 %).

The majority of students (35 %) were offered accommodation for the period of studies by the educational institution, thus revealing the significance of formal sources of knowledge.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Case study of social ties of Lithuanian higher school students in migration processes revealed that when searching for employment in foreign countries students named interpersonal (informal) ties as the most important, while in the country of descent – formal ties.

Although employment agencies serve as a source of information and knowledge on employment and accommodation abroad, however, based on the findings of the research it can be stated that the respondents often received information on employment opportunities abroad from such knowledge sources as family and friends.

Students who chose the learning strategy in the countries of target and descent named the institutionalized ties as the most important ones. Their importance became evident when searching for the necessary information on educational institutions and accommodation.

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