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# The Adaptation Strategies of Highly Skilled Latvian Migrants: The Role of Pre-Migration Cultural Capital and Typical Pathways to Labour-Market Upper Positions

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*This article analyses the strategies of adaptation used by highly skilled Latvian migrants to make the best of their situation abroad. As empirical data, 26 semi-structured in-depth interviews with highly skilled Latvian nationals in finances, management, IT and the health sector are analysed. The study reveals how migrants negotiate the value of their cultural capital in the new country's labour market. Different adaptation strategies are typical for the pre-migration phase, the phase of transition and initial settlement and of establishment in the host country. The main conclusion of the study is that pre-migration cultural capital (education, work experience, language knowledge and general and specific skills) is important but not sufficient to be successful in new country's labour market – in the UK, Germany, Norway and the USA. The labour-market outcomes are a result of the interplay between migrants' individual resources and decisions on extensive investments in country-specific human capital and structural constraints – such as typical recruitment patterns in a particular occupation and host country.*

*Keywords: highly skilled migration, transferability of human capital, strategies of adaptation*

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## Introduction

Any job applicant, whether native or migrant, in any context, has to adapt to the realities of the labour market in which they participate. However, migrants are often less informed about the realities of the labour market in the receiving country and thus face the problem of the transferability of human capital (Csedö 2008; Emilsson and Mozetič 2019; Erel 2010; Friedberg 2000; Guhlich 2017; Liversage 2009; Nohl and Ofner 2010; Nohl, Schittenhelm, Schmidtke and Weiss 2006; Nowicka 2006, 2014). This is particularly relevant for highly skilled migrants. The knowledge and skills of a highly qualified professional may be assessed differently in the host country than in the country of origin. The perceptions of a good education and qualification standards vary from country to country, as has been found by many migration researchers (Ariss and Jawad 2011; Bauder 2005a, b; Erel 2010; Nohl *et al.* 2006; Weiss 2004). Due to the problem of the transferability of human capital, migrants accept jobs which are not congruent with their education and skills. Employed highly skilled immigrants are almost twice as likely as their native peers to be overqualified for their job (OECD/EU 2015). Recchi and Triandafyllidou (2010) have found that there are two different migration streams in operation within the EU. While EU-15 citizens who relocate to another EU member state are more likely to get jobs at the upper end of the socio-economic hierarchy, A8 (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and A2 (Bulgaria and Romania) movers are comparably less successful and often face downgrading and brain waste.

As found by Csedö (2008) in her research on Eastern European migrants in London, only those who managed to present themselves in the best possible light, for example, were well-prepared for job interviews and were provided with recommendations from industry-relevant and recognisable specialists, were able to secure highly skilled jobs. These findings open up the issue of the different strategies that highly skilled immigrants choose in order to adapt to the realities of the host country's labour market. In response to this, the article analyses how Latvian migrants adapt to realities abroad, which obstacles they face and how they use their knowledge and skills. The study is based on a tradition that looks at the role of cultural and social capital in migration processes. The aim of the study is to find out the extent to which pre-migration cultural capital is important in finding a job, as well as what the role is of social capital. Second, the study analyses how migrants obtain host-country-specific social and cultural capital, including both institutionalised cultural capital (academic credentials or professional qualifications) and the embodied cultural capital (a person's means of communication and self-presentation, acquired from the national culture). Third, the study analyses the obstacles which highly skilled migrants face, including prejudice towards Eastern Europeans.

The study focuses on the experiences of Latvian migrants in finance, management, IT and the health sector and includes not only those migrants who received their educational titles in Latvia but also those who have received their educational certificates abroad or in the host country. This enabled the analysis of different fields and the comparison of the differences. As empirical data, 26 semi-structured in-depth interviews with highly skilled Latvian nationals are used. Adaptation strategies among highly educated Latvian migrants are analysed in the context of four different countries (the UK, Germany, Norway and the USA) to find out if there are any differences. These countries have been chosen because they have the highest proportion of highly qualified Latvian migrants. While the UK and the USA are English-speaking countries, Germany and Norway are non-English-speaking countries with regulated markets – open, however, for intra-EU migration. Potentially, different host countries provide different contexts and challenges of intercultural adaptation. The term 'highly skilled' has been used throughout this article to

refer to those who have completed tertiary education. This has been accepted as the most widespread and convenient academic practice in this field (Csedö 2008).

The article begins with the theoretical background of the study and a literature review and sheds light on the concepts of 'human capital', 'cultural capital' and 'social capital'. It presents the main findings of previous studies characterising the career trajectories of highly skilled migrants. The third section provides the contemporary migration trends of Latvians and reports on the data and methods used in the study. After presenting the results of the analysis, the article closes with conclusions.

### **Theoretical background**

Over the last 20 years, the concepts of cultural and social capital have played a special role in the study of migration processes. Several studies on the migration of highly qualified professionals use the concept of human capital. These concepts are closely related and important, especially in research on the highly skilled. Human capital is understood as a person's knowledge, habits and personality traits, including creativity, which is expressed as the ability to create economic value as a result of their employment. In other words, human capital refers to the totality of knowledge and skills inherent in a person. According to the theory of human capital, the migration of highly qualified specialists is related to potential migrants' rational calculation of how best to recover the funds invested in education (Becker 1993; Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino and Taylor 1993). The concept of cultural capital is essentially similar to that of human capital, with the difference that cultural capital is defined in a specific social and cultural context. Cultural capital refers to skills, education and knowledge acquired in the process of socialisation (Bourdieu 1986). According to Bourdieu's theory of capital, social capital is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1986: 247). Putnam (2000) compares two forms of social capital: bonding social capital – which refers to social networks between homogeneous groups of people, for example, family or closed social groups – and bridging social capital, which develops within social networks between socially heterogeneous groups.

Studies on the recognition of the cultural capital of highly qualified migrants have found that it depends largely on the migrants' profession (Nohl and Ofner 2010; Nohl *et al.* 2006). In areas where there is an international labour market, cultural capital acquired in the country of origin is also more often accepted internationally. In international business in particular and the information and communications technology sector, cultural capital can be utilised regardless of where it was obtained (Erel 2010; Nohl *et al.* 2006). These findings are consistent with those of other studies which see that particular groups can more easily transfer their skills between national contexts. For example, Nowicka (2006) emphasises that the majority of professionals who move within the networks of corporations and international organisations are liberated from nation-state commitments. Bauder (2012) argues that academics and inter-firm transfers are a more privileged group in mobility.

Here it should be stressed that, in general, the legal status of EU nationals is more favourable and provides for more freedom of movement within the EU (compared with the USA). The recognition of professional qualifications laid down in Directive 2005/36/EC enables the free movement of professionals such as doctors or architects within the EU. At the same time, there is no automatic EU-wide recognition of academic diplomas; however, there is a system in which your degree can be easily compared and recognised. Nevertheless, Eastern European professionals and graduates still have reservations about being accepted as integral players with full rights in Western European markets (Csedö 2010). As stressed by Schuck (2000: 188–200), 'law on the books' differs from 'law in action' and 'law

in their minds'. Besides the different perceptions, objectively the same formal qualifications can vary significantly from country to country and be based on different curricula. In this article, the focus is more on the perception of the highly skilled migrant professionals about their experience on the foreign labour market and less about the legal regulations governing the recognition of education certificates or the comparison of differences in education systems.

Previous studies show that many highly skilled migrants are not successful in gaining employment at the expected level and suffer from a process called skill downgrading, de-skilling or brain waste, because – despite their levels of education – not all are necessarily regarded in the country of destination as highly skilled (Bertoli, Brücker, Facchini, Mayda and Peri 2012). Migrants accept these conditions because the socio-economic opportunities in the host country are better than those in their countries of origin (Waters and Kasinitz 2013). Many studies evidence the tension between self-presentations and the regulatory structures of migration regimes, including host-country-specific social and cultural capital (Erel 2007; Nohl and Ofner 2010; Nohl *et al.* 2006). Any migration, including that of highly qualified professionals, can lead to a 'transition penalty'. In order to be recognised, an individual must make a very great effort (Lochhead 2003; Zikic, Bonache and Cerdin 2010).

In a study on highly skilled Hungarian and Romanian migrants in London, Csedö (2008) highlights the importance of social context and immigrant agency in the assessment of skills and human capital. Those migrants, in particular, who do not relocate with the help of their employer but have to find employment on their own, have to possess the necessary skills and language proficiency to negotiate the value of their qualifications in the destination country's labour market (Csedö 2008; Koikkalainen 2013). This does not mean that the highly skilled do not look for work through their social networks. As Csedö (2010) identifies in her study, social networks contribute to the sorting of migrants with similar levels of qualification into more-polarised labour-market positions, depending on the composition of these networks. While professional networks facilitate access to higher professional and managerial jobs, ethnic networks channel well-educated migrants into unskilled or semi-skilled positions and rarely comprise co-ethnics with influential positions.

On the basis of life-story interviews with high-skilled Eastern Europeans in Denmark, Liversage (2009) proposes a typology of five paths that reflect different types of labour-market incorporation for high-skilled immigrants. These are the 'path of re-entry', 'path of ascent', 'path of re-education', 'path of re-migration' and, finally, the 'path of marginalisation'. The 'path of re-entry' refers to those migrants who were able to re-enter with the profession they had carried out prior to migration and use their initial qualifications. The 'path of ascent' is the entry to the labour market in a less-qualified position than the migrant's initial qualifications and working one's way up. Another possibility, the 'path of re-education', refers to gaining an education in the host country. This is an alternative way to overcome professional closure and reach a goal of working in the field of one's expertise. The 'path of re-migration' is the return to the country of origin and the continuation of the career commenced there prior to migration. Finally, the 'path of marginalisation' relates to the situation where the migrant remains unemployed or takes on a low-level position.

Nowicka (2014), in her study, has demonstrated the complexity of a process of skill validation in relation to the historical socio-economic context and migrant transnationalism. She highlights that migrants are agents capable of developing new skills upon arrival in a host country. However, Nowicka argues that 'the way skills are defined, acquired and valorised in the country of origin has an influence on how migrants mobilise them in the receiving society and on how they perceive their chances for negotiating strong positions on the labour market of the host country' (Nowicka 2014: 173)

The study by Emilsson and Mozetič (2019) on highly skilled Latvians and Romanians in Sweden has shown that intra-EU mobility in many cases leads to prolonged labour-market entry and downward socio-economic mobility. They have identified three main career trajectories of highly skilled young Latvians and Romanians in Sweden: matching, re-skilling and de-skilling. The matching group represents those who are hired into high-skilled jobs, matching their educational background and previous career trajectories. Usually, they work in English-speaking environments at universities and multi-national companies. However, as found by Emilsson and Mozetič (2019), the majority of young highly skilled Latvians and Romanians in Sweden do not have high-skilled jobs upon arrival. The re-skilling group enters into high-skilled employment after several years of investment in country-specific human capital. The de-skilling group ends up unemployed or in less-productive work. The re-skilling group consists of those who have decided to acquire a university degree in the host country, although they already have fulfilled their education in the country of origin. Studying in the country of destination paves the way into the labour market of that country because it increases local social capital and knowledge about the realities of the labour market there (Emilsson and Mozetič 2019; Nohl and Ofner 2010). This is one form of migrants' personal contribution to skill validation and negotiation in the host country. However, other pathways exist and need to be explored in detail. Bearing in mind the findings of previous studies on highly skilled migrants' adaptation, this chapter examines the adaptation strategies of highly skilled Latvian migrants and the obstacles which they face and scrutinises the construction of their cultural and social capital abroad.

## Research context and methodology

### *Research context*

Latvia, like Lithuania and Estonia, has a relatively small and declining population. Since 1990, the country's population has decreased by more than 700,000 persons as a result of emigration and low birth rates (CSB Latvia 2020a). Before Latvia's accession to the EU, emigration from the country occurred at quite low rates. EU accession and the subsequent opening of the labour markets of the UK, Ireland and Sweden contributed to the influx of emigration and the outflow from Latvia has almost tripled (Hazans 2019). The 2008–2009 economic crisis in Latvia and its economic and social consequences were the main reasons for the last emigration wave. After 2012, emigration flows decreased; however, the number of emigrants still slightly exceeds the number of immigrants in Latvia (CSB Latvia 2020b). Higher salaries abroad are an important reason for most labour emigrants as destination countries usually offer better working and living conditions compared to Latvia (ICF 2018).

In 2018, according to the official statistics, 11.8 per cent or 149,000 Latvian citizens aged between 20 and 64 lived in one of the EU/EFTA countries outside Latvia (Eurostat 2019). In 2008, only 4 per cent of Latvian citizens aged 20 to 64 lived in an EU country outside Latvia. By comparison, the largest percentage of citizens living in an EU country outside their country of origin in 2018 is in Romania (21.3), Croatia (15.4), Lithuania (14.5), Portugal (13.6) and Bulgaria (13.3 per cent). Latvia ranks sixth after Bulgaria. Of all Latvian citizens aged 20 to 64 who lived in an EU country outside Latvia in 2018, 31.0 per cent had higher education (ISCED 5–8). In 2008, this proportion was 17.1 per cent. According to Eurostat statistics, the proportion of highly educated citizens living outside Latvia is similar to that of highly educated citizens living within the country (32.3 per cent). In general, we can conclude that the



share of highly educated Latvian emigrants in other EU/EFTA countries has significantly increased over the last 10 years.

Latvian emigrants in EU/EFTA countries have a higher employment rate (82.8 per cent) than Latvian citizens (76.8 per cent), which indicates that the former are mostly labour migrants (Eurostat 2019). Among highly educated citizens, employment is higher both in Latvia and abroad although, in Latvia, it is slightly higher among highly educated ones (88.9) than abroad (83.8 per cent). The most popular destination countries for Latvians are European Union member states (the majority head to the UK, Ireland and Germany) as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries – mainly Norway (CSB Latvia 2020b). Unfortunately, the statistical information on emigration from Latvia to the USA is incomplete, therefore a special study to determine the size of the Latvian diaspora and emigrants was conducted in 2020 (Hazans 2020). However, it does not provide information on the level of education of emigrants to the USA, only an overall estimate of the US diaspora. The results of the study show that there are about 90,000 people of Latvian origin living in the US, of whom about 20,000 have emigrated in recent decades.

According to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, Latvian emigrants are generally very young, 55 per cent being aged between 20 and 39 years in 2018, with slightly more men (54 per cent) than women (CSB Latvia 2020c). The proportion of highly educated people leaving Latvia increased significantly between 2009 and 2011 (Hazans 2018) and are over-represented in Science, Mathematics, IT, Medicine, Humanities and the Arts. Over the past decade, the nature of emigration has changed from short-term to the permanent emigration of the whole family, with minorities and university graduates over-represented (CSB Latvia 2020d; Hazans 2018).

### *Data and methods*

In order to understand the relationship between Latvian highly skilled emigrants' knowledge and skills on the one hand and the expectations and opportunity structures of the labour market on the other, 26 in-depth interviews with them were conducted. Of these informants, 7 had emigrated to live in the UK, 7 to Norway, 6 went to Germany and 7 to the US. All had left Latvia between 1991 and 2016. All informants have a degree and work experience in the field of finance, management, IT or the health sector. The youngest respondent was 29 years old and the oldest 65. The majority of interviews (24) were conducted in Latvian but, for two, Russian was spoken. The longest emigration period among the respondents interviewed was 27 years, while the shortest was 2 years. All interviews were carried out between November 2018 and June 2019. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed and the average length was 60 to 90 minutes. Participants were recruited through different networks, social media and snowballing. Behind the interview citations information on participant's tracking code, gender, profession, country of emigration and time of emigration is provided.

The questions focused on informants' educational and employment trajectories before and after migration and included the following topics: education motivation and experience, career paths, migration motivation and experience, perceived work discrimination and future plans. To analyse the interviews, a thematic coding approach was used. First, the units of analysis were identified and then they were grouped according to themes (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Since the focus of the study was on the strategies of adaptation of highly skilled Latvian migrants, the typifying models were sought in the analysis. After the repeated reading of transcripts, the strategies the most characteristic of the migration stages proved to be the most appropriate for structuring the analysis.

To compare the experiences of those migrants who received their educational titles in Latvia with those who received them abroad, two cases are examined in depth. Both refer to young male emigrants who were successful in London, a city famous as a magnet for workers from around the world in diverse financial and professional services. One of the informants worked in the financial sector, the other in digital marketing; however, both can be regarded as London young professionals.

Schematic images (Figures 1 and 2) are used to depict their educational and work trajectories, highlighting migration events and 'transition points'. They include a sequence of events related to education and work at a particular time and in relation to a specific place or country. Such an approach allows for the schematic depiction of certain stages of socialisation and development. The following categories are used in the images to describe work trajectories: highly qualified managerial work (includes the status of a top manager or entrepreneur) and highly skilled paid work. Lighter and darker colouring are used in the pictures, with the lightest referring to a lower level and the darkest to a higher level of highly qualified workers. The terms Mc., Mg. and Dr are used to indicate the level of education acquired.

The schematic images also reveal the most important family events mentioned in the interviews in the context of professional migration and co-operation with Latvians, both in the home country and in Latvia (categories: family factors and professional co-operation with Latvia). Such an approach makes it possible to reveal the status of transitions in the different spheres of life and how the different sub-systems of society (work team, family, friends, professional and interest organisations, etc.) come into play at certain stages.

The study followed the key principles of voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality. Interviews took place only with the participants' informed consent. The data collected were carefully maintained and secured in adherence to regulations on the protection and security of data, including the anonymisation of interviews after the preparation of transcripts and the deletion of the audio files. In processing and analysing the data, all legal regulations regarding confidentiality were strictly followed in order to ensure that the anonymity of participants was being protected. Biographical details that could reveal the identity of the informants have been changed or omitted, as have the names used.

## Results

Analysis of the strategies of adaptation used by highly skilled Latvian migrants reveals that these vary at different stages of migration. We can distinguish adaptation strategies typical of the pre-migration phase, the phase of transition and initial settlement and the phase of establishment in the host country. The pre-migration phase here is understood as the period of time during which the orientation towards migration develops. The phase of transition and initial settlement describes the period of time during which the migrants find somewhere to live and their first job and acquire the language of the host country. Different adaptation strategies also characterise the phase of establishment in the host country, the beginning of which phase can be identified at the point in time when a migrant has found a certain stability in terms of housing, work relations, partnerships and social contacts.

### *Pre-migration*

Pre-migration adaptation strategies the most often take the form of more-or-less-intensive learning of the host country's language through courses or self-study, as well as seeking information and developing social contacts in the host country when preparing to leave Latvia or looking for work remotely. One of the longest stages of preparation identified in this study is three years. In this case, during the residency

in Latvia, the doctor purposefully prepared for his residency in the US, establishing contacts with foreign Latvians who helped him to prepare for the necessary exams, find a place of live and pass a scholarship:

*I started studying for the American medical exams – I passed them in two years. There were two steps. Each took one year and the third year was devoted to finding somewhere to live in America. So basically when I finished my residency in Latvia I started my residency in New York (20. Male, hospital doctor in the US, emigrated in 1997).*

In other cases, the preparation for leaving can be very short – for example, an IT specialist applied for a possible job and went to London two weeks after the Skype job interview and took up residence there:

*We communicated via Skype for an interview. They made an offer a week later, which I accepted. I wrote my resignation and two weeks later I landed in London on Saturday, found a place to live on Sunday and started working on Monday (9. Male, IT, the UK, emigrated in 2011).*

Typically, in the group of doctors interviewed, migration to the host country was related to residency in a university hospital. The interviews reveal how doctors looked for specific residency opportunities while living in Latvia. In all these cases, professional social contacts play an important role – it is international social capital which fosters their migration. Especially in the case of doctors, professional social networks often overlap with ethnic ones and doctors of Latvian origin help new colleagues to find places of residency. At the same time, there are also doctors among the informants who establish social contacts with professionals with no Latvian origin in the host country – achieved during professional conferences or during professional practice:

*I was in practice in Germany. There are very good, important publications in my field in German, so I have also been studying German extensively for the last two years. Therefore, the choice was clear to apply for a residency in Germany (29. Male, doctor, Germany, emigrated in 2012).*

All in all, the most typical strategies of highly qualified Latvian emigrants at this stage are related to language acquisition (the form of host-countries' embodied cultural capital), the identification of information about the host country and the establishment of social contacts (host countries' social capital). Emotionally, this period is associated with high expectations and doubts.

### *Transition and initial settlement*

The experience of highly skilled Latvian migrants shows that, in many cases during the transition and initial settlement, they have more or less institutionalised a kind of a novice phase. This refers to the postgraduate residency of physicians and to the youngest employees in the finance and IT sectors. In some cases this novice phase takes the form of a trainee programme – a way for highly skilled Latvian migrants to adapt their cultural capital to the expectations of their employers. Typically, the initial stage can be characterised by a lower salary, time-consuming and unpleasant tasks and learning to work hard on self-presentation. The process of learning the language of the host country continues during all phases of migration. Although most of the highly skilled Latvian migrants have some host-country language knowledge before migration, it takes approximately a year to feel free when communicating in the host-country language. For my informants, this applied in particular to the learning of German and



Norwegian. Although, as will be shown in more detail below, English-language skills are also constantly being improved and refined:

*I understood everything. But I had trouble with speaking. Words were missing. A year passed before I was able to talk freely (29. Male, hospital doctor, Germany, emigrated in 2012).*

In the case of Norway, to acquire the host-country's language, highly skilled Latvian migrants use the possibilities which the country provides, such as language courses for migrants. Usually the employer organises and supports migrants' participation in these language courses:

*I must thank my employer for being part of the one-year programme 'Norwegian Language Courses and History for Foreign Students'. A very effective programme that taught me the basics of language during the year. It was great support for the future. (...) During the year I was able to speak Norwegian freely. That was the beginning (31. Male, financier/accountant, Norway, emigrated in 2011).*

In-depth interviews with highly skilled Latvian migrants show that the process of validation of cultural capital is almost never straightforward and requires effort. Apart from language acquisition, in most cases, many hours are devoted to the improvement of the skills necessary for work. Particularly in the UK, the US and Germany, highly skilled Latvian migrants work very hard to be perfect in their field and to show that they are very good at what they do. In most cases, the working day lasts more than 12 hours and it makes no difference in which field – finance, management, IT or the health sector – the migrant works.

*The first half of the year was tough as, every evening, including Saturdays and Sundays, was devoted to improving skills (9. Male, IT, the UK, emigrated in 2011).*

*The beginning was quite difficult because, in the banking business, it is a trainee job from 9 to at least midnight, including on weekends. Work without stopping. You are not asleep all the time, you are tested to see if you can do it. The adaptation was as follows: four trainees started but two were recruited (1. Male, entrepreneur in new technologies, the UK, emigrated in 2009).*

High levels of overload and constant stress characterise the phase of transition and initial settlement and not everybody has the capacity to take it. Those who stay and are successful prove that they are psychologically strong enough to overcome this phase:

*The beginning was very difficult. I came to work at 5 in the morning and worked until 9 in the evening. That was a huge amount of information. Every day, I had to see some 30 patients and be able to report about them to the chief. After the first half of the year, I wanted to leave everything and return to Latvia. (...) Such enormous overload and constant stress. Under stress and responsibility, I couldn't even sleep. It was very difficult. Such is the state of pre-depression. I was also very demanding of myself (29. Male, doctor, Germany, emigrated in 2012).*

However, not everyone is strong enough to face difficulties while trying to integrate into the foreign labour market. For example, the interview with a Latvian psychiatrist who lives and works in the UK

reveals that there have been some cases of suicide among young doctors there. From July 2016, therefore, a support group was established by physicians from the psychiatry and psychotherapy sectors living abroad to support Latvian physicians living outside Latvia. This support group is formed by psychiatrists in four countries (Canada, Norway, Sweden and Great Britain) and they have established an on-call plan where the person checks their email once a day for two months. The need for this support group is justified by two reasons: the understanding that doctors belong to the risk group suffering high stress levels and their need to receive support while living abroad, where the usual support system may not be available if relatives and friends live in Latvia:

*But why did we do it? After the suicide of one young doctor [in the UK] who was also a member of the Young Doctors Association. (...) Why did it seem important to us to help doctors? Because WE are doctors and we know what that means, what is needed and what difficulties doctors face, especially in their careers. For most of us, we are also immigrants. We know all this too. We can help in the form of psychiatry or psychotherapy but, above all, we can help a person to find a way to solve problems and get support in the place where he or she lives (8. Male, doctor, the UK, emigrated in 2005).*

For most of the highly skilled Latvian migrants, it is very important to make new contacts among their colleagues or professionals in the field and to develop host-country social capital. In some cases, good relationships with colleagues are important for professional support; in other cases – in finding a new job. This corresponds to the analysis of Nowicka (2014) and her conclusion that the successful validation of skills in the host country depends strongly on the ability of migrants to produce new mechanisms for it – such as social networks that can facilitate access to certain jobs. In the context of different forms of cultural capital, the following quote reveals that a migrant needs to learn the embodied cultural capital – a person's means of communication and self-presentation – acquired from the national culture:

*It was important to find a mentor to help you find out and understand those important things. There was one who had started working a year before I appeared. We made friends and then he told me how to react to our partners, how to react to different people, how to behave properly. But at the same time, I had a difficult and conflicting relationship with other colleagues – they just wanted to do badly. They thought that trainees could be treated as they wanted: 'It's the job of trainees to do all the bad things'. Well, month after month it improved (1. Male, entrepreneur working with new technologies, the UK, emigrated in 2009).*

Finding a good job abroad takes considerable effort by highly skilled Latvian migrants. They send numerous copies of their CVs and participate in sometimes hundreds of job interviews. They work hard to have references for potential employers and try to find different social contacts and channels for obtaining work. In some enterprises, employees are rewarded if they suggest a new potentially good worker and therefore it is in their own interest to prepare their protégé to be successful in work interviews. According to the findings of this study, these are win-win situations and the new professional contacts foster fruitful results in the job search.

The in-depth interviews reveal different experiences related to the first job. There are informants who have developed their careers in the same organisation. Examples are in the field of health care, where a doctor has purposely chosen a high-level university hospital which offers interesting opportunities for research and professional development and where he has developed a good career. In other cases, the first job is perceived only as an initial springboard; in parallel with the job, new contacts, new

opportunities and more-interesting job offers are sought. Successful highly skilled Latvian migrants are aware that it is equally important to fulfil the tasks to a high standard and to present them professionally; learning to work hard on self-presentation and making contacts is a way to gain recognition:

*Being a good professional means two dimensions: being able to deliver the results expected and having people perceive you as a professional. If even you are the best in your field, if people don't know you, you will be very limited in your career (9. Male, IT, the UK, emigrated in 2011).*

An additional difficulty is that informants have learned to do certain things differently – in particular how to write and how to present themselves. Several indicated that it takes about a year to acquire a sense of a language; similarly, adaptation to the new environment takes about a year for some. Previous knowledge, education and work experience, in most cases, are not sufficient to be successful. Several informants indicate that they are neglected in the host country. The situation is special in London, the metropolis of financial and various services, where even similar experience in another city of the UK is not considered to be significant: 'One of the nuances of England is that, in principle, what you have done outside of London does not count' (9. Male, IT, the UK, emigrated in 2011).

Highly skilled Latvian migrants are aware that, in several countries – for example, in the UK or the US – the national and local realities are very different compared to those in Latvia and therefore a person's first years of emigration are devoted to understanding local realities in their particular field. 'I had that view at the time. To get started, you need to understand the market here. (...) You have to get in and understand how everything works here' (5. Female, international client manager, risk management and insurance, the UK, emigrated in 2008).

Many successful highly skilled Latvian migrants are supporting newly arrived Latvian professionals, helping them to adapt and to become acquainted with the system. This is a kind of mentoring process and, in this regard, Csödö's (2010) conclusions about ethnic social networks are not relevant because these are both professional and ethnic networks, not only ethnic networks. The institutional and personal support organised by doctors of Latvian origin has been very important in the career development of many young doctors, including our participants:

*It is clear that people who have grown up locally have a pretty big advantage because they know the system. They know the system from A to Z, they don't have to guess many things. So I'm keen to help the young doctors who come here because I know how difficult it was for myself because I didn't know what people there know (8. Male, doctor, the UK, emigrated in 2005).*

The interviews also reveal some barriers – regarding the career prospects of highly skilled migrants – to their taking leading positions. These barriers are based on ethnic prejudices and the tradition that leading positions are more suitable for local professionals. Highly skilled Latvian migrants with a successful professional career see that there are possibilities to develop a career if you are very good but it is more difficult to compete with local professionals to get executive positions.

*Cultural differences. It is a very large and thick wall that has to be passed through. It is extremely difficult at the outset. Unfortunately, this culture is one that does not let in people easily. At that moment when you are in, you just have to hold on (...) They make sure theirs are in the lead. Those below them are no longer as important as they will be led. But – the higher you want to climb, the more difficult the*

*wall is. (...) The English will always be more supportive of the English. You have to be very, very adaptable to be in this environment. In terms of behaviour, in terms of attitude. (...) That feeling of superiority is very common. Indirectly (5. Female, international client manager, risk management and insurance, the UK, emigrated in 2008).*

Less-successful Latvian migrants use more-radical expressions and say that the UK and Norway possess caste systems where hidden racism is a typical praxis. One of the informants in this study living in the UK has changed his surname from a typically Russian to typically British one. A returnee from Norway expressed her opinion that, to develop a successful career in Norway, her name should be changed:

*I was looking for a job in marketing, but I needed to change my name to get a job there. (...) Because the Norwegians are pushing theirs. In low-skilled jobs, they are very keen to take foreigners but, in highly skilled jobs, they only take their own citizens. To have a Norwegian name. I know many cases where Latvians change their first and last names to sound Norwegian if they want a better job. (...) Like the British racists who have a caste system, Norway has a caste system (36. Female, public relations, Norway, emigrated in 2006, returned in 2017).*

For many Latvian migrants, access to the local labour market is built through the formal education system in the host country and, after finishing university there, they are more prepared to start finding a job:

*It all started with the practice. At the university, I had to find a place for practice. I sat down on the internet and searched. (...) After graduating, I sat down and figured out which city I was going to. I decided to go to Berlin because Berlin is big, international, with start-ups. Then I just sent in my CV, I think I sent some 60–70 CVs. I also had very many job interviews (21. Female, IT, Germany, emigrated in 2004).*

According to the typology of Emilsson and Mozetič (2019), these migrants belong to the re-skilling group. According to Liversage (2009) this is a 'path of re-education'. Although studying in the host country increases the local social and cultural capital of migrants and paves the way into the labour market, this implies a prolonged labour-market entry.

### *Establishment*

The establishment phase is characterised by a certain stability of migrants in terms of housing, work relations, partnership and social contacts. However, the struggle to acquire even nuances of the local language continues, for some, even 20 years after emigration. For first-generation emigrants in most cases it seems very difficult to integrate in the host society:

*You have to grow with it. Those local sayings and expressions, its customs and its behaviour. How information is exchanged. If you, as a foreigner, try to infiltrate this environment, there is a constant struggle because it is very difficult to understand what they mean by it. I have had very good language skills for 20 years, but it is not enough (5. Female, international client manager, risk management and insurance, the UK, emigrated in 2008).*

Interestingly, highly skilled Latvian migrants work on their language pronunciation in order to sound less 'Eastern European'; at the same time they acknowledge that it is better to be a 'white' migrant in comparison with other ethnic groups:

*Prejudice is always on some level but it helps that I'm 'white' (laughs). People like my accent but, of course, appreciate my professionalism. I have taken the training to prevent my voice from sounding so categorically Eastern European. (...) But most people notice that I am not a local. In any case, there is a major cultural barrier. I do not feel internally psychologically like an American and never will (20. Male, hospital doctor, the USA, emigrated in 1997).*

The findings of my study – referring to the fields of finance, consulting, management and IT – suggest that making use of cultural capital by referring to the language of origin and a knowledge of the particularities of the country of origin can be observed mostly during the establishment phase. In most cases, only when migrants are informed about the realities of the labour market in the receiving country will they find the opportunities to develop their own business by referring to their language and country of origin.

*Both understanding and specific terminology. All this had to be learned. Gradually learning it, everything worked. The portfolio of Latvian clients began to develop. Many Latvians do all kinds of things there and accounting services are needed, mostly in construction. Then there is already a logical link between discussing and solving accounting and consulting issues in the native language (31. Male, financial accountant, Norway, emigrated in 2011, returned in 2018).*

*What we do is export consulting. Our main focus is on attracting partners. Our client group is small and medium-sized businesses. As we are a relatively fresh and new company, our main client group at the moment is Latvian or Baltic companies (4. Female, international business, Germany and the UK, circular migration).*

#### *Case study: Martin*

To illustrate the complexity and the diversity of educational paths and work trajectories, two life stories are provided here. Both cases refer to emigrants in the UK. Martin's story represents a case when university education has been acquired abroad, while Tom received his degree in Latvia. The beginning of Martin's life story is different from that of a large number of highly qualified Latvian emigrants, because he grew up in a family of diplomats (Figure 1). As a child, travelling with his parents, he studied at schools for the children of international diplomats and learned English well from an early age. However, the life of a diplomat in a particular host country is usually not very closely rooted in it, as it is known that, after a certain time, it will be necessary to move to another country or back to Latvia. After obtaining a general secondary education, Martin decided to study finance on an international study programme in English at a university in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, after his BA studies, it turned out that the job prospects were not very promising for him, because the Dutch labour market needed specialists who knew the Dutch language well. In this respect, his case is similar to the experiences of migrants in Sweden (Emilsson and Mozetič 2019), where preference has been given to the investment in general human capital within an English-speaking context but, in the end, this strategy is not helpful in finding a job in this particular nation state. After his BA, Martin returned to Latvia and worked for a year



in an international company that provides audit, tax and consulting services. There he met his future wife and further work and migration plans were made in connection with her professional and migration choices. Having set himself the goal of working in one of the major international banks, Martin decided to obtain a Master's degree in business and, at the same time, look for a job. One of the approaches to finding work is to start with an internship and then hope that, by showing yourself well, you will be offered a permanent job opportunity. However, during the Master's programme, Martin failed to find such an internship. After his MA in the Netherlands, Martin therefore decided to go to London, partly under the influence of his girlfriend because she had the opportunity to work there; so Martin also went to London and decided to look for a job there. He faced difficulties finding his 'dream job' because he had finished a 'non-target school', which is a school where few firms (or not even one firm) recruits for back or middle office positions. The division of target, semi-target and non-target schools is of the utmost relevance in the investment banking sector. Students coming from a non-target school have to put in considerable time and effort to earn a first-round interview with a firm. By making new contacts, learning from others how to look for a job and prepare for an interview, Martin found several jobs, the last of which, in London, corresponds to a highly qualified job focused on investing in new technologies.

*I decided I wouldn't give up. My girlfriend went to London, which also gave me the opportunity to go to London and participate in job interviews on the spot. Then I started communicating with people in the financial world who are called 'non-target'. That's when you went to a 'non-target' school and have a 'non-target' CV. I asked how they do it and the answer was writing to countless companies and trying to get interviews.*

It is important to emphasise that Martin's job search required a lot of effort, because a positive result can be expected only by writing to a very large number of companies. Only then will it result in many job interviews although, after this, there are very few real job offers. In the interview, Martin states that he has sent about 100 applications and participated in at least 50 different job interviews. In the company, which was the last one where Martin worked in London, he was recommended by an employee of this company, whom Martin managed to meet and get to know and who helped him prepare for the interview:

*I met people who already worked in those companies. In that particular company, if you, as a worker, recommend a person to the company and that person gets a job there, you get 7,500 pounds. So the guy I knew was interested in recommending me and preparing me for that interview. In the end, everything came together brilliantly.*

Like many Latvian emigrants, for the first six months Martin worked as an apprentice or trainee. After two years and three months of work, Martin resigned and returned to Latvia. The main reason was his wife's desire to return to Latvia. Another important reason was his exhaustion from hard work and a lack of free time.

Martin's story in the professional field shows how the career of a highly qualified professional can be formed when education is acquired in a country with a specific national cultural capital. Without learning the national language, it is very difficult to find a highly qualified job. Relatively better opportunities for such professionals to find work are in countries where the language of communication is English. Another feature of this story is that it explicitly shows the role of bridging social capital in finding and

keeping a job. It even helps to overcome obstacles connected with particular structural constraints – namely, recruitment patterns favoured in the financial sector.

**Figure 1. Schematic life story of Martin**

	2002	2008	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
	LV / Switzerland / Canada		NL		LV		NL	UK			Returned		
Highly qualified managerial work												Start-up business (LV)	
Highly skilled paid work					Work (LV)		Work (NL)	Work (UK)	Work (UK)		Work (LV)		
Education	Studies in an international high school		Bc. (NL)			Mg. (NL)							
Family factors	Family of diplomats					Meeting his wife in LV		Wife working in the UK			Planned returned of family (LV)		

Notes: highly skilled Latvian, 28, specialisation in new technologies and start-up management, the United Kingdom, emigrated in 2009, returned in 2017.

#### Case study: Tom

Tom's experience exemplifies the case when education has been acquired in Latvia and the first career achievements have been there too (Figure 2). His specialty is digital marketing and it is a combination of several fields of knowledge – namely finance, advertising and programming. After obtaining a BA and an MA in finance and carrying out work experience with IT projects and finance in Latvia in 2010, Tom was faced with the employer's desire to reduce his salary due to the economic crisis, which he did not like and made him think about looking for work abroad. He found his first job in London through his contacts with the youth organisation Junior Achievement. Tom's first job in London was not his dream job and, after fewer than two years at the company, he felt he had reached the career ceiling, so he began to look for new opportunities: 'I proved myself. I doubled my salary, I realised that the ceiling had been reached here'.

Tom found his next job through social networks obtained while living in London. He used the opportunity to train for a public performance at the Toastmasters club and there he also made acquaintances who informed him about new job opportunities. At the moment, Tom feels he has again reached a certain ceiling in his work and is considering what to do next. Going further in his field of activity involves a change of company, including a change of activity and possibly a change of country of residence but these decisions were still in the process of being made at the time of the interview:

*The company's team is the largest in London, probably in the world. In a linear trajectory in my discipline, the agency has nowhere to climb anymore and I have something to think about. Reaching Olympus in this industry is done. But now the existential question arises: What next? I am currently at such a crossroads in my professional life.*

In general, Tom's example describes a situation where higher education has been obtained in Latvia and is only partially related to a career in London. Tom's growth and career development are based on continuous self-development, both in direct work and in addition to work, for example, training in public

speaking in English or participating in training for young entrepreneurs. Thus, he invests in the development of host countries' cultural and social capital which, in turn, helps him to find a better job. This example also reveals that, for emigrants, co-operation with the home country and using the home country's cultural capital becomes relevant only at the stage when significant career results, stabilisation and recognition in the host country and internationally have been achieved (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Schematic life story of Tom**

	2002	2004	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016	2017	2018	2019
	LV						UK								
Highly qualified managerial work									Work (UK)		Work (UK)			Work (UK)	
Highly skilled paid work		Work (LV)	Work (LV)	Work (LV)	Work (LV)		Work (UK)								
Education	Bc. (LV)				Mg. (LV)										
Professional cooperation with Latvia														Cooperation with branch in LV, conference in LV	

Note: highly skilled Latvian, 35, IT, the United Kingdom, emigrated in 2011.

## Conclusions

This study has highlighted the strategies of adaptation used by highly skilled Latvian migrants to make the best of their situation abroad. It reveals how migrants negotiate the value of their cultural capital in the new settings and develop host-country-specific social and cultural capital. As the value of cultural capital is defined in social interaction and in reference to the cultural context in question, successful Latvian highly skilled migrants actively constitute their cultural capital to fit in with the host country's requirements. Like other migrants, they learn how to use the correct job application formats, obtain references to provide to a potential employer, behave in an expected manner in the interview and use an appropriate language. The study shows that the degree of integration into local labour market may rise with time and the acquisition of host-country-specific social and cultural capital, including both institutionalised cultural capital (academic credentials or professional qualifications) and embodied cultural capital (a person's means of communication and self-presentation, acquired from the national culture).

Analysis of the work trajectories of highly skilled Latvian migrants shows that the first jobs on emigration are mostly in the positions of a trainee or apprentice, where a shorter or longer period of time is intended for the acquisition of a specific context and practice. This applies to positions such as junior specialist, trainee or apprentice, as well as an early residency in medical institutions. Following a traineeship or apprenticeship phase, characterised by intensive language learning, an internship and relatively low pay, these examples are followed by professional stabilisation and career development. As found in other studies, in some cases the adaptation strategies used by highly skilled Latvian migrants can cause prolonged labour-market entry.

Analysis of the strategies of adaptation used by highly skilled Latvian migrants reveals that these vary at different stages of migration: the pre-migration phase, the phase of transition and initial settlement and the phase of establishment in the host country. At the same time, the process of learning the language of the host country continues during all phases of migration.

For those Latvian migrants who are planning to gain a university education in the country of destination, the pre-migration phase is characterised by identifying a particular university and programme and then sending in an application and passing exams. For other migrants, the pre-migration phase depends very much on their profession. In many cases, there is a need to establish contacts and to have some references in order to gain a starting point in the host country.

The establishment phase can be characterised by a readiness to disseminate knowledge and understanding of the local labour-market situation. At this phase, highly skilled Latvian migrants are able to find opportunities to develop their own business – referring to the language and country of origin – and to use their pre-migration cultural capital.

Similar to the findings of Emilsson and Mozetič (2019), the results confirm that most immigrants have to invest in host-country-specific human capital to be successful in their career or, in Bourdieu's (1986) terms, they have to actively constitute their cultural capital to fit in with the host country's labour market. Their labour-market outcomes are a result of the interplay between their individual resources and decisions on extensive investment in country-specific cultural and social capital and the host country's structural constraints. Contrary to the assumptions of Emilsson and Mozetič (2019) that an English-speaking labour market requires less country-specific human capital, this article points out that country-specific language issues are also important barriers in the UK and the US. Among highly skilled immigrants, it is a challenge to acquire the highest level of English language skills or a particular North American or British accent.

The main conclusion of this study is that pre-migration cultural capital (education, work experience, language knowledge and general and specific skills) is important but not necessarily sufficient to be successful in the new country's labour market in the UK, Germany, Norway and the US. Those highly skilled migrants who work in the private economy as managers or consultants at the upper end of the socio-economic hierarchy have to enhance their cultural and social capital during the transition phase.


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No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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