

BARRIERS OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INFLUX OF UKRAINIAN WAR REFUGEES TO POLAND

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Purpose: The mass scale of forced migrations in the situation of war in Ukraine requires greater interest of scientists and practitioners in identifying opportunities and threats for long-term strategies of adaptation and integration of displaced persons. The objective of the paper is to discuss barriers of cultural adaptation of Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Design/methodology/approach: To achieve the objective of this paper, the method of ethnographic study was employed. The course of study comprised of regular fieldwork observations conducted from March to June 2022 at a refugee aid point in one of the communes in the Silesian Voivodeship. During fieldwork two methods were appointed – direct observation during weekly social activities and unstructured interviews with 30 interlocutors from different regions of Ukraine.

Findings: Research show that about 30% of war refugees from Ukraine want to stay in Poland permanently, regardless of the further development of the situation in their country of origin. This fact implies the necessity to conduct an in-depth analysis regarding possibilities of cultural adaptation and integration of refugees with the host communities. The Author discusses the concept of cultural adaptation and refers to the issue of chances and threats of this process for effective performance of the Ukrainian refugees in the host communities in Poland.

Research limitations/implications: The presented study is of conceptual character and is based on preliminary ethnographic work conducted from March to June 2022 at one of temporary refugee aid point in Silesian voivodship. Further research will require the inclusion of other methods and tools, enabling to capture the issue of refugee adaptation from the perspective of various stakeholders.

Practical implications: Presented paper outlines a framework for social diagnosis of barriers of cultural adaptation of forced migrants in Polish host communities. The issue of cultural adaptation and integration of forced migrants is vital for policy makers, local communities' leaders, educators, social workers, etc.

Social implications: The influx of refugees on such an unprecedented scale has social, cultural, educational, labor market and organizational consequences (both at the level of organizing the aid system and at the level of functioning of the organization in the context of cultural diversity). Challenges arising from the influx of refugees include identification of institutional support mechanisms for displaced persons, analysis of available forms of social support (psychological assistance, integrated family support system, recognition of the forms of integration of the local community and displaced persons, etc.).

Originality/value: Exile is one of the most important social problems today, both due to the growing scale of this phenomenon, globalization of migration processes and their economic basis, as well as issues related to the adaptation of newcomers in the host countries.

Keywords: cultural adaptation, adaptation barriers, forced migration, Ukrainian war refugees.

Category of the paper: conceptual paper.

1. Introduction

According to the announcement published on April 15th 2022 by the Polish Border Service, nearly 3 million people crossed Ukrainian-Polish border as a result of the Russian invasion launched on February 24 this year. As shown in the nationwide sociological survey, 93% of refugees are women (Refugees from Ukraine in Poland, 2022). The total number of the refugees fleeing Ukraine since February 24th is estimated around five million people (unhcr.org, 17.04.2022). The forecasts of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees predicted that up to 6.5-7.0 million Ukrainians, women, and children, will soon be living in the territory of the European Union. “The European Union has welcomed Ukrainian refugees, allowing them to enter its 27 member countries without visas and live and work there for up to three years” (The Conversation, 24.05.2022). Questions arises within the reference of the term “refugee” to the terminology of international law: whether Ukrainian citizens, who left their homes due to the Russian’s invasion, plan to return home after the war is over (Kennan Institute, 19.08.2022).

The unprecedented scale of migration resulting from the armed conflict situation accompanied with the wide spectrum of problems faced by both refugees and host communities as well as effective social integration will probably constitute one of the greatest challenges of social policy in Poland.

The refugee situation is associated with two types of trauma - on the one hand, it is the experience of displacement itself, while the secondary trauma is related to stress resulting from the need to adapt to new conditions. Refugees are particularly at risk of social exclusion, which may be caused, on the one hand, from the lack of the expected fulfillment of social needs (lack of accommodation, limited access to social benefits, limited access to medical assistance, difficult situation on the labor market, communication barriers, difficulties with cultural adaptation etc.), but also due to the experienced psychological stress and the lack of acceptance from the environment.

The objective of this paper is to outline the framework for the question of cultural adaptation of Ukrainian war refugees in Poland, referring to the literature, available secondary data and preliminary ethnographic fieldwork of the author. The influx of refugees has social, cultural,

educational, labor market and organizational consequences (both at the level of organizing the aid system and at the level of functioning of the organization in the context of cultural diversity).

2. Methods

To achieve the objective of this paper, the method of ethnographic study was employed. The course of study comprised of regular fieldwork observations conducted from March to June 2022 at a refugee aid point in one of the communes in the Silesian Voivodeship.

The observation began in the first week of March 2022 - according to the data of the voivodship's administration, only between February 24th and March 7th, 2022, 5,000 refugees found accommodation in the Silesia region. In the city where the observations were conducted (a medium-sized township in the Silesian voivodeship), temporary aid points were organized at the beginning of March 2022, as the first Ukrainian refugees arrived. In the time of the observation, between 10 and 37 people were accommodated at the place prepared by local authorities.

During fieldwork two methods were appointed – direct observation during weekly social activities and unstructured interviews with thirty interlocutors from different regions of Ukraine. All of them were women with children age 1 to 15, often accompanied by elderly parents. Most of them did not have relatives or acquaintances in Poland. Interview questions involved recognizing the place of origin (whether they come from territories affected by direct war operations or not), identifying their life and professional situation, determining opportunities to start working or completing education in Poland, indicating plans for the future (whether they plan to stay in Poland or move to another country of destination). The first to arrive at the temporary aid point were people from areas bordering Poland and not from direct armed conflict zone, mainly from Rivne, Ternopil, Zhytomyr, Ivano-Frankivsk. Refugees from the areas affected by hostilities – Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro - arrived in the 3rd and 4th week of March 2022. Five of the thirty interviewees stayed in Poland, in the township they arrived; the rest returned to Ukraine or left for other EU countries. The research at the place of observation corresponds to the one identified during the nationwide survey among refugees - the willingness to stay in Poland was declared by 30% of respondents (EWL Foundation for the Support of Migrants in the Labor Market, 2022).

The observation material is accompanied by the selected literature on forced migration and cultural adaptation issues. The study is preliminary and can serve as a starting point to conduct more extensive research on the adaptation and integration of refugees into the host communities.

3. Results

3.1. Research on forced migration in Polish scientific discourse

The state of research on migration in the Polish scientific reflection has changed significantly in the last 30 years. As underlined by Anna Horolets et. all, “the social importance of migration issues has increased, in line with the growing importance of migration as a complex social process and increased interest in migration as a subject of research in the social sciences and humanities. After 1989, migration studies in Poland significantly expanded their scope and became the sphere of activity of a large number of scientists” (2019, p. 8). Research on forced migration including refugee issues has been conducted since the 1990s. These studies concern the situation of foreigners applying for refugee status in Poland, mechanisms of integration processes and the changing tendencies in seeking asylum in Poland. The subject of legal, sociological, psychological or anthropological analyzes were primarily refugees staying in refugee centers in Poland and people still “in the procedure” of applying for refugee status. In this context, it is worth mentioning, inter alia, studies on psychological and sociological adaptation mechanisms of refugees from European and non-European countries (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Nowicka, 1998), the anthropological dimension of refugee issue (Ząbek, Łodziński, 2008), the phenomenon of refugee in the 1990s as a new social problem in Poland (Stawicki, 2018). There are also works presenting a comprehensive overview of the issues of socio-cultural integration of foreigners into Polish society (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Łodziński, 2008), or the pedagogical and educational aspects of multiculturalism (Januszewska, 2010).

The situation of exile is often considered a form of forced migration (in a situation where people have no influence on the decision to migrate) or forced migration (when they can, to some extent, decide to leave their place of residence) (Czapka, 2006).

Nowadays, the phenomenon of exile is analyzed not only from the legal or economic perspective, but a broader – anthropological position has been developing. “Refugees and displaced persons are at risk of impoverishment, experience a similar type of stress of losing trust in authorities, they are forced to make a similar adaptation effort to new conditions, they want to avoid marginalization” (Ząbek, Łodziński, 2008, pp. 52-53). From this point of view, the binding criterion allowing to describe the refugee's situation is not the legal category, but the sense of common fate – the “refugee experience”.

3.2. Cultural adaptation - main concept

Through the acculturation process, as a result of continuous coexistence of various groups, several adaptation strategies may evolve. Adaptation patterns were already proposed by Plato (Rudmin, 2003; Łuźniak-Piecha, 2016), but propagated and developed into the most widely used concept of acculturation by John Berry (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2009; Parfieniuk, 2009; Łuźniak-Piecha, 2016). Berry's fourfold model of acculturation has long been regarded as one

of the dominant ways of describing acculturation strategies and leading concept to study immigration and adaptation issues (Rudmin 2003; Łuźniak-Piecha, 2016). Disregarding the profound discussion with John Berry's paradigm that have begun in 1997 in the "Applied Psychology" journal (Rudmin, 2003), fourfold model of acculturation is still a starting point for theoretical and methodological reflection on the issue of cultural adaptation.

The situation of encounter between newcomers and host communities may have a different course. As noticed by Małgorzata Budyta-Budzyńska in reference to Berry's concept: "immigrants find their place in the host society differently, therefore various terms are used to describe their degree of *entering* the host community, both in everyday life and in scientific analyzes" (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 44).

From a sociological perspective, the terms used to describe and explain the "entry" of a newcomer into the host community are complex analytical categories. These categories include the separation or marginalization of immigrants, assimilation, adaptation, or integration. It should be emphasized, that "despite the frequent occurrence and intuitive understanding of these terms, there is no consensus as to their exact meaning. The meaning of these terms depends on: the context to which they are applied, or the so-called old, historic, indigenous national and ethnic minorities; or new immigrant nationalities composed of refugees, displaced persons or economic emigrants; from the discipline describing the analyzed cases - these terms are defined differently in anthropology, they are used differently in sociology, and also differently in psychology, economics or theories of politics; from the scientific paradigm, e.g. in the structural-functionalist approach the concept of adaptation is an absolutely key category, in other approaches it does not appear at all. Finally, it depends on countries' experiences with immigrants" (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 44). The concepts of integration and assimilation refer to different stages of the immigrant's inclusion in the host community, in some scientific models they are opposed to each other, while in everyday discourse they are very often used interchangeably (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Łodziński 2008, p. 42; Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 46). Adaptation, understood most simply in reference to Darwin's thought, is "gaining minimal survival skills" (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 46) or "minimal adaptation to the environment enabling survival" (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 46; Adamski 2020, p. 46).

Considering the issue of adaptation, integration, or assimilation of immigrants to the host environment, four dimensions of these processes should be distinguished: economic, cultural, socio-political and identity (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 49). In terms of immigrants' adaptation, economic dimension, cultural dimension and socio-political dimension should be taken into account.

4. Discussion: Cultural adaptation of Ukrainian refugees in Poland – chances and threats

Conditions of stay and temporary protection status of refugees from Ukraine in Poland are regulated by the special act on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with an armed conflict in the territory of that state of March 12, 2022. In the above-mentioned document, the term “refugee” was not applied; the law refers to the Ukrainian citizens, who came to the territory of the Republic of Poland directly from the territory of Ukraine in connection with hostilities conducted on the territory of that state (Dz.U. 2022, poz. 583).

Findings of the Special report on the sociological study “Refugees from Ukraine in Poland”, conducted by the EWL Migration Platform, the EWL Foundation for the Support of Migrants in the Labor Market and the Centre of Eastern Europe at the University of Warsaw (2022) show, that about 30% of newcomers want to stay in Poland permanently, regardless of the further development of the situation in Ukraine. This means a need for an in-depth analysis at the two-vector process of cultural adaptation and integration of refugees with the host communities.

Referring to sociological research as well as interviews and own observations conducted at a refugee aid point in one of the communes in the Silesian Voivodeship, the following catalog of barriers to effective adaptation can be indicated:

- 1) Language barrier.
- 2) Temporality/liminality of the situation of exile.
- 3) Trauma and psychological stress.
- 4) Limited access to childcare.
- 5) Stereotyping.
- 6) Lack of networks.
- 7) High expectations of the host community towards refugees – features of the host society.

The lack of communicative knowledge of the Polish language is undoubtedly the most severe barrier - indicated both by the refugees themselves and the people involved in helping. Findings of the Special report “Refugees from Ukraine in Poland” (EWL Migration Platform, the EWL Foundation for the Support of Migrants in the Labor Market and the Centre of Eastern Europe at the University of Warsaw, 2022) reveal that only 26% of respondents declared communicative knowledge of Polish, 55% indicated that they can communicate in English. However personal experience in the field revises these data. None of the 30 interlocutors could speak other language than Ukrainian and/or Russian. The language barrier affects the possibility of economic adaptation - most often it means a complete withdrawal from the labor market of the host society, or work below qualifications, “not in a learned profession, often in the so-called second market, less well-paid and socially secured, usually in services and professions reluctantly undertaken by indigenous people, referred to in the literature as *3D labor* (dull, dirty, dangerous) (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 51).

The second obstacle to successful adaptation is the difficult to define future status of the occupied territories - some of the displaced people treat the situation in which they find themselves temporary, which results in no need to establish relations in an unfamiliar environment, as they expect to return to their native regions and cultivate the myth of the lost homeland. However, the possibility of returning to life before the conflict broke out raises skepticism, also among anthropologists. As “the idea of a home is also a cultural construct and can change. In this context, research on the so-called *the myth of return* is of particular interest, (...) as an expression of a peculiar longing for the lost home, for the accompanying memory, prone to idealization of the past, which is not so much remembered as it really was, but created anew” (Ząbek, Łodziński, 2008, p. 65). The problems of socialization of forced migrants in Ukraine were analyzed regarding the occurrence of internally displaced people in 2013-2014 after Russia’s aggression on the eastern Ukraine. Adaptation failure is significantly related to the complete uncertainty of the future of the territories people consider native – “such a situation forms the corresponding state of a person who does not live at home, but also does not deeply integrate into the new environment due to the expectation of the temporary nature of his stay abroad. It is difficult for to make decisions about work and, especially, about the organization of life in a new place” (nbuviap.gov.ua, 21.11.2017). The refugees leave in their country not only people, but also a number of important objects that contribute to their personal identity, photographs, certificates of education and professional status (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Nowicka, 1998, p. 131). The question of identity of forced migrants is also relevant: whether it is disintegrating or, on the contrary, it is strengthened, fueled by a specific mythology of the “home country”. This is undoubtedly an issue that requires further, in-depth analysis.

Among the war refugees there are people who have directly experienced trauma. Trauma - in Greek the word means a wound, but in its semantic development it means, “an event or cycle of events that leaves a person somatic or psychological trace. (...). A trauma can be a wound inflicted on a person with a knife, a shot, anything that leaves a mark in the form of a scar” (Orwid, 2009, p. 7). The symptoms of trauma or PTSD include emotional numbness, anger, and withdrawal that can affect adaptation process.

In case of mothers of children aged 0-3 the problem with childcare occurred. They are often unable to take part in courses, group activities or other initiatives because they cannot arrange childcare. The situation of families with grandmothers is completely different - while grandmothers take care of the children, mothers work or train (also their language skills).

Another barrier in cultural adaptation is associated with negative perception of refugees as a cause of tensions and social conflicts, recognized in the part of a public opinion. A number of stereotypes towards newcomers present in discourse include a demanding attitude and claiming a special status and privileges, the lack of willingness to work and getting advantage of Polish social policy, supporting Ukrainian nationalism.

The lack of a network is also a significant obstacle - especially when it comes to navigating the new labor markets. Deprivation of networks affects refugees' "ability to seek jobs and access recruitment channels, even when their qualifications are at least comparable to those of their native-born peers. They are at an obvious disadvantage when it comes to knowledge of the host country's labour market and hiring practices, and with respect to contacts, direct or indirect, with employers" (OECD Policy..., 27.07.2022).

Last, but not least barrier identified in course of the fieldwork these are expectations of representants of host community towards refugees. The component of "appraisalment" - measuring the motivation and commitment of refugees according to the beholder's standards can be an obstacle in the process of cultural adaptation. According to Budyta-Budzyńska, it is important whether the host society has the experience of multiculturalism, because such experience shows the degree of tolerance (2011, p. 56) and empathy. In 1959 American anthropologist Edward T. Hall introduced the shortest definition of communication and culture, claiming that culture is communication and communication is culture (Hall, 1959). In this concise definition there is a deep reflection, that the culture people live in determines the way they communicate. In other words, the way of communication of a particular nation or ethnic group depends on the cultural framework - language, cultural principles, and axio-normative guidelines (Szopski, 2005). The effectiveness of the process of social integration between displaced persons and local communities depends on the development of a common level of communication. Interculturality applies to all phenomena that result from contact between diverse cultures. By intercultural communication, we understand this specific process of interaction between representatives of different national cultures.

When and under what conditions refugees can return to the place of origin? Main factors accompanying the consideration to return are as follows:

- 1) Relative "normality" in the place of residence, the end of direct hostilities - a frequent argument of the inhabitants of the western regions and the vicinity of Kyiv.
- 2) The situation of family reunification. Displaced persons – women and children have spouses and relatives who remained in Ukraine. Experience of separation both with anxiety negatively affects the mental state of refugees.
- 3) *The myth of return* – the emotional tie that diasporic communities keep with their home countries around which they renegotiate their identity (Cakmak, 2021).

At this point, it is necessary to return to the basic category of exile as a temporary search for a refuge in fear of persecution for distinct reasons. "According to the anthropologist Laura Hammond, the basis of repatriation solutions is the assumption that refugees are *out of place*, and therefore they should be *put back where they belong*" (Ząbek, Łodziński, 2008, p. 65). Ukrainian refugees make their decision to return to their home's conditional on the end of the armed conflict and the reconstruction of infrastructure. However, if the conflict is not resolved, they will not return "to their place" soon.

Conclusion

The humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian aggression on Ukraine requires the receiving societies to face the challenge of cultural adaptation of war refugees. This question is very important for Poland, which is by far the main destination country for Ukrainian citizens fleeing their homes. Economists already claim, that refugees from Ukraine “may be a human capital windfall for receiving countries like Poland, Romania, Moldova, and Hungary” (IMF: Finance & Development, June 2022). However, the issue of immigrants' adaptation to the host society is a complex phenomenon. “Ukrainian refugees do not fit the typical portrait of refugees: some of their characteristics are likely to improve their integration prospects, while others may, on the contrary, hinder them” (OECD Policy..., 27.07.2022). As highlighted in the OECD report on the potential contribution of Ukrainian refugees to the labour markets in host countries, integration patterns are different for refugees in relation to other migrant groups: “as they have not chosen to migrate, they generally have had no opportunity to prepare for their life in the new country, especially by starting to learn the language” (OECD Policy..., 27.07.2022).

On the ground of secondary data analysis and fieldwork conducted at a temporary refugee aid point in a township in the Silesian Voivodeship, the following catalog of barriers to effective adaptation were indicated: 1) language barrier; 2) temporality/liminality of the situation of exile; 3) trauma and psychological stress; 4) limited access to childcare; 5) stereotyping; 6) lack of networks; 7) high expectations of the host community towards refugees – features of the host society.

Regardless of the reasons and strategies for resettlement, all interviewed persons reported a deterioration in their own (and family) socio-economic status. Most of the displaced persons, regardless of age, have limited contact with the inhabitants of the city to which they traveled. The effectiveness of the process of social integration between displaced persons and local communities is also connected with the still unclear future of the territories that refugees regard as their home. Such a situation negatively affects the condition of a person who does not live at home, but does not integrate deeply into the new environment, assuming that the situation is temporary. Another aspect of the influx of the refugees is related to the processes taking place in host communities - the importance of establishing cultural dialogue, intercultural communication, overcoming psychological and communication barriers between guests and hosts.

Discussed concepts and preliminary fieldwork activities may contribute to the further in-depth analysis of the issue of cultural adaptation in various spheres of social and economic performance of refugees in the host communities.

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