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“INTEGRATED? JUST *LAGOM*.”

Socio-cultural integration of young EU-expatriates in Gothenburg

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Abstract

This thesis examines aspects of social and cultural integration of young EU-expatriates in Gothenburg, Sweden. It focuses on three areas – workplace, language and socialization – that came forward as the most important sites when it comes to the process of integration. Drawn on twelve qualitative interviews, the study has shown the great importance of social relations in young expats' lives, as well as their varying perceptions when it comes to the usefulness of the Swedish language in a country of high-proficient English speakers. Besides that, the research has demonstrated how an employer and Swedish working culture commonly have a central role in all of the areas of integration into Swedish society. However, the analysis has been done with the notion of highly skilled EU-migrants being perceived as *expats*, in contrast to *immigrants*, which includes somewhat different expectations from the society regarding their adaptation to the local culture. The main contribution of the thesis is that the concept of integration is examined from a contemporary perspective of mobile, dynamic and multi-diverse societies within the EU.

Keywords: Integration, Expats, Sweden, EU mobile citizens, highly skilled migrants

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Introduction

The European Union and its free movement of persons includes, among other freedoms, the right to work in any EU member state and “enjoy equal treatment with nationals in access to employment working conditions and all other social and tax advantages” (European Commission, 2020a). This has made it easier for both employers and employees when it comes to flexibility and wider recruitment process, since all European citizens should, in theory, equally be taken into account for a certain position. Hence, it is no surprise that there is an increased circulation of the EU working force within the Union, especially in the member states with stronger economies and higher standards of living, such as Sweden, taking into consideration that one of the main reasons for working mobility is “wage improvement” (van Ostaïjen et al., 2017: 4).

While all EU-citizens can be considered for a certain job position in an EU member state, at the same time, this means that there is also a certain freedom for an EU citizen to choose which EU country they would like to work in. Therefore, it is important to understand all the relevant conditions and circumstances for moving to a specific EU member state and potentially staying there permanently. Moreover, the flexibility of an EU citizen increases if they have a high level of education (*hereafter*: highly skilled EU-migrant worker¹ or EU-expat²) due to better working conditions and more possibilities in comparison to other EU-migrants who have not completed higher education. The focus of this thesis is on EU-expats in Gothenburg, Sweden, who moved to work in their profession. Besides focusing on the highly educated, this thesis departs from an assumption that EU-expats seeking employment in the other EU member state are as well more flexible if they do not have dependents, such as children. Thereby, it is assumed they do not have any legal nor moral obligations, neither have they have to take into account a person in a relationship of that kind when it comes to decision-making. Bearing that in mind, by being more flexible and having more work

¹ *Highly skilled migrant* (HSM) is a concept that refers to “people with qualifications as managers, executives, professionals, technicians or similar, who move within the internal labor markets of trans-national corporations and international organizations, or who seek employment through international labor markets for scarce skills.” (UNESCO, 2017). Since the focus of the thesis is on the mobility of the EU citizens within the Union – and the Union is a single market and therefore EU-migrants are not *migrants* in the strict sense comparing to non-EU citizens in the Union – the proposed term that will be used is a *highly skilled EU-migrant worker*

² Although the terms *expat* (*expatriate*) and *immigrant/migrant* are technically the same thing, they have somewhat different discourse. Namely, the connotation of *expat* is usually positive and refers to people who are highly educated, “cosmopolitan“ and “international“. More discussion on this will follow.

possibilities across the EU, young highly skilled migrants (HSM) might be more likely to take other factors (besides work) into consideration while deciding to move or stay in one place. One of these factors certainly is the social sphere of their life – the area that is often overlooked in both academic research, policymaking and recruitment within the European Union. Namely, when it comes to Intra-EU working mobility, the focus of the research tends to be predominantly on work, meaning that the private life is often overlooked, especially when it comes to EU-expats without family. One of the reasons might be an assumption that a young expat from another EU member state will not have any particular issues when it comes to integrating and adapting to the host society. However, this thesis aims to prove the opposite. Besides that, the study emphasizes the significant importance of the employer and the workplace that are one of the key actors in the expat's social and cultural integration.

It is also important to mention that the intensity of youth mobility and the whole concept of it has been significantly changed during the past two decades and nowadays' youth is going abroad on a large scale. Besides the EU itself being the great promotor of youth mobility, some of the reasons for the increased dynamics of temporary migration are cultural and economic globalization, individualization, and progress in communication and connectivity (Conradson et al., in Frändberg, 2013: 146, 147). Therefore, due to the increased youth mobility, there are chances that the EU citizen's work in another member state will be temporary, especially if they are not satisfied with *all* areas of their life.

When an EU citizen decides to move from one member state to another, there are certainly many factors that play a role in a decision-making process of moving and living in another country, and possibly staying there to “settle down”. If a highly skilled EU-migrant worker decides to move for a specific job position in their profession, it is to assume that working conditions are expected to be good, or in some cases better than in the home country. Keeping in mind that the work situation is “sorted out”, it is more likely that some other issues become prominent, such as social and cultural integration to the host society. This includes several factors: cultural closeness between the host and the origin country, knowledge of the host country's language, to name a few. Not to forget, it also depends on expats' lifestyle, as well as conscious and unconscious choices in their private life – for example, choice of friends, hobbies and free-time activities, but also their own drive to either integrate into the Swedish society or stay in the so-called *expat bubble*, or even within the community of their co-

ethnics. On first sight, integration of an EU citizen into Swedish society might not sound particularly challenging, taking into consideration several factors: firstly, the cultural closeness (in comparison to non-EU countries) and shared European identity; secondly, the fact that the country has always been welcoming towards foreigners, also from a legal perspective; and thirdly, Gothenburg is an international city with many young expatriates. What many are not aware of is the fact that Sweden is, according to the World Value Survey (2015), one of the most exceptional countries in the world. WVS (2015) is a global research project that analyzes people's beliefs and values, such as citizens' support for gender equality, tolerance towards foreigners and minorities, the impact of religion, people's attitude towards climate, family and diversity, to name a few. Consequently, the process of integration might be more complicated than it seems. By understanding the challenges of young HSM and the presence of cultural differences regardless of the common European identity, Intra-EU working mobility can be improved and optimized for both job-seekers and employers.

Research question formulation

This thesis aims to examine how the socio-cultural integration of young EU expatriates in Gothenburg takes place within the areas of the workplace, language proficiency and socializing. The attention will be given to these three areas that, in some cases, might be interconnected or even overlap. The thesis' aim will be achieved by answering the following research questions:

- 1) *How does the workplace affect EU expatriates' integration in social and cultural domains?*
- 2) *In which way does the proficiency in the Swedish language facilitate the process of social and cultural integration?*
- 3) *How can socializing and life beyond work carry significant importance in young EU-expat's life in Gothenburg?*

The introduction of the thesis is followed by a sub-chapter presenting the solid argumentation for why Sweden/Gothenburg seem to be an attractive destination for living and working. The following chapter concentrates on theories and previous research on the relevant topics, including the research on the integration's social and cultural domain, super-diverse societies

and the notion of being an *expatriate* in contrast to an *immigrant*. Afterwards, methodology and research design are described in detail, together with the approach to the data analysis. Finally, the results are presented and analyzed by focusing on the three main areas – workplace, language and socializing – which is followed by the discussion and the conclusion.

Gothenburg/Sweden as an attractive destination

Sweden has undoubtedly been one of the most attractive EU-countries for the highly skilled migrants to look for an employment. Firstly, it is a country that has not introduced common restrictions or transition rules on the free movement of workers for the new member states, especially during the enlargements in 2004, 2007 and 2013. Unlike most of the other EU countries, Sweden was one of the few countries – together with the UK³ and Ireland – that has fully opened the door for the workers from the new member states (van Ostaijen et al., 2017: 10).

Moreover, besides having one of the highest GDPs in the Union (European Commission, 2020b), Sweden is a country with the highest employment rate in the EU – 82.4% (comparing to the EU average of 73.2%) (European Commission, 2020c). According to EUROSTAT (European Commission, 2020d), the EU citizens who live in Sweden have equal power on the Swedish labor market comparing to the native citizens. Namely, the employment rate of Swedish citizens is 84.7%, and of EU citizens in Sweden, the number is 83.7% (for comparison, only 51.4% non-EU citizens who live in Sweden are employed). Besides that, the country has been suffering from worker shortage in plenty of professions – particularly in IT, engineering, healthcare and education sector (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2018) – meaning it is compelled to import the workforce, at least to a certain extent.

Furthermore, although the Swedish language does not have many speakers and it is not one of the usual languages to learn in Europe (in comparison to English, German, French or Spanish), the language does not seem to be a hinder for newcomers since Swedes are the second-best non-native English speakers in the world (Education First, 2019). Consequently, it can suggest that there is a considerable amount of jobs requiring only a knowledge of

³ However, due to the Brexit, this will no longer be the case

English⁴. Finally, Sweden's social welfare and well-being (OECD, 2017), which also includes a well-known policy on the work-life balance, is undoubtedly what attracts many EU citizens to its country.

This thesis focuses specifically on expats in Gothenburg, the second-largest Swedish city, which for many reasons is an attractive place to live and work as an expatriate. It is a vibrant, fast-growing city and the heart of the Swedish industry. Namely, 92% of all country's industries are represented in the Gothenburg region, with more than half a million people employed, and numerous foreign-owned companies. The region records faster population growth than the rest of Sweden. Besides that, inhabitants of the region are younger than the country's average, and most of them have completed post-secondary education (Business Region Gothenburg, 2019). Last but not least, it is the most sustainable city in the world and has received the highest score in the Global Destination Sustainability Index (2019) four years in a row.

⁴ To my knowledge, there are no official numbers on the percentage of English-speaking jobs. It is, however, well-known that big corporations (IT, tech, industry, pharma), as well as many other companies, do not require knowledge of Swedish.

Previous research and theoretical framework

The substance – social and cultural integration of young EU-expatriates in Sweden – that is aimed to be explored in this research is rather complex. It involves several types of socio-cultural factors that are, to a certain extent, interrelated. Some of these factors, such as language, social life and working environment, are well documented in the previous studies (e.g. van Ostaijen et al. 2017; Emilsson & Adolfsson, 2017; Semler, 2006), however not in the context of Intra-EU mobility of highly skilled migrants with employment in their profession. Consequently, it is expected that some important findings might result from this thesis. This chapter discusses the previous findings in more detail and present some of the relevant theories to shed light on the original findings of this study. Firstly, a brief summary of previous research is presented, including more focus on increased dynamics and multi-diversity of contemporary societies, as well as the phenomenon of conflicting connotations between *expats* and *migrants*. Thereafter, a theoretical framework on integration is presented with the focus on social and cultural domains. The integrational model developed by Ager and Strang (2008) is used as the ground theory, followed by more thorough explanations of concepts within the social and cultural domains based on the work of Phillimore and Wessendorf (2018), Grzymala-Kazlowska (2017) and Bourdieu (1986).

The research on the integration of expatriates is a growing field. However, a significant part of previous work is focused on expats' integration in countries that are culturally distant: for example, research on Western expats in Asian countries – such as China, Singapore and Japan (e.g. Semler, 2006; Beaverstock, 2002; Peltokorpi, 2008). These works have indicated that expats who learned the local language have integrated better than the ones who did not. When it comes to Europe, plenty of research has been done on issues with immigration from CEE-countries to Western Europe (e.g. van Ostaijen et al., 2017; Engbersen et al., 2010), including particularly to Sweden (e.g. Clay, 2018; Emilsson & Adolfsson, 2019). However, the discourse of the research on CEE-workers is usually focused on the labor market issues, meaning not that much on social and cultural integration. Since Sweden has been one of the common destinations for immigrants in general, there is consequently ample research on cultural integration (e.g. Nekby, 2012), but it often focuses on non-EU countries, or it makes a clear-cut distinction between Western and Eastern Europe. Moreover, it does not specifically focus on highly skilled migrants with employment in their profession. Hence, this thesis fills

the gap particularly on the issues of integration among the EU-expats in Sweden as one of the EU member states.

Furthermore, it is essential to refer to previous research that deals with the notion of being an *expatriate* in contrast to a *migrant*. Namely, scholars (Yeung, 2016; Leinonen, 2012) have highlighted the positive perception of being an *expatriate* that brings somewhat different expectations from the society and even the authorities, particularly when it comes to the language sphere. Likewise, there is a phenomenon of the *expat bubble* that describes an imaginary space where many expats prefer to stay, rather than integrating into the “real”, local society. For example, Andersson’s thesis (2019) with the focus on expats in Zürich, Switzerland has demonstrated how expats are integrated into the *bubble* rather than the Swiss society due to lack of time spent with locals, not knowing the local language, and not being motivated enough to integrate. An increased dynamics of highly skilled migrants’ work mobility consequently makes European cities more international, which can be one of the attractive factors when it comes to moving to a specific city abroad. For example, Emilsson and Adolfsson’s study (2019) focuses on young Latvians and Romanians living in Malmö and their reasons to live in Sweden. Namely, some of the factors that motivated them to move to Sweden were a widespread usage of the English language, idealization of Sweden and cosmopolitan lifestyle. Finally, Grzymala-Kazlowka and Phillimore (2018) propose different, multi-diverse perspective of the integration, since nowadays societies are getting more mobile, and this can particularly regard to the Intra-EU mobility and the free movement of persons.

To put it in the nutshell, there is a lack of research on the integration of young EU highly-skilled workers in the member states, especially in social and cultural domains that are often overlooked despite having a significant role in young EU expats’ lives. Besides that, previous research often does not include the new concept of integration in mobile EU-society, as well as different expectations from society by being an EU-citizen.

Expatriate vs. immigrant: conflicting expectations

One of the most important things for understanding the choice of this specific target group is taking a deeper look into differences between the notion of expatriate and immigrant. As

already mentioned, we might agree that these two terms are linguistically the same – *expatriate* refers to a person living outside of their home country, and *migrant*, or better to make it more specific – *immigrant*, refers to a person migrating to another country of their country of origin. However, these two terms carry somewhat contrasting connotations, meaning they refer to different social categories of people on the move

To give an example: in Switzerland, migrants are usually seen as “low skilled newcomers in search of employment” (Yeung, 2016: 723) that are expected, both from the society and the legal authorities, to learn the language in order to be seen as “well-integrated” and finally, to receive their residence permit. On the contrary, international expatriates who are working in English in the area of e.g. diplomacy, NGOs or multinational corporations, tend to learn the local language only as something voluntarily and out of self-interest. Besides, they are encouraged by society to join international schools, media in English is promoted, and the expats themselves do not feel the urge to exclusively use the local language, even in the case they speak it. In this case, how a foreign individual will be perceived depends on two factors – culture (proximity vs. distance) and skills (low or highly skilled) (Yeung, 2016: 724-726).

Another example is research by Leinonen (2012) conducted in Finland about two contrasting discourses. One of them is *internationalization* that encourages the positive picture of new perceptions and border-crossing in contrast to pure Finnishness. However, it usually regards exclusively to Western nations. On the contrary, the concept of *immigration* carries a negative connotation. Namely, it is seen as something that should be controlled, and in the case of Finland, this regards mainly to Russians, Eastern Europeans and people from the Global South. The research has shown how Westerners (in this case, Americans) perceive themselves as *expats* rather than *immigrants*, and they prefer not to speak Finnish, since speaking Finnish with an accent is, in their opinion, seen as an *immigrant* thing. Besides the language, they also believe they stand more chances in finding a job since they are “white” (Leinonen, 2012: 213, 214).

Taking all of this into account, there are high chances that a highly skilled EU-migrant will have a notion of an *expat* in Sweden and consequently, different expectations from the society and from themselves, which presumably includes more dimensions than the language itself. However, is being a white Western highly skilled EU-citizen in Sweden *really* going to make one’s integration “smooth” and unproblematic? To agree with Leinonen (2012: 213, 214), too

little research in social sciences deals with migration, and consequently integration of EU-citizens in Europe.

Integration: a shifting concept

What *is* integration indeed? What does it mean to integrate into nowadays societies that are becoming more and more dynamic, especially in the EU where the mobility of its citizens is significantly increasing? Is it to speak the country's language, behave like locals, embrace the culture of the host society, or to build strong relationships within the society?

With its many definitions and concepts, integration commonly refers to

“processes that entail the socio-economic, political, social and cultural adaptation of newcomers, and emergence of shared social relations, values and practices, including, at least in theory, the adaptation of the long-settled population to newcomers” (Ager et al., in Phillimore & Wessendorf, 2018: 3)

To start with, it is important to give an overview of the aspects that are included in the concept of integration. According to Ager and Strang (2008: 170), there are four domains within the notion of integration:

- Markers and means – employment, housing, education, health
- Social connection – including social bridges, social bonds, social links
- Facilitators – Language and cultural knowledge, Safety and stability
- Foundation – Rights and Citizenship

Although not all integration domains are in the focus of this research, it is important to pay attention to them since they can have a strong influence on each other. For example: employment can influence social bonds, housing can influence safety and stability, etc. This regards specifically to the domains of *markets and means* and *foundation* that are not in a focal point, but can illustrate how EU citizens are not equal to Swedish citizens in many legal domains, opposed to what is generally considered. To start with, when it comes to the free movement of persons, EU citizens are only *de facto* allowed to move “freely”. Even in the EU Law (Article 45, in European Commission, 2020a), it is stated that EU citizens have the right to free movement, but it applies to those who move “for work purposes”, meaning they

cannot become residents without the purpose as such⁵. Moreover, it is not guaranteed that one's professional qualification will automatically be recognized in another member state, due to special laws that apply to certain professions depending on the country (European Commission, 2020e; Capuano & Migali, 2017).

When starting life in Sweden, it is necessary to have a Swedish personal number (*hereafter*: PN - *personnummer*) in order to be a resident with the EU citizen's rights, among others having access to the public healthcare system. To be able to obtain the PN, an EU citizen needs to have a work contract or be self-employed. Alternatively, they can be enrolled in a university program for at least 12 months, have sufficient funds or a close family relationship with another person living in Sweden⁶ (Skatteverket, 2020a). The same rules apply for citizens of EEA countries, however not to the Nordic countries. When it comes to citizens of Denmark, Norway, Finland or Iceland, they do not need to have any purpose or proof (other than their identification document) in order to get the right to reside in Sweden and obtain the PN (Skatteverket, 2020b) due to the Nordic Passport Union. Apparently, this law puts these countries in a more favorable position in comparison to other EU/EEA member states. Hence, non-Nordic citizens who come to Sweden without a work contract or a university enrollment are not eligible for the PN, risking that many employers will exclude them as a hiring possibility since they lack the personal identity number. Without the PN and the work contract, it is hard to find housing since even second-hand renters usually demand from their tenants to prove the purpose of residence. Also, when it comes to the economic aspect, it is extremely hard to open a bank account without Swedish ID⁷ (which can be obtained after getting the PN), although it is against the law stating that every EU/EEA citizen has the right to open a bank account in Sweden, as long as they live in any of the member states (Konsumenternas, 2017).

Another obstacle that appears within the realm of the EU's free movement is discrimination and exploitation (van Ostaijen, 2017: 1). As the most common example, one way of reducing

⁵ Besides work, it is possible to obtain the right of residence for e.g. students, close family members and being self-employed

⁶ However, proving that one is self-sufficient or wanting to connect with the family in Sweden can, in practice, be a somewhat complicated process

⁷ There are no official numbers on refused cases. However, based on experiences of approximately 50-100 people known to me (both work and private sources), it is usually "mission impossible" to open the bank account without Swedish ID. Also, they often describe their "luck" depending on a person that was working in the bank that day, regardless of the bank company.

the costs of the company is paying lower wages. The most efficient and “innocent” way to do that is to hire another EU citizen – preferably from the member state of the lower standard – that is willing to work for less money than an average Swede would accept. Although it might look like a win-win situation, it puts in a bad position both locals and EU citizens in the country. First of all, accepting underpaid jobs lowers the standard of a certain profession which is not convenient for the Swedish citizens working in the respective field. Secondly, EU-migrants workers do have the same rights as the country’s citizens, but often they are not aware of them, which means they are less protected and more likely to be exploited (van Ostaijen, 2017: 15). In this case, language plays a big role – not even in the way whether EU-citizen speaks the local language or not (which is an obvious element), but in the way that the lack of language skills hinders access to information (Ciupijus et al., in van Ostaijen, 2017: 2).

With reference to the target group of this thesis, it is about EU citizens who have completed higher education and already had a job in their profession once they moved to Sweden. This means they might not have gone through all the above-mentioned obstacles. However, it is crucial to point these obstacles out, since they are the proof that EU-citizens can struggle with almost the same hurdles that hinder the inclusion as non-EU citizens, not to mention social and cultural factors. Moreover, many scholars (Collett et al., in van Ostaijen, 2017: 2) also believe that EU-migrant citizens may “still face significant barriers and have integration needs similar to migrants from outside of the EU”.

Mobility in super-diversity

In today’s Europe, societies are rapidly changing in their structures and demographic composition. Therefore, the whole concept of integration is in need to be reconsidered. Grzymala-Kazlowka and Phillimore (2018), for instance, suggest new perspectives and reconsideration of the current concept of integration since most societies are now becoming super-diverse rather than mono-national. The increased interrelation between different societies, growing mobility and complexity play a key-role, as well as shifting dynamics in Europe, such as the rise of right-wing nationalists, Brexit and ongoing migration crisis (Grzymala-Kazlowka & Phillimore, 2018: 181).

It is also important to look at the integration from a different point of view since it has been so far analyzed as adaptation into traditional societies. Meaning, today's host societies are more and more diverse and fluid. Besides that, many migrants do not necessarily settle permanently, or on the other hand, they preserve connections to several countries (Faist et al., in Grzymala-Kazlowka & Phillimore, 2018: 186).

On top of that, EU mobility has been rapidly growing within younger generations due to the considerably prolonged transition period from youth to adulthood. Several scholars (Conradson et al., in Frändberg, 2013: 147, 148) claim some of the reasons for that: increased number of opportunities, but also raised insecurities; and significantly increased spatial mobility that gives young people freedom of choice, but on the other hand, makes transnational mobility competence pre-requisite for employability.

Social domain

The social sphere of someone's life can doubtlessly influence their decision to live in a certain place. For an EU-expat, working opportunities in Europe are expanding, and this could mean that EU workers are, besides the job itself, presumably paying attention to other factors, such as the social one. Ager and Strang's (2008) categorization of integration recognizes *social bonds*, *social bridges* and *social links* as the main element of the social connection domain. To put it in the Swedish context, *bonds* relate to proximity to specific groups (e.g. closest friends from the same ethnic group, mixed international, or Swedish), *bridges* regard to relationship towards Swedish society (e.g. in terms of race and social inclusion/exclusion) and *links* signify the connection between an individual and the state (e.g. access to a certain system or service).

Vermeulen and Penninx (in Phillimore & Wessendorf, 2018: 3, 4) designate social integration as

“the relations migrants establish after they arrive in a new country. Such relations can be with members of the receiving society, through clubs, associations and institutions, or with co-ethnics. Importantly, social integration is considered to be instrumental regarding access to more structural aspects of integration because information about jobs, housing and schools is often gained through social connectedness.”

This type of integration can be related to the concept of *social capital*. According to Bourdieu (1986: 247), it can be defined as the collection of resources connected to “possession of a

“durable network”, “institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” and “membership in a group”. In other words, it refers to aspects of social life such as friendships and family ties. Social capital that is possessed by an individual depends on its size and as well its co-dependent relation to other capitals (cultural, symbolic, and economic). It can be symbolic as well as instituted (e.g. family name) (Bourdieu, 1986: 247). In the process of integration, social capital can be either bonded or bridged. The notion of *bonding social capital* usually carries a negative connotation since it is considered unsuccessful due to the lack of influence. Instead, *bridging social capital* is a common reference both in scholarship and policymaking. It applies to social relations that are shaped with members of the respective majority (Bloch & McKay et al., in Phillimore & Wessendorf, 2018: 4).

It has been shown that the way to successful integration does *not* exclusively mean having a close relation to the host community – in this case, having Swedish friends. Namely, Phillimore and Wessendorf (2018) have demonstrated how migrants’ settlement is supported by their friendship with both host community members, co-ethnics and other migrants, which authors call *migrant social capital*. In general, being friends with co-ethnics is usually seen as a sign of not being integrated (Casey et al., in Phillimore and Wessendorf, 2018: 2), but some scholars (Cheung & Phillimore, in Phillimore, 2018: 2; Muller, in Ager & Strang, 2008: 178, 179) stress the importance of having friends that are not majority group, i.e. co-ethnics and other immigrants, in order to integrate faster – for instance, as a pathway into work or housing. Moreover, other research (Beiser, in Ager & Strang, 2008: 178) has shown the connection between having co-ethnic friends and being healthy, whereat there is significantly three to four times higher risk of being diagnosed with depression if a person does not spend time with their co-ethnics.

Besides social integration, there are several other relevant concepts worth mentioning. Firstly, *embedding* signifies a social relationship that favors the feeling of integration and rootedness in the different areas, such as the workplace, household and neighborhood. Moreover, the concept of *sociabilities of emplacement* refers to human competence to socialize with other people as much as their desire for relationships (Phillimore & Wessendorf, 2018: 4, 5). Finally, Grzymala-Kazłowska (2017) describes the concept of *anchoring* as the process of settling down while aiming for security and stability, in compliance with Maslow’s (1954, in Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2017: 633) theory of needs. These concepts enable a migrant to feel

comfortable and “at home” while living in a foreign country, which is presumably one of the most important part of the integration in a wider sense.

Cultural domain

In the sphere of culture, one of the main competences is knowledge of the host country’s language as a key-factor towards successful integration. Not knowing the local language can cause struggles even in daily life, such as getting in contact with certain services (e.g. healthcare). For these reasons, providing translations is, on the one hand, highly recommended, and it can be seen as a step forward towards “enhanced cultural competence of essential services in a multicultural context” (Pankaj, in Ager & Strang, 2008: 182). On the other hand, it is often criticized as an “inhibitor of language learning and thereby integration” (Easton, in Ager & Strang, 2008: 182). In regard to Sweden, it might be possible that the expectations to learn the Swedish language are certainly not on the same level as, for instance, learning English in the UK or French in France. This is due to several factors that were previously mentioned: Swedish people's excellent knowledge of English, the fact that the Swedish language does not have many speakers comparing to other “big” European languages, the amount of foreign-born professionals who work in English, provided translations free of charge in public services, etcetera. Nonetheless, there is also one important and often overlooked factor that has an impact on society’s expectations on immigrants when it comes to learning the local language. As previously mentioned, these expectations are often based on migrant’s ethnicity and/or level of education, which in the context of this research regards to the notion of being an *expat* rather than being a *migrant*.

A less researched element of cultural integration is cultural knowledge. This includes being familiar with the host country’s procedures, facilities and customs (Ager & Strang, 2008: 183). As in the social domain, there is also the notion of *capital* in the cultural domain. Bourdieu (1986) divides *cultural capital* into three forms: *embodied* form that refers to people’s disposition and self-investment, *objectified* form that regards to cultural good such as books, pictures and instruments, and *institutionalized* form that is objectifying the capital through academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986: 243-247).

Research design proposal

The focus of this research is specifically on young EU-expatriates. To make it more clear, the target group are young, highly skilled professionals without children who moved to Sweden primarily for work and are currently not older than 35. One of the main reasons to concentrate on EU-citizens with no children is the fact that being a parent carries slightly different expectations and demands – both in the legal terms (legally binding to take care of the child) and social (different lifestyle) aspects. Although having a child does not stop a person from having a similar life like people who do not have children, one can agree that a child will have a huge impact when it comes to an individual EU-expat’s mobility⁸. When it comes to the age limit, there are several points of view regarding when the person stops being “young”. Based on several sources – such as the UN, the EU and the theories in psychology (e.g. Erikson, 1950) – and taking into consideration how adulthood is getting more prolonged, decided age for the research is up to 35 years. Since *completed higher education* is one of the features of the target group, it is likely that no one should be younger than 21 years.

The approach of conducting this thesis will be abductive, which means it will not exclusively rely on certain theories, but it will rather wave in the empirical evidence in theorization and back. According to Timmermans and Tavory (2012), abduction in the research context refers to a “process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence” where “a researcher is led away from old to new theoretical insights” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012: 170). Therefore, the results of the thesis will hopefully create some new conceptual understanding of the theoretical framework that guides this study. The current chapter will illustrate the proposed methodology necessary for getting some valuable results.

Based on the topic and the research questions, the optimal way to conduct the research is through semi-structured interviews. This kind of interview includes very concrete and planned questions that usually demand a focused answer, but as well topics or/and questions that can be answered more in-depth (O’Reilly, 2009: 126).

⁸ e.g. because of the child itself, a parent might want to “settle down” instead of moving around Europe every few years and testing opportunities of the EU working mobility; likewise, not the same criteria for moving will apply, for instance factors such as the education system and opportunities for a child will have a big importance

Doing interviews brings the researcher a closer and deeper look into people's "biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings" (May, in Lilleker, 2003: 208), and they are usually done to explore the topic we know a little about (Lilleker, 2003: 208). Since this is a qualitative study, it can also be defined as in-depth interviewing (Marshall & Rossman, 2016: 142) that is not purely curiosity of a one-party, but rather a "theme of a mutual interest" (Kvale & Brinkmann, in Marshall & Rossman, 2016: 142).

According to Patton's categorization (in Marshall and Rossman, 2016: 144), this proposed research belongs to the category of the topical or guided interview. Some of the category's specifications are scheduled and planned interview, whereat the interviewer is prepared in advance with a list of specific questions and topics that are to be discussed (Marshall & Rossman, 2016: 144). Although it is about the topic that the researcher is obviously interested in, the focus remains on the interviewed participant's view (Marshall & Rossman, 2016: 144).

Access and planning

In order to make this research feasible, it was important to consider several aspects while thinking about the research design. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016: 4, 5), some of the most crucial things are enough resources – both in terms of time and money – and access to the interviewees. Therefore, the complexity and extensity of the topic are chosen according to the time frame for the thesis and the author's own ability to do it.

When it comes to access, it usually demands a lot of seeking (after identifying the "perfect" candidate), locating (finally finding where the participants are) and contacting them (Lilleker, 2003: 208). Besides that, gaining access often includes a lot of negotiations, renegotiations and strong communication efforts depending on each individual or a group of people (Berg, in O'Reilly, 2009: 5). In practice, finding participants was not significantly demanding, and the most common way of reaching them was through mutual friends and social networks of the author.

After finding participants, the next step was providing a physical space to conduct the study. Since most of the participants are presumably working during usual working hours, the suggested time is during evenings or weekends, in a public place with a relaxed and informal

atmosphere, where they can talk more openly and casually without feeling pressured or “interrogated”. Based on time limitations and place for interviewing, the most effective way to document the interview was by taking notes, rather than recording all the interviews and then transcribing them. Bearing that in mind, it was important to focus on details while the interviewee is speaking, and not just on writing down as many notes as possible. Apropos conducting the interviews in practice, everything went according to plan except for a few interviews that were conducted virtually. However, this has not decreased the quality of the interview itself. Moreover, the majority of the interviews were held in English, and the rest was translated afterward⁹.

Interview Guide

As previously presented, the target group of this thesis are young EU expatriates (without children) who moved to Gothenburg primarily for work when they were under 35 years old. Through interviews, the following aspects were explored: images of Sweden before and after moving (preparedness, expectation vs. reality), the language sphere (efforts and intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation to learn Swedish), choices in terms of socializing practices (“choosing” Swedish vs. foreign friends, being in the *expat bubble*, efforts to make “Swedish friends”, choices of free-time activities and hobbies), and finally, a self-interest to integrate into Swedish society. The number of conducted interviews is twelve.

With the help of the prepared interview guide (*see Appendix 1*), the interview started with some relevant general questions, such as basic information about the person’s life and occupation. Furthermore, the aim was to examine reasons for moving particularly to Sweden/Gothenburg, including perception and images of the country before and after moving. Afterwards, the focuses shifted on out-of-work activities the expats’ relationship towards Swedes, other internationals and co-ethnics. Besides that, efforts for learning the Swedish language was questioned, together with the respondents’ motivation to integrate. Finally, the last part regarded to challenges that expats are experiencing in Sweden, taking into consideration the differences between Sweden and their home countries.

⁹ Some of the interviews were held in the author’s native language (Croatian) or partially in Swedish; all the upcoming citations that were not originally in English are translated by the author

Analysis and interpretation of interviews

Once the data is collected, i.e. the interviews are conducted, it is crucial to analyze them in a systematic way. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016: 217-230), it is necessary to make a good organization of the data. In this case, it means going through the notes, preferably right after each interview, and see if they can be visually and chronologically organized so they are clearer to read. By doing that, some potential categories already occurred during the first few interviews, which has helped in identifying and detecting the relevance of each topic, as well as which areas to (not) focus on in the upcoming interviews. For example, although not being in the focus of the research, the workplace turned out to be the central point of social and cultural integration of expatriates in Gothenburg.

The results are presented through qualitative content analysis. According to Kvale (2011: 106), this type of analysis focuses on the text's meaning and aims to create categories while paying attention to the frequency of specific themes. After conducting the interviews, it was necessary to start analyzing, which is conducted by coding the data. This regards to the process of making different categories and giving them their names, as well as creating and coming up with new ideas and concepts (O'Reilly, 2009: 34). Although it was hard to predict the correct outcome before doing an in-depth analysis, some interesting results were expected to be seen in the following areas already before analyzing: connection of wanting to learn the language with having Swedish friends; expats living in the *expat bubble* and differences in their efforts to get out of it – in connection to the choice of hobbies, international vs. Swedish work colleagues, cultural closeness to Sweden, motivation to integrate in connection to future plans, to name a few.

It is also important to stress the need for a proper categorization (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Marshall and Rossman, 2016: 217) since it will have an influence on results and the interpretation of the collected interview data. When it comes to theoretical saturation, the twelve interviews were conducted which was significant enough in order to make a good-quality coding and interpretation of the data.

Quality of the study

When it comes to the quality of a certain study, there are several criteria that are important to fulfill in order to make valuable research (*see* Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Tracy, 2010). To refer to them, this research theme is worthy since EU-mobility is always an ongoing topic and the area that needs to be improved and optimized. There are, to my knowledge, no qualitative studies looking into the integration of EU-expatriates in Gothenburg, thus this study gives a significant contribution to the research. Since there is enough relevant data collected in order to make a good analysis, this study is as well fulfills the criteria of rich-rigor and credibility, which are one of the main criteria for high-quality research (Tracy, 2010). Finally, it is important to mention that the author's academic background¹⁰ and professional experience¹¹ makes her both motivated and competent to conduct this research.

The only potential limitation of this study could be a generalization, which is always a tricky issue in qualitative research. It is clear that we cannot generalize and apply the results on the e.g. whole expatriate community in Sweden since we would need a quantitative/statistical or a larger comparative qualitative study in order to do that. However, one could argue that the study's results are transferable, which would mean that highly educated young EU-expats might experience a similar situation in e.g. other cities in Sweden. Finally, it would be possible to do an analytical or theoretical generalization of this study by relating it to previous qualitative research of, for example, some other European city.

To put in the nutshell, the ambition of this study has been to achieve some valuable results that will help and contribute to a better understanding of young EU-professionals' perceptions, willingness and struggles with integration in another member state – in this case in Sweden – which can, eventually, lead to better strategies in European and global mobility.

¹⁰ This thesis is written as a part of the MSc in European Studies (Sweden); previously, the author has obtained BA and MA degree in Swedish Language and Culture (Croatia) and Music Pedagogy (Croatia, Austria)

¹¹ Currently working in several corporates as a teacher in Swedish language and culture for Gothenburg's expats; as the part of the MSc programme, the author has also worked as a relocation consultant in Gothenburg

Results and analysis

In this chapter, the results of the conducted interviews with the twelve respondents¹² are presented through qualitative content analysis, followed by the discussion that answers research questions. The structure of the analysis aims to systematically identify categories and dimensions, with the notion of their potential interdependence. The results will be presented in three areas: workplace, language and socializing. Every chapter aims to – if applicable – discuss perceptions and views, the notion of integration, obstacles and struggles on both macro and micro levels.

Moving to Sweden

Before diving deeper into the main areas, it is important to name respondents' reasons and the motivation for moving specifically to Gothenburg, together with their expectations and perceptions of life in the country. As already mentioned before, Sweden seems to be an obvious choice among the expats for working and living based on several objective factors – such as country's high standard, access to social welfare and work-life balance. Moreover, Gothenburg is a second-biggest city in the country and the heart of a number of Swedish industries that offer plenty of work possibilities.

However, the majority of interviewees did not move to Gothenburg because they wanted to move there (or to Sweden) *per se*, but rather because they wanted to work abroad. Sweden was just one of the rational options, and the main reasons for taking it into consideration were, similar to Emilsson and Adolfsson's study (2019), work conditions and more importantly, the lack of the language barrier. Other countries, mainly EU member states, were also taken into consideration when making a decision about moving abroad. Germany is the country that most of the participants would take into account. This can also partially depend on their professional background (automotive industry, engineering), but the biggest difference in comparison to Sweden was the German language as a predominant working language in Germany. Besides that, other attractive alternatives with a language barrier worth mentioning

¹² For the full list of participants, see Appendix 2

were Austria, France and Norway. Apropos to the language, it is only Dimitris¹³ (Greek, 28, nurse) whose working language is Swedish, but the recruiting company provided the language course in prior, and he was allowed to dedicate his time to improve his Swedish for the first five months of being in Sweden. Since this is a usual practice and nowadays, there are many recruitment agencies within healthcare who take care of their candidates in terms of learning Swedish, we can agree there was no language barrier for him in a real sense, at least when it comes to work. Besides him, Alex (British, 27, opera choir singer) also has Swedish as a working language, but because of the nature of his job, it is neither a conditional factor nor relevant for his work performance.

Those who wanted to work purposely in Gothenburg were only Javier (Spanish, 34, application manager) and Dimitris, whereat both of them already previously visited the city, “liked it a lot”, and had friends living there. For example, Javier referred to Gothenburg as an optimal city since it is “not too big, not too small”, and since he already experienced life in the northern part of Sweden, he found people in Gothenburg generally “more sociable than in the north of Sweden”. Erik (Slovakian, 29, manufacturing engineer) and Robert (British, 30, sound and vibration engineer) also made Gothenburg one of their choices after visiting, although it was not the only option. When it comes to Sweden as a preferred country, Hans (German, 28, technical sale engineer) wanted to live primarily in Sweden because of people’s mentality, which he describes as “close to German”.

Despite Gothenburg and Sweden being just one of the several options, everyone had generally very positive imagination of life in the country before moving, which corresponds to other research on EU-citizens’ view on Sweden (Emilsson & Adolfsson, 2019; Clay, 2018). Although there was a significant variation between the respondents who believed they had good knowledge about Sweden and Swedish society and culture, and the ones who did not think they knew much about it, both extremes had more or less the same perception of life in Sweden. In this case, the geographical proximity of respondents’ host countries played a significant role. Similar to Hans, who claimed that German and Swedish cultures are very much alike, Margaret from Estonia (29, process manager) also emphasized her “pretty strong feelings” about Swedes since “it is so common for one country to be familiar with its neighbors”. Other than that, Sweden is perceived as liberal and society-focused country with a

¹³ All names are fictional

lot of beautiful nature, open-minded people and a well-organized system. Natalia (Polish, 29, PhD scholar) emphasized the family-positive image of Sweden and referred to Swedes as very open-minded people that are a bit cold. When it comes to the system and the social welfare, Nikos (Greek, 32, wind power product manager) described Sweden with the following words:

“It is a perfect country, and this is the image most of us in the south of Europe have. Sweden is *actual* socialism. Very high standard, you have free education, free health, you have everything.”

Similar to him, Catalan (Spanish, 26, project manager) imagined Sweden as a country with “a lot of taxes, good health and well-being”. In addition, Croatian Ida (30, design engineer) stressed the respect and gender equality in Swedish workplace as her first thought when thinking about Sweden:

“What I love the most about Sweden is the way they communicate. You are respected at work, not discriminated like in Croatia. I mean, I worked as a civil engineer back home, imagine being a woman who works as a civil engineer in Croatia, I don’t even have to explain further. And in Sweden, everything is just so normal.”

After presenting the expectations, the following three sections will try to illustrate the realities that expats have experienced in the areas of workplace, language and socializing.

Work and beyond

All interviewees have employment in their profession which they like and appreciate, and dealing with the conditions of their employment is not the primary goal of this research. However, it appears that the working environment seems to have a huge impact on social and cultural domains of the expats’ integration, which has often been an overlooked component in previous research. The importance of the employer in their employees’ integration can also be seen from the fact that none of the interview questions were concretely related to work, but participants themselves felt like talking about it.

First of all, none of the respondents particularly emphasized the expectations from their work in Sweden, except two of the participants who casually mentioned some of the “apparent” factors, such as good conditions and a respectful environment. Due to the fact that they did not really pay attention to potential distinction in the working environment, this can be interpreted as they were most presumably not aware of a different business culture that they

would encounter in Sweden. Another supportive argument for this assumption is that most of the expats were really surprised by the differences that occurred. Even though the language barrier was absent for those who work in English, the cultural one was very much apparent. This regards to the communication in the office – both in terms of discussing work and talking about private life – decision-making, responsibility and equality at the workplace. Therefore, the working environment came up as an important topic of analysis, and following Ager and Strang (2008), it can be particularly relevant when it comes to cultural knowledge that refers to becoming familiar with customs, procedures and facilities in Sweden. Reflections from the participants, as well as their surprised voice intonation while just talking about it, clearly illustrate there are certain obstacles and cultural misunderstandings they encountered within the working environment.

To start with, the workplace is an important point of reference in relation to *embodied cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1986: 243-247) and the expats' efforts in adapting to the working culture that is clearly connected to the culture of the Swedish society in general. Strictly speaking, the expats seem to struggle the most when it comes to business communication in a "Swedish way", especially when it comes to criticizing someone's work. For example, Nikos after three years in Sweden still does not feel comfortable with giving and receiving feedback, which he finds time-consuming:

"This is definitely my biggest struggle here in Sweden. It's really hard to get negative feedback from the Swedish person. They will use so many nice words and give you an introduction about how great you are. It is not very effective. Just wasting time, and also it might not even be interpreted as a critique, and then you have a misunderstanding. When I lived in the Netherlands, the feedback was so different. You could just say *Hey man, I think that's a stupid idea*. Maybe it's not great, but at least easier to understand. In the same way, I struggle with giving the feedback, you know, being very sensitive and polite. In the beginning, I didn't think about it, but it came later. So now I'm really working hard to improve that and adapt."

Likewise, Hans finds it confusing that the real meaning of one's comment is different from what it is said, which is opposite from the work culture in Germany:

"If the boss asks *Would you like to do that?*, in Sweden it means you need to do it. In Germany, it really means *Would you like to do that?* and you can answer whatever. That is so confusing! Another weird thing is doing private stuff during the work. In Sweden, it is totally okay, but in Germany, they would look at you like you're not doing your job right"

To refer to Hans' words about "doing private stuff at work", many other respondents also agree that there is significantly more tolerance at the Swedish workplace than in the countries they used to work before. Dimitris explains:

"You can just stay at home instead of going to work. They don't care. One day we needed to start working at 7 am, and one colleague just didn't appear and she just casually sent the message saying that she will not come today, but it was already past 7. And everybody is like *okay*, no matter that we all will have to do an extra job for her part. There is no this sense of responsibility."

Besides Dimitris, Natalia also emphasized how she finds it "puzzling" that no one really wants to take *full* responsibility. Similar to her, Erik thinks the lack of responsibility has nothing to do with the balance, but with simply "tolerating that the tasks are not done". In addition, another element of Swedish work-life balance that he finds challenging is putting a lot of energy into socializing at work.

"There are so many coffee breaks. I don't need it, I just want to do a proper job. I still have a really hard time to cope with that. Ok, if I want to hang out with you, I will do it *after* work. Swedes will be so chatty at work, but nothing after it. Also, at my wife's job, they measure performance on how popular you are. And they even made a comment by telling her *Oh, maybe you should socialize more*. For me that's crazy."

It is important to emphasize that these abovementioned elements are not necessarily meant in a negative way, but only in a way that they came as a big surprise and it took (or still takes) some time to adapt to them. Besides that, since none of the participants complained about any of the common markers of a bad workplace (e.g. exploitation, discrimination) or a toxic environment (gossips, bad mood, verbal abuse), it is possible to assume none of them had any struggle or experience with that. However, after presenting challenges in cultural differences that the expats are experiencing, it is clear that it can be an obstacle in the integration process. This is particularly relevant because even the respondents themselves perceive these elements as crucial when it comes to integration. For example, Robert explains integration as

"...the process where things that don't feel normal start to feel normal. Then you are integrated."

Besides the fact that the Swedish working environment "teaches" expats how one should behave and what actions are socially accepted, it is also a central place in getting familiar with Swedish traditions and customs, making it an example of *social bridges* (Ager & Strang, 2008). Namely, by internally organizing, for example, Saint Lucia's Morning, the expats are getting in touch with Swedish typical celebrations that enrich their cultural knowledge about

the country. Again, this is an important part of the integration even from the perspective of respondents themselves, for example from Nikos' point of view:

“To integrate means to think as a Swede. Not necessarily to agree, but to understand. *Interacting* is the only way how you integrate. It's like getting to know a person, the same with the Swedish culture”

Another significant element of cultural integration is certainly language, and since many companies are providing language courses for their employees, it is another proof that the employer has a big impact on expats' integration. As demonstrated in the next section of this chapter, language is as well important for the social integration, which only strengthens the importance of the workplace in this context. Moreover, the working environment turned out to play one of the key-roles in the expats' *social bonds* (Ager & Strang, 2008). Namely, a most common way the respondents met their closest friends was through work, which will be further discussed in the following section on socializing.

Besides socializing, administration and bureaucracy are also a part of the integration's social domain, although not always visible. In this case, the employers that provided their foreign employees with certain information or services undoubtedly eased their process of adapting or struggling with understanding how things work, which is one of the main characteristics of *social links* (Ager & Strang, 2008). This includes help with the accommodation and registration with the local authorities. For example, almost all of the respondents had problems with paperwork, in particular with opening the bank account, although it is against their EU-rights (Konsumenternas, 2017). Although these obstacles are parts of other domains within the integrational model (Ager & Strang, 2008) – *markers and means* (accommodation) and *foundation* (rights and citizenship) – they surely influenced the expats' *social bridges*. Hence, the respondents would appreciate if their company helped them out with that matter.

“I never understood how it works with the bank account opening. I needed to go to the bank four times before they opened my account. I was living for three and a half months without a salary because I did not have an account, so imagine that.” (Javier)

“Getting the personal number was okay, but the bank account was super hard. I needed to go there over and over again, it was horrible. The process was never explained by anyone.” (Alex)

“They wanted Swedish ID to open my account. It was just disappointing they couldn't do it. And I couldn't get an ID because my passport was not biometrical.” (Margaret)

The same applies to accommodation assistance. Namely, all of the respondents were shocked by the housing situation. For example, Dimitris had a huge struggle finding accommodation for him and his dog. In the end, he got very disappointed, expecting Sweden to be animal friendly, but “it turned out to be completely the opposite”. Similar to him, all other expats had a significant problem with the housing – except the ones who got help from the company in providing a place to live – above all because they did not expect it to be as closely hard as it was.

“It’s really easy to become homeless, and that’s shocking” (Robert)

“When I lived in the UK, it was so different. In Sweden, even if you have money, sometimes you cannot find something nice to live in.” (Natalia)

Being familiar with how the system functions is also one of the main elements of the integration from the respondents’ perspective. Catalan explains:

“The system and being able to deal with it. To know how to get a loan, ask for help from a doctor, how taxes work – *this* is integration”

Therefore, although not always directly and prominently, an employer has a strong influence on their international employees’ integration and overall satisfaction with life in Sweden.

Language proficiency

Knowing and using the Swedish language in daily life would presumably depend on one’s motivation to integrate and learn the language. Moreover, it is usually considered that knowing the language of the host country helps to integrate (Ager & Strang, 2008), which would mean that people who work in Swedish are better integrated. However, in the case of young EU-expats in Gothenburg, the situation is somewhat different. Namely, there are plenty of unexpected findings in the language sphere, meaning there are no clear patterns when it comes to the language path the expats are willing to take.

Although most of the participants’ working language is English, Swedish being irrelevant to their profession in general, all of them speak some Swedish. They have been either enrolled in a language course or put efforts on their own, which represents their *objectified* and *institutionalized cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1986: 243-247). Dimitris is the only participant using the Swedish language working as a nurse, and the recruiting agency took care of his language course. Also, it is interesting that he is the only participant who refers to language as

the biggest, and moreover the only struggle in his life in Sweden. He still does not feel comfortable talking in Swedish, but since the learning process is taking place for less than two years, this is expected to improve. Since he is the only respondent who has to use Swedish at work, it is understandable that only he sees a language as an issue in that sense. This shows how the language sphere might be more complicated than it seems. Namely, Swedish will never be his mother tongue in comparison to the local society. This is contrary to all other respondents that are working in English because in this case, both Swedes and internationals are speaking a language that is not their native.

Besides Dimitris, Alex, a singer in an opera choir, has Swedish as a working language, but he still finds his way around with English. During the hiring process, no one demanded he spoke any Swedish, so one can say he was the only one “forced” to learn the language since it is doubtlessly useful to understand it at the rehearsals and meetings. Surprisingly, he is one of only two interviewees that did not attend any Swedish course, but this is mainly caused by his dynamic and changing work schedule. However, Alex still experienced language-related struggles at work:

“At work, I kind of understand Swedish, but I still reply in English. Sometimes I feel bad for using English. Once we had a meeting, which was of course in Swedish, and a colleague made this comment that everyone should speak Swedish, and she didn’t expect that I would actually understand what she said. So I apologized for my bad Swedish, and she felt awkward. I was really surprised she said that because she is that kind of person that is so non-discriminatory and feminist. That situation was a bit, you know...”

When it comes to other expats that work in English, their knowledge of Swedish varies, especially when it comes to the usage of the language on a daily basis. There are two main factors – excluding the integration domain – that influence expats’ motivation to learn Swedish: the amount of free time and the financial factor. The economic part regards to the possibility to attend the course free of charge, either in the case the company paid for the course or they managed to enter *SFI* and *SAS*¹⁴ free courses that fit their schedule. Only one participant, Hans, financially invested to one Swedish course at *Folkuniversitetet*¹⁵. Other participants specifically emphasized that they did not want to spend any money on the Swedish course, since they “don’t really need it”. This proves that the expats mainly learn the Swedish language voluntarily and out of their own personal interest rather than seeing it as

¹⁴ *SFI-Svenska för invandrare (Swedish for immigrants)* and *SAS-Svenska som andraspråk (Swedish as a second language)* are national free language courses

¹⁵ Most popular educational association for Swedish language courses

something mandatory, which has also been demonstrated in other research on expats, for example in Switzerland (Yeung, 2016). Moreover, since the respondents claim to “not really needing Swedish”, it can be interpreted that they do not feel there are any expectations from the society to learn the local language, which can be connected to the notion of them being *expats*, similar to research on Western expats in Finland (Leinonen, 2012).

However, all of the respondents made some efforts in learning Swedish according to their free time. The most common tool for learning Swedish is the Duolingo App, together with some extra material such as watching YouTube videos, TV-shows in Swedish and reading books. In regard to the length of being in Sweden, it does not have a noticeable influence on the motivation factor. For instance, Javier and Margaret both lived in Sweden for more than four years, and while Javier claims he can manage all “small technicalities” in Swedish, Margaret does not use the language at all even if she understands it in certain situations. Furthermore, Ida and Natalia are two participants with the highest proficiency in Swedish, but they both explicitly said they did not have any aspiration about becoming a part of the Swedish society nor staying in Sweden in a long term. Finally, only Hans demonstrated the expected relationship between learning the language and planning to stay or leave the country. Namely, he emphasized how his motivation and efforts to learn Swedish recently dropped because he is not sure he wants to stay in Sweden forever.

However, every one of the respondents emphasized the same, biggest “demotivating” factor that hinders them to use the Swedish language more regularly, and that is the high proficiency of the English language by the local society. This is not a surprise due to the English language being one of the factors that attracted them to come to Sweden, which is also demonstrated in other research (Emilsson & Adolfsson, 2019). Erik refers to the language circumstance as being both “good and bad that everyone speaks really good English”. Moreover, Margaret believes that it is not that worthy to engage yourself in learning Swedish, since it is difficult to actually use it:

“It was a struggle even just to start speaking. Everyone speaks English, so it’s really hard to speak Swedish. You really put effort, but don’t get much in return”

With the reference to Easton (in Ager & Strang, 2008: 182), we can agree that the access to information in English certainly is an “inhibitor of language learning”, however not

necessarily an inhibitor of “thereby integration”, which is further argued in the following sections.

The respondents were also asked about whether they think knowing Swedish can help them in their professional and private life. Everyone, except the two who are working in Swedish, agreed that knowing Swedish would not really help based on their type of work. Few of the participants, such as Marta (Italy, 26, software engineer) and Ida, added that Swedish would help only if it is on a really high level and in some of the smaller start-ups and companies, which was not necessarily their case. When it comes to Swedish in private life, and this referred to two dimensions – administrative, “technical”¹⁶ part of life, and social life – answers were varying greatly.

To start with the usage and usefulness of Swedish in a sense of getting around, all agreed that knowing Swedish is undoubtedly useful. Hence, it is clear that not knowing the local language hinders access to certain services and information (Ciupijus et al., in van Ostaijen, 2017: 2). Firstly, the respondents mainly related to the administrative aspects where it is more favorable if one speaks Swedish. One of the common examples was being able to read letters and emails that are written in Swedish. As a solution, respondents usually ask a friend or an acquaintance that speaks Swedish to help with the translation. Besides that, it is considered that knowing Swedish puts one in a more beneficial position in e.g. legal and health services. As Margaret described it,

“If you speak Swedish, it is so much easier to get help from the *Unionen*¹⁷. And generally, I would definitely get more out of certain services [...] also, we didn’t talk a lot about the health system. Here, knowing Swedish really helps a lot. I feel they don’t really like it when you talk in English. But I prefer not to go to the doctor. *If you’re not dying, then don’t come* – I think they have this way of thinking here.”

Furthermore, some of the respondents, such as Natalia and Marta, claim that knowing Swedish is extremely relevant when it comes to reading the newspaper or watching the TV. Likewise, several participants brought up that understanding Swedish is absolutely needed in certain unexpected situations, such as when a bus driver speaks on a loudspeaker. Finally, Swedish greatly helps and eases the struggle in the accommodation search. That was particularly noticed by the respondents who posted several announcements in both English

¹⁶ This refers to understanding the Swedish language in the spheres that are a part of a routine, such as public transport announcements, arranging doctor’s appointment, and finding your way around in the supermarket

¹⁷ Sweden’s largest trade union

and Swedish. For instance, Alex argues that his accommodation search was significantly eased once he started posting announcement in Swedish:

“Swedish helps *a lot* when looking for a flat. It’s a big difference when the announcement is posted in Swedish, which is interesting. I posted in both language, and the difference was just *huge*. That is really crazy.”

It is interesting that many of the respondents initially claimed very confidently that there is absolutely no difference whether one understands Swedish or not, but as the interview was developing further, they retrospectively added an example where knowing Swedish indeed can help. Keeping that in mind, responses were considerably contrasting, but eventually, all agreed upon the same thing – that Swedish is useful – although they did not realize it immediately. Not being able to understand and communicate in Swedish caused many obstacles as well in the integration’s areas of *markers and means* (housing, health) and *foundation* (rights) (Ager & Strang, 2008) that have a strong impact on the respondents’ social and cultural integration.

Nonetheless, the interviewees seem to have different perceptions when it comes to whether Swedish would or is helping them in their social life. One part agrees that it is doubtlessly helpful in terms of meeting new people, particularly Swedes, but also the internationals that do not speak English. On the contrary, other part claims there would not be any different. Namely, Erik thinks that Swedes appreciate when expats speak Swedish, but he is certain that his life would be the same even if he spoke fluent Swedish. Similar to him, Hans believes that there will always be a language barrier, no matter how high the expat’s language proficiency is:

“Even if I would speak Swedish, the distance would still stay the same. For me, it is very demotivating. Once again, I think it’s only useful when it comes to communication with the Swedish colleagues at work, but that’s it.”

Various perceptions of the importance of the language can also be related to the respondents’ own perception of whether knowing Swedish helps to integrate. As it could be assumed, there have been various answers to the questions. One part believes that language definitely helps and is the core element of the integration. On the contrary, some of the respondents believe it does not play a big role, but it is just a matter of respect towards the local society and not the necessity. There is as well a third group that believes that the language is important, but just as the last part of the integration. Natalia described integration as

“...the process of becoming a part of society. Knowing how things work, what is important for the Swedes. An integrated person knows their way around. Well, *ultimately* it is the language, but not the basic thing.”

Similar to Natalia, Margaret also argued that the Swedish language is not a necessity for living a full life in the country:

“You can live a full life in Sweden without knowing Swedish. I mean, of course, it helps, but only to integrate to *actual* Swedish society.”

These clashing perceptions prove that not everyone perceives the language as equally important in the process of (their own) integration as an EU highly skilled migrant. Margaret’s words – “integration to an *actual* Swedish society” – perfectly illustrate the intricacy of what integration presents in nowadays multi-diverse societies (Grzymala-Kazlowka & Phillimore, 2018), especially if this multi-diversity refers to the EU-citizens who are part of the same unit, the European Union. Likewise, according to Leinonen (2012), there is a notion of being an *expatriate* in contrast to a *migrant*. When it comes to this study, the respondents seem to perceive themselves as *expats* and not as *immigrants*. Apparently, they do not feel there are certain expectations put on them by the Swedish society to learn the Swedish language, nor they ever felt bad for speaking only in English¹⁸. This can, to agree with Yeung (2016), be caused by cultural proximity (sharing the common European identity) and skills (highly skilled migrants). Furthermore, it is interesting that there is no clear connection between the level of Swedish with one’s motivation to integrate, which is another indication for how relative the importance of the local language is. For example, Robert and Hans stressed several times that they really want to integrate and find Swedish friends, but their level of Swedish is not especially high. On the other hand, Ida and Natalia have the highest level of Swedish among all of the respondents (except Dimitris who works in Swedish), but they did not show any aspiration for integration. Moreover, they emphasized quite the opposite. For example, Natalia does not feel the urge to find Swedish friends nor to integrate into the “real” Swedish society:

“No, I don’t have any Swedish friend. If I’d like to get into Swedish society, it would be good”

For Ida, the “full” integration is, to a certain extent, pointless in case one tries to force it:

¹⁸ The only situation they felt bad for speaking English is when they are in a room full of Swedish people, where all of them need to speak English because of that one person that does not understand Swedish.

“I don’t want to force my entrance into the Swedish society”

Finally, because many of the respondents misrecognized and then retrospectively remembered that Swedish actually can help in their life, it shows that it is not particularly problematic for them not to speak the local language. However, not having advanced proficiency in Swedish has still created a significant barrier because it hindered access to information, such as not being able to understand relevant messages and announcements or getting adequate help from legal, health and customer services.

Socializing

Friendship and social circle – that are a part of *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) – play a significant role in the life of young expatriates. All of the candidates made a lot of efforts when it comes to building a social circle and fulfilling their ambitions for free time in a high-quality way, which proves their strong desire for relationships and *sociabilities of emplacement* (Phillimore & Wessendorf, 2018: 4, 5). Only two interviewees that did not emphasize the great importance of socializing with other people were the ones who came to Gothenburg together with their partner.

“If you have fun, you don’t have a problem.”

These words Dimitris cited above represent what the majority of the respondents is perceiving: Sweden offers a good standard and a high-quality life in the context of being a welfare state, but at the same time, socializing has a significant importance for a young, independent individual.

Most of the participants moved to Gothenburg on their own without knowing anyone here. Some of them had a person they knew, but none of these acquaintances were the reason for moving, nor were they relevant for building the expat’s social circle.

Based on where the expats’ closest friends come from, it is safe to claim that all of them live in the so-called *expat bubble*, except Javier who has many Swedish friends he met through sports, and Alex (opera singer) who works with many Swedes and internationals who are circulating and changing depending on a project they are working on. He is also the only participant that is not enrolled in any common activity (e.g. sport) based on his unusual work schedule.

The way the expats in Gothenburg meet their friends is through various places and activities. As previously mentioned, most of the respondents met their closest friends at work, which means that the working environment is one of the crucial actors in *social bonding* (Ager & Strang, 2008). However, this is applicable only in case the work department included a lot of people in the office that were predominantly international. Consequently, this means that friends they make are mainly international, but as well in the same age group and with a similar profile (e.g. not having children). When it comes to respondents who work with only a few people or with predominantly Swedish colleagues, they met their closest friends in other places, both virtually on social network (expat Facebook groups, Erasmus groups, Meetup app), by attending social events (Expat community gatherings, food and cooking events) and through other expats that were living in the same household as them.

In regard to the free-time activities in terms of hobbies, the expats did not make a big change in the choice of their activities comparing to the country where they lived before. The hobbies usually regard to sport (volleyball, basketball, badminton, tennis) or music (playing in a band, singing in a choir). However, there is a noticeable increase in going to the gym, whereat most of the participants stress they do it more often here because “gym is kind of a thing in Sweden”. Consequently, most of them perceive and describe their life as “healthier” than back in their home countries. Although some of the participants did not explicitly emphasize that, it can, to a certain extent, be assumed their lives are healthier, based on their description of more frequent visits to the gym and less “going out and drinking” and “gaming”. As mentioned, the majority kept doing the same activities as before living in Sweden, which means they did not make any efforts to join any hobby that had to do with Sweden in particular. It was only Javier that joined *innebandy*¹⁹ as a “Swedish” sport, but it is only one of four sports he plays on a weekly basis. However, this helped him get in touch with Swedish people and he believes it is “easier to meet them through sports”. Besides him, Natalia wanted to join the choir in order to, among other things, get closer to Swedish language and music, although it was not the only reason since she has always been singing in a choir. Likewise, Marta plays football in a team where all girls are Swedish, but the main reason for joining was football was because she already played it in Italy. Otherwise, as described in the previous chapter, all

¹⁹ Floorball

participants learned something about Swedish culture mainly through celebrations and activities in their workplace.

When it comes to organizing social activities, very thorough and long-term planning of socializing is the aspect of a lifestyle everyone found surprising and, to a certain extent, exhausting. Therefore, they also had to adjust their lifestyle according to that, despite not always liking it when it comes to private life. Nikos described his frustration by giving an example:

“I ask to go for a beer, and the answer is *Yeah we can do that on 19th April at 5 o'clock. Wow...*”

Similar to Nikos, Catalan pointed out differences between Swedish and Spanish lifestyle that he noticed when it comes to socializing and going out:

“There’s no room for improvisation, and I really like improvisation in my social life. Here in Sweden, I always know what I will do the next two weekends. But going out in Sweden is more fun than in Spain, I must admit. The concept of the AW is the best thing in Sweden. But also, it is a different balance. In Spain, you can do something every day. Here in Sweden, from Monday to Friday it is so calm and almost nothing is going on, but then the weekend is crazy.”

As previously mentioned, the majority of the interview participants do not have a Swedish friend they find really close. Therefore, there are struggles with *bridging social capital* (Bourdieu 1986: 247; Bloch & McKay et al., in Phillimore & Wessendorf, 2018: 4) since it has been hard for the expats to establish deep social relations with the local society. Namely, respondents find it very difficult to make friends with Swedes, although it is important to emphasize that not everyone made an effort in doing it, but they just perceived it as difficult:

“I struggle socially. Swedes are not so immediately open, and also they are a little bit cold” (Natalia)

“You cannot make Swedish friends. I know a lot of Swedish people, but I’m not friends with them. I think friendship doesn’t mean as much for them as for me. For me – it is sacred. For them – it is flexible.” (Catalan)

“The biggest challenge I have is to get into close contact with Swedish people. It takes a lot of energy. Don’t get me wrong, Swedes are funny, they are not really introverted, but they keep the distance. I miss culture in Germany, meeting more people” (Hans)

Likewise, it is interesting that a couple of participants remembered afterward they actually have Swedish friends, but they thought that was not what not the point of the interview question. To make it more clear, the respondents were asked whether they have any Swedish

friend, without any indication of their personality. However, for an unknown reason, they assumed the author is only interested in “typical” Swedish friends.

“I do have one Swedish friend, but I don’t know if it counts. She is so extroverted and loud. When someone says *Swedish friend*, I never think of her.” (Nikos)

“Wait, I have one Swedish friend, but he is atypical and super social” (Catalan)

“I have one Swedish friend, but he is not acting like a Swede. He approaches people in a funny way” (Hans)

While some of the participants do not really care or think about the nationality of their friends – either it is Swedish, non-Swedish or a compatriot friend – others do pay attention to it, both in terms of trying hard to make Swedish friends, or on the other hand, doing their best to avoid co-ethnics. For instance, Hans emphasized several times “lack of feedback” as the main reason for not being able to make any Swedish friend. Namely, he has put so much effort and would really like to get closer, but it did not work so far. To give an example, he is playing tennis where he meets a lot of people, including Swedes. He thought they had good communication during the trainings, but “obviously got the wrong impression”. In two separate events, when one of the players sprained an ankle and another one got pregnant and left for maternity leave, at some point, Hans sent them a message to ask if everything is going well, but never got a response from any of them. Another situation he recalls is meeting a couple of people from Gothenburg at the concert in Germany, and staying with them in touch through social networks. However, once he moved to Gothenburg and ask them to meet, they accepted the invitation, but after a couple of times, he realized the communication was strictly one-way, so he stopped.

“Again, no feedback. I felt like I was bothering them.”

In regard to connection to the home country, almost all of the respondents have close friends from their home countries. A couple of participants met their compatriots accidentally, meaning they were just part of a bigger, international group they were introduced to and became friends with the people within the group. Another, and the most common way of befriending compatriots is that a certain expat became part of an already existing group of people from the same country. It is interesting how some of the expats did everything to avoid hanging out with their fellow countrymen, but eventually, they found it “impossible”. Today, they are the closest friends with them. Javier admitted:

“I have three main groups of friends and one of them is Spanish people. There is some Facebook group *Spanish people in Gothenburg*, I met them there. I really wanted to avoid them, it doesn't make sense, I am in Sweden. But after one and half a year I said *Okay let's try this.*” (Javier)

For Ida, the situation was similar:

“My closest friends are Croatians. Actually, at first I really wanted to avoid them, but it was so hard. It was easy to meet them, friends of friends”

Besides being friends with compatriots, none of the interviewees are in any way a member of an association or a community connected to their home country. Moreover, since most of these societies are run by diaspora, there is an expressed repulsion to it. For instance, Natalia does not like the involvement of religion in these kinds of communities:

“Polish communities are only connected with the Church, and I don't want that.”

Besides Natalia, Dimitris emphasized he does not prefer getting close to his compatriot Greeks that are born here, describing them as “different” from other Greek expats in Gothenburg:

“Greeks born here are different. I don't like them. They are jealous and curious, you know, asking questions in a bad way. They want to know how you got here, how come you have such a nice job, why you are successful. But they have this envious attitude all the time.”

Anyhow, having co-ethnic and international friends greatly helped the expats with all their struggles – both when it comes to meeting new friends and helping with the accommodation and administration by giving tips or assisting them. In other words, to agree with Vermeulen and Penninx (in Phillimore & Wessendorf, 2018: 3, 4), social integration in this context is a pre-requisite to all others, structural areas of integration. Besides that, having non-Swedish friends proves the great importance of the *migrant social capital* (Phillimore and Wessendorf, 2018) that has raised an overall satisfaction of living in Sweden and feeling comfortable, which is a key-element in *anchoring* (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017) and *embedding* (Phillimore and Wessendorf (2018). These give expatriates a feeling of being “at home”, which is what makes them happy to live and work in Sweden.

Discussion: Integration into what?

Through the conversation with the participants and the analysis of the interviews, it becomes clear that there are many interrelated elements that have an impact on their integration in the social and cultural domain. Although it can seem that highly skilled EU-citizens with work contracts in Sweden would not have any considerable struggles, the research has shown the opposite. Namely, many of the respondents are still not familiar with or find all the elements of the system functioning in Sweden as “normal”. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that there are certain obstacles to integration. To begin with, there are still many challenges EU-expats in Gothenburg are facing in the same way as non-EU citizens, which is something that other scholars (e.g. Collett et al., in van Ostaijen, 2017: 2) have been emphasizing as well. However, not being familiar with the system can partially be thanks to Swedish exceptionalism and its elements that the expats did not have a chance to experience in their home countries or other EU member states they lived in. This regards to various elements, such as communication, norms, expectations and behavior. As an example, the participants referred to the high level of regulation within the system – such as housing, alcohol monopoly, having a car and the transparency of personal data – as well as a different approach in healthcare services. The last aspect regards to the struggles of getting a doctor appointment, as well as the difficulty in getting medications. Besides that, the interviews were conducted in March 2020, which was the beginning of a significant outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe and globally. Namely, at the beginning of the interview, while meeting the participants, the majority of them made a comment on how the Swedish approach to the pandemic is just “crazy” and “insane”. This is just one of the illustrations of how different Sweden is perceived to be culturally, and therefore, it is not a surprise that the path to the “full” integration might be more complicated than e.g. in another member state.

1) How does the workplace affect EU expatriates' integration in social and cultural domains?

Initially, work-related elements of one's integration have not been in the focus of the research. However, it turned out that the workplace is crucial and the most important actor in the expats' social and cultural integration.

From analyzing the interviews, it is clear that the Swedish working environment and the employer play a key role in obtaining cultural knowledge which serves as a key to the

integration in other societal domains (Ager & Strang, 2008). Namely, since none of the respondents are directly included in any association that has to do anything with gaining knowledge about the Swedish culture, the primary way to learn about it is through the workplace. The participants got familiar with the Swedish traditions – such as Saint Lucia, Swedish *julbord*, *semla* day and crayfish party – primarily by celebrating them at work. The workplace helped them in understanding the elements of the Swedish everyday culture, for instance, the importance of *fika*, balance and moderation in work, communication style, equality and flat hierarchy.

Besides the cultural integration, the workplace turned out to be an important pre-requisite for social integration, including the context of *social bonds*, *bridges* and *links* (Ager & Strang, 2008; Bourdieu, 1986). First of all, it enabled *social bonding*, which is, in the case of the respondents, predominantly related to building a circle of international friends, while Swedish colleagues usually stayed just colleagues. Secondly, because of the importance of group activities and events in the office, the relationship with the Swedish society became tighter, which enabled *social bridges*. Finally, when it comes to the *social links* and being able to understand how the system works, employers had a big influence in case they provided relevant information and services that can help their expat employees to “find their way around”. The mentioned struggles expats had with the bureaucracy (in particular in relation to the banking system), although mainly a foundational part of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), still influence their social and cultural integration.

Finally, to draw a parallel with the language sphere, employers are often providing Swedish language courses for their employees, which also makes them a significant actor in a language learning process which is apparently as well an important part of the integration.

To conclude, for expats that are living in the *bubble*, which almost all of them do, the workplace is their central point of reference when it comes to cultural and social integration. Therefore, employers and recruiters need to take this into consideration while hiring a foreign workforce and wanting them to stay permanently.

2) *In which way does the proficiency in the Swedish language facilitate the process of social and cultural integration?*

The analysis has shown how the local language has an important role in young expats' lives, although its role varies in different areas of life. Namely, almost all of the respondents work in English, meaning that language is not an obstacle when it comes to the working environment, excluding not being able to communicate with Swedish colleagues in their language. Only one respondent has Swedish as a working language in a real sense, and surprisingly, he is the only one that sees language as his biggest struggle when it comes to his life in Sweden in general, since he is not on the equal proficiency level as a native speaker.

When it comes to investing one's time and money to learn Swedish, the expats did not show interest in contributing economically. Hence, they have attended either public free courses or a course that their company provided. Again, that supports the claim that the employer – in case they provided the language course – has a big impact on creating the conditions for their employees' integration.

Although all expats agreed that it is hard to use Swedish due to the high-proficiency of the English language by the local community, they agreed that knowing Swedish really helped them to deal with the practical part of their life in Sweden. However, many of them believe it does not have any influence in their private life when it comes to their choice of friends or socializing, although one part thinks that knowing Swedish would definitely help them to have more Swedish friends. On the contrary, these respondents did not make a lot of effort when it comes to befriending the Swedes.

Finally, it is interesting that the time of being in Sweden and aspirations to stay or return do not have a significant role when it comes to the expats' motivation to learn the language. For example, respondents with the highest proficiency stressed that they want to move somewhere else and are not at all interested to integrate. On the other hand, some of the participants with the longest time of living in Sweden demonstrated really low proficiency, claiming that they still live normal, "full" life in Sweden despite not knowing the local language.

To sum up, knowing the Swedish language doubtlessly *does* help in the integration. Since participants mainly do not want to invest their financial resources, an institution that provides a free language course – either employer or a state – has a significant role in this case. The language helps in getting familiar with the system and provides access to more information, although the expats themselves are not always aware of that. However, since most of the EU-

expats prefer to live in the *bubble*, knowing Swedish does not really make their private lives any different when it comes to friendship and social circle.

3) *How can socializing and life beyond work carry a significant importance in young EU-expat's life in Gothenburg?*

Based on the expatriates' social life and a circle of friends, it is clear that they primarily live surrounded by other internationals with a similar profile (HSM, mainly from the EU countries, similar age, no children) in the *expat bubble*. Besides, while potentially wanting to have Swedish friends in order to integrate better, there are no other aspirations in befriending Swedes since they feel most comfortable in their *bubble*. Moreover, the respondents primarily choose to be closer to other internationals. Only two of the respondents that have a considerable amount of Swedish friends and they do not generally perceive Swedes "different" or "closed", although they still have primarily an international company around them. Hence, it would be unfair to draw on an assumption of Swedes being "unavailable" when it comes to establishing friendships. Apart from being friends with other expats, the majority of the respondents are close friends with their co-ethnics, including the ones who tried to escape the co-ethnic communities, which proves that having compatriot friends helps in their integration in the Swedish context, even when it does not include being friends with the local Swedes. Namely, it was mainly co-ethnic friends who helped the expats with tips and advices (e.g. how to deal with the administration, resolving housing issues), and most importantly, provided them with the sense of being "at home" and feeling more secure and stable. These are, in fact, the main characteristic of *embedding* (Phillimore & Wessendorf, 2018) and *anchoring* (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017) that are significant elements of social integration. Last but not least, it is again important to highlight that meaningful, real friendships and socializing with people have a strong meaning in all respondents' lives. While the majority of the expats enjoy Sweden and they do not concretely think about moving from Gothenburg any time soon, there are several respondents who would like to either come back to their country or move somewhere else. Some respondents expressed they would like to return to their home countries due to their culture which includes "different lifestyle", "meeting more people" or "being easier to find more friends". This shows that social and cultural integration really do matter in someone's decision to either stay or leave, even though they might have an "objectively" better life in Sweden than in their home countries. Once

again, in today's EU working mobility and flexibility of choices, it is important to understand the importance of social and cultural aspects in the lives of young EU highly skilled migrants.

Conclusion

The elements of social and cultural integration proved to be important in all aspects of a young expat's life, including the workplace as a central sphere of their activity. Since interviewed EU-expats moved to Sweden to work in their profession, the conditions of their employment do not present any problem. However, as the results have demonstrated, their employers play a significant role in their process of integration in both social and cultural domains. When it comes to language, it certainly does help to speak Swedish in non-working areas of expats' lives – such as administration, bureaucracy, healthcare, housing, and private life – although expats themselves do not necessarily recognize the importance of it.

Surprisingly, there is no connection between efforts and interest in learning the language with the motivation to integrate, which can be related to the wide usage of the English language by the local society. Moreover, the expats mainly learn Swedish voluntary and out of fun, and they prefer not to financially invest in the learning process. The study has also shown that the expats prefer to surround themselves by both internationals and their co-ethnics, rather than Swedes, confirming a tendency that expats favor living in *bubbles*. Finally, the respondents repeatedly emphasized that socialization has a great meaning in their lives and is one of the main factors (apparently, besides work conditions) they would take into consideration in their decision-making process to either stay or move to another place. Hence, it is important for employers, recruiters and EU working mobility policymakers to genuinely understand the importance of socialization in the case of young, skilled EU-citizen in order to make the mobility optimal for both parties. In order to understand this matter in a wider perspective, potential further research should be conducted on a broader scale or with the focus on employers' perspective and approach when it comes to the recruitment of EU-workers.

To put it in the nutshell, the concept of integration in the context of young EU-expatriates in Gothenburg should not be looked upon from a narrow perspective of structural integration. There are several supporting arguments for that claim. Firstly, the city consists of multi-diverse communities, and therefore, the discourse of integrating into the “real” and “actual” Swedish society cannot be prevalent, nor it is necessarily relevant due to the vibrant international environment. Secondly, the expats' successful settlement depends on their *migrant social capital*, which also includes being friends with other expats, as well as with their compatriots. Thirdly, the notion of being an *expatriate* and not a *migrant* – which is

based on their EU-citizenship (cultural proximity, same Union, similar rights), high qualifications and the employment in their professions they have been educated for – gives them certain “benefits” when it comes to traditional expectations in the integration process. In the end, they clearly feel comfortable being in the *expat bubble*, and since friendship is of great importance for them, it makes the process of *embedding* and *anchoring* more likely to be successful, which, in this multi-diverse context, is the whole point of integration. Therefore, it can be concluded that with all their struggles and challenges, the EU-expatriates in Gothenburg aim to integrate not too much nor too little, but just as much as needed – *lagom*.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

Information about the respondent

Name:	Education:
Age:	Job position:
Gender:	Employer:
Nationality:	Time in Gothenburg:

Choosing Gothenburg

- Reasons for relocating
- The process of moving
- Expectations and realities

Social circle

- Closest friends and their nationality
- Ways and places of befriending people
- Swedish friends

Free-time activities

- Hobbies
- Going-out and socializing
- Involvement in association/group/club connected to:
 - o The country of origin
 - o International/expat community
 - o Sweden

Swedish language

- Swedish course and other learning tools
- Usage and importance of the language in:
 - o Professional life
 - o Private life (friendship; “practical” life)

Integration

- Self-perception of the concept
- Importance of Swedish language
- Motivation and efforts

Obstacles

- Challenges and issues
- Differences between Sweden and the country of origin
- Changes in the lifestyle before and after moving

Future plans

- Staying or moving to Gothenburg
- Factors that are/would impact the decision

Appendix 2: Profile of the respondents

Name	Nationality	Gender	Age	Job	Time in Sweden
Alex	British	Male	27	opera choir singer	1 year, 8 months
Catalan	Spanish	Male	26	project manager	6 months
Dimitris	Greek	Male	28	nurse	1 year, 1 month
Erik	Slovakian	Male	29	manufactory engineer	2 years, 2 months
Hans	German	Male	28	technical sales engineer	1 year
Ida	Croatian	Female	30	design engineer	1 year, 5 months
Javier	Spanish	Male	34	application manager	4 years, 6 months
Margaret	Estonian	Female	29	process manager	4 years, 6 months
Marta	Italian	Female	26	software engineer	8 months
Natalia	Polish	Female	29	PhD scholar: biochemistry	2 years, 5 months
Nikos	Greek	Male	32	wind power product manager	3 years
Robert	British	Male	30	sound and vibration engineer	1 year, 2 months