

# DREAMING OF SWEDEN AS A SPACE OF WELL-BEING: LIFESTYLE MIGRATION AMONG YOUNG LATVIANS AND ROMANIANS

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Received 18 May 2018; Accepted: 18 March 2019

## Abstract

Based on 41 semi-structured interviews with young Latvians and Romanians in Malmö, Sweden, this article explores why Europeans from new European Union (EU) member states want to move to, and stay in, Sweden despite economic difficulties and underemployment. Six main factors for explaining mobility patterns are highlighted: free university education, romantic relationships, cosmopolitan lifestyle, presence of English language, idealisation of Sweden and work–life balance. We read these factors as ideas and aspirations of well-being in the ‘imagined space’ of Sweden. The findings illustrate that many young migrants do not choose to move to Sweden for short-term economic opportunities, but rather to experience a different lifestyle. In most cases, these expectations are met, although over time.



## Keywords

Youth mobility • lifestyle migration • east–west migration • Sweden

## Introduction

Sweden has experienced a modest inflow of migrants from new European Union (EU) member states, despite geographical proximity and the decision to grant free access to the labour market in both the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements. Europeans from the new member states did not arrive in large numbers to claim benefits (Gerdes & Wadensjö 2013) and, similar to the experience after the 2008 liberalisation of the Swedish labour migration policy from non-EU countries, the demand for foreign workers was quite low (Emilsson 2016).

As shown in this article, young EU-10 migrants in Sweden are high skilled. Their employment rates are, however, low. The question is why young Europeans from the new EU member states want to move to, and stay in, Sweden despite economic difficulties as well as

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limited labour market opportunities. We answer this question by introducing the notion of Sweden as an ‘imagined *space of well-being*’, where there is more emphasis on ‘a good life’, standing in contrast, for example, to the UK, where the neoliberal emphasis on hard work and individualism is more apparent.

The article begins with an overview of literature pertaining to east–west intra-EU mobility and Sweden’s role in this mobility system, with a special focus on Latvians and Romanians. The main empirical material consists of 41 in-depth interviews with young Latvians and Romanians who moved to and settled in the Malmö region of southern Sweden. After a description of the data collection, their voices will help us understand their mobility decisions and imaginaries. Six main factors for explaining the mobility patterns are highlighted and discussed: *free university education, romantic relationships, cosmopolitan lifestyle, English language, idealisation of Sweden* and *work–life balance*. In the concluding discussion, we interpret the results as a challenge to the predominant framing of east–west mobility as labour migration motivated by short-term economic gains. We suggest instead a combination of lifestyle considerations (Benson & O’Reilly 2009; Benson & Osbaldiston 2016), linked to a search for an overall improvement in well-being, defined less according to material economic criteria and more in terms of broad and multifaceted life satisfaction (see de Lima 2017: 6-7).

## **Intra-EU mobility from new (EU-10) to old (EU-15) member states**

Enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 dramatically changed mobility patterns, creating what Favell (2008) called a new migration system in Europe. Although the decades preceding the 2004 enlargement saw a small, yet constant, expansion of the cross-state mobile population within the EU (Recchi 2008), the ‘new’ (EU10) citizens were more eager to take advantage of free movement. By 2013, half of all intra-EU migrants were from the new member states, although these countries account for only 21% of the total EU population (Castro-Martín & Cortina 2015).

Even though Sweden is not one of the top immigration countries, either in absolute or relative terms (Fries-Tersch, Tugran & Bradley 2016), it has experienced increasing flows of EU-10 citizens, including Latvians and Romanians, who are the focus of our enquiry. The importance of language has been put forward as an explanation for why intra-EU mobility to Sweden is low (Apsite, Lundholm & Stjernström 2012; Gerdes & Wadensjö 2014; Wolfsson, Fudge & Thörnqvist 2014), which is supported in research where migration rates are found to increase with linguistic proximity and with English at the destination country (Adserà & Pytlikova 2015). In addition, the Swedish labour market is highly regulated and guaranteeing equal pay and conditions for all workers, including migrants. Thus, employers will not gain cheap labour by recruiting workers from low-wage EU-10 countries (Thörnqvist 2015). The Swedish labour market model, with low wage spread and high entry wages, has also contributed to making the low-skilled sector, the smallest in the EU – 5%

compared to 9% in the EU on average (Eurostat 2017). Low-skilled jobs that do exist tend to be filled with non-EU migrants who have stronger networks in these sectors and access to subsidised jobs (Sjögren & Vikström 2015).

A recurring finding is that segmented labour markets and social networks are facilitators for mobility, especially east to west mobility, and for those moving to do lower-skilled, lower-paid jobs. There is strong evidence of a segmented labour market in the UK and Ireland, where EU migrants fill certain low-skilled sectors in the labour market and occupational downgrading is common (Johnston, Khattab & Manley 2015; Voitchofsky 2014; White 2016). The importance of networks is emphasised among Latvians occupying lower-skilled jobs in the UK (McCollum *et al.* 2013; McCollum & Apsite-Berina 2015). Similar results are found in Norway, where Polish migrants' decisions about settlement and return are shaped by their opportunities within segmented labour markets and their embeddedness in transnational families and social networks (Friberg 2012).

Although most research has found that economic considerations are the main driver of east to west mobility, non-economic factors have also been considered to be important, especially for more high-skilled Europeans (Bartolini, Gropas & Triandafyllidou 2017). Krings *et al.* (2013) noted that especially younger and more educated Polish migrants are part of a new generation of mobile Europeans, for whom the move abroad not only is work related but also involves lifestyle and well-being choices. Other findings indicate that educated young adults from the Baltic states migrate to London to improve their economic situation and career prospects as well as for lifestyle and personal development reasons (King *et al.* 2017).

Despite the relatively low mobility of young Latvians and Romanians to Sweden, both EU enlargement and the economic crisis have contributed to higher flows and stocks. Figure 1 shows that Romanians reacted immediately to EU enlargement and the number of young migrants to Sweden jumped dramatically in 2007. Migration from Latvia to Sweden, on the other hand, saw no immediate increase after Latvia joined the EU in 2004. This has been explained by the economic expansion during those years (McCollum *et al.* 2017). After the 2008 economic crisis hit Latvia, with a dramatic loss of one-quarter of gross domestic product (GDP) between 2008 and 2010, outmigration increased also to Sweden.

## EU10 migrants and the Swedish labour market: with special reference to Latvians and Romanians

Figure 2 shows that young Latvians and Romanians in Sweden are well educated while underemployed (noted also by Apsite, Lundholm & Stjernström 2012; Gerdes & Wadensjö 2013; Olofsson 2012). In the age group of 30–34 years, almost 50% of both Latvians and Romanians have a registered post-secondary education, similar to other EU migrants and natives, despite the fact that between 20% and 30% of them have an unknown education.

For Romanians, the employment rate has fluctuated over the years, around 60% for 30–34-year-olds. Latvians have a lower, but rising, employment rate. The low rate was

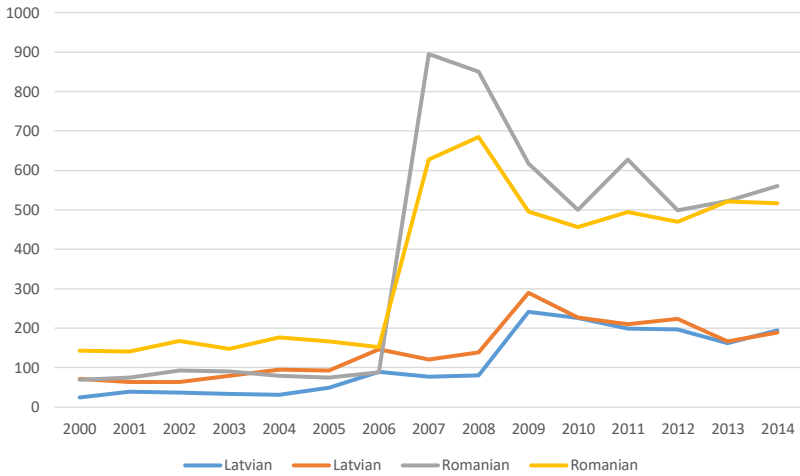


Figure 1. Immigration of Latvians and Romanians to Sweden, 15–34 years, 2000–2014. Source: Register data from Statistics Sweden.

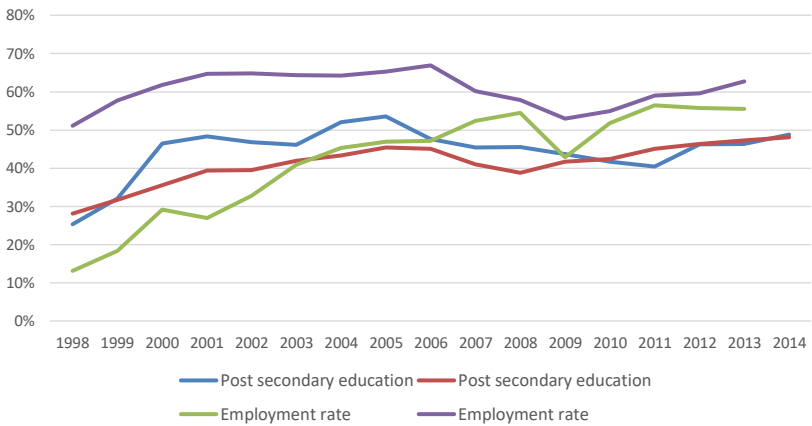


Figure 2. Latvians and Romanians in Sweden, 30–34 years, education and employment rate, 2000–2014. Source: Statistics Sweden.

explained by the over-representation of young women who moved to establish families, later going on maternity leave and/or becoming housewives (Apsite, Lundholm & Stjernström 2012; Olofsson 2012). By 2012–2013, the employment rates for Latvians had risen to 56% for 30–34-year-olds. Latvians and Romanians have much lower employment rates compared to the national average of over 85% and similar rates to EU-25 migrants.

Although EU-10 migrants have low employment rates, those employed have a similar occupational structure and wages as native-born persons. Andersson & Hammarstedt (2012) studied income and occupational positions among employed EU-10 immigrants in 2007 who came to Sweden in 2005 and 2006. After controlling for education, men were three percentage points, and women seven percentage points, more likely to be employed in occupations that do not have educational requirements. In addition, males and females had about 8% lower monthly income than native men and women. In a later study, Gerdes and Wadensjö (2013) did not find particularly big differences between EU-10 migrants, older EU countries' migrants and the general population when it came to occupational distribution, average earning and working hours. Taking into account differences in age and education, income differences were about 6% between EU-10 migrants and native born. Latvians and Romanians did not stand out from the general situation of EU-10 migrants and thus had slightly lower income than the natives. Romanians received similar social transfers as natives, while Latvians had less than half of the average social transfers. For occupations, Latvians were somewhat over-represented in agriculture, construction, financial services and personal and cultural services, while Romanians were slightly over-represented in manufacturing and healthcare.

This indicates that EU-10 workers in Sweden do not function as a complement to the native workforce or are occupying low-skilled segments in the labour market. They compete for the same jobs and when employed they have almost the same earnings. Labour market segmentation for EU-10 workers has been more connected to posted workers, for example, in construction (Woolfson, Fudge & Thörnqvist 2014).

## Empirical data and method

Our empirical data derive from 41 semi-structured interviews with young Latvians and Romanians living in the Malmö–Lund region of Sweden. Latvians and Romanians were selected, because they came from typical sending countries within the EU free movement regime. Previous research and our findings suggest that the experiences of EU-10 citizens are quite similar (Gerdes and Wadensjö 2013, Olofsson 2012). In the context of this article, our informants should therefore not be considered as representatives of their respective nationalities but rather as EU-10 citizens. Questions focused on migration history and motivations, employment experiences in migration, life satisfaction, identity issues, social inclusion, travel and remittances, integration policies and future plans. Of interest here are respondents' motivations for moving to Sweden and their arguments about if and why they want to stay.

Recruitment of research participants followed several paths. Firstly, YMobility project employees' contacts were used to connect with possible interviewees. Secondly, Latvian and Romanian Malmö University students were approached via their branch of the Erasmus Student Network, and the study was advertised on English-taught BA and MA programme platforms. Lund University also agreed to advertise the study. Thirdly, different social media channels were used. The study was advertised in several Facebook groups for Romanians and Latvians in (southern) Sweden. Interviewees were also recruited through LinkedIn and the online platform InterNations.

Interviews were conducted in English between November 2015 and March 2016, lasting on average 50 minutes. Most were conducted in person, with the exception of six Skype interviews. Interviewees were between 20 and 39 years old with a mean age of 30 years. All lived in Sweden at the time of interview and had been in the country for more than 6 months. Out of 41 interviewees, 30 were women and 11 men. Women appeared much more willing to participate and share their personal experiences. Most were higher-skilled or current students in higher education and only two who could be considered lower skilled were found.

## **Six reasons for choosing Sweden**

Only ten of the 41 informants had a job when arriving in Sweden. The majority came either to study at the university or to follow/join a partner, while others were adventure seekers who wanted to move specifically to Sweden. Almost all desired and expected to work full time or in combination with their studies. Instead, many ended up in different forms of education, mainly university studies, which only provided some an entrance into the labour market. Their strategies and stories are the subject of an upcoming article (Emilsson & Mozetič, in peer review). Since only a minority had an employment contract arranged when moving to Sweden, and many have had problems establishing themselves on the labour market, the question remained: what makes the country attractive to young Latvians and Romanians? The results pointed to six important reasons for moving to and staying in Sweden. For each reason, we summarise the main findings and illustrate with a few quotes. The experiences of Latvians and Romanians were remarkably similar and we therefore saw no reason to differentiate between them in the analysis.

### **Free university education**

Looking at the primary reason for moving to Sweden, education stands out: 16 out of 41 moved to Sweden to study, most of them enrolling in a Master course. An additional six participants said that education was part of their decision. The last decade has seen a rapid expansion of 1- and 2-year masters, and individual courses taught in English at Swedish universities which is one structural factor that facilitates increased intra-EU migration (Universitetskanslersämbetet 2017; Wächter & Maiworm 2015).

Latvians and Romanians who moved to Sweden primarily to study mention a combination of factors for their choice. They perceive the quality of higher education in Sweden as very good and they appreciate the structure of courses, where the students complete one subject at a time. Students are attracted by subjects that few other universities have, often programmes in social science or humanities such as environmental studies, urban design, human rights and migration studies. Free education for EU students also played an important role in their migration decisions. Since EU citizenship guarantees non-discrimination, all EU-citizens can utilize the free university education on the same terms as Swedish residents.

Mihai from Romania and Polina from Latvia chose to study in Sweden because of free education and the profile of the Master programmes. They both had a background from technical universities but wanted to expand their knowledge in related subjects that were more 'social science' and 'business'. Polina considered going to Germany but chose a specialised management degree at Lund University. When asked about her choice she replied: "I think that I liked Sweden generally, plus the education system is better and I thought that... yeah, education is for free."

Free university education is not only a reason for moving to Sweden but also a reason to stay. Even those who move for other reasons tend to take advantage of free university education, and 29 out of the 41 have studied for at least one semester. A common trajectory is to move to Sweden for adventurous reasons, or with a partner, and later enrol at a university. This is often a way to occupy one's time until finding a job or studies are seen as a way to increase potential employment opportunities in the future. Viktorija is a good example. She moved to Sweden to be with her boyfriend and she initially relied on him for economic support. During the next few years, she tried to establish herself in Sweden, doing volunteer work at an international student organisation and having occasional short-term jobs. When her boyfriend left Sweden, she decided to stay and study. The free education was instrumental for her choice.

My boyfriend's studies came to an end and he had to move back to his home country. And then I realised that I didn't want to move with him... Before that I had applied also for studies here because I knew it was for free and I knew I had actually saved money for a whole year to live just from that money in Sweden. I really had an aim in my head that I wanted to study a Master's for a year. So I had applied for it and I got my first choice in Lund. (Latvian, female, 30)

The young EU citizens who move to Sweden to join a partner are often high skilled and are not content staying at home. After realising how difficult it is to find a job, university education becomes a meaningful alternative. Georgiana left a good career in Romania and moved to join a Swedish boyfriend. She intended to find a job but ended up studying a Master course instead.

I knew in Romania it wasn't a problem getting a job and usually I was the one jumping from one to another after a year. I was quite an optimist when I was moving here. My

boyfriend was like ‘Oh, it will take a year to get a job’ and I said ‘Oh, come on!’. I mean, in Romania I had to beg for a one-week vacation from one job to another. So I said maximum 3 months. But anyway, just in case, I thought ‘Well, it’s a back-up or maybe just doing something fun’, I said ‘Let’s study something there’. (Romanian, female, 34)

As the examples above show, studying is not only a hedge against the difficulty of finding employment but also an investment in human capital and future well-being – as well as the chance to follow a specific ‘student lifestyle’. Moreover, the choice to study is also intertwined with romantic relationships, as mentioned by Viktorija and Georgian above, and explored in more detail next.

### Romantic relationships

The second most common reason for moving to Sweden was family and/or romantic reasons. Women were clearly over-represented in this category, indicating that they are more often the accompanying partner (Apsite, Lundholm and Stjernström 2012; Olofsson 2012). They often leave a career in their home countries, and few want to move back despite the time it takes for them to establish themselves in Sweden. One example is Katrina who has a bachelor degree in Material Science. In Latvia, she worked for a shipping company as an in-house trainer and corporate event organiser. When her boyfriend got a PhD position in Sweden, she resigned and followed him. For the last year, she has been taking university courses to improve her Swedish language skills. Despite being unemployed, she intends to stay in Sweden.

I have never made such a crazy decision to leave everything behind and to move to another country. We talked about this a lot because he had been doing a Master’s in Paris and then he moved to Sweden. So, we have experienced long-distance relationships for two years...and since he started his PhD here, I thought...I can learn the Swedish language and I can try to find a job here in some other shipping company. So, that was my main goal, that there were some options how can I, well, develop myself here. (Latvian, female, 26)

For many, partners facilitate the necessary practical support, such as basic economic security and housing, needed for mobility. Viktorija wanted to leave the UK and moved in with a Swedish boyfriend in Stockholm. “I couldn’t have afforded it, so if he hadn’t supported me for the first months, I couldn’t have moved”, she stated during the interview. Another example is Jelena, who after meeting a man on social media moved to Denmark to be with him, and they later relocated to Sweden.

I met my husband online. You know, internet. Crazy. .... But at that time it seemed totally logical and turned out kind of well. I kind of finished all the work at the University and in 2008, summer, we moved to Denmark. And started living there. He had work, a



place to live and everything. He had life in Denmark. So, I basically moved. Here I am. (Latvian, female, 30)

Relationships are central for understanding intra-EU youth mobility to Sweden. Partners offer the economic and practical support that enables the initial migration and the possibilities to stay on. Having a stable romantic relationship can also be an important element of positive well-being for many. A majority of the interviewees, 29 out of 41, were in a relationship at the time of the interview: 11 were married and 11 were living together with their partners. Four interviewees were in a long-distance relationship, and nine had children. Fourteen have a partner of the same nationality, eight have a Swedish partner and seven have a partner with a different nationality. Thus, a majority are mixed couples. A majority of the relationships were established while living in Sweden, and many met their partners while studying. One example is Sofija who wanted to study abroad and found an English-taught bachelor programme in Malmö. She calls her experience a 'typical story' of finding a partner and staying.

I didn't plan to stay here for that long, because I thought that I could also maybe go abroad somewhere like an exchange student and also like to England, so you can actually find some kind of job. And then, but I got into a relationship with a Swedish guy, so it's the typical story and then I decided, okay, I am gonna stay here. And then we were in a relationship for two years or something like that... so we were living together and I also started studying Swedish. [Latvian, female, 26]

Hope for better economic conditions in the future and emotionally enjoyable aspects of life counterbalance the frustration of economic precariousness many currently experience. For example, social life is facilitated by the common use of English throughout Sweden.

## English language

The importance of the English language for understanding intra-EU youth migration to Sweden cannot be overstated. Without the knowledge of Swedish, English is a prerequisite for working and studying in Sweden and is the language most often used in social life among our informants.

Of the ten young Latvians and Romanians who moved to Sweden to work, all but one were high skilled and were employed in English-speaking work environments. They came to work at universities, the multinational retail company IKEA, or as computer programmers, often as intra-corporate transfers. Thus, since few know the Swedish language, only a few sectors in the labour market provide realistic opportunities for potential European labour migrants. As Maxim, a computer programmer, told us:

I guess, you could say that with the education I chose and the profession that I chose, I could survive here without learning Swedish. Someone else, like a lawyer, you would need to know the language. (Latvian, male, 28)

The generally good knowledge of English outside of universities and workplaces in Sweden is also an important factor to why so many find it enjoyable to live in the country. Several informants considered moving to France or Germany but figured that it would be too difficult to live there without knowing the local language, while others compared their Swedish experience to previous stays in, for example, Spain and France, where there is a greater need to learn the local language. Markuss came to Sweden to study a Master course in Physics:

The thing is that Swedes are very good at knowing English and they're quite happy; for example, in France there's just no way I could just exist with English, but people here are a lot more open to that and that's a very good thing. If English is sufficient, I have no motivation of actually learning Swedish, except for feeling disrespectful to the people living here. (Latvian, male, 27)

Since most of those who work or study do so in an English-speaking environment, few actively learn Swedish during their first years in the country. Only when they really decide to stay does the decision to invest in learning the Swedish language becomes relevant to them. This points to the importance of expected durations of stay for the decisions to invest in country-specific human capital (Adda, Dustmann & Görlach 2016). Andrea is a typical case. She came to study, and only after a couple of years, she made the effort to learn the local language.

I was in an English-speaking environment at the university, that was my environment all the time. So I was thinking I don't even know if I wanna stay in this country because I was depressed. But at the same time there was the wild side of me which was like 'Yeah, but then maybe you should learn Swedish, you will get to know these people', so I encouraged myself...So I went and registered myself for SFI (Swedish for immigrants course). (Romanian, female, 24)

The widespread use and knowledge of English make it easy to live in Sweden. Sofia was pregnant and followed her husband to Sweden. When asked about what she found difficult with her move, she mentioned language, and also that English is often enough.

It was not that hard. I mean, everybody is talking English in Sweden, so from that point of view it was easy. It wasn't like going to a country and not being able to get anything at all ... but I remember going shopping in the supermarket and I was so frustrated not being able to shop like usual groceries that I buy because I didn't understand what it said on the package. So I tried at least to learn the basics, like the name of the groceries, because otherwise the midwife I was seeing, she was talking in English, my husband in the office was using English, so that was not a problem. (Latvian, female, 26)

Other examples are Iulia and Marian who work at a computer game company and are very fluent in English. They have no immediate plans to learn Swedish because they 'do not have

the time' and 'see no need' and they use only English at work and outside the job 'everyone speaks English'. Moreover, the international work and student environments where English is the lingua franca help create a vibrant cosmopolitan lifestyle.

### **Cosmopolitan lifestyle**

Almost all of our participants expressed broad satisfaction with their migration experience. Latvians and Romanians appreciate the cosmopolitan environment and lifestyle in the Malmö–Lund region which differs a lot from their home country. Speaking of friends, the interviewees commonly refer to their diverse international social life with great appreciation.

Andrei was transferred from his Bucharest office to the company's headquarters in Sweden. His main reason for moving was to experience a more exciting workplace in Sweden, where he could meet people from 'all over the world'.

I always like to do new stuff, to enrich my own palette of cultures, however you want to call it. I always like to meet new people... And this has helped me a lot. And first-hand experiences with new cultures since Malmö is such a vastly varied place. It is awesome. (Romanian, male, 31)

Svetlana came to Sweden to study and expected to move on to another European country. When work opportunities opened up, she stayed on and now has a good career. The social environment played a big part in her decision:

I have always been working...in an international environment with a lot of international cultures and if I think in Latvia, we don't have so many different cultures, there are only two cultures, Latvians or Russians. Yeah, so here in Sweden or in Malmö, there are so many cultures, you learn how to deal with other cultures, you learn about other countries quite a lot, and that's very interesting. I think that's the number one. Number two is of course to learn about Swedish culture, how to work with Swedes, how they work, how they do things, which is, you know, slightly different to how we do it in Latvia. (Latvian, female, 36)

Integration into traditional Swedish social circles is less common, but a few, such as Svetlana, express a desire for that kind of social integration. Thus, social life revolves around the student and workplaces. Some also take part in networks for expats. Many combine an 'international' social life with a few friends from their home country. Only a few mention loneliness or lack of social inclusion. In this way, the results are similar to a previous study made by Olofsson (2012) of Baltic and Russian migrants in Sweden which showed that, although economic integration was rather weak, a majority perceived that they are socially integrated into Swedish society and considered themselves 'at home' in Sweden.

Several of our interviewees realise that they socialise in an English-speaking international bubble, a life outside mainstream Swedish society. Roberts is completing a PhD and speaks about this.

Social life as a foreigner without knowing Swedish at the beginning, it might be tough. It's one thing if you are going to University, then, then I think it's not a big problem because it's a highly international environment nowadays here. And you have a lot of friends and course-mates from all around the world. But as soon as you exit this loop you are thrown into a different world and there the social life is probably worse than among students. (Latvian, male, 27)

Otherwise, the perception of Malmö is surprisingly similar to previous descriptions of London and other cosmopolitan centres (King et al. 2016). However, few expected to find this kind of environment when they decided to move to Sweden, and therefore it is foremost a reason for decisions to stay. Close to cosmopolitanism are values such as openness and tolerance, which young Latvians and Romanians associate with Sweden.

### **Idealisation of Sweden and Swedish values**

Some of our informants wanted to move to Sweden because of previous positive experiences as tourists and earlier temporary stays as students. For most, and especially among Latvians, the country has a good reputation of being fair and organised with no corruption and nepotism (see also Apsite, Lundholm & Stjerstrom 2012). Sweden is associated with diverse positive values; the interviewees highlighted tolerance towards difference, equality and less status differences between economic groups. Several mentioned that the approach towards children is better – ‘child-friendly’, in Veronica’s words. Others, like Stefania, see Sweden as part of a larger Scandinavian cultural area, so that she and her partner want to stay in the ‘Nordics’.

Anastasija dreamt about moving to Sweden and work with special needs children, whom she thinks are treated badly in Latvia. While visiting Sweden as a child, she saw that children with disabilities were treated well and were visible. She convinced her boyfriend to move to Sweden and is now in the process of getting her teaching licence validated.

It's very hard to just say, let's love everybody who is not the same ... When you see that they are everywhere, the special people, children, whatever. Everybody accepts them and there is no problem. This was also why I am here. Because I love them, you know. (Latvian, female, 28)

Latvians and Romanians often mention that Sweden is more tolerant, with less prejudice than their home countries. Like Ralfs, one can live more openly as a gay person or escape the stigma of being Eastern European. Latvian student Laura compares Sweden with Denmark, where she lived before.

In Denmark I kind of never felt like... [this is home]. It's clear that [Sweden] is a more open-minded society and not so much judging, so I feel that there's a lot of international people around me all the time. ... I haven't got any negative opinions about [being

Latvian], or at least I didn't notice anything here in Sweden because everyone is different. So it was a bit different in Denmark when I was there, the Eastern Europe tag came along. (Latvian, male, 36)

Marina met her Spanish boyfriend while studying in Sweden. After they finished studying they had to go back to Spain and, later, to Romania to save money. At the time of the interview, they were back in Sweden 'trying to make it'. They both see Sweden as their dream country because of tolerance, the Nordic mentality and academic opportunities; only economic difficulties stand in their way.

When I came here the first time I used to tell everyone 'You know how when you go abroad Romanians are frowned upon' and so on; that doesn't happen in Sweden. So I would tell everyone that I was so proud of not being judged on the fact of being Romanian. I always said that I match the Swedish personality and mentality more than I do of Romanian people, and it's funny because my husband says the same thing about being Spanish. We are both coming from Latin countries and we are so noisy and conversational and loud – you understand this type of stereotype, right? But we're both very calm, we're both maybe a bit introvert, we like our own space, we're a bit, as he likes to say, we are a bit Nordic. (Romanian, female, 26)

Ioana represents a more singular case where her admiration of the pop band Roxette triggered her interest for Sweden. She was 14 years when she fell in love with the band, inspiring her to learn Swedish and identify with Swedish values. In her early 30s, she left a good job in Bucharest to pursue her dream of Sweden.

Finally, those who work and/or have children acknowledge the Swedish attitude to work–life balance as valuable.

### **Work–life balance**

Swedish work–life is perceived as different from that of Latvia and Romania, something most found out after the mobility decision. The work environment is less hierarchical and less stressful and allows for more time off. Roberts, as already noted, moved to do a PhD. Even though he works long hours by choice, he reflects on the 'importance of family life' and the 'healthy working day' that he thinks are 'much more thought of here than in most countries that I have happened to see'. Roberts' appreciation of a healthy work–life balance is echoed by almost all interviewees and can be considered an important component of overall well-being.

Denisa moved to Sweden to further her career, still working for IKEA but now at the headquarters. Even if she is one of the few interviewees who plans to leave the country after her 3-year contract ends she still reflects on relaxed attitudes towards work.

What I found here, and I was surprised, is the balance between private life and work, and how much importance is on the private. People really go out at 4 o'clock to pick up the kids and this kind of thing. And being in the same company, of course, there was a lot of emphasis on work and life in Romania as well, but I have friends that work 12-14 hours a day, so the culture is more in that direction. So when I moved here I found a totally different culture, also more relaxed. (Romanian, female, 33)

Sofia moved with her husband who relocated to Sweden within a small company. After her pregnancy, she and her husband decided to stay to be able to spend more time with their child.

I mean in Romania we work like crap, 12-14 hours a day. And that was fine, we were young, we loved our jobs, we really were not bothered by that. But having a child, it changes a lot. I remember my colleagues back there complaining that they see their children only during the weekends and so on. So after I gave birth I thought that I don't want to be a weekend mummy, so how do we do it? We have to stay here. And that was the major reason we stayed and tried to make it work. (Romanian, female, 35)

Swedish work–life is also perceived as more 'flexible' and 'creative' and allows for more 'independent work'. Although there is sure to be some Latvian and Romanian companies that would offer similar benefits, the Swedish work–life balance was an integral factor in choosing to stay for many of those who had families and/or found a job. PhD student Paula compares it with Latvia where her supervisor 'said you should do this and that' and thinks that 'here I am working more independently'. Sofija is one of the few students who works alongside her studies. This is possible through an agreement with her employer who allows her to adapt her schedule according to her studies. Andrei works as a quality tester at a computer game company. Compared to his job in Bucharest, working at the Swedish headquarters is 'a bit more relaxed' and you 'don't really have a fixed schedule. As long as you do your job and you do it well, that tends to be enough.'

## Concluding discussion: lifestyle and well-being

Young EU citizens who move to Sweden are often highly educated and qualified. Despite this background, the group as a whole, including Latvian and Romanian nationals, has quite low employment rates. To explore this, 41 in-depth interviews were analysed to understand why Latvians and Romanians move to, and want to stay in, Sweden despite economic difficulties and struggles to enter the labour market.

The analysis of the interview narratives identifies six predominant reasons why they chose to move to Sweden and/or decided to stay. Free university education makes Sweden an attractive choice for young persons wanting to study abroad. University education also becomes a good alternative for those who want to stay but have a difficult time finding employment. Especially those who move to Sweden, or stay, because of romantic

relationships choose university studies because they perceive it as a productive alternative while establishing themselves. English is the language used among all those who came to Sweden for work or study. The fact that most people speak English also makes everyday life easy for young migrants. Connected to language is the appreciation of the cosmopolitan lifestyle in the Malmö–Lund area, where one meets people from all over the world and feels part of an international community. Diversity and tolerance are seen as characteristics of Swedish values as well as being child-friendly; and the fact that Sweden is seen as well organised also plays a part for those who perceive Sweden as an ideal country. Lastly, a non-hierarchical and creative work environment with an emphasis on work–life balance is very much appreciated, especially among those with children. Most of these factors play a role in both the decisions to move to Sweden and the decisions to stay. However, persons with less previous knowledge of Sweden tend to be unaware of the cosmopolitan character of the Malmö region and the differences in work–life balance when they arrive.

Taken together, the mix of motivations for choosing Sweden among young Europeans from the new member states comes across as different compared to other receiving countries where short-term economic reasons tend to take prominence (Andrijasevic & Sacchetto 2016; Kureková 2013) and where the dilemma is between staying abroad to maximise economic and career benefits or returning home for social reasons or as a patriotic duty (Lulle & Buzinska 2017). Even though other studies also found that non-economic considerations play a role, they often take a secondary role, especially for young immigrants from new member states (Castro-Martín & Cortina 2015; Gilmartin & Migge 2015; King et al. 2017). Previous studies in other receiving countries have also identified a preference for temporary mobility among higher skilled, especially in relation to family formation (Ferguson, Salominaite & Boersma 2016). In the Swedish case, the preferences among the high skilled are the opposite. Even though the informants are not a statistically representative sample of the young Latvians and Romanians in Sweden, it is clear that their reasons for choosing Sweden, and the methods for mobility, differ from what is found in previous studies in other European countries. Young Latvians and Romanians do not choose Sweden because of short-term economic gains, and they have weak co-national support networks in Sweden. Those who decide to stay do, of course, have an economic long-term strategy, but one of their primary reasons is to experience a different lifestyle and a broader sense of well-being.

Our conclusion is that intra-EU migration to Sweden is partly, if not indeed predominantly, driven by a combination of lifestyle and well-being-related considerations. By linking lifestyle with the wider concept of well-being, we simultaneously broaden the conventional understanding of lifestyle migration beyond its common association with retirement migration, second-home ownership and counterurbanisation (Benson & O'Reilly 2009). We see lifestyle migration for Latvians and Romanians moving to Sweden not as a privileged migration of affluent individuals searching for a better life in a rural utopia (cf. Benson 2011), but rather as a quest for an improved lifestyle in Sweden as an imagined (and for most of them, real) space of well-being. Our research also vindicates Wright's (2012: 10) insistence on the *subjectivity* of human well-being and, hence, of what is considered a 'good life'.

What is less clear from this research is whether this idealisation of Sweden as a space of well-being applies to the whole country or is experienced as geographically contingent on the Malmö–Lund region of southern Sweden, which is in turn functionally linked via the Öresund bridge to Copenhagen. Probably, the same dynamics can be experienced by young EU migrants in Stockholm and other major university cities, but less so in a small town and rural Sweden. This relates to a final point, which is both conceptual and empirical. Our findings provide an opportunity to interpret youth mobility, lifestyle and well-being as a combined process, where two stages can be distinguished. The first one is based on ideals of cosmopolitan youthful lifestyles experienced in the international, largely anglophone settings of universities and high-skilled workplaces, whereas the second one is related to the nation state, its institutions, the larger Swedish-speaking labour market and everyday life. So that, ultimately, if you want to live fully and well in Sweden, you eventually need to be fluent in Swedish. This requires a decision to stay and a determination to make an effort to fully integrate.

## Acknowledgment

This article is a result of the project YMobility that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 649491).

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