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Ti, kdo participují, a ti, kdo ne:

Význam politické a občanské participace v trajektoriích zakořeňování českých migrantů
v transnacionálním prostoru

Disertační práce

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Those who participate and those who don't:

The significance of political and civic participation in Czech migrants' trajectories
of embedding in a transnational space

Doctoral thesis

Supervisor: prof. RNDr. Dušan Drbohlav, CSc.

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Prague, 2025

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Praha, 31. 3. 2025

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² Psychlová is my maiden name.

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ABSTRAKT

Tato disertační práce, vycházející z transnacionálního paradigmatu, zkoumá, jakou roli hraje politická a občanská participace migrantů v zemích původu a pobytu ve vztahu k jejich diferencovanému „zakořeňování“ v sociálních sítích a strukturách příslušných společností. V práci je analyzován vliv „tekutého migračního kontextu“ Evropské Unie na pocit sounáležitosti a rozhodování migrantů. Je představen koncept „*leap of faith*“ („skok do neznáma“), který zachycuje vědomé odhodlání člověka ztotožnit se s představou „plnohodnotného“ života v přijímající zemi. Analýza je založena na hloubkových narativních polostrukturovaných rozhovorech s 50 českými migranty první generace, kteří přišli do Spojeného království po roce 1989. Výzkumný soubor sestává z podsouboru 41 informantů dotazovaných před Brexitem v letech 2014-2016 a podsouboru devíti informantů dotazovaných po Brexitu v letech 2019 a 2022. Výsledky výzkumu ukazují, že zájem o politiku a postoje k angažovanosti jsou celoživotní, ale migrace mění skutečné participační praktiky jednotlivců. Za touto změnou nicméně stojí spíše formální a neformální struktury příležitostí než zásadní změna hodnotové orientace migranta. Občanská identifikace slouží jako formální a psychologická kotva v sebepojetí migrantů. Transnacionální zájem o politiku přispívá k udržování přeshraničních mezilidských vztahů a umožňuje přenos sociálních remitencí. Aktivní politická a občanská participace funguje jako nástroj i ukazatel (ne)zakořeňování migrantů v dotčených společnostech, s přihlédnutím k jejich individuálním vlastnostem a dlouhodobým zájmům. Celkově se participace v přijímající společnosti zintenzivňuje, čím více v ní migrant zakořeňuje, zatímco transnacionální participace slábne.

Klíčová slova

transnacionalismus; zakořeňování; zakotvování; politická participace; občanská participace; sounáležitost

ABSTRACT

This dissertation, rooted in the transnational paradigm, examines the role that migrants' transnational and receiving-country-based political and civic participation play in their differentiated "embedding" in the social networks and structures of the societies concerned. I explore the role of the "liquid migration context" of the European Union for migrant belonging and decision-making. The concept of the "leap of faith" is introduced to capture migrants' conscious commitment to a "full" life in the receiving country. The analysis is based on in-depth, narrative, semi-structured interviews with 50 first-generation post-1989 Czech migrants in the United Kingdom, comprising a pre-Brexit sub-sample of 41 informants interviewed between 2014 and 2016 and an additional post-Brexit sub-sample of nine migrants interviewed in 2019 and 2022. My findings indicate that political interest and attitudes towards engagement tend to be lifelong, but migration alters individuals' actual participative practices. Rather than profound value change, surrounding formal and informal opportunity structures determine this transformation. National identification serves as a formal and psychological anchor in migrants' self-conceptions. Transnational political interest contributes to maintaining cross-border interpersonal relationships and enables social remittance transmission. Active political and civic participation work both as tools and markers of migrant (dis-)embedding in the societies concerned, as long as migrants' individual characteristics and long-term interests are acknowledged. Overall, participation in the receiving society intensifies as embedding in it deepens, while transnational participation weakens.

Keywords

transnationalism; embedding; anchoring; political participation; civic participation; belonging

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Chapter 1 Introduction

East-to-West migration within Europe, and in the European Union (EU) in particular, has received considerable attention in scholarly literature, typically concerning specific historical-political milestones which affected the size, directions and national compositions of migrant flows (e.g., Baláž & Karasová, 2017; Black et al., 2010; Engbersen et al., 2013; Favell & Nebe, 2009; King & Okólski, 2019). In addition to the perhaps most eagerly studied and discussed economic motives and effects of migration, scholars have focused on the social, cultural and political determinants and implications of mobility within the European continent.

It has become increasingly popular to examine intra-European migration through the lens of transnationalism. This scientific approach takes into account not only migrants' activities in the receiving country but also their cross-border attachments and practices, linking their multi-sited identities, experiences and engagements to one another (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1997; Glick Schiller, 2018; Vertovec, 2009). The peculiarities of migrant transnational practices and the role of their multiple social, professional and formal attachments “here” and “there” in their “integration” into the receiving societies have inspired numerous studies (Drinkwater & Garapich, 2015; Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Ryan, 2018). So has their potential transmission of various sorts of remittances (financial or social – in the form of values, opinions or innovations) to their societies of origin (Grabowska & Engbersen, 2016; Kovács, 2020; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Beyond its exploratory and explanatory scientific purpose, the “transnational turn” (Bailey, 2001; King, 2012) of much migration studies literature has contributed to informing policy in both receiving and sending states about the possible advantages and shortcomings of migrants' multifaceted cross-border relationships, responding to fears of “failing integration” resulting from migrant day-to-day transnationalism and suggesting ways of pooling benefits and mitigating drawbacks (Brickell & Datta, 2011; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Notably, some scholars have argued that post-materialist and democratic values are disseminated to migrants coming from countries that are economically less developed and politically less stable to richer and more stable democracies, with the potential of contributing to a “modernisation of values” in their countries of origin via transnational political and civic engagement (Drbohlav et al., 2017; Duda-Mikulín, 2013; Grabowska & Engbersen, 2016; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2016; Koinova, 2009). However, *whether such a change also occurs in the political and civic values of migrants* moving between two developed, democratic states —albeit with differing lengths of democratic experience —has rarely been explored (cf. Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Fidrmuc & Doyle, 2004).

Within Europe, and particularly the EU, the “liquid migration context” has enabled continuous back-and-forth movement, arguably contributing to the emergence of new patterns of mobility and differentiated attachments (Engbersen & Snel, 2013). It has, however, also been shown to hinder settling in one place “for good,” building a “grounded life,” and developing a sense of “belonging”—identification with a society or community, supported by the simultaneous feelings of acceptance and safety within that society, as well as of having a stake in it (Anthias, 2009; Bygnes & Erdal, 2017; Glorius, Grabowska-Lusińska & Kuvik, 2013). Does developing a sense of belonging to the receiving society or a specific community within it involve a change in values? If so, does this value change transcribe into political and civic participation? What role does “embedding” – being part of and interacting with various structures of society via social relationships (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015) – play in migrants’ transnational and receiving-country-based political and civic participation? And vice versa, what role does such engagement play in migrants’ embedding in the social networks and structures of the societies of origin and reception?

This dissertation responds to these questions. I intentionally use the concept of “embedding”, introduced by Ryan and Mulholland (2015), instead of “integration” due to its applicability to both the contexts “here” and “there”, as well as its sensitivity to different levels and forms of intensifying or loosening incorporation in diverse spheres of the respective societies (see also Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022; Mulholland & Ryan, 2023; Ryan, 2018). This thesis understands political and civic participation as conventional and non-conventional forms of engaging for the “public good” undertaken by “ordinary” people in their free time (that is, not professional politicians or employees of activist organisations; Jacobs & Tillie, 2007; Matějka et al., 2015; Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer & Wittrock, 1998a; Vogel, 2008a). Both low- and high-intensity activities are acknowledged, from voting to standing for office, with the most mundane participation (following current affairs and political talk) approached separately as “political interest”. Political participation is understood as activities targeting predominantly political decision-making (voting, signing petitions, contacting political representatives etc.). In contrast, civic participation is conceived of as “non-political” engagement (charity donations, cleaning or reparatory help, educational or caretaking volunteering). Nevertheless, I acknowledge the blurriness of the boundaries between these definitions, with some activities being hard to classify as straightforwardly “non-political.” On my mission to unravel the influence of the migration experience on migrant political and civic participation, as well as the part played by engagement in the process of embedding, I scrutinise the tension between the liquidity of the migratory settings and the striving for settlement in terms of the “structure versus agency” dilemma – the antagonism between individual aspirations and the delimiting effect of external factors, such as other people’s interests, formal rules, cultural conventions and other structural aspects. In this regard, the

concept of “anchoring” has been advanced – a companion term to “embedding”, according to Grzymala-Kazłowska and Ryan (2022), which links identity, security and integration by pointing to “references and grounded points which enable migrants to restore their socio-psychological stability in new life settings and establish their (subjective and objective) footholds in a receiving society” (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016, p. 1134).

Numerous studies have already applied the transnational perspective to diverse aspects of migrant life, be it work, family, formal and informal social networks, remittance transmission or politics (Tan et al., 2018; Tedeschi, Vorobeve & Jauhiainen, 2022). Political and civic participation, juxtaposed against citizenship acquisition, language knowledge and engagement in diaspora organisations, has been studied primarily using quantitative methods as a marker of migrant embedding in the receiving society (Berger, Galonska & Koopmans, 2004; Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Jacobs & Tillie, 2008; de Vroome, Hooghe & Marien, 2013). Migrant engagement in civic organisations or in the local community, on the other hand, has been mostly studied using interpretative approaches and viewed as a means of embedding and accessing resources (job, language, social ties) in the receiving country (Best et al, 2022; Pan & Maree, 2023; Studzińska, Szmytkowska & Nowicka 2023). Some scholars have examined the size and impact of “political remittances” (political values) transmitted by diasporas to their countries of origin (Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Kovács, 2020; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). However, most scholarship so far has neglected the transformation of the levels, forms and content of migrant participation that takes place alongside their differentiating embedding in the two (or even more) societies that frame the transnational fields of their lives, which is useful for understanding what happens to migrant civic loyalties in the “liquid” transnational context. This research fills this niche. In addition, existing literature either focused on highly politically and civically active migrants only (Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2016; Vogel, 2008a) or studied their varied levels of engagement rather superficially, using aggregate data (Berger, Galonska & Koopmans, 2004; Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Jacobs & Tillie, 2008). This dissertation is innovative in that it sheds light on the role of political and civic participation in the embedding of both migrants who are extremely engaged, as well as those who are “ordinary” or even virtually ignorant of politics and public affairs in general. To this end, the attention paid to low-effort participation practices was fundamental. Lastly, the study contributes to migration scholarship by presenting new findings on the motivations and experiences of “contemporary” Czech migrants to the United Kingdom, a population that has not received much scholarly attention as yet.

The central research question posed in this study is: “To what extent and how does the migration experience influence local and transnational political and civic participation of post-

1989 Czech migrants in the United Kingdom?” This research question was motivated by three assumptions.

- 1) Political and civic participation primarily derives from individual values and interests, which in turn depend on cultural and social capital (Matějka et al., 2015; Prior, 2010; Putnam, 2000).
- 2) However, in the case of migrants, participation may have added determinants and functions related to their embedding in the receiving society and the process of maintaining, as well as losing, attachments to the country of origin (Berger, Galonska & Koopmans, 2004; Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Vogel, 2008a).
- 3) Embedding in different domains of the receiving society leads to the adoption of new values that may not be typical for the society left behind but are ingrained in the social fabric of the society into which one is entering (Drbohlav et al., 2017; Fidrmuc & Doyle, 2004; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). For example, living in a society with a longer democratic tradition, which is generally more accustomed to political and civic participation, may contribute to a higher propensity to engage both in the receiving society and on behalf of the society left behind (Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020).

Based on these propositions, the central research question can be divided into three sub-questions.

- 1) What are the patterns of migrant civic and political engagement? Do they suggest value changes that occurred due to migration, or do they seem to be unaffected?
- 2) Does political and civic participation strengthen embedding in either the sending or receiving societies, or does it have other functions, like facilitating the transfer of social remittances?
- 3) Does the geographical focus, form, level and content of migrants’ political and civic participation correspond to whether they aim to stay in the receiving society, return or keep their plans open?

These research questions explore a complex network of relationships, attitudes and behaviours, which could not be easily disentangled using aggregate data. Rather than looking for straightforward causal explanations, the research questions call for a deep examination and developing understanding of these complex phenomena. Hence, I opted for a research design based on qualitative data, focusing on thematic conversation analysis of in-depth narrative semi-structured interviews with 50 first-generation post-1989 Czech migrants in the United Kingdom. Research participants were recruited on the basis of the timing of their migration to the UK and length of stay – I approached migrants who had moved to Britain after 1989 and had lived abroad for at least three years. The resulting sample comprises a pre-Brexit sub-

sample of 41 informants interviewed in 2014-2016 and an additional post-Brexit sub-sample of nine migrants interviewed in 2019 and 2022. The post-Brexit sub-sample was added to the analysis in order to compensate for my rather long study extension and to take into account the role of Brexit, which had intervened in the process. The research was undertaken primarily as part of my project entitled “Local, transnational and international civic-political participation of Czech post-1989 migrants in the EU (UK) and Czech non-migrants and its relation to the subjectively perceived extent of sociocultural and economic integration,” financed by the Charles University Grant Agency³. Additional data was collected thanks to the “Czech diaspora – Multidimensional relations and conditionality of Czechia and host countries” project, funded by the Czech Science Foundation⁴, which I participated in as a member of an inter-institutional research team.

Czech migration to Britain was chosen for a number of reasons. First, with Czechia⁵ being one of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries with a socialist past that accessed the European Union in 2004, the post-1989 and 2004 migration of its citizens to Western Europe followed similar trends as the migration from other “new democracies” in the EU. Yet, compared to, e.g. Polish, Lithuanian or Romanian migration, the volume of Czech intra-European migration has not been as significant, which is why it has not received much academic attention (Pařízková, 2011a, 2011b). Second, at the time I started my research in 2013, the United Kingdom was the most preferred destination for Czech intra-EU migrants, thanks to English being its official language and its early opening of borders to post-accession work migrants in 2004 (Vavrečková, 2006a, 2006b; Vavrečková, Musil & Baštýř, 2007). Additionally, according to some sources, Britain’s long-standing democratic tradition has historically attracted Czech migrants (Jirásek, 1999; Vaculík, 2007). The contrast between the political stability of the UK and the volatility of post-1989 Czech politics could be analysed as a potential pull factor and source of value change. Lastly, even though Brexit changed the legal conditions for migration between the two countries and contributed to a decrease in Czech migration to Britain, it did not alter the long-lasting differences, similarities and relations between the two countries and became an important factor to consider as part of my analysis of belonging.

My findings suggest that while political interest and attitudes to political participation are largely lifelong, migration transforms the actual political and civic participation practices, their content, form and level. However, it seems to be the *situatedness of such actions in complex*

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⁴ Grantová agentura České republiky (GAČR), project no. 22-08304S, 2022-2024

⁵ The term “Czechia,” the standardised short name for the “Czech Republic,” is used throughout the thesis, except for official titles (*zákon č. 200/1994 Sb., o zeměměřičství*). In interview quotes, the formulation “Czech Republic” was replaced with “Czechia”, where the original term was not key for the meaning of the account.

opportunity structures provided by the *receiving society*, *concrete social networks* and the *migration experience* as such that determines this change, rather than a more profound value change on the side of the migrant. I highlight the role of the “leap of faith” with regard to settling in the receiving country for good – a new concept that my study suggests for the migrants’ commitment to living a “full” life in the receiving country, despite any difficulties that it brings. In this regard, the role of individual agency in navigating migrants’ satisfaction with living in migration is stressed. On the other hand, the feeling of not having control over one’s migration trajectory, resulting from a conflict between the migrant’s own will and any external or “structural” factors (typically his/her family members’ interests) may lead to their dissatisfaction with life in migration and a failure to develop a sense of belonging. I show that national identification plays a key role as a formal and psychological anchor in migrants’ (transforming) self-conceptions in the context of differentiated embedding in the transnational space, regardless of whether they wish to stay, return or keep their plans open. It is also an important reference point in migrants’ attitudes to political participation, often standing behind migrants’ perception of transnational voting as a lifelong citizen duty. Transnational political interest (especially following the news), even if mostly superficial, has been found to serve as another important anchor by contributing to maintaining interpersonal relationships transnationally. In addition, it is a channel of social remittance transmission. Its level tends to differ according to the migrants’ outlook for their stay (staying, returning or keeping plans open). Active forms of *political and civic participation can work as tools of migrant embedding and dis-embedding in the societies of origin and reception* and also as its marker, yet not without reference to the individual characteristics and long-term interests of a particular migrant. In sum, the analysis suggests that as embedding in the receiving society deepens, participation there intensifies as well, while transnational participation tends to fade out. These findings resonate with the conclusions of some transnationalism-versus-integration literature on the transformation of the intensity of migrant transnational ties over time (Drbohlav et al., *under review*; Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Jones, 2020). They also highlight the fact that migrants coming from developed countries, on the whole, do not perceive country-of-origin engagement as pressingly as migrants coming from countries with non-democratic, oppressive regimes (cf. Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Koinova, 2009).

My findings can be used to inform policy on formal opportunity structures for migrant engagement in receiving countries. They can also provide evidence for sending countries on the importance of national identification, political interest and voting for diasporas, and thus can inform diaspora policy pertaining to electoral participation or the levying of social (in particular political) remittances (see also Barbulescu, Wallace Goodman & Pedroza, 2023a; Favell, 2010; Janská, 2024; Kovács, 2020). Finally, my observations contribute to academic knowledge on the role and forms of migrant anchoring in the process of embedding and dis-

embedding, the process of value dissemination and change in the context of migration within the developed world and migrant perceptions of and coping with Brexit.

Section 1.1 Structure of the Dissertation

The structure of the dissertation is as follows: Chapter 2 discusses the political, social, geographical, and historical context of the study at hand. It focuses on the key determinants of Czech migration to the UK, the relevant historical and political circumstances, and the differences in political and civic participation in the two countries. Chapter 3 sets my theoretical and methodological framework within the context of the social sciences, rooting it specifically within the disciplines of sociology and human geography, and explaining the key concepts used. The theoretical framework is related to particular aspects of the methodological one. Chapter 4 situates my methodological approach in phenomenological sociology, discussing the interpretative theoretical foundations of the qualitative method used in this research, specifically narrative semi-structured in-depth interviews, and describes the research design, the key characteristics of the data collected, as well as the sampling and interviewing process. I recount the different steps and issues encountered during data processing and analysis and finally reflect on the study's limitations. Chapter 5 scrutinises my empirical findings regarding differentiated migrant embedding, migration decision-making and developing a sense of belonging in the liquid migration context. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of citizenship, residential status and (supra-)national identification as psychological anchors within the migration and embedding processes and in developing a sense of belonging to a society. In Chapter 7, I study the levels, forms and content of migrant political and civic participation and its role in the processes of embedding, dis-embedding and re-embedding. The conclusion, which forms Chapter 8, closes the study with a summary and discussion of the findings and suggests possible ways forward.

Chapter 2 Setting the Context

In terms of their political evolution, geographical location and economic experience, the United Kingdom and Czechia could, for a long time, be perceived as part of the European “core” (Western Europe) and “periphery” (Central and Eastern Europe), respectively (cf. Baláž & Karasová, 2017). While the UK was one of the “EU15”, that is, the traditional “old” EU member states, Czechia represents one of the “EU11”⁶, or “new”, post-2004 member states. However, both countries are, in important respects, *outliers in their respective regions*. In the case of Czechia, this applies to the country’s economic prosperity and resilience, its relatively successful resistance to democratic backsliding, observed in the rest of the CEE, as well as its low emigration rate and brain drain, in comparison to other countries in the CEE region (Eurostat, 2024; Guasti & Mansfeldová, 2018; Janská, Janurová et al., 2024). In the case of the United Kingdom, this individuality rests in the country’s strong economic liberalism and its individualistic stance on immigration policy. Both countries have always held a significantly more sceptic stance towards the concept of the EU than most of the “old” and “new” EU members. This was expressed, among other things, by their unwillingness to adopt the Euro and low public trust in the EU in the long run (Kantar, 2019). While the upheaval of anti-EU sentiments in the UK culminated in the United Kingdom leaving the EU in 2020, Czechia remains one of the top Eurosceptic member states of the EU, if not *the* top one (European Union, 2024).

This chapter illustrates the political, social, geographical and historical context framing the presented research, including the political and social developments which occurred between or after my data collection rounds. I discuss the historical and social circumstances that I consider key for motivating Czech migration to the United Kingdom (UK) and structuring the research participants’ experiences. In the first section of this chapter, the determinants and structure of East-to-West European migration are outlined, with a special focus on post-1989 Central and Eastern European mobility to the United Kingdom. The role of the respective countries’ (non-)membership in the European Union (EU) is stressed. The second section zooms in on modern Czech migration to the United Kingdom and reviews available literature on this topic. The third section describes and compares the main features of political and civic participation in contemporary Czechia and the United Kingdom with reference to their historical roots. The fourth section summarises the chapter and suggests ways the differences and similarities between the two societies might function as migration determinants or drivers of change in migrants’ practices.

⁶ The states which accessed the EU in 2004-2013. In some sources also referred to as „A11“.

Section 2.1 East-to-West European Migration

Viewing migration from Czechia to the UK as a form of intra-European East-to-West migration enables the researcher to consider familiar explanatory frameworks deriving from the economic and political differences between the regions (core-periphery, brain drain, labour migration, post-accession migration). On the other hand, accounting for Czechia's and the United Kingdom's specificities, represented among other things by Brexit or the variegated nature of determinants behind Czech migration to the "West", as will be discussed below, will help to contextualise the studied migration trajectories and the collected narratives more authentically, accounting for the breadth of possible explanations.

Even though at the time of finalising this thesis, the UK is officially no longer a member state of the European Union, I will refer to the EU as the geographical context of my pre-Brexit research participants' lives at the time of interviewing since this interpretation might be relevant for comparison with other studies focusing on intra-EU migration between other member states. When discussing the broader geographical and political context surpassing the EU, I will use "Europe" as the reference frame or specify as relevant. "EU28" will be used as an acronym for the collective of the European Union member states from 1 July 2013 to 31 January 2020, the period when the major part of data collection for this research took place. When relevant, the acronym "EU27-2020" might be used for the post-Brexit collective of EU member states.

In this chapter and in other parts of the thesis, I will compare Czechia's migration to that of other Central and Eastern European (CEE) states, defined here as the eleven post-communist states that joined the EU during its "eastern enlargements" in 2004-2013 and that are sometimes also referred to as the "EU11". This includes the total of "EU8", the states that accessed the EU in 2004 (Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia), the "EU2" accessions of 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania) and Croatia, which joined the EU in 2013 (Cuaresma et al., 2012; Kaczmarczyk, 2013; King & Okólski, 2019).⁷ Despite its geographical inaccuracy, the term "East" Europe will sometimes be used as a shortcut for the CEE region, especially as part of the "East-to-West migration" expression, which has become established in some academic literature (e.g., Favell & Nebe, 2009; King & Okólski, 2019). When speaking about the European "West", I refer broadly to the "EU15", that is, the pre-2004 EU member states (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and the four European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states, i.e. Iceland, Liechtenstein,

⁷ The listed acronyms, as well as much of the relevant academic literature, usually leave out Cyprus and Malta, two southern European states that were also part of the 2004 enlargement.

Norway, and Switzerland. Despite economic differences between the southern countries in this group (Greece, Italy, Spain and partially Portugal) and the western and northern ones, influenced by both historical and more recent events, they all represent important destinations for some post-enlargement East-to-West intra-European flows (Baláž & Karasová, 2017; King & Okólski, 2019). Obviously, some of the West European countries are more important as receiving states than others (Baláž & Karasová, 2017).

2.1.1 East-to-West Migration Within and Beyond the European Union

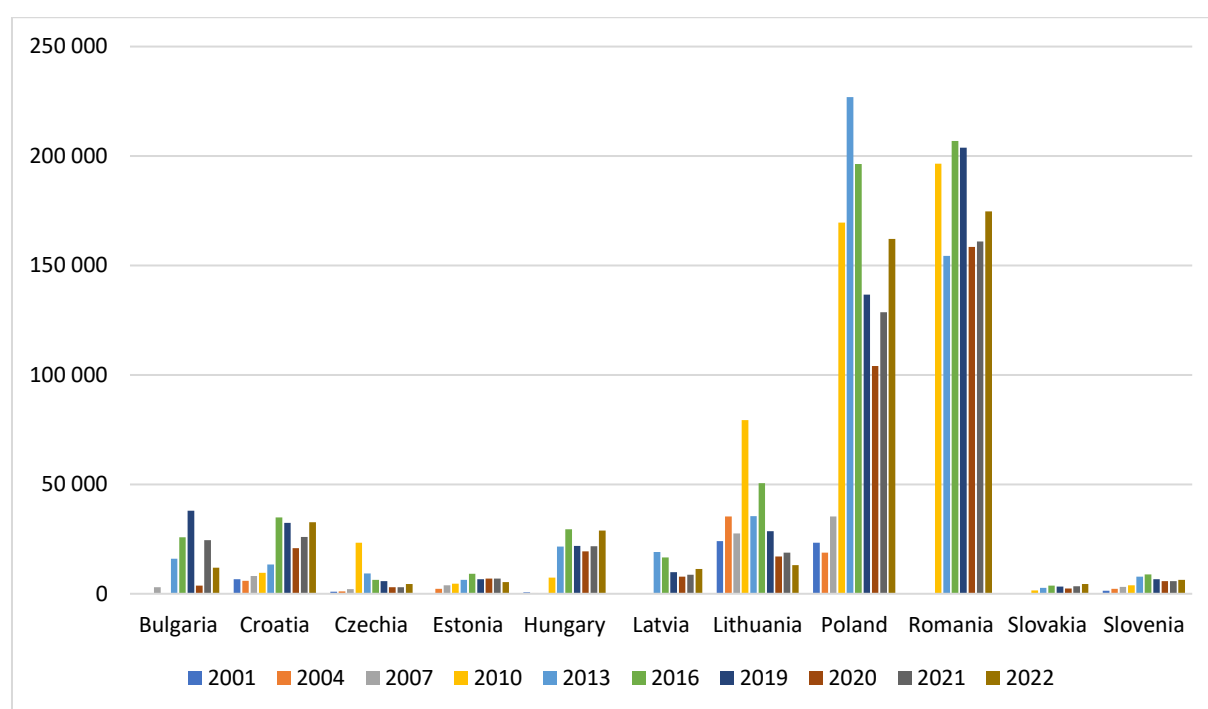
According to King and Okólski (2019, p. 18), “[o]ne of the most important political phenomena affecting recent migration processes in Europe has been the progressive integration of an expanding number of states into a single communal organisation embracing, eventually, 28 countries – or 27 pending the [now completed] departure of the UK from the EU.” CEE migration to Western Europe, navigated by such long-term factors as uneven economic development and the divergence of political regimes in the 20th century, as well as the middle- or short-term effects of policy changes, EU enlargements, political and economic crises, has been of continuous interest to scholars (Black et al., 2010; Favell & Nebe, 2009; Glorius, Grabowska-Lusińska & Kuvik, 2013; Okólski, 2007).

The fall of the communist regimes in the Soviet bloc in 1988-1992 opened the door to major waves of emigration from Central and Eastern Europe to the West (Eglitis & Kelso, 2021, p. 169-174). However, this phenomenon gained new momentum with the two “eastern enlargements” of the EU in 2004 and 2007 by ten CEE states (the EU8 and EU2, as listed above), which gave their citizens the “unlimited freedom of travel and relocation” throughout the whole of the “*de facto* internal migration space” of the EU (King & Okólski, 2019, p. 18, original emphasis). Analysing the impact of the first eastern enlargement, Okólski (2007, p. 23) identified three major factors behind the size and directions of EU8 post-accession migration, explaining why citizens of (some) EU8 countries got on the move in larger numbers than anticipated: 1) low wages and/or unemployment in the sending countries; 2) labour shortages in the receiving countries; and 3) cross-EU15 differences in the opening up of labour markets, the latter being a commonly accepted explanation for the UK and Ireland replacing Germany as the key CEE migrant receivers post-2004 (a growing preference for the UK after 2004 was visible also among Czech migrants and potential migrants, as will be discussed below). Contrastingly, King and Okólski’s (2019, p. 19) later findings showed that “[d]espite the institutional encouragement for more intra-EU migration, the region as a whole is characterised by relatively low population relocations” corresponding to only as much as “0.3

per cent of the entire population” and 1.0 per cent for “migration on an inter-regional basis (NUTS first-level regions) within countries,” less than in the USA.

However, looking at regional or individual country data instead of aggregate numbers does reveal a major impact of East-West flows on some countries. As Figures 2.1 and 2.2 show, Romania, Poland, Lithuania, as well as Estonia, were the most hit by emigration of all the EU11 (see also Baláž & Karasová, 2017; Eglitis & Kelso, 2021). The large countries of Poland and Romania contributed the largest numbers of migrants to the international flows in absolute numbers (Figure 2.1), as also the data from the receiving end confirms. Poles represent the largest minority in the United Kingdom and Germany, while Romanians are one of the top minorities in Italy, Spain, as well as the UK (International Organization for Migration, 2024). In contrast, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia most tangibly suffered from emigration in relative terms (Figure 2.1).

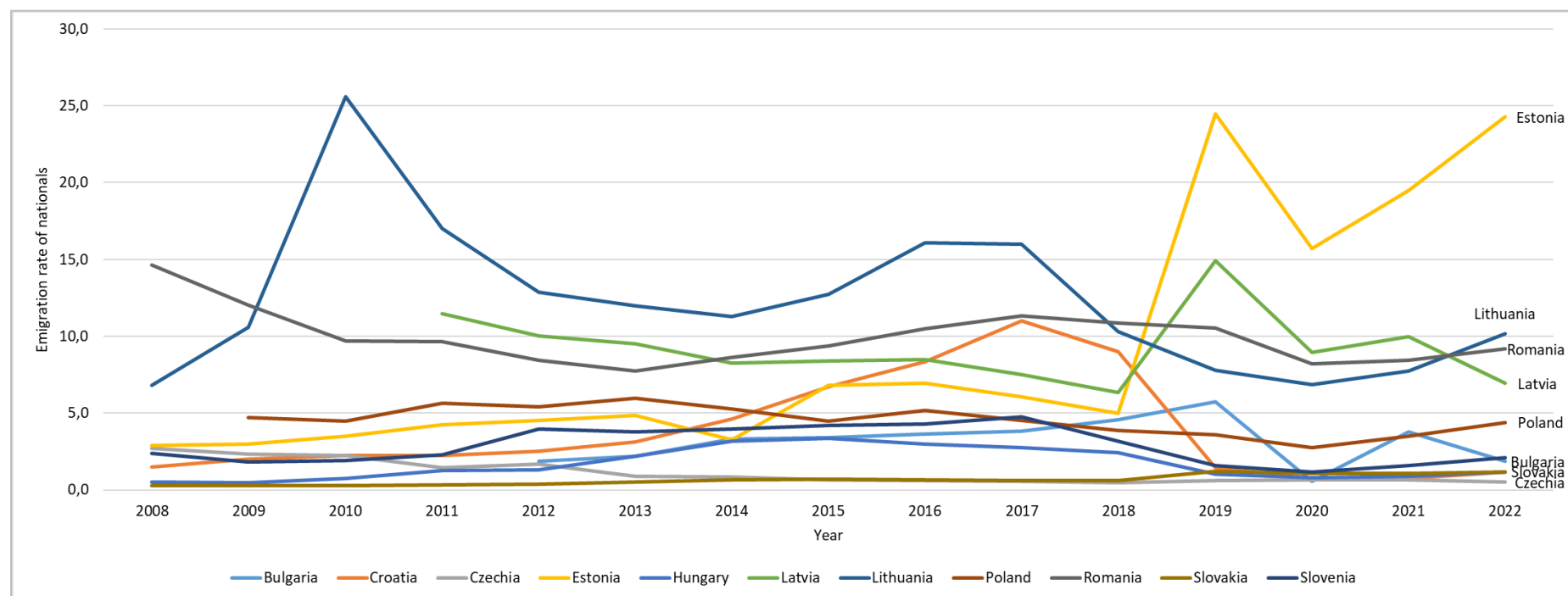
Figure 2.1 Stock of Emigrating Nationals, Selected Years, EU11, 2001-2022



Source: Eurostat, own processing

Note: For brevity, years were selected in 3-year intervals up to 2019. All of the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 were included since they represent the most recent years for which data was available when this text was finalised. The lower emigration stocks in 2020 and 2021 document the effect of cross-border movement regulations introduced in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2.2 Annual Emigration Rate of Nationals, EU11, 2008-2022



Source: Eurostat, own processing

At the receiving end, the United Kingdom, together with Germany, Italy and Spain, experienced the greatest impact of CEE immigration (see Table 2.1).⁸ In addition, these and three other European countries (France, Germany, Switzerland) received more than 75% of intra-European migration both pre- and post-enlargement (King & Okólski, 2019, p. 7).

Table 2.1 EU11-Born Migrants in EU15 and EFTA Countries, Selected Years and as a Share of Total Foreign-Born in 2019

	CEE-born total (units)				CEE-born as a share of all foreign-born (%)
	2000	2010	2015	2019	2019
Germany	1 515 417	2 988 583	3 106 806	3 777 862	28,8
United Kingdom	119 128	1 012 138	1 324 255	1 503 824	15,7
Italy	221 847	1 275 838	1 260 346	1 331 105	21,2
Spain	26 588	996 152	887 204	857 998	14,1
Austria	232 168	289 526	338 625	399 739	22,5
France	235 940	246 201	290 259	307 237	3,7
Ireland	85 289	234 632	239 683	263 137	31,6
Belgium	14 269	106 920	181 204	213 389	10,8
Netherlands	32 631	95 823	154 884	212 669	9,3
Sweden	89 353	143 163	178 943	211 113	10,5
Norway	12 049	79 064	173 709	201 978	23,3
Switzerland	75 134	99 270	154 044	174 034	6,8
Greece	86 591	152 423	143 054	139 704	11,5
Denmark	18 306	50 176	77 553	115 423	16,0
Finland	10 078	39 084	70 573	83 214	21,7
Portugal	4 685	26 896	30 487	31 000	3,5
Iceland	1 876	13 620	14 879	21 607	41,2
Luxembourg	1 686	7 196	10 973	19 090	6,5
Liechtenstein	340	454	504	529	2,1

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019)

Note: United Nations data were used for this purpose, as Eurostat does not provide country-specific data pertaining to the state of origin. I use the 2019 dataset that was the latest to include detailed country-to-country data at the time this thesis was finalised.

Though recent years saw a major “reshuffling” of the main migrant groups in some of the EU15 as a combined result of the 2015 migration crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine, and possibly also some diminishing differences in living standards between the “old” and “new” EU member states, East-West flows resulting from the three eastward EU enlargements remain “one of the

⁸ Italy and Spain lost this position as a result of the economic recession, which hit them significantly (King & Okólski, 2019, p. 13).

most notable trends” in European migration of the past two decades (King & Okólski 2019, p. 25). As such, they have also significantly transformed the migrant population in the UK. Increased EU11 immigration contributed to the rise of anti-CEE migrant sentiments, one of the loudest topics in the political campaigns leading up to the Brexit vote in June 2016 and subsequently to the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU as of 31 January 2020. This made the UK, a major European migrant receiving state, no longer part of the EU (see *Agreement on the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community*). The following section will provide an overview of the most recent developments in the United Kingdom’s immigration experience prior to and following Brexit.

2.1.2 Central and East European Migration to the United Kingdom

For decades, the United Kingdom has been a typical Western migrant destination attractive for its traditional democratic foundations, long-term political stability, economic prosperity, and relatively open immigration policy (Spencer, 2003). According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024), with 11.8 million international migrants, the UK was the fourth top hosting country in the world, following the USA (52.4 million), Germany (16.8 million), and Saudi Arabia (13.7 million).⁹ Since 1990, it more than tripled its immigrant population, moving ahead of India, France, Canada and, in recent years, also Russia.

Even though, in proportional terms, the UK is not one of the world’s top hosting states due to its large population size, the share of international migrants in its population more than doubled between 2000 and 2024, from 8% to 17% (Cuibus, 2024; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2024). This is a much greater rate of change than in the rest of the world’s key host countries, such as the USA, Russia, and Canada, and even slightly greater than in the United Kingdom’s main EU migrant-hosting “competitor”, Germany.¹⁰ Both global and local political and economic developments stand behind these changes.

Since the beginning of British decolonisation, the United Kingdom has been experiencing massive immigration from its former colonies, accompanied by dynamic (and sometimes controversial) changes in immigration, integration and racial policy (Ratcliffe, 2004; Spencer,

⁹ The UN primarily base their counts of international migrants on “foreign-born” populations, supplementing missing values with available counts based on other criteria, most commonly “nationality”. In the present text, both measures are used, depending on the source and type of data available.

¹⁰ This claim is based on my own calculations using United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024) and Eurostat data.

2003). The composition of Britain's migrant population changed gradually since the 2000s as an effect of EU enlargements and an EU-wide tightening of immigration regulations for third-country nationals (King & Okólski, 2019; Robinson, 2013). In 2004, the UK stood out by having been one of only three EU15 states not to introduce any Transitional Arrangements on immigration from the new member states (Brücker et al., 2009). Being also one of the only three EU members¹¹ where English – the most widely studied foreign language worldwide – was the official national language, contributed to making it the biggest recipient of (not only) labour and study migrants from the new member states (Brücker et al., 2009, pp. 24-26; Kahanec, Zaiceva & Zimmermann, 2009). The 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements thus turned the UK's migrant composition upside down in a short span of time. While up to 2004 the main incoming immigrant groups were from third countries, in 2004, EU11 migrants started taking over the lead. As many as 580,000 CEE citizens entered the UK's Worker Registration Scheme after 1 May 2004, and in 2005 the share of EU8 workers increased to 25% of the migrant labour force (Okólski, 2007, pp. 12–13). As shown in Figure 2.3, by 2012, both the total annual immigration and the net migration of EU citizens (of which the majority were EU11) to the UK surpassed that of non-EU citizens (Cuibus, 2023). This strikingly radical switch of trend could, to some extent, be caused by a change in the type of data used in the underlying analysis.¹² Nevertheless, available data on migrant stock, as well as broad academic literature mapping the growing presence of CEE migrants in the UK post-2004, provide rich evidence for this transformation in the structure of Britain's immigrant population (Black et al., 2010; Office for National Statistics, 2021; Robinson, 2013). Annual EU net migration kept growing until 2016 – the year of the Brexit referendum.

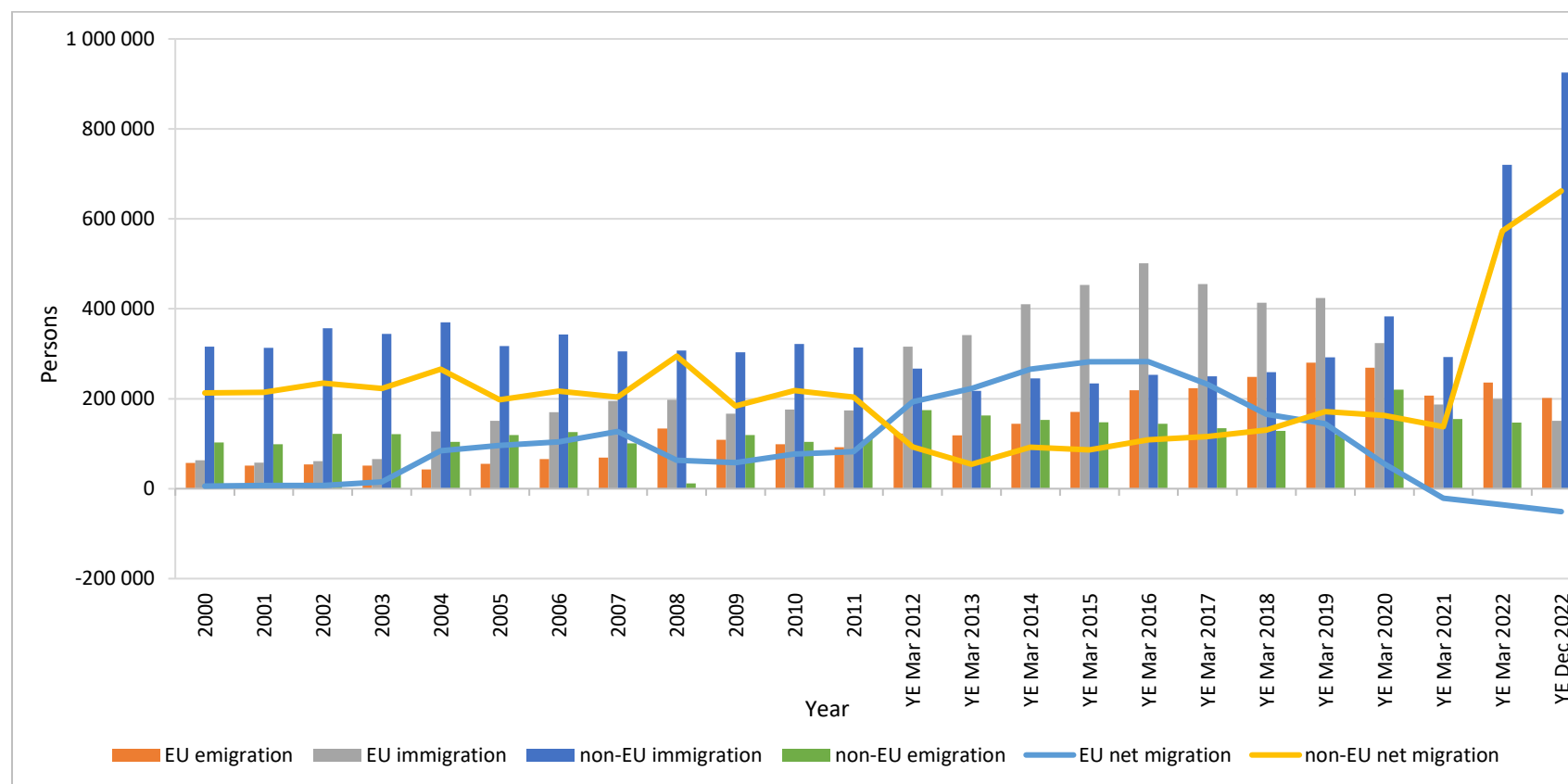
The Brexit referendum in 2016 set off yet another radical switch in the numbers of incoming EU citizens and the ratio of EU to non-EU net migration. The falling numbers of incoming EU migrants and their growing outflow in the years following 2016 reflect the uncertainty imposed on EU citizens in the UK by the Brexit-related preparations and negotiations, coupled with the effects of mobility-reduction provisions introduced worldwide in reaction to the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 (Cuibus, 2023). The effect of pending Brexit on the volume of EU immigration is evidenced by EU net migration falling below the levels of non-EU immigration by 2019, a year before Britain's definitive withdrawal, and reaching negative figures from 2021 onwards (Figure 2.3; see also Sumption, Walsh and Brindle, 2024).

¹¹ The other two were Ireland and Malta.

¹² A switch from International Passenger Survey (IPS) estimates to administrative data from the Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID) with differently defined referential periods (Cuibus, 2023; see also the note under Figure 2.3).

Brexit brought about immediate consequences for the structure of the British labour market, with some sectors, like healthcare, transport and storage, wholesale, retail, vehicle repair, accommodation and food service, manufacturing, construction or agriculture, being hit by labour shortages in the effect of the out-migration and reduced inward migration of EU citizens (King, 2021; Portes & Springford, 2023). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time Britain's withdrawal from the EU materialised contributed to deepening these effects. This synergy was especially palpable in the gradually overburdened British national healthcare services, which suffered severe staff shortages due to the departure of many EU citizens (King, 2021). Resulting changes in visa and immigration regulations eventually contributed to a change in the structure of the migrant workforce in some labour market sectors, gradually overtaken by non-EU migrants (Portes, 2024).

Figure 2.3 **Estimated Long-Term Immigration, Emigration and Net Migration to the UK, 2000-2022**

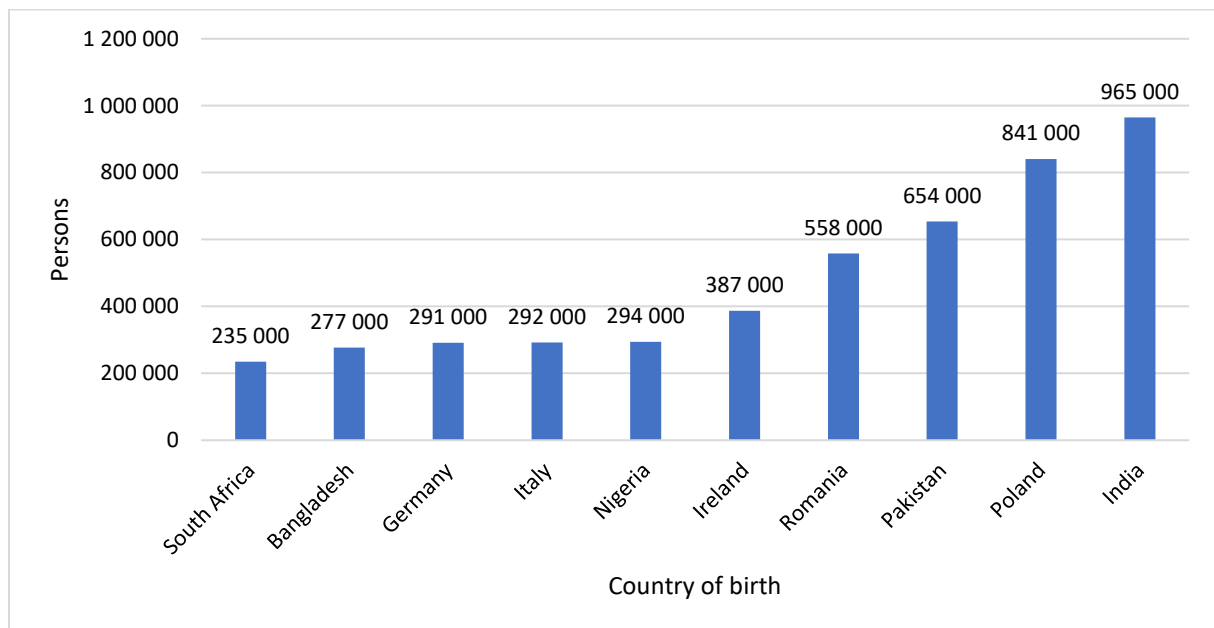


Source: Cuibus (2023; analysis of Office for National Statistics data), own visualisation

Notes: The data represent estimates deriving from different data sources, so the major change in their development between 2011 and 2012 should be interpreted cautiously. For EU migration, the data for 2000-2011 are International Passenger Survey (IPS)-based calendar-year estimates; 2012-2022 are administrative data from the Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID) for financial years ending ("YE") 6 April (2012-2019), or 31 March (for 2020-2021), or December (for 2022). Non-EU migration is calculated using administrative data. For more, see Cuibus (2023).

Despite the decrease in recent years, the massive CEE immigration to the UK between 2004 and 2016 has left a lasting imprint on the composition of the UK's population. By 2019, people born in EU11 represented almost a fifth of Britain's foreign-born population and 2% of its total number of inhabitants.¹³ In the 2021/2022 Census, Poles represented the second and Romanians the fourth largest foreign-born group (Figure 2.4; Cuibus, 2024). The CEE presence in the UK thus remains significant.

Figure 2.4 **Top Countries of Birth for Migrants in the UK, Census 2021/2022**



Source: Cuibus (2024; analysis of Office for National Statistics data), own visualisation

2.1.3 Brexit and its Consequences for the Residential Status of EU Citizens in the UK

The public referendum on the United Kingdom's future membership in the EU, which took place on 23 June 2016, resulted from a long culmination of anti-immigrant and anti-Eastern European sentiments in the British public discourse (Norris & Inglehart, 2018). It was preceded by a fierce campaign by both the opposing camps united under the umbrella mottos of "Britain Stronger in Europe" (the supporters of remaining in the EU) on the one hand and "Vote Leave" on the other. The total of 46,500,001 participants represented a turnout of 72.2% (BBC News, n. d.). With 51.9% voting "Leave", the British public chose "Brexit" over staying in the EU. Directly after the referendum, David Cameron announced his intention to resign as

¹³ Own calculations using the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019) data.

leader of the Conservatives and prime minister (PM) of the United Kingdom, to be replaced by Theresa May (Walker, 2021, p. 6).

The referendum was followed by a repeatedly extended course of political negotiations within the United Kingdom, as well as between the UK and the European Union, regarding the conditions of the withdrawal with respect to future terms of their customs and market relations and of the form of the border relations between Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit. A two-year period leading to the UK's withdrawal from the EU was officially set off by triggering Article 50 of the *Treaty on European Union* on 29 March 2017 (Walker, 2021). Due to repeated failures to reach an agreement on the "Brexit deal" or whether there should be any deal at all (a "no-deal" scenario), the UK and the EU finally agreed to extend the validity of Article 50 until 31 October 2019. In June 2019, Theresa May stepped down as prime minister for having failed to bring the views of the interested parties to a compromise and to deliver Brexit (*Prime Minister's statement in Downing Street: 24 May 2019*). On 23 June 2019, Boris Johnson won the Conservative Party leadership race, thus becoming PM in July 2019. After not having successfully completed the Brexit negotiations, Johnson pleaded with the EU to extend the date of exit to 31 January 2020 to avoid having to leave in a no-deal scenario. On that day, the UK finally left the European Union and entered a transition period which ran for one year, until 31 January 2021. After further negotiations both within the UK and between the UK and the EU, the Brexit deal ("*The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement*") was sealed between the two sides, solidifying mutual "preferential arrangements in areas such as trade in goods and in services, digital trade, intellectual property, public procurement, aviation and road transport, energy, fisheries, social security coordination, law enforcement and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, thematic cooperation and participation in Union programmes" (European Commission, 2021; Walker, 2021).

Since Brexit was largely meant to solve Britain's problems tackling the immigration influx from and via the EU, one of the most visible post-Brexit legal changes involved cutting the free movement agreement with the EU. The UK introduced an EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) for migrants from the EU and EFTA countries who have been living in the UK before the date of exit, 31 January 2021 (*Apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (settled and pre-settled status)*).

The scheme introduced two new categories of settlement based on the length of stay in the UK before Brexit: *pre-settled status* and *settled status*. To continue living in the UK after 30 June 2021, EU citizens needed to have a certificate of application or a document confirming their status in order to keep the right to access benefits, work or study in the UK, or rent a property in England (*Apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (settled and pre-settled status)*, n.d.). This applied even to those who had already obtained permanent residence, unless they applied

to naturalise as British citizens before 30 June 2021. Irish citizens or EU citizens with an indefinite leave to enter or remain were exempt from the obligation to apply.

Settled status is granted to the EU Settlement Scheme applicants with a proven continuous five-year residence in the UK. Settled status allows its holders to work in the UK, use public healthcare services for free, enrol in education in the UK, access social benefit schemes and travel in and out of the UK. It does not apply any immigration restrictions to the length of the holder's stay in the UK. However, the holder can spend only up to five years in a row outside the UK. The holder is usually eligible to apply for British citizenship 12 months after receiving settled status. *Pre-settled status* can be granted to those applicants who cannot prove a five-year continuous residence in the UK. Pre-settled status grants the same rights to the holder as settled status, but only for a five-year period, during which the holder must stay in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for at least six months in every 12-month period. Otherwise, he/she may lose the status. Pre-settled status can be extended automatically if the holder's reasons for staying in the UK still apply. After the extension, the status will usually be automatically converted to settled (*Apply to the EU Settlement Scheme...*, n.d.; Home Office news team, 2025). The deadline for most people to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme was 30 June 2021, but migrants may still apply if a later deadline applies to their case or if they have "reasonable grounds" for applying later. Up to 30 September 2024, more than 8.2 million applications have been filed, and approximately 5.7 million people have obtained status under the EUSS (Home Office news team, 2025). EU and EFTA citizens wishing to move to the UK who have not lived in the UK before 30 June 2021 need to apply for a visa, depending on their (intended) occupation and professional qualifications (*Check if you need a UK visa*, n.d.). A broad range of professions are prioritised based on the United Kingdom's labour market shortages.

Another grounds for permanently staying in the United Kingdom is the *indefinite leave to remain* (ILR). This status was already in place before Brexit. It is open to both EU and non-EU nationals who have held a qualifying visa and resided in the UK continuously for a set period (usually five years, depending on the type of visa; *Check if you can get indefinite leave to remain*, n.d.). It grants its holders the right of permanent residence in the UK and the right to apply for British citizenship after 12 months after receiving ILR. It expires if the holder spends more than two years abroad (*Apply to the EU Settlement Scheme...*, n.d.). However, in such cases, the ex-holders of the ILR can apply for a Returning Resident visa and be granted *indefinite leave to enter* (ILE; *Return to the UK if you had indefinite leave to remain*, n.d.).

To sum up, the result of the Brexit referendum and the following protracted negotiations posed multiple uncertainties for EU citizens living in Britain, with many of them (considering) leaving and others taking various steps to secure their stay in the UK (Duda-Mikulín, 2022;

Hall et al., 2022; Markova & King, 2021; Mas Giralt, 2020). Nevertheless, the newly introduced immigration and residential status regulations and their later adaptations to suit the varied situations of the target population have been gradually shown to be quite generous and relatively broadly accommodating. This reflects the United Kingdom's acknowledgement of its dependence on a migrant workforce in a range of sectors (Portes, 2024).

Section 2.2 Czech Migration to the UK in the Context of Czech International Migration as a Whole

Even though the Czech minority in the UK is relatively small compared to other Central and Eastern European minorities, in the context of emigration from Czechia as a whole, international mobility towards the United Kingdom has a special place. According to various data sources, the United Kingdom ranks among the world's top host countries for Czechia-born individuals (Table 2.2; Janská, Uherek & Janurová, 2024). The UK comes next after only the neighbouring states with which Czechia shares historical ties and intensive economic and social relations, and the USA as the world's top migrant-receiving country in absolute terms. This proves its attractiveness for Czech migrants as one of the world's most developed states in economic and political terms, an English-speaking and culturally relatable country and at the same time a very easily reachable destination due to its geographical proximity, as also the available academic literature documents (see below).

Table 2.2 Countries with the Largest Czech Diasporas (Various Data Sources)

Data source	Total	Germany	Slovakia	USA	Austria	United Kingdom	Canada	Australia
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019 - country of birth, retrieved from national statistics and other sources)	911 388	502 609	88 794	81 926	64 923	35 906	22 428	13 796
national statistics	N/A	117 000-200 000 (2020, origin)	106 000 (2021, country of birth)	68 312 (2019, country of birth, Czechia /Slovakia)	37 000 (2019, country of birth)	36 000 (2020-2021, country of birth)	105 000 (2016, origin)	12 200 (2020, country of birth)
			25 000 (2021, self-identif.)	1.3 million (2019, Czech origin) + 300 000 (2019, Czechosl. origin)	14 000 (2019, citiz.)	33 000 (2021, citiz.)		
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (2020, retrieved from various secondary sources)	200 000–250 000 (citiz.)	80 000 (origin)	35 000 (native tongue)	1 300 000 (origin)	55 000	40 000	105 000 (origin)	27 000–35 000
	2–2.5 million (origin)							

Source: Janská, Uherek & Janurová (2024), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019), Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky (2020), national statistics

Note: Information in brackets refers to the year of relevance and the selection criterion. The table illustrates the inconsistency and incomparability of migration data across states and sources. “National statistics” refers to census and other statistical data from the respective countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021;

Destatis, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2021; Sčítanie obyvateľov, domov a bytov 2021; Statistics Canada, 2018; Statistik Austria, 2020a, 2020b, Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, n.d.; United States Census Bureau, 2019).

Over the 20th century, the United Kingdom has welcomed inflows of Czech migrants of all sorts. Some of the first Czech diaspora organisations in the UK were founded in London at the beginning of the 20th century (Vaculík, 2007). During World War I, London became a temporary exile for philosopher, political activist and the future first president of independent

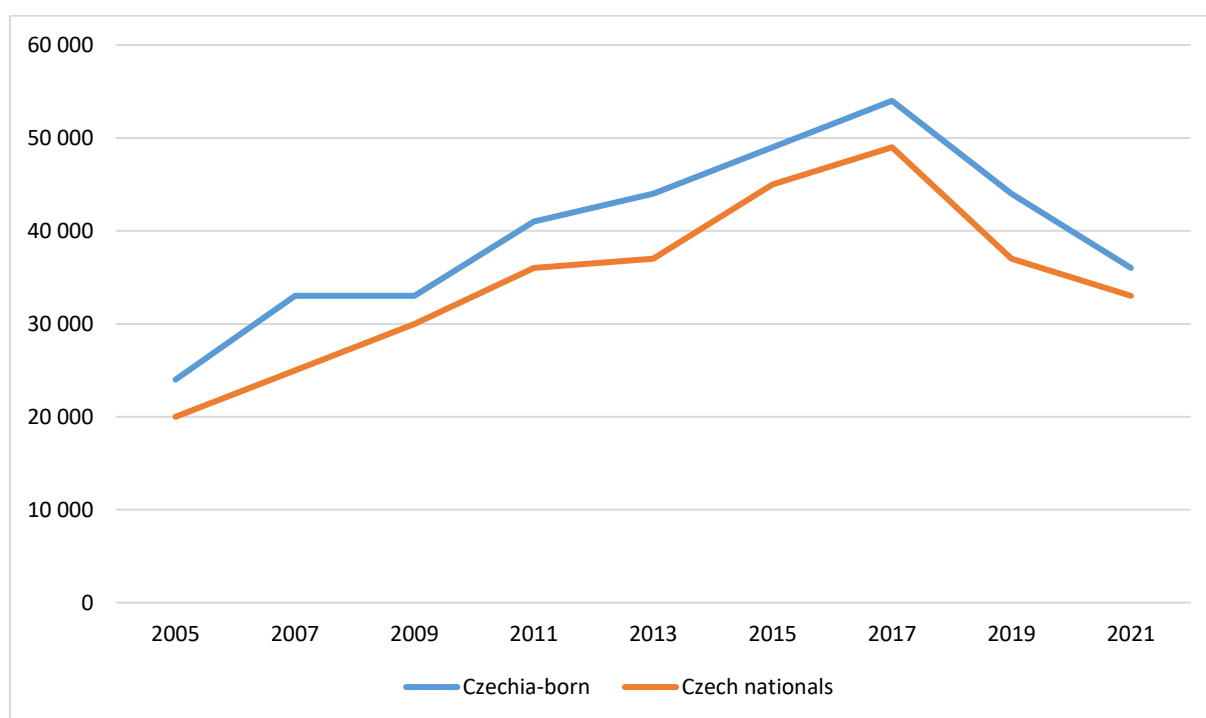
democratic Czechoslovakia Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who, together with other members of the Czech and Slovak exile and important contacts in the homeland, campaigned for Czechoslovakia's independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Preclík, 2019). During World War I and inter-war, the United Kingdom had a significant presence of Czech legionaries and various diaspora organisations (Vaculík, 2007). Before the outbreak of World War II, the United Kingdom received numerous refugees from Czechoslovakia, primarily of Jewish descent. The widely known *Kindertransport* ("children's transport") initiated by Sir Nicholas George Winton to save hundreds of Jewish children from Czechoslovakia, and followed up by similar transports from other Nazi-occupied countries, backed by the British government, are just one example of humanitarian help organised by British institutions and organisations on behalf of Czechoslovak Jewish refugees (Velecká, 2001). During World War II, London also served as the seat of the Czechoslovak exile government, founded in 1940 by the second Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš.

Between 1948 and 1989, the United Kingdom received further tens of thousands of Czech refugees fleeing socialist Czechoslovakia, including academics, former politicians, artists, members of the bourgeoisie, and other people who were persecuted by the regime due to their profession or origin, unable to perform their profession or unwilling to succumb to the restrictions of personal liberty imposed by the authoritarian regime (Tvrdíková, 2007). The fall of the socialist regime in 1989 changed the reasons for migration but did not end it. On the contrary, the opening of borders in post-1989 Czechoslovakia and later Czechia, as well as the country's 2004 accession to the EU, led to increasing Czech migration motivated by various reasons, like in other CEE countries. These included primarily work, economic betterment and study, but also love/family, lifestyle and sometimes even political reasons (Janská, Drbohlav et al., 2024; Pařízková, 2011a, 2011b; Vavrečková, 2006a).

Until lately, a major factor framing the accessibility of the United Kingdom and its labour market for Czech migrants was, for sure, the country's EU membership. Hence, the changes in the size of the Czech minority in the UK have also followed the trend described for the CEE as a whole – up to 2016, it grew (up to approximately 50,000 people), while the following years saw a decline, as Figure 2.5 shows.

Statistics on Czech applicants to the EU Settlement Scheme show higher figures. According to the Home Office *Immigration System Statistics*, as many as 92,879 Czech citizens' applications for the EU Settlement Scheme were concluded between 28 August 2018 and 31 December 2024, with 54,223 of the applications resulting in settled status and 24,047 in pre-settled status (Home Office, 2025). The rest were refused, withdrawn, void, or invalid. Repeat applications can account for the difference between this data and the stock of Czech nationals covered by Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5 **Stock of Czechia-Born and Czech Nationals in the UK, 2005-2021**



Source: Office for National Statistics – Population by country of birth and nationality datasets for the respective years, own visualisation

Notes: Two-year intervals were used for brevity. The Office for National Statistics discontinued the production of this dataset after 2021.

2.2.1 Recent Social and Political Developments in Czechia with an Impact on Migration, Civic and Political Participation

Like the United Kingdom, Czechia experienced a series of significant political developments during the extended course of my research. In 2014, the option of having dual citizenship was legally introduced (*Zákon č. 186/2013 Sb., o státním občanství České republiky*). Since 2012, Czech citizens abroad have been able to vote in parliamentary elections, and since the introduction of the direct election of the President of the Czech Republic in 2013, also in presidential elections. Nevertheless, participation so far has been possible only in person at professional representative authorities (embassies, consulates, consulates general and consular offices), on the basis of prior registration in the so-called “list of voters” in the country of residence, or on the basis of a voter card (Kandalec, 2013; Linek, 2018; *Zákon č. 275/2012 Sb., o volbě prezidenta republiky*). Physical distance from embassies has so far been the main reason why only a small proportion of Czechs living abroad have participated in elections (Janurová & Janská, 2024a; Kostelka, 2017). My data document this trend. As a result, compatriots (represented in recent years by the international initiative

Chceme volit distančně – “We Want Remote Voting”¹⁴), governmental bodies representing their interests (the Senate Standing Committee for Compatriots Living Abroad, the Department for Expatriate Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic) and some political parties have increasingly advocated for the enactment of postal voting. A draft law allowing correspondence voting, which repeatedly failed to pass the parliamentary vote, was finally approved by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate in 2024 and signed by the President of the Czech Republic (Kuchyňová, 2024; *Zákon č. 88/2024 Sb., o správě voleb*). As of January 2026, Czechs living abroad registered in a list of voters at the local embassy will be able to vote in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies, the European Parliament and the election of the President of the Republic by way of postal voting, using the two-envelope system (Kuchyňová, 2024; *Zákon č. 88/2024 Sb., o správě voleb*).

Between 2017 and 2021, Czechia witnessed growing public disagreement with the political engagement and influence of prime minister Andrej Babiš (ANO), who was accused of a conflict of interests (ownership of media, food production businesses and some private healthcare institutions) and charged with allegations of EU subsidy fraud. This and the increasingly populist acts of the Babiš administration gradually led to the rise of a pro-democratic public upheaval motivated by the *Milion chvilék* (“Million Moments”)¹⁵ civic association, which organised demonstrations and other civic pressure acts. This movement grew in popularity over time, bringing hundreds of thousands of people from all over Czechia to protest – a phenomenon that Guasti (2020) considers a sign of the enduring strength of the Czech civil society. The movement's ideas were taken up by members of the Czech diaspora worldwide, who organised numerous local supporting demonstrations, gatherings and happenings.¹⁶ The public discontent with the Babiš government escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government's response to which was heavily criticised (Guasti, 2020). These events led to the victory of an opposing political coalition in the 2021 governmental elections, after which Babiš was succeeded as prime minister by Petr Fiala (ODS). The presidential elections copied the development of public sentiments during the period described. Miloš Zeman, a representative of “eastward-looking politics” due to his affiliations to Russia and China, and known for his inappropriate, even vulgar comments on the public media, non-governmental organisations and his political opponents, was elected president in 2013 and re-elected in 2018 (Guasti & Mansfeldová, 2018). Growing discontent with Babiš's and Zeman's political style fed the “preservation of democracy” upheaval in the Czech society, as a result of which the Babiš-led government was replaced in 2021 by a strongly pro-Western coalition. Similarly, Zeman was

¹⁴ *Chceme volit distančně*, <https://www.chceme-volit-distančne.cz/>

¹⁵ originally *Milion chvilék pro demokracii* (“Million Moments for Democracy”), <https://milionchvilek.cz/>

¹⁶ <https://milionchvilek.cz/pribeh>; see also the Facebook group page *Češi a demokracie v zahraničí* (“Czechs and Democracy Abroad”), <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2199193706783202>.

replaced as President by Petr Pavel, who won the election over Andrej Babiš in 2023 with a westward-oriented, pro-democratic and socially unifying vision (Suchánek & Michal, 2024).

Some scholars have noted that Brexit did not promote a significant political debate in Czechia (Brusenbauch Meislová, 2020). In contrast, two other major recent international events occupied much of the public discourse in Czechia in recent years. First, the COVID-19 pandemic, which overshadowed Brexit, as it paralleled the 2020–2021 transition period, temporarily radically limited international mobility worldwide, and stirred up public debates about the appropriateness of state-introduced provisions (not only in Czechia). It also ignited civic engagement, with people volunteering to make missing protective sanitary equipment, delivering groceries to those more vulnerable, or supporting medical staff in various ways (Guasti & Buštíková, 2022). Second, the 2022 Russian military invasion of Ukraine, which started a full-scale war that is still ongoing, affected Czechia as a long-term key destination for Ukrainian migrants (Drbohlav, 2015; Drbohlav & Novotný, 2023). With Czechia turning into a major recipient of Ukrainian refugees, the country experienced yet another upheaval of public solidarity, with people donating money, material goods, but also lending their property for free, accommodating Ukrainian families in their own homes, and offering various kinds of hands-on help (Drbohlav & Novotný, 2023; Rapoš Božič & Kotýnek Krotký, 2024).

2.2.2 A Review of Literature on the Czech Migration to the UK

Although not heavily researched, Czech post-1989 migration to the United Kingdom has received some scholarly attention, particularly in relation to Czechia's EU accession and Brexit. The following paragraphs review the key academic findings regarding the major trends this migration flow encountered *vis-à-vis* the 2004 EU enlargement, the 2008 economic recession, the 2016 Brexit referendum, the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2020 Brexit.

A year after Czechia's EU accession, Vavrečková's (2006a) representative survey identified the UK and Ireland as the prime intended destinations for potential Czech labour migrants. The respondents prioritised the UK over Germany (the favourite pre-2004 potential destination), as well as the USA, Canada and Austria. The UK was also identified as the second most common country (after Germany) that the respondents had experience working in (a fifth of the 10.5% with any labour migration experience in the past 15 years) (Vavrečková, 2006a, p. 17). The growing preference for the UK and Ireland was explained by the immediate opening of labour markets and the fact that English was the foreign language that most respondents spoke fluently. The potential migrants were primarily young (up to 30 years old), without family or other ties, had a secondary or higher education, and mostly contemplated short-term temporary mobility.

According to Pařízková's (2011b) qualitative study,¹⁷ in 2008-2009, the main migration motives for Czech labour migrants to the UK were economic betterment, self-realisation and improvement of English language skills. They either migrated with the help of their social networks or work agencies. Czechia's accession to the UK was a major factor in both their decision-making about migration since it made the administrative procedures involved easier, and in the framing of their mobility as temporary (even if some of them stayed in the host country longer than originally planned). The author concludes that pull factors (language, higher salary, administrative easiness of the migration act) were stronger in these migrants' decision-making than push factors (unemployment in Czechia, dissatisfaction with the size of one's earnings, relationship breakup). Most of Pařízková's research participants stated that their stay in the UK was intended for 1-2 years, although some of them ended up extending it (those who were still living in the UK at the time of interviewing had been there for 3-7 years). Within the limits set by their English skills and professional experiences, they strived for "decent" jobs, comfortable housing conditions and a fulfilling lifestyle. Elsewhere, Pařízková (2011a, p. 188) points out that her Czech interviewees claimed not to have experienced any culture shock after moving to the UK owing to the two countries' cultural similarities.

From among the more recent studies, Doležalová's (2018, p. 10) doctoral dissertation focuses on the Czech and Slovak Roma people in Leeds, asking "how Roma navigate their lives in Leeds in order to escape racism." She examines the social production of Roma as socially problematic or pathological (in the Czech environment) and studies the strategies her informants use to resist or reverse the negative stereotypes associated with Roma identity. The author explains that the Roma face systematic discrimination in Czechia and Slovakia. This discrimination is based on the Roma being cast by the majority society as unwilling to work, largely dependent on social benefits or associated with "illegal and 'frowned upon' or 'immoral' activities" (prostitution, theft, black market employment; Doležalová, 2018, p. 19). This discourse effectively excludes the Roma from the majority education pathways, the housing market and the labour market.¹⁸ Doležalová points out that migration to the UK – a more ethnically diverse and politically correct environment than Czechia – is in itself a strategy for the Roma to overcome racial discrimination and stigmatisation and to be able to live a "normal" life, while at the same time retaining their cultural identity and values.

[I]iving *normálně* [normally] for Roma is linked to having dignity and respectful and acceptable social relationships, as well as a decent standard of living. Roma understand a decent standard of living as

¹⁷ Altogether, Pařízková (2011b) interviewed 62 Czechs who were living in the UK at the time, or had recently returned from the UK after a stay there. Most of her interviewees had spent a couple of years in the UK. The sample was balanced in terms of gender, a majority of the interviewees were 27-33 years old, slightly over a half of them (34 individuals) had secondary education and a bit fewer (23) were tertiary educated.

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of the situation of the Roma in Czechia, see e.g., Buday (2013) or Gabal, Čada & Snopek (2008).

not living in poverty, having a house, which is in good condition, and being able to afford good food, new clothes, a car, as well as some luxuries like a family day out. Living *normálně* was linked to having a lifestyle that Roma understand as average and “normal”. [The] informants wanted jobs, to have an adequate income, a sense of security, and of belonging and continuity.

(Doležalová, 2018, p. 236)

Doležalová’s study provides a necessary framing and a fitting vocabulary for my analysis of especially the few Roma narratives that I collected during my fieldwork. However, comparing her findings to other studies on Czech migration to the UK also helps to distinguish among the variety of motivations that my research participants had based on the life situation in Czechia that was their starting point for migration. The migration motives of Roma are rooted in existential problems and structural obstacles that make a decent living in Czechia impossible for them (Doležalová, 2018). This distinguishes them from “majority” (non-Roma) Czechs, especially those with at least secondary education, whose primary motivation tends to be to further their professional skills and increase their earnings. However, as my research findings will show, migration can have a similarly liberating effect also for non-Roma migrants in difficult existential situations.

The findings of two recent master’s theses are also relevant to my own research. Bartošová (2019) examines the motivations and experiences of Czech returnees from the UK. She finds that apart from the fulfilment of one’s original migration goal, a failed social and economic adaptation in the UK was the most common reason to return. Importantly for my own research findings, she states that her participants, interviewed presumably in 2018-2019, mostly did not perceive Brexit as one of the reasons to return. Letošníková’s (2020) master’s thesis focuses on the idea of “social remittance potential.” Having interviewed Czechs living in the UK, the author asks what kinds of ideas, behaviours, values, skills or social capital they obtain and (can) transmit to their ties in Czechia to be potentially disseminated in the country of origin. She concludes that social remittances from migrants have the potential to support and speed up value changes in the society of origin that take place in the effect of globalisation processes. She stresses that the migrant’s “starting position” in the receiving-country labour market and the migrant’s mindset with regard to becoming an agent of change are important factors for the accumulation of social remittance potential (see also Levitt, 1998). Letošníková (2020) also highlights the distinct character of financial remittances transferred by Czech migrants, which serve more as personal investments or savings than as subsistence for one’s left-behind relatives or donations to development projects, as is often the case in less developed countries. These findings also resonate with my own fieldwork.

A series of publications and research reports on the global Czech diaspora, based on several consecutive projects from recent years, also informs my empirical findings.¹⁹ Following up on Janská and Janurová's (2020) analysis of Czech social security provisions concerning the diaspora, as well as Brouček et al.'s (2017) earlier study, four mutually complementary research reports by Janská et al. (2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d) analyse Czech diaspora policy and diaspora needs, formulating recommendations in areas of diaspora policy coordination, communication or the diaspora's access to electoral participation. They show that, although a majority of the Czech diaspora is interested in Czech politics and would like to participate in national elections, fewer of them actually do so due to practical obstacles. The chapters of the book *Transnational trajectories and diaspora policies: The case of Czechia in comparison to Poland, Hungary and Slovakia*, edited by Janská (2024), contribute to the knowledge of the Czech diaspora and its different subgroups worldwide. Janurová and Janská (2024a, 2024b) analyse Czech diaspora policy and in the context of the Visegrad group, with important observations on the transforming perception of the diaspora by the Czech state. Uherek and Beranská (2024) and Doležalová and Löblová (2024) examine the character of the modern Czech diaspora, its migration trajectories, transnational ties and intentions regarding the dilemma of staying or returning. Addressing the transnational practices of contemporary Czech migrants in yet another paper based on the same data pool, Uherek and Beranská (2025) observe that highly educated, successful, cosmopolitan Czech diaspora is increasingly mobile and "interested in communicating with their countries of origin, not only through kinship networks and informal communication but also through institutionalised channels." The varied extent of embedding in the new environment, the transnational affiliations and the barriers to return, which the authors discuss, resonate with my analysis.

Janská, Drbohlav et al. (2024) emphasise the differentiation of diaspora needs and forms of transnational practices with respect to the distance of their residence from Czechia. Most recently, in a yet unpublished manuscript, Drbohlav et al. (*under review*) examine the financial and social remittances transferred by the Czech diaspora to Czechia, concluding that their character, volume and function correspond to Czechia's status as an economically stable and highly developed country with a reliable and robust social security system. Hence, migration tends to be more of a lifestyle choice than a household sustenance strategy. This is why Czech financial remittances primarily take on the form of savings, financial investment, purchase of property or (less importantly) contributions to charity organisations. These transfers are thus motivated differently than financial remittances sent to less developed countries, with which

¹⁹ Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, Beta programme (TAČR Beta), project no. TITBMZV919: "New approaches to the coordination of expatriate issues" (2020-2022); Czech Science Foundation (GAČR), project no. 22-08304S: "Czech diaspora – Multidimensional relations and conditionality of Czechia and host countries" (2022-2024); TAČR Beta, project no. TITBMZV311: "Research on the reverse contributions of the Czech diaspora to their country of origin and Czech society" (2023-2024), see also <https://www.cestikrajane.cz/>.

this concept usually tends to be associated. The transfer of social remittances takes place primarily on the micro-level of interpersonal relations. It is tied to the migrants' transnational practices, embeddedness in the receiving society and their education. My analysis of migration determinants and forms of transnational political and civic engagement will scrutinise these arguments.

Section 2.3 Political and Civic Participation in Czechia and the United Kingdom

Not all members of a particular population participate in politics and public matters. The extent of participation in the population and the favoured participation forms are conditioned culturally, historically and economically but also relate to micro-level factors (education, income, age) (van Deth, Montero & Westholm, 2007; Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006). While some scholarly approaches prioritise intensive participation of the informed elites to extensive participation of the uninformed and apathetic masses, others view broad public engagement as a necessary precondition for a strong civil society and, in effect, healthy democracy (Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006). This broad public engagement need not be constantly intensive. In fact, some scholars stress that in the long term, moderate participation favours democracy more than intensive citizen interference (Almond & Verba, 1963). In other words, as long as “politicians do their job well,” it is often enough if the citizens keep themselves informed and stay “on hold” while attending to their own affairs and take part only insofar as to correct any undesirable deviations and remind the elites of their supervision (Almond & Verba, 1963; Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006). On the other hand, if the masses are apathetic, do not use their right to vote and do not stand up for their interests, the effects on the quality of democracy may be detrimental (Whiteley, 2011). Political participation scholars generally agree that a healthy democracy derives from the informed involvement of the public, which, in turn, is rooted in a vibrant civil society, based on high interpersonal (social) trust levels (Almond & Verba, 1963; van Deth, Montero & Westholm, 2007; Linek et al., 2017; Whiteley, 2011). Hence, political and civic participation, the nature of civil society and various forms of trust are tightly intertwined.

This section reviews the main political and civic participation trends in Czechia and the United Kingdom since 1989 and places them in a historical and regional context. After looking at each country separately, I draw some comparative conclusions and suggest in what ways the experience of living in the UK might affect Czech migrants' civic and political participation.

2.3.1 Democracy, Trust and Participation in Czechia

Scholarly findings document the Czech public's resistance to democratic backsliding, despite the instability of post-1989 governments and the rise of (technocratic) populism (Bušítková & Guasti, 2017; Guasti & Mansfeldová, 2018, 2024). Longitudinal data²⁰ show that the belief that general democratic principles are being applied sufficiently has been growing in post-1989 Czechia²¹ over time. Nevertheless, confidence in democracy has decreased (Linek, 2017b). In addition, a rather strong scepticism about politics is a long-term trait of Czech public opinion, and the political and civic participation levels in Czechia are low in the context of the EU, resembling the values observed in other Central and Eastern European states (Linek et al., 2017)²².

Vlachová & Lebeda (2006, p. 13) remark that even though directly after the 1989 political turnover, the Czech(oslovak) public's interest in politics and political participation was enormous, the values quickly fell in a “post-honeymoon effect”, similarly as in other post-socialist states in the region (Kostelka, 2014). The low political trust levels among the public in these “new democracies” have been explained by their negative experience with the suppressive ruling of socialist governments and with the non-responsiveness, corruption, and arrogance associated with most post-1989 governments (Vráblíková, 2017; Zmerli, Newton & Montero, 2007).

The Czech public's satisfaction with the political situation fell in the late 1990s and has remained rather low since then (Figure 2.6), with fluctuations paralleling temporary changes in satisfaction with the work of individual political representatives and parties (Červenka, 2016, 2024a). Since 2004, at least 80% of respondents have regularly agreed with the statement that “political parties are only interested in people's votes during elections, not their opinions” (Weikertová, 2023).²³ Trust in political institutions (president, government, lower and upper chambers of the parliament, regional councils, municipal councils, mayors and regional governors) has also been quite volatile (Červenka, 2016; Glasová, 2002). Trust in local institutions and representatives tends to be generally higher than in national ones, indicating

²⁰ In this regard, I mostly refer to data collected by *Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění Sociologického ústavu Akademie věd České republiky* (also referred to as CVVM, full acronym CVVM SOÚ AV ČR). This public research body conducts ad hoc and longitudinal representative public opinion surveys. Individual research reports and press releases cited in this text are referred to by their authors' names.

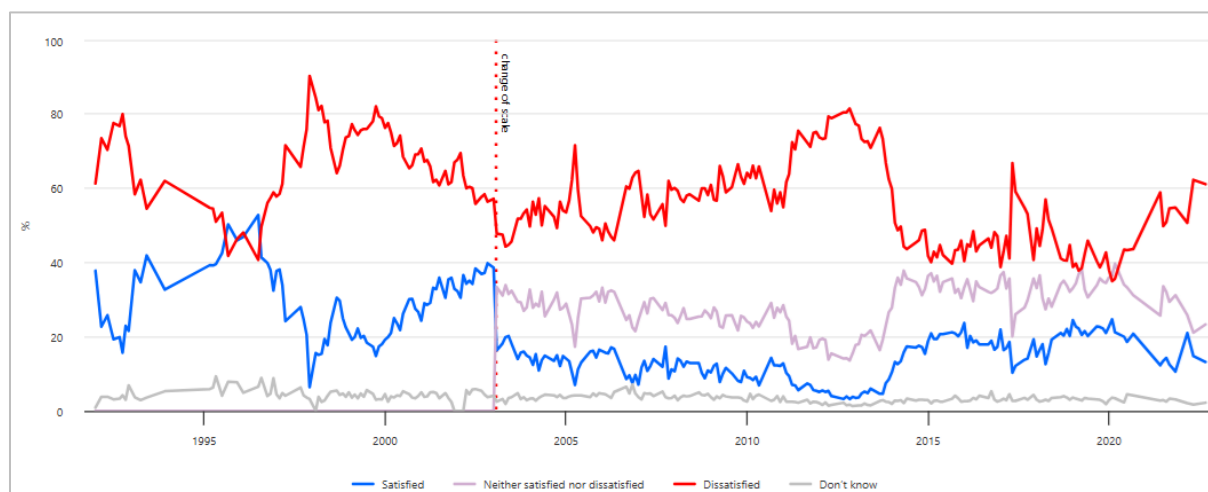
²¹ The term “post-1989 Czechia” is used for consistency with other historical references in the text, though in this chapter it *de facto* refers primarily to findings on social trends in Czechia after the breakup of Czechoslovakia, that is, post-1993. The data referred to differs slightly in the timescale covered (usually by individual years), based on the varied availability of data on the individual studied subtopics.

²² Linek et al. (2017) is a comprehensive analytical text which builds on data from multiple sources, including the 2014 ISSP citizenship module. Individual chapters from this book are referenced in this thesis by the names of their respective authors (Linek, 2017a, 2017b; Petrušek, 2017a, 2017b; Vráblíková, 2017).

²³ The only exception was 2020, when 77% of respondents agreed. The percentage corresponds to the sum of “absolutely yes” and “rather yes” responses.

that the public perceives them as more reachable (Červenka, 2024a). Similarly, it is mainly the local-level issues that the population perceives as areas where they have the power to make an impact (Weikertová, 2024).

Figure 2.6 **Satisfaction with the Political Situation, 1993-2024**



Source: CVVM “Czech society” (Naše společnost) long-term probability panel survey, representative of the population of Czechia aged 15 and over, Time series “Satisfaction with the political situation” (<https://cvvmapp.soc.cas.cz/#question4>)

Note: The data represent responses to the question “Think about the overall current political situation in the Czech Republic. Would you say that you are very satisfied with it, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied?” Until January 2003, a 4-point scale was used only (very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied). The positive responses [blue line], on the one hand, and the negative responses [red line], on the other, have been added up.

Civil Society and Social Trust in Czechia

According to Rakušanová & Řeháková (2006, p. 21), “the existence of civil society is based on the fact that a democratic political system is built on the citizens’ ability to influence public affairs through direct participation”.²⁴ In this sense, we can talk about Czech civil society forming since the early 1990s, although some authors claim that the basic values of the post-socialist civil society were already contained in the ideals of the pre-1989 dissident movement and in the society’s “inter-generational memory” of its 20 years of inter-war (1918-1938) democracy (Rakušanová, 2007, p. 51; Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006).

However, the initial public infatuation with the idea of voluntary participation later faded out in response to the new elites’ perceived corruption and misuse of the civic participation discourse (Rakušanová, 2007, p. 51; Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006). In addition, a part of the public

²⁴ Translated from Czech using DeepL.com and edited.

in post-socialist states has been rather sceptical of the moral imperative of active citizenship, reminiscent of the (effectively) obligatory participation in manipulated socialist elections, in mass organisations and in public events which commemorated the communist party and its representatives (Rakušanová, 2007, p. 26; Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006). In this regard, based on an analysis of the ISSP 2014 data, Petrúšek (2017a) shows that the Czech population prioritises law-abidingness and orderliness (“always obey the law”, “never evade taxes”, and “always vote in elections”) to civic participation (“be active in a voluntary association” and “buy products to support the environment”) as traits of good citizenship, similarly to the public in other, both old and new, European democracies – but generations differ in the order of priority they ascribe to each of the behaviours (cf. Denters, Gabriel & Torcal, 2007). Interpersonal trust in Czechia is relatively high, with slightly less than 80% of the public stating they trust “ordinary people” regularly between 2020 and 2024 (Červenka, 2024b).

Czech Political Participation Trends Between the 1990s and 2020s

The only type of national elections that have been taking place in Czech(oslovak)ia since 1990 until today are the elections to the lower chamber of parliament. According to the Czech Statistical Office (2024c)²⁵, the turnout gradually fell from over 90% in 1990 to just below 60% in 2002. Since then, it has been more or less steady.

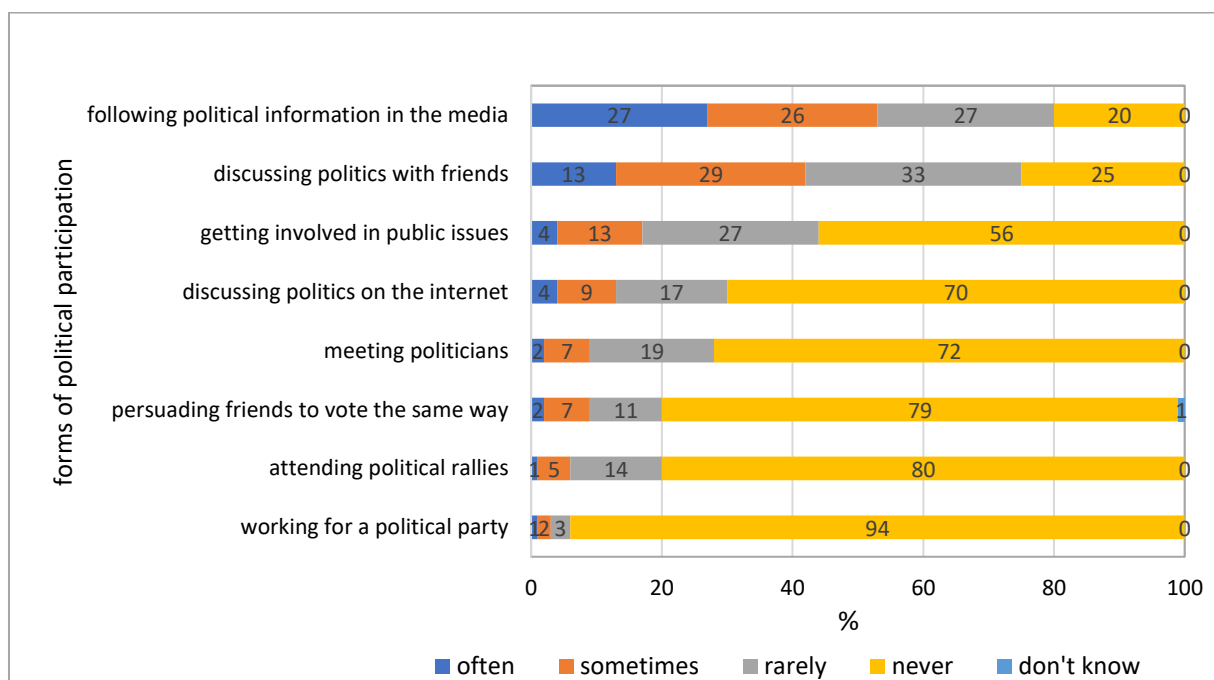
A similar development can be observed in the case of municipal council elections. While the early post-1989 elections were attended by more than 70% of voters, by 1998 the turnout fell to just over 45% and has remained steady until today. The turnout in the elections to the parliamentary upper chamber (senate) and regional councils has been rather steady, with moderate both-sided fluctuations, over the whole post-1989 period, reaching 30-40% in the case of regional councils and 30-45% in the case of the senate. The only types of elections that have witnessed *a moderate increase* in the turnout are presidential elections (since the introduction of the direct vote in 2013, participation grew from just over 60% to 70%), and European Parliament elections (between 2004 and 2014, turnout decreased from just below 30% to less than 20%, and then grew again to over 35% by 2024) (Czech Statistical Office, 2024c). These trends provide evidence for some disillusion with post-1989 politics among the Czech public but also suggest that the public’s attitudes to electoral participation have somewhat stabilised during the studied period.

In the long term, between 2008 and 2023, the proportion of the public reporting interest in politics has been slightly lower (approximately 45%) than that of those not interested (55%) (Weikertová, 2024). As shown in Figure 2.7, if we leave aside electoral participation, the most

²⁵ Only elections that took place on the proper date were considered.

common forms of political participation among the Czech public are “following political news” (53% of the population) and “discussing politics with friends” (42%), categorised as manifestations of *political interest* in this thesis (see Chapter 3). All other, more active forms of political participation are notably low, with only units of per cent accounting for those who engage in them “often” and “sometimes”. A long-term comparison shows that the values have been quite steady over the years (Kyselá, 2024). In addition, the proportions of the population that never follow political news, never discuss politics with friends, and never try to persuade friends to vote the same way have significantly grown (Kyselá, 2024). Despite these perhaps meagre results, some authors have observed Czech non-electoral participation levels to be higher than in the rest of the new European democracies (Kostelka, 2014; Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006).

Figure 2.7 **Frequency of Different Political Participation Forms (%), 2023**



Source: Kyselá (2024) - CVVM “Czech society” (Naše společnost) long-term probability panel survey, representative of the population of Czechia aged 15 and over, own translation and visualisation

Czech Civic Participation Trends Between the 1990s and 2020s

The largest and most detailed study on civic participation in Czechia conducted so far is the one by Matějka et al. (2015), based on a survey of 3,876 respondents representing the Czech adult population.²⁶ The study also considers political participation, highlighting important relations between civic and political voluntarism. The authors show that the Czech public mostly prefers those forms of participation which are not time-consuming and are to some extent “de-personalised”: financial donations (used by over 46% of respondents during the past 12 months), material donations (43%), online petitions (33%), buying specific products (25%), expressing one’s opinions online in discussion forums or on social media (20%), donating blood (12%). More engaged forms of participation, which require more time, more detailed knowledge, and a rather committed attitude to the topic in question, were carried out by fewer respondents (Matějka et al., 2015).

Matějka et al. (2015) document the existence of six disparate segments in the Czech adult population, as shown in Table 2.3. In agreement with other research findings, the largest segment is the “Occasional donors” (25.8%), a rather “passive group, only occasionally willing to support the sick and disabled or people in difficult life situations through financial or material donations or blood donations,” which forms a quarter of the population (see also Linek et al. 2017). In size, it is followed by two more active segments that, too, do not engage politically – the Apolitically active (22.5%) and the Helping hands (19.8%). In line with international research, Matějka et al. (2015) find the highly multi-directionally active (Active, 7.3%) and the not-at-all active (Passive, 9.9%) segments to be the smallest (cf. van Deth, Montero & Westholm, 2007; Vogel, 2008a). To sum up, these findings show that 90% of the Czech population at least occasionally contributes their free time, money or other resources to help the public good.

²⁶ Specifically, the population aged 15-65. The lower age limit of 15 years is a standard value used in surveys representative of the adult population in Czechia. The upper limit was set to 65 years for technical reasons (merging the survey data with a larger dataset from a regular panel, see Matějka et al., 2015, p. 6).

Table 2.3 Six Population Segments in Czechia, Based on Political and Civic Participation, According to Matějka et al. (2015)

Segment title	Size	Brief characteristics
Active	7.3% (540 thousand)	The most active group in all the topics studied, using all forms of participation and engaging at all levels.
Apolitically active	22.5% (1.67 million)	The second most active group. They focus mainly on topics related to leisure and education/upbringing, assistance to specific persons or groups, and some environmental topics.
Politically active	14.7% (1.8 million)	Almost as active as the Apolitically active, but primarily involved in political or environmental issues. People in this group focus primarily on persuasion, most often at the national level.
Helping hands	19.8% (1.46 million)	A rather passive group of people who occasionally engage in leisure and sport. They usually help with manual work at the level of a specific locality.
Occasional donors	25.8% (1.90 million)	A passive group, only occasionally willing to support the sick and disabled or people in difficult life situations through financial or material donations or blood donations.
Passive	9.9% (730 thousand)	A completely passive group of people who are not involved in any of the issues.

Source: Matějka et al. (2015), translated with DeepL.com and edited

Note: Segment size indicates both the relative representation of the segment in the research sample and the estimated size of the segment in the population of Czechia aged 15-65. The estimated size of the segments in the population is based on 2011 census data, where the population aged 15-65 years was represented by 7,388,578 persons. Estimated segment sizes are rounded to the nearest tens of thousands for clarity.

Men are the majority in all segments, except the Apolitically active and Occasional donors (Matějka et al., 2015).²⁷ They are the most overrepresented in the Politically active segment. The topics most represented in the *content* of engagement included the support of ill and handicapped persons (41% of respondents), support to people in demanding life situations (35%) and support to people affected by disasters (27%). The least represented topics (less than 2% each) included engagement in support of the EU, against capitalism and against “social depravity” (Matějka et al., 2015).

²⁷ The proportion of men to women in the Czech adult population as a whole is approximately 50:50.

A few smaller or more broadly targeted studies supply useful contextual data on this topic. A longitudinal CVVM survey, which asked about the public's organisational involvement, found that most people take part in the activities (but are not necessarily members) of sports organisations (26% in 2023), public associations and charities or foundations (19% each). On the other hand, the least common was involvement in political parties (3%). These proportions have been more or less stable since 2007 (Kyselá, 2024). These findings highlight the Czech public's preference for engagement that is somehow connected to their personal interests or hobbies and to such engagement that is rather passive and remote (since involvement with foundations or charities can be expected to represent donations mostly).

2.3.2 Democracy, Trust and Participation in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been described as one of the oldest and most stable democracies in the world with a rich "civic culture" (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 6-12; Whiteley, 2011). High levels of political trust have documented its long history of political stability, confidence in democracy and interest in politics, in which Britain historically superseded the more recent European democracies. For instance, in Almond and Verba's (1963, p. 102) classical study carried out in 1959-1960, 46% of British respondents spontaneously²⁸ reported pride in British governmental and political institutions, compared to 7% in (West) Germany and 3% in Italy. More respondents in the UK also reported talking about politics with their friends and felt free to discuss politics openly than in Germany and Italy.²⁹ Between 1945 and the early 1990s, general election turnout in the UK regularly accounted for over 70% and, in more than half of the cases, neared 80% (Clark, 2025).

The UK's political and civic participation levels have also been considered relatively high internationally. While, in the 1950s, the British respondents clearly favoured active participation in the local community and in the non-governmental sphere as traits of good citizenship of "the ordinary man", the German and Italian public identified themselves more with passive participation and "keeping oneself informed" (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 169-171).

According to more recent observations, the British public's trust in its political elites does not seem as straightforward, having experienced a gradual decline since the 1960s. In the words of Paul Whiteley (2011, p. 2),

²⁸ In response to the open question, "Speaking generally, what are the things about this country that you are most proud of?"

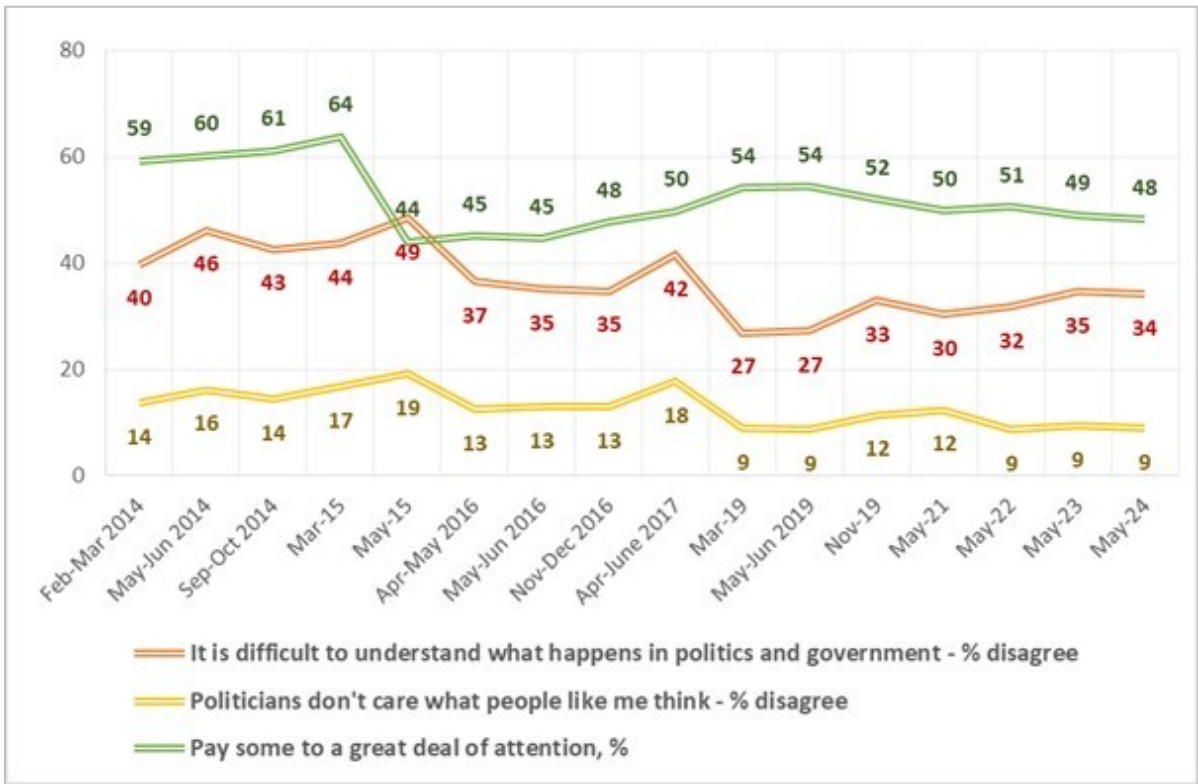
²⁹ It has to be noted that the research was carried out relatively shortly after Germany's post-World War II partition. The recent experience with dictatorial rule, war politics, and the immediate proximity of East Germany's socialism subordinate to the Soviet Union have probably impacted the prevailing sentiment of the German respondents' replies with respect to voluntary participation and freedom of speech.

The British are a law-abiding people and they possess a sense of civic obligation, for example, they believe that they should pay their taxes, they should serve on a jury when required, and they should give blood. However (...) they are less trusting of their government and the institutions of the state (...) and they are less likely to look out for their fellow citizens.

In terms of citizenship values, in the past three decades, the British have been shown to prioritise the same aspects as the Czechs: “always obey the law”, “never evade taxes”, and “always vote in elections” (Whiteley, 2011, p. 21). Interestingly, like in Czechia, the lowest importance was given to civic volunteering and politically motivated consumption. The British public seems to have become disillusioned about the political elites’ interest in their opinions and needs and their political efficacy – the chance to influence public matters if they get involved in politics (Kolpinskaya & Bennett, 2024; Whiteley, 2011, p. 25). According to the Hansard Society (2019), in 2018, 47% of people felt they had “no influence at all over national decision-making”. Based on the British Election Study, between 2014 and 2024, the percentage of those who perceived politics and government issues difficult to understand increased slightly from 60% to over 65% (Figure 2.8). During the same period, the proportion of the public who felt that politicians do not care about what people like them think increased from 86% to 91% (Figure 2.8). Membership of the three main political parties fell significantly between the 1960s and the early 2000s (Burton & Tunnicliffe, 2022). The Labour and Liberal Democrat³⁰ memberships have more than halved, and the number of Conservative party members (which was several times higher than that of the other two parties in the 1960s) has declined by over four-fifths. Notably, membership of all three parties has grown somewhat between the 2010s and the 2020s, possibly reflecting the political turmoil surrounding the Brexit referendum and Brexit.

³⁰ Former Liberal Party

Figure 2.8 **Political Interest and Confidence in the United Kingdom, 2014-2024**



Source: Kolpinskaya & Bennett (2024), based on an analysis of the British Election Study Internet Panel, waves 1-26 (February 2014 – May 2024), weighted

While 50-60% of the public in the Nordic countries, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the Netherlands trust their parliament, just over 30% of the British public have been found to do so in 2002–2006, with some of the “usual suspects” of political negativism such as Italy, Greece or Spain scoring higher, and the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe generating lower figures (van der Meer, 2010). According to the British Election Study data, between 2014 and 2024, the proportion of the public who had little to no trust in Members of Parliament (MPs) increased from 54% to 76% (the share of those reporting “no trust” rose from 19% to 31%) and the share of those who had no trust in politicians increased from 16% to 35% (Kolpinskaya and Bennett, 2024; own analysis based on Fieldhouse et al., 2024). The Office for National Statistics (2024) states that in 2024, 27% of people had high or moderately high trust in the UK government, and 12% had high or moderately high trust in political parties.

This is why some authors have stressed that long-term democratic experience and “cultural legacy [of attitudes towards the elites] which is transmitted through early socialisation” are not the only determinants of (political) trust and participation. They point to the effects of crises such as the economic recession, increased immigration, the COVID-19 pandemic or Brexit (Hansard Society, 2019; Torcal, 2017; Weinberg, 2022). The inability of recent governments

to handle these crises successfully has largely been held responsible for the recent period of democratic backsliding in the UK, a rapid decline in political trust levels and a fall in party membership figures (James, 2023; Kolpinskaya & Bennett, 2024; Renwick et al., 2023).

Despite earlier observations of a (temporary) decline in interpersonal trust (Whiteley, 2011, p. 83-88), newer studies find British interpersonal trust levels among the highest worldwide. According to 2022 World Values Survey results, 46% of the British public stated that “most people can be trusted”, 84% trusted people of another nationality, and 52% trusted people they met for the first time (the latter two figures correspond to the sum of “trust somewhat” and “trust completely” answers; Hall et al., 2023).

Some studies provide evidence for a gradual decline in formal volunteering in the United Kingdom (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024c; Whiteley, 2011, p. 83-88). Others suggest that aggregate civic engagement levels have been quite stable in the long term but socially, formally and geographically differentiated (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024a; McCulloch, Mohan & Smith, 2012; Mohan, 2015). According to the *Community Life Survey 2023/24*, the proportion of the British public engaging civically (in any form and on any level) at least once in the past year has been stable between 2018 and 2024, corresponding to between 40% and 50% (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024a). Some 28% volunteered in formal associations at least once in the last year, and 16% did so at least once a month (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024c). More intensive and proactive forms of participation, like participation in civic consultations or taking on representative and decision/making roles in the local community, were less common. Mohan’s (2015) older analysis presents similar figures, claiming that approximately 40% of the population of the United Kingdom volunteer (either formally or informally) once a year and between 20% and 30% do so at least monthly, while fewer than 10% “join no associations, do not volunteer, and give nothing to charity.” Mohan (2015) also stresses that a life-course perspective is useful because people “dip in and out” of life cycle stages, which provide them with varied opportunities and needs to get engaged. Hence, he states that most people in the United Kingdom volunteer somehow throughout their lifetime.

Political attempts at increasing the proportion of those involved have failed due to the gendered, education- and social-class-dependent nature of volunteering (Dean, 2016; McCulloch, Mohan & Smith, 2012). It is primarily highly educated, middle-class women from affluent environments who civically participate in the United Kingdom (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024a; Parry, Brookfield & Bolton, 2021). The freshly post-retirement cohorts (65-74 years) and the middle-aged (35-49 years) are an important source of volunteers in Britain, while younger generations participate less (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024a, 2024c; Fisher, 2010). Economically disadvantaged environments generate more

interpersonal distrust and low social capital (McCulloch, Mohan & Smith, 2012). Nevertheless, the proportions of people who identify “very strongly” or “fairly strongly” with their immediate neighbourhood and of those who chatted with their neighbours at least once a month have remained quite stable, corresponding to over 60% between 2013 and 2024 (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024b).

In addition to their overall positive attitude to civic participation, the British public has maintained their high political interest. According to the 2004 Citizenship Survey, 90% of the public was at least somewhat interested in politics. Out of this group, slightly less than a half were fairly or very interested (Whiteley, 2011, p. 25). Analysing a similar question, the British Election Survey found that the proportion of the British public who reported they pay “some to a great deal of attention” to politics decreased from approximately 60% to 50% between 2014 and 2024 (Kolpinskaya & Bennett, 2024).³¹ In 2008, over 60% of respondents reported daily political news consumption (Whiteley, 2011, p. 97). Lastly, despite voter turnout in general elections being at one of its long-term lows in 2024, it still accounted for 60% (Clark, 2025).

2.3.3 A Comparative Perspective on Czech and British Participation Trends

A comparative look at the political and civic participation figures for Czechia and the United Kingdom suggests that despite their very different historical experiences, their public’s contemporary attitudes to good citizenship, interpersonal and institutional trust and involvement in public matters have converged to some extent over the years. This development can be attributed to two main factors. First, participation scholars generally agree that Western societies have experienced a long-term individualisation of the social sphere, with the public increasingly attending to their private interests and needs at the expense of the public good (Putnam, 2000; Whiteley, 2011). This privatising tendency has been observed in the new and old European democracies alike, although with the added “twist” of a temporary transformational excitement about civic engagement taking place in the post-socialist countries in the early 1990s (Linek et al., 2017; Pospěch, 2021; Vachudová & Lebeda, 2006). Second, especially the two recent decades have witnessed a surge of democratic backsliding, not only in the new post-socialist democracies but also in the traditional democratic world powers like the United Kingdom and the United States (Norris, 2017). Contrastingly, during that time, the Czech society has (just about) resisted various anti-democratic tendencies taking

³¹ This question (“How much attention do you generally pay to politics?”) used a 10-point scale from “pay no attention” to “pay a great deal of attention” (Fieldhouse et al., 2024). According to my preliminary analysis of said data, the proportion of respondents who paid no or very little attention (placing themselves on points 1 to 4 on the scale) accounted for 15% in 2024, a less than two-percentage-point increase from 2014.

place in its political scene and managed to solidify – at least for the time being – its political position as a pro-Western, pro-European, modern democracy (Bušítková & Guasti, 2017; Guasti, 2020; Hloušek & Kaniok, 2021).

Authors who have examined the intra-population variation in political and civic participation agree about the key roles of education and age, valid across countries and time. People with higher education levels are more interested in politics and participate more due to being generally more politically informed, having more time to spend taking part in such matters, and usually also more financial resources to devote to them (this aspect also translates to the finding that richer households generate more political participation; Petrúšek, 2017b; Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006; Whiteley, 2011). Age or generational affiliation can be used to explain differences in the preferred forms of participation (older people adhere to more conventional forms of participation, while younger people choose new forms or modes of expression). Also, younger people tend to have more free time and more revolutionary views, which is why, in Czechia, they tend to be overrepresented among hands-on volunteers and activists, while older people are more represented among donors and choose more conservative means of expressing their opinions (Matějka et al., 2015). Contrastingly, in Britain, probably due to its long tradition of civic engagement, elderly people are overrepresented even among hands-on volunteers, in contrast to the youth/youngest adults (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024a, 2024c; Fisher, 2010). Gender differences in participation are not as clear-cut internationally. In some forms of participation, such as electoral participation, donations, or political consumerism, they are rather negligible (Petrúšek, 2017b; Whiteley, 2011, pp. 45-46). However, scholars have observed that some forms of participation vary in their attractiveness for men and women. In Czechia, women are significantly less likely to engage in political parties, with twice as many men becoming party members than women (Petrúšek, 2017b). In contrast, the three main British political parties have virtually equal proportions of both genders (Burton & Tunnicliffe, 2022). In both countries, women tend to prefer non-political activities to political ones and more often volunteer in the social and educational sphere than men (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024a; Matějka et al., 2015; Parry, Brookfield & Bolton, 2021; Petrúšek, 2017b). The size, as well as the wealth of the municipality of residence, is another determinant associated with participation forms and level (Petrúšek, 2017b; McCulloch, Mohan & Smith, 2012). These general structural differences apply in the Czech and British societies alike and are longstanding (Almond & Verba, 1963; Matějka et al., 2015; Whiteley, 2011).

Similarly, in both Czechia and the UK, the public has more trust in non-political institutions (army, police, courts etc.) than in political ones, and is more trusting of local-level than national-level institutions (Červenka, 2024a, 2024b; Matějka et al., 2015; Skinner,

Clemence & King, 2023). The Czechs and the British prioritise orderly behaviour and electoral participation over active public engagement, which goes beyond what the law states (Petrůšek, 2017a; Whiteley, 2011). Such attitudes are also common internationally (Denters, Gabriel & Torcal, 2007). An additional difference in the Czech case is that the support for democracy in general seems to be generationally differentiated with regard to the length of the individual generations' experience with the pre-1989 communist regime (Linek, 2017a).

Despite some signs of a gradual convergence of the British and Czech political and civic participation trends, the prevailing social values which characterise the civic and political culture of a society and which are on the background of participation seem to be perceived as significantly different and thus work as secondary determinants of post-1989 immigration or settlement of migrants from Czechia. Not uniquely, post-1989 Czech migrants to the UK refer to disillusionment with post-socialist politics, corruption, gender inequality and racial discrimination in their countries of origin as some of the push factors considered in their migration decision-making (e.g. Janská et al., 2022b, 2022c; Letošníková, 2019; Pařízková, 2011b).

Section 2.4 Rounding-Off Thoughts on the Determinants of Czech Migration to the United Kingdom

This chapter has shown that while Czechia continues to be perceived as a member of the economically and politically “less developed” part of the European Union, its “periphery” (the CEE), the developments of recent decades have contributed to some important shifts in the political standing of Czechia within the EU, and in its comparison to the United Kingdom. Its relative economic stability helped it sustain unexpected fluctuations, like economic recessions or refugee inflows. Czechia strengthened its integration into the EU community through its recent democracy-preserving political developments. On the other hand, owing to Brexit, the United Kingdom moved from the EU's core to a place outside of the Union, having to face numerous political, social and economic repercussions.

The described convergences in the Czech and British political and social landscape might not be as visible to the ordinary individual, especially since they take place over an extended period. Also, it is primarily not the major political participation indicators that serve as pull factors in migration decision-making. Instead, they lie in the background: the prevailing values, the nature of social conduct or perhaps – if at all – the standard of the political culture and discussion. The nature of social conduct is a hardly measurable quality that can perhaps be grasped the best in terms of interpersonal and institutional trust, but not fully – it is the

feeling that one is being approached by other people, as well as the authorities, with respect, politeness and as an equal. This quality is somewhat related to participation as well because it is the genuine interest in and respect for other people that leads to political and civic engagement. According to social capital theory, “political action is rooted in the social networks of everyday life in as much as social life gives rise to feelings of trust, and norms of reciprocity among citizens” (Iglič & Font Fábregas, 2007, p. 189). The unwritten rules of social conduct, or, what some of my respondents described as the Czech or British “mentality,” are probably more historically embedded in the character of a population and might take generations to change. The standard of the political discussion might be more prone to change in response to changes in the public mood and alongside the changing dynamics of political campaigning. However, as politics is given lesser importance in the context of other migration decision-making factors, it might not be as visible for the Czech migrant, especially since his/her experience of the Czech political discourse in the long term is most likely more negative than that of the British.

Building on these findings, a few expectations can be made. Czech migrants’ attitudes to conventional political participation might not be strongly affected by their relocation to the (transforming) participation landscape of the United Kingdom, because they may encounter a similar disillusion with politics there as they have known from their country of origin. The motivation for civic participation is more likely to be transferred to the migrant via their experience with its normativity and broad availability. However, the perception of the normativity of such behaviour will most likely form in a specific social context – if one’s social ties in the country of reception engage. What might work as a transformative factor is the overall value environment in the country of reception, including political interest and general care for civic affairs. These might contribute to the transmission of social remittances or an adaptation of one’s personal habits and opinions.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study at hand. First, it sets the theoretical and analytical approach in the disciplinary contexts of sociology, human geography and political science. Second, it overviews the complex terminological apparatus used in the thesis, revolving around the notions of transnationalism, embedding, value orientations, political and civic participation, and the dilemma of structure versus agency. The last section closes the theoretical framework by summarising the conceptual complex and highlighting the key relations between the individual terms.

Section 3.1 Disciplinary Grounding of the Research Project

Before delving into the individual strands of thinking and concepts which form the theoretical framework of my dissertation, I would first like to place the unfolding discussion in the broader disciplinary context. Migration studies are an interdisciplinary field (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008; King, 2012). This dissertation thus inevitably draws on sources from across the social sciences. Their choice reflects primarily the triple disciplinary grounding my theoretical and methodological framework is set in, comprising sociology, human geography and political science, but reaches out to other fields of knowledge, like anthropology, ethnology or history. I will now describe the theoretical groundwork in detail.

I acquired my primary disciplinary training in sociology, which has provided me with essential theoretical, analytical and methodological skills. Sociology, as the study of social relations, systems and norms, provides an essential basis for my particular study by having laid the foundations of the great debates on structure vs. agency, the role of human embeddedness in social institutions or social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1986; Giddens, 1986). Even though it is hard to declare a particular migration studies text or concept a strictly sociological one, I consider it important to mention a few of the main primarily sociological sources that informed my theoretical framework. This concerns especially some of the key literature used in the conceptualisation of *social capital* and *social ties* (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 2000; Granovetter, 1973), (social) *embeddedness* (Granovetter, 1985; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993) and the emergent processual concepts of *embedding* and *anchoring* (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022; Mulholland & Ryan, 2023; Ryan & Mulholland, 2015), *migrant integration* (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Esser, 2000; Heckmann & Schnapper, 2003; Penninx, 2005) or *intra-European mobility* (e.g., Favell, 2007, 2008; O'Reilly, 2007). I draw on sociological, as well as anthropological sources in my conceptualisation of the concept of *belonging* (Anthias 2007, 2009; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Povrzanović Frykman, 2010). Last but not least, my

research design employs methods which, despite being widely adopted – and adapted – by various social sciences, originate in sociology and anthropology (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2006; Cloke et al., 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Holstein & Gubrium, 2011; Kohler Riessman, 2001; Silverman, 2005).

Human geography is necessarily at the core of the theoretical discussion presented here, not only because the current research was conducted in a geography department, being guided by the instructions and recommendations of geography professors³², and hence continuously moulded by theoretical influences from the field of human geography. The reason is especially that migration is an inherently geographic phenomenon in terms of its spatiality, as well as its being interlinked with economic conditions and processes and their spatial distribution (King, 2012; Pott, 2013). As a qualitative study aiming to break down the subjective individual experience of migration, integration/embedding and civic engagement, my research is in line with the “post-population-geography” phase of paradigm development in human geography and migration brought about by the cultural turn (Hardwick, 2008, cit. in King, 2012, p. 146). Post-population geography has been described as preoccupied with the *questions of ambivalence, the contested and dilemmatic nature of identity and belonging*, and represented, among other things, by biographical and case study approaches (King, 2012). In this phase, human geography, sociology and anthropology have perhaps been drawn the closest to each other in terms of both the problems studied and the methods applied.

Taking up King’s important observation, the *transnational perspective* which frames my method and analysis could be interpreted as the ultimate enactment of Torsten Hägerstrand’s distinction of migration from mobility – “the *change in the centre of gravity* of an individual’s mobility pattern” (Hägerstrand, 1957, cit. in King, 2012, p. 141, own emphasis). This simple image is ever more relevant to the dilemma of *migration versus mobility* within the European Union, which has concerned Favell (2008), Favell and Nebe (2009) and Boswell and Geddes (2011), among others, and which my analysis confronts. Even though the original and most elaborate conceptualisations of *transnationalism* have been introduced by scholars based in the fields of anthropology and sociology (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1997; Faist, 2000; Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992a; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2009), the transnational perspective is genuinely geographical for a number of reasons. First, it insists on the need to study migrant stories with reference to the migrants’ pre-migration experiences and ties and their enduring cross-border connections, thus acknowledging both *spatiality* and *temporality* in their life trajectories. At the same time, the imperative of avoiding not only *methodological nationalism*, i.e. an operational enclosure in political-

³² Dušan Drbohlav at the Faculty of Science, Charles University, and Russell King at the School of Global Studies, University of Sussex

geographical and administrative terms (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003) but also the conceptual enclosure of migrants and their life stories within the static, unidirectional categories of “emigrant”/“immigrant,” lie at the heart of transnationalism. This approach corresponds to the gradual shift in human geography (and the social sciences more broadly) towards more relativity in approaching concepts such as the *(nation-)state* and *borders*, paying more attention to *mobility*, *flexibility* and *fluidity* (Sheller & Urry, 2006). The last reason is in fact a challenge to the latter. As some of the leading scholars of transnationalism have warned, the researcher perspective should not get too overwhelmed by the (seemingly) constant and often unavoidable *mobility*, *fluidity* and *transnational practices* present in contemporary migrants’ trajectories but also account for various forms of *stability* (-seeking), which is to be found in most of them (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017; Guarnizo, Portes & Haller, 2003; King, 2012; Mitchell, 1997). This is not to be understood as a return to the formerly critiqued formalism but as a need to acknowledge the interplay of fluidity and stability in individual migrant trajectories, resulting from voluntary/forced strategies, on the one hand, and chosen/imposed contexts, on the other – political, economic, social, but also geographical.

The geographical localisation of my research, i.e. migration between the “old” and the “new” parts of the not-so-recently, but significantly enlarged European Union, is an intra-EU application of the core-periphery model (cf. King et al., 2014), yet disrupted by Britain’s withdrawal from the EU. The significance of the core-periphery model is explored not only with reference to migration motives and determinants (e.g., difference in economic and political development, favourability of working conditions, wage levels, levels of meritocracy, corruption, etc.) but also in relation to the question of diverse motivations for, levels and forms of political and civic engagement. As the introduction outlines, I hypothesise that embedding in a new society will lead to adopting new values. My assumption, therefore, is that migrants coming from a (periphery) society which is less politically and civically engaged and more sceptical of democratic political procedures to (a core) one which is more engaged and less sceptical will, to some extent, draw closer in their attitudes and practices to the patterns prevalent in the society of their destination (see, e.g., Gaidytė & Muis, 2015; Linek et al., 2017; Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer & Wittrock, 1998a). Hence, the core-periphery model here relates to the difference in levels of democratisation of the political system as well as of the life of the society in the countries of origin and destination.

Some key topics studied in this research project are borrowed from political science. This concerns primarily *political and civic participation* (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Vogel, 2008a), as well as *social capital*, which is frequently postulated as explanatory of the former (Coleman, 2000; Loury, 1977; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000, 2007). *Civil society*, *civic culture* or *political trust* are other political science concepts characterising the broader analytical

framework of this study (Almond & Verba, 1963; Norris, 1999, 2011; Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer & Wittrock, 1998a; Zmerli & Hooghe, 2011). Inglehart's analyses of *post-materialism* and *value change* in Western societies provide an indispensable explanatory meta-frame for the research questions posed (Inglehart 1977, 1981, 2008). Some political science debates and approaches spill over to public policy analysis, which also served as an important analytical and terminological resource for this dissertation, with a focus on integration and diaspora policy (Barbulescu, Wallace Goodman & Pedroza, 2023a; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; Janská, 2024; McIntyre & Gamlen, 2019; Ragazzi, 2014).

Various disciplines have taken up the concepts mentioned and re-defined them.

Section 3.2 Examination of Key Theoretical Concepts

This section introduces the key theoretical concepts applied in the dissertation. It examines how their academic usage developed over the past decades and what consequences this bears for their application in the current research. It builds the discussion on the three central notions the research revolves around: *transnationalism*, *embedding* and *political and civic participation*. In addition, it pays particular attention to the dilemma of *structure versus agency*, which frames much of my subsequent analytical discussion, and the topic of *value orientations and value change*. Further concepts, such as social remittances, cultural and social capital or trust, are explained according to their relevance to the central notions to show how they are linked together in the context of the current study.

3.2.1 Transnationalism

The formulation of transnationalism as a new perspective for migration studies is connected with the seminal texts by Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992a) and Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1997). Proponents of the transnational paradigm call on migration scholars to reflect upon the “forging and sustaining [of] multi-stranded social relations” by migrants that link “their societies of origin and settlement,” creating “social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders,” (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1997, p. 7; Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992b, p. ix). These relations are considered key for sustaining, establishing and solidifying the “transmigrant’s” position within either of the societies concerned. Instead of standing in the way of migrant integration in the society of settlement, they are seen as being an important component of migrant life stories, neglected for a long time by “the dominant discourse on migration,” which only dealt with immigrant incorporation (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992b, p. x). Transnationalism brings

attention to the rich realities that contribute to weaving migrant life trajectories via their histories and continuing attachments “here” and “there,” shifting general perceptions away from the image of migrants as (socially and economically disadvantaged) immigrants who are there to stay, or “transient” and “temporary” migrants (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1997, p. 4). While not abandoning the nation-state perspective as an important structuring contextual factor, the transnational perspective brings attention to migrants’ confrontations and engagements with two or more (nation) states - on both the private and public levels (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1997, p. 30-34). This *transnational social field* perspective is integral to both the theoretical and the methodological framework used in this dissertation (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; see also Marcus, 1995).

Steven Vertovec (2009, p. 2-3) views transnationalism as a manifestation of globalisation. He stresses that *not all migrants* engage across borders and that transnationalism as a micro-level social phenomenon is not new in the human history of migration, but instead takes place in a “different configuration of circumstances” (Joppke & Morawska, 2003, as cited in Vertovec, 2009, p. 14). “Old” transnational practices include the maintenance of emotional ties in geographically dispersed families; (return) migrants’ transborder movements; ongoing transnational communication between migrants and their relatives and friends; sending of remittances; the establishment and transnational activity (and activism) of migrant associations and business networks; and transnational political interests and activism (Vertovec, 2009, p. 14).

“New” aspects of transnationalism depart from the influence of technological advancements on the “extent, intensity and speed” at which transnational “bonds of emotion, loyalty and affiliation” can be maintained. They include the effect of and on various globalisation processes, the shift in the qualitative and quantitative nature of migrant remittances, the shift in the extent, impact and formality of transnational political engagement, or the size, volume and extent of activity of migrant hometown associations worldwide (Vertovec, 2009, p. 14-16). “New” is also the expanding phenomenon of state diaspora policies which support and promote migrant transnationalism, the proliferation of multiple citizenship laws and identity politics in states worldwide, designed to facilitate the peaceful cohabitation of people of various backgrounds in single nation-state contexts (Janská, Janurová et al., 2024; Levitt, 1998; Ragazzi, 2014).

Since the 1990s, migration research literature has witnessed a burgeoning of studies on migrant transnationalism. The contemporary study of migrants’ transnational practices covers a wide array of life domains, including financial remittances and development (Carling, 2014; Portes & Zhou, 2012), kin contact (Ryan et al., 2009; Tan et al., 2018), entrepreneurship (Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2016; Katila & Wallhbeck, 2012), parenting (Bell & Erdal, 2015)

or elderly care (Baldassar, 2007; Wilding & Baldassar, 2018). However, the original focus of scholars who brought attention to transnationalism was, in fact, the power that sustained and intensive transnational practices can have in influencing civic life and political developments in migrants' countries of origin (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1999; Guarnizo, Portes & Haller, 2003; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). It was observed that this happens not only thanks to financial but especially *social remittances*, the “ideas, behaviors, identities and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities [...] transforming sending-country social and political life” (Levitt, 1998); more on this below.

My analysis examines both the “old” and “new” aspects of transnationalism. To avoid “sampling on the dependent variable,” I am trying to distinguish between transnational activities that happen just because they are nowadays a routine part of migrant (or in fact *human*) life, which virtually enables people to “live online,” and those that happen with an added endeavour and purpose (Glick Schiller, 2018; Guarnizo, Portes & Haller, 2003). I account for the role of *social remittances* and of the *liquid migration context* of the European Union/Schengen area for the migrants' perception of whether what happens in their country of origin has any relevance for their lives abroad and whether their say in sending-country issues matters (Engbersen & Snel, 2013; Janská et al., 2022b).

Social Remittances

In her groundbreaking article, Levitt (1998) coins “social remittances,” classifying them into three types – normative structures, systems of practice, and social capital. She claims that social remittances are formed and transformed in a path-dependent manner, starting from the “set of social and cultural tools” that migrants bring with them from their society of origin to their receiving society (their *cultural capital* and *habitus*, see below). These are mobilised, may be adjusted and enriched, but can also go unchanged or be discarded as part of various “blending scenarios” during the migrant's life in a new environment, which presents them with new norms, practices and emerging social ties. According to Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011, p. 2), “people's experiences prior to migration strongly influence what they do in the countries where they settle; this, in turn, affects what they remit back to their homelands” via transnational contact. My analysis in Chapter 7 scrutinises this claim, pointing to the role of migrants' characteristics and experiences prior to migration, and their newly acquired needs and attitudes in structuring their activities abroad.

The remitted values, ideas and behaviours may be re-moulded by their non-migrant recipients and even “sent” back to/via the migrant subsequently – social remittances circulate rather than going one way (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). By being transmitted between individuals who know one another, they bear the added value of coming from a trustworthy

source. Hence, they carry a potential for meaningful social, political or institutional change (Levitt, 1998; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Collective social remittances can impact major processual or legislative transformations in their respective social fields, sometimes scaling *up* (e.g., from the community level to the regional or national one) or out (e.g., from the area of politics to religion; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). These findings touch upon the idea of the “diaspora option” (Meyer et al., 1997), which claims that brain drain does not necessarily have to be counteracted by (often non-effective) return migration incentives, but that migrants can contribute to their countries of origin by sharing their skills and expertise at a distance, via networks of highly skilled expatriates, tightly linked to professionals “back home”. This presumption lies at the heart of diaspora policies employed by an increasing number of states worldwide that have come to recognise the political and economic potential of social remittances (Kovács, 2020). In the European context, this is an especially timely idea.

The (Variably) Liquid Migration Context and Migration Strategies ³³

Scholars have noted the multiplicity of migration temporalities among CEE migrants to EU15 since the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements, including seasonal, short- and long-term, permanent, and repeated migrations, many of which can be characterised by their “liquidity” and uncertainty about the future (Drinkwater & Garapich, 2015; Engbersen & Snel, 2013). Inspired by Bauman’s (1999) “liquid modernity,” “liquid migration” has been defined as mobility that is unpredictable in terms of destinations and duration, that is often repeated, individualised, economically oriented, and rooted in the “migratory habitus of ‘*intentional unpredictability*’” (Eade, Drinkwater & Garapich, 2006, my emphasis; Engbersen & Snel, 2013). According to Grabowska-Lusińska (2013), this approach of “keeping all options open,” having no fixed aspirations and obligations, comes about either as a survival strategy in the face of insecure economic circumstances or as a reflection of a person’s inability to decide about their life goals. This echoes Favell’s (2008) analysis of “Eurostars,” young, highly skilled European professionals who, on the one hand, indulge in a liberating, “de-nationalised,” existence in European metropolises and, on the other, negotiate the need to settle at some point in their lives (cf. Uherek & Beranská, 2025).

In the EU, which also, until 2020, included the United Kingdom, liquidity is made possible by the free movement policy that gives European citizens legal residence status in any destination within the Union (Engbersen & Snel, 2013). It has been observed in the 2010s that most CEE migrants moved in their 20s and 30s and were single and childless (Drinkwater,

³³ This section is adapted from my earlier article (Janurová, 2018).

Eade & Garapich, 2009; Moskal, 2013). They were willing to take rather low-skilled jobs, even if they often had a high level of education, in exchange for quick financial gain and/or international experience as such (Isański, Mleczko & Seredyńska-Abou Eid, 2013). Low-skilled employment was perceived as a short-term step beneficial for their economic and social mobility in the destination country or “back home” (Eade, Drinkwater & Garapich, 2006). This process was described by Parutis (2011) as a progress from just “‘any job’ to a ‘better job’ in the search of a ‘dream job’.” Compared to Okólski’s (2001) (pre-accession) “incomplete migration,” which was said to have concerned mainly low-skilled, rural or marginalised groups seeking irregular employment, liquid migration has been observed among both low-skilled and highly educated migrants looking for regular contracts and some form of career progression (Garapich, 2008).

Liquid migration is part of the growing “super-diversity” of world migrations, enabled by political, economic, and technological developments, like reduced travel costs and advanced information and communications technologies (Vertovec, 2007). EU11 migration to the EU15, however, is specific in that the “disappearance” of state borders has transformed old international economic migration patterns into “(semi-)internal” migration, allowing CEE citizens to look for employment in Western Europe in a trial-and-error manner with relatively low financial and time costs and little economic risk (Engbersen & Snel, 2013). When the intended migration goals (improved language skills, increased savings, international experience, socio-economic mobility) are fulfilled or fail, the migrant can always return or re-emigrate.

Krisjane, Berzins and Apsite (2013) highlight the non-committal nature of post-accession migration, noting that “migrants who initially viewed themselves as temporary or seasonal can become permanent migrants in response to economic shock in the host and home countries,” even despite the (original) seriousness of their intention to return. Similarly, Ryan (2015a) portrays Polish post-accession migration to the UK as a repeatedly extended stay (see also Kilkey & Ryan, 2021; Uherek & Beranská, 2024). Transnational attachments might serve to support or deter such a decision (Moskal, 2013).

The typology by Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2006) of Polish migrants in London based on their attachments to their societies of origin and reception categorises the various strategies that migrants employ to make their way within the liquid migration context. The circular “stork” migrants choose repeated short-term trips as a long-term strategy, while “hamsters” migrate only once for a longer period, aiming for a quick financial gain to use back home. “Searchers” deliberately keep their options open, are young, individualistic, ambitious, and perform low- to high-skilled jobs. They are more open to staying than the preceding groups mentioned, but can well imagine returning or migrating elsewhere. “Stayers” are settled in the

receiving country on a long-term basis, intend to remain, and generally have high social mobility ambitions. They value the migration experience for the acquisition of economic, as well as other forms of capital. The typology of CEE migrants in the Netherlands put forward by Engbersen et al. (2013) represents a similar, yet slightly different approach to studying migrants' differing attachments to their home and host countries, operationalised as language skills and usage, income and employment status, relationship status, but also social networks, civic engagement, and institutional attachments. The current study borrows a few of the categories mentioned and the underlying analytical areas to illustrate the differences in embedding and belonging between Czechs in the United Kingdom.

Since its introduction, the theory of liquid migration has been challenged from various standpoints (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017; King, 2018; Okólski & Salt, 2014). Bygnes and Erdal (2017) have shown that Polish and Spanish migrants in Norway in their 30s and 40s seek to establish settled, family-oriented, economically stable, and dignified “grounded lives” through their migration projects (see also Ryan, 2018). “Liquid migration” serves as the context from which they draw in this effort, making their “quest for normalcy” more difficult (Drinkwater & Garapich, 2015). Bygnes and Erdal (2017) claim that rather than voluntarily choosing liquid migration as a strategy, individuals in countries with highly deregulated labour markets sometimes end up being “trapped” in liquid migration; being forced to stay mobile to provide for their families, while their “home,” their family, and their social networks stay put. Examining the relevance of the concept in the context of recent Brazilian migration to Australia, Azeredo (2023) proves the same point by claiming that “fluid visa journeys” taken by highly educated, upper- and middle-class young Brazilian professionals stem out of necessity and represent “staggered migration” trajectories, instead of voluntarily chosen strategies of intentional unpredictability. Their eventual goal remains to be a long-term legal residence status and permanent settlement in the destination country. Azeredo's (2023) novel contribution to the discussion suggests that studying the tension between liquidity and settlement remains relevant even in the context of post-Brexit CEE migration to and contemplations of staying in the UK (see also Dagilyté, 2020; D'Angelo & Ryan, 2021; Lulle, Moroşanu & King, 2018). In the words of Engbersen (2018), “liquid migration” serves analysis if approached as an ideal type, rather than as an all-encompassing caption for intra-EU/intra-European mobility.

The few studies that have dealt with Czech migration (before and after 2004) have found that much of this flow might consist of temporary mobility connected with improving language skills, studying, gaining work experience, and short-term economic betterment, all of which are directed towards using the accumulated capital to improve one's life standard in the country of origin (Pařízková, 2011a; Vavrečková & Hantak, 2008). Thus, they provide evidence

for the prevalence of “hamster” mobilities among post-1989, especially post-2004 Czech migrants. Chapter 5 of the current study shows that while “hamster” motivations might be quite common as the initial reasons for migrating among Czechs heading to the UK, “grounded” family life aspirations may lead some of them to stay, findings similar to those of Bygnes and Erdal (2017).

3.2.2 Being and Becoming Part of Societies “Here” and “There”

This section aims to disentangle the meshwork of concepts which are currently used in migration studies literature to capture the process of migrants establishing a place in two societies (or more) at once, or moving one’s life’s “centre of gravity” from one society to another (King, 2012). Since the upheaval of transnationalism, migration scholarship has increasingly cautioned against black-and-white terminology which reinforces the view of migrants as closing the doors behind the society of origin and becoming *immigrants* in need of (complete) *integration* or *assimilation* in the receiving society (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Favell, 2022; Ryan & Mulholland, 2015; Spencer & Charsley, 2021; cf. Alba & Nee, 1997). Various new terms have been introduced to capture the multifaceted reality of adaptation and membership that migrants experience. These have emphasised the individual nature and varying speed of migrant “integration” in different spheres of life in the new society (economy, housing market, social networks, politics etc.), the individual variance in attachments maintained and formed “here” and “there” and in the importance ascribed to them, as well as the processual, time-dependent nature of the phenomena in question (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022; Ryan & Mulholland, 2015; Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

After examining the meaning and current academic discourse surrounding the widely used, but also highly contested term of *integration* and its kin concepts *incorporation* and *assimilation*, I discuss the more recently coined terms of *embedding* and *anchoring*, as well as the notions of *belonging* and *home*. This way, I map the transition of some migration scholars to a terminological framework which aims to bear in mind people’s diverse, multilocal attachments, which change over time, may or may not span borders and remain relevant even in the case of returnees and non-migrants. These characteristics make the newer concepts particularly useful for my research, which is why I have chosen to use them throughout my text, instead of the more traditional concepts.

Integration, Incorporation and Assimilation

Social science and policy most commonly interpret the term “integration” in the sense of Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) as the combined process of *including newcomers* in the

receiving society and *strengthening relationships* within it, with the goal of making these *stable* and *cooperative*. The process of inclusion is always a combination of conscious and top-down decision-making and policy measures and a more subconscious, bottom-up, “natural” formation of “relationships among individuals and their attitudes towards the society” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; see also Barbulescu, Wallace Goodman & Pedroza, 2023a). While the analytical take on “social integration” (be it with reference to immigrants or any other social groups) generally equates “society” with the nation-state, in the policy perspective, “integration” has a much more local orientation (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). Recently, scholars have criticised the normativity of the concept, resting on a “negative objectification of migrants as ‘other’,” springing from the still prevalent postcolonial beliefs of majority-white liberal democracies and methodologically nationalist imaginary of “society”, which only contributes to the reproduction of racial inequalities and hierarchies (Favell, 2022; Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

Bearing in mind these claims, I would nevertheless like to present aspects of integration analysis which I find particularly useful for my study and which I see as highly relevant for the unfolding discussion of alternative concepts. Bosswick & Heckmann’s (2006) distinction of the four dimensions of integration – structural, cultural, interactive and identificational – acknowledges the variegated nature of integrating simultaneously into different spheres of the receiving society.

Immigrant *structural integration*³⁴ comprises the gradual “acquisition of and the access to membership, positions and statuses in the core institutions of the settlement society” (Heckmann & Schnapper, 2003, p. 10). These include e.g., the labour market, the educational system, the housing and welfare systems, and the citizenship system. Participation in them is largely dependent on the opportunity structures of the receiving society, which in turn has to do with the formal entitlements and capabilities the migrant already has at the time of entry.³⁵ Public attitudes significantly facilitate or hinder the integration process (cf. Berry 1997, p. 10).

*Cultural integration*³⁶ means acquiring the cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal “core competencies of [the receiving country’s] culture and society” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). These include language and the understanding and adoption of basic rules of social conduct and interaction. Cultural integration is “an interactive, mutual process” in which both

³⁴ “Placement” according to Esser (2000, cit. in Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 3)

³⁵ For instance, being a citizen of an EU member state migrating to another one, being fluent in the receiving country language or having a particular skill or qualification in demand on the receiving-country labour market contribute to making the migrant’s structural integration easier.

³⁶ “Acculturation” in Esser (2000, cit. in Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 3)

the migrant and the receiving society have to take an active part for it to be successful (see also Vertovec, 2009, p. 77-84).

Interactive integration conveys “acceptance and inclusion of immigrants in the host society's primary relationships and social networks. [Its] indicators ... include *social networks, friendships, partnerships, marriages and membership in voluntary organizations*” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 10, own emphasis).³⁷

Identificational integration is defined as the individual's identification with the “goals of the [host society's] institutions and ... having developed a feeling of belonging in the host society” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). This is the sole dimension which looks at integration primarily from the point of view of the migrant and considers less easily measurable phenomena such as the “adoption of values, quality of relationships, or feelings of acceptance” (Janurová, 2018, p. 321; see also Anthias, 2009).

The four dimensions represent parallel, inseparable and overlapping processes. Often, acquiring particular positions (e.g., citizenship) can only occur after certain competencies (such as language) have been achieved. In yet other cases, one competency or right preconditions another and vice versa, making it difficult for the individual to break the vicious circle of “unsuccessful integration”. Thus, all of the dimensions have to be considered in my analysis. Also, even though their simple explanation replicates a largely one-sided, nation-state-versus-migrant perspective, by their recognition of the different domains of membership and pointing to the role of self-identification they can work as a relay to the concepts of *embedding, anchoring* and *belonging*, discussed below.

The term *integration* has faced some competition in academic debates with the notions of *assimilation* and *incorporation* over their political and terminological correctness. Originally quite common in the North American discourse (e.g., Alba & Nee, 1997), the usage of “assimilation” is gradually declining due to its prevailing understanding as “a one-sided process, in which immigrants and their descendants give up their culture and adapt completely to the [homogeneous] society they have migrated to” (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 4; Zhou, 1997). Some authors have used the term *incorporation* to underline the selectiveness and voluntariness of the process of migrants becoming part of the receiving society (Bevelander & Spång, 2014). Glick Schiller et al. (2004) stress that migrants may be *incorporated* only in certain spheres of life in their country of settlement, and still be considered “well integrated.”

³⁷ In an older text, Heckmann and Schnapper (2003, p. 10) use the term *social integration* instead of *interactive integration*. Even though in integration literature this term is more commonly used to denote the dimension of integration in question, i.e. inter-personal relations, ties and interactions between a migrant and members of the receiving society (e.g., Penninx, 2005, p. 141; see also below), in the present context it could easily be confused with *social integration* as a more general societal process (see above; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006, p. 2-6, 9-11; Esser, 2004), which is probably why Bosswick and Heckmann have preferred *interactional integration* later.

Also, “incorporation” allows for the acknowledgement that in some spheres of their life, migrants often remain engaged transnationally.

Embedding and Anchoring

The idea of migrants’ segmented incorporation in the life of their societies of origin and reception, and the simultaneous transformation of their self-identification has occupied migration scholars for decades. In their recent publications, Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska, Louise Ryan, and Jon Mulholland introduce the twin concepts of *anchoring* and *embedding*, which are meant to bridge the incongruencies of the terminology applied so far and offer a terminological basis which takes the lived experience of the individual migrant as its prerogative (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016, 2018; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022; Mulholland & Ryan, 2023; Ryan & Mulholland, 2015). *Embedding* has been described as “a means of explaining the process through which social actors connect to and interact with a multiplicity of social, economic and political structures through various social relationships/social networks” (Ryan & Mulholland 2015, p. 6). This comprises the micro, meso, and macro levels of social actors, networks and structures. Ryan & Mulholland (2015, p. 4-6) stress the term’s processualism – its applicability to temporally and spatially dynamic processes, transforming structures of ties and relationships. Hence they use “*embedding*,” instead of *embeddedness*, a term popularised by Granovetter (1985). Also, they explain that embedding is differentiated: multi-dimensional (individuals experience different intensities of embedding in the household domain, in the professional domain, in the local informal social networks etc.) and multi-layered (e.g. individual friendship ties may be characterised by varying degrees of embedding with regard to loyalty, obligation, sociality, trust, ease, effort, frequency and duration; Ryan & Mulholland, 2015, p. 6; Mulholland & Ryan, 2023). Embedding is not guaranteed (migrants may experience obstacles that prevent it), may be reversed (dis-embedding) and may take place inadvertently (Mulholland & Ryan, 2023).

The complementary, metaphoric concept of *social anchoring* has been described as “the process of finding significant references and grounded points which enable migrants to restore their socio-psychological stability in new life settings and establish their (subjective and objective) footholds in a receiving society” (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016, p. 1134). Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016) proposes it as an alternative notion to those of integration, embeddedness or rootedness, highlighting its ability to link “the issues of identity, security and integration,” which seldom tend to be analysed in mutual interconnection. According to the author, psycho-social adaptation, which includes identity and the need for security, has been overlooked in studies of migrant integration, despite safety/security being the second most basic human need (Maslow, 1943), which makes it key for migrants’ adaptation to life in new settings (Grzymala-

Kazłowska, 2016). Identity “can play the role of a main point of reference when individuals search for basic meaning and try to find in themselves a relatively stable and available foothold in an unpredictable world,” hence it is an invaluable resource in a migration situation, especially in the context of liquidity and multiplicity of opportunities (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016, p. 1124). Like embedding, Grzymala-Kazłowska argues, anchoring enables the analysis of diverse and multiple attachments of varied intensity, spanning individual characteristics and feelings, social ties and relations to institutions and other structural phenomena.

Grzymala-Kazłowska and Ryan (2022) bring *embedding* and *anchoring* together in a discussion which identifies their overlaps and specificities, arguing that together these terms form a more suitable conceptual equipment than previous frameworks to theorise migrants’ attachments in contemporary super-diverse migration settings. Explaining that the terms’ specificities relate to their different disciplinary backgrounds, the authors argue that their complementarity lies in combining the focus on internal *anchoring* by way of identity and cognitive and spiritual stability and security, and the analysis of migrants’ embedding in different contexts by way of relationality in various social structures (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022, p. 5). Analysing migrants’ multiple and transforming attachments in the context of the Brexit-struck UK, they show that “through their anchors, migrants may develop attachments and connections and hence begin embedding in particular settings or networks of relationships” (p. 15).

The broad applicability, depth and processualism of these concepts make them more suitable for use in my theoretical framework than “integration,” which captures only the relationship between the migrant and the receiving society. I adopt *embedding* as the lead term to denote the process of being and becoming part of societies “here” and “there,” even though I use *anchoring* wherever the specific context discussed makes it a more fitting expression. The term “integration” is used less frequently and primarily with reference to academic texts which employ it.

Belonging and Home

The concept of *belonging* is used in this dissertation to examine the individual migrant experience of being part of transnational “social fields” (Binaisa, 2013; Lacroix, 2013). My conception of belonging derives from Bosswick and Heckmann’s (2006, p. 17) identificational dimension of integration, and may be seen as a product of the processes of anchoring and embedding. Anthias (2009, p. 8) espouses the relational nature of the concept by stressing that “to belong is to be accepted as part of a community, to feel safe within it and to have a stake in [its future]. To belong is to share values, networks and practices.” In my interviews, sharing values and practices was tackled by a question about adopting general values, cultural norms,

and behaviour codes. Some interviewees spoke about differences in “mentality,” as will be shown in the analytical chapters 5, 6 and 7. Some scholars link belonging with practices and actions that are not only conscious but most often chosen and deliberate. For instance, Povrzanović Frykman (2010, p. 12) defines ways of belonging as “practices that signal or enact identity and demonstrate a *conscious connection to a particular group*” (own emphasis). A typical manifestation of this is civic participation in its different forms.

Belonging always reflects an individual’s demographic characteristics, like age, gender or sexual orientation, and their socio-economic position within the society/societies they are part of. These always, in some way, precondition the individual’s “experiences of being part of the social fabric and the ways in which social bonds and ties are manifested in practices, experiences and emotions of inclusion’ inclusion” (Anthias, 2009, p. 8, my emphasis). In my interviews, these are revealed in statements about direct experiences of acceptance or discrimination by the “society.” In other words, “belonging is never entirely about migrants’ subjective feelings of ‘fitting in’ or not, but also relates to how (powerful) others define who belongs” (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 523). Based on what has been said, the sense of belonging inevitably transforms over the life course in response to one’s ageing and transitions between educational institutions, workplaces, and power hierarchies. Migration affects and reconfigures the sense of belonging significantly by changing the collective identity reference points (Sime & Behrens, 2023, p. 1506).

The dilemma of “home” is an indivisible part of the conceptualisation of “belonging” in my analysis. “Home” is tackled as a notion of a space where one feels safe, comfortable, happy, and content, which may be intertwined with an idea of a particular dwelling or place (Anthias, 2009; Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). Authors have pointed to the ambivalence in many migrants’ conceptions of “home”, which seem “to extend outward and to be mobile, but also to be grounded and sedentary” (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 518). The transnational nature of migrant being may lead to conflicts of “double belonging,” which blur the idea of “home” and complicate the ability to settle in one place both physically and mentally – “make a permanent move” (Moskal, 2013, p. 158). Such conflicts are reflected in homesickness and recurring (idealised) consideration of return, further aspects of (troubled) migrant belonging considered in this study (Grabowska, 2016). However, the notion of a “home” (physical or mental) seems to be one of the key anchors that aid migrants’ embedding in various life domains throughout their transnational trajectories.

The Role of Citizenship

Despite the rights granted to EU “free-movers” (access to mobility, long-term residence, work, social security, voting locally and in EU elections), extensive academic discussions of the

role of *citizenship* and *naturalisation* in the migration and embedding processes provide evidence that even in the EU/Schengen area, citizenship still represents a crucial barrier to full membership, both in the formal and the psychological sense (Barbulescu, Wallace Goodman & Pedroza, 2023a; Bauböck, 2006; Donnalaja, 2020). Boswell and Geddes (2011) underline that the root of this failure is the tension between the original conception of the EU “as an economic arrangement, with mobility introduced to enhance the efficiency of labour markets and productivity” and the Maastricht Treaty “aspiration to forge a common political identity, mimicking concepts of citizenship characteristic of *national* categories of membership,” which has however mostly been a “top-down project,” not taken up by the national discourses (p. 188-189; see also Favell, 2013).³⁸ In post-Brexit Britain, the re-emerging status insecurity for EU citizens made this issue again a key part of the embedding/integration debate (Botterill & Hancock, 2019; Dagilyté, 2020; D’Angelo & Kofman, 2018; Sime & Behrens, 2023).

My analysis of migrant embedding and belonging will tackle the question of whether the transnational political membership that EU citizenship represents and the associated benefits have facilitated the process of anchoring and embedding of my Czech migrant interviewees in the (pre-Brexit) UK, or whether they have instead distracted them from consciously investing into it. Last but not least, the impact of Brexit on the migrants’ psychological anchoring, sense of belonging and embedding structures will be studied in the narratives that touch on it.

3.2.3 Structure and Agency

A discussion of migrant embedding stresses the need to address the classical dilemma of “structure versus agency” (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1986). The prevailing contemporary sociological understanding of the structure versus agency dilemma is that the two should be perceived as compatible aspects of human social existence rather than opposing understandings of it (Coleman, 1986; Giddens, 1986; Wingens et al., 2011). This discussion is important for the purposes of this dissertation in that it shows how context-dependent individual decision-making is.

Agency

“Agency,” as opposed to “dependence,” has been described as (a mixture of) free will, the capability to initiate (self-) change, self-efficacy, “planful competence,” action that involves intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflectiveness (Giddens, 1986; Hitlin & Elder, 2007). There is some disagreement about whether it is a universal human capacity or a

³⁸ Farell (2010) illustrates the contested aspects of projects aimed at “creating a European identity” through schooling.

variable one that some people have more of – for example, based on previous successful decision-making or upbringing (Hitlin & Elder, 2007, p. 183). Building on existing theorisations, this dissertation conceptualises “agency” as, on the one hand, the inherent human capacity to take free, intentional action to change the course of events and, on the other, the “self-reflective belief about one’s capacity to achieve (short-or long-term) goals” (p. 182). In other words, all individuals are able to take (free) action. Still, in certain respects or in certain situations, this may be limited by circumstances or overridden by “structure” – formal circumstances, or someone else’s agency, depending on the actor’s self-confidence and power to put their preferences into force (Giddens, 1986; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Hoang, 2011).

Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 963) define human agency as “a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).” Grabowska claims that these three components of agency are valuable for explaining the meaning of migration within occupational lives and the opportunity structure in which these are embedded (2016, p. 86). She examines the problem of creating goal-oriented career trajectories in the context of liquidity, where individuals might easily get caught up in “incident” and “drifting” behaviours and lose responsibility for lives “of their own,” i.e. lose agency over their life trajectories (Grabowska, 2016, p. 86).

Wingens et al. (2011, p. 10–11) describe three types of time in relation to the role of agency in the life course: micro-level biographical time, meso-level institutional or social time, and macro-level historical time. While the first concerns individual ageing and personal experiences, the second comprises the “social clocks” that schedule the timing of “events in particular life phases ... make life course events, whether resulting from individuals’ own decisions or just happening to them, on-time or off-time, [possibly leading to] specific socially (dis-)advantageous consequences.” The third is represented by historical events, such as, in the present context, Czechia’s accession to the EU in 2004 or Brexit in 2020. One of the greatest challenges for human agency is to synchronise the three types of time in one’s life course – align individual agency with the structural temporal framework. Migration often introduces asynchrony, which can lead to frustration and unhappiness. Some of the dilemmas of belonging studied below can be ascribed to such asynchronies in the life course.

Structure

Whether migrants do or do not get involved in different spheres of life in the receiving society depends on a range of various circumstances and interlocking processes, which include the sum of entitlements, characteristics and competencies (*individual resources*) they bring

with them to the receiving society and the *societal opportunity structure* they encounter there, as well as in the country of origin (Triandafyllidou & Vogel, 2005; Vogel, 2008a).

The *opportunity structure* that a migrant draws on comprises not only the official entitlements associated with their citizenship and residential status, the state of economic and political affairs or the social atmosphere in the countries left and entered but also the relationships and social networks he/she is part of (Wingens et al., 2011). A native spouse may increase a migrant's potential to embed economically and socially by widening their social networks and contributing to their language proficiency (Muttarak, 2011), but "mixed" families may also end up isolated as a result of having little in common with the majority population (Aure, 2013). In addition, agency is also subject to interpersonal power relations (Giddens, 1986, p. 9; Hoang, 2011). The agency of the partner a dependent migrant is following may suppress the agency of that migrant, who may then develop conflicting feelings about having migrated (cf. Hoang, 2011). This highlights the role of the household as an important unit of analysis in migration studies, which is why migrants' concerns with the interests of their partners and their children, which received much space in many of the narratives I studied, are also given increased attention in my analysis of migration decision-making and embedding. Also, it shows that, like a lot of the other decision-making that occurs at life's turning points, migrants' moving/staying decisions are not unambiguous. As spouses, partners, parents, or children, they often prioritise the best interests of their significant other(s) and/or other structural circumstances, such as employment opportunities, salary level, or various social aspects, over their own personal preferences, sometimes with questionable consequences for their subjective well-being.

To sum up, in this dissertation, "agency" is considered as the ability of a migrant to keep his/her migration trajectory "under control" face-to-face with various structural factors, such as the wishes and interests of his/her close ties, or the "liquid migration context" (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017; Grabowska, 2016). "Structure" is understood, on the one hand, as the complex of formal societal infrastructures, such as the legal foundations of migrants' access to residential and citizenship status. On the other hand, it comprises the social networks surrounding the individual, which, to varied extents, motivate, moderate or limit his/her actions – primarily family members, colleagues, friends and neighbours. In this sense, "structure" overlaps with the idea of "social capital". "Cultural capital," on the contrary, may be perceived as the product of social capital and simultaneously as one of the roots of human agency.

Habitus and Cultural Capital

The concepts of *habitus* and *forms of capital* represent a key element of the structure versus agency discussion.

Habitus is Bourdieu's (1977, p. 72) expression for the embodiment of social class and typical dispositions associated with it – it is the result of the work of “structures constitutive of a particular environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition),” which is durable and transposable. *Habitus* is the source of unwritten rules of conduct, shared understandings and interpretations. If two individuals of the same *habitus* interact, their communication is regulated by the principles of their *habitus*, which they have internalised through upbringing in their families. To some extent, *habitus* can be earned through one's own effort via learning and formal education. *Habitus* can be intentionally demonstrated in speaking or using material assets (clothes, property) to access specific resources, such as being accepted into a specific community.

Bourdieu (1986) explains *cultural capital* as the set of cultural qualities a person possesses that enable them to access varied resources or gain a certain position within a society or community. Cultural capital is largely intertwined with social class. It can exist in three forms: the *embodied state* (“long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body,” this form basically corresponds to *habitus*), the *objectified state* (cultural goods, such as books, pictures, instruments or machines) or the *institutionalised state* (academic qualifications; Bourdieu, 1986). All of these forms of cultural capital can, to some extent, be transformed into other forms of capital (social, i.e. contacts and ties, or economic, meaning finances or property). The key characteristic of cultural capital is its generational reproducibility. Parents' embodied cultural capital is likely to be transmitted to their children more or less unconsciously through upbringing and early socialisation. The effect of this “domestic transmission” is rather hard to reverse. Cultural capital in the institutionalised form, gained through education, can (to some extent) compensate for one's low cultural capital gained in the family.

Social Ties, Social Networks and Social Capital

In my analysis, I repeatedly deal with the concept of *social ties*, designating them either as “strong” or “weak.” According to Granovetter (1973), strong ties are those that bind us to our close family and friends (people who are “like us” in some way) and thus provide a feeling of safety and belonging. They are rather scarce, “mutually active,” and tend to be mobilised frequently. Weak ties are connections to “acquaintances,” e.g. professional contacts, distant relatives or “friends of friends” (people who are “different to us” in some way). They are less frequently mobilised, relatively abundant and rather passive. While strong ties are those that one can rely on in crisis and need, weak ties enable us to reach out to broader social circles and thus may function as a valuable resource of contacts and information. Strong ties represent “*bonding* social capital,” while weak ties form “*bridging* social capital” (Putnam, 2007; see below). Both types of ties are central in motivating individuals to engage in various kinds of collective leisure-time activities, join civic associations and get involved on behalf of the public.

Ties are important also in instrumenting membership, providing information and getting access to resources (Granovetter, 1973; Preston, Kobayashi & Man, 2006; Putnam, 2007). Both strong and weak ties play a central role in facilitating a large number of actions which structure an individual's embedding, as well as his/her potential migration experience, and contribute to the attitudes held and adopted by him/her.

Anchoring and embedding within *social networks* is part and parcel of human well-being (Ryan, 2023). In a migration situation, this becomes all the more apparent as the comfort zone of long-known family, neighbourhood and friendship ties is disrupted or left behind, and the migrant realises the need to build up new networks to make him-/herself feel "at home" in a new place (Ryan, 2007; Ryan et al., 2008). On the micro-level, social networks provide individuals with support and contribute to their attitudes, actions and behaviour; on the meso-level, they structure the opinions held and actions performed by social groups; and on the macro level, they are responsible for the emergence and character of social institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Coleman, 1986; Herz et al., 2018). However, they may also hold individuals back from social mobility, keep them in isolation or drag them into activities they are not comfortable with (Loury, 1977; Portes, 1998). Scholarly literature interprets social networks variably as the key *source of social capital*, or, in some cases, as social capital itself (Hardwick, 2003; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

According to Robert Putnam (2000, p. 19), the term *social capital* was "independently invented at least six times over the twentieth century, each time to call attention to the ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties." Many authors have taken up, studied and re-defined the term with the aim of achieving more terminological clarity or adapting its use to a particular field of study (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986; Jacobs, 1961; Loury, 1977; Portes, 1998). Despite definitional divergences, the consensus seems to be that social capital constitutes *the aggregate of an individual's social networks and their potential to be used as a channel for obtaining both material and immaterial resources*, such as various forms of help, knowledge and skills, or in fact, further valuable social connections (that may function as a relay to a new love relationship, a career advancement, better housing etc.; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 2000; Portes, 1998).

According to Putnam's (2000) and Coleman's definitions, positive reciprocity, trust and normativity are key components of social capital (Coleman, 2000, p. 20-23). Others have, however, not been as optimistic. Loury (1977) claimed that unequal access to opportunities through social networks can reproduce socioeconomic inequalities intergenerationally, reinforcing societal power hierarchies (see also Holt, 2008; Portes, 1998). Bourdieu's view was similar.

The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the *size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed* in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected... social capital is never completely independent of [economic and cultural capital] because the exchanges instituting mutual acknowledgment presuppose the *reacknowledgment of a minimum of objective homogeneity*, and because *it exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses* in his own right.

(Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249, own emphasis)

Like all forms of capital, both individual and group social capital also gets *transformed, increased or reduced* over time in relation to individuals' ageing, education and career paths, changes of interests, interpersonal conflicts, migratory moves etc.

Migration scholars have taken up the concept in the past few decades. The concept has gained popularity among scholars studying migrant economic and social embedding, with some of them identifying it as an important resource mobilised by migrants to achieve specific ends, such as entry into receiving-country labour markets (Anthias, 2007) or assertion of political rights for ethnic communities (Jacobs & Tillie, 2007). Katila & Wahlbeck (2012) show how migrants mobilise the social capital they have in the country of settlement *and* in the country of origin in order to establish and secure their existence in the new country, a perspective close to Grzymala-Kazlowska's (2016) idea of social anchoring.

Most of the studies quoted so far promote the normative view of social capital as something inherently, or primarily, positive, the growth of which contributes to the increase of positively charged civic values (and thus a "healthy" democracy) and smooth migrant embedding in the receiving society. However, in agreement with Loury's (1977) and Bourdieu's (1986) concerns, some studies also touch upon the potential tensions between bridging and bonding social capital as somewhat competing qualities of social interactions, where the abundance of one may stand in the way of a desirable level of development of the other (Newton, 2001). On this note, some have questioned the relationship between migrants' embedding in the destination country and the amount of intra-ethnic or transnational social capital, asking whether too much intra-ethnic migrant engagement may lead to ethnic closure (Tillie, 2004).

In my analysis, I view *social capital as social networks that function as a source of opportunities and knowledge, as well as barriers, and which influence and are influenced by migrant anchoring and embedding* in the transnational fields concerned.

3.2.4 Value Orientations and Value Change

Social remittances represent a powerful resource and mechanism of value change, which is part of a broader debate on modernisation theory that I would like to summarise in this section,

since it adds a key component to my analysis of the interplay between migration, embedding, and political and civic participation (Drbohlav et al., 2017; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). According to Inglehart & Welzel (2005, p. 1),

... the basic values and beliefs of the publics of advanced societies differ dramatically from those found in less developed societies... these values are changing in a predictable direction as socioeconomic development takes place. Changing values, in turn, have important consequences for the way societies are governed, promoting gender equality, democratic freedom, and good governance.

This process has been described as the progression from materialist to post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1977, 1981). However, the modernisation process is not linear, as the society's long-term traditions and inherited values continue to affect its cultural development, while as a result of globalisation processes, various modernisation impulses come simultaneously from different sources and with varying speed and leverage (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Research suggests that the modernisation process happens both on the macro-level (e.g. nation-state or a broader geographical region) and on the micro-level of individual life stories (Inglehart, 2008; Knutsen, 1990). Thus, migrant trajectories themselves tend to be characterised by a progression from materialist to post-materialist values as migrants gradually secure a place to live and a job and build up their language skills and social networks in the receiving society. Only when they feel well embedded in their new society does a “silent revolution” occur, and they start getting involved in activities that do not directly contribute to securing their living but are conducted out of pleasure, for intellectual satisfaction or for the greater good (Inglehart, 1977; Knutsen, 1990). According to Inglehart's “scarcity hypothesis,”

Virtually everyone aspires to freedom and autonomy, but people tend to place the highest value on the most pressing needs. Material sustenance and physical security are immediately linked with survival, and when they are scarce, people give top priority to these “materialistic” goals; but *under conditions of prosperity, people become more likely to emphasise “post-materialist” goals such as belonging, esteem, and aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction.*

Inglehart (2008, p. 131, own emphasis)

The basic premise of the scarcity hypothesis, the transition from *survival* to *prosperity*, derives from Maslow's (1943) needs hierarchy theory, which states that only people whose primary material (economic) and physical needs have been securely fulfilled on a long-term basis tend to turn towards fulfilling their other, non-material needs (need for love, belongingness, esteem) and only after these have been (somewhat) satisfied, do they develop and start to concentrate on the so-called “self-actualisation needs”, i.e. such that have to do with their aesthetic and intellectual self-realisation and expression (Knutsen, 1990).

Bearing in mind the effect of complex intervening factors, there are measurable differences in the value orientations of generations born in the same country in different historical periods, but also between people with different education levels or working in different employment sectors (van Deth, Montero & Westholm, 2007; Hall et al., 2023; Knutsen, 1990). Research also tends to support Inglehart's "socialisation hypothesis," which suggests that on an individual level, value orientations are most associated with early socialisation and education and less with short-term socio-economic betterment (Inglehart, 1981, 2008; Knutsen, 1990). Hence, value *change* cannot be approached as a given resulting from the process of migration but rather as an option brought about by influences from all the transnational fields concerned (Drbohlav et al., 2017). However, a temporary suppression of (some of) one's interests, hobbies and likes at the time a migrant seeks to "make a home" in the destination country and a later return to them (or the discovery of new ones) in a period of greater financial and social freedom and comfort is to be expected. Furthermore, some of the migrant's long-term values or interests might, in fact, be given expression *only* as a result of migration if they could not be realised in the country of origin due to social, political or financial constraints (Duda-Mikulin, 2013; Pravattiyagul, 2021), as also some of my narratives in Chapters 6 and 7 document.

To sum up, individual value orientations and value change represent a necessary element in my analysis of migrant attitudes towards civic engagement. Approaching the migration experience as both an opportunity and a disruption of a predictable life trajectory, my analysis explores the interactions between my research participants' value orientations and the broader economic, political and cultural contexts in which these are embedded. Accounting for reported or emerging value changes, the role of early socialisation and education is contrasted to that of disruptive life events, such as migration, but also starting and ending relationships, having a child, losing a close person or experiencing a different traumatic event. This way, the research participants' propensity to and character of political and civic participation is scrutinised from various perspectives with the aim of answering the research questions set in Chapter 1.

3.2.5 Political and Civic Participation

In this dissertation, *political participation* and *civic participation* are understood as interrelated and often interdependent concepts, which, however, stand for qualitatively different groups of activities. As with other concepts in the social sciences, the understanding of what they encompass has developed and diversified over time. While many studies differentiate between them, some authors see all of the activities classifiable under these terms just as different items from the "repertoire" of political expression (Sime & Behrens, 2023).

Some studies distinguish them into “conventional” (voting and party membership) and “non-conventional” (political protest, community activism etc.), or “institutionalised” and “non-institutionalised” political participation (Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer & Wittrock, 1998b; Sime & Behrens, 2023). For simplicity, the terms “participation” and “engagement” are used as synonyms, which is common in thematically related academic literature, though the prevailing convention seems to associate “participation” with “political” and “engagement” with “civic” (Jacobs & Tillie, 2008; Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer & Wittrock, 1998a; Togeby, 2004; Vogel, 2008a).

Political Participation

The traditionally studied components of *political participation* include voting, expressing political opinion publicly, for instance, by wearing political badges, signing petitions or taking part in demonstrations, contacting political representatives, engaging in trade unions or being a party member (Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Vráblíková, 2009, 2017). While some authors include in this definition “both low and high-intensity activities, ranging from reading newspapers to standing for office” (Jacobs and Tillie 2008, p. 47), others have argued that only activities carried out with a clear purpose of “influencing politics”, undertaken by “ordinary citizens,” not professional politicians, should be included (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995, p. 38-40; Vráblíková, 2017, p. 126-127). In the current study, I focus on the non-professional political participation of “ordinary citizens” in a broad sense. The most mundane forms of political participation will be analysed separately as “political interest.”

Political interest receives considerable attention in my analysis, as it is by far the most common politically relevant practice and a key precondition for more active forms of political participation. For instance, Berger, Galonska and Koopmans (2004) use “talking about politics” as a proxy for political interest, a latent explanatory variable for political participation in the narrower sense. Vráblíková (2017) distinguishes between “political communication” and “political awareness.” Putnam (2000) does not understand the interest in politics/public affairs and talking about them as political participation *per se* but accounts for them as important markers of political participation. Based on these approaches, I operationalise political interest as following political news, knowledge of political topics and talking about politics (cf. Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006).

Civic Participation

Scholars have applied definitions of various breadths to *civic participation/engagement* (e.g., Aleksynska, 2008; European Social Survey, 2018; Matějka et al., 2015; Putnam, 2000; Vogel, 2008b). A common denominator of the different studies is the inclusion of activities that are perceived as *non-political* or just *marginally political*, that are *not compulsory* (such

as compulsory electoral participation in states with authoritarian regimes; or obligatory, yet unpaid work experience conducted during studies) and that have “*positive functions for society*” (Vogel, 2008b, p. 19, own emphasis).³⁹ Most studies take into account only activities that are *unpaid or only partially paid*, i.e., non-professional. However, as Triandafyllidou and Vogel (2005, p. 11-12) point out, sometimes voluntary engagement transforms into a paid profession over time, and vice versa; sometimes, it may be motivated by one’s professional experiences.

Civic engagement may include donating food or clothes to people in disadvantaged situations, taking part in local environmental renovation, engaging in church or in NGO projects with “social” purposes (e.g., help to the elderly, children’s Scouts activities), or the financial support thereof (Jacobs & Tillie, 2008; Matějka et al., 2015; Vogel, 2008b). Some forms of civic engagement are more “political” than others. This can be best shown in such examples as boycotting or buying certain products in order to block/support a company or a cause – instances of “political consumerism” (Newman & Bartels, 2011) – or standing up in local community assemblies (Matějka et al. 2015; Vráblíková, 2017). Sometimes, the cause in the background is clearly political (such as boycotting products of companies included within the AGROFERT group, associated with the former Czech prime minister Andrej Babiš, who was accused of a conflict of interests). Sometimes, the political impact of a cause which is primarily “social” or “environmental” becomes clear only when it is viewed in a broader context (such as avoiding single-use plastic).

Form, Content and Level of Participation

Academic interpretations of political and civic participation point to three main layers of analysis – specifically, *form*, *content* and *level*. *Form* refers to the type of participation and usually includes (some of) the following: membership (in organisations, informal groups, political parties, trade unions etc.), work (manual or intellectual, voluntary or paid), symbolic and expressive action (wearing or displaying badges, stickers, flags or signs, signing petitions, posting opinions on social media, taking part in discussions – both online and in person, writing blogs, taking part in persuasion campaigns, taking part in demonstrations or strikes, boycotting products), contact with the authorities or the media (requesting the disclosure of data or information from public authorities, filing complaints, taking part in local assemblies, contacting politicians or media directly), donation (financial, material or of body tissue or organs). Neither the list nor the examples presented herein are exhaustive and the categories

³⁹ Hence, the prevailing definitions do not account for cases of forced mass civic engagement such as membership in official state-controlled “civic organisations” in authoritarian regimes, such as in the state-controlled “Revolutionary Trade Union Movement” (*Revoluční odborové hnutí*) or the “Socialist Youth Union” (*Socialistický svaz mládeže*) in communist Czechoslovakia of 1948-1989 (e.g. Rakušanová, 2007, p. 26).

necessarily overlap (cf. Aleksynska, 2008; Matějka et al., 2015; *Příloha 1 – dotazník z výzkumu Občanská angažovanost 2015*).

Content of political and civic participation are the topics in focus of the above-listed forms of participation. These typically include:

- politics and political issues (support of or struggle against political developments on the local, national and supranational levels, support of or struggle against political parties, movements or ideologies, etc.);
- skills development, education and free time (sports and hobby activities, learning, information sharing, social networking, cultural and social events, etc.);
- religions and culture (support of a particular church, religious movement or religious ideas, cultural events, arts projects and events, care of historical monuments etc.);
- health-related, social and humanitarian issues (care for the disabled or ill, help to people in socially disadvantaged situations, to people affected by natural and humanitarian catastrophes etc.);
- local development and environmental issues (local clean-up initiatives; protection and care of animals or the environment, climate, promotion of environmental sustainability etc.);
- security, justice and functioning of the society (struggle against hazard or corruption, protection of or struggle for/against freedom of information, legalisation of drugs, consumer rights, right of co-decision about public issues, rights of parents to decide about their children's education or healthcare etc.). (Based on Matějka et al., 2015; *Příloha 1...*).

Some topics overlap, and many activities address two or more topics simultaneously.

Level (or, alternatively, *degree, intensity*) works either as a selection criterion⁴⁰ or as one of the variables studied⁴¹. Definitions of the level of engagement take into account the frequency of and time devoted to political or civic activities, the extent of overlap between various forms and topics of engagement and also the extent to which the particular forms of engagement are public and influential for the course of things (cf. Aleksynska, 2008; Tillie, 2004; Vogel, 2008b). As with form and content, individual studies' conceptualisations of engagement levels vary.

In the current study, the research participants' political and civic engagement form, level and content are examined as inter-dependent phenomena which relate to the interviewees' life, work, and migration trajectories in diverse ways. They represent activities which "extend

⁴⁰ E.g., in Vogel (2008a) only "highly active immigrants" were interviewed.

⁴¹ E.g., Berger, Galonska, and Koopmans (2004) compare participation levels of different ethnic minority groups in Germany to autochthonous Germans; Matějka et al. (2015) analyse civic engagement levels in Czechia as a whole.

beyond formal entitlement to a passport and nationality to full participation in the public life of communities” (Preston, Kobayashi & Man, 2006, p. 1634). As such, they reflect but also influence their varied experiences and strategies of embedding.

Civil Society and Trust

The concept of *civil society* provides a wider context within which the political and civic participation of both migrant and non-migrant individuals has to be studied. Seligman (1992) describes civil society as an articulation of the problematic relationship between the private and the public. Rakušanová (2007), adapting Kubik (2002), defines civil society as the structure of relationships in a modern society, which is formed voluntarily outside of the sphere of influence of the state or the market (in this view, civil society is claimed to be the essence of well-functioning democracies), but adds, that in certain research contexts, civil society tends to be equated with the “public sphere”, or the sum of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in a state, and their active members.

The prevailing level of *trust* in political institutions, public services, civic organisations and other people provides an important context for studying political and civic participation in a particular country context. Academic sources typically work with the notions of political trust, social trust, and generalised or particularised trust (Gaidytė, 2012; Welch et al., 2005). According to Zmerli and Hooghe (2011, p. 3), *political trust* is “the expectation that political actors generally behave fairly,” respecting democratic procedures. It can “function as a form of diffuse support for the political system as a whole,” reflecting its public legitimacy. *Social trust* conveys believing that others will follow established norms in their actions. In other words, it can also be defined as “social intelligence” or a “subjective reduction of complexity or uncertainty” (Welch et al., 2005, p. 454-455). The concept of generalised trust represents trust in others (individuals, as well as organisations) in general, without attention to individual differences, while particularised trust deals with trust in specific groups of people or types of organisations only (i.e. only in people of the same ethnic background, only in catholic organisations etc.; Gaidytė, 2012; de Vroome, Hooghe & Marien, 2013).

Intensive political and civic engagement is believed to correlate with a strong civil society, as in principle, they nourish one another (the stronger the civil society, the more engaged the population, and vice versa) by way of political and social trust (Gaidyte, 2012; Gaidyte & Muis, 2015; Newton, 2001; Rakušanová, 2007). In turn, high participation levels and a strong, active and *inclusive* civil society are perceived as some of the key characteristics of a strong democracy, which not only reflect the quality of democracy in a particular country but also contribute to its constant (re-)formation and verification of the accepted norms and formal procedures (Martiniello, 2006; Putnam, 2000).

However, over the past few decades, scholars have observed a decline in political and civic engagement in the world's most developed democracies, which they account for by the nature of work organisation in capitalist societies, the perceived remoteness of political institutions, or the growing disillusionment with political or societal developments, often associated with a turn to the private sphere (Bauböck, 2006; Norris, 2011; Pospěch, 2021; Putnam, 2000). In democratic societies worldwide, the recent decades have been marked by a rise in political populism and signs of deteriorating social cohesion and solidarity. These significantly impact attitudes toward migrants, who are not only being approached with more suspicion or fear but also blamed for high unemployment rates or the erosion of community relations (Castles, 2018; Triandafyllidou & Vogel, 2005). Proliferating studies of migrant engagement have asked in what ways and why migrant political and civic engagement levels differ from those of the majority and examined the role of civic engagement in the process of embedding in transnational social fields.

Migrant Participation: State-of-the-Art

The analysis of migrant political and civic engagement, which is generally presumed to be of lower intensity compared to native populations, enables us to study not only the extent of migrant embedding in a specific country context but also *other functions* that engagement might have for particular migration trajectories and for the process of embedding as such. On the one hand, this can be revealed in the analysis of the (continuously transforming) formal opportunity structures of the societies of origin and reception, structured by both societal attitudes and formal regulations (among others, the conditions for naturalisation and the regulations regarding the political participation of non-citizens). On the other hand, comparable attention has to be paid to more individual factors, such as demographic, socio-economic and psychological characteristics, skills or past experiences, that shape the motivation and ability to engage (Koopmans, 2004; Vogel, 2008b).

Fennema and Tillie (2001) show that the social capital present in ethnic civic associations generates social trust that tends to spill over into political trust and, thus, also into migrant engagement in mainstream civic and political issues in the society of reception. Hence, they argue that establishing ethnic associations positively affects migrant integration (Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Jacobs & Tillie, 2008). Other studies that have tested this hypothesis in different localities and in different ethnic groups have brought varying results (Berger, Galonska & Koopmans, 2004; Togeby, 2004). On the individual level, however, all the named studies show that membership in ethnic associations has a positive or neutral effect on political “integration” in general. An obvious shortcoming of these macro-level studies has been the operationalisation of social capital as associational membership only and lesser attention paid

to the role of individual factors in structuring both social capital and political participation/integration.

Research by de Vroome, Hooghe, and Marien (2013) and Vogel (2008a) overcomes these deficiencies. Based on an analysis of the Netherlands Longitudinal Lifecourse Study (NELLS) data, de Vroome, Hooghe, and Marien (2013) claim that aggregate differences in generalised and political trust and political participation between natives and migrants can almost fully be attributed to individual social and economic characteristics and that when individual social and economic variables are controlled for, differences in trust between natives and migrants prove insignificant. Apart from associational membership, their measure of civic participation includes questions on “social resources” (people one can rely on in case of need), having “outgroup friends,” feeling integrated or isolated, and the perceived “collective efficacy” in the neighbourhood (social cohesion among neighbours that can be mobilised to achieve change).

Other political participation scholars have focused on the intensity and character of diaspora voting in their countries of origin and the effect of such political remittances on the sending state politics (Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Fidrmuc & Doyle, 2004; Kostelka, 2017; Kovács, 2020). While Ciornei and Østergaard-Nielsen (2020) observe a “steep learning curve” among diasporas from less developed countries living in traditional Western democracies, contributing to democratising their origin-country politics and increasing domestic voter turnout, the findings regarding West-bound diasporas from Central and Eastern European countries have been ambiguous. They generally identify low transnational turnout and a fading motivation to engage on behalf of the country of origin (Kostelka, 2017; Kovács, 2020). Nevertheless, Fidrmuc and Doyle (2004) observe signs of diaspora political values changing according to the value landscape prevalent in the respective receiving states.

Vogel and her colleagues (Triandafyllidou & Vogel, 2005; Vogel, 2008a)⁴² interviewed 176 highly active migrants in 25 EU member states.⁴³ Notwithstanding the obvious omission of less engaged narratives, they were able to explore the whole migrant “activation process,” accounting for numerous variables that they assign to one of the broader categories of *individual factors* (broken down into personality, resources and networks) and *societal opportunity structure* (with general and migration specific elements), interacting together to form the *motivation* to get engaged (Vogel, 2008b, p. 23-25). Their theoretical model is inspired by Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), whose “civic voluntarism model” builds on *resources*, *psychological predispositions* and the *recruitment process*. They uncover the

⁴² Individual chapters from Vogel (2008a) are referenced separately using the names of their respective authors (Aleksynska, 2008; Gropas, 2008; Jacobs & Tillie, 2008; Kotic, 2008; Vogel, 2008b, 2008c).

⁴³ POLITIS research project “Building Europe with New Citizens? An Inquiry into the Civic Participation of Naturalised Citizens and Foreign Residents in 25 Countries,” see <http://www.politis-europe.uni-oldenburg.de/index.html>

interplay of individual resources, such as language proficiency, time, money, skills or past experiences, with individual participants' paths into their respective destination countries (e.g., labour, student, “gold collar”, or refugee migration). These often impact their residence status and their positions in the receiving society’s social hierarchy (Gropas, 2008; Vogel, 2008c).

Apart from individual attitudes, values and personality traits, Vogel and her colleagues pay close attention to the activating role of social ties and networks that migrants have to build anew in their destination countries (Vogel, 2008c). Accounting for risks and costs associated with active (and public) engagement, they study in detail the character of motivations that help to overcome the potential reluctance to engage, emphasising the role of non-material rewards (the prospect of status and acceptance), material rewards (remuneration or resume-building), and sense of moral responsibility or duty (Kosic, 2008; Vogel, 2008b). They also study the intricate binds and routes that sometimes lead from one to another in the context of civic participation, depending on the country context and type of activities: “someone may have started as a volunteer and managed to turn his concern into a paid profession at a later stage, exercising it far beyond the required working hours and work intensity; or someone may have found a job in a social profession (e.g. cultural mediator, social workers, health worker) and may have become civically engaged at a later stage (e.g. lobbying for her/his clients)” (Triandafyllidou & Vogel 2005, p. 11-12).

Studying Chinese women in Australia and Polish women in Germany, Pan and Maree (2023) and Studzińska, Szmytkowska and Nowicka (2023), respectively, highlight the higher propensity of migrant women than men to engage civically. By scrutinising the impact of gender norms and the women’s motivations to engage civically in relation to their other roles in the family/household, labour market, and to their position as migrants, Pan and Maree (2023) claim that the identified patterns of engagement challenge the highly domesticised traditional roles of women in Chinese society only to some extent, but do provide a channel for their empowerment and self-realisation. Studzińska, Szmytkowska and Nowicka (2023) document the ability of migrants to develop an attachment to their neighbourhood and the role of the locality in promoting migrant public engagement.

Sime and Behrens (2023) analysed the differentiated attitudes of CEE youth to political participation and civic engagement in the Brexit-affected UK, finding that non-citizen youth feel excluded from the possibility to affect national politics but realise and use their capacity to engage beyond the political sphere. Best et al. (2022) show that civic engagement might lead to professional attainment among educated migrants, pointing out that civic ties gained through such engagement may prove to be a particularly efficient resource for migrants whose social networks in the receiving society are limited.

Drawing on the literature cited, my analysis of migrant attitudes towards political and civic participation in the migrant narratives will reflect on the civil society environment, trust levels, and the prevailing public attitudes in Czechia and the UK, covered in Chapter 2, paying attention to their respective historical legacies. It will also build on the previous studies' findings about migrant political and civic participation, examining the interplay between structural and individual factors, gender roles and norms, and the various interconnections between engagement and embedding in different spheres of life in transnational spaces.

Section 3.3 Wrapping up the Theoretical Framework: Migration, Engagement and Embedding Combined

The transnational perspective presupposes that embedding occurs both “here” and “there,” yet often with varied intensity in the different locations or nation-state contexts and spheres of life (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Mulholland & Ryan, 2023). For embedding to occur in multiple spheres of a person's life and to deepen, both individual and structural factors are important. Individual factors include length of stay in a country or locality, age, language knowledge or cultural capital, but also one's agency to influence his/her life trajectory in a sense that he/she considers desirable (move to a preferred country or locality, find one's favourite job, have a specific number of children, etc.; Moskal, 2013). Inevitably, individual agency constantly confronts “structure”, comprising social networks and relations on the one hand and formal entitlements and regulations or other external macro-factors (such as major political events) on the other. Cultural and social capital tend to facilitate access to diverse resources, enabling a migrant to accommodate to “structure” (e.g., obtain the right of long-term residence) or to influence it to their benefit (e.g., change the opinions of their social ties). In order for a migrant to feel that they succeeded in their migration trajectory, the relationship between “agency” and “structure” needs to be in balance (Wingens et al., 2011). They need to feel “in control” of their situation (Grabowska-Lusińska, 2013).

Political and civic participation involves both elements of agency (the ability to influence public affairs) and structure (the formal entitlements, the quality of civil society, prevailing social and institutional trust, and confidence in democracy; Linek et al., 2017; Rakušanová, 2007). Hence, they represent intriguing tools for studying migrant transnational embedding. Political and civic participation refers to a specific field of human activity and interests that derive primarily from early socialisation, upbringing, and education (Dean, 2016; Prior, 2010). In other words, they are closely connected to social class and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). At the same time, political (especially electoral) participation represents a (variably

powerful) tool that “ordinary people” in democratic societies possess to influence the course of public affairs, which is why states limit access to it to their citizens or long-term residents (Almond & Verba, 1963; Barbulescu, Wallace Goodman & Pedroza, 2023a). It is also why some members of diasporas remain interested in voting in their countries of origin despite long-term physical detachment (Favell, 2010; Kostelka, 2017). Civic participation may serve similar ends, though less directly. In addition, in some of its forms, it has an important potential to facilitate embedding (Pan & Maree, 2023; Sime & Behrens, 2023; Studzińska, Szmytkowska & Nowicka, 2023). Both political and civic participation reflect the overall quality of civil society, levels of social and institutional trust in a society, the population’s confidence in democratic principles and their power to influence public affairs (Linek et al., 2017; Putnam, 2000; Whiteley, 2011). Lastly, both political and civic participation tend to be perceived as markers of migrant embedding in or dis-embedding from a society (this relates to both the receiving-country and the sending-country perspective; Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Kostelka, 2017; de Vroome, Hooghe, & Marien). As such, they may signal value change in migrants or, at the least, the instrumental effect of migrating on people’s civic practices.

To answer the research questions stated in the Introduction, my analysis addresses the complex and often rather unclear relations between the concepts introduced in this chapter (and the preceding one) as the framework against which it examines the embedding experiences of post-1989 Czech migrants in the United Kingdom, bearing in mind their situatedness in specific political, historical, and economic circumstances. Building on this theoretical framework, the next chapter introduces the methodological foundations of the research and the methods employed to generate and analyse empirical data.

Chapter 4 Methodology, Methods and Materials⁴⁴

This chapter introduces the epistemological and methodological background of the research and the way the underlying theoretical premises were translated into the methods of data collection, processing and analysis. The first of its five sections discusses relevant epistemology and methodology. The second explains the reasoning behind participant selection and describes key data characteristics. The third section looks at data processing and analysis. The fourth section discusses researcher positionality. It also examines the limitations of the chosen scientific approach and of the data collected and shows how they were tackled. The fifth section summarises the methodology and methods applied in this research and presents a closing statement.

Section 4.1 Epistemological and Methodological Background of the Research Design

The research design used in my study is based on a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodologies derive from the hermeneutic strand of epistemology and as such represent the interpretative approach in the social sciences (Mišovič, 2019, p. 20; Somekh et al., 2009). As opposed to the explanatory and verificatory goals of the positivist paradigm, represented by quantitative methodologies, qualitative research designs are aimed at facilitating understanding of a lesser number of cases (or a single case) in order to create theoretical categories, concepts and theories (Mišovič, 2019, p. 20-22). A “case” can be understood as an individual person with his/her actions or attitudes, a community of people or a social process delineated by specific circumstances and characteristics (e.g., cultural, geographical, demographic – and often a combination of them; cf. Ragin & Becker, 1992). In order to build understanding, qualitative methodologies take a holistic approach to the case(s) examined, exploring and describing it (them) in depth (Stark & Torrance, 2009, p. 33). In comparison to the common idea of a quantitative study, which looks primarily at the *status quo* of the studied social phenomenon (what the respondents think and do *now*), qualitative methods often take a historical perspective, asking about their objects’ both past and present actions, attitudes or feelings, as well as about their own explanation or analysis of how any potential changes came about (Mišovič, 2019, p. 19). That is, apart from looking at people’s actions, they take into account their self-expression and the role of intersubjectivity in their interactions, including that which involves the researcher and leads to generating research material – e.g., interview or observation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011; Mišovič, 2019). They are preferred in studies which are prevalingly explorative and descriptive, rather than looking for causalities. Despite historical controversies about the incommensurability of the positivist and interpretative

⁴⁴ Some parts of this chapter were used in Janurová (2018) – literally or with some alterations in wording.

paradigms and discussions about which one is the “proper” approach for the social sciences, today, most researchers acknowledge their mutually compatible nature (Kuhn, 1996; Somekh et al., 2009). Social science research is increasingly designed as interdisciplinary and mixed-method projects and the migration studies field is no exception to the trend.

Reflecting the described paradigmatic terrain of the social sciences, the decision-making regarding the research design of the dissertation was quite straightforward. Rather than looking for verifiable causalities, my mission in this research was largely explorative. This was especially due to the complexity of the selected topic and the nature of the lived experiences and thought processes in focus. Besides trying to contribute to the growing body of literature on the relationship between embedding (integration) and transnationalism in general, my aim was to study the modes and levels of political and civic participation and their place in the lives of migrants. This goal called for a holistic attitude to the individual (life) stories of the research participants. Apart from looking at their actions (communicating transnationally, voting in their home country, applying for the citizenship of their host country, reading news from both “here” and “there” daily) – the “*whats*” of their stories – my study also had to pay careful attention to the “*hows*” of those actions: how the participants themselves understand and interpret them, what importance they ascribe to them and what role is played by the circumstances they live in (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011; Mišovič, 2019, p. 24-25). The research I could conduct on my own within the scope of my PhD studies did not enable a large mixed-method study that would allow for subsequent quantitative verification of the qualitatively generated theoretical findings, so I chose to carry out a qualitative theoretical exploration. In short, the complex of lived experiences I set out to study favoured the application of a qualitative methodology.

My research's aim and theoretical grounding called for ensuring that the whole methodological approach follows a transnational framework. My goal was to allow the migrants' attachments and practices both “here” and “there” comparable space in interviews and their analysis, acknowledging both (or all) of the geographical territories of their lived social fields as equally important components of their day-to-day lives, experiences and identities. Though such an approach is quite time-consuming, it enables the researcher to pay attention to ethnic, national or geographic categories applied by the interlocutors themselves while at the same time looking “beyond the ethnic lens” – not overvaluing their importance as a rule (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). A qualitative research design based on semi-structured narrative interviews was chosen in order to examine in sufficient depth the intricate and multidirectional relations between the outlined aspects of migrant embedding, belonging, civic engagement and various other local and/or transnational practices. Though not intended, as is sometimes the case in this type of interviewing, some of

my interviews partially unfolded as life history narratives as it was natural for my research participants to describe and explain their migration trajectories chronologically, wrapping them in the context of their lives as a whole and sometimes covering long sequences of events and experiences (Bryman, 2012, p. 491).

Rooted in phenomenological sociology, the narrative approach “does not assume objectivity but, instead, privileges positionality and subjectivity” (Kohler Riessman, 2001). This means that instead of following a strict question-answer scenario, the researcher enters the interview situation as an empathising conversation participant, letting the interviewee “tell stories,” which are believed to reveal more of the “underlying meanings of people’s ‘everyday’” and their subjective experiences through a joint construction of the narrative (Psychlová, 2012, p. 18; Titchen & Hobson, 2009). On this note, Holstein and Gubrium (2011, p. 150-151) stress that *all interviews*, including standardised survey ones, are *interactional accomplishments*, regardless of the researcher's attempts at neutrality and participant (un)willingness to cooperate. Thus, our aim as researchers should be to acknowledge our active role in constructing information and perceive interviews as “a site of, and occasion for, interpretive practice” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 151). According to these authors, knowingly adopting the social constructionist approach to studying social processes and acknowledging researcher positionality contributes to a more genuine account of the studied phenomenon than trying to “shade off” the influence of the researcher in order to produce as objective an account of the “reality” as possible (p. 154). This is because in the social constructionist perspective, each individual’s “reality of everyday life” is constantly created, co-created and re-defined through their daily experiences and interpersonal encounters (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 33-42). There is no reason to assume an interview situation works differently – instead, “animating the image of the subject behind the respondent” (but also behind the interviewer), i.e. accepting the respondent’s confession as “‘reliable enough,’ under the circumstances” and paying attention to those circumstances yields data that is richer and more authentic of the issues under study.

An animated subject behind the respondent not only holds the facts and details of experience, but, in the very process of offering them up, constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms them into artefacts of the occasion. The respondent can hardly ‘spoil’ what he or she is, in effect, subjectively shaping. Because interviews are always dialogical, they are inevitably performances aimed at particular audiences. This alone necessarily animates the whats of the matter.

(Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 153, 154)

Thus, narratives *selectively* and *inventively* convey events and memories in ways that reflect the meanings and importance the narrator attributes to them (Shacklock & Thorp, 2009, p. 156). Acknowledging the collaborative and situated nature of the interview permits “a

deeper understanding of the whos, hows, wheres and whats [as well as the whys] of [social] research” (Cloke et al., 2004, p. 150; Kohler Riessman, 2001). The circumstantial and performative aspects of interview narratives do not undermine their validity, as long as they are taken into account in analysis and as long as the narrative reflects (local or broader) shared meanings,

...such as the research topics presented by interviewers, participants' biographical particulars, locally accepted ways of orienting to those topics, institutionalized means of understanding and talking about things, and larger discourses deploying 'what everyone knows' (Gubrium 1988, 1989; Holstein and Gubrium 2000, Holstein and Gubrium 2011). Those resources are astutely and adroitly adapted to the demands of the occasion, so that meaning is neither predetermined nor absolutely unique.

(Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 156)

Shared common-sense knowledge and “typificatory schemes,” which we apply to other people and situations around us to make sense of the world, help people in face-to-face interactions – and as such, also the interviewee and interviewer – as a channel for transmitting individual experiences and opinions so that they are understandable and relatable to those of others (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 43-48). Hence, despite the seeming boundlessness of the underlying approach and the chosen method, the participant narratives generally share numerous characteristics in terms of both content and structure.

Coming from the described premises, I tried to arrange the interview situation like an informal conversation, trying to achieve a “horizontal” instead of a “hierarchical” relationship between the interviewee and me as a researcher (Kohler Riessman, 2001). I approached the research participants as “active subjects” who engage “in a continuous process of assembling and modifying answers to questions [as] active maker[s] of meaning,” thus taking part in the explorative process, where they themselves become the initial analysts of their life stories (Kohler Riessman, 2001, p. 701). Acknowledging the constitutive and circumstantial nature of interviews enabled me to pay attention to unthought-of, newly emerging topics and research participants' ways of thinking about their experiences and so to refine some questions and concepts (Shacklock & Thorp, 2009, p. 156). Especially, it allowed for various intensities of civic engagement and transnational practices to be revealed in interviews, including the possibility that some research participants do not engage in them at all or only very little so. In addition, it enabled me to explore the various forms, content and levels of civic engagement, which I had originally included in my interview guidelines based on an initial review of literature, analyse their relevance for the project's aims and search for possible other practices which could or should be included in my operationalisation of civic engagement.

On the other hand, leaving much responsibility for structuring the narrative in the hands of the research participants, I had to make sure that some key pre-defined interview areas that

the participants did not consider as important for their lives were discussed at least briefly to confirm their relevance to the particular migration story. Also, in the course of both interviewing and analysis, I constantly had to be on the lookout for topics and stories which were relevant for analysis despite being considered banal by the research participants themselves. This rigorous reflexive approach did not only enable me to research the topics in question but, at the same time, also to explore the validity of the entry definitions used, possibly refining them in the process.

Finally, as already implied, a thoroughly interpretive approach to interviewing and analysis needs to be accompanied by a critical reflection of the researcher's role in constructing shared meanings in the emerging narrative. This is because not only the interviewee but the interviewer likewise is "animated," investing one's own experiences, attitudes and emotions in the "interpersonal drama with a developing plot" that constitutes the interview, as well as in the preceding process of participant selection and in subsequent analysis (Cloke et al., 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 157). The risk of overly influencing what is narrated and then selected for analysis – to the detriment of the authenticity or richness of the studied narratives – is thus always present and remains a topic of discussion among researchers employing qualitative methodologies.

Section 4.2 Data Characteristics, Participant Selection and the Interviewing Process

This section introduces the empirical material studied in this doctoral research project, explains the reasoning behind participant selection and recruiting and describes the practical aspects of the interviewing process. For the reader's easier orientation in the text, the data is introduced first, and I move on to sampling and interviewing afterwards.

4.2.1 General Characteristics of the Data

The material collected and analysed as part of this research project comprises in-depth interviews with a sample of 50 Czech first-generation *migrants* living in the UK. See Appendix 2 for an overview of the research participants' basic characteristics. The names of research participants were replaced with pseudonyms.

The interviews were conducted in two rounds with a significant period of time between them:

- 1st round, pre-Brexit: 41 interviews (including 7 pilot ones), 2014-2016
- 2nd round, post-Brexit: 9 interviews, 2019 and 2022

The first, “pre-Brexit” sub-sample, consisting of 41 interviews, took place in 2014-2016. The first seven interviews in it served as a pilot.

The second, “post-Brexit” sub-sample, comprises a set of nine migrant interviews conducted in 2019 and 2022. The label “post-Brexit”, used for the second sub-sample, refers to the fact that the interviews were conducted after the 2016 Brexit referendum and the migrants’ experiences were thus affected by practical aspects of the process of the UK leaving the EU. Eight of the interviews took place in 2022, that is, after the UK completed its departure from the EU, including the transition period. The one interview conducted in 2019 (post-referendum, but prior to the UK’s actual withdrawal from the EU, during the course of Brexit deal negotiations, see Chapter 2) was arranged at a time when pro-democratic demonstrations calling for a major change of direction in the Czech political scene were taking place not only in Czechia, but also among the Czech diaspora worldwide. I grasped this opportunity to contact Czech diaspora activists in the UK. Though only one interview worked out in the end, I decided to include it in the post-Brexit sub-sample, as it contains rich analytical material relevant to the research topic.

The need for adding the post-Brexit group of participants to the migrant sample resulted from the interruption of my studies due to maternity and childcare. After I conducted my original fieldwork, a series of politically highly significant events occurred that were relevant for Czechs living and/or moving abroad, especially in/to the UK – most notably Brexit (see Chapter 2). Hence, I found it necessary to reflect on these developments in a supplementary body of interviews. I used the opportunity to get involved in a research project focusing on the Czech diaspora. With the permission of the project’s principal investigator and my interviewees, I extended some of the interviews and used the narratives in my doctoral research.⁴⁵

4.2.2 Research Participants’ Characteristics

The 50 research participants comprised 34 women and 16 men. The participants lived in all the nine NUTS 1 regions of England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. They were born in ten (out of fourteen) NUTS 3 regions of Czechia, including Prague.⁴⁶ The Moravian-Silesian Region (MSK) and the Ústí nad Labem Region (ÚK), two regions with some of the highest unemployment rates in Czechia, were the most common – represented by 11 and nine

⁴⁵ *Česká diaspora – multidimenzionální vztahy a podmíněnosti Česka a cílových zemí* [Czech diaspora – Multidimensional relations and conditionality of Czechia and host countries] (2022-2024, GAČR project no. 22-08304S). See <https://www.cestikrajane.cz/>.

⁴⁶ For both the United Kingdom and Czechia, I am referring to the level of administrative units which is informative enough in terms of inter-regional comparisons of population size, unemployment and other demographic and economic factors, and still broad enough to avoid the risk of violating the participants’ anonymity. This is why a different NUTS level is used for the UK and Czechia, respectively.

participants, respectively (Czech Statistical Office, 2024b). All of them had Czech citizenship, and seven also had British citizenship. Those with British citizenship have lived in the UK for 11 or more years.

A half (25) of the participants were in their 30s at the time of interviewing, a third (15) in their 40s, and some in their 20s, 50s and 60s. While the pre-Brexit participants covered the whole age range, research participants aged 40+ prevailed in the post-Brexit sub-sample.

As many as 29 of the research participants had university education, 14 secondary, four vocational training and three primary education. Their motivations to migrate and stay were diverse, including family and love relationships, career advancement, job changes involving both qualification downgrade and upgrade, studies, unemployment, as well as lifestyle change or discrimination.

In many cases the participants' reasons to stay differed from the reasons that had brought them to Britain and had transformed during their time there, as will be shown in my analysis. Most worked at the time of interviewing, performing elementary to managerial occupations. Nine were homemakers (caring for family members, especially children), two were unemployed, and two were retired (both of them included in the post-Brexit sub-sample).

As many as 33 lived with their spouses/partners, five had non-cohabiting partners in the UK, five were divorced or separated from their spouses and seven were single. A total of 19 had a Czech spouse/partner, 13 had a British one (a few of them were first or second-generation migrants as well), and some had partners of other nationalities. A total of 30 had children – those were mostly minors who lived with them in the UK. Some informants had adult offspring who lived in the UK too, but independently. Three interviewees had adult offspring living in Czechia. One of them also had one secondary school-aged child living in Czechia with the interviewee's mother.

4.2.3 Sampling of Research Participants

I used the *generic purposive sampling* approach to selecting participants for my study (Bryman, 2012, p. 422-423). According to Bryman (2012, p. 418), “the goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed.” Like theoretical sampling, which is a form of purposive sampling associated primarily with the grounded theory approach, generic purposive sampling also leads to the generation of concepts, categories and theories. However, in contrast to theoretical sampling which is sequential (units of analysis – e.g., participants – are added on an ongoing basis based on any emerging gaps in the unfolding theoretical analysis), generic purposive sampling can be fixed. “[T]he criteria for selecting [units of

analysis] may be formed a priori” (Bryman, 2012, p. 422). In my research project, the criteria for selecting research participants were stated a priori based on the research questions set, though slightly adjusted based on the pilot, as I will explain in the next paragraph. The research participants who were only added to the original sample in 2019 and 2022 were selected so as to complement the existing sample with an experience of the recent political developments whilst withholding the original sampling criteria.

The research participants were originally recruited on the basis of being born and raised in Czechia/Czechoslovakia and living in the United Kingdom, having migrated to the UK after 1989 and having lived abroad for a minimum of three years⁴⁷. After the seven pilot interviews, I decided to primarily look out for participants with a five-year minimum length of residence in the UK. This was based on the recognition that there was a significant difference in the attitude to staying/settling in the receiving country between migrants who had resided there for a minimum of five years and those who had lived there more shortly. The aim of studying the migrants’ political and civic engagement called for examining primarily the experience and attitudes of such longer-term migrants, based on the assumption that they would have been generally more embedded in the receiving society. According to Inglehart’s scarcity hypothesis (1977), which assumes that people focus on “post-materialist goals,” such as belonging or intellectual satisfaction, as long as their most pressing material needs are fulfilled, people who are already settled in the receiving society are more likely to have the capacity to reflect about what condition the society “here” and “there” is in and to get engaged in changing things about it. Secondly, the stance that such “settled” or “embedded” migrants take towards influencing aspects of life in their countries of origin seemed more rewarding to study than that of temporary migrants determined to return. Though participants with at least a five-year experience of living in the UK were prioritised, I did end up including a few with a briefer period of stay in the UK or such who had spent more time in a different country/countries and only a short period in the UK. In the end, the length of residence in the UK in my migrant sample ranged from seven months to 20 years (see Appendix 2 for details).⁴⁸ Altogether, there were eight migrants who had lived in the UK for less than five years (two of them had prior international experiences from other countries), 27 migrants who had spent five to ten years in the UK, and 15 migrants who had lived there for 11 and longer. In the post-Brexit sample, the length of stay varied between 5.5 and 26 years.

I recruited participants using various channels to diversify their characteristics and experiences, disseminating invitations to participate via diaspora associations in the UK,

⁴⁷ Years spent living in other countries before coming to the UK were taken into account as well – see Appendix 2 and further in the text for details.

⁴⁸ Only three migrant interviewees had spent less than three years in the UK at the time of interviewing, and only eight in total had been living there for less than five years.

diaspora online forums, Facebook groups uniting Czech migrants in various locations, personal contacts and snowball sampling. Despite the obvious concerns about selectivity, Facebook was the most effective in helping to reach a large number of individuals with a broad variety of characteristics and experiences (cf. Child et al., 2014; Janta & Ladkin, 2013; Kaczmarczyk & Górny, 2023).

The wording of recruitment adverts was intentionally diversified somewhat to reduce the risk that the formulations would systematically discourage some segments of the target population from participating.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, this risk could likely not be avoided altogether, so the possibility that the sample is somewhat biased due to self-selection remains (see section 4.4 on limitations).

4.2.4 The Interviewing Process

The interviews focused on migration motives and trajectories, embedding strategies and experiences, aspects and modes of belonging, questions and dilemmas of staying vs. return, and their relation to various professional and private local and transnational practices. A special emphasis was placed on activities that can be understood as political and civic participation, according to the conceptualisation presented in Chapter 3.

All interviews also took account of the participants' basic demographic and socio-economic characteristics, including their family/relationship situation, housing situation, and education and employment trajectory. Besides examining the participants' identification with the national entities they lived in, they also explored identification with the European Union or Europe as a broader cultural and political whole. I also examined the participants' subjective satisfaction with their current life situation and occupation (work, study or family/care-related) and their material, aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction, which are closely related to the dilemma of non-/belonging that assumingly comes to the fore, especially after a migrant's "transition from survival to prosperity" (Inglehart's 1977 "scarcity hypothesis," see Chapter 3). The outline of interview areas and questions, based on the conceptualisations in Chapter 3, is included as Appendix 1. The outline was refined after conducting pilot interviews in order to incorporate topics or areas originally omitted.

The seven pilot interviews were preliminarily analysed shortly after transcription in order to refine the conceptualisations of topics studied, if needed, and thus to reformulate or add questions or interview areas. The pilot interviews are included in the overall sample.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 3 for examples of recruitment adverts/invitations to participate.

The interviews lasted 1.5 hours on average and were conducted in Czech in places of the participants' choice (homes, workplaces, public places) or online. All interviewees provided their informed consent with being interviewed, and most of them also with the interview being sound-recorded and transcribed.⁵⁰ Most of the participants from my original body of fieldwork were interviewed during my research trips to various places in Britain. Twelve interviews, including all of the post-Brexit ones, were conducted via video conferencing platforms (Facebook Messenger, Skype, WhatsApp or Zoom). Most of the interviews took place in sufficiently quiet environments where both I and the interlocutors had time to focus exclusively on the conversation, regardless of whether they were in-person or online. Only in a few singular cases, the conversations were disturbed by strong background noise (in crowded or outdoor restaurants) or by other people interrupting (the participants', and in one case also my own, children). However, as these external factors were usually assumed beforehand, I took sufficient precautions to avoid data loss (especially intensified note-taking during and immediately after the interviews).

In general, online interviewing proved very helpful in enabling the interviewees and myself to find the most suitable time and place for the interview without additional time and financial costs (see also Bright, 2022). On the other hand, due to being stripped of the less formalised interpersonal contact before and after the interview, such as showing someone around one's house and small talk related e.g., to choosing restaurants and ordering meals and drinks, it is possible that online interviews were bereft of some of the mutual closeness and trust that tends to be more easily generated by in-person contact. Yet, by allowing a greater degree of anonymity, it is possible that online interviews made some of the informants more open than they would be in personal contact. Overall, I did not notice any clear pattern regarding the quality or depth of the interviews or their efficiency deriving from the difference between in-person and online interviewing (cf. Bright, 2022).

Most interviews were sound-recorded and transcribed *verbatim* for purposes of analysis. Interviewing was accompanied by taking *in situ* field notes and reflexive notes in retrospect. Those sometimes also included remarks on the participants' tone, choice of words and willingness to talk about specific spheres of their lives in case this information would become relevant for analysis. Those conversations or parts that could not be recorded due to the participants' request or for practical reasons (e.g., when interviewing or a part of it took place during a walk or when strong background noise interrupted the talk) were supplemented with detailed notes. At the participants' request, two interviews were replaced with a written exchange. Several interviews were followed up in chat conversations, video calls or e-mail exchanges that took place sometime afterwards to clarify specific interview statements or to

⁵⁰ Transcription was either done by me or a professional typist bound by a confidentiality contract.

find out how the participants' trajectories had developed. This could, however, not be done systematically due to time constraints or unwillingness on the side of the research participants.

When interviewing migrants about their life stories, it may be easy to get too absorbed by the experience of migration as such and lose track of its *transnational* aspects, or on the other hand, it may be tempting to ascribe all migrant activities a transnational relevance, thus overvaluing their significance for the particular research project (Vertovec, 2009, p. 17). In avoiding falling into these two traps, the qualitative research design itself did an enormous service by enabling me to contextualise participants' responses immediately *in situ* and in a virtually unrestricted breadth (Brannen, 2007, p. 180-182). In the case of statements that were unclear or ambivalent, I was able to pose more in-depth questions and thus develop a more consolidated understanding of the importance of the discussed topic within the emerging narrative.

Lastly, the interview guidelines designed before the start of fieldwork were adjusted not only after the pilot study but sometimes after individual interviews to incorporate questions which explored the (non-)transnationality of the individual practices. Questions targeting practical situations, such as return visits and communication with ties in the sending country (Peychlová, 2012), remitting of financial or social resources (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011) or the transnational transfer of objects (cf. Povrzanović Frykman, 2010) functioned as very useful rhetorical as well as structuring tools here. The occasional possibility to interview some of the migrants at the time of their return visits to Czechia played a no less beneficial role by providing me with insight into their interactions with people and localities in the country of origin they had left behind (cf. Marcus, 1995).

Having described the empirical material used in this study and explained the reasoning behind data collection, I will now move on to the analytical process.

Section 4.3 Data Processing and Analysis

The analytical approach used in my study was predominantly based on thematic and conversation qualitative content analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Silverman, 2005). Though it was a largely theory-driven process with a substantial portion of the analytical categories being anticipated or even formulated *ex-ante*, some elements of grounded theory were incorporated in it (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Charmaz, "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to *construct* theories 'grounded' in the data themselves. (...) data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct" (Charmaz,

2006, p. 2, own emphasis). Incorporating grounded theory approaches in the analytical process comprised, first, sensitivity towards theoretical saturation of the data (analysis of the collected narratives was carried out on an ongoing basis in order to monitor the need for further data). Second, it meant maintaining an open approach to analysis, leaving space for any unexpected topics to come up. To this end, open axial and selective coding of the interview transcripts was carried out in order to identify statements and moments leading to the saturation of pre-defined research areas, as well as such that helped to reveal newly emerging topics (Charmaz, 2006, p. 42-71; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019).

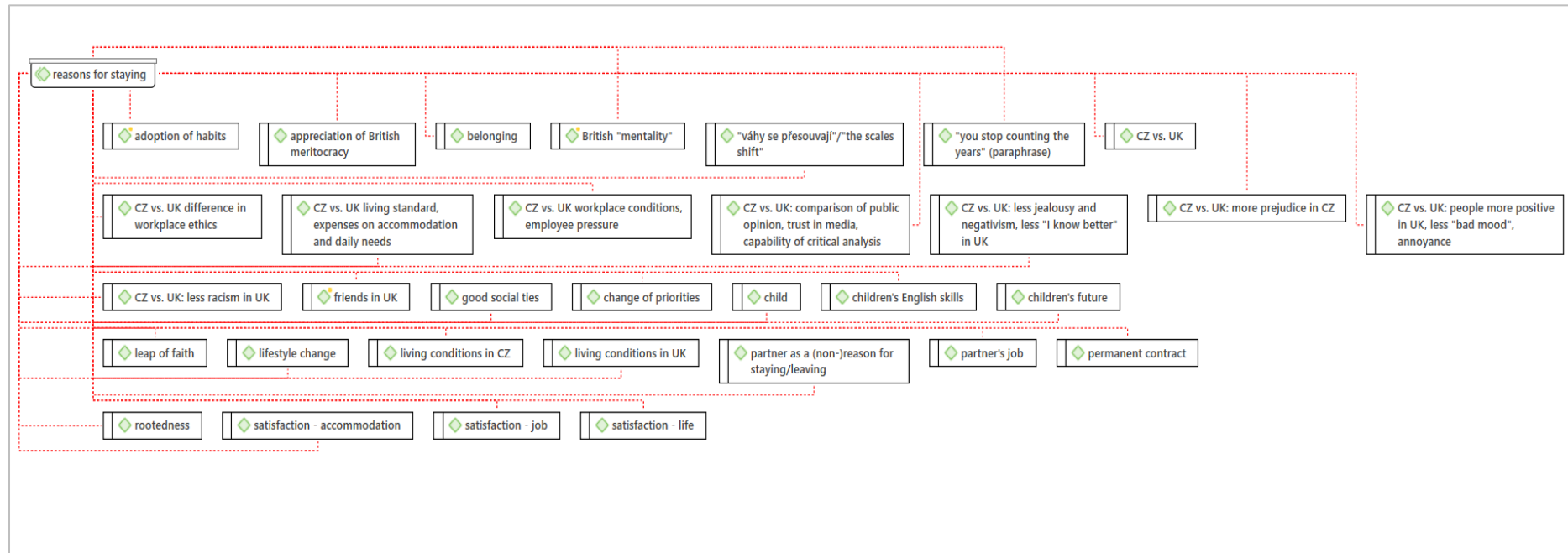
Open coding (also termed “initial coding” by Charmaz, 2006, p. 47-57) represents the first phase of working with the collected data, when any topics and statements that seem relevant to the research aim or for generating theory are annotated. Axial coding helps to identify relations between these initially created codes to create groups of mutually interconnected codes which characterise specific phenomena captured by the data in context. Selective coding leads to the final reduction of the number of codes and code groups to a set of topics crucial for generating and elaborating a coherent theory (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019, p. 87-89). While I carried out my open coding in Atlas.ti, and partially on paper, the phase that could be described as axial and selective coding, that is, analysing relations between codes, triangulating with existing theory and constructing theoretical concepts, was primarily done on paper in the form of mind maps and analytical notes and in a Word document where I started to write up the initial analytical observations and reflections. In contrast to “pure” grounded theory procedures, during the whole coding, code-reduction and analytical process, I referred back to the previously formulated research questions and interview topics to fulfil the stated research aim.

The first steps of my analysis comprised reading and re-reading interview transcripts and fieldnotes and sometimes re-listening to interview recordings in order to code each narrative in as much detail as possible. Like in interviewing, in the coding process, the first narratives processed served as a pilot in that I broke them down into a considerable number of codes to prepare the ground for the various directions my analysis might take and test the relevance of different types of codes. At this point, *open coding* was the prevailing approach taken. As coding progressed, parallel to writing up emerging pieces of analysis, I was getting more confident about what I was looking for in the narratives. Hence, the coding of newer interviews was less dense, and I also started re-formulating, merging and grouping some codes (*axial* and *selective coding*). Nevertheless, even though some threads of analysis started appearing right away, new codes and code groups kept appearing up until the last moments of my analytical and writing-up process (*open coding*), reflecting possible changes in my prioritisation of the

different topics. While working with individual interviews, I also referred back to relevant comments from my field and reflexive notes.

By the end of the analytical process, I had over 1 700 single codes, accompanied by 15 working groups of co-occurring codes, auto-generated using Atlas.ti. Figure 4.1 shows an example of a code group used, illustrating the process of analytical grouping of codes related by their positioning within the narratives (i.e., responses to the same question). It visualises the code group for “reasons for staying.” It lists all codes used simultaneously as “reasons for staying” (i.e., for the same narrative segments), ordered alphabetically. It shows the different pragmatic considerations mentioned in interviews regarding staying in the UK (children’s future, partner’s job, living conditions in both countries and comparisons of conditions for those in Britain and Czechia), as well as assessments of one’s (long-term or transformed) social and cultural affiliations (adoption of habits, appreciation of British “mentality”, less racism and prejudice in the UK compared to Czechia, social ties), or state of mind (belonging, “shifting of the scales”, change of priorities). Such visualisation can facilitate linking various topics and interview statements across the whole body of interviews, especially when working with many of them.

Figure 4.1 Code Group for “Reasons for Staying”



Note: Code group was automatically generated using Atlas.ti based on code co-occurrence.

Source: own

Some thematic threads (codes and code groups) identified by automatically generating code co-occurrences were used as a preliminary outline for detailed analysis. After outlining some of the research sub-topics in this way, I turned back to individual interviews or their specific sections to compare the participants' relevant thematic statements among themselves, referring back to the participants' key characteristics and trying to see if new groups or linkages were starting to form along thematic lines.

Even though all of the interviews were conducted in Czech, I coded the narratives in English to be able to transform them easily into analytical categories and research outcomes, which were primarily intended to be written up in English. Sometimes, I added a Czech note or comment in cases where I felt a Czech expression fit the particular statement or issue more aptly. I also kept *in vivo* codes in Czech. Interview quotes selected for use in this thesis were translated from Czech to English – some personally, some with the help of the DeepL.com translator.

Parallel to open coding, the participants' key characteristics and responses to the main questions were summarised in a Microsoft Excel sheet to simplify the analytical procedure and my orientation among different emerging groups within the sample. For a start, I noted my interviewees' age, gender, education, occupation or profession, length of stay abroad, citizenship, attitude to returning/staying/re-migrating, life cycle stage (marital status and family situation) and a general stance towards civic engagement. I then returned to these characteristics in the upcoming stages of my thematic analysis. Appendix 2 contains a significantly abbreviated version of this sheet, meant to assist the reader in orientation among the research participants.

While Gläser & Laudel (2013) claim that coding, on the one hand, and qualitative content analysis based on data extraction (extracting only thematically relevant segments of data for subsequent analysis), on the other, tend to be used for different types of research projects as they serve different ends, combining the two approaches in my analysis seemed a natural process. It enabled me to orientate within and between thematic areas smoothly for faster analysis while also being able to go back to the details of specific narratives to develop theoretical concepts in sufficient depth. This was especially helpful since I had to get back to the first round of interviews repeatedly after significant amounts of time. In addition, since my analytical approach was not “pure” grounded theory, since it took account of both previously formulated research questions as well as newly emerging topics, the possibility to continuously move back and forth between the two different analytical formats and levels of reduction was necessary to keep track of what portion of the research questions has already been covered.

Section 4.4 Research Positionalities and Limitations of the Research Material

This section discusses the possible impact of my positionalities on sampling and data characteristics and the limitations caused by the structure of my empirical data. I will first discuss the likely effects of researcher positionalities on the interviewing process and then examine the possible shortcomings of imbalances in the data structure.

As regards the question of bias caused by researcher positionality, according to Holstein and Gubrium (2011, p. 163), “[t]he concept of the animated interview casts interview ‘bias’ in a new light. All participants in an interview are implicated in the construction of narrative reality. They are involved in narrative production, not contamination.” The authors explain that “spontaneous” conversations are “not necessarily more authentic, bias-free, or unstructured” than interviews since the settings these conversations take place in also play a role in *what* is said and *how*. From that perspective, the mutual positionality and relationship of the participants of any “spontaneous” conversation and the effect of the immediate context (place, time, presence of other people etc.) would also have to be taken into account were such conversation to be scientifically analysed. Though it might seem almost impossible to commit qualitative data “bias” in this light, this argument cannot be used as an excuse for just any type of inconsistency or incompleteness of data. With this premise in mind, I will now look more deeply into the effect of my positionalities on the sampling and interviewing processes in the presented study.

Let me first outline the primary characteristics which I believe were key to defining me in my interaction with the research participants. I was a white female native Czech in my late twenties to early thirties, conducting a PhD in human geography at Charles University in Prague, Czechia. I had spent 2.5 years doing a Masters and then working (in low-skill positions) in Sweden, as well as four months on Erasmus in the UK and one month on a research fellowship in Germany. Aside from my PhD studies, I worked part-time as a social researcher. I grew up in a middle-class environment in Prague and completed most of my schooling there, including attending a private English-speaking high school. I spoke Czech and English fluently. I got married and had two children during the course of my PhD studies, which led to their major extension. Hence, the conduct of the second round of interviews was affected by my new positionality of a young mother combining work in social research with childcare responsibilities.

4.4.1 Managing and Making Use of Multiple Positionalities

Ryan (2015b), as well as Ganga and Scott (2006) criticise the long-standing fixation of migration research on ethnicity or nationality as the key dividing line of researcher *insider-/outsider-ness*. In agreement with the trend of de-nationalising migration research methodologies, they emphasise the need to “look beyond the ethnic lens” not only within the scope of research design but also when examining researcher positionality (cf. Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2009; Nowicka & Cieslik, 2014; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). Ryan (2015b) asks whether the assumed closeness deriving from a shared ethnic background between researcher and participant means that studying ethnic categories beyond the researcher’s own affiliation is, by definition, inferior, and shows evidence from her own research that contradicts this assumption. By that, she supports Ganga and Scott’s (2006) claim that “interviewing within one’s own ‘cultural’ community—as an insider—affords the researcher a degree of social proximity that, paradoxically, *increases awareness amongst both researcher and participant of the social divisions that exist between them*” (own emphasis). The authors stress that quite often, other characteristics, like age/generation, gender, class, profession or parental status, gain salience over the category of ethnicity, which might bring unwanted awkwardness into the interaction and which, in fact, not all migrants accept as a defining characteristic for themselves (Ganga & Scott, 2006; Ryan, 2015b). The following excerpt from Ryan (2015b), on the different emotions she experienced while interviewing fellow London-based female Irish migrants of different generations, summarises the complexity of the issues in question.

Despite shared gender and country of origin, it is apparent that age and time spent in Britain were highly significant in framing our experiences and positionalities. Although nearly 10 years older than me, Fidelma and I had shared life experience of marriage, motherhood, living in Britain through the “Troubles” and this may have facilitated moments of empathy. By contrast, in the interview with Sile, age/generation served to highlight differences in our experiences and life stage. I felt frustrated by her depiction of older Irish migrants in London. I wanted to resist this negative and somewhat patronising categorisation. Far from feeling like an “insider” I felt distant and alien from Sile’s imagining of the “Irish community” in London.

(Ryan, 2015b, para. 35)

Such contrasting experiences provide evidence for the claim that “‘outsider-ness’ and ‘insider-ness’ are not fixed or static positions,” similarly as the power dynamics in interview situations constantly change (Naples, 2003, in Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p. 334). I often observed that in my interviews, being a Czech who *lives in Czechia*, yet with some experiences of living abroad, seemed facilitatory of interviewee goodwill and frankness. Shared native language and cultural background on the one hand, and a good command of English accompanied by familiarity with various aspects of migrant life, made comparisons with English/British/“Western” lifestyles or habits easy to transmit. Additionally, my positionality

as an outsider to both the Czech diasporic community *and* life in the United Kingdom, in general, seemed to promote sincerity in expressions of opinion about fellow Britain-based Czechs, as well as about British society. Enabling the interviewees to act as *experts on life in the UK* also granted them a convenient position of superiority and thus contributed to their willingness to talk. Similarly, Edwards and Holland (2013, p. 78-79) observe that the fluency of power relations in qualitative interviewing can facilitate rapport and communicativeness.

The informants' references to aspects of *life in Czechia* were accompanied by "you know how it is" comments and often only little explanation, with the implicit premise that I know what they are talking about (cf. Greco, 2016). Critical attitudes about features of the Czech society (i.e., the society they were not a part of any more, but I was), education, politics, legal system, etc., were (or seemed to be) generally expressed openly by my research participants. However, sometimes they were accompanied by a euphemising remark that "hopefully young people like you will make a difference," or "maybe nowadays things are better, this is what they were like when I lived there." Especially interviewees of older cohorts used such apologetic conversation tools to indicate they did not see me as part of the object of their critique, be it out of politeness or genuine belief. This experience touches upon the observation made by Ganga and Scott (2006) that interviewing within one's own "cultural proximity" may emphasise the social divisions between the researcher and the interlocutor and stand in the way of sincerity. Obviously, I do not know whether the narratives would have been more open or reserved if I were also a migrant or a cultural "outsider" – the effect could also have been individual. However, it was quite obvious that as regards the critique of Czechia or the Czech society, the interviewees seemed more confident sharing it as long as they were able to place some *narrative boundary* between the object of their critique and me – usually generational difference/age, education, profession, occupation or social class.

In general, I dare to claim that my primary *positionality as a student collecting data for her thesis* often worked as reassurance that what was told would not be misused and relaxed the research participants in their talk. The ethos of "helping a student" sometimes seemed to work as yet another source of superiority that added to the participants' willingness to talk extensively and frankly (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 78-79). The position of a student usually lent me a status outside of the scope of any social or professional power hierarchies that seemed to matter to the interviewees, irrespective of their own social class, education or profession, across samples (cf. Mullings, 1999). Those few who were students/researchers themselves were all genuinely keen to give me a full and honest account of their experience. Though coming from a different direction, this experience resonates with Ganga and Scott's (2006) observation of researchers "moving up" socially when coming from

different (cultural) backgrounds than their interlocutors and thus not being tied up by pre-existing class boundaries.

Some interviewees were genuinely flattered that I was interested in their lives, and surprised that a topic like this would be of relevance to the wider academic community. Since the second round of interviews was conducted as part of a broader research project aiming also to inform Czech diaspora policy, the participants involved therein expressed a strong wish to speak out and speak honestly, motivated by the promise that their voices would be heard and might lead to tangible bureaucratic changes (like the introduction of remote voting). Contrastingly, even if some other participants expressed doubt about the usefulness of my research endeavour, the factor that it was their own experiences I was curious about overrode the hesitation to speak (cf. Adler & Adler, 2003).

Going back to Ryan's (2015b) and Ganga and Scott's (2006) conclusions, it was obvious across the sample that shared age and gender – and later motherhood – especially when combined, facilitated a particularly relaxed atmosphere in interviews, which thus almost felt as a chat between two friends. This applied especially in such cases where the migrant interviewees did not hold very bitter sentiments about Czechia or did not seem to identify me with the aspects of the Czech society that they reprehended. Nevertheless, two of my similarly aged female migrant interviewees seemed more alert or reserved about sharing details from their lives with me, which could have been caused by a variety of factors. While reflecting about the flow of these interviews on the spot and in retrospect, I came up with a variety of possible reasons for this. The reluctance to talk could have sprung from a general distrust or suspicion of people who try to elicit a lot of details about one's life. In one case, this discomfort could have been rooted in the finding made at the beginning of the interview that we both once went to the same school and thus had some shared acquaintances – an aspect which could have worked as an icebreaker in other circumstances but in this particular conversation seemed somewhat embarrassing or exposing. In another, I knew the interviewee was annoyed by my late arrival, caused by our previous miscommunication. While I blamed this on myself and felt increasingly uncomfortable in the interview situation, in retrospect, I realised the interviewee could, in fact, likewise have been mad at herself. However, the source of these two participants' reticence could also "just" have been that they did not feel very natural about being in an interview situation (cf. Adler & Adler, 2003). This experience is an example of the complex layers of mutual identity constructions that are part of the research conversation, of which some can be only guessed, and some are beyond our imagination.

The interviewer is trying to place the interviewee but at the same time the interviewee is also trying to position the researcher. The ways in which interviewees anticipate, position and adjust to the

researcher may facilitate or hinder data collection by fostering harmony and trust or creating awkwardness and unease.

(Ryan, 2015b, para. 16)

The mutual interpretations of one another's positionality that take place in an interview situation largely depend on the information the conversation participants reveal about themselves (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). While we as researchers expect the interviewees to tell us as much relevant information about themselves as possible and generally rely on them to be honest with us, the amount and character of information that the researcher shares about themselves remain beyond the scope of most interviewing guidelines and textbooks, being largely left up to the researcher to decide (cf. Mullings, 1999). The information we do disclose about ourselves may, however, play a decisive role in how the interview unfolds, though not always with expected outcomes, as how the interviewee interprets it is beyond our control (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 82-87). Regardless of how much we disclose though, the research participant rarely approaches the interviewer purely as a researcher. On the contrary, most research narratives show elements of multiple addressivity where the interlocutor simultaneously speaks to the researcher's different (acknowledged or assumed) positionalities (Greco, 2016).

In my interview encounters, I was usually careful not to push my own experiences and opinions through too much and tended not to provide too much information about myself at the outset, especially when the research participants were eager to talk. Sometimes, however, I found it helpful to support the flow of the conversation by reflecting on the interviewees' statements with a comment about my own experiences of a similar kind or admitting my knowledge of a specific place, activity, event etc. In some interviews, on the other hand, I resisted the urge to correct the interviewee in his/her misinterpretation of myself or my knowledge, which I sensed, in order not to interrupt their train of thought or miss their interpretation of some phenomenon (e.g., a feature of the British educational or social protection system; cf. Ryan, 2015b).

After examining the role of my various positionalities in interview dynamics, I will now outline the main limitations of my data and the sampling difficulties which contributed to them.

4.4.2 Gaps in Sampling and Data Limitations

I believe the key limitations of my data were brought about by deficiencies in sampling, which were influenced—at least partially—by my positionalities. They include the gender

imbalance of the sample, the overrepresentation of participants with university education, and the self-selection of participants with particular traits. I took a few precautions to overcome the sampling bias in my data.

Diversification of recruitment channels, as described in section 4.2, and sufficient space in interviews devoted to ambivalent issues in the migration trajectories helped to avoid sampling only migrants self-selected based on their positive experiences or letting only the positive aspects of their experiences come across. Since invitations to participate primarily focused on the migration experience as such, the self-selection of more politically or civically engaged individuals did not seem to occur, as I will also show in the analysis.

One of the reasons for the *education imbalance* in the sample was likely the fact that people with higher education levels tend to be more interested in politics and more civically engaged than people with lower qualifications (e.g., Dean, 2016; Linek et al., 2017; McCulloch, Mohan & Smith, 2012; Whiteley, 2011). This probably led to a greater willingness to participate in university-educated migrants. People with higher education levels are also likely to be more aware of the difficulties of recruiting research participants from their own experience with various surveys and thus be willing to “help out” if someone else is conducting research, as well as more committed to contributing their knowledge or expertise to a scientific cause. Uherek and Beranská (2025) tackle a similar outcome of participant self-selection for research on the Czech diaspora. They suggest that “a sampling in which self-selection plays a substantial role generates a sample corresponding to the ideas of modern migration of skilled emigrants creating dispersed diasporas with a cosmopolitan transnational field.” As shown in Chapter 2, in Britain and Czechia, education generally positively correlates with political and civic participation, which is why the risk of skewing the findings will be considered in the unfolding analysis. Triangulation with other literature on this topic will be used to avoid interpretation bias.

The *gender imbalance* of the migrant sample could reflect a greater overall inclination of women to volunteer in social research, especially in the case of women with part-time or home-based jobs or caring responsibilities, which may allow more flexibility to do so (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024a; Parry, Brookfield & Bolton, 2021). Also, evidence shows that migrant women tend to be more active in civic life than migrant men since they get engaged through their children and through schools more often, especially when it comes to women who migrate as accompanying spouses (Pan & Maree, 2023; Studzińska et al., 2023).

The female majority in my sample may also reflect *my own gender positionality*. As a young female student and later a young mother, it was surely more difficult for me to access older male interviewees than (younger) females. I received significantly more responses to my

invitations to participate from females and also the initial contact transformed into interviews more often with women than men, some of whom withdrew. This trend worked regardless of the recruitment channel used. The gender imbalance (and my gender positionality as such) could affect my analysis in the sense that “female-relevant” topics would be prioritised to topics of more relevance or interest to men. Since my analysis approaches the studied phenomena exploratively, evaluating their meaning in context, I had the space to look at my outcomes reflexively and immediately comment on any possible aspects that I considered biased or insufficiently covered by my data.

Section 4.5 Closing Comments on Methodology and Method

In Chapter 4, I situated my research within the interpretivist paradigm, highlighting its focus on the “whats”, but also the “hows” of research participants’ narrated stories – how the research participants interpret what is told, based on the circumstances of what is being told and of the interview situation itself (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011; Mišovič, 2019). I showed that the chosen research design based on semi-structured narrative interviews followed a transnational framework, allowing me to pay attention to ethnic, national or geographic categories applied by the interlocutors, while at the same time not overvaluing their importance (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Rather than hierarchical, clearly delineated questioning scenarios, I approached interviews as horizontal interactional accomplishments with naturally shifting power dynamics, which are dependent on context and the invested positionalities but, in effect, can provide a genuine picture of the participants’ lived experience. Despite aiming for as natural a flow of the conversation as possible, I nevertheless had to make sure key pre-defined topics were covered and that relevant newly emerging topics were examined and possibly incorporated in the following analysis. The logic behind the sampling of the pre-Brexit and post-Brexit sub-samples, comprising 41 and 9 participants, respectively, was explained, and the research participants’ characteristics were outlined. Describing my analytical approach as thematic and conversation qualitative content analysis, I explained that processing the data was predominantly a theory-driven process, but some elements of grounded theory, especially the attention to newly emerging topics and sequential coding, were incorporated in it as well (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In reflecting on the impact of my various positionalities on the interviewing process I explored the dilemma of insider-/outsider-ness, a frequent object of discussion for qualitative methodologists, and the question of power dynamics in interview settings. In my interviews, I observed that my various positionalities interchangeably placed me “inside” and “outside” of the different realms inhabited figuratively or factually by the research participants and simultaneously shifted the implicit power hierarchies between us (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008;

Ryan, 2015b). I identified that while expressing critical opinions of Czechia or the Czech society “back home,” my migrant interlocutors often placed narrative boundaries, such as generational difference, age or education, between the object of their critique and me to be able to speak honestly without worrying they would insult me. In general, I concluded that my primary positionality as a student and the ethos of “helping a student”, as well as shared age and gender (whenever that was the case), seemed to facilitate a relaxed atmosphere in interviews and interviewee frankness. However, my own gender and educational positionalities seemed to be part of the reasons behind bias in the socio-demographic structure of the samples, with female and university-educated participants forming a considerable majority. Discussing the possible implications of these limitations and of participant self-selection, I stated that I had tried to mitigate their effects on the analytical process by compensating with literature triangulation and reflexive commentary where needed.

I believe that I managed to show that the chosen research methodology and design formed an integral part of my scientific “quest,” where the key aim was to access as closely as possible the research participants’ transnational practices and attachments, on the one hand, and the role that political and civic affairs play in their day-to-day lives, on the other. I sought to integrate my theoretical groundwork with my empirical work from the very beginning in order to generate findings that would be both highly relevant to the academic debates in question and intimately true to the participants’ lived experiences. Since all of the conversations had to cover two large thematic bulks – the individuals’ migration trajectories on the one hand and their attitude to civic and political participation on the other – not all of them managed to examine both of the areas in all detail. Sometimes, such detail would require much more time than I could ask of the interviewees. This is because each of them emphasised different issues in their storytelling, and with each single one, the conversation dynamics and the efficiency of responding to questions were different. With hindsight, even my questions were sometimes less clear and less to the point than on other occasions. Though I found this incommensurability of the volume, informativeness and (seeming) quality of the individual interviews frustrating on repeated occasions during the analytical process, in the end, I reconciled myself with it as a necessary aspect of working with qualitative data. In reality, the variedness of the depth and amount of information carried by the individual narratives contributed to covering the research topic in its sheer breadth.

Having reviewed the methodological foundations of the study, I will now move on to the analytical part of the thesis, starting with Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 Moving, Staying and Decision-Making in the Liquid Migration Context⁵¹

Zooming in on the migrant sample, this chapter examines migrants' decision-making in the 'liquid migration context' – the space of the EU where the free movement policy enables virtually unlimited back-and-forth mobility (Drinkwater, Eade & Garapich, 2009; Engbersen & Snel, 2013). It also considers the impact of Brexit on such mobility and migrant decision-making. The analysis breaks down the different factors that influence the reasons for coming to and staying in the UK and the considerations of return or repeated migration, and how these are intertwined with the differentiated embedding in the societies of origin and reception. Besides aspects of the migrant's individual situation and personal characteristics, I show that the conflict between individual agency and dependence (whether the decision to stay was an independent one or not) plays a key role in structuring migrants' embedding and a sense of belonging. The "liquid migration context" will be examined as a factor that may complicate embedding and belonging by undermining the migrants' ability to settle in the receiving country both physically and mentally. By taking a "leap of faith", however, they may exercise their agency over their migration trajectory to obtain a more "grounded life".

Section 5.1 Reasons for Coming, Staying and Leaving

The reasons for coming to the UK and the reasons for staying on a (more or less) long-term basis are often not identical. Most of my migrant research participants' reasons for staying transformed over time and accumulated as they moved up the career ladder, started families or grew accustomed to a new lifestyle and to the norms and values of the receiving society—often all at the same time and in relation to the length of time spent living in the UK. This, in turn, often led to (repeated) extensions of stays (Ryan, 2015a).

The reasons identified for coming and staying can be classified into the following seven categories.

1. *"experience"* (the wish to try living abroad, usually accompanied by the goal of learning English and/or earning and saving money, sometimes described as a needed change in one's life)
2. *studies* (enrolment in a university programme)

⁵¹ This chapter is an extended and adapted version of my article *The Unbearable Lightness of Moving: Czech Migrants Making a Home (or Not) in the UK* (Janurová, 2018).

3. *work* (an economic concern, the aim of obtaining “any job” (Parutis, 2011), preconditioned either by the individual’s aim to earn and save money to use after returning to Czechia, or by a long-term struggle getting by, including experiencing unemployment)
4. *career* (orientation towards socio-economic mobility)
5. *partner* (reunification with or accompanying a partner who prefers to or must live in the UK, usually due to his/her employment)
6. *children* (concern for one’s children’s best interests in terms of education, living environment, language skills, social identification etc.)
7. *social reasons* (living standard, discrimination, social security, life/career prospects, lifestyle, independence, language, social ties, politics, society, mentality, belonging/feeling “at home”)

While *experience*, *studies* and *work* were named more commonly as reasons for coming, *career*, *children* and *social reasons* grew in importance later in the migration trajectory as reasons for staying. The *partner* category was the most stable over time—it was most often given as a reason both for coming and for staying. These findings resonate with other recent studies on CEE migrants in that family and social reasons appear equally or more important than economic reasons, when it comes to the question of staying or leaving (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017; Duda-Mikulin, 2017, 2022; Ryan, 2015a, 2018). Negotiating tensions between family responsibilities and economic commitments leads to varied migration scenarios, which are often at the expense of something or someone, as Běla’s experience indicates:

My plan was to make myself financially secure here and bring my kids over. I kind of knew I was going to stay here. My daughter was already an adult, so I left her the choice of whether she wanted to come with me or not. She didn’t want to, as she was studying at the time. My son was young, but [my mother was taking care of him in Czechia] and we called each other every day. I wanted him to finish primary school and come study here. However, the whole plan changed. In the end, I gave him the choice whether he wants to come or not. And he decided he didn’t want to study here. My daughter’s getting married now, so she’s already living her life, right. So I stayed here on my own and kept sending the money home every month to provide for the kids. I was separated from the kids because of the money. It sounds ugly, but it’s true. [In Czechia] I did multiple jobs. I worked in a supermarket, from there I always went to help out in a pub, two pubs actually, and it was unbearable. I was sleeping five hours a day at most. So it’s about finances. I think everybody who came here went for the finances.

(Běla, in her 40s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2022)⁵²

The participants’ migration plans, both at the beginning of their migration trajectories and at the time of interviewing, particularly whether they planned to return to Czechia or not

⁵² The year in brackets designates the year of interviewing. See chapter 4 and Appendix 2 for more details.

and in what time frame, were structured by the type of reasons they gave for coming and/or staying. For instance, Barbora's original plan was to stay in the UK just for a short temporary period to learn English, gain international experience and earn money, but over time she started to embed in the local social networks, started building up a career she liked, used the opportunity to enrol in a university course as a mature student, found a partner and realised that this whole package and the fact she enjoys the lifestyle she has in the UK are enough to stay put:

I think by the time I started working at the law firm and then started studying, I didn't even think about going back. That's when I kind of settled down, got used to it and then I kind of... I didn't think about it so much anymore, whether I would come back, not come back, how long I wanted to stay. I'm thinking that as long as the work is there, as long as one is happy here, I'm not thinking about going back.

(Barbora, in her 30s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2014)

Zora, together with her Czech partner, also came to the UK with an unclear plan, open to staying if both of them found stable, fulfilling and profitable jobs – which they did. Like Barbora, over the ten years they spent in the UK, they have built up a life they liked, being securely embedded in both informal and professional social networks. However, due to the birth of their first child, they decided to move back to their home town in Moravia in order to be close to their extended family.

I would say that now I feel at home here [in the UK]. Whenever we are in Czechia, of course [the "home" feeling] is there right away, right? When we arrive there, I just get that feeling straight away. But now [I get that feeling] here also a little bit, maybe more and more. Every time we're back home in Czechia, we're looking forward to coming back here, we're already rooted here a little bit.

(Zora, in her 30s, on maternity leave, 10 years in the UK, 2022)

Barbora's and Zora's accounts point to the process of balancing and finding compromises between the reasons for staying and the reasons for leaving, which most of the migrant interviewees engaged in throughout their migration trajectories. The reasons for leaving were often intertwined with the reasons for staying, standing in opposition to them, offering an alternative scenario to the migrants' future professional, family and life(style) trajectories. All of the migrants who had any significant ties remaining in Czechia took their reasons for leaving seriously, even if they were not perceived as strong enough to make them actually leave. They typically included some of the following categories.

1. *family obligations and preferences* (the wish to live closer to one's left-behind relatives – children/grandchildren/parents/other – for various practical and emotional reasons; the need or wish to provide hands-on help and care to ageing parents; the wish for one's children to grow up in Czechia for various reasons)

2. *retirement* (the wish to live in Czechia after retirement was coupled with various factors – typically the geographical proximity of relatives and old friends, a greater accessibility and quality of healthcare in Czechia compared to the UK, and the affordability of a greater standard of living thanks to British pensions)
3. *emotional and social reasons* (nostalgia; homesickness; preference for the “Czech mentality”; richer social ties than in the UK; ability to enjoy a greater standard of living/better social position in Czechia than in the UK; belonging/feeling “at home” in Czechia)

The topic of “feeling at home” was one of my key interview questions. However, even if this question was not (yet) asked, most of the interviewees touched upon it explicitly or implicitly when reflecting about their embedding in the different spheres of life “here” and “there” and trying to express their relationship to either of the societies or countries in question.

The feeling of belonging to the societies of origin and reception, which tends to be less explicitly pronounced and represents a broader scope of emotions than just “feeling at home,” was not influenced by the extent of practical embedding in these societies (through work, social ties, housing situation) or by the reasons for coming, staying or leaving alone. Instead, it derived from the quality and dependability of social ties, feelings of satisfaction with one’s place in one’s referential social circles, and also by whether the migrant’s own agency was behind the decision to stay or whether that decision stemmed from circumstances the migrant saw as ‘external’ to their will. This will be discussed in the following section.

Section 5.2 Stay, Return, or Decide Later? The Role of Agency in Structuring Migrant Belonging and Decision-Making

In this section, I will borrow a few categories from the typology by Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2006), which are instrumental in illustrating differences between migrants based on their reasons for coming, staying and leaving, and the role of individual agency for the feeling of belonging.

5.2.1 Stayers

At the time of interviewing, 24 of my 50 migrant interlocutors were determined to stay in the UK. In total, 19 of them had spouses or long-term partners in the UK and 18 had children. Most migrated in their 20s, some in their 30s and a couple in their 40s. They represent the type of migrant dubbed “stayers” by Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2006) in the sense that

they had already been settled in the UK for a fairly long period (16 of them had lived there for 10 or more years), and generally had achieved notable social mobility in the UK, regardless of their education level and current occupation, both of which varied widely. Most importantly though, most of them were firmly embedded in UK-based social networks and situated the focal point of their working and social lives there (see also “settlers” in Engbersen et al., 2013).

This group included migrants who ended up settling in the UK after an original “trial” stay (original plan was to return), such as those who originally came with an open plan after which they would “see what next”, as well as those who came to the UK with a plan to stay.

For those whose original plan was open or a temporary stay, this always comprised work experience such as a temporary job or internship, mostly coupled with the aim of improving their English and saving money, after which the migrant would return to Czechia to pursue a career there (cf. Isański, Mleczko & Seredyńska-Abou Eid, 2013). Yet, circumstances, such as a long-term job offer, a romance, or the realisation that their living standards or lifestyle in the UK were better than those they would have in Czechia, led to the person staying much longer. In comparison to the reasons for permanent settlement identified by Krisjane, Berzins and Apsite (2013) among Latvian migrants, family or social reasons were given as much importance as economic ones, as the following example shows.

The original plan was that I would go somewhere for six months and improve my English. I had already started looking into job offers [in CZ] (...) The political situation [in CZ] was one of the factors that kept me away from going back. (...) Plus, my English still [wasn't good enough]. I said—it makes no sense going back now because I still haven't learned what I wanted to, I still don't speak as well as I would like to.

(Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in UK, 2014, STAYER)

These research participants describe the story of their staying in the UK as a positive coincidence. An important aspect of these stories that distinguishes them from more ambivalent migrant stories in the sample is the element of “individual agency”; they describe their decision to stay as *fully voluntary and independent*. This voluntariness, as well as the appreciation of the “new opportunity” that the country has given them, is what contributes to their strong feelings of belonging to UK society, as we can read in the following quote.

I didn't finish [university in Czechia]. I decided to stay here (...) I felt after those eight months here that I had started something here and wouldn't have the chance to finish it [if I were to return]. It seemed more important to me than going back to Prague and studying at university. (...) I liked London, I enjoyed everything here, everything was so new and ... when I compared the two options (...), here suddenly everything suited me better somehow. So I decided to stay.

(Daniela, 30s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2014)

Cook, Dwyer and Waite (2010) and Duda-Mikulín (2013) demonstrate that among their CEE research participants too, the prevailing reason they developed a long-term attachment to the UK was that life there had given them a sense of empowerment and dignity. In this sense, migration can be seen as an opportunity for a “silent revolution” in the individual’s self-expression to take place, as their long-term values or interests might be given expression *only as a result of migration* when they had to be held back in the country of origin due to various constraints (e.g., restrictive family expectations, racial prejudice, ostracisation of LGBTQ+⁵³ people, lack of financial resources; see also Pravattiyagul, 2021). Such was the experience of Kašpar and Vanda in my sample.

Kašpar, who was of Roma ethnicity, described his and his family’s settlement in the UK as a life transforming experience. The main reason was the opportunity that the UK has given them to live a “normal” life without being faced with systemic racism and prejudice (Cook, Dwyer & Waite, 2010). Instead of being confined to segregated schools and to hardly finishing primary education, which would have been their reality in Czechia, his children were able to successfully complete mainstream primary, secondary and perhaps even tertiary education in the UK. Kašpar’s own embedding in the British society and labour market was not as smooth though – his English knowledge was mediocre, which is why he was sometimes dependent on his children’s interpreting. He performed various blue-collar jobs for nine years, but at the time of interviewing was already retired due to a chronic health condition. Despite having to rely on state support and manage with a limited budget, he appreciated being able to live “normally” in the UK, compared to the inescapable position of the “other,” discrimination and hardship that he used to face daily in Czechia (Cook, Dwyer & Waite, 2010; Doležalová, 2018).

It's not “golden” in England either, but it's still a bit better than at home. There nobody asks you if you have kids or don't have kids, compared to England. Here [in England] nobody cuts your water off, or electricity or gas and stuff, if there are kids in the house. It's very easy to punish people by law, yeah? The law is a stick, whoever holds the stick in their hand, they just rule. But to make life a little bit easier for those people (...) I've got kids graduating from college here (...) one finished college, he can still go to uni or wherever and he does business. And I haven't put a dime into school in all these years, basically. (...) Because the English are awfully smart, they know, they really hold on to that saying that kids are the future and they invest in them. So (...) whether it's the child of an immigrant or the child of an Englishman, it doesn't matter.

(Kašpar, in his 40s, retired, 11 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

Vanda initially came to the UK temporarily to earn money and improve her English working as an au pair. Even though at that time she was already quite inclined to live abroad (she subsequently applied for an international Masters degree combining university courses in the Netherlands and in Czechia), she was not fully set on the UK as the only option. However,

⁵³ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or gender non-conforming and other.

she “met a guy” in the UK and the acquaintance later brought her to the country for good. Vanda’s decision to get married and stay in the UK was more pragmatic than emotional. She wanted to escape the influence of her mother, whom she described as rather cold and unappreciative, and thought that “nobody else [than her partner at the time] would marry me anyway.” In addition, she really liked the warm relations in her partner’s family and his parents. When she divorced him later on, after having had two children together, and stood on her own for the first time, she paradoxically realised she was at home in the United Kingdom now, embedded in UK-based social networks, while dis-embedded from the ones in Czechia.

I'm at home in England now. I've had many of my firsts here. I got my first car and my first house here, and it's... it's like these big things that just kind of switch the home from Czechia to England. And two kids, right, so it's just different.

Researcher: And at what point would you say that changed? When did you realise that you don't feel at home in Czechia anymore?

I think after I got divorced. I got my own house, and I finally felt at home because back home in Prague, the relationships weren't the best, so it was like, yeah, I had a little room as a kid, but just as one kind of grew up and studied and got to know the world and how other families worked, I suddenly realised that it just wasn't right. And now I've finally just come home and it feels like home. That was probably that, that basic feeling. And that kind of... my relationship with my kids is completely different than what I'm used to from Czechia, from my family.

(Vanda, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

This loyalty to the UK, based on concrete experiences of having been given a chance, “not being let down,” was not a specificity of stayers – the accounts of Mirka (a searcher, see below) who, *due* to her high qualifications and rich experiences, experienced extreme hardship finding a stable job in Czechia, and Jaroslav (a return-wisher), a Roma who moved to the UK with his family to get away from racial discrimination, document similar sentiments.

Well, we live normally, better than in Czechia, that's for sure. Because in Czechia, if [my wife] was this sick, I don't know. Here, when you get into such a situation, the state helps you. Here, it doesn't let you fall down.

(Jaroslav, in his 40s, caring full-time for his wife, working occasionally, 3 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

For those migrants who were already determined to stay in the UK at the outset of their migration trajectories, loyalty to the UK as a state and to its society was an even more straightforward sentiment. In general, they were very positive about their decision. They described the story of their coming to the UK and staying as natural and their reasoning about remaining as clear-cut, like Klára:

I left [for the UK] with the plan to stay. I figured—there's no future [in CZ], OK, so it's time to pack up and go somewhere else, draw a line and start anew.

(Klára, 30s, working, 3 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Most of the stayers cited their career, partners, and children simultaneously as reasons for staying – that is, in the key areas of their lives, they were already embedding in UK-based networks (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022). They were satisfied with their decision to migrate and with the development of their life trajectories since then, which they mostly described as the result of their free, informed choice, a natural part of their career and life development, in which “action, agency, [a person’s own] self-control and (...) perception that ‘migration must be under control’ is clear” (Grabowska, 2016, p. 100–101).

5.2.2 Searchers

The second group of 15 participants were keeping their plans “open” about whether they would stay, return or move elsewhere, though most of them were more inclined to one of the options. Only one of them was married, five were single, one divorced, and eight others were in more or less long-term relationships. All but four in this group were childless. Most had tertiary education and most performed jobs corresponding to their education level and qualifications. The duration of their stay in the UK ranged from seven months to 11 years, and some had already lived in other countries prior to coming to the UK. Eight in this group had come to the UK in their 30s, four in their 20s and three in their 40s and 50s.

This group most resembled the category of “searchers” as defined by Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2006). Like their Polish counterparts, their general reference point was the UK, and they valued the economic and lifestyle opportunities offered by the UK; career and lifestyle/living standard were the most common reasons for staying. They were open to staying, but so far remained neutral about the “geographical placing of their futures” (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017, p. 104), implying an openness to challenge and opportunity (cf. “bi-nationals” in Engbersen et al., 2013). They had strong social ties in both the UK and Czechia and were generally satisfied with the balance, mostly not acknowledging their weakening contact with their extended family and their old friends as a problem (cf. Favell, 2008, p. 203–205).

... when I come to [my birth town], I usually go out with all the friends I am interested in seeing, we talk over everything, and then I leave again. It’s not like we need to call each other all the time.

(Luboš, 20s, working and studying, 3 years in the UK, SEARCHER)

This is the only group in my sample that could be claimed to be deliberately and actively engaged in liquid migration. However, despite having declared that their plans were open, most of them were already at an advanced stage of their careers, which they described in goal-oriented and pragmatic terms. They did not generally resemble “explorers” with no clear vision

of the future and they did not seem to perceive the future as (painfully) uncertain (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017; Grabowska, 2016). Rather, the fact that they were often single and childless or involved in relatively new love relationships seems to be why they did not feel comfortable declaring they were planning to settle somewhere for good. They explicitly or implicitly posited this as a decision they would make later, together with their (potential) life partners.

[My future career plans] depend a lot on whether we stay here or not. Because (...) before [our son] starts going to school, we need to decide whether we'll be here or in Czechia.

(Prokop, in his 40s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

However, in most cases, their work, migration, and life trajectories show that they were ultimately also striving for a “normal”, settled life in a stable relationship and with a family. Mirka stood out from this group by having moved to the UK when she was already in her 50s, was divorced and had an adult daughter (who worked and lived independently). The life cycle stage she was in – not having a family to depend on her – gave her even greater freedom to decide about her future than the younger searchers enjoyed. The case of Mirka resonates with a wider body of research by Lulle and King (2016a, 2016b) on the migration to the UK of another mature-age group (Latvian women) who achieve economic and personal empowerment through migrating and working in later life. Despite being inclined to return to Czechia to be close to her potential future grandchildren, the career satisfaction and economic stability that Mirka was finally given through migration were very strong reasons for her to stay in the UK for an indefinite period, even despite her partner's longing to return to Czechia.

Researcher: Are you thinking about returning to Czechia?

Well, that's a question, because I also expect to have grandchildren someday. I don't know how I would manage [living so far away from them]. But I don't know. I'm afraid that the Czech state, as it hasn't helped me in anything so far, won't help me in retirement either. (...) My partner would move right back to Czechia. He's already said that he would support me [financially] if we moved back. (...) Except it always looks good in theory, like when I moved to Prague, it looked good in theory that I could get a job easily in Prague because there are lots of jobs available. But you're not going to get one. If we were 100% sure [we would find jobs in Czechia], I'm sure he could talk me into it quickly. I'd have an awfully hard time giving up what I have here, but we could move. But I'm afraid that after the experience I've had with the system in the Czech state, with us falling through all the safety nets, and there's no one there to help you with the simplest thing. (...) There are a lot of nonprofits and a lot of agencies and stuff. But if I tell them – “you're the unemployment office, I just need to find a job,” they'll say, “We've got ads posted over there.”

(Mirka, in her 50s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2022, SEARCHER)

All but one of the searchers declared they came to the UK with an “open” plan. Their reasons for coming were diverse, including work, children, a partner, gaining experience, studying, divorce, or discrimination. Their reasons for staying were often different from the ones they had for coming, but they were relatively uniform across the group as such, in most

cases relating to their career, partner, lifestyle, and living standard, like in the case of stayers. Like the stayers, they also generally portrayed their migration trajectories as a product of their own agency and evaluated them positively. What differentiated them from the stayers was their unwillingness to characterise their stay in the UK as definite. This was primarily because most of them were not bound by family responsibilities or by love relationships that would keep them in the UK – rather, they were often eager to show they would be willing to move (anywhere) if a serious reason appeared. Also, despite their multifaceted embedding in UK-based networks, they were still embedding more actively in Czechia-based relationships than the stayers. Even though, on the one hand, this supports the side of the debate over intentional unpredictability that sees liquid and “Eurostar” migration as a liberating project of personal development (Favell 2008, p. 3–9), it must be stressed that most searchers demonstrably hoped for a relatively stable future.

5.2.3 Return-Wishers

The last group, comprising 11 interviewees, were those who wanted to return. Most of them were married or in relationships, two were divorced. All but three in this group had children. Six had tertiary education, four secondary, and one primary. They had been in the UK between 3 and 11 years. The group was quite evenly divided as to the age at migration: some moved in their 20s, some in their 30s, and some in their 40s. Only three performed specialist jobs corresponding to their tertiary education or requalification, four were homemakers, three had domestic/caring jobs they were overqualified for, and one was unemployed with only occasional work contracts. None of them was a “hamster” or “stork” type of migrant in the sense of Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2006) or a “circular” migrant as described by Engbersen et al. (2013).

Their reasons for staying were primarily partners, children, or social, and they all had been based in the UK for a relatively long time. Paraphrasing Bygnes and Erdal (2017, p. 109), their situation could be described rather as “working in the UK, living in Czechia”. Despite embedding in the UK in some key spheres of their lives, they still clung strongly to their Czech social ties. They fostered rich transnational ties with their friends and family in Czechia through frequent and long phone and Skype calls, e-mailing, and Facebook messaging. They looked at returning as their ultimate dream but did not see it as very realistic. The only exception to this pattern was Zora, who was fully satisfied with her life in the UK in terms of career progression, earnings and lifestyle, as well as embedding in various social networks. After ten years in the UK, she and her husband decided to return to Czechia, mainly because they wished to enjoy the proximity of their parents and help with taking care of their first child.

There were three notable respects in which this group was different from Bygnes and Erdal's (2017) Polish interviewees. First, none of them was single or separated from their nuclear family in Czechia. For the two divorced participants, the key motivation for returning was the security of a familiar environment and the welfare protection that they (being in their 40s and 50s) anticipated they would enjoy in retirement after having experienced a change of career abroad. The rest of the return-wishers were living with their partners, most of whom had a stable job in the UK, and most often also with their children, some of whom were of school age and enrolled in British education institutions.

Second, the prevailing motivation for returning in this group was not straightforwardly the fulfilment of a short-term plan to accumulate capital. Even though everyone in this group had originally come to the UK for a temporary stay or with an open plan, all but the two divorced ones eventually ended up reconsidering it and agreeing to remain in the mid- to long term, usually in the interests of their partners and/or children, as illustrated by Jaroslav:

See, I am here mainly because of [my children]. If it wasn't for them, maybe I would have been back home a long time ago. But mainly ... because I know they have a future ahead of them, you know? For example at school (...), they are managing much better now.

(Jaroslav, in his 40s, caring full-time for his wife, working occasionally, 3 years in the UK, 2014,
RETURN-WISHER)

However, despite having invested a lot of effort, time, and money into this new project, all of them were disappointed with life in the UK, which is why in their contemplations of the future, they turned back to their original intention to return and to the safety net of old friendships and family contacts back home (cf. Bartošová, 2019; Moskal, 2013). This disappointment was connected to a set of negative experiences, such as a lack of success in establishing themselves on the British labour market (deskilling, unstable contracts), a sense of uprootedness, non-acceptance and estrangement from British society, and social isolation, as illustrated in the following quote by Ilona.

For me—and for my husband too—it is important to have some social status. And that we can never have here with our Eastern European accent. The English are so politically correct, they don't show it that much, but you can feel it (...) even at my husband's workplace all the bosses are English, even though in general the employees are from everywhere (...) but even my husband, who thinks about this much less than I do, sometimes says, "you know, us from the East, they will never take us seriously".

(Ilona, in her 40s, homemaker, 9 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

This sense of alienation was sometimes amplified by a lack of English language skills and/or homesickness, as expressed by Olga:

We're not doing bad. We have everything we need. But (...) I am terribly homesick. I am that type. I think it is also due to my age. (...) I think I am too old to adjust. I don't know. Even though (...) I always had to be active (...) I was ambitious, I still discovered that home is home, right? That my home is there [in Czechia], not here. Even though I have my home here with [my British partner], I am still at home there, I feel my home is there, even though my parents aren't living anymore.

(Olga, in her 40s, homemaker, 6 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

Third, these interviewees differed from Bygnes and Erdal's in that the reason they could not return was not (primarily) a lack of economic opportunities or bad social security conditions. The situation in the Czech labour market and the provisions offered by the Czech welfare state were not as dire as those Bygnes and Erdal (2017) described in Poland and Spain, and, especially in the migrants' own perceptions, they did not represent such significant barriers. Rather, the highly skilled interviewees in this group had difficulty finding a fulfilling job in the UK and were confident they would find one in Czechia easily (cf. Aure, 2013). In most cases, they were "stuck" in the UK because their partners (some of whom were Czech and some British) could not or did not want to move to Czechia. Ilona's quote vividly illustrates the mixture of frustration and helplessness.

[My plan is to return to Czechia], but my [Czech] husband disagrees with this. He wants to stay longer. But that's not a rational decision, I think. (...) That won't bring anyone any benefit, just potential complications for the children's education. (...) The money, that's one thing. And the second thing is, he doesn't like changing things that work well and says—[what] if they fire me? (...) And I think that subconsciously he's also worried about how we could live in Czechia. He has become very critical of the situation there.

(Ilona, in her 40s, homemaker, 9 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

As in the case of migrants who feel more at home in the UK and are more satisfied with their trajectories, there are various factors that contribute to the return-wishers' troubled feelings about belonging (language barrier, labour market failures, ethnic discrimination, social isolation, age etc.). However, the crucial difference is that most of the narratives describe their *personal will* being overridden by *someone else's* (a partner's or children's) *will* or the family's 'objective' well-being. The decision to come or stay because of a romance, discrimination, or unemployment is being blamed for the participants' having given up their independence, career prospects, social ties, interests, or their own well-being (*losing "control"*), which is a fact they now sometimes regret (cf. Duda-Mikulín, 2017). These migrants' reactions to the question of where they feel "at home" were the most ambivalent, as in the following quote (see also Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

If you have lived here for more than three years, you start being so ambivalent about it that you don't know anymore. And either you decide to go back, or you stay, and you waver. I don't know. I have it half-half now, because the father of my daughter and his family are here. (...) I think home is both here and in Czechia. I can't say there is just one home.

This reveals that what seems to steer the migrants' sense of belonging in the host society is whether they identify with their reasons for staying or perceive them as external to their own will, imposed on them by circumstances or by another person. Not identifying with the reasons for staying arises when there is a disparity between the migrant's subjective preferences in the question of whether to stay or return and the *accepted* reasons for staying. Agency is thus an important structuring factor in migration decision-making because it establishes a sense of empowerment, of having the migration project "under control", and thus contributes to a feeling of self-satisfaction and subjective well-being (Duda-Mikulin, 2017). If a migrant perceives his/her migration trajectory primarily as a result of having given up their agency in favour of someone or something else, that is, if their sacrifice to someone else's well-being is their only anchor in the receiving society, then it sooner or later becomes difficult to develop a sense of belonging to that society (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). As the presented quotes imply, this mental process does not stand alone. It is influenced by other aspects of the individual's migration situation and personal characteristics, such as length of stay in the host country, age at the time of migration, job satisfaction, access to social networks, value identification, or a person's individual temperament, the effects of which might be difficult to disentangle. Hence, a migrant whose primary reason to stay was a partner or children but who developed his/her own career and/or a reliable net of social ties in the receiving society might be absolutely satisfied with staying since the experience of success and awareness of their own ability to get by "on their own" in the receiving society, provides them with multiple anchors (like e.g. the stayers Vanda and Daniela) (cf. Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). *Agency*, regardless of the combination of sources behind it, thus seems to be *the key difference* behind the return-wishers' and the two previous groups' attitudes to staying.

The next section will deepen this argument by investigating yet another factor complicating embedding and thus the development of the feeling of belonging — the "liquid migration context", which lies in the background of the factors listed to this point.

Section 5.3 The Lightness of Moving and the Heaviness of Taking the Leap

The above overview of the three types of migrants identified in my analysis echoes the findings of Bygnes and Erdal (2017) that living a "grounded", settled life, as opposed to one characterised by uncertainty and an unpredictable future, is the ultimate desire of most "older" adult migrants, regardless of whether they see their future in the host or the home country, elsewhere, or in a geographically (as yet) unspecified space. My findings thus support Bygnes

and Erdal's conclusion that "liquid migration," that is, the ability to move between countries according to one's needs, facing relatively low legal and administrative constraints, is the legal and administrative *context* in which their migration and life trajectories must be analysed, rather than examining it as a chosen strategy or lifestyle (2017, p. 114). Even though the "liquid migration context" tends to be perceived primarily as an inherent characteristic of the EU/Schengen space, effectively, it was present in the background of both the pre-Brexit and post-Brexit interviews that I conducted since all of my post-Brexit interviewees already had either British citizenship or settled status sorted and thus were not troubled by residential status insecurity (the role of residential status in migrants' negotiations of belonging and migration decision-making will be discussed in the next chapter).

A problem arises when a migrant's notion of a "grounded life" is based on or tied to a return, but the return does not take place for the reasons described above. Such migrants might end up being "trapped in liquid migration", not necessarily because they are being forced by economic factors to remain mobile, as described by Bygnes and Erdal (2017), but in the sense that they are physically living in the UK, but mentally are being pulled back to Czechia. This "trap" can be avoided in two ways: first, by reversing the situation (e.g., by convincing one's partner to move to Czechia), and second, by embracing the status quo as the best of all options and committing oneself to living a "full" life in the receiving country; a change of attitude that will now be described as a "*leap of faith*."

Contemplating return was a common feature in all the narratives. Although few research participants considered return realistic, most of them harboured some such idea, considering it either the last resort if their migration plans failed or as a kind of fantasy (the "myth of return"; Anwar, 1979), as illustrated in the following quote from Blanka – a stayee.

Researcher: Do you sometimes think about returning to Czechia?

Sometimes, when something upsets me [*laughter*]. Recently I started to think that I could leave everything and go (...) take over my father's job. I was depressed about working in a huge company where things change constantly (...). So, I had this period when I thought—I'll do the exams, take over dad's clients (...). But those are rather fantasies.

(Blanka, 40s, working, 13 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

A constant awareness of the possibility of returning sometimes had the effect of complicating a migrant's feeling of belonging in British society. As the following quotes suggest, in cases when it was not the migrant's personal decision to stay, putting up with actually staying was difficult because the person was not able to definitively move to one place or the other, both physically and mentally. Instead of serving as a source of opportunities, the "liquid migration context" thus rather acted as a "trap", complicating the migrants' feelings of

belonging to both societies and, in effect, causing a sense of in-betweenness detrimental to their subjective well-being.

I think we have it harder [than people who were virtually forced to migrate due to discrimination and enduring unemployment in their home country] in that we can choose whether we stay or go back.

(Ilona, in her 40s, homemaker, 9 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

Originally, I came to the UK for a new experience and to learn English. However, the family [me and my partner] worked for asked whether we would like to stay longer. Then I started to study at a university, so it was better to stay in the UK, and in the meantime, the economic crisis started in Europe, and we had a secure job in the UK but not (...) in Czechia. In the end (...), we are [constantly] looking forward to returning home but are constantly postponing it.

(Zdena, in her 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2015, RETURN-WISHER)

Zdena was not the only one who described her stay in the UK just as a repeated extension of her original temporary visit, which is a typical effect of the liquid migration context (Ryan, 2015a; Uherek & Beranská, 2024). This points to the role of (not) taking a determined stand on (the length of) one's migration or, effectively, (not) deciding where one *wants to belong*, letting one's agency be overruled by circumstances (getting caught up in one's "non-choice"; Lacroix, 2013), as Olga's case illustrates.

... I still believe we will [one day] live in Czechia. But I don't know what to do because there are some good things and some bad things here and in Czechia [too]. I'm just confused. I don't know. I'm afraid of going back, and at the same time, I want to be there.

(Olga, in her 40s, homemaker, 6 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

A gradual extension of the stay in the host country—along with changing reasons for staying and changing individual life plans—can sometimes occur almost “unconsciously” (Ryan, 2015a). Hence, it is important whether the migrant maintains a homeland orientation and avoids “mentally” settling in the host country or, conversely, whether the migrant embraces the host country as his/her new *home* and forms a (new) *feeling of belonging* and thus also a sense of psychological well-being. For this transition to occur, the migrant has to take a “leap of faith.”

I use the term “leap of faith” to describe the mental act of committing oneself to establishing a “full” life in the country of settlement—in other words, of allowing the possibility of re-migrating to the country of origin to become just a formal aspect of the migration experience, instead of a real, repeatedly contemplated option. Whether or not a migrant has taken a leap of faith very much relates to how seriously they consider returning. Even though the collected narratives provide only a few specific quotes to illustrate this literally, the overall message of the individual stories shows that this leap can occur years or even just a few months after

migrating, before migrating, or never. I will now try to illustrate the role this leap of faith plays using a few examples from my sample.

While Marek claims not to have yet decided whether he would stay in the UK “for good”, he seems to be fully embedded in British society and describes the UK as his mental and material ‘home’, in contrast to the nostalgic home that his parents’ house and familiar spots in Czechia represent for him. The practical aspects of his life have made him accept the UK as the place he belongs.

Researcher: When did you realise you would probably stay here?

I haven’t yet. But ... let’s put it this way. We have a [pre-school daughter], my wife is black, so in Czechia it surely wouldn’t be ideal for them. (...) I would like for [my daughter] to learn English perfectly, which means she must go to an English school. (...) [Recently, my mother] asked me, “are you ever going to return?” And I said, “I don’t know”. And now, well, this week, I am going to buy a house. (...) Which means, I must [earn money in the UK] for at least 15, 20 years, so I can pay the mortgage. So, this is how it is.

(Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Martina’s case represents an example of a migrant having taken a leap of faith on behalf of her children and feeling “grounded”, despite her troubling experience of having few social ties, poor language skills, and repeated difficulty finding a stable job.

I miss many things, but home is here. Home is, I have my own [rented] house here, I got used to it, I take it this way, that I have something of my own here. (...) I am happy to be in one place. The only thing I am interested in is the future of my children, their upbringing, and the area we live in. (...) I got used to living here a lot.

(Martina, in her 30s, working, 3 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Běla expressed leap of faith the most succinctly.

I found peace in my mind here.

(Běla, in her 40s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

Conversely, Jaroslav, whose experience was similar to Martina’s in the respects indicated above, provides an example of someone who has not taken a leap of faith.

We [our family] are at home [in Czechia]. We live here [in the UK], but we are not at home here. Still ... we still have one foot in Czechia, if you think about it.

(Jaroslav, in his 40s, caring full-time for his wife, working occasionally, 3 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

The stories of Ilona, Marta, Olga, Zdena, and other return-wishers outlined above could serve as further examples of migrants who have not taken a leap of faith. On the other hand,

Vilém, a stayer whose migration experience has been marked by homelessness, poor language skills, and family break-up, is a clear illustration of a migrant who has determinedly embraced the UK as his new home.

... I would not go back to Czechia, you know? I bought a house here, all this—and I used to be homeless! All straight. No fraud, all straight. I sweated it out.

(Vilém, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

My findings regarding “leap of faith” add an important component to the picture of the complexity of influences that structure what I have called *belonging* in this thesis. They show that migrant psychological well-being depends on whether they have their migration trajectories *under control*. Taking a conscious “leap of faith” is one way of avoiding the “trap of liquid migration” and thus of exercising personal agency over one’s perception of staying in the host country, even if it cannot be exercised over the migration trajectory as such, and thereby achieving a more “grounded” life abroad. This might bring about dis-embedding from some Czechia-based networks, but for sure, it means embedding in UK-based networks more deeply by embracing their significance for one’s future better mental well-being (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016, 2018; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022).

Section 5.4 Concluding Remarks Regarding Migration Decision-Making in the Context of “Liquidity”

The intra-EU migration environment is particularly fruitful for analysing migrant transnational living in that its “semi-internal” character provides for truly “liquid”, trial-and-error mobility that involves relatively little time costs and low economic risk (Eade, Drinkwater & Garapich, 2006). Even though migration from the EU to post-Brexit Britain and back is now more constrained by a visa regime, it is still a manageable project and an easy one for those with indefinite leave to remain or British citizenship, as represented in my post-Brexit sample. However, as this chapter has shown, even people who are virtually free to move “there and back” within spaces that are culturally and socially related negotiate multiple engagements. Their subjective well-being may suffer either if, against their own will, they are not able to return, or if they are not able to “make a permanent move” (Moskal, 2013). As a result, they develop few anchors in the receiving society, which leaves them in a constant feeling of insecurity and unfulfilled-ness and their embedding in the receiving society remains “shallow” (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022).

Even though some Czech migrants might engage in genuinely “liquid migration”, and deliberately keep their options ‘open’, this chapter suggests that that this is often just a phase

in the migration trajectory, which is likely to be replaced by a desire for a more predictable, settled life, with a fulfilling career, social ties, and in a society one identifies with (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017). The analysis of the Czech migrants' reasons for coming to and particularly staying in the UK has shown that their migration motives are rarely primarily economic, as has repeatedly been claimed about CEE intra-EU migrants (Drinkwater & Garapich, 2015). While economic reasons might trigger their international mobility, family and various social reasons seem to play a decisive role when it comes to the question of staying, returning, or postponing return. Based on just the data at hand, it cannot be said whether Czech intra-EU migrants are significantly different from other CEE migrant populations in their migration decision-making. Rather, this chapter suggests that migrants' priorities transform with time spent in the destination, along with the migrant's life cycle stage and occupational situation.

The process of nurturing a sense of belonging in the countries of origin and reception is always structured by a series of factors. These include the migrants' personal characteristics and aspects of their individual migration situations, such as age at the time of migration or the length of stay. However, at play are also external circumstances and the mental processes by which the migrants either actively and independently exercise their agency or let it be overrun by feelings of inability and dependence. When a migrant perceives his/her long-term or permanent stay in the receiving country as a decision taken voluntarily, with his/her agency, then he/she seems to be more likely to develop a sense of belonging in the receiving society. On the other hand, not identifying with the reasons for staying tends to hinder the development of a sense of belonging in the host society, bolstering the migrant's attachments to the country of origin (Duda-Mikulin, 2017; Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016).

While a certain level of undecidedness about whether one will return to one's country of origin one day can be observed in most migrants' thinking, the migrants who take a "leap of faith" with regard to settling in the host country both physically and mentally seem to be more satisfied, as it empowers them to work towards a more "grounded" life, instead of getting "trapped in liquid migration" (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017). The finding that some migrants will always yearn to return despite being settled long-term in their destination should not, however, always be understood as an inability to decide whether to stay or to go on their part. It can also be the result of dissatisfaction in various spheres of their lives, the tendency of migrants to idealise homecoming and their homeland, and probably also their personal temperament. The mental act of taking a "leap of faith" to (re-)gain agency over one's migration trajectory in cases when staying is (to some extent) involuntary might be a way out of this dilemma – intentionally building a missing anchor for oneself to feel more confident about staying on (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016).

This chapter highlights the importance of viewing migrant decision-making as intertwined with the preferences and needs of their family members and of distinguishing between their individual agency and their respect for other members of their household in order to uncover the inconspicuous private power hierarchies that may explain the dilemmas of belonging (Czaika, Bijak & Prike, 2021; Hoang, 2011; Ryan & Sales, 2013). Although family, love, or various social factors often serve as key motives for migration or for staying on, they rarely suffice on their own to satisfy a migrant's need for personal fulfilment (e.g. Aure, 2013; Duda-Mikulin, 2017). However, if dependent migrants are able to find opportunities to realise themselves economically and socially, this may help them (re-)gain agency and develop a feeling of belonging in the host society. The next chapter builds on the findings presented here by studying the role of citizenship, residential status and identification as potential roots of belonging. Then, Chapter 7 addresses the role of civic and political participation in the processes of embedding and belonging.

Chapter 6 Citizenship, Residential Status and (Supra-) National Identification as Roots of Belonging

Being one of the key spheres of embedding and anchoring in a state and its society, citizenship and residential status determine the access to diverse resources, including electoral participation and other forms of civic and political participation, and influence the migrant's concept of temporality with respect to their stay in the host country (Duda-Mikulin, 2017; Mas Giralt, 2020). In addition, the collected narratives provide evidence that framing one's self-conception in terms of nationality is a habit common to all the migrants interviewed, despite differences in their future plans, views on migration, diversity or cosmopolitanism, or their self-presentations with regard to these issues. Hence, this chapter precedes the analysis of migrant political and civic participation by examining how migrants' negotiations of belonging and self-identification relate to their citizenship and residential status, the importance they ascribe to having the citizenship(s) of any of the countries concerned, and the emotional and practical aspects attached to this. In this thesis, belonging represents the multiple and continuously transforming self-identifications the migrants hold with respect to their demographic characteristics and their socio-economic positioning within the (trans)national and local contexts they live in (Anthias, 2009; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). In migrant narratives, ethnic, national and geopolitical self-identifications (as Czech, British, European, international, Londoner, cosmopolitan, etc.) or the negotiations thereof tend to be as pronounced as identifications with other groups and communities (family, school class, neighbourhood community, workplace community, profession, lifestyle subculture, age cohort, gender etc.).

Section 6.1 The Role of Citizenship and Residential Status in Cultivating a Sense of Belonging

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the migrants' often complex feelings of (non-) belonging to the societies concerned are intertwined with their attitudes to the question of staying, returning or moving on. Therefore, the previously presented threefold typology of stayers, searchers and return-wishers will be referred to as a pattern according to which the migrants' civic self-identifications and negotiations of (formal) belonging are analysed, and, like in the preceding chapter, in the quotes that follow, each participant will be categorised as one of the three types. There were proportionally more holders of British citizenship among stayers (five out of 24) than among searchers (one out of 15) and return-wishers (one out of 11). Notably, most of the stayers who did not have British citizenship yet, mentioned they were

planning to apply for it or were in the application process at the moment (11). In contrast, return-wishers and searchers more often only had Czech citizenship and did not consider applying – either because they were considering leaving anyway or because they did not see any major practical advantages in having it.

Controverting the academic caution against using citizenship and nation-state framing as givens in migration and transnationalism research (Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2009; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003), ethnic and national categories were repeatedly used by the interviewees in the collected narratives, showing that they bear major relevance to the migrants' meaning-making about themselves and their social context (Botterill & Hancock, 2019; Sime & Behrens, 2023). Citizenship status was referred to as a natural attribute, a strategic tool, as well as a sentimental tie (cf. de Silva, 2023). The following quotes illustrate a common shortcut the migrants often used to explain and assess cultural differences between people in Czechia and in the UK – positing “us” Czechs against “them” Brits, English people or, for instance, “people in the West”. That sometimes happened even if they implicitly distanced themselves from the characteristics they ascribed to “us Czechs”, like Ilona.

We Czechs... we swear at corruption, we swear at it, but at the same time we are very tolerant of it. There is corruption [in the United Kingdom] too, but when it is revealed, those [politicians] have to resign. (...) We [Czechia] are a small country. Maybe that affects us too, our self-confidence. However, I think we Czechs have a big ego, and that's a bad thing too, right? It's not good in anybody, neither in a nation nor in an individual.

(Ilona, in her 40s, homemaker, 9 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER, own emphasis)

In their pondering about self-identification, the research participants often mirrored their civic and ethnic self-perceptions against the categories they felt as being placed in by their surroundings. Like Mirka in the following quote, the interviewees quite often expressed a certain restlessness about such misplacements and an urge to be placed correctly.

*I have a Zoom profile, and for example, during my [online] English classes, I have my name written there with “Czech Republic” in brackets, and a lot of these lessons start like this – “introduce yourself”. Because many people don't know where Czechia is and many people are able to tell me that it's *Eastern*⁵⁴ Europe. Even geographically, not only geopolitically.*

(Mirka, in her 50s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2022, SEARCHER, own emphasis)

Narratives across the migrant sample included bittersweet stories about how people in the UK or elsewhere in the “West” routinely still hold Czechia for “Czechoslovakia,” sometimes without actually realising the countries split in the 1990s. Like in Mirka's account, stories about

⁵⁴ As opposed to “Central” Europe, implying that she perceives “central” Europe as different (more advanced) to “eastern” Europe in political terms.

the Brits' (or other foreigners') geographical and political misplacements of Czechia were also common and often met with certain annoyance.

[My English partner's] mom was worried that I was working for the KGB or something, that I was Russian. Because they think of us Czechs here as Russians, some of them, that we're spies or something. Yeah? So his mom goes like, we always laugh about it: "Watch out for her, she might be a spy or something!" She didn't know... they don't even know where Czechia is. I think 70% of English people don't know where Czechia is. That always makes me really angry. And yet it's so close. Germany, everybody knows where Germany is. But when you say Prague, a lot of people know that Prague is beautiful, right? (...) But they just think of us as Czechoslovakia (...) Yeah? So, you have to explain it to them. Or if you tell them "Czechia", some people think it's somewhere in Africa, somewhere near Africa, somewhere near China. That's happened to me before. (...) And yet, it's so close to here! What do they learn in schools here?

(Olga, in her 40s, homemaker, 6 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

Various narratives showed that the research participants repeatedly confront situations when they are asked about their nationality, origin or mother tongue, which serve as an impetus to continuously contemplate their own identities in civic or ethnic terms and reflect on their emotional attachments to their nationality and country of origin (Vertovec, 2001). Such situations may remind them of their otherness in terms of the tension between their accent in English, or even their habits or looks, and their wish to be perceived as part of the majority, their acquired British citizenship or intended naturalisation (cf. Samaluk, 2016). At the same time, they catalyse considerations of citizenship applications, return and other practical strategies associated with embedding and belonging in the various local and transnational fields they are part of (Botterill & Hancock, 2019). The following quotes by Filip and Luboš illustrate these contemplations, as well as the subtle differences in the migrants' reasoning.

When asked, I usually specify it right away. I say I am from Czechia, but live in England. (...) I am no super staunch patriot in the sense that I'd say I am Czech and from Czechia all the time and never mentioned England, right? England is an essential part of my life, and I already also have dual citizenship, and that is not just for practical reasons, so I could vote and have government protection in places where Czechia does not have representation. (...) I applied only when Czechia started allowing dual citizenship, so I didn't have to give up the Czech passport. (...) [Had this not changed] I would probably not have applied because the advantages are relatively marginal.

(Filip, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

No, getting British citizenship isn't tempting for me at all. There's no reason for it. (...) I feel Czech, and I will never feel British. I feel fine here, but I am Czech and will always be Czech. Or Moravian.

(Luboš, in his 20s, working and studying, 3 years in the UK, 2014, SEARCHER)

The difference between Filip's eagerness to have both Czechia and "England"⁵⁵ formally represented in his citizenship status and Luboš's adherence to "Czechness" reflect the length of time each of them had spent in the UK at the time of interviewing, the extent to which each of them was embedded in social networks in the UK and Czechia, and, in turn, their emotional ties to the two countries. Despite both being searchers, claiming to be ready to move to another country or back to Czechia if serious professional or relationship reasons came up, Filip already felt so settled in the UK that he did not posit relocation as very likely, while Luboš clearly was undecided yet. This contrast shows the ways in which *citizenship status serves as both a utilitarian and an emotional tie or a form of embedding*.

A multiplicity of factors, strategic decisions and emotions is invested in migrants' negotiations of their civic embedding and the sense of belonging, and they often contradict one another, as documented by the following accounts.

[My home] is here [in the UK], absolutely four-square. Here. I would never in my life go back. I don't know what I should return to. That's why I don't speak Czech to my children, but English, because I know they won't need Czech. (...) It would have been different if my husband were Czech. That's something completely different because we would have family there, we would speak Czech at home, and we would go there for holidays. But since he is British, we go to the sea for holidays or somewhere. And we speak English at home, of course. (...) I have Czech citizenship. (...) I don't plan on getting the British for one single reason. Everywhere I come and open my mouth, I have an accent, and everybody knows (...) I am not British and never will be. I'd probably be embarrassed if I showed my passport and then – excuse me. So, I don't know, probably not. (...) I am proud to be Czech. I would not change my citizenship. If you live somewhere, it does not mean you have to change your citizenship right away.

(Kateřina, in her 20s, homemaker, 8 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER, own emphasis)

Kateřina's decisive refusal of the idea of applying for British citizenship and an emphasis on her national identification might seem paradoxical in the context of her devotedness to a UK-based existence. The reference to her self-consciousness with regard to a foreign accent in English, however, reveals that migrant identity is often composed of conflicting embeddings which cannot always be banished or hidden and, thus, are more easily dealt with if postulated as an asset. In this regard, Jana's reflection on her citizenship status strongly resembled Kateřina's.

My children have both citizenships, because they were born here. I can also have both now, right, but I'm keeping it this way [*laughter*]. I'm going to keep my Czech citizenship for now.

⁵⁵ "England", where most research participants lived, was their common reference point, rather than the "United Kingdom". Sometimes, they even used the term "England" as a shortcut term, even if, in reality, they meant the "United Kingdom" as a whole.

I'm Czech and I'll be Czech. Everybody always knows it when I speak here, everybody knows I'm not British. And I'm not ashamed of it.

(Jana, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Considering the fact that Jana had already been living in the UK for 17 years at the time we spoke and had experienced a period when Czechia was not yet a member of the European Union, her statement suggests that apart from being “proud to be Czech”, she also felt very safe in terms of her residential status and the right to stay in the UK. This was in part thanks to being married to a British citizen and having been granted the indefinite leave to remain based on her marriage status already before Czechia’s EU accession, but in part also to the fact that she had a stable job and income and good socio-economic status.

I did not get the chance to speak to Luboš, Kateřina or Jana close to or after Brexit to see whether they were still living in the UK at that time and to verify whether the change of conditions affected their reasoning about the acquisition of British citizenship. Examining the accounts of the research participants who have lived in the UK the longest suggests that the longer the time spent in the receiving country, the deeper the embedding in its society and its various systems, increasing the motivation to apply for citizenship. Hence, all of them might have changed their minds eventually. However, embedding also includes stabilising one’s position in the residential system, meaning that being married to a British citizen, Kateřina would have had indefinite leave to remain and been entitled to settled status, and the same would apply to both her and Luboš (regardless of marital status) based on having spent 10 or more years working legally in the UK. This means citizenship could continue representing a primarily emotional tie for them, as was the case for Jana (see Chapter 2). This differentiated them from some of the more recent incomers to the UK in the pre-Brexit sub-sample, whom I interviewed closer to Brexit. These migrants perceived their opportunities of staying in the UK as more compromised by the looming Brexit referendum and/or Brexit, as will be shown below, especially when their economic situation was not completely stable.

The migrants’ strategic decisions with regard to citizenship also differed in terms of the importance they ascribed to having particular citizenship, reflecting primarily their economic, residential and social (in)securities. Daniela, who had a stable career, a high income and a broad network of reliable social ties in the UK, seemed quite relaxed in her contemplations of the future. So was also her perception of the (non-)importance of having British citizenship, and, in line with it, her acceptance that applying for it might be a useful strategy.

I have a Czech passport, but at the moment I am in the middle of filling in the application for the British passport. (...) I let it be for very long because, as an EU citizen, you can apply for it already after five years of permanent residence here. I could have gotten it a long time ago, but I wasn’t really interested. And I don’t need it now either. It was, in fact, my mum’s idea

that I should have it sorted in case I had children sometime soon, so they could have British citizenship. I don't know about other advantages it could have for me.

(Daniela, in her 30s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Contrastingly, Soňa faced insecurity in both Czechia, where she and her family had experienced perpetual racism and discrimination as Roma, and in the UK, where she did not encounter racism but struggled with social isolation as a stay-at-home mother caring for a young child, with few social ties and limited English language skills, dependent on social benefits and her partner's income. Her determination to settle in the UK was the option that offered better prospects, though it was not an easy one (see Section 2.2.2; Doležalová, 2018).

It's stupid because gypsies, we're all Czechs, right. I have Czech citizenship; I don't consider myself as if I'm something else. I was born there, and it's just home to me. And now, take it that we can't be at home; we had to leave our own home to live somewhere we don't want to, but we just have to.

(Soňa, in her 20s, homemaker, 1 year in the UK, 2014, SEARCHER)

Even though some negotiations of one's citizenship status and its significance in the process of embedding were present in most of the narratives, there was some difference between the migrants as to the extent to which citizenship was viewed as a practical tool or a sentimental tie, corresponding to their plans or wishes regarding staying, returning or keeping options open (see also Fernández-Reino & Sumption, 2023). The stayers who did not have British citizenship and did not want to apply for it generally seemed confident about it. They all presented it as their voluntary decision, suggesting they felt in control of the situation, in correspondence with their overall feeling of agency and satisfaction with life in the UK, as discussed in Chapter 5. However, in some cases, they admitted that they had considered the application but assessed the practical requirements (price, language test, citizenship test) as too demanding. Such ambiguous reflections of one's citizenship status and national identification like Soňa's, including the image of being involuntarily torn between two worlds and references to various barriers to embedding "here" or "there", were shared by some of the return-wishers and searchers.

Overall, as the quotes above show, my research participants were very reluctant about stating that they identify as or "feel" British/English and more so about putting these identifications in connection with their (intended) naturalisation. Of the whole sample, only Daniela and Kateřina conceded they already felt to be "half-half", specifying they had adopted various British/English habits, ways of thinking or conduct, and felt comfortable in what they perceived as the British part of their identity. Despite this, Kateřina did not find it quite right to have British citizenship herself due to her impostor feelings, and Daniela perceived her naturalisation intention as purely a strategic step. The remaining migrants who already had

British citizenship or intended to apply for it also described their decision to naturalise as motivated predominantly by practical concerns, sometimes reflecting the fact that most of their day-to-day activities were already taking place in the UK anyway. This finding partially contradicts Donnalaja's (2020, p. 14) claim that migrants "naturalise once they already feel and act as citizens." My interviewees did "act as citizens" in the technical sense that they lived and worked in the UK, paid taxes, and their children attended education institutions there (I am leaving aside "citizen responsibilities" in the sense of civic and political participation for the moment). However, the aspect of "feeling British" was missing in most cases (see also Fernández-Reino & Sumption, 2023).

The role of citizenship status and national identification will be scrutinised in relation to migrant political and civic participation in Chapter 7, where I will delve into an even deeper conversation with Donnalaja's (2020) and other scholars' conclusions about "acting as citizens." Before that, let me examine the migrants' conceptions of membership in relation to the ideas of Europe, the European Union, and Brexit.

Section 6.2 Europe, European Union and Brexit

In this section, I examine the significance migrants attach to the broader legal, political and geographical frameworks and circumstances their lives are embedded in on various levels of determination, i.e. the municipalities, regions and states concerned, the European Union, Schengen, the "East-West" paradigm, and the political and administrative barriers (and the lack of those) perceived as important to their lives. Brexit, which came about and took place during the course of my research, will be addressed as a key political reference point. The informants were asked not only about their personal experiences with Czechia's and Britain's EU (non-)membership (free movement, finding work, settling, paperwork) – some of them witnessed both countries as members as well as non-members during their time in the United Kingdom – but also about their knowledge of, experience with and opinion about the European Union and EU membership. This section examines the migrants' conceptions of membership in the context of EU free movement regulations and the barriers related to residential status uncertainty posed by (the idea of) Brexit. Also, it examines migrants' attitudes to the EU and Brexit as a precondition of some of their motivations for political and civic participation.

At first, I address the migrants' opinions about the European Union and membership in it as part of an analysis of their (non-)identification with the EU and/or Europe as a broader geographical and political entity. This will allow me to examine the idea of migrants fostering transnational identities deriving from their multiple embeddings and their ability to engage in liquid migration.

Nikola, a stayer, held both Czech and British citizenship, had a British husband and a UK-born daughter, and was predominantly embedded in British society structures. Despite having come to the United Kingdom before Czechia's EU accession, she appreciated certain practical advantages that the accession brought her as – then – a Czech citizen living in the UK. This, however, contrasted with her indifference to the concept of the EU as such. Also, her opinion about the usefulness of having British citizenship, in addition to Czech, documented her play-it-safe, strategic thinking about national affiliation, bereft of emotional sentiments.

[Czechia's entry to the European Union] really made a difference. At that time, I worked in my friend's company [employing a non-EU citizen meant additional paperwork]. When we entered the EU, I knew I could do a normal job in a large company. So, this helped me. (...)

[Britain's membership in the EU] doesn't interest me at all. If Britain decides to leave, which I think it won't, I won't rely on whether they decide to make changes and say, "people from Eastern Europe can't work", or, "we won't give them what they are eligible for". Or "they'll have to pay for NHS [National Health Service]". To me, [the uncertainty] is not worth it. I live here, and it seems I'll live here until I die, so... why not? It is not exactly the cheapest thing, but when I can have dual citizenship, why not have it? I won't have to worry. I won't have to rely on anyone. It is worth the money.

(Nikola, in her 40s, working, 16 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

Nikola declared a general disinterest in political matters (this will be discussed below), so her purely pragmatic stance on the EU was not a surprise. However, this view of the EU as a source of practical advantage, rather than of emotional affiliation, was shared by most other participants, even the politically much more interested and engaged ones, such as Filip.

[Regarding self-identification as European] That's an interesting question. In some contexts, I feel it internally, but I'm not able to give an example. (...) I feel it the most at work [dealing with EU regulations]. Beyond work, of course it is great crossing the borders or travelling around Europe just with my [Czech] citizen ID, moving freely here, not having to make a fuss about recruiting people, transfer of capital and such things. That's comfy.

(Filip, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

Reflecting on whether living in the United Kingdom or experiencing intra-EU mobility changed his self-identification in some way, Filip added:

Of course, [moving to the UK] expanded my horizons a bit, and here in Britain, you have to deal with other kinds of things, so probably it did expand my horizons without me reflecting on it. But I wouldn't really call myself a citizen of the world just because I live in Britain. That would be a bit too pretentious.

(Filip, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

Most research participants agreed that having lived outside of Czechia has affected their sense of belonging and made them re-think how they view themselves regarding national and transnational identification, cultural affiliation and emotional ties. The progression from a

denial of one's "Czechness" and attempts at promoting a relativised, international view of oneself, to a firmer identification with one's Czech origins, such as that described by Nora below, was not uncommon.

I think it's changing with time. I used to not identify so much with my Czech roots, and really, as I said, I used to avoid Czechs most of the time. But now, I don't know if it's because I'm older or because I've spent so much time away. I've [come to terms with] my Czechness and am more at peace with it. I even joke about it when I talk to my colleagues and I say - well, you know, *us Czechs*... So now I think that I definitely feel more like a Czech than I did five years ago, when I kind of repressed it and pretended that it didn't concern me, that I was just some kind of supranational nationality.

(Nora, in her 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

On the other hand, positioning oneself strictly in cosmopolitan, nationality-free terms was rather unique in my sample (cf. Favell, 2008, 2010). Aneta's account shows that such self-identification largely represents a deliberate characterisation of one's worldview, perhaps rather than an authentic loss of national self-conception.

I perceive my identity as Czechoslovakian.⁵⁶ But I also feel quite international. Like, I've lived in several countries, and I've travelled a lot, you know. So, I think of myself as pretty much international. You know? Kind of, I feel at home everywhere.

(Aneta, in her 30s, working, 1 year in the UK, 2014, SEARCHER)

In principle, while return-wishers generally clung quite strongly to their "Czechness", refusing the idea that they could identify as anything else, searchers were more inclined to reflect on their identities in cosmopolitan/transnational terms, and stayers most often considered their identities within the duality of Czechness vs. Britishness. Self-identification as European was rare and mostly contextually situated – the informants used it only in the geopolitical sense of "continental", in opposition to "British", or e.g. to "American" (cf. Sigona & Godin, 2023). Overall, a pragmatic, utilitarian perception of the European Union prevailed among the research participants, regardless of their future outlook for the stay (cf. Favell, 2010). The sample was quite evenly divided between those who were indifferent about the EU as a concept, like Nikola or Matyáš, those who were positive, or even enthusiastic about it, like Barbora or Ctirad, and those who were critical of it, like Prokop or Patricie. In general, though, even the critics appreciated the individual-level practical advantages associated with EU membership, and even the enthusiasts criticised EU management, claiming that it represents an excessive administrative burden for its member states and calling it a "self-consuming system." Prokop's testimony summarises this ambiguity.

⁵⁶ Despite having been born shortly before the breakup of Czechoslovakia, this interviewee referred to her country of origin repeatedly as "Czechoslovakia", implying that she still conceives of the two countries as tightly related. With reference to her national self-identification, she stressed this once again, emphasising the international, border-crossing aspect in her self-conception.

For me, [being in the EU] is positive, because with travelling not only here but across Europe, if I'm passing through, it's easier, obviously. But then again, for example, in my job, I deal with a lot of complications because of European regulations, which are often nonsensical. So [the EU] complicates things legislatively.

Researcher: So, what is your overall opinion of the European Union?

Well, I think that it's a nice idea, but only theoretically. Unfortunately, I think that if there's a big problem, countries will always look at themselves first, especially the big ones. I'm a bit of a pessimist here. [The EU is] artificial, it's not backed up by the natural evolution. I don't know, there's a lot of these political decisions that aren't practical and they're actually going against their own people. So, I think that's... well, I don't think it's going to last. And I think the British will leave.

R: And does [leaving] seem like a good idea of them to you?

I think it's a very good idea of them. Because they'll avoid the problems that they're going to have. Just now [the EU] has averted Greece from going bankrupt by (...) giving them more money. And the fact that the Greeks... they're promising how much they're going to save, right, (...) but that's just money wasted that's going to be paid again by others and those Greeks are going to go bankrupt, it's all clear now. (...) It's just a matter of time. And the longer it takes, the more it's going to cost. So, it's very good of the British to walk away from it.

(Prokop, in his 40s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

The migrants' attitude to Brexit – or the idea thereof – differed in relation to their own residential status, their subjective residential (in)security and also depending on the time period when the interview was conducted. The pre-Brexit informants (from 2014-2016⁵⁷) were mostly doubtful that Brexit could actually happen. Despite that, they did express – more or less serious – uncertainties about what it would mean for their future life in the UK (see also Lulle et al., 2019). Some of the first interviews were conducted at a time when even the idea of a Brexit referendum sounded like a very unlikely political fantasy, which is why my first interviewees did not perceive it as a serious threat. The interviews taken closer to the actual date of the referendum reflected on the potential consequences of the UK's EU withdrawal in more depth, reflecting the more specific information available at the time. Compared to people interviewed earlier (in 2014-2015) and later (the post-Brexit sub-sample), these interviewees expressed the most uncertainty and anxiety in relation to Brexit (cf. Hall et al., 2022; Sigona & Godin, 2023).

I managed to follow up on my original interviews with four pre-Brexit informants after the Brexit referendum. While Radka (a stayer, originally interviewed in February 2015, followed up in January 2020) said she was too frustrated by the result to talk about it, Prokop (a searcher, originally interviewed in August 2015, followed up in November 2016) was excited about it, saying he thinks Brexit will help the UK in the long run and induce changes in the EU. He also said, now planning to settle in the UK permanently, that the referendum finally

⁵⁷ The last of these interviews were conducted in April 2016.

provoked him to sort out his British citizenship. Patricie (a return-wisher, originally interviewed in April 2016, followed up in January 2017), on the other hand, was rather indifferent about the result of the referendum, claiming she hardly ever notices that it had taken place. She did not feel discriminated against on this basis, despite admitting problems with her job search. Nevertheless, sometime later, she returned to Czechia, where she could find a more fulfilling job and live in greater proximity to her close ties. Marta (a return-wisher, originally interviewed in March 2015, followed up in November 2016) expressed understanding for Britain's wish to leave the EU because "there are already too many people here," which projects itself in long waiting times at the doctor and high real-estate prices. She said she was "happy for the British to have chosen the Leave." At the same time, she admitted she and her family (including her British partner) were planning to move to Czechia due to lower real-estate prices, lower business competition and to be closer to her extended family.

The post-Brexit informants, on the whole, were quite relaxed about the withdrawal, as by the time I spoke to most of them (all but one were interviewed in 2022), the legal conditions enabling migrants to stay in the UK were clear and generally considered fair and attainable by the interviewees. Besides, the migrants I spoke to either already had British citizenship, settled status or indefinite leave to remain or were confident about being able to obtain one of them soon – they were already taking concrete steps to secure their stay in the UK (cf. Hall et al., 2022; Mas Giralt, 2020; Markova & King, 2021). Such strategies of "self-securisation" in the UK were mentioned by both pre- and post-Brexit interviewees in relation to (the idea of) Brexit, though with varied urgency (cf. Mas Giralt, 2020). The following quotes were chosen to illustrate the differences in attitudes to Brexit between my pre-Brexit and post-Brexit interviewees.

Talking to me in 2014, Blanka, a stayer, admitted:

I haven't even sorted out Czech [passports] for [myself and my daughter] yet. I'm taking it easy for now, but I guess I will [have to do it]. First of all, I don't believe that Britain will leave, and I think they're just making a fuss. Because they [politicians] have got to satisfy all the voters, and so of course when they're badgering us with this, they're just trying to... it's about trading, isn't it? They're just so keen to jerk themselves into a better position than the others, so they're just taking positions. Of course, a tiny chance is they [Britain] will go crazy and get out [of the EU]. But I think that chance is very small. Still, though, it's a little stressful if you think about it.

Researcher: Do you think it would affect you in any way if Britain pulled out?

Not in practice, because theoretically, it would only affect new people wanting to move to the UK. But maybe it would. I don't know if it could affect tax problems or other things. I think it could complicate things bureaucratically.

(Blanka, 40s, working, 13 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Also not being seriously worried about what a potential Brexit would mean for her family in terms of their right to stay in the UK, Dagmar, whom I interviewed in 2015 and who was also determined to stay in the UK, meditated about the usefulness of having one or both citizenships with reference to her family's mobility to the EU and back again. Her account highlights that the fact that Czechia allowed dual citizenship in 2014 was a crucial prerequisite for Czech migrants in the UK to be able to secure their residence in the UK via naturalisation without facing the dilemma of having to give up their original citizenship for purely practical reasons in the face of Brexit.

R: Did it play a role for you [that Czechia allowed dual citizenship in 2014], or would you apply for British citizenship even if you had to give up the Czech one in return?

[My husband and I] would have applied for the British one even if they were going to take away our Czech one. But now with Britain talking about leaving the EU, I don't know what we'd do. I guess we'd let it go if we couldn't keep our Czech ones because it would close the door for us to the whole of Europe again, wouldn't it? Maybe. If by some chance [Brexit] did go through. But now, thank God, we can have dual citizenship, so that's good.

(Dagmar, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

Compared to the two previously cited informants, Jaroslav, who had been in the United Kingdom for a shorter time and whose socio-economic situation was less stable, was more restless about the idea of the UK leaving the EU, expressing fear and anxiety. Asked about whether he follows the news, he said:

All of it, regularly. Everything, so I can keep track of what's going on. Because I need to keep track, right. (...) Here, you always think that anything can change. I don't know, maybe in two years [Britain] will leave the European Union. What about us then? If you're not eligible, you don't have citizenship, then you've got to move out. So, you've got to keep an eye on what's going on.

(Jaroslav, in his 40s, caring full-time for his wife, working occasionally, 3 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

Jaroslav's trying to keep ahead of the course of events in the face of a potential Brexit resonates with Donnalaja's (2020) finding about migrants being more interested in (country-of-reception) politics prior to naturalisation than afterwards. While Donnalaja (2020) interprets this as migrant socialisation into citizen habits characterised by prioritising other topics in their day-to-day lives, it is important to note that migrants are especially alert to political matters which concern their residential and work status in the country of reception. When potential anti-immigration developments and legislative changes no longer represent a threat to their ability to stay, their interest slackens.

My post-Brexit sub-sample of nine migrants is not large enough to supply data for major conclusions. However, in the context of available academic findings, it offers a less usual

picture of CEE migrants in Brexit-affected UK, as it captures the views of three Czechs – two of them also naturalised UK citizens – who described themselves as Brexiters, praised the UK for leaving the EU and expressed relief about it (cf. Lulle, Moroşanu & King, 2018; Lulle et al., 2019; Markova & King, 2021; Mas Giralt, 2020). The rest of my post-Brexit interviewees were either rather unhappy about it or indifferent. Nevertheless, most of them stated that they understood the reasons why the (majority of) voters in the United Kingdom wanted Brexit. Notably, no one in the sub-sample was worried about their opportunities to stay in Britain. They perceived the conditions set by the British government as fair and manageable to fulfil and did not experience any other pushes to leave, such as the difficulty in finding a job or anti-migrant discrimination and racism, as other studies on the post-Brexit situation of CEE migrants found (Duda-Mikulín, 2022; Lulle, Moroşanu & King, 2018; Markova & King, 2021). Rather, they assessed these social and labour market factors as much more favourable than those they had encountered (and struggled with) in Czechia. The following quotes, which document their attitudes towards Britain's departure from the EU and the consequences they experienced, suggest that for some of my research participants, Brexit has virtually ceased to be a topic in their day-to-day lives.

Jarka's anti-EU stance was very emotional. Like others, she explained why she understood Britain's reasons for leaving and how she perceived the whole process of the UK's separation from the EU.

My opinion [on Brexit] is positive. I am not opposed to the joining of nations, for example, in business, tolerance and peacekeeping, but independence, culture, and identity should not be taken away. Each nation or ethnicity has its own [principles] to run its country - it's like a family. Each family runs its own affairs. The British have done much for Europe in the past and many years after the war. I think the EU has forgotten this a bit, and the whole "divorce" felt like children on a school playground. I apologise for the comparison, but it's the closest I can get without being biased.

(Jarka, in her 50s, working, 26 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

Mirka, who also used the metaphor of a divorce, expressed an even stronger bitterness than Jarka about how Britain was treated during the Brexit negotiations. This was mingled with her disappointment about the difficulties of trying to strike up constructive discussions with others on the topic.

After Brexit, the European Union acted like an insulted wife who gets the car, the house, the summer house, and you don't see the kids. They say Britain has caused damage to itself by doing wrong to the EU, and Britain is to blame for that, right? Only some people will say that actually, the EU had more power in that negotiation and just forced some things that really aren't fair. That's one thing about the referendum. Another thing is that many people want to rejoin the EU (...), but again, they don't realise and probably don't even know that if that happened, they [Britain] would be newcomers and that the EU is not what it used to be in the 1980s, 1970s when it was the EEC [European Economic

Community]. Then, they would just be those who pay and... Well, that's how it is. It's hard to discuss with these people because as soon as you bring out the numbers and the facts, they run away from the discussion.

Researcher: Are you talking about discussions that you have with your friends in Britain?

That varies. I'm on Facebook quite a lot, and sometimes, posts on the topic pop up, even from groups I am not a member of. Or maybe we're talking [in my English class], and we come across something like that. It's just that most of the people there don't have an economics background or insight either, right? They just know one thing; all they know is that [the UK] left the European Union, and at that point, there was a problem with transport to the supermarket. And I tell them that there's this problem all over Europe because COVID came down at the same time as Brexit, yeah? It all got blended together terribly, and one is being blamed on the other.

(Mirka, in her 50s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

Vanda repeatedly stated that she is not interested in or knowledgeable about politics and insisted that she did not have a straight-cut opinion about Brexit. Despite that, she claimed that exercising her right to vote meant a lot to her in principle. This was why, as a recently naturalised UK citizen, she used the resources at hand to decide which side to vote for.

I didn't really care [about whether the UK would leave the EU or not], actually. I mean, it's probably a bit hypocritical because, of course, thanks to the European Union, I could study in [another EU country]. But on the other hand, I talked to my uncle, who's something like my adoptive dad, and when [Czechia] entered the EU, he told me - I'm giving it 17 years. There was Austria-Hungary, and we never liked the fact that they were telling us what to do. If it was just the export-import, I think that was a great idea. But considering [what I heard] about how they're just wasting money out there on administration and stuff, I voted for Brexit. That's what [me and my uncle] arrived at [as the right decision]. But other than that, I don't really have an opinion on it at all, for me nothing's really changed and I know that there are still Czech students studying in England so it doesn't seem to have affected that. Luckily, it did not affect travel either.

(Vanda, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

While Vanda's stance towards Brexit was purely rational, the previous two research participants' protectionist attitudes regarding Britain's position during and after Brexit combined factual knowledge about the various issues at stake and their emotional attachments to the UK as a state they understood and were loyal to. Loyalty to Britain as the country which became their safe harbour was palpable also in other post-Brexit interviewees' opinions on Brexit, such as Kašpar's.

We know why the English [people] did it. They were fed up with subsidising somebody all the time. (...) Since they closed the borders, they had to introduce these tariffs and so on, but that's perfectly fine. It's their decision. As far as the status is concerned, if you live here for more than five years and you work for five years, you get this [settled] status, which is basically

unlimited (...). So that's fine. And [you can have pre-settled status] if you can't get settled status yet. Yeah? So, you can do that too. From what I've noticed, there haven't been any problems with that at all. The English have been very benevolent about it. They put one deadline in there. Whoever doesn't have a status, let them apply by that deadline. And then they were so benevolent that they extended it by another month, right? Which is totally cool. People made it and again, on the other side of it, [the people who] got left over [could not fulfil the conditions], they weren't any good, they were doing bad things here [*implying that they engaged in criminal activities, worked illegally, abused the social security system etc.* – *authors' comment*].

(Kašpar, in his 40s, retired, 11 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

However, not all of my post-Brexit interlocutors perceived the new rules to be as easy to fulfil, such as Běla, who otherwise praised the British legal and tax system over the Czech one.

I think leaving the EU was bad for the UK. Because many people have left, so they don't have people, they don't have truckers, they don't have people in the hospitals, they don't have people in the shops, and they're figuring out just now over time that actually the English people would rather be on benefits than get in a truck and bring you that diesel. So, they're just now finding out. Bringing in goods from abroad is complicated, and the prices are getting higher and higher. Maybe it's liberating for [the UK] in that they're not bound by anything, and they can make their own laws, yes. But they don't have the people. They lack people everywhere. Many people couldn't prove that they had lived here long enough, paid taxes, or, I don't know, so they were denied the right to stay and had to leave the country. I think there are still many people who are living here illegally.

(Běla, in her 40s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

The variety of the research participants' opinions about Brexit resembles the variety of opinions present in the UK on the whole (Difford, 2025; Norris & Inglehart, 2018), pointing to the various factors that structure these opinions – it is by far not solely the migrant experience, or one's personal life situation as such. The level of knowledge about and interest in the topic, political sympathies, and the influence of one's significant others' opinions and experiences contribute in various ways. The effect of one's personal experience was, however, clear in the migrants' assessments of their post-Brexit status in terms of stability and security. This also distinguished my post-Brexit interviewees from the pre-Brexit ones. While for the pre-Brexit ones, the *idea of* Brexit opened various questions and dilemmas (even if sometimes unsubstantiated) regarding their future status in the UK, this insecurity was not present in the post-Brexit narratives. This was in large part due to the fact that all of my post-Brexit research participants already held British citizenship, settled status or were doubtless about being able to obtain either. However, the fact that the practical consequences of Brexit, such as the conditions regarding eligibility for settled and pre-settled status, were already clear at that time, was an important factor as well.

Section 6.3 Final Thoughts About Citizenship and Belonging

Despite some scholars' attempts to challenge the central role of citizenship as a meaningful organising category in social research (Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2009; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003), and despite the once-popular discourse which viewed European Union citizenship, free of state-bound differences and administrative barriers, as the goal of EU integration, this chapter shows that national and ethnic identifications are important and sometimes central to migrants' self-conceptions, while there is rather little evidence of a supra-national "European identity" forming (Botterill & Hancock, 2019; Favell, 2010; Habermas, 1992; Sigona & Godin, 2023). In fact, national identifications often function as the migrants' crucial psychological anchors in the context of embedding and belonging by providing them with a safe reference point in their otherwise transforming perceptions of themselves (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). Nevertheless, this is not to say that in the migration environment, these national identifications are not being constantly negotiated and re-negotiated. The migrants get confronted with questions and comments regarding their nationality and national identification on a running basis, which is one of the reasons they come back to them quite often and tend to be able and keen to express a relatively thought-out argument about them (Botterill & Hancock, 2019). A migrant's outlook for his/her stay seems related to their national or supra-national self-conceptions. This became especially apparent in the narratives of those of my pre-Brexit informants who perceived Brexit as a real, yet at the time unclear, threat to their prospects of staying in the United Kingdom (Botterill & Hancock, 2019; D'Angelo & Kofman, 2018). Their re-considerations of their intended future life/work/migration trajectories showed signs that they perceived the urge to secure their residential status in the UK as becoming more pressing in the face of the idea of Brexit (Fernández-Reino & Sumption, 2023; Hall et al., 2022; Mas Giralt, 2020).

Even if my interviewees, in general, did not seem to feel too worried or infuriated by Brexit, the introduction of the idea of Brexit in my conversations with them did seem to open up deeper reflections on belonging than my question regarding their identification with the European Union as a whole – an observation made also by Sigona and Godin (2023). In the narratives of both the pre- and post-Brexit informants, opinions about Brexit were intertwined with practical concerns regarding residential and citizenship status but also touched on the migrants' self-perception in citizenship terms and their loyalty towards Britain (Fernández-Reino & Sumption, 2023). Most of my informants spoke about the UK or, more specifically, Brexit voters, in third-person terms ("I understand why they want it"; "they don't have enough healthcare workers now"), as if the situation did not concern them personally, regardless of the side of the argument they agreed with. While those who were in favour of Brexit expressed more protectionist opinions, stressing their agreement with the motivations behind it, those

who were not so supportive of it tended to be more critical and doubtful of both the micro-level (subjective) and macro-level consequences, assumed or observed. In general, stayers expressed more support for Brexit than searchers or return-wishers. The strongest supporters of Brexit were also among those most pronounced about their loyalty to the UK. However, it is difficult to draw a straightforward conclusion about the relationship between migrants' loyalty to the UK, their opinion about Brexit and their future outlook for their stay, as my sample does not show any undisputable patterns.

Chapter 7 Migrant Civic and Political Participation and its Role in Embedding Processes and Strategies

This chapter builds on the findings made in the previous two chapters by examining how the process of embedding, dis-embedding and re-embedding in transnational spaces interacts with civic and political participation in its various forms and intensities and with the motivations for it. The chapter asks whether Czech migrants in the UK participate politically and civically in their receiving country and transnationally, and how. It also studies their reasons and motivations to (not) do so and the role that migration and embedding play in this process. It scrutinises the role of value orientations and change, social remittances, and, yet again, agency. Each of the sections 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 covers a different form of migrant political and civic participation (political interest, political participation, civic participation), differentiating migrants' motivations to engage on the local, national and transnational levels and comparing the intensities of engagement. As this chapter addresses the most important and central of the research questions specified in Chapter 1, it is the longest in the thesis.

The analysis shows that the motivations (not) to engage “here” and “there” are often intertwined and sometimes identical. However, I argue that the migration experience and its circumstances relate to the different modes of political and civic participation in qualitatively different ways. The general level of (dis)interest in political news and/or in taking part in public affairs seems to be a lifelong trait influenced more by a person's set of priorities than the migration experience as such, though unusual events and situations (such as being in the process of migration decision-making) may change it temporarily. Geographically specific interest, on the other hand, is strongly attached to belonging, which is in turn influenced by migration. Political participation (especially voting) is quite low among all research participants due to practical obstacles, lack of motivation and dilemmas of “belonging.” Various forms of civic engagement (“non-political” volunteering, taking part in local community events/projects, charity donations, responsible consumption habits) depart from varying motivations which are connected to the migrant's social status and extent of embedding in the societies of origin and reception in contrasting ways. I conclude that the motivation for political and civic participation derives from individual social and cultural capital. In migration settings, it can be (temporarily) muted due to a change in priorities or, on the other hand, activated, e.g. to serve a particular function fostering embedding, but not majorly overturned. However, in some cases, a favourable opportunity structure in the receiving society may facilitate the mobilisation of an “activist potential” that the particular person carried but did not put to effect prior to their migration.

Section 7.1 Political Interest

This section takes the findings discussed in Chapter 6 as a background against which migrants' political interest is being scrutinised. Political interest, as the softest form of political participation and an (almost always) necessary prerequisite for its more active forms, is studied via the interview areas of "following the news" and "talking about politics", which were tackled in all interviews (Bennett, Flickinger & Rhine, 2000; Putnam, 2000). The nature and intensity of migrants' political interest is primarily approached from the life-course perspective. The research participants' declared political interest at the time of interviewing is considered in the context of their life cycle stage, their roles in the professional and private spheres, and the process of embedding. Also, as available, it is compared to the interlocutors' testimonies of their political interest prior to migration and over time in general. The focus of the migrants' political interest is analysed with respect to their future outlook for the stay (stayers, searchers, return-wishers) and with respect to relevant recent "unsettling events" (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021).

7.1.1 Following the News

Most research participants declared at least some interest in the political affairs in Czechia and/or the UK and at least superficial knowledge of the political situation or the current political topics, affairs or names being talked about in either country. Often, the interviewees mentioned that maintaining a general overview of the main media headlines was part of a rather regular ritual. Even if the time they devoted to watching or reading the news was limited and gave them just fleeting knowledge of what was going on in the UK, Czechia or worldwide, the interview accounts of it tended to include expressions like "daily", "regularly", "almost every day", or "every morning", as will be shown in the following quotations. Apart from this regularity, they capture other key aspects of practices associated with political interest of the interviewed Czech migrants: 1) the geographical prioritisation of the news followed (British news are usually given priority over those from Czechia or international news); 2) the choice of media through/from which information about current affairs is obtained; 3) the rituals and activities associated with getting to know the news, 4) the migrants' general attitude and importance ascribed to keeping themselves informed about what is happening in their countries of settlement and origin, with a special focus on politics.

I do follow the news from Czechia, because of course I access my e-mail via Seznam⁵⁸, so sometimes I run through the headlines there, but I have to admit I sometimes end up reading about who married whom and who broke up with whom. *[laughter]* It is sort of a firm moment, similar to when people

⁵⁸ Seznam.cz is Czechia's oldest search engine, as well as an e-mail provider and news portal. It is very widely used in Czechia. In the long term, it has been ranked the second most frequently used search engine in Czechia after Google (Seznam.cz, n. d.).

watch *Ordinace v růžové zahradě*⁵⁹. So for me, this is that kind of escape moment. But of course, I do read the news.

(Patricie, in her 40s, working, 4 years in the UK, 2016, RETURN-WISHER)

I follow the news in Czechia all the time. Every day, when I come back from work, even if I'm tired, I open Facebook or the electronic newspapers, Seznam, I read what's going on in Czechia, so I have a very good idea of it. (...) I do follow the news in the UK. Especially Cameron, he's very distinctive.

(Klára, in her 30s, working, 3 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

The aspect of rituality contained in Patricie's and Klára's attitudes to following the news from Czechia was common in the collected accounts. Even if they gained only superficial knowledge of the current affairs this way, stayers, return-wishers and searchers alike engaged in such rituals in one way or another. They often named one specific news portal, broadcaster, or social media service that they used almost automatically to stay informed. As captured by the following quotes from conversations with Žofie and Blanka, these rituals sometimes varied in depth and frequency according to the individual's priorities and interests and with respect to important events in their lives.

I sure follow the news in Czechia. IDnes⁶⁰ is the kind of portal one follows all the time, also the Czech Television⁶¹, the things they have in their archive. Now, we may watch it a bit less because my husband and I are not really that excited about TV watching; we don't need it. We choose just the programmes we want to watch. For example, this morning, we watched ČT24⁶².

(Žofie, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, RETURN-WISHER)

In the beginning, I maintained [my overview of what is going on in Czechia] quite a lot, but especially since my daughter was born, I stopped being interested completely, because... the first two, three years I was hard-put to just survive in terms of work and home, to arrange everything to make it work. I'm keeping track of what's going on in the sense that when I turn on the computer in the morning, then alongside my work e-mail, I also open my private e-mail via the Seznam homepage, and I check out what's in the headlines before opening my inbox. So, in this sense, I know what's in there. (...) I was not very interested in politics before leaving Czechia either.

(Blanka, 40s, working, 13 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Blanka's case highlights a few issues. For one thing, the informant claimed her keeping track of the news from Czechia was rather superficial, contrasting with previously cited Žofie, who seemed to suggest her interest in Czech politics went into quite a lot of depth. This difference might be credited, on the one hand, to differences in subjective perceptions of what is "a lot" and what is "little". On the other hand, it could be explained by the two interviewees'

⁵⁹ A popular long-running Czech TV series.

⁶⁰ Idnes.cz is a popular Czech news web portal.

⁶¹ Czech Television (<https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/>) is the public TV broadcaster in Czechia. It operates seven channels that can be watched abroad if pre-paid. Some archived programmes can also be watched for free online.

⁶² A 24/7 news channel of the Czech Television.

differing life situations. Blanka was a stayer, had a British husband with whom she could only discuss Czech politics to a limited extent, and generally described her life as quite isolated, focused on her work and the nuclear family. On the other hand, Žofie was a return-wisher, shared her interest in Czech affairs with her Czech husband, and was in frequent contact with other Czechs in the UK. Further, Blanka's account presents an example of a temporary disruption in following the news (from her country of origin) caused by new motherhood and the need to focus on balancing professional and parental responsibilities, a phenomenon studied by Quaranta (2015). Some research suggests that the effect of marriage or parenthood may, in fact, be much more long-term as a result of the profound and lasting transformation of roles and focus that ensues and – sometimes – a resulting lack of resources enabling one to engage (not only finances but also time, support or knowledge) (Jennings, 1979; Stoker & Jennings, 1995; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

Studies suggest that political interest forms in the teenage years and tends to be relatively stable over the life course, with disruptions and changes usually being temporary (Neundorf et al., 2013; Prior, 2010). As such, it is influenced by the cultural capital of the childhood household – that is, political socialisation during one's upbringing (Neundorf et al., 2013; Sapiro, 2004; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995), but also by the “participation culture” of the country where one grew up (Gaidytė, 2012; Gaidytė & Muis, 2015; Gropas, 2008). Despite being claimed to be mostly temporary, the duration of the effect of various private and external events on one's political interest and other forms of political participation has been observed to vary. The act of migration sets in motion changes in an individual's life course that are often similarly profound and long-lasting as those brought about by parenthood, which is why it is worth examining in what sense these changes affect migrants' political interest (Berger, Galonska & Koopmans, 2004; Best et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the role of external “unsettling events” is rather ambivalent regarding the duration of the transformative effect (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021). Unique events with consequences affecting migrants' residential or working opportunities, such as Brexit or the COVID-19 pandemic, may heighten their attention to political news for a period of time (months, perhaps years) and then disappear from sight, as they no longer represent a danger or become part of their daily lives, as the narratives of some of my informants show. However, especially when intertwined with the process of embedding in the country of reception, political interest directed at the country of reception may keep intensifying over time spent there and take on a specific form or focus, deriving from the migrant's specific situation and opportunities in the receiving country (such as in the cases of Marek or Daniela, discussed in detail below). Political interest targeting the country of origin tends to fade out or de-intensify as migrants continue embedding in reception-country social networks and structures and find

less time for transnational political participation. However, migrants might also have specific motivations to keep it up. In the following paragraphs, I try to trace the effect of the migration experience behind the migrants' specific motivations to (not) pay attention to political affairs in either country and analyse what role their heightened, lowered or thematically altered political interest played in their (dis-)embedding process.

Current Affairs as a Source of Stress

Some interviews revealed an ambiguity or a cause of stress in the narrators' relationship to following the news. Even though they perceived keeping an eye on the news as a "normal", obvious part of life, they felt gradually driven away from it by being repelled by the content of the prevailing news. This was especially the case with regard to news from Czechia, which some migrants thus chose to ignore or keep up on very selectively, like Patricie:

I feel sick about Zeman [the Czech President at the time]⁶³. I take this really personally. I don't know what kind of an emotion this is. (...) I feel embarrassed that he's our president. I do not have that emotion in England. I think they have their own system here and I think I should accept it because I am a visitor here and I receive a lot of bonuses from this country. So of course, I do follow the Czech news sometimes, but I don't feel very good about it. (...) For the past half year, [my partner and I] have had a subscription for the Czech Television. But I just don't watch the news. I don't watch the news on purpose because it makes me really upset.

(Patricie, in her 40s, working, 4 years in the UK, 2016, RETURN-WISHER)

Sometimes, discontent about the political developments in Czechia was part of the reasons the people decided to move abroad, and thus fading transnational political interest was an intentional part of the process of their detachment from the reality of the country of origin. The following quote from Nikola's narrative illustrates this gradual disconnection from Czechia and its political problems, even though the interviewee's remarks about her attitude to following the current affairs suggest quite a low political interest overall, not only associated with Czechia.

I follow the news on a normal level. I know what's going on, I want to be in the picture, but (...) As for politics [in the UK], if some scandal is taking place, we speak about it, I notice it. In the case of Czechia, I don't even notice it. I am not interested in it. I know there's corruption there, and I wave it off. I prefer not to care. Here [in the UK] it does interest me more because I live here. But it's not like I need to talk about it a lot. (Nikola, in her 40s, working, 16 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

⁶³ Miloš Zeman is one of the key Czech politicians from the 1990s transformation period. He was a former long-term leader of the Czech Social Democratic Party and the president of the Czech Republic from 2013 to 2023. He was elected in the first-ever general presidential election in 2013 and then re-elected in 2018. He was also somewhat politically active before 1989. Having entered the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1968, he was expelled from it in 1970 for his critique of communism (Píhová, 2017).

The interlocutors who spoke about their unhappiness with the Czech political scene and their disillusionment about the political developments in Czechia since the (promising) political turnover of 1989⁶⁴ tended to draw comparisons between the political culture in the UK and Czechia. Explaining why they preferred following the British political scene to the Czech one, they naturally started to speak about the differences between the prevailing values of the two societies, which, for many, were one of the reasons for leaving Czechia or not returning. Speaking about maintaining a day-to-day knowledge of the Czech political scene, Ema made a direct transition between these questions.

That's exactly what I told my parents. They don't like it, of course, but I said - why would I go back to a country where people elected an alcoholic, narcissistic, egocentric guy as president?⁶⁵ This is what people like and what they like about him because they see it in themselves. Why should I go back to that country? Yeah? It's not that a few politicians elected him. The *people* did. I know it wasn't (...) all the people (...) But it's the person that they elected. (...) So basically, this shows, I know you might not like it as a Czech, but it shows where the nation is. And I don't want to be in that nation.

(Ema, in her 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER, the informant's emphasis)

In my sample, Ema served as a less frequent example of a stayer who claimed to maintain a very good overview of the Czech news despite their disillusionment with the Czech political scene and her unwillingness to return. Apart from the wish to keep herself “equipped” with information for discussions with her parents, her intensive political interest was motivated by a need to make sense of the transnational spaces her life occupied. This need was present in most of the narratives in different forms and depths. Even if deeper interest in Czech politics was not very common in my sample, many migrants mentioned differences in the general quality of political culture and discussion in Britain and Czechia in their comparisons of life in the two countries, sometimes mentioning them as reasons not to return (cf. Doležalová & Löblová, 2024).

Political Disinterest

Only a few interviewees stated outright that they were never particularly interested in politics, never followed it in much detail and thus maintained only superficial awareness of political (and other) news, if any. Matyáš was the most straightforward about this.

I don't follow the news much. For instance, my brother [who lives in Czechia] texts me something, and I say, “I don't get it.” And he goes: “you didn't see the news, you didn't see that?” I say I didn't. If I don't see it on the Seznam homepage, I don't have a clue. And if no one in my family tells me about it, I have no idea. I don't find it entertaining somehow. Not even here in England, I don't watch the

⁶⁴ The year of the so-called Velvet Revolution that marked the definite dismantling of the old socialist regime driven by the one-party rule of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its replacement by a new liberal democratic regime (see also Chapter 2).

⁶⁵ Referring again to Miloš Zeman (president of the Czech Republic 2013-2023).

British TV. I don't know. I do more useful things. (...) I'm not much into politics. I don't follow it, I never followed it in Czechia. And as regards England, I probably know more, because I work with English people, so sometimes they or my boss mention something and we talk about it, right? Or I get some news in my e-mail, so if it's something interesting, I read it, but that's about it. I definitely know more than [about the news] in Czechia.

(Matyáš, in his 20s, working, 5 years in the UK)

Having “more useful/important things to do” was a recurring statement in the collected narratives, used as an explanation for low political interest and participation. A few more quotes in this chapter will show that for the migrants, politics is often at the end of the spectre of topics desiring their attention, a finding that complies with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943; cf. also Berger, Galonska & Koopmans, 2004). This finding is unsurprising in the context of the freedom of choice framing contemporary Czech migration, especially within the European Union. Compared to the pre-1989 generations of Czech migrants, politics is not at the fore of migration determinants in an aggregate perspective (Brouček et al., 2017; Janurová & Janská, 2024a; Vavrečková, Musil & Baštýř, 2007). This being said, there were quite a few migrants in my sample who placed politics among their reasons to move or not to return – even if not as the main one. Interestingly, political culture – sometimes intertwined in migrant reflections with social manners and relations in general – was an important topic in the decision-making even for those migrants who otherwise did not have much interest in politics whatsoever (the case of Nikola). These observations show that in the migrants' perceptions, political culture is intensively connected to the social climate of a particular society as a whole, in some ways perceived as its calling card (see also Doležalová & Löblová, 2024).

Vanda represented a different example – even though she stressed that politics did not interest her, she valued her electoral rights and responsibilities very strongly. This meant she always used the available resources (asking reliable significant others) to “make an opinion” and took the time necessary to participate in elections *despite* her political disinterest

I don't follow politics at all, but I just think it's my civic duty. So many women have died for women's rights and people's rights to vote, so I just think that I deserve to go to the polls even though I don't understand it. I have an uncle who's kind of a father figure for me and he always tells me when the election is and who to vote for and I go vote.

(Vanda, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

This example shows that political interest need not forego other forms of political participation or, rather, that political interest might not always mean “following the news” through the media and creating an opinion based on public informational sources (Bennett, Flickinger & Rhine, 2000). It can also mean “just” the fact of recognising one's stake in the future of a country and taking responsible action to contribute, even if detached from specific

political knowledge. Even though Vanda's narrative documented that she was already tightly embedded in the society of the UK, which she called her home, this peculiar case of political transnationalism shows that *citizenship rarely serves just as a pragmatic tool*, even if by migrants, it is sometimes presented as such. The recognition of one's stake in a country's future might be especially strong when it is tied to a country of one's upbringing or ancestry. Vanda's case mirrors the cases of migrants who report very intensive (even if sometimes selective) political interest but do not politically participate in other ways, as will be discussed now. This intensive political interest, yet detached from more "active" political participation, often serves to strengthen both local and transnational emotional and social affiliations by providing shared topics for discussion with one's social ties and fostering the notion of membership (Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013).

Selective Political Disinterest – Geographical Prioritisation of News

Some interviewees declared that they were interested but did not have enough time to follow the news in much detail and regularly. In some cases, this applied to (political) news in general, but more often, the participants mentioned this as a reason to miss out on the news from Czechia. Generally, people who felt well embedded in the United Kingdom, had lived there longer, planned their future there, and were proficient in English were more interested in and informed about British political news, while limiting their consumption of Czech news.

Other informants followed Czech news media quite intensively but had limited interest in news from the UK. In their case, the declared reason was not a lack of time but rather language skills, knowledge of the British context and (in turn) also a lack of identification with the society in Britain. This was the case of some searchers and return-wishers, such as Jaroslav (as quoted in Chapter 6) or Olga.

I have Czech [TV channels]. [My husband] arranged it for me. When we were in Czechia, we bought a [subscription], so now I have Nova, ČT1, Prima⁶⁶, these basics, so I watch the news in the evening. [I watch the British news] too, with [my husband], for example. But I don't understand about half of the English news. I don't know why, but it's still difficult for me, those reports.

(Olga, in her 40s, homemaker, 6 years in the UK, 2014, RETURN-WISHER)

Some interviewees in these groups explained their attitude to following the news in either country by the act or process of migration and embedding. Intensively following the news in Czechia was explained by a longing for return, homesickness, or even a desire to create for oneself the feeling that one is still living "there", being on the same page with one's close ties in the country of origin (as was clear from Jaroslav's account). On the other hand, regular, intensive consumption of British news was presented as part of an eager wish to merge with

⁶⁶ Various commercial and public Czech TV channels.

the host society in terms of language skills and general knowledge, to indulge in its various desirable characteristics like political correctness, professionalism or gentlemanliness or to have quality conversation material ready to use at work as part of one's career development. For these reasons, some migrants intensified their consumption of political news from Britain especially in the initial stages of the migration experience. Blanka and Dagmar formulated the two poles of migrant political interest succinctly.

My [Czech] friend [who also lives in the UK] watches Czech news on the TV literally every day. It feels to me as if he lives in Czechia instead of here. I just check the news online. We don't have Czech Television, we didn't want it. I think it is important to know what's happening in the country where one lives. (...) I have a very basic overview of the Czech news. I don't know much about Czech politics now. Just the basics. I don't know who to swear at.

(Dagmar, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

In the beginning, I followed the news [in the UK] almost religiously. I watched Channel 4⁶⁷. Then it faded out somehow. Now especially, we cannot turn on the news in front of the child when they constantly show murders or something negative like that. I have a subscription to the Economist and used to subscribe to the Guardian, but (...) now I read it online. And I have a tablet, so I follow the news all the time.

(Blanka, 40s, working, 13 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

The described "religiosity" of Blanka's attitude to keeping abreast of the British news in the initial stage of her migration experience contrasted with her disinterest in Czech politics, both pre- and post-migration, as mentioned above. It suggests a strong commitment to becoming part of the new society but also highlights her excitement about living in Britain, mentioned elsewhere in the interview. On the other hand, Dagmar's own distinction of the two possible variants of transnational political interest illustrates the interplay of the pragmatic and the emotional in migrants' attitudes to following news from their country of origin (de Silva, 2023).

Intensive Multidirectional Political Interest

Yet another group of research participants declared a very keen political interest and quite detailed knowledge of the political scene in both the United Kingdom and Czechia, as well as worldwide. Some interviewees in this group were people for whom political discussion and analysis was to some extent part of their work (e.g. in the sphere of economics), others yet were people with high academic qualifications and high cultural capital, for whom talking politics was a natural part of their cultural habitus (Bourdieu, 1986; de Vroome, Hooghe & Marien, 2013). Yet others saw this as one of their hobbies. Most of the interviewees in this group had a perfect command of English, were embedded in the UK in terms of all four Bosswick and

⁶⁷ Channel 4 is a British free-to-air public television broadcaster. It is the oldest television channel in the UK.

Heckmann's (2006) integration dimensions and did not generally plan to return to Czechia unless on a temporary basis or for retirement.

Daniela, who worked as a sports instructor in a very high-class environment where she came into daily contact with British politicians and top company managers, gave an account of her wide multi-directional scope of political interest, which was to a large extent fuelled by her wish to satisfy her parents in Czechia, on the one hand, as well as to perform well in her role at work, on the other.

I must follow the Czech news because my dad always tests me on whether I follow the elections or just anything that concerns the daily news in Czechia. My mum, on the other hand, is interested in celebrities and various scandals, so she always talks about those. So, I read about this kind of stuff. I have to. Because I think my parents (...) want me not to forget I come from Czechia and that I grew up there. They don't want me to completely break away from Czechia. During the first three years that I was away, my mum kept asking when I would come back. (...) And now they probably know that I won't come back. But exactly because they know I won't, they want to solidify in me [the knowledge] that I come from there and should in some way keep the Czech mentality, Czechness and so on. Maybe (...) when my parents are not there anymore, I will not constantly be that anxious for the information. Maybe I will, but I think now I do it mainly because I know they will ask me about it. But whether I'd do it just for my own sake? I don't know. Maybe I'd miss it. (...) I read IDnes a lot, I often compare how worldwide news are spoken about in articles there and in British newspapers. (...)

[In British newspapers] I read a lot about politics. In the beginning, I read the Financial Times a lot to have something to talk about with [my clients at work]. Every morning, I read the papers properly, any papers, on my way to work, to make sure I knew what was happening where, because they want to talk about that kind of thing, (...) various political affairs and so on. So, politics is surely a number one topic all the time. Any topic from the financial world is interesting. But (...) sometimes we also just talk about silly things. You have to be ready to talk with them about just anything.

(Daniela, in her 30s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Unlike Daniela, Luboš's political interest directed at both the United Kingdom and Czechia was fully self-motivated, and his attitude to following the news was quite emotional, reminding of Dagmar's quote above, documenting the conflict of affiliations "here" and "there" that many migrants experience in different spheres of their lives with respect to their countries of origin and destination (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017; Erdal & Oeppen, 2013).

Sure, sure, [I do follow the news media in the UK]. I read BBC. I am interested in what's going on in the world, of course, and what's going on here [in the UK]. Still... after all the time here, I haven't formed such a relationship with it as I have with what's going on at home [in Czechia]. Obviously, I constantly read about what's happening at home. I have a better knowledge of the British [political scene] now, what political parties they have, which politicians, what they do, what issues they are tackling, what troubles them. But of course, I don't have such a relationship to it as I have to what's

going on at home. Even though what's going on at home virtually does not concern me, it still interests me more than what's happening here.

(Luboš, in his 20s, working and studying, 3 years in the UK, 2014, SEARCHER)

This section has shown political interest as a distinctly ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, most interviewees declared at least *some* political interest, and many of them stated they read the news daily or “regularly”. On the other, most political interest captured in the narratives involved a brief running through headlines which tended to be described as a “by-product” of another activity (typically accessing one’s e-mail through a web portal homepage with a daily news feed). Some interviewees also associated the act of following the political news with some sort of ambivalence, dilemma or even distress. This often concerned the content of the news (e.g. the notion that most political news from Czechia was disappointing, frustrating and embarrassing), the lack of time available to keep up on the (Czech) news, or the difference in emotions felt when reading or watching news from Czechia and Britain. The level of prioritisation of Czech news over the British or vice versa illustrated the interplay of national identifications, migrant emotions, experiences and decisions, as well as knowledge of the political and social context, language skills and length of stay abroad.

7.1.2 Talking About Politics

Talking about politics, the second key form of political interest studied here, also took on mutually controversial forms. For some, talking about politics served as (one of) the primary source(s) of political awareness (Bennett, Flickinger & Rhine, 2000). For others, it was an activity they largely avoided in order to evade tensions or conflict over controversial opinions – quite a common motivation according to Schmitt-Beck and Neumann (2023). Some of them assessed the British culture of political talk as more reserved than the Czech one, in contrast to academic comparisons, which find people in the United Kingdom and other Western countries with a long history of democratic rule more open to talking politics than citizens of formerly authoritarian states (Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013).

What struck me when I came here, my friend who was sort of teaching me the English realities, said - we don't talk politics in the pub. Which I thought was totally [strange]. Because in Czechia, that was actually the main topic, right? There, politics was just discussed all the time. And he says - politics and religion divide people, so that's why we don't talk about it in the pub, so we don't get upset for nothing. I don't know, [it seems to me that in the UK] it's the civic engagement rather than political, that people write letters to different authorities or to the local authority or something like that. Maybe it's in Czechia too, I don't know that much. But it seems to me they discuss less but do more when they get into it.

(Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

I don't even know [whether I voted for the same party as my British husband did]. I think we voted the same way. But my husband won't even tell me who he's voting for, so that's why I'm not sure. Here, people don't say who they're voting for. Maybe, he'll say – I'm going to vote for the Greens. But then he votes for someone else. In Czechia, you'd ask, "who are you going to vote for?" Such a question is not even asked here. Nobody says who they are voting for. And if they do tell you, they tell you a completely different party.

(Nikola, in her 40s, working, 16 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

Some informants explained their and their family and friends' unwillingness to talk politics by reference to other topics being worthier of their attention.

Researcher: Do you talk about current political affairs with your family or friends in Britain?

Only exceptionally. Mostly they or I are interested in other things, like how their family is, what they have achieved, what made them happy, etc. I don't have any friends in Britain who discuss politics much. Mostly, if anything, they use cute sarcasm.

(Jarka, in her 50s, working, 26 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

This argument was used especially in the context of the limited time the migrants have available to talk with their transnational ties.

Researcher: Do you talk about politics when you get together with your friends in Czechia?

Sometimes, we talk about it if something extraordinary takes place, but otherwise, we would rather talk about how everyone's doing, work, families and so on. There's usually not enough time to talk politics.

(Vendula, in her 30s, working, 7 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

Yet others claimed they sought deep political discussions with their close ties both locally and transnationally, in some cases admitting they perceived them as a channel of positive influence on the values of their left-behind relatives or friends. Filip automatically started to speak about his attempts to facilitate the transfer of such social remittances in both directions.

Researcher: [Speaking about contributing to the country's prosperity or development] do you try to "open people's eyes" when you talk to people in Czechia?

Well, yeah, sometimes I do. Of course, I do, in many aspects. In economic questions, ethnic tolerance, whatever I think works better here, I try to share that, right? And vice versa. There are things that work better in Czechia that I think can be changed here [in the UK]. So why not enrich that, right?

R: What would that be, for example?

Well, that's... I think some things are too bound by the law here or by various regulations and so on that people have almost forgotten to think on the go, so to say. Just a little bit more improvisation when a problem comes up wouldn't hurt. Like, daytime lights in the car, for example, that kind of [thing]. There's been a terrible campaign about it here, claiming that it's something that's imposed on us by European structures. I'm trying to explain to people that it's just in the context of safety, that there are always long nights in the winter, and bad weather, and in the summer it's always light - shade, light - shade, so if everybody's got their lights on it's just safer on the roads. I'm trying to show

them the appropriate level of service in schools, [healthcare services], or the different delivery services. I just feel that the service isn't as good as it could be.

(Filip, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

Filip was among the most outspoken on this topic. Other interviewees tended to talk about exerting influence on other people's opinions with caution. Most were struck by the question and had to take some time to think whether their actions or opinions indeed might have some impact on their (transnational or local) close ties' opinions. Some were even dismissive about it, claiming that they do not try to influence anyone's opinions, and even those who admitted they share their political views or experiences from life in the UK intentionally did so rather reluctantly. Jarka summarised this attitude concisely.

[On speaking politics with people in Czechia] If a political conversation ever starts, I usually listen. People are happy to explain if I don't understand something and ask. Otherwise, I don't persuade or try to influence them with my point of view. I respect that these people live their daily lives in this political situation and composition, and I believe that I do not have enough real experience to impose my point of view on them. Mostly people want to speak out, to pour out their troubles and to express their frustration. If someone asks me about the political situation in Britain, I will answer how I feel, but I still try to be loyal. If people want to express their point of view, I let them, but on the whole, I don't need to explain much because they don't live my everyday life. I certainly don't influence people. Everybody has the right to have their own view, and it doesn't have to be the same as mine, but I don't see that as a reason to argue.

(Jarka, in her 50s, working, 26 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

A specific form of talking about politics is taking part in online discussions. It is different to talking politics with friends and family in that the discussion counterparts have the possibility to contribute anonymously, which makes sharing opinions easier, though effectively, it tends to generate verbal assaults, often bereft of factual knowledge of the topic in question (Mascheroni & Murru, 2017; Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013). On the other hand, on social media like Facebook, which was widely used by my research participants, comments on publicly accessible posts are often instantly visible to the commenter's network of contacts (if not using a ghost profile⁶⁸), so anonymity and privacy in such conversations is not always guaranteed. Besides, it is an activity which can be rather time-consuming and requires significant resilience and zeal for the topic in question, not to speak of thematic knowledge, if taken seriously. While most of my interviewees said they avoided such discussions, for Mirka, taking part in them was a hobby. Apart from being a member of a private Czech discussion forum, the members of which even got together in person on several occasions, she also engaged in random discussions on Facebook. Her motivation was not only to talk about topics

⁶⁸ A ghost profile is a user account on social media with limited activity, created in order to protect one's privacy from one's contacts, disseminate content or collect data. (Kontentino, n.d.)

she was passionate about (apart from politics this also included cooking and baking, for instance), but also to share her knowledge of them.

Every day, I debate. Every day, I get yelled at [metaphorically, in online discussions] by someone who has no idea what I'm talking about but has a different opinion of what I'm talking about.

(Mirka, in her 50s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2022, SEARCHER)

Summing up, like following the news, migrants' willingness to talk about politics was altered somewhat by their experience of migration and embedding. The migrants' general level of political interest, and political talk specifically, however, did not seem to have changed dramatically as a result of migration and embedding in a new country context, in accordance with Prior's (2010) conclusions about political interest being stable over the life course. In terms of content, most migrants shared their experiences and knowledge of the British or international (political) context when speaking to people in Czechia, or even the other way round. However, only some of them did so intentionally in order to provide their interlocutors with a new perspective. In terms of frequency and depth, some interviewees' occasions to speak about politics gradually decreased after migrating in effect of reduced frequency of contact with their ties in Czechia and more reluctance to talk openly about politics among people they knew in the United Kingdom (cf. Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013). Overall, while following the news functioned as a private mechanism of fostering or maintaining one's embedding in either of the country contexts concerned, talking about politics served as a way of nurturing existing social relationships and, on the other hand, as a channel for the face-to-face or online transmission of social remittances to other people (Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2016). Differences between research participants as to the geographical focus of their political interest corresponded to their future outlook for the stay, but by no means exclusively. Most migrants were, to some extent, interested in or informed about current affairs in both Czechia and Britain.

Importantly, the migrant narratives revealed that individual reasoning about one's own political interest is intertwined with the processes of embedding, anchoring and belonging – the (transforming) identifications with the national, local or otherwise defined communities and the individual perception of “home”. Sometimes, even if one's prevailing professional and social embedding is in the country of reception, social and sentimental attachments to the country of origin may still be very strong. Routine political interest – keeping track of what is happening in the country of origin and talking about it with one's close yet physically distant ties there – might be a mechanism of fostering those ties, saturating the need for keeping those attachments alive. This finding shows that, like migrants' overall thinking about their country of origin, also their political interest is framed by the “myth of return” (Anwar, 1979) – the enduring possibility of going back – where the recognition of one's citizenship responsibilities

to the country of origin (electoral rights) and potential legal or economic affiliations (property, inheritance etc.) is often intertwined with nostalgic feelings and lifelong social relations. When we perceive political interest in this way, the objective intensity, form and content of it (how, how much, how often, which sources) is irrelevant for assessing its importance as a tool in migrant embedding “here” and “there”; it is the migrant’s subjective experience of embedding that counts. In addition, if we accept Bennett, Flickinger and Rhine’s (2000) presumption that individuals rarely base their political views only on simply “following the news” through public informational sources but formulate and re-formulate their opinions largely in conversations with others, casual political talk represents a rich source of political awareness and readiness for various (other) forms of political participation. The following section will move the analysis to more active forms of political participation, comparing their role in embedding processes to that of political interest.

Section 7.2 Political Participation: Voting and Beyond

Compared to other forms of political participation, voting is the only form that is provided to the voters as a direct means of exercising control over the elites (Almond & Verba, 1963). Hence, it is also the most common form of political participation in democratic states (van Deth, Montero & Westholm, 2007; Linek et al., 2017). It differs from all other forms by its regularity and normativity – even if participation is not compulsory, it is socially expected that those who are eligible to vote will take the opportunity to do so (Vlachová & Lebeda, 2006). Other forms of political participation are significantly less frequent due to their voluntary nature, (varying) exceptionality and time-demandingness (van Deth, Montero & Westholm, 2007; Linek et al., 2017; Matějka et al., 2015). Nevertheless, engaging in them is usually perceived as a sign of stronger political interest and commitment. This is why they deserve close academic attention, even if they concern only a minor part of the studied population. The current section shows that migration and differentiated embedding in the societies “here” and “there” transform migrant political participation in specific ways, adding new meanings to its different forms, which in turn influence the ongoing embedding and dis-embedding processes.

7.2.1 Voting

In the narratives collected, political participation of the traditional sort was mostly limited to electoral participation. All of the interviewees were Czech citizens and thus eligible to vote in the Czech elections. In presidential elections (since 2013) and elections into the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber of parliament, since 2012), they could thus vote in person at

Czech representative authorities if previously registered in a special registry of voters (see Section 2.2). As regards the United Kingdom, this meant the Czech embassy located in London, and, since 2019, also the general consulate in Manchester. In all elections (the above, as well as the Senate, regional, municipal and European Parliament elections), they could vote in person if they were physically present in Czechia on the day of the elections and if they had kept their permanent residence in Czechia (Janská & Janurová, 2020; Kandalec, 2013; Linek, 2018). Those who had obtained British citizenship were also eligible to vote in all types of elections in the UK. Those without British nationality could take part in municipal elections in the place of their residence in the United Kingdom and in European Parliament elections by virtue of being EU citizens (Ziegler, 2018). The informants were asked about their electoral participation in Czech elections prior to migration, as well as since moving abroad, and about their electoral participation in (relevant) British elections since moving.

The voting behaviour of the migrants in my sample represented a whole scale of attitudes. However, two aspects were common to most of them. First, correspondingly to the findings of large-scale research into the political participation of diasporas (e.g. Fidrmuc & Doyle, 2004; Janská et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; Kostelka, 2017), most of the interviewees declared they did *not* vote – locally, in the municipalities they lived in, and/or transnationally, in the national elections in Czechia. Second, dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the state of the Czech political scene and political culture in Czechia were shared by all interviewees to some extent and served as one of the reasons to not vote. Third, the narratives suggest that the migrants' voting behaviour was affected by migration primarily in the practical sense and less in the sense of adaptation to receiving-country trends. That is, living in a different country posed geographical (distance travelled), administrative (prior in-person registration needed) and financial (travel money and financial loss when taking days off work) obstacles to all of the interviewees' electoral participation in Czech elections, which most of them considered "too much of an effort," as expressed by Mirka, resonating with the findings of Janská et al. (2022a, 2022b). In addition, as most of them were quite sceptical that any major change of standards was possible in the Czech political scene and have become less attentive to political affairs in Czechia due to physical distance and a lack of time, many interviewees stated they "wouldn't even know whom to vote for".

Researcher: Have you been to the polls since you've been in England?

No. I haven't been to the polls because the only way to vote if I am not in Czechia at the time, is to go to London to the embassy. And that's almost... if I had a trip there with something attached to it, then maybe I would, but [I wouldn't] particularly want to make a trip just for that... Because, it's horrible to say that one vote won't make a difference, but in the reality of it, I was like - so I've got to spend, I don't know, a hundred [pounds] on petrol or a hundred on the train. It's hard to do London from here. I've sometimes done that embassy thing in one day, but it's tiring and dangerous in my opinion.

So, when we've got something to do at the embassy, we stay in a hotel there, and then we come back [home] the next day. So, it's two days off work and I'm saying, for the sake of getting Zeman elected or whatever, it's not worth it to me.

(Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Only a few migrants – those most politically alert – took the opportunity to vote in British elections, either national or municipal, and European Parliament elections. What made a difference was naturalisation. Of those six who already had British citizenship, only Jarka stated that she did not take part in elections. The remaining five seemed to approach voting as an automatic responsibility which comes with citizenship, even if they were not intensively politically interested or informed. This attitude was shared by most of the sample – many of those who considered applying for British citizenship stated that they would take part in British elections once naturalised.

If I had [British citizenship], I would definitely [vote]. It seems to me the same as the local [elections]. I can go there, and I think it makes sense to express my vote there [so I do it]. And it is the same with the national ones. I see it the way that I want to make my voice heard in some way, so I would go to the polls. But it is not that I would get citizenship just for that.

(Hugo, in his 40s, working, 14 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

Similarly, most interviewees stated that they would vote in Czech elections if they lived in Czechia, and thus, there would be no or much smaller practical obstacles involved in accessing polling stations. This finding supports the frequent argument that increasing the number of polling stations abroad promotes greater electoral participation among the diaspora (Burean & Popp, 2015; Lesińska, 2024). According to the interviewees' reports of their pre-migration voting behaviour, their attitudes to voting corresponded to their lifelong stances. Still, due to practical obstacles, more of them ended up not voting than would have been the case had they stayed in Czechia. In the following paragraphs, I will now explore this issue further. I present three key voting scenarios identified by my analysis – non-voters, selective voters, and devoted voters. Trying to examine their determinants, I will account for the role of embedding in the local and transnational social networks, of the migrants' future outlook for their stay, as well as of the pre-/post-Brexit context.

Non-Voters

Non-voters, counting 25 migrants, were the largest group in the sample. Their reasons not to participate and their attitude to politics and political participation were quite varied, as was the extent of their embedding in the Czech and British societies and their future migratory outlook. The stayers Kateřina, Daniela and Klára, searchers Matyáš and Aneta, and return-wishers Otakar and Marta were examples of non-voters who voted neither in Czechia nor the UK and have never or only very rarely participated in elections even pre-migration.

Nevertheless, each had quite a different relationship to and knowledge of politics. Kateřina's indifference to the Czech elections was an extension of her attitude to politics in general – she just did not consider them important – and her detachment from the Czech day-to-day reality.

I never voted. No. I had a lot of studying and other things to take care of, so I never voted. I didn't even know Havel⁶⁹ died. I only found it out from my sister somehow, much later, maybe a couple of months later. (...) I didn't even know Zeman became president.

(Kateřina, in her 20s, homemaker, 8 years in the UK, STAYER)

In contrast, Daniela's account presented a dissonance between the (high) intensity and frequency with which she talked and followed politics and the (low) interest she actually had in influencing politics. This disparity, which was not unique in the sample, but was the most pronounced in her case, could be explained by her claiming that a lot of her political interest was utilitarian, as shown in the quotes.

Whenever there are any national elections in Czechia, Dad subtly pushes me to go to the embassy and vote. But unfortunately, I haven't done it yet. I never voted in my life because when I still was in Czechia, when I was 18 to 20 [years old], I didn't manage it. And since then, maybe I'd make time for it if I wanted to. But I'm not so much into politics, even though I speak about it daily with many people. It does not interest me in such depth as for me to want to influence the course of things. (...)

In Britain I can vote in the municipality I live in. But I don't vote. I don't engage politically, even though I think I know more about politics than an ordinary person because I have to talk about it with someone all the time. And I think my dad would be pleased if I engaged more, especially in the Czech elections. But I somehow haven't reached the point where I'd want my voice to count. And on the other hand, I think that maybe it is not right for me to vote for people who will decide about things in Czechia when I don't live there, and it doesn't concern me. I think I don't have the right to decide about it or that it is wrong for me to decide who will lead the people there when I am not there. I think it is unfair for me to mess up with it. It was my decision that I didn't want to be in the country.

(Daniela, in her 30s, working, 10 years in the UK, STAYER)

Daniela's opinion that one should not interfere with the politics of the state one does not live in was shared by other non-voters and some selective voters. Klára's lack of detailed knowledge of the Czech political scene, coupled with her doubtful stance towards transnational voting, reflected her orientation towards settling in the UK and scepticism about Czech politics, which was quite common in the interviewee sample.

I follow elections in Czechia. I received the voting ballots [*to her registered address in Czechia – author's comment*], but because I am not very interested in the politics in Czechia and the specific candidates, I don't vote. If I were to go, I'd vote for someone I know nothing about. I'd read, OK, he's got this and that in his programme, but we all know how this works and how much of it he's going to

⁶⁹ Václav Havel (1936–2011), originally a writer and playwright, became a key representative of the Czechoslovak dissent in the 1970s and 1980s and later a symbol of the 1989 Velvet Revolution. He became Czechoslovakia's and Czech Republic's first democratic president (1989–2003) following the political turnover of 1989.

fulfil anyway. So, no. Even if I were to vote, I think my vote would not influence it. You can say – if everyone does this, it will end up badly again. Yes, it can end badly, but I think in Czechia, whoever you vote for, it will always be bad. (...) When there were presidential elections⁷⁰ in Czechia, I was not there and was really surprised when I found out Zeman was our new president. I thought – gosh, so people in the country really don't have any brains if they vote for someone like that. (...)

(Klára, in her 30s, working, 3 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

From among the searchers, Matyáš was both politically disinterested and electorally non-active, focusing wholly on his work and hobbies in the UK, the way he had done already before migrating. In contrast, Aneta stated she was quite keen on international political affairs and expressed willingness to vote, but described her not having taken part in any elections – ever – as basically a coincidence, having to do with her multiple international migrations since finishing high school.

Well, in Czechia, [I never voted], although last time there was an election, I mean for the president, I was keeping my fingers crossed for that guy (...) And then I was so disappointed [by the result]. Well, hopefully, next time [the candidate I liked] will win. I didn't read a lot on [him], you know? But I read some articles about him, and it seemed like the gentleman had a little something in his head. And Zeman is kind of from the communist era, so I didn't really want him. It's not that I'm committed a lot as far as Czechia is concerned. But here in the UK, here I would like to vote in the next election for sure. Here I would like to be a bit involved.

(Aneta, in her 30s, working, 1 year in the UK, 2014, SEARCHER)

Both Otakar and Marta were return-wishers who never voted on purpose despite their relatively keen interest in current (though not necessarily political) affairs, both in the United Kingdom and Czechia. Marta said that she gained her indifference to political participation through her upbringing: “my family in Czechia, we're not interested.” Otakar explained his electoral non-participation through a lifelong scepticism about election outcomes.

On principle, I'm not a voter. I think that the dictatorship of the proletariat has been replaced by the dictatorship of the majority, and then basically, the minorities get to hang around and rant and have some separate rights like the gypsies. But it's still a dictatorship in principle. I don't take part in elections. I don't see the point of it. In the last [Czech] election, I thought I'd take a look at it and give it a try. But there wasn't much to choose from. And look at the marasmus, like who's the president of Czechia, that's the result of the election. It's the people's choice, right? What you see there.

(Otakar, in his 50s, working, 6 years in the UK, 2015, RETURN-WISHER)

Despite their keen political interest, Mirka, Luboš (both searchers), Ilona (a return-wisher) and Běla (a stayer) were examples of non-voters too. However, they stopped voting only at the time they moved to Britain. With respect to taking part in Czech elections, the shared denominator of their reasons not to vote was a cost-and-benefit calculation considering the

⁷⁰ The historically first general presidential election in 2013.

resources they would have to spend in order to take part in these elections (see also Favell, 2010; Janská et al., 2022b). Paradoxically, though they acknowledged the general importance of electoral participation and expressed a will to vote (unlike most of the other non-voters), some of them calling for the introduction of distance voting in Czechia, they admitted that they considered other things more important; their work, their time, their families and interests, and the money saved. Some of them admitted feeling guilty for granting voting such low priority.

I didn't vote [in the first Czech general presidential election]. For me the only opportunity to vote then was a trip to London. And that costs 100 pounds, which is quite a lot of money, and you have to spend three hours on the train going there and three hours on the train going back, so it is not practical. Of course, if I could, I would vote, but it was not practical for me. Otherwise, I would like to be active in this. I would vote if there were some opportunity to do so, I don't know, at the local town hall, if someone organised it. I would take part. Most likely, I would. But I will not make a trip to London because of it, no way.

Researcher: And have you ever used the opportunity to vote when it was convenient for you to make a trip to Czechia?

I have never done that. I usually go home when there are holidays in England, when there are a couple of days off. I add a few of my own days off to it and go to Czechia. Maybe for a week. And elections never happened to take place at that time.

(Luboš, in his 20s, working and studying, 3 years in the UK, 2014, SEARCHER)

Other non-voters used their critical opinion of Czech politics to justify missing out on Czech elections, claiming their vote “would not make a difference anyway.”

I'm very interested in politics, and I know that some of the [Czech] girls from here ordered a minibus and went to vote in Manchester. It's not worth it to me when the electoral law was changed just so that Babiš couldn't be elected,⁷¹ so I don't really care anymore. I wouldn't have voted for Babiš, but it seemed like an intentional set-up, and I have this tendency to always protect the weak. And to tell you the truth, I don't know who I would vote for now.

(Mirka, in her 50s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2022. SEARCHER)

British local elections, which all of the informants were eligible to participate in⁷², did not seem to attract them either. Bringing to the fore their consciousness of being foreigners, they seemed to perceive them as something external to their lives that cannot stir up their emotions enough to make them take action or as something they should not interfere with (cf. Favell, 2010).

⁷¹ Referring to “*Lex Babiš*” – the amendment to the Conflict of Interest Act (*Zákon č. 159/2006 Sb., o střetu zájmů*) that was passed in 2016, to prevent the abuse of political power for economic gain. The amendment has been a source of ongoing controversies, repeatedly challenged and changed.

⁷² Before Brexit, their eligibility was based on being EU citizens. After Brexit, they could vote if they were holders of one of the legally defined permissions to stay since 31 December 2020 without a break (*Types of election, referendums, and who can vote*, n.d.).

In the case of return-wishers and searchers, such as Ilona or Luboš, this attitude was coupled with their orientation at return, or undecidedness about whether they would settle in the UK forever, intertwined with emotional attachments to Czechia. Despite their multilayered embedding in British society, these migrants still felt very attached to Czechia as their (second) “home” (see Chapter 6), some of them still wavering about taking the “leap of faith” with regard to settling in the UK. The non-voting stayers shared this sentimental relationship to Czechia with them, and even if they did not see it as a place where they could live anymore, they were concerned about the well-being of their left-behind families. This contrasted with how doubtless some of them felt about the quality of British politics. Kašpar’s explanation for his lack of motivation to participate in British elections was characteristic of such attitudes.

As an ordinary citizen, you don’t care who sits there. I am not interested in who is there when I know that everything works well anyway.

(Kašpar, in his 40s, retired, 11 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

In terms of demographic and socio-economic characteristics, the non-voters were the most diverse group of the three. They included migrants of all the education levels represented in my sample who performed a wide variety of professions from elementary to professional and, correspondingly, differed in terms of income and living standard. Hence, also in terms of cultural capital, they were a mix. A few of them were homemakers, a few retired, and the rest were working. The group included migrants of all age groups (20s to 60s), as well as of all life-cycle stages, family and relationship constellations covered by the sample. The number of return-wishers and stayers in this group was slightly higher than that of searchers.

Selective Voters

As many as 21 of the interviewees were *selective* with respect to what elections they voted in. Some of them voted exclusively in the Czech or British elections. Their reasons to vote only in one of the countries varied but generally had to do with their future outlook for the stay and reflected their citizenship and residential status, individual capacities to access the nearest polling station (distance, finances), as well as the individual attitude to the significance of and need for voting (one’s own capacity to influence the course of affairs). Some selective voters participated only in some types of elections (e.g., municipal, parliamentary, presidential) based on their perception of priorities, administrative circumstances, and even chance. Some selective voters were very determined about their electoral behaviour, some were rather unexcited. The reasoning behind these different choices will be revealed in the following quotes.

Among selective voters, the most common was voting in British elections only. Not surprisingly, this voting behaviour was almost exclusively reserved to stayers. Voting only in

British elections was part of their commitment to life in the UK – embedding in British social networks and official structures, which included a process of dis-embedding from their formal attachments (property, bank accounts etc.), day-to-day knowledge of current affairs and entitlements in Czechia. Engbersen et al. (2013) describe a similar process with regard to their “settler” type migrants. This did not only apply to those who were already naturalised but also to other interviewees who expressed confidence about their plan to stay in the United Kingdom. Prokop (a searcher) and Žofie (a return-wisher) were the only UK-oriented selective voters who mentioned concrete – though also very long-term – plans to return or re-migrate. Since they were both quite politically alert and proud to be part of their respective London neighbourhoods, they enjoyed being entitled to participate in the local elections.

Researcher: Did you vote in any elections here [in Britain]?

[*About his wife and himself*] Yes, we vote.

R: In the municipal ones?

Yes, we voted for Boris Johnson. Popular.

R: So you do follow what’s going on in London for instance. You went to the elections informed.

I didn’t want the... what was his name? Ken Livingstone to be re-elected. So we supported Boris.

R: And did you vote in the EU elections? They usually take place together with the local ones.

I don’t remember. But it’s possible it was together. We always vote for the Conservatives, so... I am happy about Cameron [becoming prime minister in 2010], even though we didn’t vote because we can’t [due to not being naturalised]. But I’m happy he won.

R: And did you vote in the Czech elections?

No. I wouldn’t even know who to vote for, to be honest. I’d surely not vote for anyone who’s in the government or in the opposition. (...) I don’t follow it that much, so I don’t know the small parties there.

(Prokop, in his 40s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

Like among non-voters, common reasons for missing out on (Czech) elections among selective voters were “trivial” (Favell, 2010): the inaccessibility of the polling station, or, plainly, “laziness” – the unwillingness to make arrangements in one’s daily life to be able to attend the vote.

In Czechia, I would consider it realistic to go to the polls wherever I was, right? I would just take the time to go vote. It’s more about comfort than anything else. If there were a consulate [in my place of residence], I’d definitely vote.

(Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Voting only in Czech elections was quite rare. Only Ivo and Hedvika (a London-based couple) and Karla stated they always make time to be able to attend Czech national elections at the Czech embassy in London. Stressing that this is their only engagement on account of

Czechia, Ivo and Hedvika made a point that electoral participation was a citizen responsibility they took seriously, but that was all they were ready to do. Karla placed a strong emphasis on participating in the Czech elections, though she also mentioned her disillusionment with the Czech political scene. She felt very strongly about democratic values and perceived her right to vote in Czechia as something one should not ignore, referring to Czechoslovakia's experience of totalitarianism.

I always voted regularly. And I vote even now. I registered in the special list of voters at the embassy, so last time, when there were parliamentary elections, I voted at the embassy. (...) I did not vote in the presidential election because I missed the registration. I think you have to do it six weeks ahead and I missed it.

(Karla, in her 40s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2016, RETURN-WISHER)

The remaining selective voters combined voting in the UK and Czechia according to the importance of the particular elections or even by coincidence. Most of them were rather unsystematic in their voting behaviour. They mentioned voting “when they happened to be in Czechia at the time of elections” or “probably having voted once or twice”.

Like non-voters, selective voters also varied in terms of the role they ascribed to voting. While some of them were intensively politically interested and kept themselves informed about current affairs on a running basis as a precondition for participating in elections “here” or “there”, for others, voting was a responsibility they were not particularly passionate about but took part in it out of habit or duty (see also Favell, 2010; Petrušek, 2017a). Yet others approached voting as a virtuous activity that was, however, not as crucial to go out of one's way to take part in, like Nikola.

I voted for the first time [in British national elections] this year because I could do so as a [newly naturalised] British citizen. And I chose I would do it by post, because you can do that here. So, I had the paperwork sent home, voted, and sent it off.

Researcher: And what about the municipal elections? As a European citizen, you could have participated in those even before.

I know. Maybe I voted once or twice, but... No, I didn't, because then you couldn't vote postally yet. You had to go there. So, I didn't vote in municipal elections. Only now, for the first time. My husband made me. My husband made me vote, and my daughter had to do the crosses.

R: And did you vote when you still lived in Czechia?

I did. For the only party that was electable, the ODS⁷³. At that time, it was either the ODS or the communists. There was not much to think about – “I am going to vote because it will be better [than not doing it].” I considered going to the embassy when there were presidential elections [first general presidential election in Czechia in 2013]. It didn't happen because the Czech embassy is disorganised.

⁷³ *Občanská demokratická strana* (Civic Democratic Party) – one of the new democratic parties established in Czechoslovakia after the breakup of the socialist régime in 1989, still active today.

(...) One really has to make an effort to do it. It is not [possible to vote postally]. Everything is so difficult, and it takes so much time. For me, it was easier to become a British citizen than to apply for a Czech passport again.

(Nikola, in her 40s, working, 16 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

Nikola's quote captures much of the reasoning shared by selective voters – how the decision-making about one's participation is affected by the accessibility of the vote and one's opinion of available candidates. But also, how a growing embedding in the receiving society and dis-embedding from the society of origin may be supported by one's bad experience with the country-of-origin authorities (cf. Doležalová & Löblová, 2024).

The selective voters were significantly less diverse in their demographic and socio-economic characteristics than non-voters. Most of them were in their 30s and 40s and married, or in a relationship. They were prevalently university-educated, though a few had lower education. Despite their high education, their occupations covered a rather wide range since some of them were experiencing deskilling, mostly due to insufficient English proficiency. In terms of income and living standard, based on the indirect evidence, most of them could be said to be “doing fine,” corresponding to above-average, middle-class standards. They could also be said to be coming primarily from middle-class family backgrounds, rather rich in cultural capital. There were slightly more stayers than searchers and return-wishers in the group.

Devoted Voters

Devoted voters were those research participants who perceived their voting responsibility very strongly and believed in the inherent positive value of the democratic vote. Hence, in their case, their individual future outlook for the stay did not seem to matter. They voted in all elections available to them in their current migratory situation and residential/citizenship status, regardless of where they were about to live in the near or distant future. For them, practical obstacles did not represent a serious issue; they were ready to make arrangements to overcome them, as long as it was at least a little possible. They were the smallest group in the migrant sample, counting five research participants.

Filip was one of the few interviewees who had both Czech and British citizenship and made sure to take part in all elections possible. He also had a very clear opinion on why it was important for him to vote in both states.

I vote in both places [UK and Czechia], or, specifically, I vote in both local and national elections in Czechia and in both local and national elections in the UK. (...) In the local elections in Czechia, you can only vote in person. I'm not saying I go there every time, but I try to plan my trips so that I can be there [when elections take place]. (...)

I don't think I can remarkably influence it with my single vote. And by voting for someone, I don't necessarily force my own opinions on him or her. But, of course, I vote for someone who I think will lead the country to prosperity. And since I still have family and friends in Czechia who are important to me, if my vote can influence it, why would I not use it. (...)

Of course, I'm interested in what's going on in my [London] neighbourhood primarily (...) But the British "first past the post" system limits the choice quite a lot, so I was just happy with the Lib Dems in that borough. I thought the guy [local Liberal Democratic representative] did a good job. He was reachable, he delivered what I would expect him to deliver. That's why I voted for him in that local election. And I voted for him now, too, in that national election. (...) In the national election, I'm interested in what they do even more, what their agenda is just for the next five years, because that's an important decision. So, before I made the decision this time, I've been thinking about it... I've been properly thinking about it. But I voted, like I say, I voted tactically just for the Liberal Democrats, because if I'd voted Conservative [which would have normally been my preference], [my vote] would have been lost.

(Filip, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

Ema and Vanda (both cited repeatedly in Section 7.1) were examples of devoted voters who were absolutely convinced about the inherent positive value of electoral participation, even though they held quite different attitudes to politics and political decision-making. While Ema kept herself politically informed and was quite passionate about the state of political culture in Czechia, Vanda's stance towards politics was rather indifferent and neutral, and her vote was a pragmatic way of fulfilling her citizen duty.

Researcher: Which elections do you take part in?

Any that are open to Czechs living abroad.

R: So, is it important for you that you can influence what's going on over there?

I was brought up hearing that the only thing that's necessary and that we have the right to do in politics is to go vote because that's the only way we can influence things. So, I vote.

R: And did you also vote in elections here in the United Kingdom, the European and municipal ones?

Yes, I did. (Ema, in her 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

I talk to people I respect, and that's the only time I deal with politics. And I'm interested in their opinion. They have their opinions, their arguments why they believe in this or that party. Or why they don't and why they've changed it. And that's where my conversation ends. Even if I were to vote e.g. for the Greens, some neutral party, if nobody advised me who to vote for, I'd just vote for somebody neutral, just to get that vote in.

(Vanda, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

The attitudes to voting expressed by devoted voters present some of the strongest examples of social remittances transmitted by the research participants in my sample. Regardless of their motivations to vote, deliberately making arrangements to be able to participate in Czech elections (or at least claiming to do so) meant these migrants placed high importance on the values transmitted to their country of origin, not only on the

micro-level of interpersonal relationships but also on the aggregate level (cf. Drbohlav et al., *under review*). The importance they simultaneously ascribed to voting in their new locality and country of residence (“any elections open to Czechs living abroad”) underscores their devotion to the idea of participative democracy as a principle, as well as their acknowledgement of (or belief in) their power to influence public matters that concern them. This observation converses with a few of the issues that have been raised by other scholars in this regard.

First, even though my sample does not aspire for representativity, it suggests that such intensive commitment to multi-sited electoral participation is rather rare, a finding made also by Favell (2010) in his research of the “Eurostars” in three major European metropolises. According to Favell (2010), most of such highly educated, highly qualified and in many respects also socially very engaged migrants do not seem to see the value of voting in their country or locality of residence, even despite their thorough knowledge of the environment and a multifaceted embedding in the locality. Only a minority indulge in receiving country-based voting, and even that is mostly “out of curiosity” (Favell, 2010).

Second, the exclusivity of this committed electoral behaviour prompts the question of who these migrants are. The five devoted voters in my sample were all university-educated and worked in highly qualified professions where they held responsible managing positions. Three of them were stayers, and the fourth was a searcher with a preference for staying in the UK. As regards living standards and income, they were all middle-class, financially secure and relatively high-earning. Evidence collected about their family background and their educational journeys suggests that they all had high cultural capital, either inherited from their family home or acquired through their own study and personal development, which they cherished through their attitudes and actions – voting being one of them.

Third, and lastly, it remains to be asked what values these migrants transmit via their voting to Czechia. Although I have not asked the informants specifically what parties they vote for, from their spontaneous expressions of political opinion or indirect comments regarding political culture, it could be inferred that they mostly prioritised moderate pro-Western political parties, which in recent years stood in opposition to the “turn to the East” and political backsliding represented by the former president Miloš Zeman and the populist politics of Andrej Babiš. Their political remittances, transmitted by their vote, would thus correspond to the characteristics described by Fidrmuc and Doyle (2004) as “liberal and democratic”. However, in contrast to these authors’ conclusions, I would be careful to view their political values as adopted through their embedding in the receiving

society's prevailing value framework because their pre-migration trajectories, perhaps with a slight exception of Vanda, suggest they had acquired their political opinions prior to migration.

Wrapping up Voting

Examining Czech migrants' voting behaviour has revealed a few important points regarding the relationship between migrant political participation and their embedding in transnational spaces. First, "not voting" does not equal "no interest" or "no emotions" regarding politics or political participation. In fact, many emotions were involved in the migrants' explanations of why they do not partake in Czech elections, especially. Rather than indifference, not participating was often the result of a calculation of practical priorities that migrants have to do when facing the question of whether to participate in country-of-origin elections, considering the various costs involved. This highlights the importance of the societal opportunity structure (both "here" and "there") in motivating, or on the other hand, deterring migrant participation (Vogel, 2008c). Opportunity structure includes the conditions for extra-territorial electoral participation (distance voting, polling stations), accessibility of the vote to migrants with varied resources, the influence of public opinion, etc. (Burean & Popp, 2015; Lesińska, 2024; Vogel, 2008c). Even those migrants who stressed that they do not vote in Czech elections on principle often had quite sophisticated and emotional opinions about Czech politics and political culture, as well as a running knowledge of them. Often, criticism thereof was one of the reasons why voting was considered "a waste of time" – no good can come out of the Czech political scene anyway. Not voting in British elections sprung from a combination of factors, including a lack of interest and knowledge, as well as a lack of identification with British affairs (cf. Favell, 2010).

Second, voting behaviour seemed to be affected by migration and related to the migrants' variegated embedding in transnational spaces, but only to some extent and in some situations. Migration surely worked as a source of interruption in the migrants' voting habits – many migrants stopped voting in Czech elections in the effect of having moved abroad for practical reasons, regardless of their future migratory outlook. For those migrants who were strongly focused on their life in the UK (primarily stayers), a re-orientation of focus on British politics and elections from the Czech ones was a natural part of their dis-embedding from the Czech reality and a gradual, multi-sited embedding in the British one. However, the general attitudes to voting were shown to be long-term rather than affected by the migratory situation *per se*. This was most strongly illustrated by the examples of lifelong non-voters and devoted voters, but also by the fact that those

migrants who started missing out on Czech elections only after migrating frequently claimed they would vote if they still lived in Czechia or if they were to return.

Even if they were not seriously considering return, for some migrants voting was inherently connected to their responsibilities and attachments to their country of origin and of citizenship, not to their country of residence, even though most of their day-to-day lives were happening there. Favell (2010) observes this somewhat irrational, nostalgic attitude to voting as very common among his “Eurostar” informants.

This finding points to the significance of life-long membership conceptions for migrants in transnational contexts, highlighting that despite not contributing actively by casting a vote, migrants bear a political remittance potential by having a long-term concern for the state of affairs in their country of origin (Kovács, 2020; Krawatzek & Müller-Funk, 2020; Triandafyllidou & Vogel, 2005). As the narratives suggest, if extra-territorial voting is more accessible, then migrants are more willing to politically remit. However, their concern and their opinions can also be transmitted in the form of social remittances in conversations with their transnational ties, even if not explicitly intended so. The actual transmission of political remittances via voting in my sample took place primarily in the case of devoted voters, all of whom were also convinced of the importance of thus contributing to Czech political affairs. Nevertheless, their voting behaviour did not seem to be affected by migration in any significant way, except for providing them with a new political unit to vote in (the United Kingdom) – they would vote anyway, wherever they were, as long as they were eligible to do so.

Overall, these findings raise a warning against viewing voting behaviour as a marker of embedding in its own right. Yes, stronger embedding in the country of reception in the case of stayers seems to lead to decreased transnational political participation and to shift focus to the country-of-reception politics. In contrast, stronger embedding in the country of origin in the case of return-wishers seems to be coupled with an enduring motivation to vote in the country of origin to the detriment of interest and participation in receiving-country politics. However, the data do not bear evidence of migrants’ voting behaviour adapting in its character to the patterns prevalent in the receiving country or changing their political views in the effect of migration or embedding in the receiving country’s social networks (cf. Fidrmuc & Doyle, 2004). This finding complies with Levitt and Lamba-Nieves’s claim (2011) that what migrants do in their destination or what they remit depends on what they bring with them to their destination in the first place (see also Kasic, 2008). Similarly, the collected narratives do not seem to suggest there is a difference between the voting behaviour of the migrants interviewed pre-Brexit and post-Brexit.

Overall, the data suggest that the migration experience changes voting behaviour, with the underlying reasons being practical obstacles to taking part in elections in either of the countries concerned (distance, costs involved, citizenship status). Since the migration situation poses multiple challenges to migrants in terms of managing their finances (especially in the initial stages of the migration experience), adapting to the new environment in various ways, and balancing one's responsibilities and attachments in the countries concerned, the data suggest that voting tends to become one of the lower-priority responsibilities they gladly leave out to save their resources. However, as soon as they become more deeply embedded and possibly adopt the receiving-country citizenship, there is a possibility that their electoral routines from the pre-migration period will be transferred to the country of residence. Though transnational voting might lose attractiveness in such scenarios, the opportunity to vote remotely might work as a motivating factor at least in some cases. Only in the case of the most devoted voters does the migration experience not seem to alter their voting habits at all.

7.2.2 Political Participation Beyond Voting

There is little evidence of migrants' political participation other than voting in the interview sample. Some interviewees spoke about taking part in demonstrations and signing petitions on an occasional basis. Mostly, these were one-off events they came across by coincidence – for instance, through someone they knew – not part of any longer-term activities or engagements. Some informants mentioned engaging in *indirectly political* activities, like buying fair trade or charity products or contributing to charities. These activities will be dealt with in the following section on civic participation. Only three of the interviewees had a broader scope of direct political participation.

Highly Politically Active Migrants

Having quit his undergraduate studies, Marek came to Britain after completing military service and a few years of office work. He started off as a cleaner in a small local food company and, over time, worked his way up to become the company's deputy director. After approximately seven years spent in the UK, Marek decided to become a party member and later even stood for election to the local council.

In my family, we always admired Margaret Thatcher, already since way back into communism, because, of course, her anti-communist stance, her and Reagan's stance sort of disarmed the Soviet Union. Well, they were total heroes, you could say. (...) And with that, I came here, into Thatcher's

country, right? And I come to [a city in the north of England], and people absolutely hate her here. (...) I know there were some decisions that had to be made that were terribly unpopular. Particularly they affected the north [of England], Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield. the heavy industry there suffered from that. But overall, the country benefited. When Thatcher died a year and a half ago, people at my workplace were almost celebrating. And I thought this was terribly unfair. So, I went online, and I joined the Conservative Party. I paid about £25 for a year's membership, and I felt that at least I did something for my... I just wanted to show that even in the north some people are thinking sensibly. (...) And after a couple of weeks I got an e-mail saying that they were meeting. As new members, they were meeting somewhere in a pub near where I live. And I wouldn't normally go out amongst strangers like that. Like I said, I just joined the party more out of... it was kind of a gesture for me personally. But that it was so close and an informal meeting, new members in a pub and all that, I was like... I went there.

(Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Marek went on to describe how becoming friends with the other party members enriched his social life in Britain, helped him find new working opportunities, and made him volunteer to stand in the local election, though for a party that did not stand a chance in the given locality. Hence, his initial step, perceived by himself as a “private” political gesture, led to deepening and intensifying his embedding in the local social networks, as well as supporting his social mobility in the country of reception.

And I met this guy there. [Since then, we've become good friends], we hang out a lot. Every week we do something together. And in general, [the other local party members were] really nice people, we had a nice chat, and then I stayed sitting with [this new friend of mine], and we talked for a long time about Middle Eastern politics and other things that I was interested in, and that he was very interested in too, communism and all that, all wonderful.

(Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

At the time we spoke, Marek oversaw the party's local branch social media management and was proud to have pushed through the branch's public statement on a couple of local and international political issues he was very concerned about. He also took part in various political protests and happenings in his place of residence. Marek was highly politically aware already since his childhood, explaining he adopted this interest from his family, with his grandfather having been a political prisoner in 1950s Czechoslovakia and his grandmother being a concentration camp survivor. Nevertheless, he claimed he never engaged politically other than by voting prior to migration and neither did he participate in Czech politics transnationally since then. As shown above, he even admitted to being rather lazy to arrange to take part in the Czech elections. In fact, despite maintaining a close relationship with Czechia and keeping detailed track of Czech political affairs, he also mentioned the state of political culture in Czechia as one of his reasons not to return.

I had job offers [in Czechia], I would have gotten a job if I hadn't left, say, in the police or something like that. But when I discussed it with my grandfather, he discouraged me and said, "be careful, not much has changed [in the police since the fall of communism] and you could get hit hard and you might not like it very much because it just doesn't change, or it's terribly slow to change." So, I [stayed here], and I kept sort of keeping an eye on [the political situation in Czechia], whether it's getting better or not getting better. And I told myself – grandpa fought [the communist regime], but that doesn't mean the whole family has to keep fighting. Right? So I was like, I want to use my life to try something different. And I'm saying the political situation was one of the factors that kind of kept me from going back. Now you see it here [in the UK], it's not ideal either, there are many mistakes and many problems, but it's... the political culture, it's chalk and cheese. And that actually reflects on the sort of normal civil society or how people live. So, I see it [the way people behave to each other in the UK] as much more mature and better.

(Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

The respectful nature of political discussion and public conduct in general, which Marek admired about the UK, as well as his impression of the public being more vigilant to the activities of their elected representatives (as discussed in Section 7.1), might have supported him in engaging more actively, though he did not rule out engaging in party politics had he stayed in Czechia. Nevertheless, his willingness to build up social ties, eagerness to learn and curiousness about the British way of life, which were largely set off by migration and the associated experience of social isolation, played a significant role in his personal "activation".

Svatopluk was another politically very active research participant, and his political interest and engagement were local, transnational, as well as global. A Czech-Vietnamese alumnus of two UK universities, brought up in Czechia, now working as a contract analyst for international companies in London, he was intensively involved in the Czech community there, including its relatively numerous Czech-Vietnamese part⁷⁴. He repeatedly participated in local political events organised by activists from among the Czech diaspora in support of the massive pro-democratic *Milion chvilék* demonstrations which were taking place in Czechia around the time of our interview (see Chapter 2), having helped to promote them in his social networks. He had also taken part in various political events supporting other causes, e.g. anti-Brexit demonstrations (he claimed to have attended almost all anti-Brexit protests that took place in London up to the time of our interview) or demonstrations supporting the Hong Kong "Umbrella Revolution" of 2014, but also public debates and talks. Having volunteered with a human rights organisation in Rwanda during a break in his university studies, he also mentioned donating to civic, political and human rights organisations on an irregular basis,

⁷⁴ Vietnamese, who have been coming to Czechoslovakia via state-run economic projects already since the 1950s, form the third largest migrant minority in Czechia (after Ukrainians and Slovaks, see Czech Statistical Office, 2024a; Kušniráková, 2013; Svobodová, 2017). With education being highly prioritised by Vietnamese parents, especially in the context of migration, which is seen as a way of enhancing their children's achievement potential (e.g. Svobodová, 2017), there are non-negligible communities of Czech-Vietnamese students at high-ranking international universities, e.g. in London.

depending on the topic and cause. Like Marek's, his motivation for his political engagement sprung from a combination of multidirectional, intensive, and even passionate political interest, which he already had before arriving in the UK, and friendship ties. He, too, seemed to connect well with other politically highly interested and involved individuals.

Ctirad differed from Marek and Svatopluk in that he arrived in the UK in his 40s when he already had a rich professional career (and family life) behind him. While carrying out random manual jobs under communism, he became a self-taught underground Catholic pastor, serving and evangelising especially members of the Roma community, which he was involved with also in his later jobs in the post-communist era. Before moving to the UK, he worked as a social curator and also engaged as a political activist and political adviser. Due to his Roma background and his political and Christian activism, he faced increased aggressivity and violence from neo-Nazi groups in the 1990s, which is why he and his wife decided to join their daughter in Britain, where they received international protection and practical help from their Christian friends. Since then, he established his position as a teacher in religion and social mediator in the Czech community in the UK, assisting not only Czech Roma in finding their way in Britain. Apart from providing them with practical help, he also preached in various languages, including streaming his lectures in Czech online for his transnational followers. His political activism was tightly linked to his Christian ideals, which he promoted as a basis for just and corruption-free politics. Constantly broadening his networks of political contacts both in the United Kingdom and Czechia, at the time of our interview, he was preparing the grounds to start a new political party in Czechia and preparing to run for senator – a job that would be his only motivation to return. Despite being very focused on country-of-origin politics and intensively bound to the (Roma) Czech diaspora in the UK, through his activism he has built up a very rich network of both private and professional social contacts in the majority population in the UK, representing an example of transnational engagement that Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou (2016) describe as “mobile social remittances”, accompanied and supported by strong civic and political engagement also in the receiving country.

By starting to communicate with the community, and therefore with the authorities, I have made contacts in high-level politics here in Britain, and I know Jeremy Corbyn in person, the former opposition leader of the Labour Party here, and other politicians, even the Conservatives, Boris Johnson and so on. Because I'm the kind of person who doesn't sit at home. When you have an idea or a concept, you have to go where things are happening. And that's either the church, the churches, because I'm an ecumenical Christian (...), that's why I've been invited to all the churches that exist here, Anglican, Baptist and other Christian churches. I've even made friends among the Jehovah's Witnesses here in England.

(Ctirad, in his 60s, working, 18 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

The stories of Marek, Svatopluk and Ctirad differed in the focus and form of their political engagement and somewhat also in the pathways that lead these migrants into engaging in politics much more intensively than the rest of the sample – and more than is common in either Czechia or the United Kingdom. However, they had three key factors in common: the migrants' long-term political interest, with which they already came to the UK and which was not only passionate but, in fact, seemed to form an integral part of the migrants' way of life (cf. Gropas, 2008); the migrants' available resources to which they owed their initial political interest and their capacity to engage politically (cultural capital, education, English language knowledge and learning, as well as residential and economic stability; see Gropas, 2008; Triandafyllidou & Vogel, 2005); and their ability and will to build up social capital in both or multiple countries (a question not only of resources but also of personal character and social skills) (Putnam, 2000). To a large extent, these assets are long-term; some of them life-long or rooted in upbringing and political socialisation during adolescence (Kosic, 2008; Prior, 2010; Sapiro, 2004). However, the migrants' international experience(s) have apparently also contributed e.g. to building up their ability to “socially capitalise” by bringing them opportunities to confront new social environments and to build up new ties (cf. Gropas, 2008; Vertovec, 2009).

The Not-So-Politically-Active Migrants

The majority of the sample was not so politically active. They also often mentioned their strong and weak ties as drivers of their non-electoral political participation. However, in most of these cases, such participation was rather random and not invested with a deep or long-term interest in the topic in question. Sometimes, the motivation was to support the author or organiser of the action (a petition or a political protest event) rather than interest in the cause itself.

A few migrants stated that they appreciated the responsiveness of the locally elected representatives (Members of Parliament, MPs) in the United Kingdom to the public's everyday concerns, and, in turn, they noted the British public's greater vigilance to their MPs' work, compared to Czechia. They saw this as a major difference to the atmosphere of indifference and abandonment they perceived as typical for Czech politics. For instance, according to Filip, also the election choices of people in the UK were, on the whole, more responsible than those of people in Czechia, who tend to vote for “the lesser evil”. Some of them even took the opportunity to address their MPs regarding issues that mattered to them and generally had a positive experience.

Researcher: Do you follow the local politics a lot in the UK?

No, not so much. I guess it doesn't matter here. We don't see much change here. Here it's pretty... they're pretty good at it. They really do fix those roads. When I call the council now and complain, something really starts happening. Or at least they'll write me a letter. I just complained to the MP

for this constituency about cricket balls flying into my house. I don't know what she's going to do about it; so far, it's been quiet, and it's been going on for six months. But at least she wrote back. At least they're trying to do something, or at least they look like they're doing something.

(Dagmar, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

The prevailing stance to engaging politically among my interviewees was, however, one of indifference or reluctance. They either contended they did not happen to feel so strongly about an issue to the extent that it would make them get involved or implied they were doubtful about the impact of such action.

Before the election, a lot of (...) people come here, and there's a lot of discussion. Or they're trying to debate with you at the door and convince you that they're the right ones to [represent you in the Parliament]. But otherwise, did we ever sign something [a petition]? There are internet petitions that affect the whole of England or the whole of Britain. What else? Something like that, that we'd somehow do a lot of, what's the word? Participate in anything, no.

(Jana, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2014, STAYER)

Partly, partly we do [get engaged about political issues concerning the locality]. But again, it's rather passive. It's not very active. For instance, there's a lot of construction work going on in our [town]. So maybe [my husband and I] go to look at it, when we've read about it [in the local paper], to see what's going to happen. But again, it's not like we'd revolt against it, sign petitions or try to get a petition written. I think there's a lot of disillusion from people here about politics or how much can be accomplished by something like this.

(Gabriela, in her 40s, homemaker, working part-time, 10 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

With the exception of the highly active migrants discussed previously, these opinions were shared by both my pre-Brexit and post-Brexit interviewees. Most of them were rather private in their interests and non-professional pursuits and passive with regard to the question of non-electoral political engagement. Regardless of their opinion of Brexit, neither the pre- nor post-Brexit interviewees took part in political events supporting or demonstrating against the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU, or any other recent heavily discussed political topics, with the exception of Svatopluk, who was very active in various types of political participation (see above). If anything, engagement focusing on non-political or indirectly political issues was more common. This will be examined in the following section.

Section 7.3 Civic Participation

Civic participation, that is, engaging in indirectly political or non-political activities contributing to the “public good”, was more common among my migrant interviewees than “active” political participation. This complies with Matějka et al.'s (2015) findings on the

preference for various kinds of engagement in the Czech population. Civic participation ranged from buying fair trade or charity products to contributing to charities to hands-on volunteering in civic organisations. For some migrants, these activities were regular, long-term and thought-through. For others, they were temporary or random and occasional. Most participants' civic engagement was taking place in Britain, whether it was hands-on or donation-based. However, a few participants did mention being active transnationally (in the form of financial donations or online communication) or prior to their migration. In this section, I will examine the migrants' motivations for this kind of engagement, studying their relation to the migration experience and differentiated embedding in transnational spaces.

To start with, when talking about civic participation, "pure" civic engagement, conducted for the greater good with no other motivations in place, is rare (Triandafyllidou & Vogel, 2005). Most such engagement tends to be motivated by interests which are to some extent selfish, be it the pleasure taken in helping someone or conducting a particular activity, the wish to gain professional experience in a certain field, or the aim to build up one's social networks (Gropas, 2008; Kosic, 2008). Examples from my fieldwork show that it would be shortsighted to ignore such activities in analysis because they are somehow connected to the doer's private interests. For instance, Vanda had two long-term, very time-consuming volunteering activities that she engaged in. First, she had been a key member of staff and co-founder of a Czech school – a local diaspora association established by a small group of Czech parents with the aim of supporting their children's knowledge of Czech. Although this position was unpaid and took her extensive time, one could argue she got involved in it for selfish reasons – to secure Czech education and friendship ties for her children. Vanda's second such engagement was voluntary work for a sports club of which she was a member. Again, such volunteering can be seen as only "paying back" to a community one is a member of in return for the benefits one accrues from this membership. Matějček et al. (2015) are reluctant to include such forms of volunteering in their conception of civic engagement. However, as Triandafyllidou and Vogel (2005) point out, civic engagement and hobbies sometimes spill over into one another, and voluntary activities done out of responsibility to a particular community might grow in extent far beyond the theoretical value received from that community in the first place, so the divide between self-interest and public good loses clarity (see also Parry, Brookfield & Bolton, 2021). This was the case with Vanda's diaspora school engagement; in fact, the growing amount of work and responsibility asked of her was also the reason why she gave up this volunteering job after years of intensive involvement. As Parry, Brookfield and Bolton (2021) show, the tension between volunteering, work and family responsibilities is a common source of distress, especially among working mothers of younger children, which leads them to reconsider participation after some time.

The migrants' motivations for engaging and dis-engaging civically and the individual benefits of such engagement, which are not always foreseen beforehand, show that civic engagement can support migrant embedding "here" and "there" in intricate ways. Local civic engagement – even if focused on a diaspora community – contributes to building migrants' social capital and thus deepening their embedding in their locality, or their country of residence as a whole. For instance, Vanda's engagement in a Czech diaspora organisation in the United Kingdom deepened her embedding in the social networks there, not her motivation to return.

Most importantly, with my business and the Czech school, I blended with the community. I really felt like I belonged there, that I just didn't belong in Czechia anymore, right? I have friends [in Czechia], but everybody's living their own life, and they've got different routines and they've got different lives.

(Vanda, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

Let me stay with Vanda for one more moment, as her narrative contains rich material relevant to the analysis of other migrants' experiences, too.

Here, it's quite common [to volunteer]. I'm the treasurer of a [sports] club [I am a member of], I take care of the finances, the memberships and reservations for our hut. It's good. It looks good on your CV when you do something like that. But I guess it's also that one needs to give something back, not only through charity, which is also very common here, but I think it's better to... a lot of people here do scouts and coach football clubs. Almost every parent participates in some way in those kids' free activities, and they don't even think about it. I don't recall my mum ever doing anything like that. Or the people around us. But maybe I was just ignorant. I don't know, I can't compare. But I wasn't aware of anyone ever doing anything like that [in Czechia] when I was a kid.

(Vanda, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2022, STAYER)

This account sums up people's three key motivations to engage in unpaid activities which do not serve (just) their own private interests: 1) such engagement contributes to one's human capital and professional quality ("it looks good on your CV"); 2) the need to "give something back" to the society one lives in or to a particular community; 3) the normativity of such engagement in a particular society/community, i.e. "it is common here" – sometimes to the extent that it would not feel "normal" not to engage (cf. Dean, 2016; Iglič & Font Fábregas, 2007). At face value, the first motivation is predominantly self-centred, while the other two are more outward-oriented. However, all of them in some way derive from an interplay of the individual need for acceptance and self-appraisal and the structural/societal pushes to do what is expected, considered "right" or "normal". Vanda's quote aptly captures the difference in normativity between Czechia and Britain that she perceived as a migrant. Even though she admits that her view of civic engagement in Czechia might have been affected by her "ignorant" childhood perspective and implicitly suggests that the situation could have changed since then, her example clearly documents a transition in attitude that was influenced to a great extent by

the experience of embedding in the social networks of the receiving country. Maturity, a strong need to be a different parent than her own mother, and perhaps an inherent evolution of personal values have surely played their parts too. However, as also Vanda's other quotes document, she was aware that the value environment of the British society contributed a lot to change her thinking about interpersonal conduct, relationships, and values in general.

Dagmar's account contrasted with Vanda's in the sense that her attitude to donating and volunteering seemed to be much more matter-of-fact. Even though her narrative implied that the British charity-rich environment supported her and her husband's motivation to engage, it seemed to be primarily her son's illness and the support her family received regarding his treatment that drove their dedication, regardless of the cultural environment or place. Hence, like Vanda's engagements, Dagmar's donations were a form of giving back.

We send money. And actually, our junior had cancer when he was born and was supported by a charity. So, we support the charity, we do these different... we collect money for them and send it back to them and stuff. And my husband helps another charity. It's a charity that picks up elderly people once a month, to take them out for some activities (...) and then drives them back. Always one Sunday a month. Well, then we send money to Save the Children⁷⁵, we raise money for kids with cancer. And now the junior's birthday's coming up soon. And he's gonna have a party, so I texted everybody and told them I didn't want any presents and that instead of paying for presents, they should send the money to Water Aid. It's a charity that builds wells in Africa.

(Dagmar, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

Also Svatopluk's and Filip's motivations to get engaged in their respective fields of concern contained the aspect of giving back to a community they were part of, combined with a specific interest in the topics in question. Apart from occasional charity donations, Filip's major civic engagement was in a tenants' association. Such "small-scale democracy" participation (van Deth, Montero & Westholm, 2007), was very much in line with his devoted political interest, discussed earlier – an interest in the quality of life in the locality he is personally involved in. Besides, it paralleled his political participation in terms of form as well – rather than hands-on physical work, he preferred learning about available solutions, collecting opinions, contacting relevant stakeholders and making decisions.

I'm quite active in the tenants' association in the place where I live. We take care of the building and exchange opinions with the other owners in the development, whether our management company is doing a good job and what they could change and stuff. But am I doing any charity work or anything? I donate to charity occasionally, but I guess that doesn't count, does it? That I would just put my hand to work somewhere and go clean up a park or something? No, no.

(Filip, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, SEARCHER)

⁷⁵ A major international charity organisation that supports children in undesirable situations worldwide.

Svatopluk's civic engagement was more diverse, stretching from charity donations targeting developing countries in Africa where he had volunteered for one year, to volunteering for the elderly, to collaborating on cultural and educational events and activities at the time when he had lived in Czechia. His motivations comprised a combination of genuine interest in the topics of concern (which often derived from his personal experiences of living in various places or being part of the Czech-Vietnamese community), supporting friends in projects they organised, a wish to make his CV more attractive, as well as a will to use his free time productively.

Apart from the motivations mentioned, some interviewees engaged civically to find something to fill their days with at times when they were unemployed. Stella, Gabriela and Patricie started some of their volunteering activities for this reason.

At the very beginning, I volunteered in a charity shop, which I think was not a bad idea at all. But I discovered that I'm the only person from my surroundings here [*meaning other Czechs, Slovaks and Poles she knew in her neighbourhood – author's comment*] who even thought of something like this. The rest of them were always aghast about why I went somewhere to do something for free. But I was just tired of sitting at home alone, waiting for my partner to come home from work.

(Patricie, in her 40s, working, 4 years in the UK, 2016, RETURN-WISHER)

Mentioning the attitude of "her surroundings", Patricie noted two important points: for other Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants she knew in her locality, volunteering was not a natural thing to engage in. However, their attitude apparently did not change through migration. Later on in the interview, she hinted that a lot of the other CEE migrants she met in Britain were people with virtually no political interest, assumably low-skilled, and predominantly focused on fast financial gain. For these reasons, she felt quite different to them – not only in the sense of lifelong values and interests but also in the sense of the attitude they held towards embedding in British society.

And then when you sit down with these Czechs, and you say – do you watch the news, do you read the newspapers, do you vote, are you interested in what's going on in your country? Since they're so community-oriented [*keeping together as a diaspora – author's comment*], right? And now you find out that nobody reads anything, nobody watches the news, nobody cares about anything, they wouldn't volunteer in a charity because it's free. And then you find out they can't speak English enough to even get by.

(Patricie, in her 40s, working, 4 years in the UK, 2016, RETURN-WISHER)

This comment yet again suggests that the personal characteristics, habits and knowledge that migrants bring with them matter extremely as a starting point for their activities in the destination (Gropas, 2008; Kasic, 2008; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Even if their attitudes and ways of spending time might change after migration, the cultural capital and purpose they start off their migration experience with is a necessary input for directing their future

motivations and activities. Were Patricie to come across a more like-minded group of CEE migrants, perhaps better situated socially, with a better knowledge of English and with higher education levels, she probably would have encountered migrants open to volunteering and embedding in British society more deeply.

Like Svatopluk's story above, Žofie's trajectory provides an illustrative example of civic engagement evolving in diverse transnational spaces, across one's life course and alongside one's educational and professional path. Despite having moved a lot around the world since the age of sixteen to take part in study programs and internships, Žofie was already an active event organiser and a group glue as a student. Having built up her professional career, she established numerous networking groups around herself, aiding information exchange and contact-making. When she was on maternity leave, she brought together a group of mothers from her locality to make outings together. Like Svatopluk's, Žofie's civic engagement in the UK was a continuation of her activities and a realisation of the predispositions that she already had before migrating. One could expect that her overall professional ambitions and inherent sociability would have transformed student gatherings into professional and family-related networks regardless of where she lived.

I've always been very organisational. I've always tried to bring people together. Whether it's that all the people are at a dinner party and I'm doing a potluck for 15 people or that I try to make them network with one another. I think that the networking group [*a diaspora-oriented professional group that she established – author's comment*] is the first of its kind here. I have other networking groups alongside this one that are connected to my business (...). Already at my university, I had a small mailing list of classmates, and we kept up to date with different news, or we put a group of people together, friends, and we just went somewhere or did something.

(Žofie, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015, RETURN-WISHER)

Žofie's account targets the key question asked in this research project regarding the role of civic participation in the context of embedding – put crudely: what comes first? Does civic participation contribute to embedding, or is it the other way around? As expected, the answer is complex. Various migrants stated that civic engagement helped them “make friends” and enlarge their social networks – and thus, effectively, deepen their embedding in the receiving society (Kosic, 2008). Even though this was not usually mentioned explicitly as one of the reasons for engagement, having found new friends or intensified pre-existing friendships was often one of its results. As Gabriela's or Svatopluk's narratives showed, getting engaged in a particular type of civic activity, however, also tends to be directed and motivated by existing friendships. While Svatopluk described a lot of his rich and varied political and civic engagement as providing support to his friends' activities, Gabriela's multiple volunteering jobs formed a sequence of activities that snowballed one after another because of the friendships that she made on the way.

As regards helping, I also have other activities. I have friends who are parents of other children from my children's school. We always used to stand outside the school. (...) We always had fun. And then you get to know each other more, then you walk the dog together. And then (...) they had a reading group, so I joined that... they let me join the reading group. And that was about ten years ago. They're mostly local people. I knew some of them from that school, and then through that reading group, I got to know more of them. Another thing that I do is modelling, that's through a colleague at work, that's a bit of a different connection.

(Gabriela, in her 40s, homemaker, working part-time, 10 years in the UK, 2015, STAYER)

These examples show that civic engagement and friendships may have a mutual multiplier effect, which simultaneously contributes to the doers' firmer embedding in a community or society. Yet again, though, the individuals' initial proneness and will to take part in such type of activities are necessary, in the same way as the socio-economic conditions of their life play a key role. Existing research suggests that people rarely engage for the public good when their own socio-economic standard is poor, but that marginalised people might be more likely to stand up for a shared cause than those who are more well-off (Vogel, 2008a). My data show that the research participants who lived in economically strenuous conditions and/or were in some way socially marginalised (their knowledge of English was low and/or they did not manage to establish many social ties in the UK), rarely engaged civically. Patricie and Stella represented the only exceptions to this claim. Their engagement, which was temporary and primarily motivated by their professional goals (to learn English, to improve their CV, to establish contacts), cannot be viewed as a selfless commitment to charity. However, as a creative way to build a professional portfolio and network, it does differentiate these migrants from those in a similar occupational situation, but with lower cultural capital and fewer financial and linguistic resources, who either opted for a bad job or stayed "at home," either unemployed or caring for their close ones, such as Olga or Jaroslav.

In accordance with both topic-specific research findings and the widely accepted theories of need satisfaction and post-materialism (Inglehart, 1977, 2008; Putnam, 2000), a major group of 26 research participants were those who had a substantial knowledge of English and a stable (though not necessarily high) income, yet did not engage outside of the realm of their personal needs. This rather material and individualistic reasoning was sometimes connected to the necessity to provide for themselves and their families. Such migrants were striving hard to satisfy their material needs, not leaving them time to contemplate post-materialist values (cf. Inglehart, 1977). Sometimes, such situations did not only comprise performing an exhausting job but also studying to improve one's qualifications for a better job, caring for someone, or being occupied with one's own health issues. In other cases, where the pressing impact of material needs was not apparent, the reason behind the migrants' individualistic focus seemed to be low interest in the public sphere, a failure to see the value of unpaid work

for the broader community or for oneself, or a conscious decision to focus on one's own (and one's family's) wellbeing. Outside of this group, three other non-active participants (Jaroslav, Olga and Soňa) were very marginalised in terms of low English knowledge, a rather low income and very low social capital.

A much smaller group of 12 informants participated civically only to a limited extent – either occasionally, which usually happened in relation to their work or parental responsibilities, or regularly, but in that case, the engagement was mostly in the form of charity donations. Despite mostly high proficiency in English, good income and living standards and multilayered embedding in British society, these migrants generally put their work and family responsibilities and their hobbies to the fore. Two additional participants (Patricie and Stella) were slightly more active, but their engagement was mostly stirred by need – they perceived it as a potential route into employment, a way of enhancing skills or establishing social ties.

A rather small group of eight research participants who did engage civically on a regular basis were people who generally had a good financial income and also a certain confidence about their position within their social networks and the social fabric of their local community. They felt to be in a position where they could “give back”. It remains to be asked what it is that differentiated these migrants from the much larger group of others who were in a similar socio-economic position but chose not to engage. Bringing up the “usual suspects” of intervening socio-demographic factors does not help much. In terms of gender, age, marital status and (not) having children, as well as education and occupation, the civically active migrants resembled many of the non-active ones, reflecting the general homogeneities of the sample as such, especially as regards the prevalence of highly educated interviewees. In principle, the civically active participants were also quite intensively involved in their jobs with little “spare time” to give away.⁷⁶ In terms of their future outlook for staying and embedding, none of the active participants were return-wishers and their embedding in various social networks in the UK was intensive and multilayered. Yet again though, these were characteristics they shared with many of the non-active or less active research participants, so it cannot be claimed that their motivation to settle and build social networks in the receiving country was stronger. Not all of them were civically active prior to migration.

However, the role of the value environment of the United Kingdom, or of the locality they lived in, in their activation process, was in most cases ambiguous at best. While Vanda's narrative provided evidence of the likely effect that the British civic environment had on her willingness to engage, the remaining narratives suggest that rather than migration and an

⁷⁶ Gabriela was the only one who did not have a time-consuming and demanding job, and at the same time, her two children were already in their teens, requiring less of her hands-on care, which gave her more free time to spend volunteering than most of both the active and non-active participants had.

associated value adoption and embedding, it was personal experience and an “activist potential,” perhaps deriving from their cultural capital acquired through upbringing, and habitus earned through a combined influence of their upbringing and their professional development, that led the other migrants to become civically engaged in the UK. The value environment in their new country of residence could have provided more suitable conditions for sparking off their activism – a space for “the silent revolution” to occur (Duda-Mikulin, 2013) – than the value environment they experienced in Czechia, but it was likely not the main factor.

Section 7.4 Finally: Political and Civic Participation as a Tool or Marker of Embedding?

Chapter 7 has scrutinised migrant political and civic participation in transnational spaces through the idea of embedding, the dilemma of staying versus leaving and the question of belonging. It has shown that the scope of migrants’ motivations to participate politically, on the one hand, and civically, on the other hand, is qualitatively different. Political interest and the *importance ascribed* to different forms of participation seem to be largely motivated by individuals’ lifelong values, while *actual* electoral participation, various other active forms of political participation, and civic participation tend to be more dependent on the geographical space and political environment they are set in. Hence, most of the research participants’ electoral participation de-intensified or faded as a result of migration, regardless of the value they ascribed to voting on principle. The reason was primarily that it was logistically and financially more demanding to access a polling station than it had been when they had lived in Czechia (in the case of Czech elections) or to obtain the right to participate in British national elections (become a British citizen). Taking part in local and (prior to Brexit) EU elections, available also to non-citizens, was exceptional in the sample, yet usually signalled keen general political interest or a strong determination to settle in the United Kingdom. Notably, of the few research participants who have already naturalised, most participated in British national elections. Though their motivations varied, the relation between their dense embedding in British society, an acquired sense of belonging and an acknowledgement of responsibilities towards their new polity of membership was clear. These findings contradict Donnalaja’s (2020) claim that migrants’ political interest declines with naturalisation. The reported political interest of my research participants seemed to have remained stable over their life course, in line with popular political socialisation theories (Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Prior, 2010). On the other hand, naturalisation, which most of the respective migrants understood both as a pragmatic step and a confirmation of identification with British society, contributed to increasing their active electoral participation (cf. Bevelander & Pendakur, 2011).

Civic participation, even if rather rare in the sample, seemed to have been promoted by the migration experience and embedding in the country-of-reception social networks to a greater extent than political participation. This finding, however, cannot be explained by the migrants' value change, for which the data provide only sparse evidence. The reasons rather seem to be that 1) the British value environment has provided the migrants who already had an "activist potential" with opportunities to realise this potential in one way or another; and 2) civic participation turned out for them as a means to achieve their diverse individual goals, be they professional, educational, hobby-related, family-oriented or social. *The migrant experience, which sets most migrants beyond the reach of known social networks and processes, tends to create space and impulses for such engagements, which some individuals might not have taken the opportunity of had they not migrated.* Since these engagements also inevitably aided them in becoming more involved in receiving-country social networks, *civic participation, especially such that contributes to creating social bonds, does seem to operate as a tool of embedding.* Further, the activating effect of the British value environment seems to rest in the migrants' perception of the widespread support for charity and various non-governmental organisations and of the atmosphere of kindness, helpfulness and trust, which they see as different to their experience from Czechia. Hence, in the context of intra-European migration, which does not encompass transgressing major differences in the cultural and political value sets of the societies concerned, the evidence of *migrant political and civic participation practices transforming through migration* should primarily be accredited to *differences in the opportunity structure to such participation provided by the societies of origin and reception* rather than (major) individual value adoption and change.

It remains to acknowledge the situation of the large group of migrants in my sample who did not participate politically and civically or did so only occasionally without any specific determination. Their narratives of migration and the associated processes of embedding and dis-embedding rarely included spontaneous remarks about politics or civic engagement. When asked to relate to these issues in their migration stories, they were often confused. This disinterest did not have much to do with the intensity of their differentiated embedding in the United Kingdom and Czech social networks or their sense of belonging, as most of them were similarly dis-engaged with regard to both societies both pre- and post-migration. Rather, political and civic participation were beyond the scope of their life priorities. These migrants concentrated on their professional and family lives, leisure time activities and social ties, as a value in itself. For many of them, the lack of interest in the political and civic sphere was most likely contained in their cultural capital – they were not brought up to be politically and civically concerned or did not find such concern fulfilling. Many of them were entrepreneurial and creative but directed their activism into their careers and profit-making instead.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Since the simultaneously feared and celebrated first “eastern enlargement” of the European Union in 2004, Europe has become an increasingly “unsettled continent” (Recchi et al., 2019). The diverse crises which the population and the political system of the European Union had to withstand brought European integration to a halt through the widespread rise of far-right party support, populism, and criticism of EU supremacy, accompanied by much political hesitation on the side of the core national and Union-wide democratic political groupings (Mudde, 2016; Muis & Imerzeel, 2017). These developments took place in response to rising security concerns, overburdening of social security systems and growing xenophobia (Norris, 2017). The United Kingdom and Czechia, the two European countries which are the focus of this thesis, have each come out of this period with their own unique experience, in some respects characteristic of their traditional positions and views in the context of the European community of states.

The British public’s response to the social and economic burden of Central and Eastern European immigration and the EU “dictate” was to vote to “Leave” the EU in 2016, which, after four years of political negotiations and a range of uncertainties imposed on both the domestic and the immigrant populations, resulted in Brexit (King, 2021). Czechia, likewise, has been experiencing surges of populist and xenophobic public discourse since it entered the EU: be it in relation to the 2015 refugee crisis and the accompanying debates on refugee redistribution; in association with the protracted controversy surrounding the unauthorised use of European funds by a former prime minister for his private commercial purposes; or, lately, in response to Russia’s war on Ukraine. Nevertheless, this disintegrative discourse has also stirred up much public disagreement, which contributed to bringing pro-democratic, politically moderate candidates into government leadership and the presidential seat (Guasti & Mansfeldová, 2018; Suchánek & Michal, 2024).

In the midst of these processes, there are people who have moved from post-1989 Czechia to the United Kingdom, following the conventional East-West (“periphery”-to-“core”) route together with many others from the CEE region, to make use of the opportunities that living in a newly free, democratic country, and later an EU member state, gives them. They move abroad freely to gain experience, earn money, establish relationships and then, possibly, return. Or maybe not. Their reasons may be primarily economic but are always accompanied by others: love and family, experience and skills, studies, career advancement, lifestyle and various political and social reasons. These motivations were named by my informants in diverse combinations and changed throughout their migration trajectories, along with their deepening embedding in multiple structures of the receiving society, their transforming embedding in and often dis-embedding from their society of origin, and their life cycle.

In order to answer the question about *what role is played by political and civic participation in the process of migrant embedding in transnational spaces*, I brought up the classical “structure versus agency” discussion, examining it in different contexts throughout the analysis. I paused at the idea of the “liquid migration context” promoted by some scholars in the wake of the massive post-enlargement CEE migration flows to the old EU member states, the United Kingdom in particular (Drinkwater & Garapich, 2015; Engbersen et al., 2013; Okólski, 2007). For migrants living in a free, integrated European space and an increasingly globalised world, this means there is no need to stay forever, no need to return, but both are possible. As many authors have noted before, this interconnectedness of global societies enables migrants and their left-behind ties to benefit from a richness of transnational practices (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992b; Levitt, 1998; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2009). Having and maintaining these multi-sided attachments simplifies some things but complicates others. Keeping in touch with the country of origin despite striving for a “grounded” life in the destination may be challenging at times (Bygnes & Erdal, 2017). Especially migrants who were unsatisfied with their life in the United Kingdom and felt “trapped” in migration in the interests of others (usually their partners or their children) expressed anxiety about their lack of control of their trajectories (Giddens, 1986; Grabowska-Lusińska, 2013). These findings have highlighted the importance of distinguishing migrants’ individual agency from their subjection to the interests of their loved ones to uncover the intricate private power hierarchies that sometimes underlie the dilemmas of belonging (Czaika, Bijak & Prike, 2021; Ryan & Sales, 2013). In this regard, I have introduced the concept of the “leap of faith” – the mental commitment to a “full” life in the receiving country, where the possibility of return becomes merely a formal aspect of the migratory situation, rather than a repeatedly contemplated and seriously considered option. Taking a “leap of faith” means accepting life in the receiving country as the best of all available options, despite any difficulties it entails, and deciding that one wants to settle and belong there, thereby regaining agency over one’s migration trajectory.

The tension between individual agency and external social pressures applies not only in private matters but also in terms of maintaining knowledge of public affairs. In fact, as my analysis has shown, maintaining one’s private relationships across borders is often intertwined with keeping oneself informed about public matters in the country of origin. These varied engagements, hence, buttress one another. Migrants who have not made a “leap of faith” about settling in the receiving country on a long-term or even permanent basis may tend to “live in Czechia” mentally through their consumption of country-of-origin media, despite working/raising children/dwelling with their partners in Britain. In other words, they waver about embracing the “change in the centre of gravity” of their lives (Hägerstrand, 1957). Nevertheless, even for migrants who have made this psychological leap and cultivated a sense

of belonging to the receiving society, interest in public affairs in the country of origin sometimes functions as an important “anchor” in their (transforming) self-conception (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). Quite often, however, migrants’ transnational political interest fades out due to a lack of time and gradual detachment from the daily realities of life in the source country as their embedding in the receiving country networks and structures deepens. Sometimes, this detachment is largely intentional. Also, sometimes, the lack of political interest is a lifestyle choice and very much a lifelong trait.

To analyse the relationship between embedding, belonging, and political and civic participation, an examination of the role of national, ethnic and supra-national identification is crucial. Despite the optimistic post-nationality discourse surrounding the 1990s EU integration debate, my research demonstrates that *national* citizenship plays a key role in migrant embedding “here” and “there” (Botterill & Hancock, 2019; Habermas, 1992). Citizenship status was approached by the interviewees as a natural attribute, a strategic tool, as well as a sentimental tie. Even if their “Czechness” was constantly negotiated and re-negotiated throughout their migration trajectory, alongside the embedding and dis-embedding processes they were going through, their Czech citizenship (which all the informants still held) functioned as a psychological anchor, a routinely used official reference point. On the other hand, British citizenship (which a handful of the research participants acquired, and some were aspiring for), even if more often presented as a pragmatic tool than as a subjective identification, worked in their trajectories effectively as the highest result of their process of embedding (“integration”) into the receiving society (cf. Barbulescu, Wallace Goodman & Pedroza, 2023b). To use the words of Favell (2010), even if it was not perceived as such *attitudinally*, then *behaviourally* it was surely the case – in terms of the migrants’ incorporation into British society’s structures and social networks, adoption of certain daily habits, as well as the change or widening of focus of their political and civic participation on the UK. The tension between citizenship’s identificational and pragmatic role became especially apparent in the migrants’ reflections on securing their residential status in the face of Brexit (Fernández-Reino & Sumption, 2023). Those (pre-Brexit interviewees) who disagreed with the idea of Brexit or were doubtful about it happening put their Czech identification to the fore and claimed (hoped) that their European citizenship, length of stay and embeddedness in British society would suffice to secure their stay (cf. Markova & King, 2021; Mas Giralt, 2020). Applying for British citizenship was viewed as a last resort and a purely pragmatic step (cf. Markova & King, 2021; Mas Giralt, 2020). Those (both pre- and post-Brexit interviewees) who supported Brexit were more eager to put forth their loyalty to the UK and either already had British citizenship or were more ready to apply for it, thus (proudly) sealing *their own earned right* to live in the UK. In general, though, Brexit was not conceived of as a major threat or issue by either the pre-Brexit or the post-Brexit informants.

Even though *political culture* did not appear among the primary migration motives, it did come up as a reason for staying on, together with “mentality” and the unwritten rules of interpersonal conduct in public. These findings reflect some of the prevailing weaknesses of the otherwise economically and socially developed Czech society, such as the prevailing corruption in the political environment or the lack of political correctness and politeness in general conduct. My research participants discussed these qualities when asked about the values they favoured about British society or even adopted through migration and when prompted to speak about their political and civic participation pre- and post-migration. Even if they acknowledged various crises and “affairs” on the British political scene or perceived British politics as transforming in line with the worldwide backsliding trend, they did not perceive these issues as critically as the corruptness and shamelessness of Czech politics. Usually, they were convinced that the high standard of British political discussion, British laws and the public's alertness were a safeguard that corruption and unscrupulous behaviour of politicians or the authorities would not be tolerated for very long. In this sense, a few of them mentioned trying to test British politicians' and authorities' “well-known” responsiveness to their public by contacting the local political representatives. Nevertheless, most remained passive in this sense, continuing their pre-migration habits or claiming that “things work well anyway”.

The migrants' civic and political participation was somewhat related to their differentiated embedding in the transnational spaces and their outlook regarding staying in the UK, returning to Czechia or keeping their plans open. However, each form of participation was affected by the migration experience and by embedding in a different way and to a different extent. The migrants' general level of *political interest* – and political talk specifically – *did not seem to have changed dramatically because of migration and embedding in a new country context*, in accordance with Prior's (2010) conclusions about political interest being stable over the life course. The major change was in the lowered frequency of talking Czech politics (due to a lack of opportunities and time) and, for some migrants, of adapting to the British environment in the sense that politics is not a topic for casual “pub” discussions, as they claimed (cf. Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013). While following the news helped foster one's embedding in either of the two country contexts, talking about politics served to nurture existing relationships and, sometimes, to transmit social remittances (Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2016). The geographical focus of the migrants' political interest corresponded largely to their outlook for the stay, with stayers mostly focused on British affairs, return-wishers on Czech, and searchers being split or largely ignorant of both. Nevertheless, most migrants were at least superficially interested in current affairs in both Czechia and Britain.

Corresponding to prevailing scholarly findings on political socialisation, while political interest and the *importance ascribed* to participation seem to be largely motivated by individuals' lifelong values, *actual* political and civic participation seems more dependent on the geographical, social and political environment they are set in (Favell, 2010; Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Prior, 2010; Sapiro, 2004). Hence, most of the research participants' electoral participation de-intensified or faded because of migration, regardless of the value they ascribed to voting on principle (Kostelka, 2017). This did not only apply to their participation in Czech elections, but in general – most did not participate in local or European Parliament elections either. Only those who were already naturalised were keener on participating in British elections (on any governance level; see also Fernández-Reino & Sumption, 2023).

Going back to national identification, but also to the conception of “good citizenship” popular in both Czechia and Britain, this documents the tight relationship between citizenship, belonging, and the acknowledgement of responsibilities towards the polity one is an *official* member of (Favell, 2010; Petrúšek, 2017a; Whiteley, 2011). Hence, *migration experience changes voting behaviour*. However, the reason is not the adoption of receiving-country values, but, prosaically, *practical obstacles* to taking part in elections in either of the countries concerned (distance, costs involved, citizenship status). When balancing various costs and obligations, voting is one of the lower-priority duties that migrants (at least temporarily) give up on. However, along with a deeper embedding in the receiving society, possibly accompanied by acquiring the country's citizenship, their pre-migration electoral routines might be transferred there. If, in addition, transnational voting can be conducted with minimal additional costs (e.g., remotely), it may retain its attractiveness for a broader spectrum of diaspora voters than just the most devoted ones (Lesińska, 2024).

Civic participation, also rare in the sample, was inspired by migration and embedding in the receiving society to a greater extent than political participation. However, it did not seem to be primarily the result of value change, let alone caused by migration itself. First, the *British values and social environment* and the migrants' *immediate social networks* provided the *migrants who already had an “activist potential” with opportunities to realise this potential* (cf. Vogel, 2008c). Second, *civic participation served as a means* to achieve their diverse *individual goals, whether professional, educational, hobby-related, family-oriented or social* (Parry, Brookfield & Bolton, 2021; Kasic, 2008). The space and impulses created by the migrant experience often led to engagements that some individuals might not have taken the opportunity of had they not migrated and thus found themselves *beyond the reach of familiar social networks and processes*. Since these engagements tend to contribute to migrants' greater involvement in receiving-country social networks, civic participation, especially that which contributes to creating social bonds, effectively seems to operate as a tool of embedding

(Fennema & Tillie, 2001). Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that it was not the receiving society, its laws or values *per se* that promoted these migrants' civic activation, but rather the social networks they were situated in that provided the necessary impulses. This highlights the *relevance of social capital for promoting civic engagement*. More particularly, opportunities for any form of engagement derive from the *character* of the specific *social ties* that one engages with – their social class, cultural capital, habitus, specific interests, opinions and routines. Hence, the evidence of migrant political and civic participation practices transforming through migration should primarily be accredited to *differences in the opportunity structure to such participation* provided by the *migrant's situatedness in different social contexts in the societies of origin and reception* rather than major individual value adoption and change (cf. Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

The main contribution of this research to scholarly knowledge is the detailed examination of the relationship between migrant embedding and political and civic participation, suggesting that *while political interest and attitudes to political participation are largely lifelong, the actual participative practices, their content, form and level may transform as a result of migration*. Nevertheless, rather than through migration-driven value change, *these activities fade, mute, resume or emerge due to their situatedness in specific opportunity structures, consisting of formal conditions, value environments and social networks*. To a certain extent, *the act of migration matters in itself* because it *presents individuals with new social constellations, relationships, ties, and thus, again, opportunities*.

With regard to transnational political and civic participation, it needs to be said that some transnational *political interest* seems to be *common for migrants in general* but *stays strong only in the case of the most devoted voters/activists*. In general, its level differs according to the migrant's individual outlook for his/her stay. *More active forms* of transnational political and civic participation seem to be *much less common*. However, *voting in the country of origin remains to be perceived as a citizen duty despite physical separation*. It has the potential to be carried out more frequently if the opportunity structure improves (e.g., through the introduction of remote voting or an increase in polling stations). Overall, *political and civic participation can work as a tool of migrant embedding and dis-embedding in the societies of origin and reception*, and, with respect to individual characteristics and interests of the migrant, as well as its *marker*.

These findings can inform the diaspora policy of sending countries regarding extra-territorial voting or channelling of social remittances (see also Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Janská, 2024; Janská, Janurová et al., 2024; Kovács, 2020). Making extra-territorial voting more accessible is likely to promote greater electoral participation among diasporas and, in turn, also intensify their interest in the public affairs of their country of origin. My

findings can also contribute to receiving-country policy-making regarding the role of citizenship in the embedding process by showing that the acquisition of receiving-country citizenship is closely tied to individually perceived civic loyalties to that country (Barbulescu, Wallace Goodman & Pedroza, 2023a). Moreover, my observations prompt further questions beyond this study's scope. Truly longitudinal research on migrant values, political views, and civic practices that examines their transformations over time with respect to various micro- and macro-level characteristics is still scarce. Large-scale longitudinal quantitative research comparing the political and civic participation of the stay-behind population (non-migrants) and the diaspora of particular countries along demographic and socio-economic lines could prove very informative in shedding light on the political-civic values and characteristics that contribute to an individual's decision to migrate and on the character of the potential political remittances that are lost or gained through (out)migration.

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Attachments

Appendix 1 – Outline of Interview Areas and Questions⁷⁷

Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics, Migration Trajectory and Experience

- age, gender, education level
- citizenship(s)
- language skills
- Where in Czechia do you come from? Where have you lived in Czechia? Have you moved around Czechia to study, to work, to be with your family?
- For what reason did you move to the UK?
- Since when have you lived in the UK and where? Have you ever moved within the UK?
- Have you also lived in any other country for a longer period of time? If so, when and for what reasons have you lived there?
- Have you ever interrupted your stay in Britain by returning to Czechia for a longer period of time, after which you returned to Britain again? If yes, what were the reasons for this?
- In what field did you receive your education? If you worked before you left Czechia, was it in this field or another? How long did you work in Czechia?
- Are you now working in the UK? If yes, in what field? Have you been working in this field since you came to the UK? How long have you been working in your current job? If you have changed jobs since coming to the UK, how many times has this been and for what reasons?
- If you are working, do you enjoy your current job? Would you like to continue in the future or would you instead like to do something else?
- If you are not working now, what is your current status - studying, on parental leave, unemployed, retired, etc.? Do you have any professional plans for the future? What are they?

⁷⁷ Translated from Czech using Google Translate and edited.

- Do you have a partner in the UK? Is he/she Czech or not? What nationality/ies does he/she have? Did you come to the UK together, or did one of you follow the other (who had a job, residence, citizenship, etc.)?
- What is your partner currently doing - working, unemployed, studying, looking after a child, other...?
- Do you have a child/children? If yes, how old is your child/are your children? Does your child/do your children live with you? If so, were they born after you came to the UK or while you were still in Czechia?
- Do you have other relatives in the UK? (parents, siblings, in-laws, other extended family – on your side or your partner's side)
- Do you live in a house or a flat? Do you rent or own the property? Do you live alone, with your partner, with your child/children or with other people?
- What languages do you speak at home, at work, with your family and friends?

Living in the UK

- Do you plan to stay permanently in the UK/ return to Czechia/ move elsewhere? Why?
- Do you feel that you are already intimately familiar with British cultural and social customs, behavioural traits, thinking etc.? Do you think you have adopted any of them? Why?

Ties in the UK

- Do you have friends or acquaintances in the UK? If so, how many? Are they Czechs, Slovaks, Brits or people of other backgrounds? Were they born in Britain or did they move there?
- How did you meet your friends/acquaintances in Britain?
- How often do you keep in touch with your friends/acquaintances in the UK? How/what do you do together?
- What are the main topics you discuss with these friends/acquaintances?
- Would you say you are closer to the friends/acquaintances you have in Czechia or those who live in the UK?

Professional ties

- If you currently work or have previously worked in the UK, what kind of relationship do you have/have you had with your colleagues? Professional only or have you become friends? Are your colleagues mainly British or do they have other backgrounds?

Formal ties to the UK

- What kind of formal attachments do you currently have in the UK? Property, bank account, insurance, savings, doctors, other...?

- Do you financially support any of your relatives in the UK (apart from co-resident children)? Who are they (parents, children, in-laws, other)?

- Do any of your relatives who live in the UK support you, or have they ever supported you financially, materially or in other practical ways during your stay in the UK? How?

Ties to Czechia

- Do you ever travel to Czechia? How often?

- What do you usually do during these trips?

Kinship ties

- Do you have relatives in Czechia - parents, siblings, children, other?

- How often are you in contact with any of them? How (visits, phone, videocalls, e-mail, other)?
(Focus on the people with the most contact and the closest relationship.)

- What are the main topics you discuss with your relatives?

Friends and acquaintances

- Do you have any acquaintances or friends in Czechia with whom you keep in touch? How often do you keep in touch with them and how?

- What are the main topics you discuss with these friends?

Professional ties

- Do you have any work contacts in Czechia that you use in your current employment (or have used in the past in your employment in the UK)? If so, how often do you contact them, and what do you discuss with them?

Formal ties to Czechia

- Do you currently have any property, bank account, insurance, savings or other similar attachments in Czechia?
- When you travel to Czechia, do you deal with any practical matters, such as doctors' appointments, contact with the authorities, etc.?
- Do you financially support any of your relatives in Czechia? For example, do you ever send them money, pay for their flight tickets when they come to visit you, pay for their holidays, contribute to the purchase of some more expensive things, etc.? Who are they (parents, children, grandparents, siblings, etc.)?
- Do any of your relatives support you or have they ever supported you financially, materially or in other practical ways during your stay in the UK? How?

Civic and Political Participation and Other Activities Before and After Coming to the UK

- What do you do in your "free time"?
- Are these activities similar to what you did in your free time before you left Czechia? If your interests/leisure activities have changed, why?
- Do you follow the Czech media? Which ones? How often? What topics do you mainly focus on?
- Do you follow the British media? Which ones? How often? What topics do you mainly focus on?

Political, Social and Cultural Affairs

- How good is your knowledge of the current political situation in Czechia?
- Do you ever talk to your family, friends or acquaintances in Czechia about current political affairs in Czechia? Do you ever talk about it with your friends, acquaintances, or relatives living in Britain?
- How good is your knowledge of the current social and cultural affairs in Czechia?
- Do you agree with your family and friends/acquaintances in Czechia in your opinions on political and other issues? In what ways do you agree, in what ways do you disagree? With

whom? If you disagree, do you feel that your disagreements somehow reflect the differences in thinking between people in Czechia and in Britain? Do you try to influence your relatives and friends/acquaintances in Czechia in their opinions in some way? If so, are you successful in doing so; have you ever succeeded?

- How good is your knowledge of the current political situation in Britain?

- Do you ever talk to your family, friends or acquaintances in Czechia about current political affairs in Britain? Do you ever talk about it with your friends, acquaintances, or relatives living in Britain?

- How good is your knowledge of the current social and cultural affairs in Britain?

- Do you agree with your friends/acquaintances/family in Britain in their opinions on political and other issues? In what ways do you agree, in what ways do you disagree? With whom? If you disagree, do you feel that your disagreements somehow reflect the differences in thinking between people in Czechia and in Britain? Do you try to influence your friends/acquaintances/relatives in Britain in some way? If so, are you successful in doing so; have you ever succeeded?

Elections

- Do you participate in elections – Czech, British? If so, which ones (all, presidential, parliamentary, municipal, European Union, etc.)? When was the last time you went to an election – which one? If you don't vote, why? Have you voted in the past – before or after moving to the UK?

Other forms of political participation (in the UK and/or in Czechia)

- Do you ever participate in any public debates (esp. pertaining to political or governance issues)? Do you take an active part in them by asking questions, discussing with others, etc.? Have you ever done that?

- Do you sometimes sign petitions? If so, what is their focus, what petition(s) have you signed lately? Have you ever done that? If not, why?

- Do you express your political opinions in other ways – wearing a badge, putting up a sticker or flag, sending e-mails, posting or re-posting on social media...? Have you ever done that? Why yes/not?

- Do you participate in political debates online (news portals, forums, social networks...)? Why yes/not?

- Have you ever contacted any political representatives? Why yes/not?
- Do you take part in political coercion activities – demonstrations, happenings, sit-ins, etc.? Have you ever done that? Have you ever organised or helped to organise such activities? Which? Why yes/not?
- Are you a member of a political party; have you ever been? If yes, why did you get involved, what is/was your role in it, how time-consuming is it? Provide any other details.

Civic engagement (in the UK and/or in Czechia)

- Do you contribute financially or materially to any charitable activity? If so, what kind – is it a specific one, more of them, or was it rather random? Regularly or occasionally?
- Do you help someone in your free time with some work for free (e.g., translations, proofreading, childcare, animal care, household work, education, construction work, providing consulting and advice based on your professional or life experience)? To whom and how? Is this regular or occasional help?
- Do you participate in organising any extra-work leisure or professional activities and events at your workplace? (social activities, trade unions, etc.)
- Are you a member of any non-profit organisation, association, movement, etc. in the UK or Czechia? Are you a member of the trade unions at your workplace? How active is your membership - do you only receive and read newsletters, pay a membership fee, attend regular meetings, discuss in person or online, actively participate in the organisation and conduct of events and projects? If so, why, which ones? If not, why?
- Do you volunteer in a non-profit organisation or within the community where you live? If so, what kind of activity and organisation is it? If not, have you done it in the past? Have you done something like this also before moving to the UK?
- Have you ever participated in an event of a Czech/Czechoslovak diaspora association in Britain? If so, have you participated several times/do you participate regularly? What kind of activities were/are they? Did or do you like the activities of this association and its members? Why yes/no?

Additional questions for post-Brexit informants

- What is your opinion on Brexit?
- Have you participated in any Brexit-related political events (demonstrations, debates, happenings, campaigns)?
- Has Brexit affected your life in the UK and your contact with people in Czechia (or other countries, if relevant) in some ways? How? (*Refer to residential or job insecurity, steps to secure one's residential or citizenship status, considerations of return, effect on practical daily matters, etc.*)
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life in the UK and your contact with people in Czechia (or other countries, if relevant) in some ways? How?

Appendix 2 – Overview of Research Participants’ Key Characteristics

no.	pseudonym, age, occupation, length of stay, interview year	outlook type	current occupation description	education	voting type
1 (pilot)	Klára, in her 30s, working, 3 years in the UK, 2014	stayer	sales orders trainer	university	non-voter
2 (pilot)	Luboš, in his 20s, working and studying, 3 years in the UK, 2014	searcher	tech engineering specialist, PhD student	university	non-voter
3 (pilot)	Martina, in her 30s, working, 3 years in the UK, 2014	stayer	cleaner	apprenticeship	non-voter
4 (pilot)	Daniela, in her 30s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2014	stayer	sports specialist, entrepreneur	practical secondary, professional requalification	non-voter
5 (pilot)	Olga, in her 40s, homemaker, 6 years in the UK, 2014	return-wisher	homemaker	practical secondary	non-voter
6 (pilot)	Barbora, in her 30s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2014	stayer	specialised interpreter	university, practical secondary	non-voter
7 (pilot)	Marek, in his 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2014	stayer	sales and logistics manager	general secondary, unfinished university, professional requalification	selective
8	Jaroslav, in his 40s, caring full-time for his wife, working occasionally, 3 years in the UK, 2014	return-wisher	homemaker: caring for wife, craftsman	primary, uncompleted apprenticeship, professional requalification	non-voter
9	Soňa, in her 20s, homemaker, 1 year in the UK, 2014	searcher	homemaker	primary	non-voter
10	Ilona, in her 40s, homemaker, 9 years in the UK, 2014	return-wisher	homemaker	university	non-voter
11	Aneta, in her 30s, working, 1 year in the UK, 2014	searcher	administration and sales	university	non-voter
12	Jana, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2014	stayer	specialised cleric	practical secondary	selective
13	Blanka, 40s, working, 13 years in the UK, 2014	stayer	research specialist	university	non-voter
14	Magdalena, in her 30s, working, 7 years in the UK, 2014	searcher	artist	university	non-voter
15	Kateřina, in her 20s, homemaker, 8 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	homemaker - temp., study, teaching	practical secondary, apprenticeship	non-voter
16	Radka, in her 30s, homemaker, 8 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	homemaker - temp., social mediator	university	selective
17	Vilém, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	assembler, machine operator	apprenticeship	non-voter
18	Marta, in her 30s, homemaker, 7 years in the UK, 2015	return-wisher	homemaker - temp., food prep. assistant	practical secondary	non-voter

no.	pseudonym, age, occupation, length of stay, interview year	outlook type	current occupation description	education	voting type
19	Otakar, in his 50s, working, 6 years in the UK, 2015	return-wisher (for retirement)	engineering specialist	practical secondary, unfinished university	non-voter
20	Matyáš, in his 20s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2015	searcher (prone to stay)	food prep assistant	secondary, unfinished university	non-voter
21	Žofie, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015	return-wisher (for retirement)	financial specialist	university	selective
22	Ema, in her 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2015	stayer (but open to change based on circumstances)	financial specialist and therapist	university	devoted
23	Gabriela, in her 40s, homemaker, working part-time, 10 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	homemaker	secondary + extension	selective
24	Inka, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	sales specialist	secondary + extension	non-voter
25	Filip, in his 40s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015	searcher (prone to stay)	management consultant	university	devoted
26	Hugo, in his 40s, working, 14 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	IT specialist	university	selective
27	Tamara, in her 30s, homemaker, 10 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	homemaker	university	selective
28	Vendula, in her 30s, working, 7 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	media specialist	university	selective
29	Cyril, in his 30s, working, 6 years in the UK, 2015	searcher	IT specialist	university	non-voter
30	Nora, in her 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2015	searcher	auction administrator	university	selective
31	Prokop, in his 40s, working, 10 years in the UK, 2015	searcher	building maintenance, manager	apprenticeship	selective
32	Stella, in her 30s, unemployed - working occasionally, 5 years in the UK, 2015	return-wisher	unemployed, teacher	university	selective
33	Nikola, in her 40s, working, 16 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	clerical support worker	general secondary	selective
34	Robin, in his 30s, working, 7 years in the UK, 2015	searcher	IT specialist	university	selective
35	Ivo, in his 30s, working, 7 years in the UK, 2015	searcher	administration and sales	university	selective
36	Hedvika, in her 30s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2015	searcher	library worker	university	selective
37	Dagmar, in her 30s, working, 11 years in the UK, 2015	stayer	PhD student	university	selective
38	Zdena, in her 30s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2015	return-wisher	live-in household staff	university	selective

no.	pseudonym, age, occupation, length of stay, interview year	outlook type	current occupation description	education	voting type
39	Cecilie, in her 30s, unemployed, 0.5 year in the UK, 2016	searcher	unemployed	university	non-voter
40	Karla, in her 40s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2016	return-wisher (for retirement)	caretaker	practical secondary	selective
41	Patricie, in her 40s, working, 4 years in the UK, 2016	return-wisher	animal caretaker	university	selective
42	Svatopluk, in his 20s, working, 7 years in the UK, 2019	searcher	contract researcher and programmer	university	selective
43	Kašpar, in his 40s, retired, 11 years in the UK, 2022	stayer	retired (various elementary positions)	primary	non-voter
44	Mirka, in her 50s, working, 5 years in the UK, 2022	searcher (prone to stay)	chef	university	non-voter
45	Běla, in her 40s, working, 9 years in the UK, 2022	stayer	entrepreneur in various crafts	practical secondary	non-voter
46	Zora, in her 30s, on maternity leave, 10 years in the UK, 2022	return-wisher	early childhood educator	university	selective
47	Jarka, in her 50s, working, 26 years in the UK, 2022	stayer	director in family company - car components	practical secondary	non-voter
48	Ctirad, in his 60s, working, 18 years in the UK, 2022	stayer (return only if political position in CZ)	religious worker, social mediator, political activist	university	devoted
49	Radek, in his 60s, retired, 22 years in the UK, 2022	stayer	retired (craftsman)	apprenticeship	non-voter
50	Vanda, in her 40s, working, 17 years in the UK, 2022	stayer	company owner and manager	university	devoted

Appendix 3 – Examples of Recruitment Adverts/Invitations to Participate⁷⁸

Invitation letter

This is an example of the wording of an invitation letter disseminated before the first round of interviews via diaspora organisations, relevant Facebook groups, the Czech embassy and other channels.

Dear Madam or Miss, Dear Sir,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project examining the lives of Czechs living abroad. If you came to the UK between 1990 and 2011 and can spare at least an hour and a half, I would be happy to hear from you.

I will be interested not only in why you came to the UK and what your experiences are with adjusting to life in a new country, but also in where you feel “at home,” what people in the UK and Czechia you keep in touch with, whether you are interested in the public affairs in one or both countries, or whether you participate in any activities in your place of residence or remotely in Czechia. It is not a test of knowledge – I rather expect us to have a pleasant conversation. I am interested solely in your experience and opinions.

I expect the interview to last between one and three hours, but it mainly depends on your taste and time availability. I would appreciate if we could meet in person. However, we can also arrange to meet via Skype.

For the purpose of my interviews, I will come to a location that is most convenient for you, where I will not interfere too much with your duties and where you will have enough time for me. Alternatively, I will arrange the premises for our meetings myself.

Your anonymity will be ensured when processing the interviews.

Thank you very much for the time you have spent reading this letter, and I hope that my intention has interested you enough to agree to participate in the research. If you can participate in the research or have any questions, please get in touch with me using one of the methods listed below.

Thank you very much in advance for your response!

⁷⁸ Translated from Czech using Google Translate and edited.

Post in a diaspora discussion forum

Hi!

I am conducting doctoral research on Czechs living in Britain. I am looking for Czechs who came to the UK between 1990 and 2011, and who would not mind being interviewed about their life in the UK.

As I live permanently in Czechia, I will have limited time to conduct personal interviews, specifically in the period (...). During those days, I will be travelling between Sheffield, London, and Brighton, so I would be very happy to meet Czechs in these cities. However, I can also come to other locations if necessary (e.g., Manchester, Liverpool, Leicester, Birmingham).

Otherwise, I would also appreciate volunteers for Skype interviews or personal interviews in Czechia, if you are planning a trip there, anytime during (...). If you do not feel like engaging in an oral interview, I would appreciate the opportunity to ask about your experiences via e-mail or chat.

Thank you very much in advance for your answers and for spreading this advert among your Czech contacts in the UK.

Facebook group post

Hi! I am conducting research on Czechs living in the UK. Currently, I am mainly looking for people in London and the surrounding area. Did you come to the UK after 1990 and have you lived there for at least five years? Would you be able to find about an hour of time to talk with me about your life in the UK? If so, I would be happy to hear from you. A videocall is also an option. If you do not feel like engaging in an oral interview, I am also happy to ask about your experiences via e-mail.

Thank you very much in advance for your willingness to help out!