

— ARTICLES —

Migration for Achievement: The Life Strategies of Skilled IT Migrants from Ukraine in Australia

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Based on 25 interviews with high-skilled migrants, this article examines the migration of IT professionals from Ukraine in Australia. Their migration experience – identified as ‘migration for achievement’ – is examined in three ways. First, the article sets out the structural context for migration and the formation of the achievement life strategy: (1) the emergence and growth of the IT industry in Ukraine, in combination with (2) shifts in Australian migration policy triggered by the growth of the innovation economy and demand for highly skilled migrants. Second, it examines migration decision-making and the individual motivations, values, aims and agency of migrants. Third, the article explores how achievement life strategies are recreated or transformed after migration by looking into the migrants’ adaptation, occupational outcomes, language and national identity, future plans and aspirations. The narratives of the ‘achievement migrants’ in Australia form a story of well-integrated members of Australian society and active agents of social and economic life. Given their capacity to successfully maintain their social and economic status after migration, along with their positive contributions to Australian society in terms of social cohesion, innovation and economic production, this group can be considered a ‘brain-gain’ for Australia.

Keywords: skilled migrants, post-independence Ukrainian migration, Australia, achievement life strategy, IT professionals

Introduction

The mainstream literature on international migration in the Asia-Pacific region explores numerous aspects of cross-country mobility: migration in a global context within the development of capitalism, colonial expansion and imperialism (Castles 2010; Castles and Miller 2009; Massey 1988; Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci,

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Pellegrino and Taylor 1998; O'Reilly 2012); skilled migration as a 'substantial contribution' to the workforce in the era of globalisation (Arunachalam and Healy 2009; Florida 2005; Hugo 2004; Kuptsch and Pang 2006); academic mobility as 'brain mobility' (Bauder 2003); Kenway and Fahey 2006, 2009; Williams 2006); family, social networks and migration (Castles 2010; Gill and Bialski 2011; Kennedy 2004; Scott 2007; Vertovec 2002); migration policy (Arunachalam and Healy 2009; Boucher 2013; Hawthorne 2005; Hugo 2006a, 2006b; Markus, Jupp and McDonald 2009).

This article addresses an area outside mainstream migration studies – the life strategies of migrants in Australia. Using the example of post-independence Ukrainian migration to Australia, the article discerns and explains the pathways of skilled migrants through the analysis of their life strategies, which are the outcomes of their personal characteristics and individual actions as well as of structural frames and conditions. The post-independence Ukrainian migration to Australia is an understudied phenomenon (Oleinikova 2020). Given the lack of knowledge or substantive research about Ukrainian migration to Australia and the absence of studies about the post-independence Ukrainian migration period (Oleinikova 2017), this study is unique in its investigation of the reasons, motivations, values, sense of agency and future plans (all the elements that build up an individual's life strategy) behind the arrival of Ukrainian skilled IT migrants. The focus is on migration in the period between 2004 and 2013, which presents a particular interest for research as, between these years, skilled arrivals from Ukraine in Australia were recorded to be the highest in number since the 1950s (Oleinikova 2020). Furthermore, in this period, IT professionals from Ukraine experienced particularly favourable conditions for immigration to Australia and unfavourable conditions for staying in Ukraine. These structural conditions on both sides encouraged young Ukrainian professionals to search for ways to control their lives and implement their life strategies with the help of migration.

With the intention of presenting empirical evidence on how skilled migrants coped with the challenges of the post-Soviet transition in Ukraine and how they shaped their life strategies both before and after migration, this article utilises an integrated life-strategy research perspective to explore agency and structure. This combination solves the macro/micro-complex problem by suggesting that the concept of life strategy enriches our understanding of how structural contexts facilitate or impede individual life strategies and how the cohort of skilled IT migrants became active agents of their biographies through migration.

First, the article explains the life-strategy conceptual framework and methodology, before setting out the structural context for migration and the formation of the achievement life strategy. Then, relying on the interview data, it examines migration decision-making and the individual context of the motivations, aims, values and agency that were formed while in Ukraine. Next, the article explores how achievement life strategy is recreated after migration by looking into the migrants' adaptation, occupational outcomes, national identity, future plans and satisfaction with migration. Finally, the article concludes that the narratives of the skilled IT migrants form a story of well-integrated members of Australian society, active agents of social and economic life, who demonstrate an effective usage of the new opportunities that emerge in the recipient environment. Given their capacity to successfully maintain their social and economic status after migration, as well as their positive contribution to Australian society in terms of social cohesion, innovation and economic production, this group can be considered as having the potential to impact on the situation in Ukraine from afar.

The life-strategy conceptual framework

Central to the structure/agency of the life-strategy research framework is the definition of life strategy as suggested by Reznik (1995) and further developed in Reznik and Smirnov (2002): a life strategy is a dynamic, self-adjusting system of socio-cultural presentations that orients individuals' behaviour throughout a protracted

period of life. The dynamic life strategies of skilled migrants were analysed across temporal and spatial dimensions. The temporal layer was used to investigate how life strategies are shaped in a particular period of migration (between 2004 and 2013). The emphasis is on these particular years, as the skilled arrivals from Ukraine in Australia noticeably increased in this specific period and are seen as the mainstream of the arrivals of ‘achievement migrants’. The spatial layer was then used to conduct analysis across Ukraine and Australia. Within this framework, migration is understood from a wider perspective to be a tool used to assist in the implementation of a life strategy that is designed to help an individual cope with socio-economic and political changes in Ukraine and build pathways in Australia according to their motivations, values and sense of agency. The category of ‘skilled migrant’¹ is used to describe the group of actors whose life strategies are examined.

Though the concept of the life strategy is constantly under-utilised by mainstream international migration and post-Soviet transition scholarship (exceptions include Geisen 2013; Mrozowicki 2011; Volodko 2007), a life-strategy approach helps researchers to ‘gai[n] new insights on migrants as social actors’ (Geisen 2013: 1). The life-strategy research framework used here relies on a structure–agency theoretical approach that was developed through a combination of the existing research on the most typical social-life practices and the role of the agency of people originating from the post-Soviet states (Golovakha and Panina 2006; Kutsenko 2004; Kutsenko and Babenko 2004; Naumova 1995; Zaslavskaya 1999; Zaslavskaya and Yadov 2008) and a modification of the typologies of life strategies suggested by Eastern European (Ukrainian and Russian) scholars (Babenko 2004; Belyaeva 2001; Naumova 1995; Reznik 1995; Reznik and Reznik 1996; Zlobina and Tykhonovych 2001). Taking as its central standpoint the differentiation between the micro and the macro dimensions that shape life strategies, this approach has two scopes: agency/content and structure/context. Within the life-strategy research framework these two scopes will be referred to as the ‘individual content of life strategy’ for the analysis of values, aims, needs and agency and the ‘structural context of life strategy’ for the analysis of the events on which the life strategy was formed. The ground-breaking approach to the combination of structure and agency was made by Giddens in his work on the theory of structuration (1979), where he describes structure and agency theories as two sides of the same coin: structures make social action possible and social action creates and transforms structures. Giddens calls it the ‘duality of structure’ and develops a stratification model of social action. According to Giddens’ (1984: 5) ‘stratification model of human action’, individuals are knowledgeable within the constraints and opportunities presented by social structures. The interplay between structure and agency is viewed as key to understanding the complex phenomenon of life-strategy formation and implementation in the context of migration. Both agency and structure are critical to the life-strategy perspective. The kind of aims, needs, values and sense of agency that Ukrainian migrants possess largely depends on the direction of the post-Soviet regime transition and migration policy regulations. I understand structure to be the space where agency is being enacted. This space is represented by economic structures, government politics, national and international events and policy that regulates migration. This is the space in which participants build their life strategies.

In the life-strategy scholarship there is no commonly agreed opinion on the key structuring elements that build up the individual context of life strategy. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya (2001) argued that life strategy includes three components: (1) the value component (as an expression of immaterial–material values), (2) the purpose of life (as a way to retain and implement the achieved position in life), (3) the meaning of life (as a generalised reflection of needs) (Abulkhanova-Slavskaya 2001). According to Golovakha (2000: 267) ‘value orientations, life goals and plans form the core of life strategy’. Here, I refer to four micro structuring elements of life strategy: motivations/aims, values, sense of agency and decision-making.

In this study I argue that the life strategies of Ukrainian IT migrants are neither effectively explained by the tripartite typology that Reznik and Reznik (1996) propose, nor the four types of life strategy that Zaslavskaya (1999) identifies in her studies of Russian society on their own. Reznik and Reznik (1996) suggest that there

are three main types of life strategy available to individuals: (1) the welfare strategy, (2) the success strategy and (3) the self-realisation strategy. According to these scholars, the ‘welfare strategy’ is one of the most common types of life strategy and is characterised by the following features: receptive (‘acquisition’) activity and reference-group (correlative) consumption, the prevalence of the attitude for acquiring (rather than creating) welfare, the desire for material comfort and maximum life security and the dominance of the image of a stable and peaceful life. The ‘success strategy’ is seen as a fairly common and appealing type of life strategy, characterised by such features as achievement-driven activity and active life position, transformational activities and a focus on high performance, the ability to live and work in conditions of uncertainty and risk, originality and diversity in the selection and implementation of cultural lifestyles and a steady focus on external recognition and approval from others. The ‘self-realisation strategy’ is the third type. Reznik and Reznik (1996: 110–119) and later Reznik and Smirnov (2002: 35–36) describe it as being characterised by a conscious and practical orientation of the individual towards creative change and the transformation of his/her own life for the purpose of self-improvement and self-development. At the same time building on her theory of post-Soviet transition, Zaslavskaya (1999) defines four classes of life strategy: (1) achievement, (2) adaptation, (3) regression and (4) destruction.

My life-strategy conceptual framework, which helped to define and classify the life strategies found in the stories of skilled IT migrants, consists of two types of life strategy which appear as the opposites of one another – the dynamic, risk-taking and future-oriented ‘achievement life strategy’ and the conservative, risk-minimising and survival-oriented ‘survival life strategy’. The core of the applied life-strategy typology in this research mainly draws on the integrated developments of Reznik and Reznik (1996) and Babenko (2004), who proposes that the level of adaptation to transition is the strongest indicator of the real social situation and the direction of social development of a society in transition. Babenko (2004) has distinguished four life-strategy types: (1) achievement, (2) adaptation, (3) exclusion and (4) survival.² The two-fold modified typology used in my study, consisting of the survival and achievement life-strategy types, provides a space to explore the combination of tools and resources employed in the formation and implementation of the achievement life strategies found to be particularly visible among my skilled IT migrant interviewees.

The first type – the achievement life strategy – in the context of migration is conceptualised as a life-strategy type directed towards achievement, self-realisation, the use of new possibilities (extensive goals) and the extended re-creation of social and economic status (Babenko 2004). The main pre-condition of the achievement strategy is motivational activity (‘achievement’) serving future professional and self-development and public recognition (Reznik and Reznik 1995).

The second type – the survival life strategy – is a life-strategy type directed towards limited re-creation at the level of physical survival, which also entails a decline in social and economic status and life chances together with self-restraint (Reznik and Reznik 1995). According to these authors, within survival life strategy, individuals set themselves the most accessible aims to provide for their own or their collective (e.g. family) survival needs.

The scholarship suggests that achievement strategies, being dynamic, risk-taking, future-oriented and ‘creative’, are typical for societies where individualism, free-market economics and pluralism dominate (Oleinikova and Bayeh 2019; Reznik and Reznik 1996). Reznik (1995) suggests that, according to its social and cultural parameters, the achievement life strategy is an essential condition for the existence of Western civil society. The achievement life strategy I examine in this article – as was found in the narratives of all 25 interviewees and as representative of developed Western societies – demonstrates that these skilled IT migrants had already led their pre-migration lives in Ukraine by the individualistic, sovereign, welfare-based and egalitarian standards that are typical in developed democratic societies, where people are not struggling for survival

but, rather, are strong enough to compete for achievement and success. Thus, their integration in the recipient society, in both the professional and the social sense, is smooth and fast.

Methodology

The structure/agency dichotomy maps onto the two methodologies used. The first was the collection and assessment of secondary data resources on both the emergence and growth of the IT market in Ukraine from the mid-2000s and migration policy in Australia. The second involved conducting qualitative interviews that were analysed using a thematic coding approach and a variation of narrative analysis. By bringing together these two different methods, this article presents a comprehensive analysis of the migration of IT professionals from Ukraine to Australia between 2004 and 2013.

The data are drawn from fieldwork conducted in Australia (NSW and Wollongong) from October 2012 to May 2013. The empirical basis for this study is formed by 25 semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian skilled IT immigrants who migrated to Australia, from 2004 on, through the general skilled migration (GSM) programme³ as ICT skilled professionals. An interview script was developed, consisting of a set of questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007) which provided a starting point to guide the interaction. The questions were based on the research aims and served as a framework for the thematic analysis of the transcribed texts. Both prospective and retrospective approaches were used to guide the conversation and capture respondents' reflections on the past and their visions for the future. The interview script was guided by a set of five themes, each containing a series of questions that fit into the two approaches. The first four themes were classified as retrospective and were aimed at finding out about the formation and genesis of the existing events or event-structures of the participants in relation to their lives in Ukraine and their arrival in Australia. The fifth theme was classified as a prospective one. The aim of the questions in this theme was to elicit descriptions by the participants of possible and desirable prospects for their lives. Participants were recruited through passive snowballing sampling, avoiding direct contact with potential respondents and recruiting through radio announcements, newspaper ads and introductions through friends and community. All the respondents were assigned pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality and the study was approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The interviews were conducted in various settings – at the participants' residences, in offices, canteens and sometimes even in bars and city parks – and, on average, lasted for 1.5–2 hours. All the participants were very open and willing to share their stories in order to assist in the research. It is important to mention that qualitative methodology recognises that the subjectivity of the researcher is intimately involved in scientific research, as well as the ability of the interviewees to present things not the way they are but the way they wish to present them. This poses unavoidable limitations to this study and needs to be acknowledged.

The participants originated from different Ukrainian regions: 11 were from Eastern and 5 from Western Ukraine, another 5 were from Central Ukraine and 4 came from Southern Ukraine. Of the participants, 17 were men and 8 were women. This gender sampling reflects the gender composition of the ICT industry, where women represent about one third of total ICT employment (Walby, Gottfried, Gottschall and Osawa 2006). As far as their social origins were concerned, 19 interviewees were born into white-collar and 4 into blue-collar working class families, while the remaining 2 interviewees originated from the class of cultural and scientific intelligentsia. Most of the migrants (23 out of 25) had university degrees and all worked professionally in the ICT sector prior to migration. Their average age was 29 years old. Regarding their marital status, 16 were married with no children and 1 was divorced at the time of the interview, while 8 participants were single.

The choice of the case study of the migration of IT professionals to Australia between 2004 and 2013 was informed by two trends: (1) a steady growth in the number of Ukrainian arrivals in Australia over the last decade and (2) the change in the profile of Ukrainian migration to Australia since 2004. In 2004, for the first

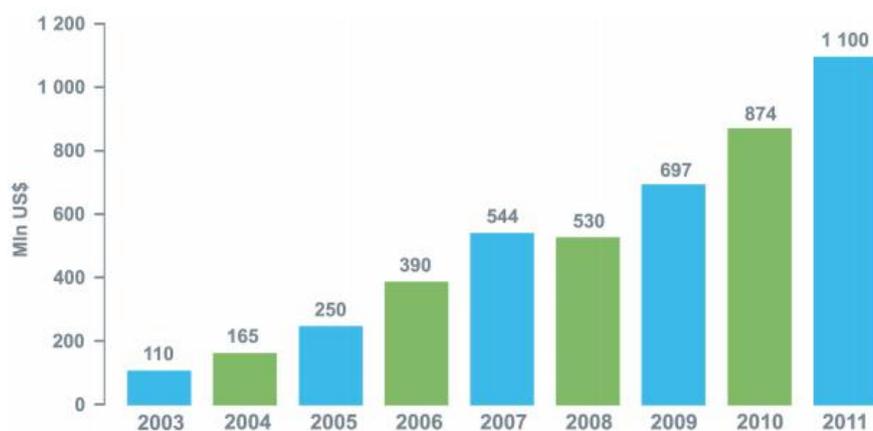
time in the overall history of Ukrainian migration to Australia (including that prior to World War I and the waves of post-World War II migration), the number of skilled Ukrainian arrivals outnumbered those who arrived through the family reunion and humanitarian stream (Oleinikova 2020). Out of the 2 470 permanent arrivals between 2004 and 2013, a total of 1 312 migrants came through the skilled stream while only 1 005 came through the family stream (DIAC 2014).⁴

Structural context: the migration of IT professionals from Ukraine to Australia between 2004 and 2013

The IT industry in Ukraine during the early 2000s and the growth of offshoring (outsourcing) in Ukraine after 2003

Before 2003, the IT industry in Ukraine reflected a population that was passive and lethargic in its use of the Internet. After 2002–2003, this shifted significantly to a culture of dot-com start-ups and an orientation towards offshore projects. Offshoring or outsourcing is the practice of hiring external labour to perform necessary business functions in a country other than that in which the products or services are actually being sold. In the case of Ukrainian IT professionals, the offshoring (outsourcing) means that an overseas organisation moves its IT development to Ukraine. As Marko, one of the interviewees, defined it, the ‘global downturn and an orientation to offshore customers’ caused the Ukrainian IT market to slow down and led to a series of individual bankruptcies of Ukrainian-based corporations delivering IT services onshore. After 2003, the IT industry in Ukraine found its way again and is still growing. From 2003 and for the next nine years the value of Ukrainian-made software development and IT outsourcing services increased tenfold (Ukrainian Hi-Tech Initiative 2012) (see Figure 1).

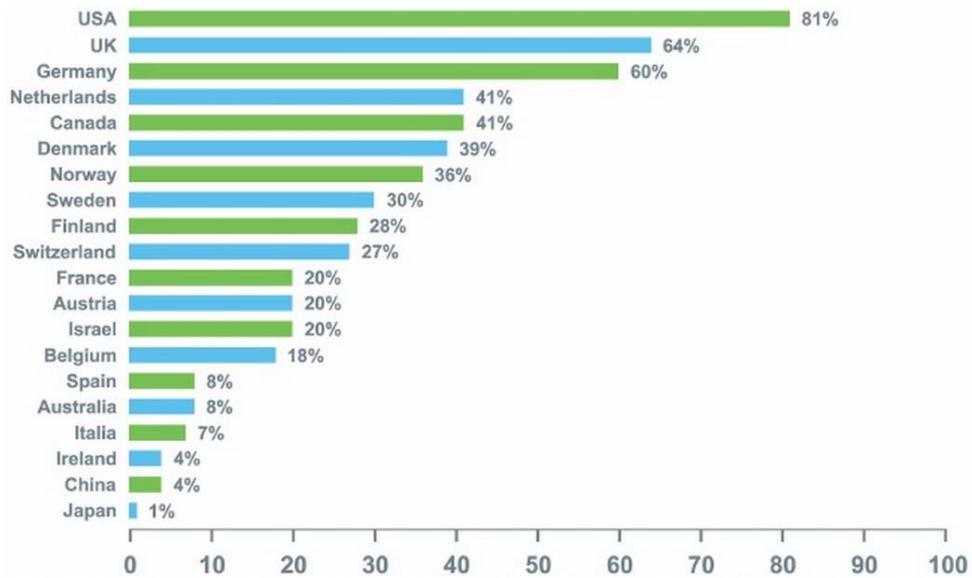
Figure 1. The value of IT outsourcing services provided by Ukraine between 2003 and 2011



Source: Ukrainian Hi-Tech Initiative (2012).

Today, Ukrainian IT professionals have proved their competence in the global market. The numbers of IT professionals in Ukraine is estimated at between 200 000 and 215 000 people. Each year over 16 000 Ukrainian IT specialists graduate. As a result, in 2013 Ukraine was the most dynamic and the leading IT outsourcing market and talent pool in Central and Eastern Europe (Intellias 2013). In terms of the countries that import Ukrainian IT services, Australia is in 16th place, drawing on 8 per cent of the available Ukrainian-made services (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Key regions for exported IT services

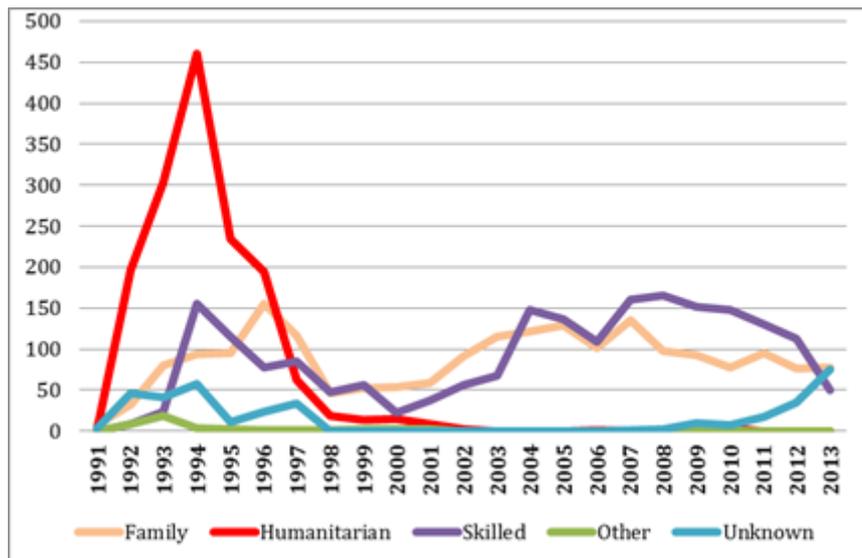


Source: Ukrainian Hi-Tech Initiative (2012).

Shifts in Australian migration policy since 2004

In 2004, for the first time in the history of Ukrainian migration to Australia, the number of Ukrainians who arrived there through the skilled migration stream with permanent status outnumbered humanitarian and family migrants (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Ukrainian permanent arrivals in Australia by migration stream (from 1 January 1991 to 1 January 2014)



Source: DIAC (2014).

This shift towards skilled arrivals, dominated by IT professionals from Ukraine, was shaped by a significant change to Australia's more-recent migration history. In 2008, the Rudd Labour government announced plans to increase the number of skilled migrants in Australia by 30 per cent from the previous year and this trend for preferring skilled migrants seems to be continuing (Boucher 2013; Markus *et al.* 2009; Oleinikova 2020). Since 2010, Australia's main focus of economic development has shifted from mining and resources to tech-innovation (Oleinikova 2017). This growing demand for skilled migrants attracted IT professionals and engineers from Ukraine.

Another important change in migration policy that created more favourable conditions for Ukrainian IT migration to Australia was the decrease in the country's assessment level for Ukraine. For many years, Ukraine was on the list of countries with an excessive risk of illegal immigration to Australia. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's review of visa risk-assessment levels, which took effect on 24 March 2012, Ukraine's assessment level decreased to Level Two, making the procedure for obtaining a visa for Australia easier (DIAC 2012). The following visa categories, more specifically, now require less paperwork for Ukrainians: (1) Subclass 570 – ELICOS (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students); (2) Subclass 571 – Schools; (3) Subclass 573 – Higher Education; (4) Subclass 574 – Postgraduate Research and (5) Subclass 575 – Non-Award.

Individual content of the achievement life strategy

Motivations/aims

It was in these structural circumstances that the IT professionals made their decisions and plans to move to Australia based on their motivations/aims. Their aims refer to individuals' life goals and motivated activity plans that form the core of the achievement life strategy (Abulkhanova-Slavskaya 2001). Drawing on the 25 narratives of the skilled IT migrants, the following motivations/aims were found to be key to their migration for achievement between 2004 and 2013:

1. the growing competition among IT professionals in Ukraine resulting from the rapid growth of the IT market since 2003;
2. a desire to develop, innovate and grow as employees and professionals;
3. a desire to change from being outsourced labour (available cheaply to developed countries) into well-paid professionals who manage IT projects from the heart of an IT hub;
4. being a well-paid cohort in Ukraine, the awareness that they can earn more Australia; and
5. the stable growth of the Australian IT market, employment shortages in the IT Australian industry and the easy conditions for their skilled immigration.

Given the increasing number of trained IT specialists in Ukraine, it is perhaps not surprising that growing competition among them was the first reason the interviewees gave for choosing to migrate. Marko, Fedir, Panas, Ivan, Oleh, Tamara, Bohdan, Zoya and Maksym all mentioned this as the reason why they applied for permanent residence in Australia through the skilled migration stream. For example, Marko said: 'Since Ukraine became well known for skilled IT professionals, the competition in the Ukrainian ICT industry has started to grow. I took another degree at that time to develop more skills but then I realised that it was better to invest in migration'. However, the issue for the IT group was not just about job competition. The participants listed individual characteristics that suggested that they wanted a particular type of work experience with room for growth and innovation, which was the second factor motivating skilled IT migration to Australia. Borys said he was 'always following new trends and self-education' in his profession. Fedir noted he had 'skills and

a strong self-awareness [of himself] as a professional and a desire to innovate'. Marko said: 'I aim to be an expert in what I do and always search for opportunities to grow as a professional and employee'. The aim of professional growth and development, as drawn from the IT migrants' narratives, was found to originate from the sense of technological abundance in Ukraine.

Marko, Panas and Anatolyi expressed the feeling of technological abundance in Ukraine and a desire for global engagement with the mainstream and cutting-edge IT industry. As, Marko said: 'Being in IT in Ukraine makes you feel abundant by the world. Technologically, Ukraine is laid-back. There is a lack of inspiration for innovations and keeping up with global cutting-edge trends. Australia offers innovation hype vibes and enormous possibilities for career development'.

The third factor that participants said facilitated their skilled migration was their desire to change from being outsourced labour (available cheaply to developed countries) into well-paid professionals who manage IT projects from the heart of an IT hub. Maksym put it well when he reflected that he wanted to shift from 'being part of a low-cost outsourcing labour force in Ukraine, to being part of the well-paid cohort of IT professionals in Australia'. Interestingly, the experience of all 25 IT professionals was that they had always been linked to global orders, services and corporations. Panas said: 'I worked for different international IT companies in Ukraine and travelled to the US and London for some project work. I was always a part of global corporations', then adding 'However, it was always outsourced labour'. Anatolyi, Borys, Panas, Mykola, Simon, Kateryna, Svitlana, Zoya and Maksym mentioned that they had sufficient cultural capital to implement their achievement life strategies through migration to Australia – they had experience of working overseas and were exposed to a Western lifestyle and values. Panas said that he travelled abroad 'very often for work, to the US, Norway and the UK', while Marko said that he worked for three months in the United States and that his values had changed once he returned to Ukraine.

Indeed, these IT professionals were motivated by their externally acknowledged economic ability. For example, Panas described the 'experience of being "headhunted" by IT companies in Ukraine and internationally'. All these experiences built up their economic, cultural and social capital, which served as a platform from which to implement their achievement life strategies through migration. Maksym considered his professional mobility post-migration as an achievement of the transition from being an outsourced programmer in Ukraine to the IT manager of outsourced projects in Australia: 'In fact I moved from an outsourced programmer to the manager of outsourced projects. I have even done some offshore work with several programmers in Ukraine'.

The fourth factor that made participants go to Australia as skilled migrants was their desire to earn more money there. Panas said: 'I was very well paid in Ukraine, but I knew I could earn more in Australia for the same job'. Like Panas, Borys said the following about his financial situation in Ukraine: 'In L..., as a programmer, I earned \$2 000 per month. That is the amount of money that my father earned in two years. In economic terms, IT programmers in Ukraine walk like gods; our status is high'. Participants said that they acquired sufficient economic capital through employment in the IT industry in Ukraine to turn their work (which was, typically, programming and product support) into well-paid employment as part of a cohort of professionals in a developed country such as Australia. Despite the cost of living in the host country being (significantly) higher than in Ukraine, their earnings in Australia leave them with more 'spending money'.

Lastly, our participants explained that they were interested in going to Australia because of the stable growth of the Australian IT market, which coincided with employment shortages in the country's IT industry, as well as easy conditions for their skilled immigration. The Australian IT industry matched the emergence of that in Ukraine and demonstrated stable growth over the eight years from 2000 (Australian Trade Commission 2008). Indeed, the IT sector is one of the most dynamic and progressive industries in Australia and contributes about \$42 billion to the nation's economy every year (Smail 2013).

All 25 IT professionals were aware that Australia is a fast-growing and highly advanced digital economy. Fedir said: ‘Before migrating I read and was impressed that Australia’s ICT industry is one of the fastest-growing and most-innovative sectors of the Australian economy’. Borys said that the fact that ‘onshore IT projects dominate over offshore imported services in Australia’ encouraged his migration. This condition and a perfect supply/demand match, set Australia apart from other possible immigration destinations.

A good university education, a knowledge of English and the skills to work in a high-priority Australian profession allowed the IT professionals to successfully pass through the restrictive Australian points-based skilled migration system. Fedir, when asked ‘Why Australia?’, explained that it was the easiest country to migrate to:

Australia had the easiest immigration conditions when I was applying. I considered New Zealand and Canada but they didn’t have my IT specialisation on the list. Australia did. If you are a programmer and your specialisation and experience are needed in Australia, you get a permanent visa automatically. Other countries didn’t have this – you could go on a temporary working visa or you needed to have an employer. It creates difficulties. Many IT workers from Ukraine went to the US but Australia is better!

Migration decision-making

Thematic analysis indicates that all 25 interviewees clearly realised that moving abroad was a massive project that required preparation, planning and management and ‘involved the allocation of a long period of one’s life to this project’ (Borys). They generated their migration pathways and planned their achievement trajectories consciously by analysing their situation before leaving Ukraine and counting the potential ‘dividends’ from migration on the basis of information received from official channels, acquaintances, friends and relatives who had migration experience. For example, Marko said:

I remember I was very serious about migration from the start. I analysed the causes and the effects that I would hopefully get from moving to Australia. I talked to friends in Australia, and friends in the US and Canada. After calculating the potential return on investment, I made the decision to leave Ukraine for Australia.

Marko uses the very rich expression ‘return on investment’ in relation to his migration decision. A similar mindset was revealed in the stories of Zoya, Andriy, Maksym, Vasyl, Panas, Daryna, Tamara, Anton, Oleh, Ivan and Mykola. Their stories show that they chose the most efficient way to implement their aims and values, reflected in their rational decision-making.

Firstly, they gathered information. The main information channels mentioned by Fedir, Borys, Tamara, Maksym, Bohdan, Zoryana, Anatolyi, Panas, Mykola, Marko and Andriy are: (1) official sources (Fedir and Borys mentioned the official Australian immigration website; Marko said he looked into unemployment statistics and did IT industry research; Panas and Anatolyi said that they used migration agents in Ukraine); (2) media resources and (3) friends and family (Mykola and Tamara relied on the advice of family and friends).

Secondly, after finding enough information to convince themselves that migration to Australia would be a professional, social and financial upgrade, they started to evaluate their chances of immigration. In order to go to Australia through the skilled migration stream, which is a points-based system, applicants need to amass a sufficient number of points to successfully launch their visa application. During the evaluation of their personal characteristics for suitability for the skilled migration programme to Australia, several participants (Mykola, Panas and Borys) said that they discovered they were lacking English-language skills and years of professional experience. Borys said: ‘After the decision was made, it turned out that my main problem was the

English language. I began to learn it just before leaving'. Mykola, who trained as a radio engineer and worked as an IT support engineer in Ukraine, went to Australia in 2012 through the skilled migration stream, said: 'I had to re-sit the IELTS test eight times before I got the required score'. Another IT professional, Panas, went to London for three months to study English and to sit the IELTS in England.

Thirdly, participants said they used official and 'expensive' (Anatolyi) migration agents to help them to organise all the documents and guide them through their application process. Panas said: 'I used a migration agent just to feel secure and to be sure that I hadn't missed a thing. I could have done it all myself; I read a lot about it and knew the process. It was hard to get time off work at that stage'. The interview data analysed in this section suggest that the process of decision-making for IT migrants is rational, meaning that they include the reflexive monitoring of actions and environments.

Sense of agency

Another element that shapes the life strategy of achievement is agency. Participants expressed themselves as active agents of their lives, which drives their achievement life strategy. The manifestation of a strong sense of agency is an active life position (Zlobina and Tykhonovych 2005). Borys, Tamara, Fedir, Maksym, Anatolyi, Bohdan, Kateryna and Andriy described their active involvement in the social and political life of Ukraine. For example, Borys said: 'Together with friends, I was actively involved in many activities: I visited orphanages, tried to create cycle paths and parking. I think people make their own choices and make something good out of it'. Tamara said: 'I was involved in some social activities and shared my optimism and strength with people who were suffering hardship'. These cases demonstrate motivation and a high capacity and desire to produce change. Fourteen participants (Borys, Fedir, Andriy, Kateryna, Bohdan, Anatolyi, Daryna, Pavlo, Oleh, Petro, Daryna, Svitlana, Panas, Anton) indicated that they actively participated in the 2004 'Orange Revolution' protests in Kiev, meaning they were involved in the fight for the right and freedom to produce further social and political change in Ukraine. The revolution's lack of success prompted young Ukrainians to search for ways to control their lives and make a difference with the help of migration. Borys, who took part in the 'Orange Revolution' and went to Australia in 2010, explains his life position and decision to migrate:

I'm not one of those people who gets disappointed and stays silent, dissatisfied and stressed on the inside because I live in such a bad country and do nothing at the same time. Together with my friends we supported the 2004 protests. But, unfortunately, the 'Orange Revolution' did not succeed. In such conditions, I decided that the best thing to do was to change countries (migrate), rather than fight endlessly to change the country from inside.

This way of thinking is evident in the narratives of the other five participants (Fedir, Andriy, Kateryna, Bohdan and Anatolyi). This cohort reveals a certain level of flexibility, the ability to feel as though they themselves are the subjects of the change and the ability to actively use every opportunity to improve their situation. Another example is Bohdan, whose behaviour, like that of the other migrants mentioned above, is characterised by consistent decision-making, leadership and a clear understanding of his prospects. He said: 'I tend not to avoid problems but solve them. I realised that Ukraine was a dead-end for me in terms of development and self-realisation'. The narratives of 17 other migrants (Fedir, Slava, Daryna, Zoya, Tamara, Marko, Andrii, Vasyi, Anton, Svitlana, Oksana, Panas, Anatolyi, Mykola, Maksym, Simon and Bohdan) demonstrate the exercise of personal control over their circumstances and prove that, with the help of migration, they took responsibility for their own lives and guaranteed a certain degree of independence, liberation and freedom for themselves.

All the narratives of the interviewees reveal that they are actively involved in the social and political life of Ukraine. The majority of the participants mentioned they follow the news from Ukraine and actively participate

in the life of their friends and family back in Ukraine, as well as invest energy and financial resources to support civil initiatives and pro-democracy NGOs. Borys, Tamara, Fedir, Maksym, Anatolyi, Bohdan, Kateryna and Andriy mentioned their active involvement in democratisation efforts in Ukraine. For example, Bohdan said: 'I am still actively involved in many activities in Ukraine, as I want to see Ukraine become more liberal and democratic. I regularly financially support three big democratic movements and NGOs in Ukraine – Chesno, Razom and Ukrainer. I feel I can do much more for Ukraine when living abroad'. The majority of the participants demonstrated strong agency and the potential to impact on the situation in Ukraine from afar.

Values

Another building block of achievement life strategies is the set of liberal and non-materialistic values (Abulkhanova-Slavskaya 2001). These values include prospects and opportunities for self-realisation and a favourable environment for developing one's own initiative, freedom and independence. The stories of skilled IT migrants are dominated by expressions of liberal values. For example, Tamara said she values 'freedom and independence above all'. Like Tamara, 14 other participants (Borys, Fedir, Daryna, Zoya, Anton, Andriy, Vasyi, Anatolyi, Maksym, Mykola, Marko, Oksana, Slava and Panas) talked about freedom and independence in economic terms, referring to the career opportunities and financial independence that led them to choose to leave Ukraine. Marko noted: 'It is important for me to build my life and career only in a state of freedom'. Panas said: 'Freedom is crucial' while, according to Marko, people prefer 'the status of being a free spirit to the comforts of a stable life'.

Another value expressed by participants was the opportunity for self-realisation in combination with spiritual and professional development. Tamara said that the determining factor for her skilled emigration was that 'there were no opportunities for self-realisation, for further professional and spiritual growth for me in Ukraine'. At the different stages of her narrative, Tamara also expressed the value of the 'equality of life opportunities for people from different social groups'. She also mentioned the 'freedom of expression'.

Furthermore, the financial benefits of migration were not the primary pull factor for migrating to Australia; other reasons, explained above, provide a stronger motivation for the move. Thus, material values did not determine the life strategy of these migrants. Anatolyi said: 'In my life I most value life itself, not money! Even when I get my monthly pay, I am not excited. I see it as a means for living, not as a goal'.

Achievement life patterns after migration

Successful adaptation and social and economic integration define the achievement life patterns of Ukrainian IT migrants at the post-migration stage. According to Taran (2009), the indicators of successful integration are the possession of the professional, language and social skills necessary for an effective work and social life in the host society and the adequate protection of the immigrants' interests and rights there, including the right to preserve the essential elements of their ethnic identity. After immigration, all 25 interviewees sought integration in terms of professional and social success. They expressed in their narratives a strong desire to become 'locals' in the most efficient way. As Fedir said: 'I already feel Australian and I want to become local in the eyes of Australians as soon as possible, which I feel will move my career forward and let me have a complete social life here'. Later in the interview, Fedir clarified that, by being local, he meant being perceived as equal in the professional sphere, where he can communicate without barriers and show initiative that is supported by his Australian colleagues. Indeed, Mykola and Zoryana also used the word 'local' to describe what integration was, with Mykola saying: 'Being seen as local will definitely move my career forward'.

The IT cohort is ambitious and works hard to reach their desired advancement in social and economic status. Our interviewees were found to have done well after their migration in terms of labour-market outcomes. Following the logic suggested by Oleinikova (2020) – who used the match or mismatch of migrants' professions at home with their post-migration employment as an indirect indicator of status upgrade or downgrade – the IT migrants from Ukraine managed an exact match in their careers, both before and after migration. Moreover, they tended to get higher positions and/or promotions in their new jobs in Australia. As Marko said: 'My first job in Australia was at the same level as in Ukraine. After one year I was promoted from an IT data and insights analyst role, to the senior role of an offline marketing director, which would hardly have happened in Ukraine'.

In addition to using the narrative data, Mrozowicki's (2011) occupational careers descriptors – anchor and bricolage – are applied in order to understand the common thread running through the narratives of IT migrants who chose an exact (Panas, Fedir, Anatolyi) or an even better career match for their educational and professional backgrounds (Andriy, Vasyl, Anton, Svitlana, Oksana, Marko, Slava, Mykola, Petro, Kateryna, Daryna, Tamara, Simon, Fedir, Bohdan, Oleh, Zoya, Maksym, Borys, Tamara, Daryna and Pavlo). According to Mrozowicki, an anchor career is an 'intentionally shaped single-track pattern, based on lasting employment in a particular work organization in a particular field' (2011: 160). 'Anchoring' careers are those in which participants, while still in Ukraine, have already established and guaranteed their employment in the same company in Australia, as was achieved by Anatolyi, Fedir and Panas. In these cases, anchoring played a securising function and a guaranteed income in the same role as in Ukraine in the first days after arrival which, as Panas pointed out, 'sped up my successful integration'. 'Bricolage' careers, found to be the most common among our interviewees, involved a high level of responsiveness to the new environment and great adaptability, with their given resources and skills, to upgrade in their chosen occupation. According to Mrozowicki (2011), a bricolage career is a multi-track occupational choice that involves a high level of responsiveness to institutional and structural challenges in the new environment – which demands high flexibility and job mobility and excludes the emphasis on workplace continuity.

Another feature that defines the lives of IT migrants focused on achievement was the national self-identification of the participants as cosmopolitans or Australians. As Zoryana said: 'I value the freedom of self-identification. I feel I am a world citizen now'. The identification with Ukraine expressed by the interviewees seemed to be weak. Their national self-identification with Australia or even the world signals the success of their integration. Anatolyi said: 'I came to Australia to start a new life outside Ukraine. Why would I want to join the Ukrainian community? I want to be different and be Australian now'. Anatolyi's story suggests that his first priority was to build a new life and career (or advance his career) with no affiliation to the past. IT migrants are more involved in secondary groups. Borys said: 'I am a member of several tourist and professional societies in Sydney. I am more involved with Australian groups than with Ukrainians'. Building ties to the dominant group of Australians who are the best equipped to provide the participants with the information they need about predominant cultural codes, was also important to Panas, Anatolyi, Anton, Zoryana, Oksana, Andriy, Borys, Marko, Zoryana, Daryna, Mykola and Ruslana. As a result, IT migrants demonstrate a high level of English proficiency. Seven participants, including Fedir, who explained that he wants 'to sound completely native', mentioned their aim to get rid of their Ukrainian accent.

The narratives of the IT migrants also suggest that they are not indifferent to Australian political, social and economic life. Reciprocity and a strong sense of agency guides their lives. They remain active agents after migration, significantly impacting on institutional dynamics in Australian society. For example, Mykola said that he wants to bring innovation and progress to Australia by working on his new social business. Kateryna summarises this attitude, saying that: 'I see Australia as my new home ... how can I stand aside? I want to contribute to its improvement and to make it a better place'.

As discussed in the theory section, when determining the process of the formation and consolidation of a life strategy in the structure/agency dichotomy, one of the fundamental categories is that of time (Abulkhanova-Slavskaya 2001; Naumova 1995; Reznik and Reznik 1996). The future plans of IT migrants are directed at both the present and the future. Their primary aspirations are articulated through: (1) plans to gain new skills and/or education in order to build a successful career in Australia, (2) plans to go overseas to gain professional experience in order to be promoted in their current occupation in Australia after they return and (3) plans to start their own businesses and build entrepreneurial careers.

Satisfaction with migration was expressed by all the interviewees – they considered their migration as a move that improved their life overall. For example, Oksana said: ‘My life has improved since I moved to Australia’; Marko said: ‘I have upgraded my career’ and Tamara said: ‘I am satisfied, I see where to grow in Australia’. Above all, this satisfaction is attributed by the IT migrants to their use of their individual resources, intellect, skills and education. As Marko said: ‘Yes, there were people who supported me but everything that I have achieved in Australia is only because of my skills, enthusiasm, education and intellect’.

Conclusion

The cohort of skilled IT migrants from Ukraine to Australia clearly represents the ‘achiever’ types whose lives are shaped by intrinsic achievement-oriented life strategies. All 25 participants implemented their achievement life strategies through their migration to Australia and continued these strategies after migration. They catered for interesting work and professional growth and self-realisation, successful integration and the upgrading of their social and economic status and, overall, demonstrated a strong sense of agency focused on improving Australia, their home country – Ukraine – and the people around them.

The popularity of the achievement life strategies among the interviewees was found to be influenced by a combination of personal characteristics and individual actions (a set of liberal values, strong agency and the goal of a professional, social and economic upgrade) as well as of structural frames and conditions (relevant for the period between 2004 and 2013 in Ukraine and Australia). Structurally, the migration of IT professionals was formed by the growing IT market in Ukraine and shifts in Australia migration policy towards the greater acceptance of and favourable policies for IT professionals. At the individual level, skilled IT migrants demonstrate a strong self-awareness of their own power over their lives. Their choice of migration is well-informed and rational. Furthermore, the IT cohort interviewed were characterised by their engagement in the global industry and their transferable skills, along with the desire to escape from a job situation shaped in Ukraine by a glut of workers and a predominantly outsourced labour force, intertwined with feelings of technological abundance and low wages compared to the rest of the world. Through migration they became globally engaged in a technologically advanced environment – a space where they could have opportunities and develop, innovate and grow as employees or professionals.

Subsequently, the narratives of the 25 skilled IT migrants form a story or present themselves as a well-integrated members of Australian society – active agents of social and economic life who took advantage of the new opportunities that emerged. The reproduction of their life strategy of achievement after migration was informed by successful adaptation and social and professional integration, an Australian and/or cosmopolitan national identity, a high level of English proficiency, satisfaction with migration and future plans to succeed in terms of professional self-realisation, career growth and personal development.

Another issue that arises when analysing the cohort of skilled IT migrants from Ukraine is the ‘brain drain’ to developed economies. These migrants, who are classified as ‘achievers’ in terms of their values, motivations/aims and sense of agency, are part of the phenomenon of Ukrainian brain drain on the one hand and, on the other, of Australia’s ‘brain gain’ (Beine, Docquier and Rapoport 2008; Docquier and Rapoport 2012;

Straubhaar 2000). Increasing economic globalisation, Ukrainian migration flows to Australia and the global interdependence of national, regional and local economies through the intensification of the cross-border movement of goods, services, technologies and capital, all created the completely different circumstances in which these IT migrants have found themselves in the last 15 years. This changing global order shaped the life strategies of Ukrainian migrants into achievement life strategies.

It should also be emphasised that the main limitation of these findings is the timeframe for data collection, which investigated the arrival of post-independence Ukrainian skilled IT migrants into Australia between 2004 and 2013. This specific period is the heart of the study as in these years there was a noticeable increase in the arrival of skilled migrants from Ukraine to Australia – seen to have produced migrants who implement achievement life strategies. Since 2014, the ‘Euromaidan protests’ and the military conflict in East Ukraine could have changed the dynamics of Ukrainian migration into Australia. Due to this, the changes to the life strategies of skilled IT migrants are expected and are assumed to be driven more by ‘survival’ than by ‘achievement’, although this is not the focus of the current study.

Notes

¹ Skilled migrants are people on the move who possess university degrees or extensive work experience in professional fields when they leave their countries of origin to seek employment elsewhere.

² Babenko (2004), a Ukrainian sociologist who studies social practices, life strategies and mechanisms of post-communist societal transformation, supports the ideas of Reznik and Reznik (1995) and Zlobina and Tykhonovych (2001). Babenko’s division is based on the following criteria, which determine the strategy content: (1) the way in which social status is reproduced (advanced, simple and truncated) and, therefore, the decline or increase of life chances and opportunities, (2) the degree and quality of adaptation to changing conditions of social reality (successful), uncertain (unstable), failed (inability or refusal to adapt), and (3) the degree to which new opportunities are taken up in conditions of rapid change within post-Soviet transformation processes (Babenko 2004).

³ The General Skilled Migrant (GSM) programme was designed to allow highly skilled people to migrate to Australia to live and to look for work or self-employment opportunities.

⁴ As per the DIBP (2014) Settlement Database (SDB) data (extracted on 30/04/2014), the total number of Ukraine-born arrivals who were granted a permanent visa in Australia between 01 January 2004 and 01 January 2013 was 2 470 people, of whom 1 312 were skilled migrants, 1 005 were family, 6 were for humanitarian reasons and 147 for reasons unknown.

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No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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