

Transnational Field of Dispersed Diasporas: The Czech Case

Zdeněk Uherek^{*}, Veronika Beranská^{**}

The text shows how the transnational field of Czech skilled migration to Western European countries and to developed non-European countries is constructed. It works with quantitative and qualitative data on the Czech diaspora and creates a variant of a transnational field with links to formal institutions on the one hand and personal contacts based on family and friendship ties on the other. It weighs where and under what conditions institutions and friendly connectivities play a role and shows a variety of networks where institutional ties play a crucial role in the target countries. The study indicates that these skilled migrants follow patterns of mobilities between Western EU countries. However, it has been more pragmatic, less focused on the quality of the environments in the destination countries and more direct on building personal social capital. The text shows that the Czech diaspora is highly dispersed yet capable of social mobilisation for joint activities.

Keywords: emigration, Czech diaspora, Czech Republic, transnational fields

* Charles University, the Czech Republic; Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the Czech Republic. Address for correspondence: zdenek.uherek@fsv.cuni.cz.

** Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences, the Czech Republic; Charles University, the Czech Republic. Address for correspondence: veronika.beranska@gmail.com.

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Introduction

The European Union's area creates a specific migration environment with porous borders allowing multiple migration movements and free choice of residence, which results in extended transnationality. Specifics of this type of mobility have been studied since approximately the 1980s (Carling and Erdal 2014; Delhey, Verbalyte, Aplowski and Deutschmann 2019; King 2002; Koikkalainen, Lulle, King, Leon-Himmelstine and Szkudlarek 2022; Salt 1983, 1992). It is multiple and highly individual, with frequent return migration and repeated trips to new destinations (Erlinghagen, Ette, Schneider and Witte 2021; Harney and Baldassar 2007; King 2002; Koikkalainen *et al.* 2022; Recchi and Favel 2019; Tedeschi, Vorobeve and Jauhiainen 2020), which 'blur further the never-straightforward boundary between migration and mobility' (King 2002: 90) and draws 'stayers' into the concept of transnationalism (Recchi and Favell 2019; Tedeschi *et al.* 2020). At the European level, the processes associated with these migratory movements are sometimes called 'horizontal Europeanisation' (Heidenreich 2019). However, this type of migratory movement is not limited to Europe; it is recorded to varying degrees between Europe and other parts of the world. Residents of Czechia partially joined this migratory environment in the 1990s with the dismantling of the communist regime – and entirely in 2004 with the accession to the European Union. Before 1989, Czechia also experienced various migratory movements but the state strictly regulated immigration and emigration, so these were usually one-way. Transnationalism and contacts of residents in Czechia with diasporas abroad were limited.

The impact of new migration conditions and changes in the characteristics of Czech diasporas are understudied. While there have been several comprehensive publications on emigration up to 1989 (Brouček, Barteček, Beranská, Grulich, Jakoubek, Kočí, Lozoviuk, Sulitka and Uherek 2019), analyses of new out-migration trends especially are predominantly probes concentrated on partial cases (Brouček, Beranská, Červinková, Jiráková and Uherek 2017; Brouček *et al.* 2019; Drbohlav and Pavelková 2018). It is only recently, in light of the growing political interest in the Czech diaspora in Czechia, that more robust data have been collected there, as evidenced by the publication edited by Eva Janská, with a foreword by the Czech politicians Jiří Bělor (Deputy Chairman of the Subcommittee on Relations with Compatriots of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic) and Jiří Krátký (Special Envoy for the Czech Expatriate Community and Expatriate Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic) (Janská 2024) and efforts to contextualise policy towards the Czech diaspora within current international trends (Janská and Janurová 2020; Janská, Janurová, Löblová and Novotný 2024). The primary motivation of these texts is to map what the diaspora needs from the institutions in the country of origin and to strengthen the link between them. The 2024 publication, edited by Eva Janská, also includes chapters that analyse in more detail texts that have been written about the original Czech diasporas (Janská, Uherek and Janurová 2024); however, a more complete picture of how Czech transnationalism is ordered is still lacking. We address this question in the following text.

In order to grasp transnational behaviour from different points of view, a number of concepts have been developed. Prominent among these are concepts of transnational (social) space, the transnational field and transnational habitus. All three concepts have been utilised in a variety of meanings in the past and their very use has been already analysed and evaluated (regarding transnational space, see Pries 2001; Riaño 2017; the transnational field, Lubbers, Verdery and Molina 2020; transnational habitus, Stahl, Soong, Mu and Dai 2024). These three concepts include three dimensions of socially produced space: materiality, social practice and meanings. While the concept of transnational space refers predominantly to the sociospatial (sociocentric) dimension of transnationalism (Pries 2005) and includes a variety of perspectives (from individual to institutional plurilocal frameworks – Pries 2001), the transnational field refers to its personal, egocentric (perceptionalist) dimension (Fouon and Glick Schiller 2001; Lubbers *et al.* 2020; Molina, Petermann and Herz 2015). The transnational habitus then includes transnational practices and powers that migrants activate

(Guarnizo 1997; Stahl *et al.* 2024). In this text, we focus primarily on the egocentric dimension of the transnational field constructed through actors' responses to the questionnaire survey and narratives in the in-depth interviews. In constructing the transnational field, we considered that many diaspora members go abroad to work or study and maintain primarily work and study relationships abroad rather than relationships with diaspora members. This circumstance is often overlooked when studying the transnational field (Lubbers *et al.* 2020). In so doing, we ask ourselves the following questions:

- How is the transnational field of our samples constructed and how important is the role of formalised relationships between individuals and institutions compared to informal relationships with family, friends and acquaintances?
- How are the state institutions in the country of origin embedded in the transnational field?
- Do individuals of dispersed transnational fields form a diaspora?

In the following discussion, we place the results of our analysis in a broader context.

In approaching these questions, we use the concept of transnationalism as a transnational 'set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organised and transformed' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1009). The term 'diaspora' we understand, following Robin Cohen, as a defined group whose members are dispersed to many destinations – they construct a shared identity; they still somewhat orient themselves to an original 'home' and they demonstrate an affinity with other members of the group dispersed to other places (Cohen 2023: 1).

Data and measures

Basic strategies for transnational field research

In conceptualising the transnational field, Fourn, Levitt and Glick Schiller all drew on Bourdieu's (1993) notion of a field of social (power) relations which, in line with the Manchester School of Social Anthropology, can be represented as a social network. When this concept is applied to migration groups, the field encompasses at least 2 locations, destination and source countries – and creates a network of (at least 2) networks (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Molina, Petermann and Herz 2012, 2015). In this paper, we conceptualise the social field as egocentric. It consists of the individuals (Egos) and their personal contacts with individuals and institutions – the subjectively perceived ties with significant others that anchor Ego in society (Goffman 1961).

To explore the transnational field, we used a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data sources (Creswell 2014; Lubbers *et al.* 2020; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009).

Data

The data for the quantitative evaluation were obtained through a questionnaire survey collected as part of the project Research on the needs of compatriot communities in individual countries in terms of maintaining their ties to the Czech Republic and analysed for the purposes of this text during the project Czech diaspora – Multidimensional relations and conditionality of Czechia and host countries. The questionnaire survey was conducted from May 2021 to September 2021 and was intended for adult Czech citizens or persons of Czech origin who had been abroad for at least 6 months. A person of Czech origin could be anyone with Czech ancestry, regardless of citizenship or country of birth. The important thing was that they did not live in the Czech Republic.

The questionnaire was distributed in electronic form. Czech associations abroad, Facebook groups and the organisation Czexpats in Science were addressed and individuals were contacted to fill it in via the Czech Compatriots web portal (Cestikrajane 2021). Through this sampling method, 940 questionnaires were completed. These were collected by institutions residing in the source country (Charles University, the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences, the National Institute for Research on Innovative Technologies and the Czexpats in Science NGO). The distribution of the questionnaire allowed the participation of all segments of the diaspora, bearing in mind that the distribution of the questionnaire gives room for self-selective processes and attracts active and communicative individuals.

According to the estimates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are currently 2–2.5 million people of Czech origin living abroad (MZV 2023a, 2023b), of whom approximately 290,000 have Czech citizenship; the rest claim Czech origin despite being citizens of other countries (MZV 2023a). According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the most frequent destinations of Czechs abroad are the USA, Great Britain and Germany (MZV 2023a). Our transnational communication was accepted predominantly by Czech citizens (883 out of 940 respondents participating in the survey – i.e. 93.9 per cent). These respondents lived previously in Czechia. The average age of the sample was 43 years (median 40 years, range 17–93 years), with the most significant number of respondents aged 37–53 years (st. dev. 13.279). They lived in Czechia for an average of 26.96 years (median 25). If we assume that they were born in Czechia (a question unfortunately absent in the questionnaire), it is apparent that they left primarily between the ages of 19 and 35 ($n=921$, missing 19, st. dev. 7.922). At the time of the research, they were living in 53 countries. Most resided in the United Kingdom (166 respondents, 17.7 per cent), Germany (163 respondents, 17.3 per cent), the USA (143 respondents, 15.2 per cent), Canada (58 respondents, 6.2 per cent) and Austria (49 respondents, 5.2 per cent). The migratory movement of respondents, however, was not so simple. Qualitative research shows that respondents' first departures abroad were often realised at younger ages (Uherek, Beranská 2024). The length of stay abroad varied considerably, ranging from 6 months to 71 years. Still, the average stay abroad was 15.6 years, the median was 12 years and most respondents had been abroad between 3 and 30 years (standard deviation 13.04).

Another important characteristic of the sample is education – 60 per cent had a university degree (at least BC) and 24 per cent had a PhD. There is an obvious bias here: the questionnaire was also partially distributed through the networks of Czexpats in Science with special questions for highly skilled diaspora members. However, although this circumstance probably boosted the number of university-educated respondents, it is clear that the communication with researchers through the questionnaire was carried out predominantly by educated and qualified people. It is important information for the academic sphere and the state administration because these people usually save time. If they devote it to creating feedback to the country of origin, it cannot be considered a mere sentiment but a thoughtfully designed part of the transnational field in which they set particular aspirations.

The quantitative enquiry was followed by the qualitative one, based on online and face-to-face interviews conducted from January 2022 to July 2024. The sample contains 109 narratives based on semi-standardised questions about the reason for going abroad, life and integration abroad, future plans and contacts. The sample is predominantly based on self-selection – 90 interview partners are respondents of the questionnaire survey who expressed their willingness to be subsequently interviewed by a research-team member. This core corpus of data was then supplemented by purposive sampling through interviews conducted during fieldwork and by directly approaching narrators with whom the researchers came into contact.

While the questionnaire survey did not limit the country where the respondent was located – the researchers only ensured that the countries with the most significant number of Czech diaspora members were proportionally represented – the qualitative research focused on only a few countries with a sizeable Czech

diaspora. Interviews were thus conducted with Czechs in Germany, France, the UK, the USA, Australia and New Zealand.

Measures

In addition to basic personal data, the questionnaire focuses on the reason for staying abroad, which is, in this text, an indicator of the reason for the creation of the transnational field. Then follow the questions about the respondents' relationships with individuals (family members, friends, acquaintances) and formal institutions (offices, schools, voluntary organisations, clubs, political groupings) and the frequency of these contacts (respondents selected whether they had daily, weekly, yearly, less than yearly or no contact with a given category of person or institution). For this analysis, we consider the following indicators:

- contacts at the destination countries and their frequency
- contacts with the country of origin and their frequency

We modelled the transnational field by:

28. simply summing how many people a given contact type has in the sample and, next,
29. adding an index number as an auxiliary tool.

As demonstrated below, this operationalisation allows for at least a partial refinement of the transnational field we have created. A symbolic expression could be as follows:

$$I = \frac{n_c \cdot t_c}{n \cdot t_{max}}$$

I = index number

n_c = number of respondents that participate in a given category of contacts

t_c = mean of participation in the activity for those who participate

n = total number of respondents ($n=940$)

t_{max} = total number of contact units ($t_{max}=365$)

For instance, if the contact is used once every 2 years, we report 0.5 annual contacts. In the case of full-time employment, we have calculated, for instance, $t_c = 240$ working days per year and $n_c = 760$ respondents were employed or studying. The resulting index number was, therefore, $I \approx 0.53$. From the symbolic notation and interpretation, it is clear that the index number can take values from 0 to 1, where 1 is the maximum number of contacts and 0 is no binding. The significance of this number is only to show the rough proportions between the included categories of contacts.

We used qualitative research to illustrate the quantitative data. From the narratives collected, we selected passages related to reasons for migration, mutual contacts and future aspirations, which reveal the use of the transnational field and show what the data collected through quantitative research means. The qualitative analysis in this text makes it possible to understand the specificities of the transnational field and to interpret the quantitative data.

Bi-national and institutional/private tracing

Data obtained by queries to construct a transnational field can answer many diverse questions. Since our research questions ask about the role of formalised institutions in forming the transnational field, we construct a transnational field that considers contacts with formalised institutions and informal contacts that arise on a friendship or kinship basis separately. Although these contacts may include multiple countries, interviews and questionnaire surveys have shown that they are almost exclusively concentrated on our sample's destination and country of origin. That is why the transnational field is concentrated on these 2 destinations. The transnational field, as shown in Graph 1, therefore has 4 sections. The top left is the institutional section of the destination country, the top right is the private section of it; the bottom left is the institutional section of the country of origin and the bottom right is the private section of it.

In this text, we do not study individual contacts but categories of contacts. That is why we did not use a name generator. In the questionnaire, we ask about the frequency of contacts with acquaintances, relatives and institutions. A specific category of relations is diaspora associations which, while located in the target destination, refer to the source destination. Entrepreneurial activities are linked in the narratives to the private and institutional spheres. Therefore, in Graph 1 they interfere with the institutional and private spheres. We separate them into a specific category. All quantified data (from quantitative and qualitative surveys) were processed using SPSS software 29.0.1.0. Qualitative data were coded partly manually and partly using Atlas ti 23. We make the results available in tables and simultaneously present them in the form of a sociogram. The egocentric network that emerges in this way speaks not only to the Ego's relations to categories in the transnational field but also to the Ego's relations to itself and its goals and aspirations (Ryan 2024; Scott 2017; Silver and Lee 2013).

Results*Institutional and professional links in the destination country*

The quantitative research (n = 940) summarised in Table 1 shows that more than half of the respondents left their country of origin because they were attracted by ties falling into the institutional rather than the private sphere.

Table 1. Reasons for migration (n = 940)

Reason for migration	Per cent
Work, employment	28.3
Private (family, partner)	36.0
Education, qualifications	22.6
Political	9.9
Other	3.3
Total	100.0

This corresponds to the current economic status of the respondents ascertained in the quantitative survey (n = 940), where 9 per cent reported being in education, 30.9 per cent were employed in the private sector and 20.3 per cent in the public sector, while 11.3 per cent were in business.

Qualitative interviews (n = 109) showed us that respondents usually contacted foreign institutions independently before going abroad. Mediation by an agency from the Czech Republic was also recorded but,

more often, we observed respondents' independent and active initiatives. We select illustrative examples from the qualitative research:

- departure for Erasmus during Bachelor's studies, return to the Czech Republic and subsequent Master's and doctoral studies abroad, with continued employment (male, 33 years old, university education, Australia);
- studying in the UK after high school in the Czech Republic and then staying abroad (female, 41 years old, high-school education, New Zealand);
- after high school, *au pair* (agency placement) in the UK, then return to the Czech Republic, travel to the same country for a more-qualified high-school position and then Bachelor's studies in the UK (female, 41, university education, UK); and
- MA study in the Czech Republic and subsequent internship abroad, return to the Czech Republic and then following PhD study abroad (male, 29 years old, PhD, USA).

The interest in studying and improving qualifications as a primary (acknowledged) motivation for going abroad also reflects agencies providing short-term low-skilled work. The value hierarchy verified by the questionnaire survey and qualitative interviews is summarised by the advertisement of the company mediating employment abroad:

30. Work experience abroad is not only a great item for your CV but also a way
31. to get to know the world and see places that most Czechs do not even dream of. Thanks to a work abroad opportunity, you will
32. become independent, learn to rely on yourself and
33. make contacts with people worldwide.
34. Improving your English and other languages is a matter of course, as well as
35. earnings, which are hard to achieve in the Czech Republic (Czech-us 2023) (underlinings and figures inserted by ZU).

It is clear from the advertisement that even employment agencies do not primarily attract customers to financial resources but to *social capital*, which includes knowledge, qualifications and social ties.

The survey results differ from the data obtained in Poland in the 1990s, where existential reasons and earnings are identified as one of the most significant push factors initiating foreign migration from Poland (Morawska 2001). However, if we consider highly qualified migrants here, the situation is also ambivalent and the structure and interests of migrants are changing, among other things, due to the increase in student departures (Kaczmarczyk 2010). The motivational factors identified by Sasnal (2023) are then almost entirely consistent with our findings.

Institutional links to the source country

While the institutional attachment to the target destination is shaped mainly by education and employment, the institutional attachment to Czechia is primarily formed by citizenship and local belonging. Our respondents also needed to secure residency status, housing, tax and insurance obligations in destination countries during their stays abroad. Nevertheless, these themes have been emerging, mainly concerning the Czech Republic. It was partly due to the position of the researcher – who focused on these topics and was sometimes asked for

advice – and partially because the bureaucracy at a distance from Czechia is not developed and functions poorly. Czechs living abroad, therefore, choose several strategies for this institutional link:

- keep it to a minimum (check out of residence, leave asset management to others); and
- deal with official matters during their stay in the Czech Republic.

Selected frequencies of institutional contacts are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Frequencies of visits to particular institutions of the Czech Republic (n=940)

Institution	Frequency of contacts in valid per cents				
	Never	Maximum once a year	Several times a year	Several times a month	Total per cent
Tax authority	78.3	17.0	4.2	0.4	100.0
Social Insurance Office	76.7	19.2	4.1		100.0
Office for Czechs Abroad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)	93.3	4.0	2.3	0.4	100.0
Commission for Czechs Abroad in Senate of the CR	94.5	3.0	2.5		100.0
Local municipality in CR	49.0	43.0	7.5		100.0
Consulate	42.5	43.8	13.6		100.0
Embassy	69.1	23.0	5.9	2.0	100.0

Institutionalised economic ties linking residence abroad and the Czech Republic, such as doing business in both countries, are also not widespread. Some 80.3 per cent of respondents declared that they were not involved in any economic activities in the Czech Republic (n=940). Few had entrepreneurial activities (a share in a company, ownership of an economic unit, 3.7 per cent). The exception is the academic level – membership of scientific boards, committees, joint grants or lectures in the country of origin. Cooperation also reported respondents who work abroad in the field of human rights or as honorary consuls. Individuals also occasionally taught languages and participated in cultural events. In total, 16 per cent of respondents reported some other non-business transnational activities. A bank account or a data box often linked them to Czech institutions.

It is clear from the list that, after leaving the Czech Republic, the transnational link in economic activity, association activity (except diaspora associations, which Czechs abroad sometimes contact only after leaving) and political activity weakens significantly. However, interest in the right to vote remains.

The transnational field in personal life

Following the qualitative interviews, the choice of place of residence did not coincide with compatriot or kinship relations – some 90.4 per cent of respondents knew nothing about Czechs in the area in which they lived before coming, with 9.6 per cent even claiming that they did not intend to seek any contact with Czechs. However, they left behind friends and relatives in their country of origin. They are in contact with families, especially parents and siblings – the most important transnational link to the source country, although primarily emotional, sentimental and symbolic. All participants in qualitative and quantitative research had such a link, albeit with varying intensity. Together with the relationship to the landscape, the means of communication and the friendly relations, it was an attractor that could play a significant role in the decision about whether to stay abroad or to migrate back.

However, many respondents also built similar ties abroad. The personal reason for going abroad or following the partner was declared by 36 per cent of the respondents in the quantitative survey (n=940). The partner relationships were sometimes already formed before previous stays abroad. As the following table shows, although approximately two-thirds of Czechs were leaving Czechia single, more than 70 per cent of the respondents (n=940) were living in a marital or partner relationship at the time of the survey (as shown in Table 3).

Table 3. Marital status (n = 940)

Marital status	Frequency	Per cent
Divorced	75	8.0
Single	140	14.9
Married	495	52.7
Widowed	27	2.9
With partner	193	20.5
Do not answer	10	1.1
Total	940	100.0

Some of the new relationships were established with foreign partners. Separated couples (one in the source and one in the destination country) are uncommon in this sample. A significant proportion of respondents established nuclear families (or partner relationships) after going to their destinations. Some of these relationships are with a partner from abroad, some with a partner from Czechia. The qualitative interviews show that approximately half of the mixed marriages are with a partner from the destination country, creating a cosmopolitan transnational field with them. The preference for mixed-marriage partners cannot be determined. We indicated partners from Jamaica, China, the United Kingdom, the USA and other destinations. The acquisition of a position abroad and the subsequent search for a partner in the country of origin described in the literature for other groups of migrants (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) was not frequently observed in the sample. Couples were engaged in various interest ties in new environments, including compatriot ties that were sometimes significant to them. In this sample, we rarely encountered the chain migration of family members to new destinations.

From the qualitative inquiry, we present some model examples:

- a young woman who travelled privately, found a local partner and subsequently stayed abroad (enrolled in school and found a job) (female, 43, university – BC, USA);
- a young woman who went to work in the UAE, met an Australian partner there and now lives in Australia, where she has upgraded her qualifications (female, 44, MA, Australia);
- a young Czech student couple who were awarded a scholarship in Finland (each in a different specialisation) and, subsequently, both won positions in their professions in UK tenders (male 32 MA, UK);
- a male student who left the Czech Republic to study in Australia and found a Chinese partner there (male 33, MA, Australia);
- a man who broke up with his partner in Czechia, went as a single man to Australia and found a local woman there (male, 51, BC, Australia);

- a young woman who met a US Army officer during a business visit to Germany and now lives with him in the US (female, 35, BC, US); and
- a young woman who went to London to study English, found a partner of English origin and moved with the partner to New Zealand for permanent residence (female, 41, high school, New Zealand).

It is clear from these examples that private partnerships could have several effects on respondents' transnational fields:

- strengthening ties to the new destination;
- extending transnational links and new incentives for migration; and
- creating new cosmopolitan fields.

We only have data about the partner's life from qualitative research. Quantitative enquiry only indicates that 60.7 per cent have children. In some cases, these children create a link to the country of origin and, thus, a distinct transnational field while, in other cases, they embed partners in a new destination. We provide the following examples from the qualitative research:

- a man in Australia who lives in a mixed marriage and whose children no longer speak Czech and have no relation to the father's country of origin (male, 51, BC, Australia);
- a woman who is living in the USA, has children who do not have Czech citizenship and for whom returning to Czechia would be administratively very difficult for all of them (female, 47, BC, USA);
- a man who lives in a mixed marriage in Australia and definitely wants to spend at least 1 year with his child in the Czech Republic to train her in the Czech languages and enable her to gain new experiences (male, 33, MA, Australia); and
- a couple from a Moravian village who returned to the Czech Republic after the birth of their child so that their child could grow up in the friendly and safe environment of a Moravian village. They work from home for the London companies where the parents are employed (male, 32, MA, UK). We include this case because it is a specific type of transnationalism, where the family has moved to Czechia but still maintains the established institutional ties abroad and does not rule out moving abroad again.

Contacts with relatives are also an important element in the generational transmission of transnationalism. As a private Czech teacher in New Zealand reported, 'Many families send their children to Czech classes to get along with their grandparents. They come to visit them in New Zealand and are unhappy that the children do not understand them'.

Table 4. Informal contacts in the Czech Republic (quantitative sample N=940)

Informal contacts in the Czech Republic	Frequency of contacts in valid per cents				
	Never	Maximum once a year	Approximately 4 times a month	Several times a week	Total per cent
Family members	3.6	14.1	28.2	54.0	100.0

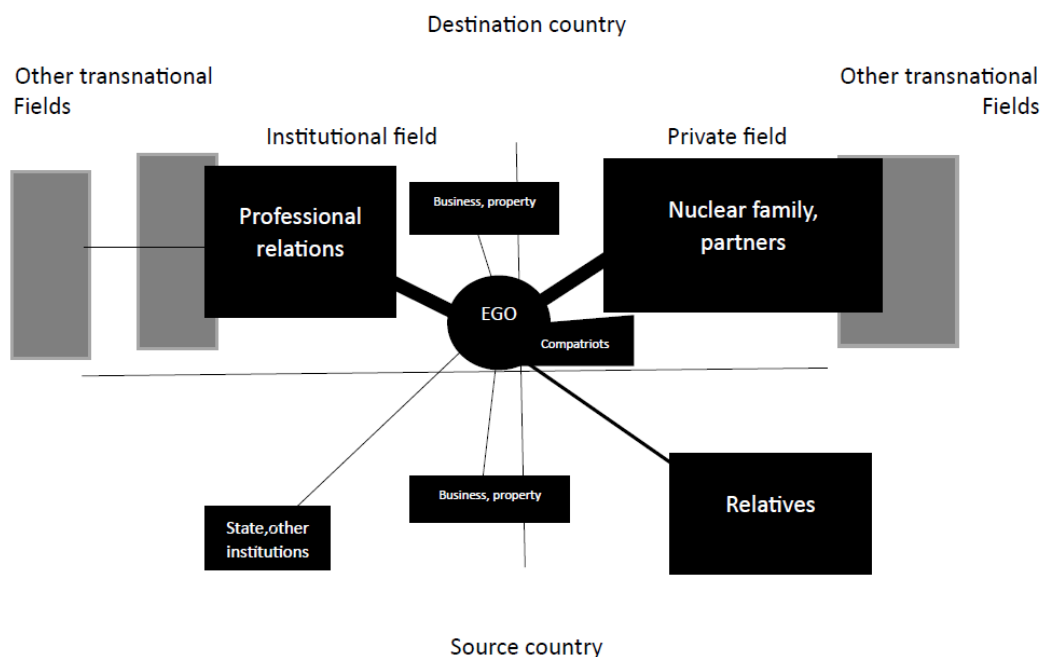
In addition to family relationships abroad, newcomers abroad from Czechia have also formed other relationships with Czechs abroad. Only 17.7 per cent of the respondents in our quantitative enquiry declared that they do not have contact with anyone of Czech origin abroad. These were largely informal contacts,

following Facebook pages or casual meetings, which were relatively marginal for forming the transnational field. However, there are Czech associations abroad with members who regularly visit them.

Overall characteristics of the transnational field for the Czech sample

With the variables used, it is possible to construct a transnational field of the following shape:

Graph 1. Transnational field of Czechs abroad



As mentioned above, we have divided the transnational field into four sectors symbolising the types of the Ego's contacts. They are structured by national borders and divided into private and institutional sectors. The size of the black rectangles in particular sectors represents the strength of the Ego's connections to the respective sectors. Given the data available, the strength of EGO's relationship to each category can be considered in several ways. In this paper, we consider the strength of contacts based on 1) the number of respondents that mentioned a given contact category and 2) an index that considers the number of respondents and frequency of usage of a given contact category.

The questionnaire survey shows the importance of family and partner relationships in the destination (73.3 per cent maintain them), as well as relationships with employment and educational institutions, which were the most important reasons for migration for 45.6 per cent of respondents; 78.9 per cent of respondents are employed, doing business or studying abroad. Employment, education and (nuclear) family are also the most important attractors for staying abroad (including salary, which is again linked to formal institutions). From the simple frequencies of each category of contacts, it is also clear that informal contacts with relatives and acquaintances are the strongest link to the Czech Republic (96.4 per cent of respondents maintain contact with relatives at least once a year). Approximately 60 per cent of respondents maintain contact with Czech authorities in the Czech Republic and abroad. Regarding the frequency of contacts, this relationship appears to be the weakest but we do not have data on the importance of these contacts to respondents. Given that they

often commented on the functioning of this relationship in the qualitative interviews and asked for its improvement, it is clear that they attach some importance to it.

The application of an index number increases the difference between the categories. As already indicated in the methodology section, institutional attachment in the destination represented by employment is expressed by an index of 0.53. The attachment to the nuclear family in the destination country (we calculate year-round contact for 74 per cent of respondents) would be represented by 0.74. Attachment to family in the source destination was calculated according to Table 4 = 0.245 and attachment to institutions in the source destination was calculated according to Table 2 = 0.008.

The index numbers show that we have adjusted the size of the institutional field in the source country. This field should be much smaller according to the index score. On the other hand, it is evident from the qualitative research that the importance of this field does not adequately capture the frequency of relationships.

The Ego is placed in the destination part of the sociogram since respondents were emigrants. Ego is eccentrically in the diagram and the more significant part of the Ego is in the institutional zone, as more respondents have institutional than family ties. However, when calculating attachment frequency, the area of the rectangle in the private destination section must necessarily exceed the size of the rectangle in the institutional zone due to the frequency of contacts (we calculate the whole year, 365 days). The areas of rectangles in the destination country are disproportionately more extensive than those in the country of origin and correspond with the frequency of contacts. According to this calculation, the strength of the Ego's relationships in the destination country exceeds the strength of transnational ties to the source country. It also mirrors that a larger proportion of respondents in both the quantitative and qualitative enquiries did not consider returning to their country of origin, at least at the time of data collection. When respondents were asked if they planned to return to Czechia, 47.8 per cent said 'No' or 'Probably no' and 23.7 per cent did not know or did not answer. Only 28.4 per cent of the quantitative sample (n=940) were seriously considering returning.

The source country rectangles show that private, non-formalised ties are a much stronger attractor for returning to the source destination than institutional ones. However, research in other European countries shows that attitudes towards return migration often do not match the later actions of respondents (Ette, Sauer and Fauser 2021).

We have also reflected, in the diagram, contacts with other Czechs abroad, which were usually established during the stay in the destination country and which can be social and emotional support for the Ego but typically have little influence on whether the Ego stays in the place of residence, moves to another, third destination or returns for some time or permanently to the source country.

In contrast to other conceptualisations of transnational fields, transnational economic and religious practices (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) played a marginal role in the Czech case. State and other institutions in the country of origin were important themes in the qualitative interviews and the questionnaire survey. However, the contacts were utilitarian, with little emotional investment. Harney and Baldassar (2007: 193) rightly point out that, even within the transnational field, the state remains 'the guarantor of goods and services to its citizens and is the unit that has political legitimacy in global economic arrangements'. The role of a service institution implies the provision of impeccable services, which are generally only sought when necessary, even though state institutions develop proactive policies towards their minorities abroad (Weinar 2020).

For Czech migrants, in particular, the relationship to formal institutions – and especially to the state in the country of origin – has undergone a fundamental transformation. Whereas, until 1989, the totalitarian state was an essential factor in decisions about whether or not an individual would travel and return (Holy 1996; Kostlán 2011; Okólski 2007; Uherek 2004; Uherek, Beranská 2024), its role has now weakened considerably. However, it is still significant on an instrumental level as an institution that provides service and legitimates

respondents' civic identity. On a symbolic level, it represents the space from which immigrants come. In the sociogram of the transnational field, it not only forms the square at the bottom left-hand corner but also co-creates the horizontal axis that separates the world of 'here' and 'there' and legitimates calling the field 'transnational'. Whereas, before 1989, communication with the state about return was almost impossible for people who chose to live abroad, they now want to communicate with it and are looking for a facilitator to negotiate the conditions under which return or expansion of the transnational field would be efficient for them. At the same time, however, they demand that the state not only provide them with quality service but also represent them well. It is also why we have depicted the area which the state occupies in the constructed transnational field as being more extensive than that represented by the index number.

Transnational fields and dispersed diaspora

The presented transnational field (Graph 1) with marginal compatriot ties raises the issue of the legitimacy of talking about diaspora in this case. The concept of diaspora, however ambiguous, presupposes at least elementary relations beyond the nuclear family (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Cohen 2023; Marinova 2017; Uherek 2017; Vertovec 1999, 2009; Weiner 2020). However, the lack of regular community life does not preclude the occasional social mobilisation, as we have seen in the case of the *We Want to Vote Distantly* initiative. Difficulties in reaching polling stations in embassies without the possibility of electronic or postal voting have mobilised hundreds of compatriots, since 2020, to engage in virtual discussions with the government and parliament of the Czech Republic on the enactment of distance voting (Janská and Janurová 2020). The initiative has its website, coordinators, events and stories (We Want to Vote Distance 2023). Thanks to the initiative of compatriots, the distant vote was enacted in 2024 and will be implemented for the first time in 2026 (Act No. 268/2024 Coll.). Alongside other platforms such as diaspora associations and institutions, *Czexpats in Science* and the *School Without Boundaries* platform, it creates a space for communication that can mobilise people to social action.

Discussion – specificity of the Czech diaspora sample

The enquiry carried out from the source country selected respondents representing a picture of a dispersed diaspora, with a predominance of skilled migrants with a high proportion of university-educated individuals. A similar type of migration has been indicated in Western Europe since the 1980s (King 2002; Salt 1983, 1992) and similar samples describe studies of European migrants to other European Union countries in the European Internal Movers' Social Survey (EIMSS) (Alaminos, Recchi, Braun, Muxel, Tambini and Santacreu 2007) or the PIONEUR project (PIONEUR 2004). The data collected in the PIONEUR research involved 54 per cent of university-educated or currently studying individuals originally from Italy, Germany, the UK, France and Spain, who were, on average, 49 years old. At the time of the research, they had lived abroad for an average of 14 years and had moved there the most often between the ages of 22 and 48 ($n=4\,901$, mean 35, median 31, st. dev. 13.258) (PIONEUR 2007). The similarity of the sample obtained by like sampling indicates that, with a lag of at most 18 years, Czechia generates a similar type of diasporas as the countries studied in the PIONEUR research and, at the same time, that a sampling in which self-selection plays a substantial role generates a sample corresponding to the ideas of the modern migration of skilled emigrants creating dispersed diasporas with a cosmopolitan transnational field. Although we do not know accurately in either case to what extent this sample corresponds to the migrant population from the countries in question as a whole, it gives us evidence of the existence of these diasporas not only in the most technologically advanced countries of Europe but also for Central European countries. At the same time, however, it is a caution to identify such samples as

migration flows generally. Both datasets generated mainly successful migrants and did not include those who have returned and are more likely to have had a negative experience abroad (Braun and Arsene 2009). Also, migrants with fewer qualifications and aiming mainly for higher earnings, as described in other Central European case studies (Drbohlav and Pavelková 2018; White, Grabowska, Kaczmarczyk and Slany 2018), are under-represented in the dataset.

On the other hand, both datasets confirm that the group of educated and successful residents abroad is interested in communicating with their countries of origin not only through kinship networks and informal communication but also through institutionalised channels such as the questionnaire survey.

The lower average age of the Czech population sample may indicate that, in 2004, this type of migration and diaspora migration was more 'traditional' for citizens of Italy, Germany, Great Britain, France and Spain than in the 2022 survey in the Czech Republic. The PIONEUR survey sample mainly contains migration since 1974 (Braun and Arsene 2009: 36), while the Czech Republic sample captures migrants, to the greatest extent, after 1989 and especially after the Czech accession to the European Union in 2004. There is a striking difference between the lengths of stay abroad, which is 14 years for the PIONEUR sample and 26 years for the Czech sample. However, this creates a different pattern in migration from Czechia to European countries and to non-European overseas destinations – short and long-distance migration. In the case of migration to European countries (the sample from the Czech Republic also retained Russia, Turkey and European countries that are not in the European Union), the length of stay of Czech emigrants changed and decreased to 14 years. Still, the age of emigrants remained lower on average – 42 years (n=624). It is clear from these data that non-European migration, at least from the Czech Republic, is more long-term and the movement between source and destination countries is not as intense. However, as far as Europe is concerned, this is essentially the same migration pattern as captured by the PIONEUR project or described for German migrants in a particular study (Heidenreich 2019). It means that, for skilled migrants from the Czech Republic, the boundaries to non-European countries such as the US, Australia or New Zealand are essentially similarly permeable, the only difference being that the circular movement is not so intense.

Respondents from Czechia chose their place to live mainly because of employment (education) opportunities. The strong link between migration and social-capital formation shows that migration in this sample can be framed by social capital and habitus theory. Such migration has often been encouraged by their student mobility, the importance of which has been highlighted many times in terms of the migration patterns of 21st-century migrants (Cairns 2021; King 2002; Riaño, Van Mol and Raghuram 2018; Teichler 2015). The choice of place of residence is frequently utilitarian. The Czech sample does not significantly follow *the environmental preference and retiree migration* typical of Western European states (Kountouris and Remoundou 2016; Williams, King and Warnes 1997). The landscape in narratives of Czech diaspora members frequently created an attachment to the country of origin and was, like relatives, an attractor for return migration or dual residence.

Although the free movement of Europeans across Europe ought to be seen as one of the key dimensions of European integration (Favell and Recchi 2009), we did not observe in the interviews that living outside and inside the European Union created a different perspective of the transnational field for the respondents. Only distance and customs rules caused slightly different opinions.

Conclusion

The data on the Czech case are mainly about skilled and well-established diaspora members in the developed countries of the European Union and overseas. The described mobilities are primarily initiated and directed by formal institutions and oriented towards social capital-building. Considering institutional ties and their

importance for building informal ties in the transnational field, we therefore perceive them as crucial in the study of contemporary migrations. However, the behaviour of the respondents was expectedly also partly motivated by curiosity, the desire for new experiences, partner relationships and economic reasons. The sample we explored develops strong ties to formal institutions in the destination countries and establishes strong informal ties based on nuclear families there. The transnational field is mainly directed toward friends and relatives in the source country. These ties to Czechia are mainly informal, friendly, emotional and non-economic. Ties to formal institutions in the source destination, especially the state, are important but limited to the legitimization of residence and the mutual obligations of the citizen and the state. Thus, it can be said that, for most quantitative and qualitative survey respondents, the transnational field was weaker at the time of the research compared to ties in the destination countries.

Our sample behaved more like dispersed individuals than a diaspora. However, the lack of functioning source state institutions can mobilise migrants to social action. It shows us that even such highly individualised and dispersed migration behaves like a diaspora in specific situations.

The sampling process gave a voice predominantly to a new generation of diaspora members who can communicate electronically and have the will and often the professional skills to articulate their views in offered forms. It does not mean that there are not others who have been left behind communicationally and who also need attention – as was noted, for example, in the project dedicated to Texas Germans (TGDP 2023; Warmuth 2021). Their transnational fields are, of course, different.

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ORCID IDs

Zdeněk Uhrek  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0817-000X>

Veronika Beranská  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4335-0735>

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