

## ROMANIAN MIGRATION ABROAD AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: THE SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS\*

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### Abstract

*Amongst all European countries, Romania has one of the biggest immigrant communities abroad, and this has become a major social issue, especially after Romania became a member of the European Union. But what happens to these Romanian immigrants from the sociocultural point of view? Are they integrating themselves successfully in their adoptive countries? Which factors exert the most important influence in the process? How is sociocultural identity being reshaped by the immigration experience? In this paper, we shall try to find answers to all these questions, using already existing theories and studies, but also using a primary research on a group of high-skilled immigrants living in Italy and Great Britain.*

**Keywords:** migration, intercultural communication, integration, identity.

### Introduction

In the recent history, Romania has undergone significant political changes which also affected the country's population socially and culturally. The 1989 Revolution radically transformed the lives of the Romanian people

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from the scarcity and restriction of communism to a sudden overflow of information, consumer goods and media products from the western world, and, most of all, a newly-found freedom to travel, and even emigrate in search for a better quality of life. This process has amplified increasingly with the 2002 freedom of circulation in the Schengen area without a visa, then Romania's adhesion to the European Union in 2007, and ultimately, the fact that all EU member states were required to abolish all work restrictions applied to Romanian citizens. The last 25 years and all these historical and political milestones have turned Romania into one of the European countries with the biggest number of immigrant communities across the world, adding to an approximate number of four million people.

But who are these Romanian immigrants, socially and culturally? How were they accepted by the society of their countries of destination? Did they integrate themselves successfully, making the new country their home? Has their national identity undergone significant transformation? Apart from theoretical information and concepts, we will also look at the findings resulting from primary research, consisting of 20 interviews with high-skilled Romanian immigrants, who shared the particularities of their lives abroad, the important challenges they went through, and whether their cultural orientation and identity is still linked to Romania or has it been shaped by their host society to a large extent?

### **Post-communist Romania: Sudden Globalization and its Impact on Migration**

Before the fall of the communist regime in December 1989, Romania was probably one of the communist countries with the least access to information coming from the capitalist western world, and also with one of the most restrictive legislations as far as traveling abroad was concerned. Consequently, the Romanian Revolution brought with itself an intense craving for knowledge of everything that was foreign, directly proportional with the restrictions that characterized the Romanian society up to that point in history. Globalization arrived suddenly and was experienced intensively, causing almost a counter-nationalist effect, resulting in the rejection of Romanian cultural values, especially in the younger generations. Suddenly, what was Romanian did not seem to matter anymore. It is true that Romanian

culture has regained its well-deserved place in society, and started being valued again after several years, but the 1990s consisted of an intensive orientation of the Romanian population towards the west.

The most important consequence of the fall of Communism is by far the freedom to travel, not only as a tourist in the mere quest to discover the world, but also as a migrant willing to take one's chance in finding a better quality of life abroad. Migration is a product of globalization, and, in the case of Romania, it also went through various transformations and phases. Hence, in the book *Lumile sociale ale migrației românești în străinătate* (*The Social Worlds of Romanian Migration Abroad*), sociologist Dumitru Sandu clearly describes the first three phases<sup>1</sup> which link historical periods with countries of destination and levels of qualifications of the immigrants:

a) 1990 – 1995: A period of initiation and the first steps towards mass emigration. This period was mainly characterized by the migration of ethnic minorities present in Romania towards their country of origin. Therefore, the main destinations tended to be Hungary, Germany, Israel, Turkey and Italy.

b) 1996 – 2001: The focus is being more intensively placed on the exploration of the western world. To the countries of the first phases, Canada and Spain are added. It is important to mention that in the first two phases dominate definitive and high-skilled migration.

c) 2002 – 2006: The milestone of free short-term circulation in the Schengen area is reached. The main form of emigration is for temporary, under-qualified work, and the main destinations are Italy and Spain.

To the phases defined by D. Sandu, we must add the latest phases and their particularities:

d) 2007 – 2014: Romania becomes a member of the European Union, a fact that considerably diminished the levels of work restrictions in the older member states, encouraging the increase of the emigration phenomenon. However, several countries still required a work permit for the Romanian citizens who wished to work on their territory.

e) 2014 – present day: On the 31st of December 2013 all work restrictions applied to Romanian citizens on the EU territory were abolished. Nine countries were still placing these restrictions: Belgium, Germany,

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<sup>1</sup> Dumitru Sandu, *Lumile sociale ale migrației romanesti in strainatate*, Iasi: Polirom, 2010, p. 87.

Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria and the United Kingdom. Spain, whose work market used to be unrestricted for quite a long period of time, had reintroduced restrictions in August 2011, due to the high unemployment rate that the country was facing. The elimination of all these restrictions resulted, as it was expected, in the orientation of Romanian immigrants towards these previously “difficult” countries, especially the United Kingdom. This fact is concerning migrants of all qualification levels and various activity domains.

A very numerous and worldwide dispersed immigrant community is, therefore, the result of a mix of factors: political, historical, Romanians' desire to explore the world, which was denied to them during the communist years, and, last but not least, the need to search for better professional opportunities abroad, opportunities to which they might not have access to by staying in Romania.

When we analyze the sociocultural integration process and the orientation of immigrants' identity, there is another key concept which we must take into consideration – the one of social world. This concept has also been defined by D. Sandu, and offers a general perspective on the social contexts of migrants. It is defined as “strongly structured life space, based on thinking patterns, identities and actions associated to migration. Sociocultural spaces in which group profiles are strongly defined on criteria such as thinking and acting mechanisms, as well as identity affirmation. The social world of Romanian migration abroad is in permanent motion.”<sup>2</sup>.

The author mentions that social worlds are differentiated according to three factors:

- a) migration situation: the Romanians who are abroad in the present moment as opposed to returned migrants;
- b) identity orientation: migrants can be mainly oriented towards Romania, towards the host country, or simultaneously towards both;
- c) migration wave: recent migrants compared to those arrived in the host country several years ago;
- d) migrants' level of education: high-skilled as opposed to medium or low-level qualification.

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<sup>2</sup> Dumitru Sandu, *op.cit.*, p. 12

Our paper will give a particular attention to the second factor, identity orientation, the transformations it may go through, and the reasons behind these transformations. Moreover, as far as migrants' level of education is concerned, we will concentrate upon the high-skilled ones, for reasons that will be revealed in a later section.

### **Romanian Sociocultural Identity – European Sociocultural Identity**

There are two main types of theory<sup>3</sup> regarding identity. We shall start with the substantialist theory, which affirms “a static vision of identity, accentuating biological, social, or historical traits”. This way of interpreting identity implies the fact that, at birth, an individual is assigned to a specific, fixed identity, which remains as such throughout the entire life span. On the other hand, interactionist theories present identities as being subjective, according to the theories of Ladmiral and Lipianskyi, mentioned by A. Gavreliuc, analyzing it “in the context of a dynamic relationships with other identities, in which, as a given, identity becomes a process. The social actor builds his self-representation in relation to other actors in a particular society, national identity becoming not as much an organic inheritance, but a permanent cultural and social crystallization and negotiation”.<sup>4</sup>

On a middle ground between these two approaches, Horațiu Rusu sums up the concept of sociocultural identity as the result of any action or product of social actors, “be they individual or collective, it is a combination of social and cultural factors. (...) All types of collective identities, regardless of their reference system – race, nation, ethnicity, class, gender, etc. - are sociocultural identities. In other words, we let go from the beginning of the concept of multiple identities and instead we affirm the idea of the unique, yet multidimensional, reference point.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Alin Gavreliuc, *Psihologie Interculturală*, Iasi: Polirom, 2011, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Alin Gavreliuc, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Horatiu Rusu, *Schimbare sociala și identitate socioculturala*, Iasi: Institutul European 2008, p. 120.

If we were to talk about a Romanian sociocultural identity, this is already a complex topic in itself, as it is hardly a fixed frame of values and characteristics. We could start from the basics, such as the fact that we find ourselves at a geopolitical crossroads between European countries and cultures. Romanian is the only Latin language in Eastern Europe, also with Slavic, Greek, Turkish and Hungarian influences. Also, Romania is the only Latin nation which is predominantly orthodox. All Romanian art forms hold similarity to all the surrounding cultures, while also keeping its own national specific. Social behavior tends to vary geographically, people being known to be more open and friendly in some parts of the country rather than others, and adherence to traditions is more accentuated in the rural environment rather than the urban one. And the list could continue. In other words, the Romanian identity seems to be inherently prone to flexibility and transformation.

Taking a further step, thanks to the post-communist intake of western information and cultural products, we could say that Romanians have become prepared for some of the challenges that emigration may involve, especially in relation to general knowledge and language proficiency. As a consequence, this leads to a higher level of openness towards embracing a foreign society with a different culture. An individual who chooses to live in a different country from his native one, will gain a global perspective on the world, which will most likely result in a multidimensional sociocultural identity. In the book entitled *Cultura și valorile morale în procesul de globalizare (Culture and Moral Values in the Globalization Process)*, author Elena Cobianu emphasizes precisely this aspect of cultural identity and the transformations that it can go through in relation to globalization. The landmarks of national identity which are specific to a nation, such as language, traditions, lifestyle, and the way to relate to society, are apparently jeopardized the moment the subjects interact with cultures which are different from their own. Therefore, nations or local communities often defend their cultural imprint and the right to be different.

In the case of immigrants, it is interesting to discover the result. Could we talk about borrowing cultural values from abroad, to the detriment of the national ones? Or, on the contrary, does life in a different environment accentuate the national identity, increasing the subjects' desire to affirm

and defend their own values, creating an informational exchange between themselves and the “others”?

In the article “Policies and Practice Concerning the Integration of Immigrants and Refugees in European States”, author Mircea Radu talks about the common vision drafted by the European Commission, in November 2004, during the Danish presidency of the European Union. With regards to the integration of immigrants in the society of the member states, several key principles were established, the most important priorities being the following<sup>6</sup>:

- respecting the fundamental values of a democratic society;
- the immigrants' right to preserve their own identity;
- offering appropriate rights and obligations, in accordance with the EU legislation;
- the active participation of immigrants in all aspects of community life (economic, social, cultural, political civic), in the same regime as the local population.

However, we must keep in mind that the European Union consists of numerous independent states, each one with its own set of laws, but also with its own separate sociocultural identities. Abandoning national sociocultural identities in the name of globalization, or, better said, “europeanization” is impossible, as is the creation of a system of European values, which are totally valid and accepted in all EU countries. “The formation of the European citizen conscience, that makes a lifestyle of these values, is a long-term, difficult process, more so as the nations' diversity brings their national imprint on the front line”.<sup>7</sup> It often happens that in each European country there are attitudes showing fear towards a possible uniformization of cultural values and practices, to the detriment of national ones. These attitudes and opinions are often induced by extreme right political parties, but also conservative communities and individuals.

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<sup>6</sup> Mircea Radu, „Politica și practica privind integrarea imigranților și refugiaților în statele Europene”, în *Calitatea Vieții XVII*, nr. 3-4, 2006, p. 322.

<sup>7</sup> Elena Cobianu, *Cultura și valorile morale în procesul de globalizare*, Grinta: Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 349.

## Sociocultural Integration: a Challenge for Immigrants and Host Societies

The concept of integration, originally defined by Marc Granovetter, refers to “a characteristic of the social system, of the global society, the intensity of the established relationships between parties, social cohesion, individual and group perspectives”<sup>8</sup>. This includes two variable components, directly proportional with the extent to which sociocultural integration is being achieved:

- 1) frequency (the number of contacts between the immigrant population and the native one)
- 2) intensity (the quality of human relationships)

Most times, frequent and intense contact between the parties involved have as a consequence a more efficient exchange of information, leading to mutual knowledge and understanding, culminating with at least the partial identification of the subject with the adoptive society. Therefore, it is rather unlikely for people who do not identify themselves with other groups in their social world to develop frequent and intense liaisons.

At a first glance, the crucial factors which determine the success of sociocultural integration is closely linked to concrete living conditions (housing, employment, social life, personal relationships), which must be equal or superior in quality to those from the country of origin.

On a deeper look, and keeping in mind the particularities of social worlds, sociocultural integration is first of all characterized by the state in which the individuals who left Romania's territory find themselves in. How did they perceive the separation from their native country – as a sacrifice or as a step towards a better life? From the sociocultural point of view, do they still identify themselves with Romania, do they rather feel citizens of their host country, or do they feel somehow balanced, being pleased with their lives abroad, but also staying in contact with Romania, and creating a transnational lifestyle? Obviously, those who regret their lives in Romania and who perceive their departure as a necessary, yet temporary, sacrifice,

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<sup>8</sup> Marc Granovetter în Mircea Radu, „Politica și practica privind integrarea imigranților și refugiaților în statele Europene”, în *Calitatea Vieții XVII*, nr. 3-4, 2006, p. 319



would be much more attached to Romania and possibly also inclined to return home, compared to those who adapted themselves successfully to their new social world and who generally feel emotionally connected to both countries. Although identities are not fixed, but built and rebuilt according one's own personal experiences, we could inevitably say that there is also a given/inherited identity foundation, which the subject will work upon, consciously or subconsciously.

Besides, in the cases in which the immigrants choose to life in close contact with the Romanian communities, they would be more tempted to keep the national cultural and social values alive. This option is more frequently met in the cases of Romanian immigrants with low to medium qualification, than in the one of high-skilled migrants. However, when the company of fellow Romanians is specifically sought, we might come across a vicious circle. As long as a Romanian immigrant keeps stronger bonds with the country of origin, there are bigger chances for him to preserve the national cultural identity. Still, the episodes of daily life happening (almost) exclusively in groups of Romanians would make communication and interaction with the authorities and population of the host country difficult, slowing down the process of mutual knowledge, and, implicitly, stalling the integration process.

In the study entitled *Fenomenul migrationist din perspectiva aderării României la Uniunea Europeana (The Migration Phenomenon from the Perspective of Romania's EU Adhesion)*, coordinated by Daniela-Luminita Constantin and published by the European Institute of Romania, the author follows to achieve a synthesis of a sociocultural dimension of the migration phenomenon. Therefore, in order to analyze the process of sociocultural integration, the answers to some essential questions are followed<sup>9</sup>:

1. What is the profile of the migrant?
2. How are migratory flows perceived both in Romania and in the countries of destination?
3. How is the integration of immigrants achieved?
4. What is the attitude towards return migration?

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<sup>9</sup> Daniela-Luminița Constantin, *Fenomenul migrationist din perspectiva aderării României la Uniunea Europeana*, Iasi: Institutul European, 2004, p.37

These questions represent a good departure point in the empirical research. The process of sociocultural integration is presented to us as a challenge for both parties involved: for the immigrant communities (in our case, Romanians), through individual and collective willingness to adapt to the new life environment, as well as for the population of the host country, through its own level of openness towards diversity. Therefore, the most important aspects for both parties are mentioned in the lists below:<sup>10</sup>

a) Challenges for the immigrant:

- achieving proficiency in the language of the host country;
- access to education system;
- access to work market;
- the possibility of increasing professional mobility through raising the level of education and professional qualification;
- equality in front of law;
- cultural and religious liberty;
- respect for the laws and traditions of the host country.

b) Challenges for the society of the destination country:

- developing values such as tolerance and openness towards immigrants;
- agreement to receive immigrants;
- understanding the advantages and challenges of the multicultural societies;
- offering unlimited access to information regarding the advantages of integration, tolerance and intercultural dialogue;
- respect and understanding for the condition, traditions and culture of the immigrants;
- respect towards immigrants' rights.

On a similar note, the problematic of sociocultural identity and integration in a country that is different from the country of origin is also approached by Florin-Teodor Olariu, in the study entitled „Romanii din Torino – comportament și atitudini (socio)lingvistice în mediu aloglot” (“The Romanians of Torino” - (Socio)Linguistic Behaviors in a Different

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

Linguistic Environment”). Although the study is present in a linguistic journal and offers a particular focus on linguistic aspects, some principles could be applied in all aspects of sociocultural integration. Therefore, the integration process is defined through the following factors<sup>11</sup>:

a) the emigration policy of the host country, containing the specific legal frame, reflected in the country's own cultural, economic and social policies;

b) Romania's state policy regarding the emigration process; support for its own migrant communities by creating the necessary institutions in order to safeguard Romanian identity;

c) explaining cliches and stereotypes in the daily discourses of the target society;

d) safeguarding cultural and linguistic identity and learning the relationship dynamic between verbal and non-verbal communication during the integration process;

e) the internal availability for adaptation manifested by the Romanian communities and people's capacity to cope with the challenges of the immigrant status.

Therefore, the responsibility for the sociocultural integration does not belong exclusively to the population of the host country, which may be more or less open towards immigrants, or to immigrants themselves, who can choose to make a bigger or smaller effort towards integration. Both parties must be aware of the challenges they have to face, and make consistent efforts in order for this social phenomenon to develop in a least problematic way possible.

### **Case Study: High-Skilled Romanians in Italy and Great Britain**

For the case study, two very different European countries have been chosen. The motivation behind this choice is very simple. Both countries have been intensively targeted by Romanian immigrants, each of them in different periods of time and by different social categories. Moreover, each country has had a different set of immigration policies, as well as different cultural values and characteristics.

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<sup>11</sup> Florin-Teodor Olariu, „Romanii din Torino – comportament și atitudini (socio)lingvistice în mediu aloglot”, *Philologia Jassyensia VI, nr. 2*, 2010, p. 221

The category of high-skilled immigrants was chosen, as they are more inclined to look at the migration experience beyond the necessity of finding a job and improving their material status, making it also a general learning experience, and an exercise in embracing another culture from all points of view. In order to achieve an effective intercultural learning experience, a strong cultural awareness, which is also more prominent for this social category, and “upon which one can build a wide and objective perception of plurality, behavioural openness towards the others, a complex and multidimensional understanding of the pluricultural nature of the world. Intercultural capacity facilitates the relationship between cultures – internal or external to a society – and interprets them critically, analytically, and in a balanced way.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, despite the mutable nature of sociocultural identity, a subject who had a different openness to education and knowledge will also be able to filter the sociocultural values and manifestations which suit him, among what is being offered by the society of the host country, and also willing at least to understand and respect those parts of the new society which are very different from his own, or even deemed unacceptable in his home country.

Italy has been a very popular country of destination since the 1990s, chosen mainly due to its relative geographical closeness, the linguistic similarity, which makes it easy for Romanian nationals to learn the Italian language without having studied it in school, and the cultural similarities, Italy being a country with similar values (family, gastronomy, art, nature, etc.). On the other hand, more often than not, Italy was chosen as a country of emigration by low and medium qualified immigrants. High-skilled immigrants are also present, but in a smaller proportion. As far as immigration policies are concerned, Italy never implemented a specific set of policies for high-skilled workers, and mainly focused on filling workplaces which were deficient on the Italian work market. Statistically, high-skilled migrants can be found in professional domains such as healthcare, education, finance, engineering, and Romanian-specific cultural activities. However, weaknesses of the legal system has unwillingly allowed the arrival of illegal immigrants, who were a source of criminality, damaging Romania's reputation as a country. Consequently, the

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<sup>12</sup> Anca Nedelcu, *Fundamentele Educatiei Interculturale*, Iasi: Polirom, 2008, p. 25.

major challenge for the Italian society has been learning to identify and respect honest and unthreatening Romanian immigration, and for immigrants to work a little harder towards rebuilding the image of Romanians as a nation, emphasizing its real values and making it known to the native population.

Great Britain instead has only been a preferred country of destination during the past two or three years, mainly because of its strict immigration and employment regulations. Before 2008, British immigration regulations required Romanian workers to obtain a work permit, the application having to be made by the employer in the name of the employee, and only in cases where the job could not be fulfilled by a British citizens. In 2008, Great Britain implemented a points-based system which was highly favourable to high-skilled immigrants, facilitating the process of being assigned the right to work on the country's territory. Although it was one of the countries with a most restrictive policy system, most immigrants aspired to it for its worldwide-known good reputation in the academic world, as well as the wide variety of professional opportunities. Not only is the British culture very different from the Romanian one, but also Great Britain is a cultural contrast between its classical stereotypes which hardly exist any longer, and a modern, informal and often libertine contemporary reality, which often creates cultural shocks. Apart from that, the multicultural environment which can be found there, particularly in London and the major cities, would make it easy for any immigrant to find a social world to fit in.

Beyond the theory and the facts, what are Romanian immigrants telling us? From the methodological point of view, 20 structured and semi-structured interviews with high-skilled Romanian immigrants living in these two countries, have been carried out. They are students and professionals aged between 25 and 60, from different activity domains: IT, teaching, cultural management, languages, graphics and design, finance and accountancy, business management.

Some of the interviewees emigrated during school and university years in order to accompany their working parents, who only in some cases were high-skilled immigrants. This situation is more frequent amongst the Romanian immigrants living in Italy than those living in Great Britain. The younger the age of emigration, the easier the integration in the society of the host country, both socially and culturally.

Chronologically, the first step in the integration process consists of the immigration formalities, and the regulations applied by the host country. These used to be more difficult and more strongly bureaucratic before Romania's EU adhesion. Although these are strictly administrative procedures, their easiness or difficulty manage to dictate the first perceptions of life in the host country. If the subject feels he has to go through a lot of verifications and questioning before being granted the right to stay in that specific country, or if he knows he has restriction towards a career of his choice, he would feel hostility, resulting in a cause and effect chain between the feeling of not being accepted and the unwillingness to integrate.

Language proficiency also played an important part from the first interactions with the new society, having consequences on the academic and professional life, as well as social life. In the case of Italy, the cases in which the immigrant arrived on the country's territory already fluent in Italian were rather rare, and improved their Italian language skills with time, through study and through practice in daily life. Instead, Great Britain was chosen by numerous professionals also thanks to the fact that English is the language most frequently studied at school in Romania, which represented one obstacle less in the way of finding work, or simply in the way of general integration in society.

The next fundamental element in the process of sociocultural integration is deemed to be the access to education and/or employment. Access to education never proved itself to be a problem as far as formalities are concerned (especially after Romania became a member of the EU), but rather as far as academic requirements are concerned, and surely more problematic in the cases where the subject does not display a thorough knowledge of the host country's language. An example of this kind is the one of Great Britain, where university assignments encourage creativity and analytical thinking, compared to memorizing theory, which often occurs in Romania. Instead, finding a workplace tends to be more difficult, even in the case of high-skilled migration, notably in the cases where the subject did not have an already-made employment arrangement in the moment of emigration. Before Romania became a member of the European Union, tuition fees were much higher and the formalities linked to obtaining a work permit more complicated than they are nowadays, and the access to a job that is in accordance to academic qualifications, much more difficult. At

present, although the work restrictions have been abolished in both researched states, in countries where the unemployment rate is high, such as Italy, finding suitable employment is still an issue, but it applies also to the native population, therefore nobody can blame the discrimination factor.

Beyond these problems, which are unavoidable for all immigrants, it is important to find out to which extent they are still oriented towards Romania, or if the society of the host country has transformed their ways of thinking and behaving. Amongst the most appreciated sociocultural characteristics of the host countries, the following have often been mentioned:

- The open mentality of the native population and the feeling of being accepted. Hostile behaviors were only mentioned in a few isolated cases, and often cases of lack of general knowledge about Romania lead to conversational gaffes (the former was more frequently mentioned for Italy, whilst the latter for Great Britain). On the other hand, the fear of not being accepted, which often exists before emigrating is followed by a stronger sense of relief, even if the attitude of the host population is simply 'not hostile', even when it is not 'over-friendly'.
- Well-adjusted social protection system and public administration institutions, with minimal bureaucratic procedures. Formalities which were particularly difficult in Romania, in these two countries could be solved with unimaginable ease.
- Community spirit and civic participation;
- The possibility to develop their own professional skills in any domain;
- Well-functioning healthcare system;
- Appreciation and respect at the workplace;
- Regular road traffic;
- Low level of corruption;
- Environmental awareness.

Although these all practical social aspects of daily life, and they are generally applied to both case studies country, the cultural components of the host countries are also appreciated and often adopted, especially in the case of Italy, which is more similar to Romania, from the cultural point of view. Plus, the Romanian immigrants in Italy are those who claim to have a

bigger number of friends from the native population, as opposed to Great Britain, where they prefer to socialize with other foreigners, Romanians included. Consequently, the orientation towards Romania or towards the host country also depends on the similarity between the two national cultures. Instead, professional and administrative advantages, notably in the case of Great Britain, are strong enough to maintain the immigrants' desire to remain in their adoptive country.

As far as the orientation towards Romania is concerned, this is always present, regardless of the immigrant profile and the country of destination. People become more aware of their own cultural identity and cultural values when they interact with other societies, with their own different cultures. This is when the difference between "us" and "them" becomes more visible, both when we notice similarities and when we notice contrasts. In particular, Romanians also have to work at re-establishing the nation's reputation, ruined by illegal immigrants and by old stereotypes (e.g. Dracula). Therefore, the orientation towards Romania increases also as an immigrant "teaches" a local citizen about Romania and its realities, as the focus is placed on the positive. However, the sociocultural aspects being missed the most are rather of an emotional or purely cultural nature. Amongst these, the following were mentioned:

- family members and friends who remained at home;
- the feeling of having "roots";
- gastronomy;
- hearing the Romanian language on a daily basis;
- nature and landscapes;
- music, literature and free or convenient cultural events.

What is being demonstrated is that, in general, high-skilled immigrants have a balanced sociocultural orientation, being mentally and emotionally tied both to Romania and to the country of emigration. Being in a different country from your own implies discovering and embracing different cultures, as well as developing self-awareness as far as one's original cultural identity is concerned. In this context, identity can be shaped according to the subject's values and experiences, as a mixture of the inherited part, and what is acquired during the immigration process.



## Conclusions

Sociocultural integration is a non-linear process, involving numerous factors, and, beyond theoretical approaches, it is a continuous daily life training. The Romanian identity, as well as the country's history and geopolitical situation, is complex and not easy to define in a rigid frame. But, at the same time, it is also flexible, and easy to combine with other cultures, finding various similarities. In other words, it is very likely for a Romanian to integrate socially and culturally in many parts of the world, especially in Europe. On the other hand, one of the biggest challenges is to be open to differences, as well as to the laws and customs of the host countries. All these should be understood and respected, even though they are not in line with our own. More often than not, these social actors will build a transnational identity, adopting elements of both cultures and mixing them according to preference.

Last but not least. We should keep in mind that, despite the European Union functioning successfully from the sociocultural point of view, and the Romanians' ability to integrate in different countries and social structures, Romania is losing a valuable workforce, which becomes more numerous each year. Beyond the sociocultural aspects, there are also the practical matters which attract and keep the Romanian workforce in Western Europe. It is hoped that this flexibility in matters of sociocultural integration becomes re-applicable also to Romania, in the eventuality of return migration. As we have seen, Romanian identity and values never disappeared, even when the migrating subject is fully integrated and happy in the country of destination. Therefore, those elements of society which keeps them there, and which may not be as present in Romania should act as guidelines for social policies, with the final purpose of encouraging return migration.

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