

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN INTEGRATION OF RUSSIAN-SPEAKING  
IMMIGRANTS INTO THE HUNGARIAN LABOR MARKET**

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## Abstract

“Better to have one hundred friends than one hundred rubles”, – says Russian proverb. In this study I explore the role of social capital in employment opportunities of Russian-speaking immigrants and their integration into the Hungarian labor market. Furthermore, I investigate application of *blat* by the immigrants which means “privileged access” to the beneficial commodities, services or other non-material resources through social networks (Pesmen 2000).

The theoretical starting point of the research was the following concepts: social integration, bonding (strong ties) and bridging (weak ties) social capital (Granovetter 1973; Putnam 2000), human and cultural capitals. Qualitative research methodology, namely in-depth interviewing was utilized in this study. The qualitative research data consisted of twelve interviews (six with men and six with women) with Russian-speaking migrants, who live in Budapest.

The results of the interviews revealed that weak inter- and intra-ethnic ties of the immigrants have a high priority for them over the job placement in Budapest, while country-specific human capital plays an important role in their integration into the Hungarian labor market. Cultural and human capitals as well as gender aspect were the key factors which influenced establishment of social networks by Russian-speaking immigrants in Budapest. Due to the certain reasons *blat*, in spite of its widespread application in the post-Soviet Union countries, was not used by the immigrants for getting a job in Hungary.

**Keywords:** social capital, *blat*, human capital, cultural capital, Russian-speaking migrants, employment, Hungarian labor market

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## Introduction

“Shops are empty but fridges are full.”

*Russian proverb about blat*

A 29-year old Anna from Russia moved to Budapest with her parents in 1989, because her mother, professional museologist, found a well-paid work there. She had to adapt to the new society and complete Hungarian high school and university. She was not happy with the fact that she had to leave her friends in Russia and start a new life in Hungary. However, Anna says that now she is grateful to her mother, because Hungarian citizenship, which she got in three years after arrival, opened doors to new opportunities in Europe. Besides, she got acquainted with good people at the university, who became her close friends. The next fragment from Anna’s story shows how important it is to have personal social networks in a foreign country. One day her classmate, Russian guy, asked her what she was doing. Anna replied that she was writing her thesis. He wondered if she wanted to work, because his company was searching for new employees. She sent her CV to the company and in three days they called her. Basically, in one week Anna received a “welcome letter” from the manager.

This is a story which Anna remembers as a starting point of her career path in Budapest. It certainly points to the significance of the social networks in job searching. Thus I attempted to answer a related question which stays unaddressed in the academic literature: What is the relationship between social capital<sup>1</sup> of Russian-speaking immigrants/Russians<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this study I operationalize social capital as social networks and resources embedded in them, for example, access to information about job opportunities, assistance with moving, financing, etc.

<sup>2</sup> I will explain the reason of combination of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians in one category “Russian-speaking migrants” or simply “Russians” in the Section describing East Slavic Culture (p. 13).

(representatives of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) and their employment opportunities in the Hungarian labor market?

According to the research on Russian culture, social capital plays a crucial role in their daily life (Richmond 1995; 2003). They trust and rely on a close network of relatives, friends and co-workers in order to secure unpredictable private and public spheres of life (Richmond 2003). In the business world Russians tend to use their personal contacts in order to get a job or necessary items. The word *blat*, which means “access or connections” or someone who obtains a job or a place in the university using social networks (which usually consist of high-status individuals), came from the Soviet times and is widely used in Russian-speaking countries.

The number of Russian-speaking migrants in Hungary is rather significant. According to the most recent results of the immigration statistics, the Ukrainian community (7.64%) was the third largest in Hungary in 2011 (Hungarian Office of Immigration and Nationality 2011). The quantity of immigrants from Russia equaled 2.90%, which placed them on the fifth place among other diasporas in Hungary (Ibid.). A majority of Russian-speaking migrants moved here after the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Angelina Zueva (2005), who studied gendered aspect of Russian emigration to Hungary, claims that there were different interlinked reasons of their moving at that time. She highlights such factors of leaving as a stable social environment in Hungary, opportunities to establish a secure business, keeping the family intact (family reunification), welfare of children and even love motives. Besides, she claims that there is a clear division of male and female reasons for emigration: Russian men moved to Hungary in order to improve their career chances, while women stated their position as passive, namely as followers of men, devoted to the family and children.

Speaking about labor migration and work opportunities of Russian immigrants in Hungary, it is important to look at the statistics of unemployment rate there. According to Eurostat (2012), the rate was 11.2% in 2010, while a few years ago it was lower, namely 10% in 2009 and 7.8% in 2008. Therefore, we can see an obvious tendency of constant growth of unemployment in Hungary, which is unfavorable for job placement of immigrants.

Reviewing the literature, I found that the issue of migrants' employment opportunities in the labor market in Hungary is not well studied, while, for example, in Sweden it is one of the urgent topics (Duvander 2001; Reroz & Rosca 2007; Behtoui 2004). The last research which I conducted in Sweden (Borenkova 2011) was related to employment opportunities and integration of immigrants from different countries into the Swedish labor market. An interest in this topic came from my own unsuccessful experience of job searching in the European Union. The results of that study have shown that immigrants perceive social network or social connections (as a part of the social capital) as one of the most important factors that influence their career chances. For instance, a man from Kurdistan, whom I interviewed, emphasized that: "You also must have personal contacts, network to get a job. With this network it is easier to find a job. If somebody knows who you are, if somebody knows how good you are, it is always easier to get a job."

In order to explore this issue, I apply the following theoretical concepts in the study: social integration, bonding (strong ties) and bridging (weak ties) social capital (Granovetter 1973; Putnam 2000), human capital (education and work experience) and country - specific skills. Cultural aspects of establishment and maintaining of social connections by Russians were also considered.

The study was conducted in Budapest which is a large metropolitan area and the main industrial, commercial, and transportation center of Hungary. It attracts immigrants because there is a concentration of international enterprises inside and around it. Therefore,

immigrants might have more work opportunities here and more chances to be integrated into the Hungarian labor market.

The sample was constructed from the first-generation immigrants who currently live in Budapest and have stayed in Hungary for at least two years. Twelve Russian-speaking respondents, six male and six female, of different age<sup>3</sup> were recruited with help of the Russian social network, forum and blog for Russians in Hungary, Russian Cultural Center (Andrássy út. 120) and the Alfavit Foundation (Aradi út. 15).<sup>4</sup>

The Russian Cultural Center (RCC) is located in the building of the former trade union of the soviet embassy. It is only one state Russian institution in Hungary, which was established for representation and promotion of Russian culture. The first Russian library was opened in this building. Moreover, there are exhibition center, concert hall and auditorium, where the Russian theater in Budapest performs frequently. The RCC is also a place of holding Russian traditional holidays, such as the Old New Year, the Pancake Week and Tatiana Day. Hungarians as well as Russians are the regular visitors of the RCC. Many Hungarians, who formerly studied at the soviet universities, have very warm memories about their student times.

Another field site is the Alfavit Foundation established by Rita Khasanova, Russian by origin, who got married a Hungarian man. The main aim of the Foundation is to maintain Russian language and culture in Hungary. It offers Russian language courses for children and

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<sup>3</sup> I divided the respondents into three categories according to their age and professional status: young professionals (18-34), experienced professionals (35-61) and retired (62+)

<sup>4</sup> The Russian social network is called Vkontakte, the link is the following: <http://www.vkontakte.ru>. Link to the Russian forum is <http://www.hungary-ru.com/?mode=forum>. The blog is called "Russians in Hungary" and can be accessed through the following link: <http://hungary-russia.livejournal.com/>.

adults, music classes, training for citizenship exam, painting classes, amusing folklore for children, choir classes for adults, etc.

The research was conducted using an *in-depth interviewing*. The method of interviewing is a very useful technique because “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the life experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman 2006:9). The advantage of the in-depth interview is that an interviewer can adjust questions depending on respondent’s understanding, cognition or mind (Seidman 2006:10). In-depth interviewing involves a small number of respondents in order to “explore their own perspectives, perception of a particular idea, program, or situation” (Boyce and Neale 2006:3). In the current research, each interviewee had a unique life story that had to be discussed in different way.

Ethical principles were considered in this study. All participants in this research were asked about their consent to be interviewed, recorded and to use received information for the academic purposes. The names of respondents were replaced by made-up names in order not to divulge personal information. Also participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the duration of interview and about confidentiality and anonymity before executing the research.

The study consists of three main sections. Following this introduction, I conceptualize social integration, social capital, human capital, moving to review of the works on social capital and integration of migrants into the foreign labor market. In the last subsection I focus on specificity of the East Slavic cultural capital. The analysis and interpretation of the empirical data is presented in the Section Two, which is divided into three subsections. Within my analysis I investigate the connection between human, cultural and social capitals of the Russian-speaking immigrants. Moreover, I address the notion of *blat* as a part of social capital of Russians and its influence on their employment. Furthermore, I examine the ways



of job searching in Budapest by the immigrants and which factors affected their employment opportunities and integration into the Hungarian labor market. The empirical section is followed by conclusions that summarize the main findings of the study and applies the results to a larger sociological context.

# 1. Theoretical Framework

## 1.1 Defining Social Capital

Social capital has received a great attention in social sciences and particularly in the field of migration studies (Gódri 2010; Kinz 2005; Lancee 2010; Portes 1998; Putnam 2000) due to its crucial role in the labor market outcomes and integration of migrants. There is no consensus on single definition of this term, because social scientists tend to consider it in a different way, depending on which element of social capital they focus on. However, there is a growing agreement among social scholars on one of the features of social capital: "... it stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures" (Portes 1998:6).

One of the supporters of the mentioned "beneficial attribute" of social capital is Alireza Behtoui, who considers it in the form of "resources embedded in one's social networks that are accessible through one's direct and indirect ties" (2004:19). It implies that possession of the certain social capital makes migrants more *privileged* in the foreign labor market. Among those resources which are advantageous for the newly arrived migrants is information about job opportunities, assistance with moving, financial support, etc.

Ann-Sofie Duvander (2001) argues that people in a specific social network recruit new employees from the group they know; it means that social capital gained by one group of people will be a loss for others who do not possess this capital or have a lack of it, so-called "social capital deficit". The latter is associated with reproduction of inequality and social exclusion which prevent migrants from integration into the labor market. Behtoui and Neergaard argue that immigrants born outside the north-western Europe and North America are "associated with a substantial social capital deficit" (2010:773). They assert that resources embedded in the personal ties of those immigrants may prevent them from working in

supervising positions or white-collar jobs in general (Ibid.). It might be an excessively generalized conclusion; that is why I focus on unique stories of Russian-speaking immigrants in order to avoid it.

How do migrants acquire social capital which provides with access to certain benefits? Pierre Bourdieu (1986) explains it saying that social capital is a credit which could be won through the social struggle or class struggle in different social arenas or fields. He puts the emphasis on conflicts and the power function (social relations that increase the ability of an actor to advance his/her interests). In short, according to Bourdieu, migrants who have a higher social status and therefore more authority and power than other migrants, gain more advantageous social capital. However, higher social status may be gained through social capital either; therefore, it is a dual process, which Bourdieu does not take into consideration.

I do not consider social capital within social struggle or power relations, but I distinguish two types of social capital, namely “inherited” and “acquired” one. In the first case, social capital is transmitted from the family of a person, while acquired social capital is the prize which a person wins through interaction with other members of society. In this study I focus on both types of social capital and their impact on employment opportunities of migrants.

Another typology of social capital, developed by Robert D. Putnam (2000), is also used in this thesis. He divided social capital into three types depending on the strength of ties within social networks, namely bonding, bridging and linking social capitals. The first two types are widely used in various research on labor market participation of migrants by other scholars (Lancee 2010; Salem 2009; Waldinger 1997). “Bonding social capital refers to connections to people like you [family, relatives, kinship]...bridging social capital refers to connections to people who are not like you in some demographic sense,” and “linking social capital pertains to connections with people in power, whether they are in politically or

financially influential positions.” (Putnam 2000, cited in Woolcock and Sweetser 2002:26). The differentiation of social groups depending on the type of social capital they possess is represented in the Table 1.

**TABLE 1. Classification of social capital**

<b>Type of social capital</b>	<b>The strength of ties</b>	<b>Similarity within groups</b>	<b>Example</b>
Bonding	Strong ties	Homogeneous groups	Relatives, close friends, kinship
Bridging	Weak ties	Heterogeneous groups	Acquaintances

Strong ties are characterized by more time which people spend together, higher emotional involvement, more intimate and wider reciprocal services, while weak ties are related to rare interaction of people, lower emotional intensity, less intimate and narrower reciprocal services (Granovetter 1973). Putnam suggests that strong ties are “to get by”, while weak ties are “to get ahead” (Putnam 2000:23). Moreover, he adds that the advantage of weak ties is that unique information and opportunities come into reach. Mark Granovetter (1973) agrees with this assumption, saying that weak ties rather than strong ties support upward economic mobility of a person, because they favour diffusion of information regarding job opportunities. I assume that resources are diffused mainly through weak ties not due to their strength, but because most people have more acquaintances than close friends and relatives in their life (excluding people who are socially isolated).

Speaking about similarity within social groups, which Putnam and Granovetter highlight, it is crucial to consider the concept of human capital. Adam Smith defines it as “acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of the society” (Smith & Krueger 2003:119). He asserts that acquisition of such abilities during study, work or apprenticeship “always costs a real expense.” (Ibid.) Human capital includes level of

education, work experience, language skills and other talents. There is a certain connection between social and human capitals. Behtoui and Neergaard claim that higher education level, more work experience and higher parents' job status are positively associated with access to social capital (2010:773). In homogeneous groups, members tend to have the same human capital. For example, a person with higher education will probably search for a person like him/her, namely with the same level of education.

Besides, human capital includes country-specific skills, namely a fluency in country's language, competence, cultural interaction skills and knowledge particular to a specific context. Also an educational system that is approved in the country of destination has a positive effect on the immigrant position in the labor market, because it is difficult to transfer credentials from one country to another; moreover, employers might be prejudiced regarding the quality of the foreign education (Duvander 2001).

To sum up, social capital is associated with social relations and social network as well as resources and power that are embedded in particular social networks. In the current study I apply the concept of social capital referring to social networks which contain certain resources (i.e. job information, financial and moral support, etc.) which might be beneficial for the job opportunities of migrants. Also I consider two types of social capital, inherited and acquired, that could be advantageous for promotion of migrants. Furthermore, I investigate the role of weak and strong ties or respectively bridging and bonding social capital of Russian-speaking migrants in job searching in Budapest. According to agreement of Granovetter and Putnam, weak ties play a crucial role in job searching, that is why I examine that assumption in my study. Besides, I consider possible connection between human and social capitals of Russian-speaking migrants on the basis of their and parents' education and work experience.

## 1.2 Defining Social Integration

Social integration incorporates multiple dimensions of well-being that means people have “the opportunity and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural activities which are considered the societal norm” (Fremstad et al. 2007:2). Also it can be characterized as “equal opportunities and equal outcomes for comparable groups” (Böhning & Zegers de Beijl 1995:8). In turn social segregation is defined as “a lack of participation in society and stress on the multi-dimensional and changing nature of the problem” (Peroz & Rosca 2007:16). There are some indicators of social integration of migrants into the labor market such as employment, income level, socio-economic mobility and women’s labor force participation (Böhning & Zegers de Beijl 1995; Fangen 2010).

One of the obstacles for the integration of immigrants into the Hungarian labor market might be the stigmatization. The theory of stigmatization<sup>5</sup> was developed by Erving Goffman in 1963. According to Goffman, “normals” or majority categorize or stigmatize minority – “abnormals”. He argues that “normals” believe that a person with a stigma is not quite human being, and also “we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances” (Goffman 1963:5). Another scientist, Abdelmalek Sayad, confirms this theory arguing that “immigrants’ appearance, the way they talk the language of the new country, the way they dress, their gestures, postures [...] even the names they have, it all become stigmatized feature” (Sayad 1999:260). Stigmatization causes unequal treatment of members of disadvantaged minority groups on the basis of their “ethnic status” in the labor market and “leads to unequal treatment of them in the social

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<sup>5</sup> Stigmatization - a process of selection of the person among other individuals on the basis of his/her unacceptable deviation from the norms or standards of society and application of social sanctions to this person (Goffman 1963).

relationships that are formed among individuals in everyday social interactions” (Behtoui 2004:31).

Another possible impediment for migrants’ integration into the labor market is the lack of country-specific skills. Charlotta Ryding Zink considers good knowledge of the local language as a prerequisite for entering the labor market since employees are expected to participate in the “normal coffee break chat” in order to “be team members and to have a good reputation among colleagues” (Ryding Zink 2001:126).

In this study social integration into the labor market is meant as migrants’ subjective impression of being a part of the labor market as well as justified equal opportunities of migrants on a par with natives in the labor market, for example the absence of discrimination and stigmatization and concomitant equal access to employment opportunities. The factors which impact on migrants’ perception of being integrated or disintegrated from the Hungarian labor market were investigated through qualifying questions in the interviews. Drawing from my experience, I assume that country – specific skills, especially good knowledge of Hungarian language, are crucial for integration of the Russian-speaking migrants due to the commonly encountered problem of the language misunderstanding.

### **1.3 Past Research on Social Capital and Integration of Migrants**

There is a little research on social capital and integration of migrants into the Hungarian labor market. Firstly, I would like to focus on the relevant studies which were executed in Budapest and then I would review research conducted in other countries. Irén Gödri asserts that social capital plays a crucial role in sustainment of migration. According to her and Pál Péter Tóth (2005), most of the immigrants who are coming to Hungary have already made social contacts with Hungarian citizens (usually it is relatives or friends who moved to Hungary for permanent residence), so they possess bonding social capital. In regard to this

finding, there is a presupposed theory that strengthening of the bonding social capital might result in variety of negative effects such as ethnic marginalization or social isolation of migrants (Bolin et al. 2004).

Furthermore, Gödri and Tóth point that human and economic capitals supply presence of the mentioned social capital. It implies that migrants, who are not well supplied with other resources embedded in human and economic capitals (i.e. education, work experience, knowledge of language, etc.), do not tend to mobilize their social networks for getting information about job or something else before migration. Nonetheless, quantitative research suggest the opposite effect (Raza et al 2012; Behtoui and Neergaard 2010; Lancee 2010a, 2010b). The results show that resources embedded in social networks of immigrants help to overcome the lack of human capital and achieve upward economic mobility in a foreign country. Therefore, as I mentioned it before, human and social capital and interconnected.

I would like to return to the definition of social capital as an advantage. Many scholars conducted studies in order to find which type of social capital is more “profitable” for immigrants in the host countries. According to the findings of Nederveen Pieterse (2003) that confirm the theory of Granovetter and Putnam, inter-ethnic relations (weak ties or bridging social capital) help immigrants to get access to helpful external resources (such as information) and herewith increases their chances to be integrated into the labor market.

Bram Lancee, who is interested in influence of the social capital on the labor market integration in Germany and Netherlands, has found that the bridging social capital or weak ties is associated positively with the possibility of being employed and with higher income (Lancee 2010a:220) in both countries, while bonding social capital leads to social isolation within one group or has no effect at all.

Lancee separates two dimensions of bonding and bridging social capital, namely structural (behavioral) and cognitive (attitudinal). In terms of bonding social capital,



structural dimension means strength of family ties, while cognitive includes solidarity and thick trust toward a family (2010a:210). Structural aspect of bridging social capital is about spanning structural holes (cultural identity, difference in occupational status), while cognitive aspect points to thin trust between inter-ethnic communities. He claims that bridging social capital leads to network diversification in terms of spanning structural holes across identity and status which leads to upward mobility of immigrants (Lancee 2010a:209). Moreover, he says that bridging social capital serves as an alternative channel for search of better jobs and circumvents discrimination. Lancee argues that in Germany most of employers are Germans, that is why weak ties with natives is associated with the likelihood of being employed.

It is important to note that most of the works on social capital and integration of immigrants are gender – blind. One of a few research which considers gender aspect is the work of Li Xue (2008) about employment opportunities of recent immigrant to Canada. She points out that female immigrants use social networks for attachment to the labor market more often than men (2008:26). Besides, the elements of social networks such as size, density and diversity, play a crucial role in female immigrant's employment probability. Geographical closeness of friendship is also positively associated with their employment. Xue asserts, like Lancee, that ethnic diversification (weak ties) increases employment opportunities both for male and female, however, it has a differentiated effect depending on immigration category and ethnic group.

According to the reviewed studies on social capital, it can be concluded that bonding social capital could help immigrants to access labor market in a host country, but usually it is associated with low-paid jobs and limitation of upward economic mobility. Parents tend to provide their children only with emotional support, but not with job opportunities. Those immigrants who have weak ties, namely native acquaintances, have access to well-paid jobs, since natives hold a specific country-specific capital (human-cultural and social capitals),

which is valuable and beneficial for immigrants. For instance, natives could recommend a good job to immigrants or translate job advertisement, make a reference, etc. The next section will illustrate the connection between social capital of Russian-speaking immigrants and their employment opportunities in the Hungarian labor market.

#### **1.4 East Slavic Culture**

Culture has become one of the most ambiguous and contradictory concepts in the field of social sciences. Referring to Weberian and Parsonian views, culture is a set of ideas or values which determine actions of actors. Talkott Parsons (1964) defines values as a system that direct actors to certain goals and thereby resolves their choices. He also emphasizes that culture is formed through individual learning process, socialization and collective decision-making. In the thesis I consider this constructionist approach to culture rather than biological determinism, where the latter indicates a “given nature” of culture. I argue that citizens of Russian – speaking countries gain the values and beliefs which determine their behavior and perception through the process of socialization in the family, school, university, etc.

The mentioned values, beliefs as well as traditions and language are the integral components of cultural capital. It is argued that cultural capital engages other types of capitals, social, human and economic. For instance, Ricardo D. Santon-Salazar and Sanford M. Dornbusch found a particular causal link, namely that people transform cultural capital into “instrumental relations” or social capital with institutional agents who can transmit valuable resources to the person (1995:121). Therefore, I consider cultural capital (or rather its components listed above) of Russian-speaking immigrants as one of the factors which influence the way they establish and maintain social networks.

There is one well-known joke about the culture of Russians which I heard many times in my childhood and still hear from the foreigners, who visited Russian-speaking countries: “I

have never met anyone who understood Russians”<sup>6</sup>. Saying “Russians” I mean not only native citizens of Russia, but also citizens of Ukraine and Belarus which are usually put together in one category named East Slavs or Russian-speaking citizens or simply Russians by representatives of other countries or as a rule by citizens of these countries living abroad. Why is it so? First of all, because in Russia and in Belarus Russian is an official language. In Ukraine almost half of the citizens use it in their daily life (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology 2004). All respondents, which I chose for the study, indicated Russian as their native language.

Also there is a constant movement of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians across territories of these countries due to visa-free labor migration, family reunification or love motives. Because of the cross-national marriages, people tend to mix their identity. Quite often I heard from the respondents: “Do you want to hear who I am according to my nationality or citizenship?” Another reason, which I mentioned, is the tendency of their identification as Russians abroad. Citizens of Russia established many institutions in Budapest while there are a few institutions organized by Ukrainians or Belarusians. My assumption is that two last nations tend to equate themselves with Russians, because they attend meetings of compatriots and celebrate common holidays in the Russian Cultural Center. The same values, traditions and religion (Orthodox) of Russians, Ukrainian and Belarusians facilitate this combination also.

I would like to emphasize some points made by social scientists who studied cultural representation of Russians. According to the findings of Yale Richmond (1995; 2003) Russians are notable for the communal spirit, togetherness and importance of close friendship and family relationships. The last value they acquire through socialization and learning at

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<sup>6</sup> Originally said by Grand Duke Aleksandr Mihailovich.

school. In Russian-speaking countries “...you are sharing your inside with your friends. [...] Talking with friends becomes your second nature. A need.” (Richmond 2003:115-116). Russians are known as sociable people who can easily find an approach to any person. Richmond (2003) nicely explains it on the example of a Russian who joined a table with unknown people in the restaurant because he did not want to sit at the single table.

The word “friend” (or *drug* in Russian) connotes a special relationship and must be used carefully in East Slavic countries. Richmond claims that *drug* is like a “bosom buddy”, someone you can fully trust, rely on and treat like a member of the family (2003:116). It takes time to develop a real friendship with a Russian, but as soon as you are a *drug* of a Russian, you can expect or ask for any kind of help and support. “Once a good personal relationship has been established, based on friendship and trust, the job is half done and success is assured” – Richmond asserts (1995:7).

Reciprocity is expected and highly appreciated in the friendship with Russians. If they do a favor for someone, they suppose that a person will do it for them in future. It can be also applied to acquaintances. If this is a matter of close friendship and family, Russians joke: “What’s mine is yours, what’s yours is mine, especially if it is in the refrigerator” or “Your friends are my friends, my friends are your friends”. From my experience, referring to the case of Russians abroad, it might be argued that reciprocity is expected not only within a group of acquaintances, family and friends, but also within larger group, Russian-speaking citizens. If one Russian citizen who lives abroad helped another Russian with employment or housing, etc., the recipient of that help would support another representative of the nation in order to avoid placing him/her in the same situation.

Russians are represented as the followers of a strong tradition of helping their friends and family. “Having a friend who knows someone in the right place can mean the difference between success and failure, such as gaining government approval for a petition or obtaining

something in short supply” (Ibid.). Such strong friendship is usually based on school ties, especially communal living or other shared experience of Russians.

As it was mentioned in the introduction, there is a widely used Russian word *blat* which is translated as “privileged access, connections” and means getting a job or place at the university or other help using personal social networks, which have a high professional status and certain authority in the company. *Blat* appeared in the Soviet Union by reason of usage of informal connections or agreements (Ledeneva 1998). For instance, I found many jokes about *blat* in the popular satirical magazine “Krokodil” published in the Soviet Union. This is one joke of many:

- How are you planning to start the independent life?
- I have got Daddy, Mummy, Grandad and Auntie running around sorting out permission for me to stay in Moscow (Krokodil 1952:4).

*Blat* is still a topical word in Russian-speaking countries. Russians tend to establish contacts with as many people as they can in order to secure unpredictable life in terms of job placement under unstable economic situation in a country. It is very important to find “right” people (also implies *blat*) among other acquaintances who can help with finding a job or acceptance to university or with something else. “But more important than merely knowing the right people is cultivating those contacts over a period of time through favors, smiles, drinks and food, and gifts” (Richmond 1995:8). Therefore, *blat* needs reciprocity, the following Russian phrase nicely illustrates it “I scratch your back, your scratch mine” (in Russian “Ty – mne, ya – tebe”) (a folk saying).

In a nutshell, Russians or Russian-speaking citizens are represented as open-hearted, sociable and friendly. Referring to the findings of Richmond, Russian people are known as those who like to be in a company even with unknown people and thereby tend to broaden their social networks in order to get different kind of help in a future. Trust, understanding

and reciprocity are recognized as the most important characteristics within social networks of Russians.

In the next section I will present the data which I collected through in-depth interviewing and the main findings of the research. The section is followed by concluding discussion.

## 2. Results and Analysis

For this research I interviewed twelve Russian-speaking immigrants in Budapest, six men and six women. Most respondents emigrated from Russia, while four were from Ukraine and one from Belarus. All of them were first-generation immigrants who were either currently employed or retired<sup>7</sup>. I divided the respondents into three categories according to their age and professional status: young professionals (18-34), experienced professionals (35-61) and retired (62+). A majority of respondents (seven out of twelve) were representatives of the second group that was preferred for this study due to more work experience and working age. Everyone had a higher level of education, except one respondent, who was a long-distance truck driver. The minimum age of interviewees was twenty nine, the maximum – sixty five.

The interviewees had different reasons for moving to Budapest, among them: economic reason or labor migration, studies, health safety (as a result of Chernobyl disaster), family reunification, and love motives. The first reason was typical only for male immigrants, while women migrated mostly as followers of men or due to studies. The duration of residence of Russian-speaking immigrants in Hungary varied from four to thirty nine years.

In the next three sub-sections I analyze twelve interviews focusing on specificity of establishment and maintenance of social networks including gender aspect, methods of job searching in Budapest within the context of Russian migration to Hungary and factors, which influenced their integration into the Hungarian labor market.

### 2.1. Establishment and Maintenance of Social Networks

How do Russian-speaking immigrants establish social networks in Budapest? With whom do they communicate? What is the gender aspect of their communication behavior?

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<sup>7</sup> However, one 65-year old man is currently self-employed.

How do they maintain social relations? In this sub-section I attempt to answer these and other questions through in-depth analysis of the conducted interviews.

First of all, ten respondents out of twelve mentioned that they knew somebody in Budapest or Hungary<sup>8</sup> prior to their emigration. Among “familiar faces” in Budapest were: husband/wife, other relatives, friends of family and managers of the local companies. The respondents divided into two categories, those who had bonding social capital (wives/husbands, relatives) and those had bridging capital (friends of family and employers) before moving to Hungary. Referring to the first category, it must be said that many Russian women got married to Hungarians because the latter studied in the Soviet universities which was a popular phenomenon starting from 1947. The oldest interviewee Aleksandra talked about meeting her future husband:

I moved to Hungary in 1973, got married to a Hungarian student who studied with me in Russia. There are 50 000 of us (Russian wives of Hungarians) in Hungary. Many foreigners studied at the Soviet universities, mainly boys, because there were many technical universities with special subjects. We were young, 18-24 year old, so it was logical that 70% of them came back with Russian wives.

While the cross-national marriage was more typical for women, two of the male respondents accidentally met their Hungarian wives abroad. Dmitriy remembered the first meeting with Orsolya while they were working together on the international boat: “I understood that she was my fate.” Since then they are together. In this case Dmitriy accepted the passive role of follower and moved to Hungary. Some of the interviewees emigrated to Hungary in order to reunite with their family members. A few immigrants got invitations from Hungarian employers while being in Russia, Ukraine or Belarus. As a rule they knew only their managers prior migration. Another category of Russian-speaking immigrants is those who moved to Hungary due to studies. Svetlana, who belongs to this category, was sixteen, when

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<sup>8</sup> Many of them lived in other Hungarian cities/towns before moving to Budapest.



she had to travel alone to Budapest. However, Svetlana emphasized though she emigrated alone, she was provided with a moral support of the friends of her family in Budapest. She noted that she would have hard times without them.

The last category includes only male immigrants who emigrated with their families to Hungary due to economic reasons, particularly searching for better life conditions. One of them, Ivan, possessed a valuable human capital, namely he had two higher education and work experience in four countries. Referring to the point of Gördi and Tóth mentioned earlier, Ivan as opposed to other “economic” immigrants mobilized his professional networks prior to migration to Hungary in order to know all information about Hungarian labor market and other everyday necessities. In a nutshell, most of the Russian-speaking immigrants who moved to Hungary because of the specified reasons except love motives and family reunification, tended to have weak ties with its citizens.

Returning to the social capital theory developed by such scholars as Portes and Behtoui, I analyzed privileged resources embedded or missing in the mentioned social networks of Russian-speaking immigrants. Those immigrants who were closely connected to either Hungarian husbands/wives or relatives through the bonding social capital, had access to beneficial country-specific resources. For example, a Hungarian wife of Dmitriy helped him with translation of job vacancies in the papers, negotiations with employers or everyday conversations. In turn, bridging social capital of the immigrants contained only information about everyday necessities, such as shops, rent of apartment, and its renovation. Moral support of the family friends that was indicated by Svetlana, was also a crucial resource that favored her adaptation to the new society. The point of contact for both types of social capital was information about jobs in Hungary provided by strong and weak ties, but not direct help with job placement. As opposed to the owners of bonding and bridging social capital, those immigrants who moved to Hungary not knowing anyone, noted that they spent too much time

sing for jobs, , in the beginning of their new life in Hungary. It had a negative impact on their primary adaptation to the day-to-day activities in Hungary which required a prior knowledge about it.

Secondly, I noticed a gender division of communicational behavior distinctive for the interviewed Russian-speaking immigrants. Five out of six female respondents indicated that they are sociable and talkative which helped them to establish social networks in the source countries as well as in Budapest. For instance, 63-year old Anastasia told me about herself: “I am a communicative person, I always find acquaintances. I don’t remember any moment when I was alone, bored and did not know what to do.” Women expressed their behavioral style verbally, while men tended not to talk about their personality, but it emerged from their narratives. Most men were intentionally searching for professional networks in order to find a job, when women wanted to find friends due to personal reasons, i.e. to spend free time together or to do some activities together, to discuss their problems, etc. Women expressed their perception of being integrated into the Hungarian society, because they did not have communication problems there.

The ways of establishment of friendship or acquaintance by male and female immigrants were distinct. Women indicated that they got to know Hungarians through their children, for instance attending parents’ meetings, discussing teachers and common problems related to studies. The same religion has united them too. 46-year old Ekaterina, who moved to Budapest because of her boyfriend, told me that she met good Hungarian acquaintances in the Catholic Church, which she regularly attended. Besides, women in the age category 62+ specified that they have very good relationships with their Hungarian or mixed Hungarian-Russian neighbors. 63-year old Anastasia told me about her close Hungarian friend: “Eszter, my neighbor, she is like my elder sister. She is very kind, open, helpful and straightforward. She has literally Slavic soul. Many Hungarians cannot say “no”, try to politely refuse, but

Eszter behaves differently.” Obviously, in this case similar personal characteristics have brought them together.

Younger women indicated that they do not have such close relationships with their neighbors, at the most they greeted the latter and nothing more. 29-year old Svetlana joked about this kind of relations, saying that neighbors usually hate each other, so if they just live peacefully, it is more than good. The difference in perception and behavior might be explained by the dynamism and mobility of younger generation, which presupposes frequent changes of addresses. For instance, Aleksandra, a representative of older generation, who moved to Budapest almost 40 years ago, felt nostalgic about her first place of residence in Budapest, because she passed most of her youth at that place and her daughter grew up there.

As opposed to women, a majority of men established contacts through their previous work or in the process of job searching. Ivan told me a story of job searching via a paper, where the local companies posted their vacancies: “It was only one interview...they invited me for an interview, for some reasons we didn’t agree, but in the end we became very good acquaintances with a manager.” As a result, he did not get that job, but he established the long-lasting contact which had a higher value for him than the job position. Another male respondent, Dmitriy, met his acquaintances when he got into trouble. There was a car accident he was involved and the men who were witnesses of it, towed off his truck. Afterwards, the new acquaintances recommended him to a good company, where he could work as a driver. Furthermore, two of the male interviewees mentioned Russian baths as one of the informal places where they encountered new people.

To sum up, men seemed somewhat distant compared to women, because they had less time for establishing acquaintance or friendship due to job searching. Almost all interviewed women moved as the followers of men or because of studies, which is why they had more free time to meet other people. The indicated male role as job-seekers in Hungary emphasizes

that the traditional division of labor still remains in Russian-speaking countries and the interviewed Russians tended to comply with it even in Hungary. According to this separation, men are obliged to be “breadwinners” in a family, while women follow the “homemakers” model, which does not require employment, but usually they combine these two roles. Besides, the interviewed women seemed and identified themselves as more sociable than men. Because of the specified reasons, only male immigrants complained about loneliness in Budapest, while all women had somebody to talk with. There was no disparity between establishment of networks by older and younger male generation, but it was more typical for women of different ages. Judging by the narratives told by female immigrants, younger generation reported the importance of privacy and got acquainted with selective people only through university or work, while older generation preferred to meet acquaintances or friends in any place where they spent time, for example, in the building, where they live/lived, in the kindergarten or school, where their children or grandchildren study/studied, etc. Furthermore, older female immigrants as opposed to younger ones, tended to establish a long-lasting friendship.

Besides the specificity of social networks establishment by Russian-speaking immigrants, I focused on the groups which the respondents considered as significant. When I asked the interviewees about the first-priority groups in their life, a family was mentioned as the most significant or even sacred group by them. Anna talked about her family with a glitter in the eyes:

Family...it is difficult to say something about family...Family – is everything. You love, you are loved, nobody sends you away, and you get the last piece of bread. When I say “family”, I also imply my grandmothers. They are all for me. I visit them quite often in Russia and Ukraine.

This quote emphasizes family values or in other words conservative ideology supported by Russian-speaking immigrants. It can be explained by the fact that millions of Russians are the

followers of the Orthodox Church, which promotes considering family in its spiritual context. Family or inherited or so-called bonding social capital was mentioned by the respondents as the source of emotional support in the case of problems which occurred to them in Hungary. But no one referred to the family while speaking about job searching. I assumed that the significance of family for Russians affects the human capital which the latter possess. I found out the connection between educational attainment of the immigrants and their parents. Those respondents who completed university had two parents or at least one with higher education, while the immigrants with secondary education had parents with the same level of it or even lower. I will discuss the impact of human capital on the job searching in the next subsection.

Returning to the significant groups of Russian-speaking immigrants, close friends were named as the second-priority group. The notion of a close friend was presented as highly valuable by Russians. For example, Eugeny explained who is a close friend for him: “It is a person who will take off the last shirt for me and leaves only underwear for himself/herself.” There are common patterns in definition of close friendship provided by them: grasping his/her point immediately and no need to explain anything, accepting person’s imperfections, relying on this person in any situation and trusting him/her. Granovetter developed four dimensions that serve as measurements of the strength of interpersonal ties, namely combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services (1973:1361). Russians did not name reciprocity as the important factor of close friendship, but they added new dimensions to those four. A few respondents even equated friendship with love, asserting that it is an unexplainable feeling. It could be concluded that friendship has a special meaning for Russian speakers. All respondents pointed out that they maintain strong relationships with their relatives and close Russian friends in their home countries. They tended to communicate with the latter using different

facilities like phone, Skype and social networks. Most of the interviewees also mentioned that they attempt and like to visit their home countries, at least once a year.

The importance of common interests for establishment of a friendship was supported by a majority of immigrants. Furthermore, almost all respondents referred to the same level of education (as a component of human capital) as a prerequisite for friendship. The exception was Dmitriy, a long-distance truck-driver with completed secondary education. He noted that an education does not matter to him; there are people with the same level of education as well as with higher education among his friends. It means that the impact of human capital on social capital is only applicable for highly educated Russian-speaking immigrants.

As close friendship was established by the Russians I spoke to at school or university, especially by those who lived together in the dormitory. As a result, a close friendship was measured by time they spent together, joint residence and common activity (studies). One of my respondents, Egor, mentioned that: "It is difficult to find close friends when you are above thirty. My friends, with whom I maintain good relations, are from the Belarusian university, where we studied together and lived in the dormitory." Consequently, most of interviewees indicated that their close friends are Russians, except Anna, who moved to Budapest to study at the university and Aleksandra, who emigrated from Russia to Hungary a long time ago.

Establishment of the contacts should be considered in terms of mutual agreement and initiative. Friendship or acquaintance was not initiated only by one side, namely Russians, but they attracted attention of others. For instance, Aleksandra mentioned that among her good friends was a Dutch family. The wife in that family, Teresa, had a Russian grandmother and when she heard Aleksandra speaking in Russian, she approached her. Teresa liked to talk in Russian with Aleksandra and still they are very good friends. Another interviewee, Dmitriy, told me a story of meeting a Hungarian man who served in the Army with Russians: "It was

New Year and I got to the café which owner was a Hungarian man. He asked me where I am from. When he heard that I'm Russian, I haven't paid anything for the food and drinks I ordered that night." So, in both cases Russians got to know other people on the latter's initiative.

Nonetheless, majority of the respondents reported the difference in mentality and personality of Hungarians and Russians, which impedes their close friendship, but at the same time they support good relationships. Ivan, with whom I had the longest conversation, considered socialization as one of the crucial factors that forms a distinct world view, perception and behavior of Russians: "We (Russians and Hungarians) attended different kindergartens, so it is inevitable that we are not the same. It is an additional obstacle to understanding each other."

According to the interviewees, Russians are profound, open-hearted and sociable. If you are a friend of a Russian, you will be a regular visitor to his/her home. For example, 63-year old Anastasiya told me that she met Daria, a Russian woman, through her husband's work and now they are desired guests at Daria's home:

If we got acquainted with Daria, it means that we got access to her home and if we got access to her home, it means that we met all her friends, Russians and Hungarians. We were like old friends at her home. If Daria founds new connections, it means that we become familial souls with them.

This narrative shows the friendly relationship between the interviewed Russians in Hungary. When I started searching for respondents, I concluded that though there is a sizable amount of the Russian-speaking immigrants, it seems like a small circle of people who know each other. Moreover, majority of respondents knew all Russian places in Budapest, from Russian supermarkets to a restaurant, where the chef is Russian. Because I am also a representative of Russian-speaking community in Budapest, I was invited to all Russian events and meetings of compatriots. In one week I knew all Russian institutions in Budapest and people who work

there. In a nutshell, there is a communal spirit and friendliness within Russians-speaking community supported by their curiosity concerning the life of their compatriots in Hungary.

In turn, most of the immigrants claimed that Hungarians are more distant, closed and unobtrusive. It is a subjective perception which might imply a social closure of Russian-speaking community, but in fact all interviewees had at least weak ties with Hungarians. I was faced with two opposite views on this situation. 65-year old Aleksandra argued that all people are the same and negative perception of Hungarians is the matter of prejudice and superficial knowledge about them. On the other hand, 35 year-old Eugeny, an employee of the IT company, complained about his Hungarian co-worker, at the same generalizing it to a larger Hungarian population. Through the joke he emphasized the difference in ways of spending free time by Russians and Hungarians:

We (Russians) have a different world view, different interests compared to Hungarians. For example, you are working with a guy of the same age as you are. Both of you have a free time. You know, we (Russians) are used to go to the bar, have a drink, but that Hungarian guy says: “Let’s paddle a kayak, then cycle, then climb a mountain and in the end guys on the helicopter will pick us up.”

It is interesting that both Aleksandra and Eugeny moved to Hungary because of their Hungarian loved ones. However, Aleksandra will celebrate fourth wedding anniversary with her Hungarian husband next year, while Eugeny complains about living alone now, because “he did not succeed in those relationships”. The latter emphasized that he establishes high expectations for all people and that is why he has difficulties with making strong friendship.

To sum up, a majority of the interviewed Russians tended to have weak ties with Hungarians in Budapest due to the mentioned impediments such as different socialization process, mentality and interests. Most probably, if I interviewed second generation migrants in Budapest, I would get other results, because of the socialization which they would go through in Hungary. Besides, according to Russian-speaking respondents, maintenance of the



good relations with Hungarian acquaintances, especially professional networks, demands too much emotional investment, which is hard to support. The ways of establishment of social connections were different for men and women and varied from accidental acquaintance to intentional searching for professional networks. Due to the traditional division of labor and the compulsory male role of the “breadwinner”, women tended to have more free time in the beginning of their new life in Hungary compared to men that is why they met more people who became their acquaintances or friends. Through friendship and acquaintance Russians got access to the advantageous resources which favored their further integration into the host society.

## **2.2. Job Searching and Employment of Russians in Budapest**

In this subsection I analyze successful stories of employment of Russian-speaking immigrants in Hungary. Though unemployment of immigrants is a topical issue, which is mentioned in more than twelve thousand academic sources<sup>9</sup> and much research focus on the factors which prevent job placement of immigrants, I aimed to study the causes of their fortune. Each narrative is unique, therefore I thoroughly considered them. First of all, I would like to mention two independent problems that impeded employment of immigrants in the beginning of their new life in Hungary. Then I move to the methods of job searching applied by the respondents and how it affected the labor market outcomes for them.

The first external factor, which influenced career chances of Russian-speaking immigrants, was politics and economics of Hungary. For instance, 63-year old Anastasia was a witness of the economic crisis of mid-nineties in Hungary, which started due to political transition, namely collapse of the socialist state. She noted that there was a terrible

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<sup>9</sup> According to JSTOR.

unemployment, which made it impossible to find any kind of job: “They (Hungarian employers) asked us: “Do you think we will hire you instead of Hungarians?”

Another obstacle for getting a job in Hungary was problems with preparation of the documents including a residence permit. Dmitriy and Eugeniy mentioned that they needed from half a year to one year to get their documents ready, since they were faced with bureaucratic institutions and even discrimination. During that time Dmitriy had to find illegal jobs, which were much easier to get, but hard to defend his own rights afterwards. He told me a story about one firm which did not pay him a salary: “I worked here for half a year and left it, because I could not fight for money anymore.”

Regarding country-specific skills, namely the knowledge of Hungarian language, it was indicated as a crucial factor which affects job placement only by two female immigrants, representatives of older generation. Others agreed that it is possible to work knowing English/or German and Russian, especially in the case of jobs connected to the Russian market. It points to the labor market transformation in Hungary, particularly to the changes in the labor demand, knowledge of Hungarian is not as important as thirty years ago. I assume that during this time more international companies opened their branches in Hungary which improved job opportunities for Russians who are good at English or German.

The last factor mentioned as the one which positively or negatively affected employment of Russian-speaking immigrants was reputation of Russians in the Hungarian labor market. This reputation does not allow any claim of generalization, rather it points to the specific cases of Hungarian employers which hired Russians and made certain conclusions about their work. Depending on that impression, it has an impact on future hiring of other Russians by those employers. For instance, I had a conversation with Dmitriy about such situation of “reputation effect”:

I met one Hungarian guy who worked with Russians. I sent him a e-mail, he called me immediately and said that if I will not find a work, I can call him, because he worked more than ten years with Russians. He said he will not pay a lot, but I will get a full social package, etc. But I found a better job and did not call him afterwards.

In this example, Dmitriy was welcomed by the Hungarian employer due to good reputation of Russian workers. Despite I did not hear stories about the influence of negative reputation of Russians on employment opportunities of their followers, I suppose that it might take place also.

As opposed to the listed factors which prevent employment of immigrants, Anna emphasized that in 2009 many Russian companies moved their business to Hungary, opened new offices and hired many Russian-speaking people. Therefore, it was quite easy to find a job at that time. Anna told me that surprisingly she got a job at the bank without a Master Degree, any work experience and specialization in finance.

Among methods of job searching the interviewees mentioned social connections, papers with job vacancies and the Internet (social networks, career web-sites and corporate web-sites of the companies). However, there were unique stories about other methods of getting a job. For example, Svyatoslav shared with me a story which emphasizes his insistency and self-confidence:

I wanted to work at X company, but there were no open vacancies. On their official web-site I found the date and place of the corporate New Year party. I went there with my CV, found the manager and gave it to him. That is how I got a deserved job at X.

This quote confirms a well-known Russian proverb which states that “everything is possible if you deserve it.” At the same time it is important to note that Svyatoslav had a valuable human capital at that moment, namely narrow specialization in physics and work experience in this field in addition to his personal qualities which increased his career chances.

Eleven out of twelve respondents agreed that they found at least one of their jobs<sup>10</sup> in Budapest through their connections, as a rule acquaintances or in other words weak ties, while one respondent was self-employed. However, usage of social networks should not be considered as a blat, because only two immigrants, Anastasia and Ivan were recommended for a job and got it easily, the former was introduced by the friend of her husband's sister and the latter – by one person from his professional network. In all other cases the interviewees just received information about available vacancies from acquaintances, which was also beneficial for them, but did not fully guarantee employment. Blat implies getting a job with the usage of social connections, which have certain authority in the company. Since most of my respondents did not have such connections primarily due to their insufficiently high professional status or failure to find “right” people in Budapest, they could not use blat for job placement. Speaking about the first reason of absence of blat, there is again an obvious impact of human capital on social capital of the immigrants. Besides, 35-year old Eugeniya specified that blat is an outdated term nowadays:

Now it is not the same structure, acquaintances cannot help you like it was before. The infrastructure is more developed now, it is easier to use the Internet for job searching. It was before “your father is a General, and then you are General too” or “we will call to Kolya and Kolya will solve all problems.”

I noticed that Russians tended to apply blat for getting a job while being in their home countries, but not in Hungary. They explained it saying that it is just not “typical” for Hungarians. No one from the category of immigrants who moved to Hungary due to love motives was recommended for a job by their Hungarian loved ones. Therefore, strong ties did not work in this case, at the most immigrants were provided with moral support and country-specific information. Another possible reason of “non-working” blat was mentioned by 42-

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<sup>10</sup> Those who changed their job places.

year old Dmitriy: “People value their jobs in Hungary, they are afraid to lose them and it is understandable.” So, he associated the usage of blat by immigrants with negative consequences, namely getting fired, for those who help with a job placement.

Most of the immigrants found jobs through information provided by their Russian connections. Some of them received job information from their Russian acquaintances prior to migration, while others met their “information providers” in Hungary. In the last case, meetings with compatriots were rather accidental than intentional, for example, through clients or colleagues from their previous work or friends of friends. Generally, opinions divided over reciprocal helpfulness within the Russian community. On the one hand, three respondents mentioned that they were willing to help other compatriots directly with a job or information about job in order not to place them in the same situation in which they were. For instance, Alyona, who opened a shop some time ago, told me that she preferred to hire only Russian cashiers, despite of the fact she did not like their impudent behavior. On the other hand, some immigrants argued that Russians do not like to help each other abroad, because “everyone cares about himself/herself.” These respondents were notable for individualism and high level of distrust. They were the followers of the well-known Russian proverb: “Trust, but verify.”

Two of the interviewees with a high professional status, indicated that their method of job searching was specific. Both of them are men, Ivan and Svyatoslav. Ivan is a manager of an international company which deals with distribution; Svyatoslav works as a manager at another company, but his work is connected to the Russian market. The former claimed that he is “a very expensive person to search for job through the Internet or papers” and he establishes professional networks with people at the same level as him, while the latter asserted that he does not look for a job, but headhunters find him and offer it. Ivan highlighted his intentional establishment of professional networks, which helped him not to

waste time searching for a new job in a new country. He told me that before his moving to Budapest, he came there in order to find people who could help him with employment:

Social connections are very important in each country. I do my best to acquire them. This is a certain work, yes. You have to make efforts to build your own world. If you don't do it, it is very hard afterwards. I know people who don't do it. I think it is not right and they are suffering from it.

Thus, Ivan pointed to the importance of establishment of social networks not only in terms of job searching, but also as a necessary resource for adaptation in the foreign country. He also indicated that establishment and maintenance of such networks should be considered as a work, because it consumes too much time and requires emotional investment which is tiring.

Because immigrants, who changed their jobs in Hungary, tended to use different methods of job searching, I compared them with the focus on labor market outcomes. For example, Dmitriy, who found two of his jobs through announcements in the papers, agreed that those jobs were really bad, he either did not get salary there or employers tried to cheat on him. Conversely, Dmitriy was satisfied with other jobs which he got through advices of the accidental acquaintances. However, there was no connection identified between method of searching, salary and job position of the respondents. Thus, in this case job searching through social networks was advantageous only in terms of reliable employers.

In a nutshell, all interviewed Russian immigrants used social connections (in varying degrees) for job placement in Budapest. Weak ties with Hungarians were positively associated with access to the labor market, because they tended to provide Russian-speaking immigrants with valuable information regarding work opportunities. The concept of blat or “privileged access” was practically not applicable in the case of the job searching in Budapest by the interviewed Russians. I specified some reasons of that, for example insufficiently high professional status of the respondents or failure to find “right” people in Budapest and blat is

not as typical in Hungary as in Russian-speaking countries, where citizens possess distinguishing cultural capital.

### **2.3. Integration into the Hungarian Labor Market**

In this study social integration into the labor market was defined through subjective perception of the respondents. Besides, I focused on such pattern of the social integration as equal opportunities of the immigrants on a par with natives in the labor market, namely an absence of any kind of discrimination and stigmatization.

First of all, Russian-speaking immigrants connected this kind of social integration to the country-specific human capital. According to them, if you are specialized in the subject that is essential in Hungary, for example, electronics, IT or specific industry connected to control of the quality, it gives you confidence in the future and you feel integrated into the labor market. For instance, Svyatoslav defined labor market integration as “supplying the demanded labor parameters in one or another society.” Saying “parameters”, he meant demanded specializations or languages. Knowledge of the languages which are rarely known by Hungarians, but needed for cooperation with the foreign markets, was also identified by the respondents as highly valuable for integration. Lack of such “parameters” might be an impediment for assimilation into the labor market.

Another obstacle, which was mentioned by one of the respondents, is a possession of another element of the country-specific skills, namely knowledge of Hungarian language. Anna, who knows Hungarian at the same level as Russian, mentioned that good knowledge of Hungarian language is crucial, even if it is not strictly required for work: “It is more comfortable when you know Hungarian. My manager is Hungarian and she likes very much when we speak in Hungarian with her. It gives me an additional privilege over colleagues who don’t know it.” Referring to Ryding Zink (2001), it is important to participate in

informal chats with colleagues over a cup of coffee or a cigarette in order to feel integrated. Ivan emphasized his limited integration into the Hungarian labor market due to the lack of knowledge of Hungarian language. He is a manager of the company and the only one who speaks only in English there: “Several times per year I present my speeches in Hungarian to my subordinates. Usually the speeches are very short and perceived rather as a show.” On the other hand, Ivan complained that Hungarian is very difficult to learn and his life did not force him to know it fluently.

Besides country-specific skills and human capital, the respondents mentioned sociability as one of the crucial factors which affects integration into the labor market. Svetlana, who claimed that she is fully integrated, pointed to that: “I am not a genius, but I can present myself as such.” She asserted that sociability must be supplied with unique human capital, and then it is the formula of successful integration.

Furthermore, the respondents claimed that integration into the labor market means an absence of any kind of discrimination. Almost all Russian-speaking immigrants agreed that they are not discriminated against, especially those who work at the international companies, where majority of co-workers are foreigners; however, they felt suspicion and sometimes prejudice of their Hungarian colleagues. On the other hand, the interviewees told me that “people do judge by actions”, therefore, because of the good work the former performed, the latter changed their negative attitude to the positive one. For instance, Anastasia mentioned that:

In the beginning of my work I didn't have good relationships with all of my colleagues, especially with younger ones, because they heard about our system, that Russians are bad people. But then they understood that I am not bad, I tried to find approach to each person, I smiled to them and was always friendly, and we had lunch together...Even now, when I'm retired, those young colleagues invite me to their weddings.



Nevertheless, an appearance alongside with a perfect knowledge of Hungarian language was mentioned as one of the ways of avoiding stigmatization and concomitant discrimination. Ekaterina, who was born in Armenia, argued that everyone identify her with Hungarian because of her look and fluent Hungarian (she studied at the department of Hungarian language in Moscow). These factors helped her with assimilation into the Hungarian labor market.

Surprisingly, no respondents compared themselves with Hungarians and mentioned equal rights they must get on a par with natives. All of them felt comfortable in Hungary, while in my previous research in Sweden (2011) the immigrants complained about discrimination and injustice. The difference in perception of immigrants in Sweden and Hungary might be explained by various factors: starting from popularity of that topic in Sweden and ending with Swedish Discrimination Ombudsman to whom immigrants can report. Hungarian government still did not develop such protective measures against discrimination which prevents social integration of immigrants into the Hungarian labor market.

To summarize, almost all Russian-speaking immigrants noted that they feel as a part of the Hungarian labor market or in other words social integration. Such factors as sociability, country-specific skills, namely country demanded specializations and Hungarian language, knowledge of rare languages or specializations which Hungarians do not know or possess were identified as significant for labor market integration. The last was considered by the respondents in terms of its temporality and consequently in a larger context of the adaptation and social integration into the new society.

In the next section I would draw conclusions about the main findings of this research. Moreover, departing from the limitations of it and I would suggest specific patterns of social capital of Russian-speaking immigrants which should be studied further.



### 3. Concluding Discussion

In regard to results of this study the difference in establishment of social networks by male and female immigrants in Hungary accentuated traditional division of labor followed by them. Russian-speaking men as “breadwinners” had to establish professional networks in order to find a job, while women tended to find people for their enjoyment, because they more free time. Social capital of Russians was dependent on human and cultural capitals which they possess, but not the other way around. Human capital affected their selection of the homogeneous actors or “people like them”, which became their friends or acquaintances, while cultural capital influenced the formation of “social tie” value.

The study shows that social capital as a credit played a crucial role in employment of the interviewed immigrants, but *blat* as such was not applicable outside of Russian-speaking countries. A majority of Russians got their jobs through information embedded in bridging social capital, namely both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic relations with Hungarians and Russians respectively whom they met accidentally or intentionally in Budapest. It means that the cohesive power of weak ties and its assistance with dissemination of valuable information related to employment opportunities<sup>11</sup> is relevant for the Russian-speaking community. In turn, the bonding social capital they possess did not influence their career chances in Hungary.

Furthermore, integration of Russians into the Hungarian labor market was mainly influenced by their country-specific human capital, primarily certain specializations and proficient knowledge of Hungarian language, rather than any type of social capital. Those immigrants, who possessed skills demanded in the labor market in Hungary, perceived

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<sup>11</sup> Which was reported by Granovetter almost 40 years.

themselves as a part of it. None of the Russians speakers reported discrimination against them from the side of Hungarian employers due to the hard work of the former. “People do judge by actions”, - they explained. Integration into the labor market should be considered in a larger context of the full integration into the foreign society. Analyzing the narratives of Russian-speaking immigrants I found out that their assimilation into the job market in Hungary was one of the numerous stages of adaptation to the new society. Through their work in Budapest, Russians got to know the principles of functioning of the Hungarian labor market and professional relations there, but their integration into the Hungarian society is more complex process which should be further studied.

The research has some limitations. The sample was quite small, because of the dedicated time limit. Therefore, it does not allow any claims of generalization. Besides, the research was conducted only in one Hungarian city, however, it might be interesting to analyze it in terms of a space pattern, namely rural vs. urban impact on the social capital which migrants possess and how it is connected to their job opportunities. Due to the mentioned time limitations I did not interview unemployed and second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants, but these two categories should be also studied within the context of the labor market integration and job placement. It is crucial to analyze resources embedded in the social capital of both unemployed and employed immigrants in order to prove its significance in searching and getting a job in Hungary. Furthermore, second-generation immigrants who go through the same socialization process as Hungarians might possess similar cultural capital which impacts on social capital and further career chances of the Russian-speaking immigrants.

Discussions of the impact of social capital on employment opportunities and integration of immigrants do not address the specificity of cultural capital of Russian-speaking expats in Hungary. Moreover, there is a shortage of studies which focus on the gender aspect of social

capital establishment and application by the immigrants from the former Soviet countries. The conducted research contributes to the field of migration studies through filling these empirical gaps in the academic literature. The continuation of studying this topic is crucial in order to understand the process of assimilation of immigrants into the Hungarian labor market and Hungarian society as a whole, how they perceive it, which factors encourage them to be integrated and which preventing them from that.

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## 5. Appendix

### Interview guide

*Hello! My name is Anastasiya, I am a current Master Student at Central European University. As a final step towards getting my Master's degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology, I am doing a thesis with the title "The Role of Social Capital in Integration of Russian-Speaking Immigrants into the Hungarian Labor Market." I will ask you questions related to this topic, it will take up to 1 hour of your time. If some questions will be sensitive for you, you can leave them and answer the next questions. All information you provide me with is anonymous and will be used only in scientific purposes. Please, be frank and truthful in your answers.*

### Human Capital

- What is your age?
- What is your highest educational level? Major?
- What is the highest educational level of your parents? Major?
- Could you, please, name your three best friends? What is the highest educational level of them? Major?
- Employment status of your parents? Best friends?
- How many years of work experience do you have? (if applicable) How did you search for a job in Russia? Did you ask for any reference? Where did you work in Russia?
- What is your native language(s)? Which language(s) can you speak fluently?

### Moving to Hungary, social capital in Russia

- Do you stay in touch with your relatives and closest friends in Russia? If **yes**: How often do you communicate with your relatives in Russia? With you closest friends?
- Tell me, please, about your (or parents') moving to Budapest. What were the reasons?
- Did you (your parents) know somebody in Budapest before your arrival? If YES, how close were relationships with that person (people)? Did he/she/they help you (your

parents) with moving (provided with necessary information, arranged accommodation, job, etc.)?

### **Social Capital in Hungary**

- Could you map and identify your most significant networks. What characteristics are most valued among network members (e.g., trustworthiness, reciprocity, cooperation, honesty, community respect, etc.)?
- Tell me, please, about your neighborhood. Who are the people living in your neighborhood? Which relationships do you have with them?
- Do you communicate with native Hungarians? If YES, how close are your relationships? How often do you communicate? How hard was to approach natives?
- Do you have close friends in Budapest? If YES, who are they? How often do you communicate?
- Could you name three people you trust the most in Budapest?
- Could you name three people on whom you can rely for different kinds of assistance or help (e.g. entering university, goods, cash, job search, etc.)?

### **Job search in Budapest**

- Could you tell me about your methods of job search in Budapest? How did you find your job(s) in Budapest?
- If a respondent used more than one method of search. Do you see any significant difference between jobs found through application of different methods of search?
- Is there a difference in payment and level between job(s) you had in Russia (if applicable) and your job(s) in Budapest?
- Where do you currently work?
- Are you satisfied with your current job? Why YES or NO?

- Who are your colleagues (mostly natives or Russians)? Could you tell me about relationships with your colleagues?

**Integration/segregation into the labor market in Hungary**

- What do you think: are you integrated into the labor market in Hungary (are you a part of the labor market in Hungary)? Why YES or NO?
- If YES:
  - Which factors helps you to be integrated into the Hungarian labor market?
- If NO:
  - How you perceive your segregation?
  - Which factors impede you to be integrated?
- Do you perceive some changes towards your integration or segregation into the Hungarian labor market from your arrival in Hungary till now?