"It is such a crazy country, where everything happens at the last minute". Approaches Towards Chance of Polish Workers in Icelandic Tourism.

By

Magdalena Krystyna Kopańska

Submitted to Central European University - Private University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology
and Social Anthropology (2-year Program)

Supervisor: Andreas Dafinger; Johanna Markkula

Vienna, Austria
2025

Copyright Notice

Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Magdalena Kopańska**, candidate for the MA degree in Sociology and social Anthropology declare herewith that the present thesis titled "'It is such a crazy country, where everything happens at the last minute'. Approaches Towards Chance of Polish Workers in Icelandic Tourism" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 10 June 2025

Magdalena Kopańska

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the lives and work of young Polish people in Icelandic tourism, where the increasing percentage of jobs are performed by migrant workers. This qualitative research conducted with the methodology of ethnographic fieldwork contributes to the fields of migration studies, infrastructure, and tourism geography and specifically to the bodies of work dedicated to the labour migration of Poles to Iceland. The semi-structured interviews and participant observations were made during work at the hotel and visits to places of employment of the study's participants in summer 2024. The sample concerned consists of twenty Poles employed in the sector.

The current shape of the Icelandic job market is marked with the demand-driven work arrangements, high labour turnover, substandard employment, and fluctuating demand for labour force. This results in precarious working and living conditions of migrants in low strata jobs. This research offers a novel and original framing of mobility and is placed within the debate around post-accession migration from Poland, especially in relation to the concept of *liquid* migration. This study aims at identifying how those who work in the sector conceptualise and approach volatile employment in reference to their *personal temporalities*, that is individually experienced past, present and future. A concept of *chance* is developed to indicate a common approach of young Poles to work in Icelandic tourism. *Chances* emerge at the intersection of structural traits of a flexible job market and individual actions of working and migrating subjects. The framework of Different Approaches Towards Chance is developed to address people's attitudes towards their mobility experience. The analysis of research's data offers an avenue to advancing the scholarly debate on tourism-worker nexus, temporality as an axis of inequality, migration and tourism infrastructures; as well as presenting a case study of those debates in the context of Polish labour in Iceland.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Prof. Andreas Dafinger and Prof. Johanna Markkula for guiding me through the process of preparation for the fieldwork and thesis writing. This work in its current shape is due to invaluable feedback and conversations I held with you.

Thanks to my dear family and friends for supporting me throughout the research and writing process. Special thanks to Sam who has been the first reviewer and commenter of all my work, gave me a space to test and discuss my ideas and have performed an immense emotional labour supporting me in this process. Thanks to Yoline who cared for me in Vienna and for my parents and sisters who cared for me remotely from Warsaw.

I am grateful for the trust and friendship of those I met in Iceland. I am deeply touched by the enthusiasm and life energy of people who choose *chances* and live by the virtue of their uncertainty.

Special thanks to Prof. Anna Wojtyńska and Lara Wilhelmine Hoffmann from University of Iceland, as well as Prof. Horolets from University of Warsaw for feedback on my research and accommodating me in Iceland.

List of Illustrations

Table of contents

Chapter one: Introduction

1.1. Openings, Closures and Chances: the scope of this study.

Figure 1A photo frame found in a charity shop in Akureyri
on the occasion of meeting with my interlocutors in August 2024.

"Something closes,

and something opens.

(...)

Another surprise,

it caught me from around the corner.

How did it happen?

Six months have passed."

Stefanova[1], the lyricist of the song above, wrote it whilst working in Icelandic tourism. We met in Iceland during my anthropological fieldwork in summer 2024 and have kept in touch since. Nearly a year after my departure from the island, Stefanova released her newest song titled "Czas" eng. "Time". As she told me during our phone call, this piece is based on a poem she wrote when she found herself at the crossroad of another working season in Iceland. She arrived to the country in fall 2021 and consequently extended her initial plan to work abroad for three months. Her employment on the island evolved around several occupations, many of which she performed simultaneously and changed erratically, finding new opportunities to capitalise on. She mostly worked in the lowest paid service jobs, which were established by an unofficial agreement with the employer and protected by an adequate local labour union.

The moments of openings and closure of work opportunities imbued a particular sense of time in Stefanova. She experienced its acceleration, as in "How did it happen? Six months

---

[1] Stefanova is an actual artist pseudonym of my interlocutor. Since I am referring to her artwork I wanted to give her credit for it, and will refer to her person throughout this thesis with the artist's stage name. Therefore, this case is the only one with partial pseudonymisation of personal data apparent in this thesis. I have consulted this choice with the person concerned and shared the context in which she will appear as Stefanova.

have passed" and mundaneness, "[the] Ordinariness has taken hold. The triviality of my thoughts. They turn into banality". The concurrent fast and slow passing of time experienced by Stefanova is an effect of the instability and flexibility of her employment. In her first working season in Iceland, she found avenues for her creative work and other passions, which she engaged in while being employed at multiple jobs. She thought of these activities in terms of "personal missions", goals she has set for herself to grow as a person. Thus, both the new skills and financial benefits were important for her to gain at the time of work abroad. On one hand, the adaptable manner of arranging job and leisure commitments generated (dis)continuities, but also presented itself as a range of potentialities she capitalised on.

When reflecting upon Stefanova's handling of time in the face of flexible employment in Iceland, the "Hard work never killed anyone, but why take the chance?" question might be posed. I interpret this seemingly banal inquiry altering its rhetorical tone. The phrase in the original version has a humorous tone and primarily renders a message to refrain from hard work[2]. However, its quality can be flipped and understood literally to inquire why one might be willing to take up work, an uncertain *chance*. The hard work of manoeuvring between several employers, the works' physical nature, as well as the effort put into self development, were all *chances* Stefanova took up, hoping for their positive outcome. Why did she take them up? I find an answer to this in the structural issues dictating Stefanova's world of work, as well as in her personal biography and migration story.

In 2024, 44% of employees working in the Icelandic tourism industry were from an immigrant background, constituting around 14 thousand individuals, which is the highest figure recorded to date (Statistics Iceland, n.d. -a). Many of those workers, similar to Stefanova, were

---

[2] The fully literal investigation of this question would also result in deconstructing the statement "Hard work never killed anyone". Without doubt, it is a fallacy; hard work has obviously caused many deaths. In my treatment of this phrase, I am not going to address this claim.

young Poles. How did these people approach the precarious employment in the sector? How did they form their attitudes towards the (dis)continuous time of openings and closures governing the low strata jobs in tourism industry? In this thesis, I will present a concept of *chance* and will elaborate on how people approach it in the context of work in Icelandic tourism. In general, this thesis will address issues at the intersection of labour migration, migration infrastructure and tourism geography.

1.2. Research questions and thesis structure.

In order to investigate the problems marked out above, the three research questions are going to be addressed in the following thesis:

1. What is the relationship of Poles working in Icelandic tourism with their everyday environment, considering their motivations and biographies that brought them to work in this setting?

2. What defines Polish workers' everyday, its tangible nature and social context?

3. What are the circumstances dictating the relationships and shape of work of Polish workers in the Icelandic tourism industry?

The above leads to elaboration on temporality, addressed in the question: "How does employment in Icelandic tourism affect Polish workers' attitudes and approaches towards time?".

To address the above, this thesis will be structured as follows. The second chapter will reveal the research design and chosen methodology, and also address the researcher's positionality. The third chapter will provide historical background which will contextualise and

introduce to the studied case. The fourth chapter will address the chosen literature, which will put the studied phenomena in the perspective of wider scholarly debate. The fifth chapter will consist of conceptual and methodological guidelines which will compliment the presented literature and chosen methodology. The Background and Literature Review chapters will partially address the second and third research questions revealed above. These dilemmas will be further illustrated in the sixth chapter with the ethnographic data. The sixth chapter will consist of ethnographic account framed in the chosen conceptual framework. The Different Approaches Towards Chance framework will mostly speak to the main research question about time but also respond to the remaining ones with the collected data. The last, seventh chapter will reiterate my findings, show their relevance for selected literature and highlight their contributions to the chosen body of scholarly work. This structure will enable to address the research questions by introducing different levels of analysis; macro referring to the historical context and wider processes; meso, that is specific dynamics which occur between actors and institutions in the presented frame; micro, that is individual actions. These three levels will be mirrored in thesis' structure, which will depict and analyse the chosen phenomena from the broadest to the most specific ones and show their entanglements.

Chapter two: Methodology, research design and implementation

The following chapter will reflect on the research design and methodology implemented for data collection. First, I will address how I designed my methodology in relation to the research questions and interest. In subsection 2.1., I will address the way in which I accessed the field. Furthermore, in section 2.2., I will address the composition of my research group. In section 2.3., I will elaborate on my interview questionnaire and show on what basis I came to

my conclusions, which will lead me to the discussion on my research's limitations. I will only highlight the composition of questionnaire and do not disclose other research methods with much detail, since my conclusions were mostly formulated according to this source and participant observations.

2.1. Research design and field methods.

The methodology implemented in the research is ethnographic fieldwork which I conducted for two months, between July and August 2024 in Iceland. My main research site was the Northern town of Akureyri, where I worked in a hotel as a night receptionist and a housekeeper and rented accommodation. Additionally, I spent two weeks in the South of the island where I travelled to remote guesthouses and spent time in the capital, Reykjavik. During this time, I conducted participant observations at the locations of my work and leisure, which I spent with research participants and other social actors (such as hotel managers and other workers). The participant observation also extended the time of my stay in Iceland, and I followed up on the life of some of my informants after I left the field (see: Amit 2000, 9). The primary source of my data are semi-structured interviews. I conducted 21 of these interviews, each lasting between 30 minutes and two hours. The research sample will be described in the section 2.2. Research Group.

My engagement in the field followed some common, conduct guidelines. These were reflexivity, "long-term and open-ended commitment, attentiveness, relational depth, and sensitivity to context" (Ingold 2014, 384). Ethnographic fieldwork and its applied methods (participant observation, note taking, interviews) are common means in anthropology to access the lifeworlds of a chosen study group (see: Okely 1992; Amit 2000; Ingold 2014). The semi-structured interview, which aims to recognise participants' mobility narratives, their attitudes

and sentiments, has also been employed by researchers concerned with similar social groups (see: Schaller 2016; Zampoukos 2017). The application of the mentioned methodology requires openness and adaptability depending on the circumstances and therefore cannot be rigidly designed before the researcher's engagement in the chosen context (Amit 2000, 17). The way in which I engaged in the field was ultimately related to my positionality (Okely 1992, 2). Therefore, it is necessary to mention that the place of my origin, age, gender and social class resonates with that of many of my interlocutors. My research interest in the management and perception of time became important to me because, to some extent, I could relate my life situation to that of my informants. Some of whom I knew from back home or became close friends with. There occurred to be some commonality in which young Polish people (including me) think of their dreams, plans for the future and the circumstances in which we are performing those. However, I am aware of the fact that in the field I was primarily a researcher. Even if I found myself close in positionality to my interlocutors, my university affiliation and research interest in the field made me an outsider to the group. In summary, the knowledge presented in this thesis has grown on me in the forge of my relationship with those whom I encountered in the field (Ingold 2014, 391). This knowledge has been both rendered and analysed by me in an iterative manner (Aspers and Corte 2019, 155).

I implemented several channels through which I reached and established relationships with my interlocutors. I had an initially easier access to the group of five informants who resided in rented accommodation and worked in the tourism sector in Akureyri. I met Stefanova, my first informant and gatekeeper to the local reality and networks, as a result of personal connections from home. Other participants were scouted from a private Facebook group for the Polish community in Akureyri, on which I posted an invitation for the study in which I addressed my university affiliation and explained the objectives of my research. I gained access to the group of workers and residents of secluded guesthouses through the personal networks

of my other interlocutors and by engaging in everyday interactions in the town and my place of work.

All of my informants were notified about the nature of my study and, mostly, consented to the recording of data as well as the data afterlife and its processing. Before the recording of each interview, I gathered signed consent forms from each participant who agreed to its statements. I honoured requests regarding the anonymisation of data, and I will present my findings without using the informants' real names or other information which might reveal their identity. For this purpose, I also decided to anonymise the names of settlements and towns other than municipal Akureyri. That is due to the small population of these locations and potential easy identification of migrant workers therein.

An additional important component of my study is a photography and art project conducted for the purpose of the Advanced Certificate in Visual Theory and Practice (VTP AC) at Central European University. The project, named *Safe Journey Welcome Back*, had a collaborative dimension, and it has been conducted with full agreement and understanding of its purposes by its participants. This part of my study can be found under the link: https://rb.gy/0u9icb which directs to the digitised final publication presenting results of the project. Importantly, *Safe Journey Welcome Back* has proved to be a great way to establish and evolve relationships centered upon the premise of creating a visual account of the life of my interlocutors together.

2.2 Research Group.

The great majority of the interviewees had Polish citizenship, spoke Polish as their native language and identified as nationals of Poland; except for two people who identified with their place of birth (Greece) and parents' nationality (Russia) as well as with Poland. I label this

8

group of my informants as Poles. Two of my interviewees were Czech, and our interactions were held in our second language, English. Overall, my findings are informed by interactions with a much greater number of people, both Polish and non-Polish with whom I have conversed and spent time not dictated by the framework of the interview meeting. At times, when such encounters resulted in conclusions or reflections regarding my research questions, I recorded them in my field notes.

In this study, I will address my findings regarding Polish workers in the hospitality sector in Iceland. My conclusions are based on the thematic analysis of thirteen interviews and field notes based on interactions with a group of six other interlocutors. Overall, this analysis is based on the testimonies and personal stories of twenty people (one of the interviews concerned a couple), who were employees in Iceland in the summer of 2024. Four of them identify as men, two as nonbinary, and the remaining 14 as women. They come from different parts of Poland, anywhere from the northern east to the central south, predominantly from cities and urban nuclei. Their age ranges from 19 to 35 years old at the time of the interviews, with the majority of the interlocutors (twelve) being under the age of thirty. All the interlocutors have been previously engaged in job market (either in Poland or abroad) and were, at least, graduates of high school and holders of the Matura, final exam. Fourteen of them were staff members of hotels or guesthouses, and at the time of their contract, lived on the premises of their employer, in the dedicated staff houses. Most of these locations were outside any regular settlement, except for three interlocutors, who lived and worked in small towns (between 800 and 2.5 thousand inhabitants). Overall, this study group worked in nine different hotels and guesthouses, out of which I visited five and stayed overnight in three of them. Six of these businesses were located in the northern municipality of Akureyrarbær, and the remaining three were in the southern municipalities of Skaftárhreppur, Hrunamannahreppur and Bláskógabyggð. The remaining six employees of hospitality worked in the tourism and service

sector and resided in rented accommodations, all based in the northern town of Akureyri (19.5 thousand inhabitants).

At the time of the interview, seven of the people concerned, worked in Iceland for the first time (not necessarily visiting the country for the first time); nine were returning for another working season, five of whom for the second one. From this group, three people found employment in the hospitality industry in the fall, the rest working only in the summer. Three people overall have resided in Iceland on a more permanent basis and have been engaged in the labour market (employed or registered unemployment) outside the summer months. Out of these interlocutors, the person who has been residing in Iceland for the longest has been there for 10 years, and the remaining two for a year. Obviously, the situation of an interlocutor who has lived in Iceland for the longest differs from those who arrived relatively recently or have been engaged in the labour market not year-round. However, since this person was also employed in the service sector catering for tourists (souvenir store by the tourist attraction), her testimonies on work and life were relevant for my analysis. Of all the interlocutors, five of them have worked abroad in other European countries prior to working in Iceland. Eleven of them have had friends or relatives who have worked in the country in the past or were working there at the time of the interview. Among the interlocutors, there were three couples of friends or life partners who had come to Iceland to work together and a pair of relatives who had joined their family residing in the country.

2.3. Interview questionnaire and research limitations.

The interviews related strictly to my research questions and were concerned with themes apparent in the past, present and future tense of my interlocutor's lives. An initial question leading me to this query was "Could you tell me about your way to Iceland: at what point in

your life did you make this decision and what led to it?". The beginning of the conversation was also remarked by the information that it is an "open and broad" question, which led many of my interlocutors to interpret it differently and choose a relevant topic for the discussion. According to the information I gained from this testimony, I navigated the questionnaire accordingly and selected a logical succession of the issues at hand.

By inquiring about the past, I learned about motives and initial ideas regarding the participants' stays and their personal grounding. This concerned questions about preparation for the move, such as investments and interactions with close ones, and ways through which the employment abroad was arranged together with the know-how which comes with it.

Most of the interview was centred around issues concerning the present moment in which my interlocutors found themselves. I inquired about the conditions of work (such as actual work intensity, relationships at the workplace, duties, and requirements). I was especially interested in personal experiences of these aspects and asked about people's attitudes and views on their jobs, including queries about emotions and feelings. Another topic I wanted to identify among testimonies was an attitude towards the living space and the surrounding environment. Among these questions were ones about the arrangements of household tasks, relationships with housemates, sentiments towards the personal and shared spaces and their everyday executions and inner politics.

What concerns the least populated part of my questionnaire is the question about the future. This group of questions was concerned with issues of planning, implementation and development of ideas connected to the time after the end of the work period. I have developed my understanding of approaches towards time from these testimonies, participant observations and established relationships, which allowed for insight into people's lives after the interview. As I will show throughout the following chapters, I found out that work in Icelandic tourism is

marked with uncertainty and has limited availability in terms of time and demanded workforce. Therefore, analysing my ethnographic material, I developed the concept of *chance,* which I later related to people's attitudes and ways of managing time during their labour mobility.

The above explanation of my methodology and data processing leads to the recognition of my study's limitations. Firstly, my argument is based on data gathered during a summer season, which is a time of the year with heightened tourism operations in Iceland and high-end mobility of migrant workforce to the country. Therefore, my observations on people's approaches towards work in Iceland relate only to this point in time. However, thanks to inquiring about people's past and future, I also learnt about their (im)mobilities, that is periods of work and non work, outside of the summer months. Another shortcoming of this thesis is my analysis of the chosen research group without relating it to the other groups of Poles on the island, such as older generation migrants or workers of different sectors than tourism. This choice was dictated by the length and scope of my study. Another social group which could have been included in my analysis are representatives of tourism managers, such as employers of my informants and sites' owners. Again, I have not spoken with these people because of the length and scope of my study and also the fact that these interviews would have to be held in English, the operational language of tourism sites. Inquiring about migrant's lives and their personal temporalities proved to be insightful in my native language, Polish. Therefore, I also dropped the idea of speaking with other nationals employed in low strata jobs in tourism and that's why I have conducted only two interviews with Czech women. Finally, another shortcoming I recognise in my writing is the selective thematic scope of my final thesis, that is temporality. However, thanks to my research questions, I will also elaborate on the wider circumstances leading to people's Approaches Towards Chance. I will not go into details about other aspects of people's mobilities, such as migrant imaginaries, relationship with the Polish diaspora and host community, as well as wider societal trends leading to labour migration of

young Poles. I have learnt about the above topics through my fieldwork, but due to the scope of this Master's thesis and for the clarity of my argumentation, I will not speak about them extensively.

Chapter three: Background and Historical Information

In order to investigate research questions and context marked out above, I will provide preliminary information that will serve as a backdrop against which the events described in this thesis will be set. In the following paragraphs, I will mention chronologically the process of Iceland's modernisation in the second half of the 20th century with a focus on infrastructural developments and an influx of migrant workforce to the country. In this query, the issue of migration from Poland will be key, and the context of Polish post-accession migration patterns will be mentioned. Next, I will map out the topic of Icelandic tourism in regard to the country's expanding global connectedness and rising field of migration. Thanks to this inquiry, I will expose the context of the flexibilisation of the job market. This foundation will allow me to elaborate on the issues directly related to my research problem, that is, the development of the tourism industry and the character of migrants employed in the sector. This will be further developed in the literature review section.

3.1. Modernisation of Iceland: Developments of physical and migrant infrastructure in the 20th century.

Broadly speaking, the most substantial process from which all the other issues presented originate is the gradual economic prosperity of Iceland and the infrastructural developments that followed in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of 21st. One of the most relevant modernisation projects in the contemporary history of Iceland is the expansion of the

road system, with the ring road, circling the whole island and connecting secluded settlements, being finished in the 1970s (Feltendal 2013, 66). This was followed by other important developments such as the advancement of shipyards and the building of an aluminium smelter in the 1980s (Wojtyńska 2011, 32). The impact of these improvements brought a change in the spatial characteristics and economic profile of many locations. This can be illustrated with the example of one of my research sites, the biggest town outside the capital region, Akureyri. This Northern settlement experienced major urbanisation in the span of 20th century and eventually converted its economic heritage of harbour trade to the service and knowledge-based industries. The modern-day developments of the town's architecture and infrastructure appeared amidst the emergence of neoliberal policies, which shifted from the post-war regulated economy to privatisation and deregulation in the 2000s (Skaptadóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016, 21). Overall, the move toward an open market was prompted by a set of political choices, such as waiving visa regulation for foreign contractors in the late 80s, joining the European Economic Area in 1994 and the Schengen Area in 2001 (ibid.). These reforms resulted in an increase of foreign mobility to the country and the employment of a migrant workforce needed for the development projects. Since the rise of work migration, Polish people have been the largest minority in Iceland.

Wojtyńska, who extensively studied the topic of Polish migration to Iceland, detected distinctive periods of heightened mobility between the two countries (2011, 30). In the context of my study, it is important to highlight that early involvements of Poles in Icelandic society were related to workers' transfers, which happened amidst the above-mentioned modernisation projects of the 80s and 90s. Since then, the continually growing migrant community which settled in Iceland was easing the way for their relatives and friends, establishing a migrant network (Wojtyńska 2011, 41). The political transformation of Poland in the early 90s and the joining of the European Union, merged in time with Iceland entering the European labour market and that resulted in the most numerous influx of Poles coming to the Northern state.

According to data from Statistics Iceland, there were 3,331 Poles in Iceland in 2006, which is a sudden increase compared to 1,541 in 2005 (Statistics Iceland n.d.-b) and a significant number considering the total population of 299,891 in 2006 (Statistics Iceland n.d.-c).

Wojtyńska's observations correlate with the wider characteristics of migration processes which happened in Poland since the accession to the European Union (see: Glorius et al. 2013). The most notable trait of Polish migrants detected by the scholar is the financial reason for the relocation and entering the foreign labour market without intention for long-term settlement, yet consequent extension of the period of stay according to fluctuating circumstances (Wojtyńska 2009, 37). Such an approach toward work abroad was primarily possible due to the array of new destinations available, and approachable because of the developing transport and communication models, such as the Internet and international budget travel (see: Janta and Ladkin 2013; Preiss 2022). These phenomena were all emerging amidst neoliberal policies bringing together job markets and allowing pan-European flow of workers.

3.2. Modern Day Iceland: Neoliberal advancements, tourism boom and expanding field of migration.

Generally, statistics reveal that prior to 2008, there was a consequent rise of different nationals immigrating to the country (Statistics Iceland n.d.-d). It was the citizens of Slovakia, Slovenia and Lithuania, new EU member states, who, as well as Poles, were gradually increasing in numbers. It is the crisis of 2008 which slowed down the influx of foreigners to Iceland, with the observable intensification and diversification of different nationals incoming, which happened only after the year 2012 (ibid.). The current Icelandic migration field is somewhat an aftermath of these reformulations and brought up the fact that in 2024, immigrants constituted 18.2% of the total population, amounting to approx. 17 thousand individuals; 32.1%

of all the immigrants, that is around 22.4 thousand people, were from Poland (Statistics Iceland. n.d.-e). The other major minorities were from Ukraine and Lithuania (ibid.).

The newest advancement dictating the world of work of my interlocutors is the development of the tourism industry in Iceland. Following the findings of Jóhannesson and Huijbens, tourism has been perceived as a remedy for the economic crisis of 2008 and has been followed by the extensive developments of infrastructure catering for visitors (2013, 143). This emergence directly follows the trend described earlier, that is the shift from a resource-based economy toward one oriented at services, with a private sector and entrepreneurial freedom playing a crucial role in accommodating the demand (Jóhannesson, Huijbens 2013, 139). The advancement of Iceland's visibility on the globalised tourism market is due to the marketing strategy of the Icelandic Tourism Board, which successfully piqued consumers' interest in the country since 2010 (Skaptadóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016, 23). This trend can be seen in the number of foreign visitors arriving. This figure amounted to approx. 488.6 thousand people in 2010 and around 2.3 million in 2024 (Ferðamálastofa n.d.). Since the local labour pool was not sufficient to provide for the rising sector, the foreign workforce had to be employed to fill the vacant niches (Koutsogeorgopoulou 2023, 7). Over the years, there has been a heightened proportion of foreigners working in tourism in comparison to Icelanders. Júlíusdóttir and Halldórsdóttir observed that in 2011, 14.6% out of approx. 33.4 thousand workers in Icelandic tourism were of immigrant background (2020, 171). In 2024, immigrants constituted 44% of the workforce in tourism, amounting to around 14 thousand individuals. According to the special processing of data accessible to Júlíusdóttir and Halldórsdóttir, the most numerous group working in Icelandic tourism in 2019, outside of Icelanders, were Polish nationals (2020, 171). The authors also point out the international character of the workforce and name multiple other European nationalities engaged. This observation complies with the earlier described character of the

16

Icelandic migrant workforce, which consists mostly of Europeans, with the biggest share of Polish nationals.

Many of the tourism sites in Iceland are reliant on nature tourism and operate only in the summer months. A big share of the positions offered are seasonal and are strongly dependent on the changing climate circumstances. It is recognised that tourism has a modest entry barrier and is often considered to be a low skilled sector (see: Koutsogeorgopoulou 2023) as it hires individuals without host language competences and occupational training. A standard in the industry is hiring workers at trial periods without long term contracts, guaranteeing minimum wage (Karlsdóttir and Jóhannesson 2016, 53). Precarious circumstances of employment are prompted by the volatile nature of the demand, and were described by Karlsdóttir and Jóhannesson, "the tourism labour force (...) has to be available at particular time periods. The nature of the demand is such that this labour force must have sufficient flexibility to meet daily, weekly, and seasonal fluctuations." (2016, 43). This results in the hypermobility of employed individuals and their high disposability as their position is typically not secured for long term (Júlíusdóttir and Halldórsdóttir 2020, 183). Another aspect of organisation of labour which is a salient point in the context of precarity is housing. It is a common practice for employers who hire migrant workers to also offer work accommodation. In the Icelandic context, Júlíusdóttir and Halldórsdóttir discuss the common issues which arise with such an interlinkage, among them substandard housing, overcrowding, high rent with questionable salary-rent ratio (2020, 181). These issues are commonly caused by the fact that employers often have to improvise in the face of market volatility and insufficient regulations.

The Icelandic tourism has been reliant on the private sector with answering growing demand and development of the industry (Skaptadóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016, 23). It is on the side of private operators to answer to the central marketing strategies and the following infrastructural developments and to comply with the top-down directives. This reliance on

17

private entrepreneurship led to the expansion of micro, small and medium size businesses which constitute the majority of all the operating actors (Statistics Iceland n.d.-f). Work conditions in these places are restricted and monitored by the appropriate labour unions, which follows the fact that Iceland has the highest labour union density in Europe, amounting to 92%. The legal protection of unions is as well legally binding for all the foreigners employed in Iceland. The collective agreements constitute that even seasonal workers employed without written contract, have to deduce union fees and become union members (Júlíusdóttir and Halldórsdóttir 2020, 175). An important remark to make is that however people are often recruited on flexible, unofficial contracts, they can still seek legal and otherwise support from their unions. Union membership guarantees assertion of wage level as well as social benefits. An integral aspect of organisation of labour in Icelandic tourism which is not under the jurisdiction of labour unions is housing, which evidently adds up to the precarity of this element.

In light of the above revision, some key components of the Icelandic international labour market are visible. As shown, migrant workers constitute a great share of the workforce in Icelandic tourism, a rapidly growing and economically significant sector for the local market. I recognised that due to the historical ties between Poland and Iceland, it is Polish workers who dominate in sectors which are seen to be less favourable in terms of remuneration and workload for Icelandic workers. Due to such hierarchisation, work in tourism is characterised by precarity of employment. In the following Literature Review, I will refer to the context presented above with the chosen scholarly fields.

Chapter four: Literature review

To evaluate the research questions and the chosen empirical parameters, I decided to refer to three scholarly fields: labour migration, infrastructure and tourism geography. The

chosen literature will expose different strands of my study accordingly. The aim of this thesis is to address the issue of temporality. Therefore, the mentioned academic areas will later be complemented and tied together with a debate on temporality, which will be adequately related and recognised throughout this chapter's sections.

I see the field of infrastructure and tourism studies as comprehensively addressing the structural issues referred to in this thesis. I will utilise them to locate the prevailing practices and their physical and digital manifestations as they occur in the context of the tourism industry. The first research question (see: chapter one) aims at gaining insight into the perspectives of individuals who work in tourism. These personal standings are grounded in specific drivers and biographies, which inevitably are played out in the wider socio-historical context. In order to investigate this problem in the context of my ethnographic data, the field of migration studies will be accounted for. The literature review of relevant concepts in migration studies will be instructive for the discovery of prevailing migration patterns as well as phenomena related to individual standings of migrating subjects. Furthermore, I will identify how studies of migration, infrastructure, and tourism geography reflect on the subject of temporality which will be followed on with elaboration on *chance*. The following literature review will speak to some broader academic debates and further mention how those have been approached by studies dedicated to Iceland and Poland.

4.1 Migration studies: labour migration and *liquid* migration.

Most fundamentally, the topic of this thesis refers to labour migration. Participation in the foreign labour market is a phenomenon performed in the nexus of structural and individual predispositions. Czaika and Reinprecht addressed the question of "why people migrate", and pointed out various drivers behind such a decision, which is both an effect of "factors and

contexts that shape both individual migration trajectories and broader migration processes" (2022, 49). The authors identify drivers as structural features that enable and constrain the exercise of agency by social actors (2022, 50). The form of such drivers depends on socio-political developments which enable or disable certain migration to appear and foster or suppress specific geographies to become recognisable to people as attainable opportunities (ibid.). Following this assessment, I would like to point to the complexity of migration drivers, which are both the aftermath of the structural set-up and individual decision-making. First, I will address the migration patterns and circumstances which fostered the mobility of young Poles to Iceland. In this regard, below, I will assess the complexities of post-accession migration from Poland to the EU.

The current shape of the migration field in Poland is the aftermath of societal changes which occurred as the country transitioned from post-socialism to the neoliberal, open market economy. Since Poland joined the European Union in 2004, researchers have traced the newly appearing migration patterns and contextualised them in the transnational field where border regimes of centralised politics no longer constrain movement. Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich, one of the key researchers from the field, concluded that the migration which happened since Poland joined the EU is characterised by the enhanced mobility of individuals who have a considerable freedom of engagement in the chosen geographies (2006, as cited in Glorius et al. 2013). This freedom occurs amidst the Schengen zone regulation and the openness of markets to the foreign labour force.

The authors recognise the evolution of *liquid* migration, a designation which refers to the work of philosopher Zygmunt Bauman who diagnosed the condition of the postmodernist subject (Bauman 2005, as cited in Engbersen and Snel 2013, 3). In context of labour migration, scholars use *liquidity* to designate the uncertainty of a plan to stay abroad, which is partly constructed in relation to the fast-changing reality of demand in the receiving labour markets

(Engbersen and Snel 2013, 31; Brzozowski and Kaczmarczyk 2014, 109; Lesinska et al. 2014, 11). It has also been found that those who chose to migrate after 2004 represented a new social class, that is, young, educated, unmarried individuals who sought employment abroad without an exactly specified financial goal or definite duration of this experience (Glorius et al. 2013, 11). Therefore, there often appeared an educational mismatch so that the post accession migrant commonly undertook a low-skilled position abroad (ibid.) However, the low-skilled jobs often offered better remuneration compared with back home. The *liquidity* of migration in the emerging transnational labour field designates the openness of the mobility plan, which is due to the often-changing market arrangements. It has also been discovered that along with the economic motifs, post-accession migrant often presented the will to discover a new lifestyle, a deep dive into different cultural reality and familiarisation with foreign values and social norms (Trevena, 2013, 186). The fluctuating circumstances amidst which those divergent aspirations could have been realised, promoted the agility and flexibility of migrants who had to adjust to the demand-driven markets (Grabowska-Lusinska 2013, 56). I position the concept of *chance* in relation to the phenomena of *liquid* migration. The idea that people capitalise on and adjust to fluctuating circumstances renders a notion that the open market economy provides happenstance incidents which migrants take up and adjust their plans to. *Chance* is both a possibility which arises because of the structural setup in which migrants work and the occurrence which is acted upon by an individual. Bauman's idea of liquid, postmodern life, entails that people live across fragmented incidents which arise because of accelerated social, cultural and economic practices (Tarkowska 2006, 369). The analysis presented in this thesis refrains from seeing people's actions as unbound and brought down to the principle of personal freedom and life experienced from day to day, which are apparent in Bauman's characteristic of the postmodern subject (ibid., 368.). Instead, as will be shown in the ethnographic chapter and brought up in the discussion on structure and agency in the literature review, I will

emphasize that people are coherent, complex social beings who even if they live by virtue of taking up uncertain *chances* are referring them to the totality of their experience. The investigation into how one approaches *chance* will address the personal experiences of the openings and closures, which do not only refer to the current moment but also speak to the past and the future of each individual, hence personal temporalities.

The above recapitulation speaks to the phenomena which arose in Poland over twenty years ago and undoubtedly needs to be assessed in the face of the specific case under investigation, that is, the present-day migrant labour in Iceland. As I have shown in the Background section, the Icelandic tourism and neoliberal advancements necessitate the employment of migrants. In the next section, I will explore the question of "how do migrant workers facilitate their relocation, and how do they reach distant places?". These issues will be revealed thanks to the discussion on physical and digital infrastructure, which will directly refer to the profile of migrating subjects.

4.2. Infrastructure: By what means and how does labour migration emerge?

My analysis of infrastructure will be resolved twofold, firstly, I will outline the meaning of this term in a most broad sense, and further contextualise it in the context of migration studies.

Carse (2016), who revised the genealogy and current use of the term *infrastructure,* instructs that in the modern scholarly debate, this noun should be understood as encompassing abstract and material matter. In the abstract sense, infrastructure relates to the social relationships, logics and hierarchy influencing the overarching processes, for instance, people's mobility (Carse 2016, 36). These abstracted processes happen within the material world, which

is both technical and quotidian, and is facilitated by the design, management, and maintenance of the physical structures, such as transportation or digital facilities (ibid.). Edwards (2019) argued that both aspects of infrastructure, abstract and concrete, are executed and adapted to by its users. Therefore, agents who navigate through the complex assemblages of material and social infrastructures inhabit them and, by this principle, make them into their lifeworlds (Edwards 2019, 365). Evidently, there exist hierarchies, imbalances, and particularities in a way that distinctive agents come to and relate to the specific infrastructures. This sentiment is embraced by Xiang and Lindquist (2014), who relate to the heterogeneity of context-dependent dynamics apparent in the migration process. The primary idea behind migration infrastructure is to look into the processual aspect of movement, which systematically interlinks technologies, institutions and actors (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 122). This approach highlights how people's movement is mediated through migrant networks and looks at the mobilisation of these social assemblages to make migration happen. One of the key takeaways from this concept is that specific infrastructures (abstract and concrete) mobilise the migration of a certain group of people. This, in turn, fosters specific subjectivities of the users of the systems (Xiang and Lindquist 2014, 143). This conclusion resembles the wider debates in infrastructure studies dedicated to the investigation of subjectivity in the face of structural advancements, which were mentioned in earlier paragraphs.

In light of the above, the concept of digital migrant infrastructure elucidates some further nuances of the migration process. Xiang and Lindquist, in their influential paper, differentiated five distinct logics of operation of the migrant infrastructure and Preiss (2022) further elaborated on the digital facet of those. The author pointed to the use of technology by migrants and migrants-to-be and stated that they both mediate and encourage mobility. Voluntary labour migration operates with different mediums corresponding to the three pillars of digital infrastructure. Preiss listed different examples, among them - smartphones and

computers (hardware elements), social media, blogs and online travel agencies (software), as well as advice agencies and governments (actors). These pointed elements of digital migration assemblage speak to further observations of Dekker and Engbersen (2014), who addressed the impact of social media on people's mobility. The authors summarise that due to the ease and speed of information circulated within online social networks, the strategies of migrants can adapt to the accessed information and not only strengthen people's ability to migrate, but also to feed their aspiration to do so (2014, 6). Dekker and Engbersen argued that access to insider knowledge and information infrastructure ultimately renders "streetwise" knowledge for potential migrants (2014, 9), who utilise it thanks to non-traditional, loose and often changing social ties (2014, 7). This observation on migrants' ways of operating in the face of job search signals the influence of specific infrastructure assemblage on the shape and character of migration and type of work performed. This conclusion speaks to the above described concept of *liquid* migration. Migrant infrastructure which is carried with digital means accelerates and populates the available information. These infrastructures both facilitate the emergence of *chances* and dictate their shape and availability, making certain offers prevail and chart the way in which they are utilised by migrants. The usage of *chances* will be described in the chapter six.

The above summarised key issues in infrastructure studies lead to a conclusion that migrants' subjectivity, their drivers, predispositions, desires, and plans correspond to the utilised technology and Internet content those people engage with. Consequently, in the following review of tourism literature, I will discuss the core issue of the migrant/tourist nexus and point to the lifestyle motivations of labour migrants. This assessment will be presented in discussion with the mentioned conclusions about digital migration infrastructure, *liquid migration*, its multidimensional drivers and adjustable handling of time.

4.3. Tourism and its workers: Tourist-worker nexus.

One of the central issues in the studies of tourism geography is the inquiry about the normative categories of tourist and host (Jordhus-Lier and Underthun 2015). Bianchi argued that tourist destinations are sites of cultural encounters where patterns of mobility between different groups and individuals intersect (2000, 7). This thought has been influential for Karlsdóttir, and Jóhannesson, who investigated the boundaries between leisure, travel and work, which demonstrate some interlinkages and are played out in the Icelandic context (2016, 46). Through a set of examples, the authors demonstrated that in the current socio-economic landscape of Iceland (see: chapter three), foreigners enter the domestic economy and contribute to the transnational complementarity between far-away locations. These transnational ties result in the emergence of different practices, such as labour migrants circulating between home and host countries or generating visits of their friends and families to the location of their station (Karlsdóttir and Jóhannesson 2016, 44). Importantly, there is a need to investigate the tourism-worker correlation as originating hierarchies, possible discriminations and exclusions. Additionally, thinking of this relationship as a correlation allows for a distinction of a variety of individual engagements and exploration of a spectrum of fault lines running across class, place of origin and race (see: Jordhus-Lier 2015).

The worker-tourist positionality, as explained in the mentioned literature, contributes to the emergence of distinctive motivations of mobile individuals. The authors argue that those employed in tourism might choose to relocate to Iceland with lifestyle motivations (Karlsdóttir and Jóhannesson 2016). This conclusion resonates with observations of the character of workers in other Nordic nature tourism sites. Bohn and Bernardi, who looked into the case of the tourism industry in Finland, Sweden and Norway, conclude that due to the structural constraints of seasonality, jobs in the sector are mostly non-permanent and render an insufficient basis for

livelihood sustenance for workers (2020, 350). Migrant workers who decide to work on flexible and nonstandard contracts frequently do so due to wage disparities between sending and receiving countries, and the financial benefits of a non-permanent position, which outweigh the lack of security of long-term employment (see: Jordhus-Lier and Underthun 2015). It has been found that the low-paid seasonal jobs are usually performed by women, youngsters, and migrants who, in addition to financial motivations, seek employment in Nordic tourism because of lifestyle motivation (Bohn and Bernardi 2020). Authors provide different examples of these lifestyle drivers, for instance, "young people, many of them still completing their education, take jobs during gap years or holidays, in order to earn pocket money while having adventurous experience" (Karlsdóttir and Jóhannesson 2016, 51).

The above speaks to multidimensionality of migration drivers (Czaika and Reinprecht 2022) and additionally instructs that migrants, due to their lifestyle interest in a certain geography, inhabit an ambiguous position of both migrant and tourist. In here, an intersection of tourism and migration infrastructure also occurs, as people might be simultaneously users of both of these (see: Karlsdóttir and Jóhannesson 2016). Importantly, migrants' desires might be capitalised on by employers who attract adventurous labour force which is seen as transient and inherently non-permanent (ibid.). This issue will be elaborated on in the chapter five.

4.4 Concluding remarks.

In the above recapitulation of some main debates in migration, infrastructure and tourism geography, I have shown how time is interpreted to be an axis of inequality. The prevailing thought was that people operate within assemblages of material and abstract infrastructures which, essentially, either allow or constrains certain practices to arise. I discussed the multidimensionality of individual migration drivers together with the economic

imperative of post-accession migration from Poland which places young Poles working in Icelandic tourism on the spectrum of migrant/worker nexus. This has been shown in the example of post accession migration from Poland, where migrants deployed open-ended plans, easily adjustable to the changing circumstances. Mouldable futures of migrant workers could have arisen due to the newly available geographies and economies. Such was the case of the Icelandic tourism boom, which attracted both tourists and workers who were able to reach the island due to its increased international connectivity and development of transport and tourism infrastructure. I have also recognised that such an arrangement promotes particular migration drivers to prevail so that nature tourism in Nordic countries attracts a young, educated, *adventurous* labour force. This observation has to be revised together with information addressed in the chapter three, that is the emergence of migrant saturated sectors in Icelandic tourism, where foreigners occupy low strata positions. Due to flexibilisation of work and job markets, working conditions and lives of these individuals are marked with precarity. This condition is manifested in the temporal aspect of short term and volatile employment in the tourism sector, which commonly does not provide long term financial substance for migrant workers. Hence, I addressed the concept of *chance*, implying that migrant workers implement different approaches to managing their time in the face of the presented market arrangements and that they frame these within their personal temporalities, that is past, present, and future. As discussed in the migration section, I also spelled out the problem of migrants' distinctiveness in context of their understanding of time which nuances the *liquidity* of migration. When discussing the fields of migration and infrastructure I also pointed out that people's referral to *chances* is conditioned by their individual standings and structural set up which spurs certain offers and practices. In the following chapter, I will lay ground for the creation of my framework Different Approaches Towards Chance. This conceptualization will be elaborated

27

on in the following ethnographic chapter six, where I will respond to my research questions in parallel to the context presented in the preceding parts.

Chapter five: Conceptual framework and methodological guidelines

This chapter will be dedicated to framing the mentioned literature with some critical approaches to study of tourism labour migration. These guidelines will encompass conceptual and methodological approaches which will direct me at the investigation of Different Approaches Towards Chance.

5.1. Discussion on tourist-worker nexus and methodological foundations for inquiry on temporality.

I will put the assessment of tourist/migrant nexus in light of writing of Zampoukos (2017) and James (2024) who closely examined the injustice this relationship generates. James recognised that the observed blurriness between the categories of tourist and migrant is beneficial for governments of wealthy countries (2024, 1054). The seasonal and booming Icelandic tourism industry necessitates filling labour shortages with migrant workers, and the flexible and insecure forms of employment are able to address these fluctuating shortages effectively. James asserts that the mobility infrastructure which brings and facilitates the movement of foreign labour takes the forms of bureaucracies, policies and laws (2024, 1061). These instruments govern people's engagement in the economy and generate uneven levels of access to rights between citizens from different country states (2024, 1055). Overall, James comes from the theoretical standpoint which highlights the uneven hierarchies dictating the work of the mobile, who due to their respective positionality can either "'roam the globe like

masters' or live 'like slaves'" (Hage 2016, 44 as cited in James 2024, 1055). This distinction echoes the previously mentioned diagnosis of Bauman who's views on that matter were recalled by Tarkowska: "the range and freedom of mobility is the most powerful stratification factor (...). It is the criterion of belonging to the world of prosperity or the world of outcasts" (2006, 370).

On the contrary, Zampoukos goes beyond understanding mobility as the overarching stratification line resulting in the distinction between master and slave or the world of prosperity and the world of outcasts. The author reinforced the idea to neglect normative typologies prevalent in the critical study of tourism (2017, 50). However, on a similar note to James, this author also sees the importance of the study of labour mobility together with the inevitable (im)mobility prompted by the transience of labour under late capitalism (2017, 51). The flexibility of the open market has the force of generating and closing opportunities which promote and restrict people's mobility. By this virtue, the author believes that particular lives of individual subjects should be at the core of inquiry into mobility agency (2017, 50). Zampoukos relates to a body of literature dedicated to locating strategizing practices of tourism workers which point to their conscious choice of improving their life situation[3]. Such sentiment was voiced by Alberti (2014 as cited in Zampoukos 2017, 54) who found that migrant workers in London "strategize around their mobility to escape degrading jobs and make strategic use of temp jobs to gain skills, to enrich their social life and to attain other, non-economic gains". However, Zampoukos sees this analytical takeaway centring the workers' strategy to be one dimensional, focusing on a purposeful, linear development that celebrates progress. The author

---

[3] Zampoukos (2017) discusses migrants ability to strategies around their mobility. However, she does not straightforwardly address the distinction between strategies and tactics apparent in the postructuralist literature e.g. in the writing of de Certeau. Her research interest lays in the evaluation of migrants' life narratives in face of labour (im)mmobility but she does not label their life approaches as straightforwadly strategic or tactical as described in the classic literature on the topic (see: Certeau, Michel de. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press).

believes that tourism workers' mobility is not always and everywhere *strategic* as some "have entered the hospitality sector in a way that appear to be happenstance, and some workers might want to leave a peripatetic existence but find themselves in an ambiguous position and in a situation where the options are uncertain" (2017, 54). Zampoukos findings has been accounted to by her methodology which strives to learn about workers' mobility through their narrative accounts on their past and future embedded in the current moment.

As can be seen in the research questions provided in the chapter one, my study approach has much in common with the above listed postulates of Zampoukos. This is mainly because similarly to Zampoukos I see tourism workers not to operate in a linear logic of strategies and small scale tactics but as exercising their particular agency in the face of labour (im)mobility which I encompass under the concept of *chance*. This (im)mobility is dictated by the logic of the open market and its openings and closures governing the emergence and termination of work opportunities. In the same manner to the mentioned author, I also position people's narration and actions to be the most instructive element in the inquiry on the topic of personal temporalities.

5.2 Time and Flexibility.

Overall, the issue of flexibility prevails as the most common structural trait in the mentioned observations from literature across different fields of study and related to migrant labour in the tourism sector. In this section, I would like to draw on some general traits and patterns which emerge due to the phenomena of flexibilisation. In this regard, I will point to scholarship concerned with temporality.

Bear, in "Time as Technique" from 2016, reviewed some central scholarly references which speak to vectors of inequality which occur on canvas of temporality as performed and

understood by people and institutions in capitalist modernity (497). This is referred to a scholarly debate which locates human action within timescapes, that is "networks of representation, technologies, disciplines, and rhythms in time" (2016, 496). These different techniques are employed in regard to time by distinctive actors involved in capitalistic relations. The heterogeneity of actors involved "suture together and generate conflictual unequal relations" (Bear 2016, 497) in regard to perception and management of time. In light of this assessment, the inquiry into time can expose, evaluate and assess inequalities run across classes, genders, and racial categories (Bear 2016, 489). I would like to contribute to this debate by elaborating on personal temporalities and *chances*. How are these inequalities manifested in the logic of flexible accumulation?

Garsten (2008) researched the organisational operations of temporary staffing agencies which supply labour for white collar positions. The author investigated the lifeworlds of workers of such companies in Sweden, UK and US in the late 1990s. This examination insightfully addresses the concerns of modern anthropological debates regarding sense of time and time management as outlined by Bear. This resemblance occurs because Garsten's premise was to detect the interface of power relations "between different expectations and aspirations, between different organisations, systems of control, and between work and market" (2008, 14). Therefore, similarly to Bear, Garsten set out to research the inequalities which result from antithetical application of temporal techniques by different agents. These observations tie together the majority of the described phenomena related to work and workers in Iceland's booming service sector. The following points serve as an effective summary of what has already been covered in the earlier Literature Review section. These main takeaways are as follows:

- Flexible work is largely governed by the logic of improvisation (Garsten 2008, 88).

- Organisational improvisation caters for the demand-driven market (ibid, 89).

- Workers have to be adaptable, agile and embrace change in order to meet organisational demands (ibid, 15).

- Temping jobs have an inscribed insecurity and workers develop different attitudes towards this volatility (ibid, 89). Therefore, workers are tied into circuits of mobility and temporal rhythms they learn to adapt to (ibid, 99).

- Work in these circumstances necessitates certain kinds of individual predispositions. Therefore, flexible work calls for the kinds of people who are willing to yield to its demands and carve their place into its structure (ibid, 100).

The last, mentioned trait of work marked with flexibility refers to the freedom of choice with which people are presented to engage in a certain job. The demand is that an employee is agile and versatile in order to meet the corresponding traits of the corporation and of capital (Garsten 2008, 16). On a concluding note, Garsten sees the above entanglements as rendering flexibility "not an unbound landscape of possibilities, but a bounded space of openings and closures in which individuals have to navigate as best as they can" (ibid, 16). Importantly, the above addressed takeaways from Garsten's writing align with already diagnosed traits of work and workers in Icelandic nature tourism. Furthermore, her judgment of work in late capitalism as being a space of openings and closures speaks to the described analysis of Zampoukos (2017).

Considering the above, in the following ethnographic chapter, I will stress the idea of bounded space of openings and closures to which people relate and according to which they adapt certain temporal *modus operandi*. As will be shown, I conceptualise these personal temporalities to be performed according to Different Approaches Towards Chance, where *chance* is the uncertain opportunity to work in Icelandic tourism. Consequently, I will also

address how the utopia of "landscape of possibilities" is created and how people think of it in terms of their personal temporalities, that is their past, present, and future.

Chapter six: Different Approaches Towards Chance, a conceptual framework addressing the field of personal temporalities

In the following chapter, I will reflect on my ethnographic material using a conceptual framework of Different Approaches Towards Chance, which I specifically developed for this aim. This model will help to address the main research question of this thesis, 'How does employment in Icelandic tourism affect Polish workers' attitudes and approaches towards time?'. To address this issue, I will first present the concept of *chance*, which is key to accessing the field of personal temporalities. I will follow this by elaborating on the conceptual framework, which will be mapped out with two complementary approaches, which I identify as Expand/Evolve or Experience/Endure. I understand these two strategies not to be dichotomous and exclusionary, but complementary and relational. They do not function along the lines of either/or logic, but are compatible with each other because they speak to individual experiences of people, which often escape easy compartmentalisation. I argue that the experience of time of Poles working in Icelandic tourism is played out along the lines of either embracing one's mobility and expanding *chances* presented, or submitting to their limitations and yielding to their effects. This belief will be illustrated with the gathered ethnographic data. A further explanation of the characters of the above pairs of verbs will be provided in the respective sections and illustrated with the gathered data.

6.1 "Luck is my business plan": On concepts of *Chance* and Opportunity.

Chance is not an emic concept, yet it accurately represents the shared approach towards migration to Iceland expressed by my interlocutors. I recognised the commonly defined concept of *chance* in sentiments and motivations that people shared with me. A *chance* is primarily an opportunity that might come to fruition in a favourable turn of events. Nevertheless, the potential of things going one's way is not certain and is prone to fluctuations of external circumstances. In this regard, *chance* differs from an *opportunity*, which denotes fixity of an occasion at hand. An *opportunity* also involves a measurable and predictable outcome, whereas *chance* opens up space for unpredictability and uncertainty, leaving the upcoming effect in flux. That is to say that the phrase "to take a chance" evokes a sense of putting trust into the undertaken actions, whereas "to use an opportunity" cues to a known, desired outcome which certainly can be fulfilled. I believe that both terms hint at a direct effect of one's efforts and reflect one's agency in taking a *chance* presented, or seizing an opportunity given. In the case of *chance*, one acts autonomously towards the speculated outcome and aims at receiving the best results possible with given resources and circumstances, which, importantly, can change along the way. This approach is reflected in a phrase one of my interlocutors reflected on her past employment experience with: "*'Luck' is my business plan.* This sentiment brings the question of how one navigates the uncertain future and circumstances that thwart initial plans. Furthermore, what strategies do an elusive arrangement like that induce in Poles working in Icelandic tourism?

The above can be partially answered with the words of Ela, a Polish-Russian woman in her early 30s who came to Iceland to join her (Polish) partner, who lived in the country for the past three years, working as a construction worker. Ela found employment in Akureyri as a

housekeeper in a hotel a year before our interview. This enterprise offered her a full-time position only in the summer and part-time employment in the winter. Ela had to find an additional source of income and got a cleaning job in a local kindergarten. This instance speaks to the seasonality and the fluctuating demand for the tourism workforce, which results in people not being able to rely on long-term solutions. At the time of the interview, Ela was satisfied with her salary, which was higher than the one she received in her previous workplace in Germany, where she occupied a position relevant to her university degree and from where she travelled to Iceland. This positionality speaks to the diagnosed traits of the *liquid* migrant, such as high educational status, performing work below qualifications, intensified mobility as well as having transnational ties between different job markets. Considering the character of Ela's mobility, it is worth examining how she referred to her move to Iceland. Does this sentiment voice the concept of *chance* presented earlier? The interview question to which the provided answer refers was "How long did you plan to stay here?"

> At first, I wanted to try it out and see how it is here, but now I'm thinking of staying as long as possible, unless the economic situation worsens, and it becomes difficult to find work, in which case I will return to another country. Overall, my goal is to never return to Poland.

The sense of unpredictability expressed in Ela's words relates to my understanding of *chance*, primarily as it points out the external conditions as the main factor affecting her decisions. Furthermore, it is a fact that she actively navigated among the presented circumstances and wished to make the most of the given *chance*, yet was aware of its limitations. These sentiments speak to the character of employment in Icelandic tourism such as limited availability of a full year sustenance, which was addressed in the chapter three.

Yet, people's reasoning behind their mobility was not always straightforwardly referring to the concept of *chance*. For instance, Stefanova, presented in the opening paragraphs of this thesis, had a strong sense of the direct effect on her prosperity and described her move

to Iceland as the "First Day of Independence". She understood her migration to be a liberating instance, cutting her from the lack of prospects and unsatisfactory personal arrangements back home. Stefanova initially migrated to the South of the island, where she worked in a restaurant managed by the family of a friend who arranged her journey. Stefanova also took up many other part-time offers, and her income increased significantly. The money she earned working at the swimming pool, guarding the local culture house, guiding tours in the adventure park and housekeeping at tourist accommodation allowed her to fulfil her dream of travelling, and she decided to visit North America with a friend who also worked in Iceland. This motivation speaks to tourist-worker nexus and the multidimensionality of migration drivers addressed in the chapter three. Stefanova wanted to come back to Iceland after a few months break, as she had learnt that work in Icelandic tourism could provide her with a high income. She needed to "bounce back" financially as she had spent her savings on travelling. Yet, looking for a job from abroad, after an interlude, proved to be difficult, especially because none of her employment in town was designated to be a long-term solution.

> When you leave, you're out of the loop, you don't live here anymore, and there are so many people who are eager to take your place, I'm telling you, it's hard (...). The fact is that even in V [name of the town], I had all these options open if I wanted to go back to all those jobs [her previous jobs], I already had them arranged. But I didn't have a place to stay.

As can be seen above, Stefanova's process of job searching has been done remotely, with the use of a migrant know-how and digital migration infrastructure discussed in Literature Review. Here, the similar lack of stability of employment, also present in the case of Ela, is visible. Another similarity is how both of my interlocutors tied their future with this uncertain set-up and aimed for it to last as long as possible. Stefanova employed all her motivation and energy in finding employment after the period of travels, nevertheless, it seemed like the kind of experience she wished to repeat was no longer available for her. It was as if the *chance* she was given and respectively expanded, ceased and could not be replicated. Similarly to Ela, she

36

refused the idea of coming back to Poland and tried her best to work abroad, regardless of the uncertainty of the feasibility of this plan. After considering different options and being unemployed for a while, Stefanova got an offer to work in Akureyri, where we met in summer 2024. The position she occupied was an entrance-level guide for special tours. She became aware that she was chosen for this job among "millions of people from around the world". The intention to work in Icelandic tourism despite the high competition mentioned is another factor which makes this arrangement resemble a *chance* more than an opportunity. It is apparent in Stefanova's words that getting an offer she had dreamt about was a favourable turn of events, something she could not have predicted succeeding in, and something she considered to be close to impossible considering the number of people interested in the position.

Considering the above outline of *chance*, a conceptual tool which helps to understand the approach of many of my interlocutors to work in Iceland, in the following sections, I will present how people tackle the inscribed uncertainty of such employment. This will strictly relate to the topic of personal temporality.

6.2. Approaching Chance through Expand/Evolve: "To get to know Iceland well, search for opportunities, and just like that, something will come up".

The phrase in the title of this section invokes a common sentiment of a group of my informants who came to work in Iceland with an attitude I recognise as following the postulate of embracing one's mobility and expanding the *chances* presented. "To get to know Iceland well", the beginning of the quote I noted in my field notes after an interaction with Judyta, is one of the main motivations shared with me in the interviews of this group. A desire to explore the country was often recalled by people who chose to take up the position in Icelandic tourism

as a result of a wish to begin a new chapter in their lives and is often correlated with lifestyle motivations discussed in the chapter four. As will be shown in the following examples, an interest in exploring Iceland correlates with an intention to move away from Poland. A *chance* of getting to know Iceland is in fact a *chance* to forget about one's life back home.

6.2.1 Judyta

Judyta described her main motivation to work in Iceland as an act of cutting herself from the negativity of her past and changing her city lifestyle into a more satisfactory and balanced one. Back in Poland, Judyta occupied a well-paid job in an IT company, which position was related to her computing education. Back home, she also engaged voluntarily in charity work. Initially, she wished to earn extra money to pay back old debts. She also wanted to sustain herself in a voluntary job she wanted to pursue full-time, as it was an activity giving her a sense of purpose, in contrast to the office job, which she felt drained at. She visited Iceland a few years before our interview as a tourist, and she was charmed by the natural environment and the cold climate she enjoys. After browsing through online forums, she found a Polish job influencer who promoted work in Icelandic tourism as a *chance* to gain a lot of money, whilst being surrounded by the natural environment and performing easy, physical tasks. Judyta pointed out to me the different advantages of a housekeeping job she wanted to take up. Firstly, her salary would be comparable to a specialist's remuneration she received in Warsaw, yet her costs of living would be lower in Iceland, as she wished to find employment with accommodation and food provided. Secondly, she wanted to have access to a staff car, which would allow her to go on sightseeing trips during days off. Her enjoyment of the natural environment would be possible as her mind would be taken off the pressure of an office job. Judyta wished to replace the stress she felt in Poland with tasks that would enable her to "have her mind not busy and perform tasks automatically". The housekeeping position appeared to her as a perfect solution to relax and be able to enjoy Iceland in the meantime. This

outline clearly manifests the intersection of tourist-migrant positionality and speaks to lifestyle motivations of migrants in the Nordic tourism. This example additionally informs about another facet of digital migration infrastructure, that is an influencer's activity, which generates the idea of "land of possibilities".

Judyta planned to stay in Iceland for at least three months, yet as our relationship grew, I discovered that her actual desire was not to return to Poland at all, and she kept looking for reasons to stay abroad. This was partially linked with her idea of moving abroad, which she thought of as a *chance* she took up and wanted to use to the fullest. Additionally, she had no set plans for returning, and because she wanted to experience a different way of life, she developed new friendships and passions while also managing to pay off her financial dues. Her initial interest in exploring Iceland grew into a wish to explore a new lifestyle and change her environment for one in which she could flourish. She achieved these imperatives by finding new work opportunities and embracing change. In the meantime of our two-month relationship, Judyta took up at least four different jobs in the Icelandic tourism and service sector. Judyta's actions speak to the previously described flexible employment in Icelandic tourism and the resulting emergence of *chances*, uncertain offers to be capitalised upon. Judyta's sentiment additionally refers to a sense of temporality which is not limited by a horizon of any obligation which ties to home or some other place. The urge to change one's life and not to return to an old one affects a wish to expand and evolve in the current of ongoing events. A conflict which arises here relates to the often limited possibilities of long-term employment in Iceland, with which people tie their dreams and desires for a change.

6.2.2. Kacper

The sense of temporality and time management exemplified above could be linked to the financial position Judyta had. Her relatively good salary in Poland, together with a social

status of an educated young professional, could have possibly contributed to the feasibility of her open-ended plan, grounded in lifestyle motivations. Nevertheless, there was a group of my interlocutors who took up work in Icelandic tourism with such motifs, yet without significant financial means to achieve it and less privileged social standings than Judyta. Kacper, a Polish man in his 30s, remembered his life back in Poland as limiting and degrading in terms of a lack of prospects and career advancements. Kacper used to work in several bars and restaurants in a major city in the West of Poland, where he tried to establish himself as a bouldering coach in the local gym. Yet, he recognised that due to a lack of initial capital to sustain himself in this passion and without established connections, he could not prosper in his workplace. Similarly to many of my interlocutors, Kacper had also achieved an MA degree, yet he never worked in the field related to his education. He recalled a big city where he resided as being an ugly and dirty landscape, in which he had to live from pay cheque to pay cheque. A dissatisfaction with his life situation at that time was met with a *chance* presented by one of his bouldering students, who knew about his financial issues and made him aware of the possibility of working in Icelandic tourism. His student recommended that he "just write and send it [a job searching e-mail], add your CV and say that you want to come for a few months and that you might like to stay a little longer". Following this guide, Kacper succeeded in getting a job at a family-run guest house in the North of the country. He recalled that at the time of arranging the job from Poland, he was not certain about the period he would be employed for, nor the exact position he would occupy at the guesthouse. He said that staff assembled through online recruitment could have been allocated to any service position, from pot wash to front of house. This instance speaks to the described migrant infrastructure through which migrants access information and facilitate their move (see: 4.2 Infrastructure). Kacper's job offered him seasonal employment, yet he envisioned staying abroad for longer and did not buy a return ticket. Here again, the concept of uncertainty and *liquidity* of labour migration comes forward. Kacper's attitude

towards this volatile *chance* provides additional information about how people typically perceive an offer to work in Icelandic tourism. Regardless of the time limitation of the given *chance*, people wish for it to be a long-term solution.

During the interview, Kacper expressed how his work and leisure time in Iceland are significantly more satisfactory than in Poland. Kacper grew very passionate about Icelandic culture and environment, and summarised his move as "fixing his soul and fixing his budget". One of the factors contributing to Kacper's satisfaction was the low cost of living, which he succeeded at maintaining thanks to an arrangement with his place of work, which also provided him with accommodation and food. This instance speaks about common interlinkage of housing and work which generates dependence on, as in this case, small family business, which is a phenomenon described in the chapter three. Kacper believed these costs to be very affordable in the context of his salary. Nevertheless, this set-up was not secured by a written contract, and after a few months, Kacper sensed that because his relationship with his boss wasn't good, he might get fired soon. This guesthouse was well known in the local community for its swift hiring practices and frequent changes of personnel. Kacper recalled a quarrel he had with his boss over the fulfilment of his duties, in which he was accused of performing too slowly. After this instance he started to look for another job in the area. Thanks to a friend who worked in the nearby chain hotel, he got a waiter position there, which also came with food and accommodation. Soon after, following his presumptions, he was fired from his first workplace. This situation illustrates the volatile and unsecured work circumstances in the sector, as well as usage of migrant networks for job arrangements.

Kacper referred to his work in Iceland and the sense of time it yields in him, saying that "there are three days here for me: yesterday, today and tomorrow". This sentiment speaks to the feeling that his world has shrunk in comparison to his previous life, in which he had to hustle to stay afloat, and worry about his future. Whilst working in rural hospitality sites, his

41

time horizon was much more manageable and was taken care of partially by his employer. He did not have to worry about his accommodation or food, as they were deducted from his pay, which contributed to living "today". His past was informed by the recent happenings at work. The passions and relationships he developed during leisure time were seemingly freed from the burdens back home, which amounted to living in close proximity to the horizon of "yesterday". Kacper's "tomorrow" could only have been planned with some certainty due to the insecure work arrangement. Nevertheless, this future in flux allowed him to explore different *chances* and expand a vision of an alternative lifestyle, which he aimed at living amidst the beauty of the natural environment and by virtue of employment in Icelandic tourism.

Kacper's *chance* to work in Iceland presented itself to him as a means to escape reality, in which he could not afford to flourish and evolve. Yet, an economic landscape which he saw as yielding *chances* for growth is volatile and demands flexibility from individuals who wish to settle for its demands. In the following section, I will show what the personal temporalities of those who subscribed to limitations of *chances* are.

6.3. Approaching Chance through Experience/Endure: "But it's not that we thought of this place in terms of 'We will spend the rest of our lives here'".

The attitude articulated in the earlier section is defined by the enthusiasm Judyta and Kacper put into the evolution of *chances*. Their personal temporalities evolved around attempts to expand time abroad and eventually turn the lack of fulfillment tied to their past into today's enjoyment. To contrast this approach, I would like to highlight the stories of Marianna and Jagna who approached a *chance* to work in Icelandic tourism with a chosen time horizon, dictating their return back to Poland. This attitude can be summarised with a quote from a

different interview in which two of my interlocutors stated "- Such a place will do for a moment. - But it's not that we thought of this place in terms of 'We will spend the rest of our lives here', more like, 'okay we will get through it for a month or three, we will earn money and go to somewhere pretty". Thanks to implementing their short term plan, Marianna and Jagna could afford their future ambitions, which did not revolve around extending their time in Iceland but enduring the working season with its highs and lows.

6.3.1. Marianna

I interviewed Marianna, a 19-year-old from the North of Poland, in her place of work in a town in the North of Iceland situated amidst touristic routes. Summer 2024 was her second working season in Icelandic tourism. She came to Iceland following her childhood dream of working abroad. This wish arose out of an experience of visiting her grandmother, who worked as a cleaner in Belgium. Marianna remembered fondly the times when she visited her and played around the house, amidst "all those luxuries", whilst her grandmother worked. Her idea to go abroad emerged twofold. First, it was her motivation to prove herself through a personal goal she set in the past. Second, she wanted to earn money that would sustain her in daily life back in Poland. Marianna started enacting her plan in the summer when she finished high school. She believed that the best way to find employment abroad was to have an intermediary who would introduce her to the local reality. This *chance* arose when she coupled her efforts with a friend whose sister already worked in Iceland and offered them help. Marianna admitted that she had little to no knowledge of the country, and she had never worked in tourism before; she only occupied a part-time job in a grocery store and was a tutor of mathematics. She planned to stay abroad for two months as she was supposed to begin her first year of university back in Poland in the fall. She remembered her parents bidding her farewell saying, "Go, kid, earn money, experience life, this is your chance".

Marianna's *chance* to experience the novelty of work abroad was made possible thanks to the initial stability of having accommodation on site. Thanks to the sister of her friend, they found a place in the town where they wanted to find employment. Their rental was owned by a Polish man who rented out shared rooms to incoming Polish workers. Marianna commented on her experience of job and apartment hunting with the help of her sister's friend:

> And once we had the flat sorted out, we had a kind of confirmation that 'okay, girls, you can come over, we'll find some work'. Because here, with work, you can get it at the last minute, but once you have a flat. Because there's a problem with flats, it's difficult to get one.

Indeed, her job search went smoothly, and Marianna got a job with her friend in the first workplace they came into. She remembered a meeting with an Icelandic boss, the owner of a hotel and a café located in a venue of a popular local museum, to be a nerve-wracking experience since she did not speak English at the time. The owner informed them that "well, if you had come to me yesterday, I wouldn't have had any work for you, but today I do". This memory speaks to an earlier observation of Marianna that the process of job searching seems to be organised *ad hoc* and answers a current, volatile situation. She commented on this practice earlier in the interview, saying that "it's such a crazy country, where everything happens at the last minute." Her words and observations remind of the analysis of tourism sector labour practices recalled in the chapter three. These were for instance hiring of young unskilled migrants and governing the necessary labour force according to fluctuating demand. An especially striking observation expressed by Marianna concerns the labour force assemblage which happens *in situ* at the point of consumption. What follows is the improvisation of small private owners who seem to be acting last minute on momentarily arising circumstances and capitalising on people's desires. What seemed to be a provisional decision for the employer was a *chance* Marianna had dreamt of.

The experience of working in a café proved to be challenging for Marianna, especially because of the separation from home. Her time horizon was set on a close return date, and during the interview she recalled often calling her family, friends and boyfriend, whom she missed. Yet she embraced this short experience and despite the hardship of a novel situation, she achieved her goal of proving herself in independent decision-making and improved her English. This achievement made her think of the Icelandic experience positively. Yet, when she pondered the effect that leaving home had on her, she confessed that it "caused her some harm". She recalled meetings with her boyfriend after the return and the fact that she couldn't stop crying when they were supposed to say goodbye, as it reminded her of their time apart. Considering Marianna's employment in Icelandic tourism not being a long-term solution, it is important to mark the emotional weight which it had on her. Despite her awareness of the limited quality of the *chance* she took up, its place in her personal array of experiences was significant.

Marianna's *chance* was visibly more secure than the *chances* of my other interlocutors due to the mentioned arrangement as well as the desire to work only for a short period of time. It is apparent that the fact that her plan had a certain time horizon contributed to the feeling of fulfilment of earlier established short-term goals (such as learning English and earning higher wages than in Poland). It is as if Marianna's *chance* was more plausible to come to fruition because of the *modest* expectations, adequate for the logic of seasonality and flexible demand in Icelandic tourism. Nevertheless, the *chance* offered by a flexible job market through which Marianna fulfilled her dream had an inscribed uncertainty to it. This disarray was no different from any other cases presented earlier. Here, similar incidents happened as in the case of my other interlocutors. These were the scarcity of accommodation, swift hiring practices and insecure employment, which appeared amidst the high tourist season.

6.3.2. Jagna

Whilst many of my interlocutors grew fond of Iceland or straightforwardly thought of this country as their dream destination, there are a group of people who chose to go there without major enthusiasm. Jagna's story represents these sentiments well and additionally will expose exploitative working conditions. Many of my interlocutors also experienced hostility in the workplace, but I decided to highlight just one case in which such practices were acutely stark and signal that similar mistreatment of workers was also apparent elsewhere, in varying degrees. The interview with Jagna is the only one I conducted online, and it took place while she was still employed in a hotel in a remote location in the South of Iceland at the time of my fieldwork. I felt compelled to speak with her as I found a post on one of the Facebook groups for Poles in Iceland in which she asked for help as she felt at risk in her workplace.

Jagna, a woman in her mid-twenties, was a practising musician back in Poland. In the past, she took up several seasonal jobs abroad, many of them in agriculture or housekeeping in western Europe. The idea to come to Iceland appeared to her when she saw her friends' posts on social media and became aware that many people from her hometown in Central Poland work in Icelandic hospitality. Jagna did not know much about Iceland, and this destination appeared to her as an option because of her circle of friends. This sentiment can be summarised with a statement voiced by another interlocutor: "If Egypt were popular as a work destination, I would have gone there". Jagna's decision was made out of pragmatic calculations, and she recalled that she seized this *chance* because she grew aware that Iceland offers the highest wages in Europe. Yet, there was nothing else that compelled her to this destination. In fact, she remembered her first impressions after driving through lava fields to her first workplace in 2023 "God, I was terrified (...) on the side of the road there was this brown soil, there were no trees, and it looked like Mars", she thought to herself "oh fuck, where am I".

Nevertheless, her work experience and the money she earned were good enough for her to want to return to Iceland for another working season. Therefore, she arranged with a friend who worked in a chain hotel in the South of Iceland to join him and work as a housekeeper in the summer of 2024. Jagna only wanted to work for a month because she established that the money she would earn in this period would be sufficient for her to pay her rent in Poland for a few months and also afford private healthcare back home. This *chance* could arise because her friend, who had already worked in a hotel for several years, wanted to split his working time, so that the two of them would make up one seasonal position. This example illustrates the substandard employment in the sector. Similarly to the case of Marianna, Jagna had a short-term goal which could have been answered with temporary work in Iceland. This setup was able to come to fruition thanks to connections on site and because of her friend's flexible agreement with the employer. This position affected Jagna's attitude towards work intensity, which she described as follows:

> It's okay for me to work more because, you know, I came here just to earn money, so it's kind of like I want to work overtime. It's really tiring, but I'd rather push myself through this month and just earn more money.

The kind of sentiment signalled above, one which prioritises work over leisure time, has been a recurring motif in many of my interviews. This approach, understood through a framework of *chance*, reveals that many people, knowing the limitations of the offer to work abroad, set out to take full advantage of it and endure short term fatigue. Such a manoeuvre is possible to achieve since it is a common practice of employers that the working time on a given day is subject to sudden changes which depend on changing factors, such as current workload and fluctuating workers number.

Jagna's workplace in the summer of 2024 was fully managed by Polish staff and was highly hierarchised. People working in the managerial positions and in the kitchen were all related to each other, which Jagna described to be a case of nepotism. There existed a clear

distinction between staff members and the older Poles who managed the hotel. Jagna was among other young people who came to work seasonally. She described the core workers as representatives of a lower social class and was told they were criminals back in Poland, who were "simple people who came into power in Iceland". She referred to practices of the managers as *bullying*, which was characterised by the rough and cruel manner of referring to people lower in the hierarchy. Jagna was promised food and accommodation on site, which, together with her wage and working time, were all arranged without any written contract. Curious about her hourly wage, she attempted to ask one of the core members about her remuneration. This request was met with a rude comment that she could just see it herself on the internet, and that she could not meet with a person responsible for this issue. The staff house, where all the workers and management lived, was located 3 kilometres away from the hotel. Every morning, people were transported to their workplace in the open boot of a staff car. Jagna commented on the working pace as too fast, not allowing her to have a rest. Breaks for employees were the result of an arbitrary decision by the cleaning team manager, who sometimes decided to take a cigarette break. Smoking during working hours was prohibited for employees lower in the hierarchy, however, they had to comply with the work rhythm dictated by the smoking habits of their supervisor. Met with such treatment, after four days of work, Jagna decided that she had to find another place of employment. This is when she posted a message on one of the Facebook groups for Poles in Iceland, and she asked for immediate help. Importantly, she did not want to go back home as she had only recently arrived in Iceland. This approach can be understood through the concept of *chance*. It is that Jagna wanted to carve out another solution for herself, not to lose a *chance* to earn money abroad.

Jagna decided to appeal to the Icelandic manager, a person responsible for the personnel. Some younger staff members with whom she shared her idea were surprised that she wanted to take any steps to fight this situation, because they said they feel too powerless to attempt to

improve their position. This anxiety was probably prompted by the fact that all the staff members were dependent on their bosses, and the idea of potentially losing the job would come together with being left out without accommodation, food or due salary. When Jagna disclosed the treatment of workers to the Icelandic manager, he acted as if he were not aware of any of these incidents. When she raised the idea that she might be leaving soon to work on a farm, the manager

> called me half an hour later and said that I got a job at another hotel belonging to the same company. I said, 'Okay, I'll give it a try,' and he just said that they would pick me up from there [her first workplace] the next day, and I would go to this other hotel.

The above situation speaks to the frequently identified practice of swift hiring practices and the disposability of seasonal workers in Icelandic tourism. Additionally, it discloses the attitude of a boss who, rather than letting the worker go, decided to relocate Jagna to another location of the chain hotel. In my understanding, the employer was possibly afraid of Jagna's potential legal steps, which she could have tried to take to appeal against the employer. At the time of the interview, Jagna decided not to bring this instance to labour unions because she was afraid of being fired from the current position in the same company. This instance encompasses well the precarity of work in Icelandic tourism. Here, workers were afraid of losing their substandard employment due to the fear of being left without accommodation or food, and despite protection from an adequate labour union they decided not to bring this case up to their jurisdiction.

As described above, Jagna's approach towards the *chance* to work in Iceland showed that she adopted strategy and had handled it accordingly to withstand the situation that arose. Her management of time was dictated by a presumption that whatever is happening is a brief affair. Importantly, this sentiment did not make her passive and curb her own needs and desires.

Despite the short time horizon of her work, she actively sought to improve her position, which was plausible because of the flexible market of *chances* that she reached when needed.

Chapter seven: "Hard work never killed anyone, but why take the chance?": Final remarks and conclusions

In this summary, I will answer the question set out in the beginning of this thesis, that is "Hard work never killed anyone, but why take the chance?" and address my research questions following the ethnographic chapter.

As can be seen from the actions and narratives of my interlocutors, *chance* in the described context primarily originates from the free will one executes towards work opportunities. For instance Jagna got her first job in Iceland thanks to a friend and Marianna had to prove her confidence and visit a workplace to ask for a vacant position. It is clear that these *chances* arose due to their deliberate actions and structural character of the labour market in a sector which offers uncertain work arrangements in the first place. Chapter six also revealed that people are users of migrant and digital infrastructures and acquire a *migrant know-how* via the use of social media and the Internet. Such was the case of Judyta who followed the guidance of an influencer in finding a job and Kacper who learned about ways of finding employment thanks to a friend in Poland. Therefore, *chances* were never readily available to take, but often necessitated hard work in order to find them. The fact that employment was mostly based on unofficial agreements with employers and the demand for workforce fluctuating, made many of my interlocutors face the reality in which, "well, if you had come to me yesterday, I wouldn't have had any work for you, but today I do". This conclusion addresses the research questions

concerned with structural traits of Icelandic labour market and social context in which this arises, which have also been exemplified in the chapter three.

The short-sighted sighted *today* of employers inevitably results in a sense that "it's such a crazy country, where everything happens at the last minute". This in turn yields specific sentiments towards time which, as I exposed, can be approached with agreeing to its limited availability or aiming at expanding its potential. This shows an important trait of *chance*, that as much as it is fleeting and short-lived, it brings people benefits. Whether financial, as in the case of Jagna, or lifestyle, as in the case of Judyta, *chances* offered by work in Icelandic tourism are perceived by people through, what I called, their personal temporalities. The present moment dictated by *chance* is always related to people's past experiences and future hopes. Such was the case of Marianna who fulfilled her childhood dream of working abroad or Stefanova who could experience her "First Day of Independence" by virtue of "Go, (...) earn money, experience life, this is your chance". These anticipated and often realised positive outcomes contribute to the idea of the "landscape of possibilities", a place in which people dream of fixing their souls and budgets, to paraphrase Kacper and to illustrate the tourist-worker positionality. However beneficial *chances* are, they also yield harm and inequalities and rather than the "landscape of possibilities", they inhabit a system of uncertainties. This was visible in the case of the abusive work environment of Jagna and substandard employment of all my interlocutors. *Chances* are also inherently precarious since they do not allow for substantive long term employment and turn people to live with a short term horizon, as in "there are three days here for me: yesterday, today and tomorrow". This conclusion addresses the first research question about the relationship of Polish workers in Icelandic tourism with their everyday environment, considering their motivations and biographies that brought them to work in this setting.

The presented stories of a selected number of people are reduced to a sample, and the remaining participants of my study experienced different *chances* and approached them with an array of practices. Importantly, my analysis did not encompass narratives of failure in arranging jobs in Iceland. To some extent, all the people presented were 'lucky' in getting the *chance*. The question remains how individuals who do not succeed in getting a *chance* experience it within their personal temporalities. This question has only been signalled in the case of Stefanova and her relentless attempts to renew the *chance* of work in Icelandic tourism. Analysing my data, I discovered that Different Approaches Towards Chance always oscillate and intermingle the two poles of either embracing or submitting to the logic of the open market. *Chance* is therefore an ambiguous concept since it encompasses limitations and possibilities, the anticipated and unwanted openings and closures. In this way, I have answered the main research question "How does employment in Icelandic tourism affect Polish workers' attitudes and approaches towards time?".

Overall, throughout this thesis I have reflected the three levels on analysis, providing historical ad contextual background and describing overarching processes (labour migration in post-acession context, modernisation of Iceland, flexibilisation of job market); the execution of those in the presented context (utilisation of migrant infrastructure, migrant work under precarious circumstances), and people's approaches towards those. By depicting and analysing the studied phenomena from the broadest to the most specific one, I showed their entanglements.

The above research findings correspond with literature from the fields of migration, infrastructure, and tourism geography and are also relevant for the body of work dedicated to time as executed within the logic of flexible accumulation. Thanks to placing migrant stories and their biographies in the centre of my inquiry, I gained insight into the phenomena of *liquid* migration. I have examined its assumptions on people's engagement in labour in the context of

post accession migration from Poland. I understood that the implementation of open-ended plans described in literature (see: Engbersen and Snel 2013; Brzozowski and Kaczmarczyk 2014; Lesinska et al. 2014) makes people work hard for the *chances* to arise and often, work hard for them to be fruitful. I have made an original contribution to this body of works thanks to developing a novel framework of Different Approaches Towards Chance. Following Garsten (2008), I have observed how the improvisation of the flexible market results in the rise of *chances* and how they urge people to adapt different approaches towards time. The diagnosis of people's temporal practices resonate with the research of Zampoukos (2017), and reveals that people's biographies are crucial in understanding their position in the world of (im)mobility and (dis)continuity. The investigation into the politics of worker-tourist nexus (see: Bianchi 2000, Jordhus-Lier 2015, Karlsdóttir, and Jóhannesson 2016) allowed me to see that the specific physical and digital infrastructures dictate and facilitate the world of migrant workers, which complimented the writing of Dekker and Engbersen (2014), Xiang and Lindquist (2014), and Preiss (2022). I also contributed to the body of work dedicated to Poles in Iceland and labour in Icelandic tourism by showing how migrant and tourist infrastructures are related with each other and how they cater to the logic of improvisation and accelerate competition for jobs (see: Wojtyńska 2011; Jóhannesson and Huijbens 2013; Karlsdóttir and Jóhannesson 2016; Schaller 2016; Skaptadóttir Loftsdóttir 2016; Bohn and Bernardi 2020; Júlíusdóttir and Halldórsdóttir 2020).

To conclude, this thesis addressed broader debates concerning migrant labour and also contributed to the body of scholarship dedicated to Polish people in Iceland. That was achieved thanks to a development of an original framework relating to the observed reality and analysed data. I am not aware of any other anthropological study specifically concerned with labour of Poles in Icelandic tourism. This research has therefore contributed to the study of the rising

sector, which sees year-on-year increases in foreign workers exposed to the precarity of employment.

Bibliography

Amit, Vered. 2000. 'Introduction. Constructing the Field'. In *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World*, by Vered Amit, 1–18. European Association of Social Anthropologists. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Aspers, Patrik, and Ugo Corte. 2019. 'What Is Qualitative in Qualitative Research'. *Qualitative Sociology* 42 (2): 139–60. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7.

Bear, Laura. 2016. 'Time as Technique'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45 (1): 487–502. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102313-030159.

Bianchi, Raoul V. 2000. 'Migrant Tourist-Workers: Exploring the "Contact Zones" of Post-Industrial Tourism'. Current Issues in Tourism 3 (2): 107–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500008667869.

Bohn, Dorothee, and de de Bernardi, Cecilia. 2020. *A Labour Regime Perspective on Workforce Formation in Nordic Tourism: Exploring National Tourism Policy and Strategy Documents*. Edited by Andreas Walmsley, Kajsa Åberg, Petra Blinnikka, and Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47813-1_20.

Brzozowski, Jan, Romuald Jończy, and Paweł Kaczmarczyk. 2014. 'Ekonomiczne skutki migracji'. In *Dekada członkostwa Polski w UE. Społeczne skutki emigracji Polaków po 2004 roku*, edited by Lesińska Magdalena, Okólski Marek, Slany Krystyna, and Solga Brygida, 109–40. Warszawa: Wydawawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Carse, Ashley. 2016. 'Keyword: Infrastructure: How a Humble French Engineering Term Shaped the Modern World'. In *Infrastructures and Social Complexity: A Companion*, edited by Penelope Harvey, 1st ed., 27–40. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2016.: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622880.

Certeau, Michel de. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press.

Czaika, Mathias and Constantin Reinprecht. 2022. 'Migration Drivers: Why Do People Migrate?' In *Introduction to Migration Studies: An Interactive Guide to the Literatures on Migration and Diversity*, edited by Peter Scholten, 49–82. IMISCOE Research Series. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8.

Dekker, Rianne, and Godfried Engbersen. 2014. 'How Social Media Transform Migrant Networks and Facilitate Migration'. *Global Networks* 14 (4): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12040.

Edwards, Paul N. 2019. 'Infrastructuration: On Habits, Norms and Routines as Elements of Infrastructure'. In *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, edited by Martin Kornberger, Geoffrey C. Bowker, Julia Elyachar, Andrea Mennicken, Peter Miller, Joanne Randa Nucho, and Neil Pollock, 355–66. Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20190000062022.

Engbersen, Godfried and Snel, Erik. 2013. 'Liquid Migration Dynamic and Fluid Patterns of Post-Accession Migration Flows'. In *Mobility in Transition: Migration Patterns after EU Enlargement*, by Birgit Glorius, Izabela Grabowska-Lusińska, and Aimée Kuvik, 21–40. IMISCOE Research. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Feltendal, Ida. 2013. 'Changing Relations - the Shift from Sea to Land. A Study of Two Settlements in Eyjafjörður, Iceland'. MA thesis, University College London, Bartlett school of Graduate Studies.

Ferðamálastofa Icelandic Tourist Board. n.d. 'Numbers of Foreign Visitors'. https://www.ferdamalastofa.is/en/research-and-statistics/numbers-of-foreign-visitors#number-of-foreign-passengers-with-cruise-ships.

Garsten, Christina. 2008. *Workplace Vagabonds: Career and Community in Changing Worlds of Work*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230227460.

Glorius, Birgit, Izabela Grabowska-Lusińska, and Aimée Kuvik. 2013. *Mobility in Transition: Migration Patterns after EU Enlargement*. IMISCOE Research. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Grabowska-Lusinska, Izabela. 2013. 'Anatomy of Post-Accession Migration How to Measure "Liquidity" and Other Patterns of Post-Accession Migration Flows'. In *Mobility in Transition: Migration Patterns after EU Enlargement*, edited by Birgit Glorius, Izabela Grabowska-Lusińska, and Aimée Kuvik, 41–65. IMISCOE Research. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Ingold, Tim. 2014. 'That's Enough about Ethnography!' *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 (1): 383–95. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.021.

James, Donna. 2024. 'Precarious Labour Geographies of Working Holiday Makers: Querying Sustainability'. *Tourism Geographies* 26 (7): 1053–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2024.2366488.

Janta, Hania, and Adele Ladkin. 2013. 'In Search of Employment: Online Technologies and P Olish Migrants'. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 28 (3): 241–53. https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12018.

Jóhannesson, Gunnar Thór, and Edward H. Huijbens. 2013. 'Tourism Resolving Crisis? Exploring Tourism Development in Iceland in the Wake of Economic Recession'. In *New Issues in Polar Tourism: Communities, Environments, Politics*, edited by Dieter K. Müller, Linda Lundmark, and Raynald H. Lemelin, 133–48. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5884-1.

Jordhus-Lier, David. 2015. 'Fragmentation Revisited: Flexibility, Differentiation and Solidarity in Hotels'. In *A Hospitable World? Organising Work and Workers in Hotels and Tourist Resorts*, edited by David Jordhus-Lier and Anders Underthun, 39–48. Contemporary

Geographies of Leisure, Tourism and Mobility. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Jordhus-Lier, David and Underthun, Anders. 2015. 'Introduction. The Spatialities of Hotels and Tourism Workplaces'. In *A Hospitable World? Organising Work and Workers in Hotels and Tourist Resorts*, edited by David Jordhus-Lier and Anders Underthun, 1–6. Contemporary Geographies of Leisure, Tourism and Mobility. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Júlíusdóttir, Magnfríður, and Íris H. Halldórsdóttir. 2020. *Migrant Workers in Tourism: Challenges of Unions and Workers in the Icelandic Tourism Boom*. Edited by Andreas Walmsley, Kajsa Åberg, Petra Blinnikka, and Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47813-1_20.

Karlsdóttir, Anna, and Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson. 2016. 'Tourists as Migrants/Migrants as Entrepreneurs – the Agency of the Visitor's Eye'. In *Mobility to the Edges of Europe: The Case of Iceland and Poland*, edited by Dorota Rancew-Sikora and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 38–65. PL: Scholar Publishing House. https://doi.org/10.7366/9788373838062.

Koutsogeorgopoulou, Vassiliki. 2023. 'Immigration in Iceland: Addressing Challenges and Unleashing the Benefits'. OECD Economics Department Working Papers 1772. Vol. 1772. OECD Economics Department Working Papers. https://doi.org/10.1787/645ca1ac-en.

Okely, Judith. 1992. 'Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge'. In *Anthropology and Autobiography*, by Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, 1–28. ASA Monographs 29. London: Routledge.

Preiss, Caroltta. 2022. 'Digital Migration Infrastructures'. In *Introduction to Migration Studies: An Interactive Guide to the Literatures on Migration and Diversity*, edited by Peter Scholten, 99–110. IMISCOE Research Series. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92377-8.

Schaller, Harald Josef. 2016. 'Tour Guides in Nature-Based Tourism: Perceptions of Nature and Governance of Protected Areas, the Case of Skaftafell at the Vatnajökull National Park'. In *Mobility to the Edges of Europe: The Case of Iceland and Poland*, edited by Dorota Rancew-Sikora and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 187–214. PL: Scholar Publishing House. https://doi.org/10.7366/9788373838062.

Skaptadóttir, Unnur Dís, and Kristín Loftsdóttir. 2016. 'The Tourist and the Migrant Worker: Different Perceptions of Mobility in Iceland'. In *Mobility to the Edges of Europe: The Case of Iceland and Poland*, edited by Dorota Rancew-Sikora and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 17–37. PL: Scholar Publishing House. https://doi.org/10.7366/9788373838062.

Statistics Iceland. (n.d.-a). 'Register Based Employment by Economic Activity by Years, Sex, Age Groups and Origin 2008-2024'. Retrieved 8 April 2025. https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Samfelag/Samfelag__vinnumarkadur__vinnuafls kraargogn/VIN10030.px/table/tableViewLayout2/.

———. n.d.-b. External migration by sex, countries and citizenship 1986-2022. Retrieved April 23, 2024, from https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Ibuar/Ibuar__buferlaflutningar__buferlaflmillila nda/MAN01404.px/table/tableViewLayout2/ .

———. n.d.-c. Population - key figures 1703-2025. Retrieved April 23, 2024, from https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Ibuar/Ibuar__mannfjoldi__1_yfirlit__yfirlit_man nfjolda/MAN00000.px/.

———. n.d.-d. Population by country of citizenship, sex and age 1 January 1998-2024. Retrived April 23 2024, from https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Ibuar/Ibuar__mannfjoldi__3_bakgrunnur__Rikis fang/MAN04103.px/table/tableViewLayout2/.

———. n.d.-e 'Immigrants 18.2% of the Population of Iceland'. https://statice.is/publications/news-archive/inhabitants/population-by-origin-1-january-2024/.

———. n.d.-f. Number of Enterprises and Operational Information by Industry and Size 2008-2022. Retrieved April 25, 2025 from https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Atvinnuvegir/Atvinnuvegir__fyrirtaeki__afkoma __1_afkoma/FYR08001.px/table/tableViewLayout2/.

Tarkowska, Elżbieta. 2006. 'Zygmunt Bauman on Time and Detemporalisation Processes'. *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 3 (155), 357–74.

Trevena, Paulina. 2013. 'Why Do Highly Educated Migrants Go for Low-Skilled Jobs? A Case Study of Polish Graduates Working in London'. In *Mobility in Transition: Migration Patterns after EU Enlargement*, edited by Birgit Glorius, Izabela Grabowska-Lusińska, and Aimée Kuvik, 169–90. IMISCOE Research. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Wojtyńska, Anna. 2009. 'Islandia i Islandczycy oczami polskich imigrantów'. In *Islandia: wprowadzenie do wiedzy o społeczeństwie i kulturze*, edited by Włodzimierz Karol Pessel and Chymkowski, Roman, 147–70. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio : Collegium Civitas.

Wojtyńska, Anna. 2011. 'Historia i charakterystyka migracji z Polski do Islandii'. In *Polscy Imigranci w Islandii. Integracja czy asymilacja?*, 29–43. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

Xiang, Biao, and Johan Lindquist. 2014. 'Migration Infrastructure'. *International Migration Review* 48 (1_suppl): 122–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12141.

Zampoukos, Kristina. 2017. 'Hospitality Workers and the Relational Spaces of Labor (Im)Mobility'. *Tourism Geographies* 20 (1): 49–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2017.1331259.