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Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students' in higher education perspective towards experiences in other countries and migration

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Abstract

Despite the growing number of young people affected by international migration, university students' migration is rarely a key issue at international debates as compared to other issues. This paper draws on surveys with Estonian (N=182), Latvian (N=359) and Lithuania (N= 159) university undergraduates to examine migration intentions and experiences and also to detect commonalities and differences between the three Baltic States. Theoretical basis based on modern statistical data and tendencies about migration among young people in the three Baltic States. Based on quantitative empirical analysis of data this project finds that a large number of the Baltic States university students express the desire to live abroad for short time, but differenced between three samples were in the area of either live abroad for a long time or permanently. It was revealed that the value of foreign experience was mostly positive, but connected with mixed emotions; and only one-third of the students were able to have a low-qualified job outside the country.

Key words: *migration, migration experience, university students in the Baltic States*

1. Introduction

Mobility seems to have achieved the largest scope in our history, and therefore we are witnessing the development of multicultural society (Zuzevičiūtė, Pranevičienė and Ruibytė, 2013). Even if we focus on quite recent times: the last millennium, the incidents of globalization are evident in some cases. For example, first universities: Paris University (13th century), Torun university (15th century) are examples of extreme multi-culturist with people from all over countries and kingdoms of the time discussing professional issues and promoting their profession (Durkheim, 1977). Globalisation manifests itself through the intensification of increased mobility of individuals, capital, and information on a global scale, that is, a multicultural society is being constructed under our eyes on a global scale (Zuzevičiūtė, 2011). Therefore today migration in many cases is also a mundane activity. In many cases (except in countries with civil unrest) is the source for improvements in socio-economic situation or in gaining experiences that advance career and social networking rather than a matter of survival. This is true for the three for Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia,

Lithuania), because these three countries already for the third decade experience peace, prosperity, stability, and whatever problems they face: e.g., economic downturn - these are not severe and they are just similar to situation in other countries.

Statistical analysis showed that the migration of highly skilled labour force from the three Baltic Sea countries is as a process with negative impact on the economic potential of the region, but at the other side - the traditional structures of higher education is inefficient in the situation of high mobility in a global society (Kirch and Mezentsev, 2012).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discuss and investigate what are perspective of students in higher education (in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) towards experiences in other countries and migration. Methods of critical reference analysis, and a quantitative survey were employed for the study; empirical data was analysed by calculation of frequencies and non-parametric relations (χ^2).

Facts of reality of contemporary world and mobility (even migration) as an educational necessity

Human history is a history of globalization. Though the term of ‘globalization’ dominates scientific, political and economical discourse during these last decades, however, the phenomena itself has been an integral reality of our history since even our written memory. We started our journey in one continent, spread to other continents, some finding substantiate the claim that there were several waves of contemporary man’s journeys across continents. Globalization is defined as a process of mobility of people, capital and information. Mobility seems to have achieved the largest scope in our history, and therefore we are witnessing the development of multicultural society (Zuzevičiūtė, Pranevičienė and Ruibytė, 2013). Even if we focus on quite recent times: the last millennium, the incidents of globalization are evident in some cases. For example, first universities: Paris University (13th century), Torun university (15th century) are examples of extreme multi-culturist with people from all over countries and kingdoms of the time discussing professional issues and promoting their profession (Durkheim, 1977). Globalisation manifests itself through the intensification of increased mobility of individuals, capital, information on a global scale, that is, a multicultural society is being constructed under our eyes on a global scale (Zuzevičiūtė, 2011).

The reason why discourse on globalization became so dominant in contemporary world is twofold. Firstly, people today live longer than they have ever before. Advancements in science and technology enable citizens in at least a third of countries to live a relatively healthy and rewarding life until mid-80 ties. Secondly, these technologies to an impressive degree are based on information and communication technologies (in agriculture, industry, transport, medicine, every sector, in fact), also, however, information and communication technologies are used for just the purpose that their title suggests: as a tool for exchange of

information and organize communication. The exchange of information enables us both to benefit from productive innovations and to identify faulty suggestions without delay of years, decades or millennium (as in the case of the erroneous structure of Solar system). Therefore, even if objectively globalization has always been a reality of humankind, only in recent centuries subjectively people have both time and means to experience globalization and to participate in it intensively. Also, if earlier exposure to globalization was a privilege just for a few (for those in Medieval universities) or a disaster for quite many (for those who built grand churches with literally bare hands, palaces and died under crumbling pillars), today exposure and participation is a reality of almost any person in almost any country. Surely, unfortunately, there are still exceptions, such as countries with civil unrest. Except for those cases, globalization today is subjectively a mundane reality of almost anyone.

Therefore today migration in many cases is also a mundane activity. In many cases (except in countries with civil unrest) is the source for improvements in socio-economic situation or in gaining experiences that advance career and social networking rather than a matter of survival. This is true for the three for Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), because these three countries already for the third decade experience peace, prosperity, stability, and whatever problems they face: e.g., economic downturn - these are not severe and they are just similar to situation in other countries.

Migration in these countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), especially, among higher education students, is a form of learning. If not formal learning, then surely learning non-formally and informally. While any young adult at the age of 18 to 25 or so has to become a self-reliant personality, an adult, who is able to take care of himself/herself and those dear to him/her (Merriam, 1993), some experience abroad or a choice to migrate provides opportunities to become more mature and responsible, than merely living in one's own country. Therefore we provide here one of the main claims of this paper here: migration in contemporary peaceful and prosperous societies for young people merely expand developmental arena, enables young people to face at least some challenges, at the face of which, they could build their responsible and self-reliant personality.

Intercultural awareness, respect for others, ability to somehow maintain constructive discussion and communicate, and collaborate in a multicultural world are one of the most important core competencies of a contemporary person. It would seem that these competencies have already been achieved by young adults, and however, as some of the studies reveal, awareness of the needs of the other person, awareness about the need for solidarity, mutual respect, and at least tolerance, if not an active support remain a challenge in our society (Martinkiene and Adomkus, 2009). Culture is a sociological concept with a number of different meanings but usually it refers to the totality of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values of a social group (Zuzevičiūtė and Bagdonaitė, 2012). Culture shapes learning relationships, because people may immerse into experiences and seek common interpretations of the world (Zuzevičiūtė, Kondrotaitė and Mijoč, 2008; Várnagy, 2011). It

should be noted that for many theoreticians, culture is intimately related to learning. Culture is something material (books, paintings), and immaterial (ideas, conversations, songs) that has significance for us and that turns us into who we are, and that we are constantly creating. Culture shapes us, and we contribute to culture almost every minute of our life. Any individual is always bound to the cultural and social context and his/her life is partially determined by social forces, and cultural context always influences and shapes learning. Culture also influences our understanding of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and enables us to identify the similarities or differences that affect our ability to communicate effectively and to focus our efforts for learning.

In the three Baltic countries there are quite few opportunities for intercultural learning due to the profile of composition of ethnic groups, however, they are minimal. Latvians have always been the largest ethnic group in Latvia during the past century. Before WW II (according to the population census in 1935: 77% Latvians) the proportion of non-Latvians was approximately 23%, the Russians being the largest minority (8.8%), followed by Jews (app. 5%), Germans and Poles (2-3%). However, after 1990s, Russian minority inhabitants' number has decreased from 29.6% in 2000 to 26.9% in 2011. Belarus minority inhabitants' number has decreased from – 4.1% to 3.3%, Ukrainian minority inhabitants' number has decreased from –2.7% to 2.2%, Poles – from 2.5% to 2.2%, Lithuanians – from 1.4% to 1.2%. Relative indicators state that Latvia's citizen proportion in the total number of the state's inhabitants has increased to 83.8% from 74.5% in the previous Population census, but the number of non-citizens has decreased from 21.2% to 14.1% (Demographics of Latvia, 2013). After gaining independence (at the end of World War I) by Estonia, a population census was held in 1922 and 1934 there. At that time Estonians were still the predominant ethnic group, while all others constituted 12% of the total population of Estonia. Today, Estonia is an ethnically fairly diverse country. Estonians make up 889,770 or 68.7% (compared to 88% in 1934), Russians make up 24.8% or 321,198 (8.2% in 1934) inhabitants of the total population (Demographics of Estonia, 2013). In Lithuania the reality of demographics is as follows: Lithuanians - 2,583,518 (84.6%), Poles - 183,228 (6.0%), Russians - 146,583 (4.8%). Therefore, the situation with the citizenship in Lithuania is different: Lithuania's membership of the European Union has made Lithuanian citizenship all the more appealing. Lithuanian citizenship is theoretically easier to obtain than that of many other European countries - only one great-grandparent is necessary to become a Lithuanian citizen. Persons who held citizenship in the Republic of Lithuania prior to June 15, 1940, and their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren (provided that these persons did not repatriate) are eligible for Lithuanian citizenship (Demographics of Lithuania, 2013).

With globalization being a fact of reality of a contemporary world, we claim, migration should be considered (at least in peaceful, prosperous societies) as a tool (may be even necessary) for young people to face some challenges in order to stimulate their development. Intercultural learning is of reciprocal nature. On the one hand, people have to be prepared for learning in multicultural contexts, e.g., mobility (have to know foreign languages at a certain

level, and also have certain attitudes to new situations and people), and on the other hand, it is a multicultural context that accelerates learning both of languages, communication skills, awareness building and even maturing (Zuzevičiūtė, Pranevičienė and Ruibytė, 2013). Therefore, we claim, some form of mobility (even if it is a short study visit or a choice to migrate permanently) is a necessary educational experience in contemporary societies that has to be promoted and sustained. In the intersection of these realities: globalization is a fact of contemporary reality; intercultural experience both requires certain minimum competencies, and in its own turn, prompts faster development of competencies, migration may be considered a productive form of both competence building and developmental arena. Therefore, and empiric study, conducted in 2011-2012 was aimed at investigating what are perspective of students in higher education towards experiences in other countries and migration.

2. Methodology, procedure and samples

Three samples of university students from the Baltic states were participated in the study: Estonian sample consists 184 university students (average age: 23,7 years, Latvian sample consist 359 university students (average age: 22,9 years) and Lithuania sample of 159 students (average age: 23,4 years), whereby about two thirds of them were females, and all were future teachers. Totally there were 700 respondents.

Questionnaire consists of five questions about the migration intentions: *Would you be able to go away from your country for a short period (1-6 months)?; Would you be able to go away from your country for 1-3 years?; Would you be able to go away from your country for unknown period of time?; Would you be able to do low-qualified job outside Estonia/Latvia/Lithuania?* to three possible answers: with *Yes*, with *No*, and *I'm not interested*. Questionnaire consists two questions about experiences about migration: *What is your experience in international tours?; Your feeling outside Estonia/Latvia/Lithuania?*, whereby the respondents are required to choose their answer from a set of pre-provided answers (accordingly question variants): *Tourism, Experience exchange, Conferences, Not interested in, No experience*, and *Liked, Did not like, No comment, Surprised positive, Surprised negative*. First questions of the questionnaire were introductive: *Are you mobile?*, and *Have you thought about migration in Estonia/ Latvia/Lithuania in future?*

3. Results of the survey on students' in higher education perspective towards experiences in other countries and migration

Data shows that in all three Baltic countries young people consider themselves mobile, with 2/3 answering positively to the question: 65% among Estonian students; 60 % among Latvian students and 66% among Lithuanian students.

Fig. 1 illustrates the frequency distributions for several questionnaire items that measure the students' migration intentions across the three samples of students (Estonia, Latvian and Lithuanian).

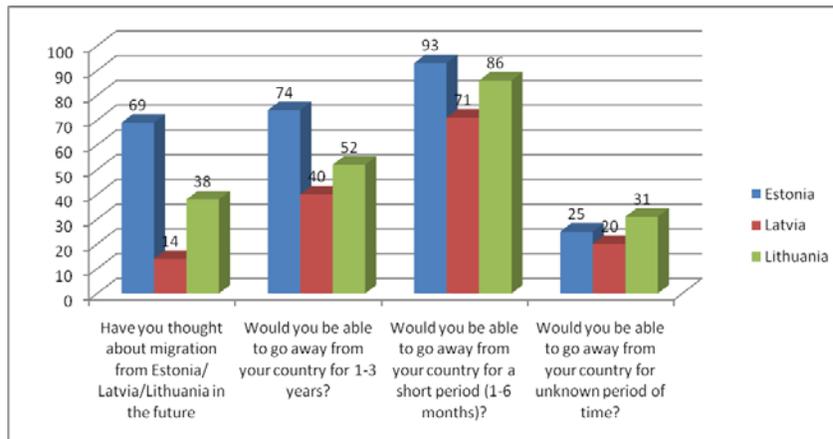


Fig. 1. Readiness of respondents for mobility, in per cent (Estonians; N=182; Latvians N=359; Lithuanians N=159)

It would seem, students are ready to experience at least the short time mobility, which, according to ideas of this paper, may provide students with invaluable experiences.

Fig. 2 illustrates that hypothesis of the authors of this paper that for Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students experiences abroad are more important for educational and developmental purposes rather than ultimate career goals, was correct. The majority of respondents (more than 2/3) see opportunities for themselves in their countries of birth. However, also quite a large proportion of respondents are quite flexible and ready to take up jobs that may be below their qualification.

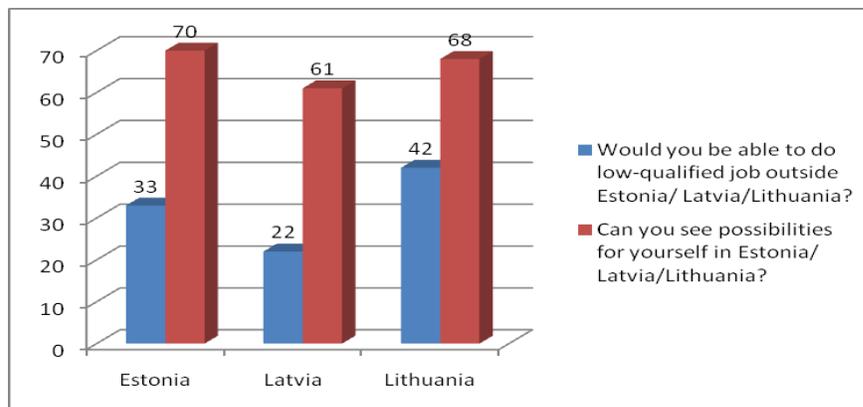


Fig. 2 Perspectives of respondents towards opportunities in countries of their birth and to jobs, in per cent (Estonians; N=182; Latvians N=359; Lithuanians N=159)

Table 1 represents statistically significant differences measured by χ^2 test compared answers of the questionnaire items across the three Baltic States samples consisting only statistically significant differences.

Table 1. Percentages of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students answers across questionnaire items about migration intentions

| Question | Estonia (N=182) | | | Latvia (N=359) | | | Lithuania (N= 159) | | |
|---|-----------------|-----|----------------|----------------|-----|----------------|--------------------|-----|----------------|
| | Yes | No | Not interested | Yes | No | Not interested | Yes | No | Not interested |
| Are you mobile? | 65% | 0% | 15% | 60% | 12% | 28% | 66% | 11% | 23% |
| Have you thought about migration from Estonia/ Latvia/Lithuania in future? | 69% | 31% | 0% | 14% | 61% | 25% | 38% | 39% | 23% |
| Would you be able to go away from your country for 1-3 years? | 74% | 16% | 10% | 40% | 37% | 23% | 52% | 28% | 20% |
| Would you be able to go away from your country for a short period (1-6 months)? | 93% | 3% | 4% | 71% | 19% | 10% | 86% | 10% | 4% |
| Would you be able to go away from your country for unknown period of time? | 25% | 69% | 6% | 20% | 60% | 20% | 31% | 41% | 28% |
| Would you be able to do low-qualified job outside Estonia/ Latvia/Lithuania? | 32% | 63% | 5% | 22% | 58% | 20% | 42% | 37% | 21% |
| Can you see possibilities for yourself in Estonia/ Latvia/Lithuania? | 70% | 19% | 11% | 61% | 22% | 17% | 68% | 10% | 22% |

Research results indicated that most of the university students (more than 60%) in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania perceived personally that they are mobile, whereby more students (69%) in Estonian had thought about migration in their country compared with Lithuanian students (38%) and also with Latvian students (14%). Although, most of students in the Baltic countries think about themselves as mobile young people, there were differences in

perceptions about migrations as a country-level question – more Estonians than Latvian, and in the middle frequency Lithuanian.

Table 2. Statistically significant χ^2 values of comparison the frequencies of questionnaire items of three samples of respondents

| Question | Estonia versus Latvia | Estonia versus Lithuania | Latvia versus Lithuania | Estonia versus Latvia | Estonia versus Lithuania | Latvia versus Lithuania | Estonia versus Latvia | Estonia versus Lithuania | Latvia versus Lithuania |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | Not interested | Not interested | Not interested |
| Have you thought about migration in Estonia/Latvia/Lithuania in future? | 22.88* | 13.51** | 13.97* | 11.70* | ns | 10.11* | 4.12* | 4.00* | ns |
| Would you be able to go away from your country for 1-3 years? | 13.04* | 7.34* | ns | 10.83* | 9.14* | ns | ns | ns | ns |
| Would you be able to go away from your country for a short period (1-6 months)? | 12.02* | ns | ns | 4.92* | ns | ns | ns | ns | ns |
| Would you be able to go away from your country for unknown period of time? | ns | ns | ns | ns | 4.72* | 4.09* | 3.98* | 9.17* | ns |
| Would you be able to do low-qualified job outside Estonia/Latvia/Lithuania? | ns | ns | ns | ns | 11.11* | 4.17* | 5.13* | 5.00* | ns |

* - <0.05; ** - <0.01

Most of the university students of the Baltic countries (more than 70%) express intention to migrate for short period of time, but Estonian students express this desire more frequently than Latvian and Lithuanian students, and there were lowest rates for not having a short-time international migration among Estonian young people.

With regard to the long-time (1 - 3 years) international migration from the country, there were differences between Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students migration intentions – more Estonian than Lithuanian and Latvian students recognized that they are able to go abroad, whereby the lowest rates were among the Latvian university students.

About one-fourth of the students in the Baltic countries say that they want to go away from the country for unknown period, but more Estonian and Latvian students than Lithuanian students reveal that they do not want to migrate permanently, whereby more Latvians and Lithuanians were not interested in this matter compared with Estonians.

The same tendencies were also revealed concern with the having low-qualified job at abroad – about one-third of the youngsters noted that they can do low-qualified work outside their country, but more Estonian and Latvian students than Lithuanian students express a wish for not to do this kind of work, whereby more Latvians and Lithuanians were not interested in this matter compared with Estonians.

At the same time, all students in three countries were quite optimistic about their future in their own country – more than 60 percent see possibilities for professional development (no significant differences were revealed between opinions of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students' answers).

Summarizing, based on present study, it was found that a large number of the Baltic States university students express the desire to live abroad for a short time, but differences between students revealed in the intentions either live abroad for a long time or permanently. Namely, Estonians tended to wish a desire to migrate more often for a long time, and Latvians less often; Lithuanian students tended to be able to migrate permanently and to have low-qualified jobs outside the country more often than the others.

Table 3. Percentages of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students answers about migration experiences and χ^2 values of comparison the frequencies of answers

| What is your experience in international tours? | Estonia (N=182) | Latvia (N=359) | Lithuania (N= 159) | Estonia versus Latvia | Estonia versus Lithuania | Latvia versus Lithuania |
|---|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Tourism | 69% | 70% | 74% | ns | ns | ns |
| Experience exchange | 24% | 9% | 8% | 22.05** | 14.48** | ns |
| Conferences | 6% | 1% | 1% | ns | ns | ns |
| Not interested in | 0% | 5% | 14% | ns | 14.67** | 9.89* |
| No experience | 1% | 15% | 2% | 13.43** | ns | 10.84* |

* - <0.05; ** - <0.01

Table 4. Percentages of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students' answers about the feelings of migration experiences and χ^2 values of comparison the frequencies of answers

| Your feeling outside Estonia/Latvia/Lithuania? | Estonia (N=182) | Latvia (N=359) | Lithuania (N= 159) | Estonia versus Latvia | Estonia versus Lithuania | Latvia versus Lithuania |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Liked | 42% | 68% | 64% | 18.90** | 12.47** | ns |
| Did not like | 14% | 9% | 3% | ns | ns | ns |
| No comment | 1% | 4% | 9% | ns | ns | ns |
| Suprised positive | 40% | 15% | 22% | 5.29* | 4.84* | ns |
| Suprised negative | 3% | 4% | 2% | ns | ns | ns |

* - <0.05; ** - <0.01

Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students migration experiences were mainly (about 70% of cases) connected with tourism, and with experience exchange connected with studies more often for Estonian students compared with Latvian and Lithuanian students, whereby Lithuanian students tended more frequently to be not interested in this matter and Latvian students tended to have more frequently no such experiences.

Most of the Baltic States countries students valued their migration experience positively, but it was connected with mixed emotions: positive and negative. Estonian university students valued their foreign experience relatively low compared with Latvian and Lithuanian students opinions, and also more often connected the foreign experience with positive emotions (positive surprise) compared with the others.

Consequently, most of the Baltic States university students had valuable migration experience as tourism experience, and additionally Estonian students had frequently also academic experience exchange, but Lithuanian students tended to be more often not interested in this matter and Latvians had more probably than the others no migration experiences. Estonian students connected their foreign experiences more often with positive feelings compared with Latvian and Lithuanian students who had more frequently mixed feelings.

4. Conclusions

Today migration in many cases is also a mundane activity. In many cases (except in countries with civil unrest) is the source for improvements in socio-economic situation or in gaining experiences that advance career and social networking rather than a matter of survival. This is true for the three for Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), because these three countries already for the third decade experience peace, prosperity, stability, and whatever problems they face: e.g., economic downturn - these are not severe and they are just similar to situation in other countries.

Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students migration experiences were mainly (about 70% of cases) connected with tourism, and with study experience exchange more often for Estonian students compared with Latvian and Lithuanian students, whereby Lithuanian students tended more frequently to be not interested in this matter and Latvian students tended to have more frequently no such experiences. The main purpose of the stay abroad is to perform work activities and to study or get training (Makni, 2011), and the last intention overwhelmed among Estonians reflecting Estonian students higher transnational student mobility compared with Latvians and Lithuanians.

Most of the Baltic States university students had valuable migration experience as tourism experience, but it was connected with mixed emotions: positive and negative with one exception – Estonian university students' feelings about foreign experiences were dominantly positive.

Results highlight a high overall student mobility in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – about 40 % have no intention to leave the country, and for 70-60% there is some possibility of staying abroad for a short time (less than half year) or long time (1-3 years), whereby there were differences between three Baltic countries – more Estonians than Latvians, and in the middle Lithuanians. Thus, potential migrants account among Baltic States university students was about 60% of all respondents for short-term and long-term migration. We may speculate that income differentiations between countries and different unemployment levels are indicated as the major factors in high educated youth migration intentions. Thus, Baltic States modern student is flexible, responding to the new intensive processes in cross-border relations connected with different work experiences.

At the other side – Baltic States university students were optimistic about their future in their own country – more than 60 percent see possibilities for professional development in their own country; and it was revealed that only one-fourth of the students in the Baltic countries say that they want to migrate permanently or do a low-qualified job at abroad, whereby more Estonian and Latvian students than Lithuanian students expressed these migration intentions. This finding is parallel with previous studies (Liduma, Rone, Zuzevičiūte and Kõiv, 2012) that university students' attitudes toward mobility among the three Baltic States were similar at the global levels, and differentiated at the country level.

International migration in the Baltic Sea region is today more diverse, more rapidly changing and more challenging than ever before (Kaczmarczyk and Okólski, 2011), and these tendencies characterize also today's university students migration experiences and intentions. The issue about Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian students' in higher education perspective towards experiences in other countries and migration is important as reflection of general tendencies of the three Baltic counties (Kirch and Mezentsev, 2012): Nowadays structures of higher education are inefficient in the situation of high education.

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