Modern life experience of Ukrainian migrants in the context of intercultural strategies

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ABSTRACT

The article reveals the current aspects of the problem of intercultural relations, adaptation and integration of Ukrainian refugees in a new social and cultural environment. The stages of acculturation of migrants are systematized using the classic works of K. Oberg, J. Berry and modern sociological research. It was found that the processes of assimilation of values, forms of behavior of a new community, creation of new cultural algorithms contribute to the separation of a person from the traumatic experience of the past and overcoming post-traumatic cultural stress.

An important component of adaptation processes of migrants is the support of their host state and civil society. The need to work with migrants is emphasized, in particular, work with injuries caused by the military conflict, strategies to counter violence caused by the consequences of war, work to achieve dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts, countering discrimination, integration of refugees into the everyday and cultural space of the local community, assistance in the development of social entrepreneurship to resolve socio-economic conflicts.

KEYWORDS

migrants,
intercultural
communication,
cultural adaptation,
intercultural strategies,
liminality,
integration

Introduction

The active movement of Ukrainian migrants in the European world, their experience of adaptation and life prompts scientific research into this phenomenon. There is an urgent need for theoretical understanding and the search for practical mechanisms for the integration of migrants into a new cultural environment. Ukrainian refugees' biographical narratives help create a methodological background to analyze acculturation stress and the adaptation of migrants to a new socio-cultural environment. By understanding the reasons that drove people to migrate and identifying their main migration strategies, it is possible to outline a range of adaptation challenges to new living conditions, a new environment, and to discern people's attitudes to new circumstances. The complexity of intercultural relations with migrants requires thoughtful consideration and consequently it requires development of strategies for their unfolding. It seems crucial to take into account the difficulties and conflicts that hinder contact, opportunities, and prospects for migrants' adaptation in the new culture. The utilization of phenomenological methodology and sociological research methods that rely on the experiences of refugees, their own life experiences, and autobiographical narratives, is fruitful for identifying cultural priorities and developing social policies regarding the relationships of migrants with the society of settlement. The effective implementation of intercultural communication, whether through situational contacts with the local population or the process of integrating migrants into another culture, is an urgent necessity in today's conditions. This is especially true in the context of the challenges posed by war.

The *purpose of the article* – to analyze the problem of the liminal existence of Ukrainian migrants and to invent effective strategies for their cultural integration into the new society.

Research methods

The research is based on the phenomenological method of studying the life experience of Ukrainian refugees in a different social environment and cultural space. The method of system analysis is used to create a theoretical scheme of adaptation of migrants to the new environment and their integration into society of settlement.

To define the constitutive concepts for analyzing the adaptation features of refugees, let's consider the concept of "liminality", which refers to the condition of individuals in a border state (psychological or sociocultural), particularly on the boundary between two different cultures. This concept is methodologically fruitful for studying both adaptation and the consequences of refugees' non-adaptation. The concept of liminality is comparable to the concept of marginality. Marginality denotes the borderline social or cultural position of a subject in relation to the social community into which he finds himself. This potential of marginality is determined by the nature of liminality, the border situation. The conditions of ambivalence and uncertainty, blurred sociality stimulate the energetic search of the marginal for a new fundamental community. The transition to a

new environment, liminality is a temporary state that allows the marginal to acquire a new status, recognition of a new community, to cease being a marginal.

The conceptualization of liminality originated from anthropological research by A. van Gennep and Victor Turner and is prominent in contemporary postmodern humanistic studies. In his work "The Rites of Passage" A. van Gennep described rituals that involve changes in social status within tribes and traced the sequence of the rites of passage in which an individual moves from one social world to another. He characterized the very transition as the passage of a person through liminality, a phase of chaotic and unstructured life. This very phase in the lives of refugees is pivotal. As described by the Ukrainian researcher Lyudmyla Horbunova (Horbunova, 2017:73), "within its boundaries, against the backdrop of chaos, freedom, and uncertainty, a creative process of exploration and testing of possibilities and scenarios for further development takes place, and choices for the future are formed».

An important method of obtaining data for for our research is the method of collecting and analyzing information from open sources, including reports from all-Ukrainian sociological surveys, materials of research on world migration, intercultural experience.

Results and Discussion

Additional clarification is required for the conceptual terms – adaptation, acculturation, and related concepts in this terminology series. Social and cultural adaptation (Latin: adapto – to adjust, socialis – societal) refers to the interaction of an individual or a group with a new social and cultural environment. It involves acquiring new social and cultural skills, competencies, and abilities through communication, education, and the strengthening of both private and public connections.

When individuals from their home culture enter a different cultural context and attempt to establish their way of life in the new culture, they go through specific stages of adaptation, also known as acculturation. The process of adaptation is influenced by social and cultural differences between newcomers and members of established cultural communities. The time frames for the acculturation process also vary depending on the social and cultural factors that exist before and arise during acculturation.

The conflict of cultures at the individual, group, and societal levels is referred to as acculturation stress or culture shock. This term was first coined by the American anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (Oberg, 1960: 142) in the mid-20th century. He described culture shock as "precipitated by anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life". In the liminal space of a person transitioning from a familiar, home culture to an unfamiliar, foreign one, two different sets of ideas, traditions, everyday actions, and rules collide. Here, there is a potential loss of familiar signs and symbols of everyday interaction. An individual enters a different social dimension, encounters an alternative system of life coordinates, and a different reference framework. Distancing from the home group in space and time leads to a significant narrowing of the field of interpretation in which the individual finds themselves. "If reality is imagined by a person as a particular symbolic picture of the world, then encountering another symbolic system forces a person to reassess and rethink this reality. When the symbols used for conceptualizing the world are unfamiliar and foreign, it can lead to feelings of disorientation, isolation, or even a loss of identity" (Kolinko, 2019b: 261). Any form of discomfort that an individual experiences in an unfamiliar environment can be a symptom of culture shock. Kalervo Oberg compiled a list of symptoms, including "excessive washing of the hands, excessive concern over drinking water, food, dishes, and bedding; fear of physical contact with attendants or servants", a sense of helplessness in communication, irritation with service delays, and other discrepancies. "Finally, that terrible longing to be back home, to be able to have a good cup of coffee and a piece of apple pie, to walk into that corner drugstore, to visit one's relatives, and, in general, to talk to people who really make sense" (Oberg, 1960: 142-143). While anthropologist Oberg focused on the psychological indicators of acculturation stress, our task is to understand the social components of the traumatic experience of refugees.

A migrant enters a new environment without knowing what is expected of them and what to expect from others. Previous learning and skills are no longer applicable, and new ones have not yet been acquired. Acculturation stress is associated with the situation of cultural encounter and is considered a temporary state that diminishes as the migrant gains a better understanding of the new social environment and transforms their perception of their own way of life. The reshaping of their life world follows certain patterns.

The adaptation of refugees to new living conditions is governed by various social, cultural, and political mechanisms. Renowned Canadian psychologist John Berry in his work "Acculturation strategies and adaptation" emphasizes the influence of cultural contexts on the adaptation process of migrants and presents acculturation strategies. He states, "This process involves the cultural and behavioral changes that result from contact between groups and individuals who have different cultural backgrounds". According to the cross-cultural approach of John Berry, acculturation can be measured by the following parameters: "The first is the relative preference for maintaining one's heritage culture and identity. The second is the relative preference for having intercultural contact with, and participating in, the larger society along with other ethnocultural groups. The third is the role played by the larger society (its policies and institutions) in allowing or constraining these first two preferences" (Berry, 2007). Therefore, it's important to analyze how individuals relate to the identity formed in their home culture before the migration period. It's essential to examine to what extent individuals make efforts to understand and assimilate the new culture and identify with it. Additionally, assessing the conditions created by the host community for the adaptation of migrants is crucial. Key markers of individual and social life spaces include: language of communication (native or new); cultural traditions (those of the home community or the new one); social circles and friendships (migrants from the same country or local residents); contacts during social interactions (with representatives of the native culture or the local population).

The areas of work with migrants are work with trauma caused by the war conflict, strategies to counter violence caused by the consequences of war, work to achieve dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts, countering discrimination, integration of refugees into the local community, assistance in the development of social entrepreneurship to solve social economic conflicts.

John Berry defined "the four acculturation strategies of assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural iden-

tity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the Assimilation strategy is defined. In contrast, when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others, then the Separation alternative is defined. When there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination) then Marginalisation is defined. Finally, when there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups, the Integration strategy is defined" (Berry, 2007). The psychologist underlines: "there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time seeking, as a member of an ethno cultural group, there is a desire to participate as an integral part of the larger society". Berry distinguishes assimilation from integration (Berry, 2007): "Note that integration has a very specific meaning within this framework: it is clearly different from assimilation (because there is substantial cultural maintenance with integration), and it is not a generic term referring to just any kind of long term presence, or involvement, of an immigrant group in a society of settlement".

During the process of adopting the values and behavioral norms of a new community, new cultural constructs are created. These constructs contribute to the individual's separation from their traumatic past experiences and the overcoming of post-traumatic cultural stress. To understand this process, it is essential to clarify the stages of acculturation. The model of acculturation stress is often depicted graphically as Lysgaard's U-shaped curve: from the initial excitement to disillusionment and fatigue, followed by adjustment. During the first stage, euphoria sets in. Everything is fascinating, from meeting new people to understanding everyday rules, new tastes and colors, architecture, communicative skills, and communication style. This phase typically lasts from a few days to several months, depending on various circumstances.

The second stage, often referred to as disillusionment or crisis, can be the most challenging in the process of acculturation stress. During this phase, people's actions and reactions may be irritating. The pace of life does not align with the sojourner's feelings, leading to frustration due to a lack of understanding of cultural cues, social norms, and non-verbal communication. This amplifies the sense of disconnection from the surrounding environment. Holidays may seem strange, and objects may appear to be in the "wrong" places. Communication plays a pivotal role during this stage, making language barriers particularly acute and noticeable.

The fact of having a low level of proficiency in foreign languages can be a significant barrier to the integration of refugees into a new socio-cultural environment. Scientific research conducted in Ukrainian society in recent years (such as "Naslidku", 2015; "Hybrid War", 2017; Kolinko, 2019a) confirms the insufficient command of foreign languages by the majority of Ukrainians. This situation is not exclusive to migrants but also affects the general population. Therefore, the Ukrainian government initiated a national program for learning English called "Future Perfect" in 2024 and provides access to platforms like Promova and Empower for online foreign language learning.

Communicative interaction with a supportive cultural group can help refugees cope with loneliness and homesickness, as confirmed by cross-cultural research by C. Ward, S. Bochner, and A. Furnham (*Ward et al., 2005: 87*): "friends and acquaintances are considered as sources of

social support... co-national relations are the most salient and powerful source of support for both sojourners and immigrants".

The third stage of acculturation stress is often considered adjustment, during which the possibility of the applicability of one's experience, further stay, and overcoming the negative impact are analyzed. As demonstrated in our research, "migrants who leave for permanent residence in another country and wish to become full-fledged members of the new culture are strongly motivated. A powerful incentive is obtaining education abroad for students or highpaying jobs" (Kolinko, 2019b: 263). If sojourners did not want to leave their home culture (refugees, displaced persons), they have a more challenging time adapting to new circumstances. Some of them seek communication with expatriate communities. There, acquaintance with a foreign culture occurs through interpretations, making the adjustment phase easier. When a person or a community achieves success, social recognition, they acquire existential balance, plan their future life, hope for prospects, and have a cultural horizon that helps them adapt to another culture. It is worth agreeing with the well-known researchers C. Ward, S. Bochner, and A. Furnham (Ward et al., 2005: 85), who point out that in the interaction between an individual and a new culture, the success of adaptation depends on a unique "cultural fit": "in many cases it is not personality per se that predicts cross-cultural adjustment, but rather the 'cultural fit' between the acculturating individual and host culture norms», as well as the readiness of the social environment to accept newcomers".

Acceptance is the final stage in which either a new identity is formed, and the sojourner feels like a part of the new culture, or they accept the new conditions as necessary to move forward, solve problems, and embrace differences. Rarely, a third scenario is realized - the marginalization of a refugee who could neither understand nor accept the offered cultural conditions. Of course, a person may not be enthusiastic about the new country (as in the "euphoria" stage), but they can live in it without unjustified anxiety, criticism, or negative attitudes. At the stage of partial assimilation (referred to as differentiated inclusion), the new culture does not become entirely understandable, but there is an awareness that successful living and activities in the host community are possible without a complete understanding of the new environment. This psychological state is productive for the further acculturation of refugees. An analysis of the experience of Ukrainian refugees shows that the sequence of acculturation stress stages can be variable. This process does not proceed linearly; it forms a network of interactions and relationships that influence its development differently. The traumatic transition can lead to a negative evaluation of the encounter with the host culture in the early days and depressive moods later on. Based on the stories of migrants, it can be concluded that "it is more probable that the transition commences in a state of at least moderate distress" (Ward et al., 2005: 82). Simultaneous influences of multiple stages are also possible. Liminal mechanisms imply the likelihood of reverting to an earlier stage, a repeated crisis. Moreover, an individual's private cultural space is constructed as unique, eliciting individual reactions. Some refugees may never progress to the final stage of adaptation and return home. This can be related to the short duration of their stay in the host culture or their unwillingness/inability to adapt.

Social and cultural adaptation of refugees becomes an important condition, and it requires social support from var-

ious sources, including the state, the host community, family, friends, and acquaintances. The methodology for developing adaptation mechanisms for migrants should also consider the "social-individual assessment of the migrant's labor contribution, their current life situation, interests, etc. It should determine their place in the overall process of reproducing the territorial social system, and ensure a balance between the individual requests and aspirations of the migrant and the real opportunities determined by the level of socio-economic and legal organization of society" (Naslidky..., 2008: 147-148).

Ukrainian refugees who found themselves in Europe during the Russian-Ukrainian war largely embody European values, which hopefully predisposes the public to a tolerant attitude towards them. Lenka Dražanová and Andrew Geddes from the Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, provided survey data on the perception of Ukrainian refugees (*Attitudes towards, 2022*): "This is significant because many people have 'conservative' value orientations meaning that they value order and stability and that, consequently, scenes of apparent chaos as likely to trigger concern. In contrast, Ukrainian refugees have been portrayed as people requiring help and support. Clearly, the fact that Ukrainians were represented as fellow Europeans played a key role too".

The motivation for the integration of Ukrainian refugees depends on the reasons for migration, the attractiveness of the host society, intercultural competencies, language competencies, prospects for safety, and financial well-being. The timing of the decision is crucial. When a person makes a decision to migrate urgently due to a threat to their life, such as evacuating from a conflict zone, they share responsibility for their future way of life among themselves, the organization helping with evacuation, and the community accepting the refugees. Individuals who make independent decisions, free from chaotic pressures, tend to have more motivation, rational arguments regarding their decision, and better awareness of their risks. They can justify their choice of liminality and the decision to relinquish their roots in their native community.

To consciously become an outsider, courage is needed. This drives Ukrainian refugees toward dynamism, readiness for risks and sacrifices, which enhances their competitiveness. They "squeeze" into unfamiliar environments and feel their foreignness, but long-term migration goals can "bind" them to the new country in achieving personal, family, social, financial, and political objectives, leading them towards integration into the socio-cultural, economic, and political space of the European state.

After a year and a half of full-scale war with Russia, the migration of Ukrainian refugees and their return home depends on the intensity and duration of the conflict, as well as the prospects for security and quality of life. This has been noted by analysts, experts, and sociologists in Ukraine and abroad. For example, in a report by Vasco Botelho for the European Central Bank, he offers the following assessment (*Botelho, 2022*): "The proportion of Ukrainian refugees who remain in the euro area in the medium term will depend on the duration and the severity of the war. If the fighting becomes more protracted or more intense, the number of refugees will rise".

The choice of a host country can be influenced by the ethnic background of refugees and the places of origin of their genetic ancestors. In such cases, they may seek to settle in a specific region. For example, Ukrainian Greeks

from Mariupol ended up in Greece, Crimean Tatars in Turkey, and Germans who were citizens of Ukraine chose Germany as their host country.

In countries where the language preferences and religiosity of Ukrainian refugees noticeably differ from similar markers of the host country's population, the process of adaptation of migrants to the local community and their adequate acceptance by the new community may be slowed down. Italian analyst Vasco Botelho points out that despite the increasing influx of refugees, "a significant number of people – around 2.1 million – have temporarily re-entered Ukraine" (Botelho, 2022). Language serves as an indicator of the linguistic self-awareness of citizens. A satisfactory level of adaptation to the conditions of living in a new social environment is achieved more quickly by the younger generation, as they are more proficient in foreign languages and do not experience the same level of discomfort in the process of communication.

In recent years, European public opinion has expressed concerns and reservations regarding sojourners, influenced by the influx of migrants from various regions of the world. Doubts have been raised about the positive impact of immigration on culture and national identity. Many people associate social issues such as unemployment and crime with immigration. Fear and distrust of migrants have fueled the creation and even success of anti-immigrant political parties in several European countries. Large migration flows into Europe have correlated with an increase in social anomie in the areas where they settle because migrants bring their cultural patterns to the host countries. Their concepts of the domestic world may differ from those of Europeans, making them appear foreign and potentially dangerous, as they could be seen as potential disruptors of the host culture's foundations. This issue not only pertains to refugees from countries suffering from political tensions and economic decline but also to "mobile EU citizens", as they are referred to in European political discourse, which includes residents of Eastern European countries.

The active incorporation of different cultural traditions and beliefs can disrupt and challenge the categories that have long shaped the European cultural understanding of itself. Well-established and fixed cultural and political forms provide a sense of security to the population, which is why a certain portion of society is reluctant to accept refugee strangers, fearing the uncertainty of change, a state of "constant suspension", and the disruption of the established order. For the sake of fairness, it should be noted that the desire for stability and continuity is characteristic of the majority of cultural individuals. However, this is not a justification for the development of xenophobia. Moreover, the similarity of the worldview and the way of everyday life of Ukrainians to the countries that provide them shelter works in favor of friendly relationships between migrants and the representatives of the new culture for them.

Migrants' distinctiveness and their former priorities do not necessarily threaten the established order of the world they encounter. Instead, migrants challenge the everyday norms of the new sociocultural space. In their presence, not only social risks and communicative obstacles hide but also the possibility of rejuvenating the system, offering the prospect of cultural innovation. While considerations of cultural reconstructions do not imply migrants' obligatory role in cultural creation, their impact on these processes should be acknowledged. Detachment from their native cultural roots can lead to the destruction of cultural identity, but it

can also broaden the horizons of life for both migrants and the residents of the host culture. Notions of the conventionality of sociocultural concepts and the mechanisms for the reconfiguration of sociocultural relationships lead to a strategy of cultural recognition (*Kolinko, 2017; Kolinko, 2019b; Kolinko, 2019c*). The trauma of sociocultural transition influences the migrant's relationship with their new environment. Variants of a newcomer's integration into a different cultural environment can be identified: public inclusion, inclusion in the diaspora's home world, integration into the host community, differentiated inclusion, exclusion from the world of the new culture.

For the majority of Ukrainian migrants, a high degree of adaptive inclination is characteristic, which can be explained by various factors. These factors include prior experience with labor migration, shared values and cultural orientations with the host society, proficiency in the English language and/or the language of the host society, and the independent decision-making process regarding migration. As a result, migrants tend to exhibit readiness for social, cultural, professional, and personal integration. This readiness leads to constructive communication with the new social environment, improved living conditions, the assimilation of values and norms of the host culture, ultimately resulting in the internalization and acquisition of a new identity.

Conclusion

Acculturation stress is understood as an inherent and procedural phenomenon in the social and cultural adaptation of Ukrainian refugees, and this interpretation is considered productive. The study of its components contributes to optimizing the process of integrating individuals or groups into a new cultural environment. An analysis of the acculturation stress issue shows that, despite the painful and complex nature of this period, it is an essential tool for adaptation to the society of settlement. It helps individuals develop the ability to live in an ever-changing world where geographic and cultural boundaries blur, and communication without borders becomes increasingly important.

The phase of liminality is crucial for the adaptation of refugees to their new conditions of existence. Liminal social status is characterized by uncertainty, the marginalization of the migrant, their openness to encountering another social system, and fears about this encounter. The transition of Ukrainian refugees from simple segregation to integration can have various causes and manifestations. Motivation factors of migrants, the level of tolerance of the host community, and the presence of institutional and public support for newcomers are of paramount importance in resolving the issue of cultural inclusion. Social status, education, and professionalism of newcomers do not guarantee a priori proficiency in intercultural communication skills but increase their competitiveness. During the process of aligning an individual's cultural rules with the norms of the host community, special attention should be paid to improving language skills, understanding the non-verbal cues of interlocutors, as well as social and cultural awareness of sojourners, and the study of local customs and traditions. Analysis of intercultural interaction studies shows that barriers to establishing productive communication include stereotypes and superstitions, ethnocentrism, linguistic incompetence, negative historical experience, and cultural differences.

The adaptation strategies of Ukrainian refugees involve engaging them in various aspects of life within the society of settlement. The experience of Ukrainian refugees has

contributed to the accumulation of knowledge regarding ways to generalize and categorize the processes of adaptation and acculturation of migrants in their new life circumstances. In most cases, integration is the most desirable strategy for Ukrainian refugees. This process may involve distancing sojourners from their home culture and a desire to strengthen their relationships with members of the society of settlement. However, communication with the cultural community left behind or the diaspora can be maintained, and relationships with the new social environment can be established. This option is the most socially productive and psychologically comfortable for migrants. It is worth noting the significant role of UN initiatives, European governments, international charitable organizations, and religious institutions in facilitating effective communication between Ukrainian refugees and host communities.

Researching the life experience of Ukrainian migrants is a promising phenomenological approach for creating narratives of intercultural communication within European society and its individual countries.

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Сучасний життєвий досвід українських мігрантів у контексті міжкультурних стратегій

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У статті розкриваються актуальні аспекти проблеми міжкультурних відносин, адаптації та інтеграції українських біженців у новому соціокультурному середовищі. Систематизовано етапи акультурації мігрантів з використанням класичних праць К. Оберга, Дж. Беррі та сучасних соціологічних досліджень. Виявлено, що процеси засвоєння цінностей, форм поведінки нової спільноти, створення нових культурних алгоритмів сприяють виокремленню людини з травматичного досвіду минулого і подоланню посттравматичного культурного стресу.

Важливою складовою адаптаційних процесів мігрантів є підтримка їх приймаючою державою і громадянським суспільством. Підкреслюється необхідність роботи з мігрантами, зокрема робота з травмами, які обумовлені воєнним конфліктом, стратегії протидії насиллю, що викликано наслідками війни, робота з досягнення діалогу та мирного врегулювання конфліктів, протидія дискримінації, інтеграція біженців у повсякденний та культурний простір місцевої спільноти, допомога в розвитку соціального підприємництва для вирішення соціально-економічних конфліктів.

Ключові слова: мігранти, міжкультурна комунікація, культурна адаптація, міжкультурні стратегії, лімінальність, інтеграція.

Received (Надійшла до редакції): 20.06.2024, Accepted (Прийнята до друку): 01.08.2024, Available online (Опубліковано онлайн) 30.09.2024