

THE INTEGRATION OF ROMANIAN MIGRANTS IN THE DANISH SOCIETY

Gabriela BOANGIU*

Abstract: The reasons for choosing this theme – Integration of Romanians in Danish society – is the fact that it fills a scientific gap in the grid of academic research, not being very much investigated from a sociological perspective, with a well-structured, innovative methodology and with clearly formulated hypotheses from the sociological point of view. The poor knowledge of Romanian communities in the countries of northern Europe, namely Sweden and Denmark, must be replaced by sociological research of excellence, which will ensure recognition of these communities alongside others in Europe and the world, ensure the preservation of Romanian identity, the right to preservation of the Romanian language and culture in the communities of Romanians who gather far from their country of origin.

The importance of studying the phenomenon of Romanian migration to Denmark arises from the rights of Romanian communities to maintain contact with their country of origin, with the Romanian language and culture. Researching the level of well-being, the level of social and professional integration, the quality of life of Romanians from the diaspora existing in Sweden and Denmark is a task of Romanian sociology, in the context of a united and coherent Europe, in which the rights of minorities must be recognized, but also the principle of affirming unity through diversity, of preserving the original identity of migrants in the new context of the adopting countries.

Considering the chosen topic, the objectives, the goals and the universe of the field research, I chose triangulation as a method of approach, that is, the gathering of three methodologies for investigating the studied phenomenon in order to have a more detailed analysis of it. Therefore, we used the sociological questionnaire – quantitative method, the non-directive interview and the life story or social biography, but also the content analysis of some social documents (magazines published by the community, messages of community members investigated on different forums and social networks, letters, e-mails, photos from respondents' personal archives).

Keywords: migration, Romanian in Denmark, integration, socialization, triangulation.

The title of this study refers to the existence of well-defined structural, social, economic and cultural Romanian communities in the social space of Northern Europe, more precisely in Denmark.

The phenomenon of the migration of Romanians to other social spaces in Europe or other cultural areas is a favorite topic for many doctoral students of the Doctoral School of Social Studies, Specialization in Sociology, of the University of

* 3rd Degree Scientific Researcher, PhD. “C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor” Institute for Research in Social Studies and Humanities from Craiova, of the Romanian Academy; E-mail: boangiu_g@yahoo.com

Craiova, such as Cristina Ilie, Alexandra Porumbescu, Wedad Quffa, Dan Voinea, Cristina Pescaru, Elena Basarab, Alexandra Deaconu, Decebal Floroiaica, Dumitru Onică, Călin Roșu¹.

The reasons for choosing this theme – Integration of Romanians in Danish society – is the fact that it fills a scientific gap in the grid of academic research, not being very much investigated from a sociological perspective, with a well-structured, innovative methodology and with clearly formulated hypotheses from the point of view sociological. The poor knowledge of Romanian communities in the countries of northern Europe, namely Sweden and Denmark, must be replaced by sociological research of excellence, which will ensure recognition of these communities alongside others in Europe and the world, ensure the preservation of Romanian identity, the right to preservation of the Romanian language and culture in the communities of Romanians who gather far from their country of origin.

The importance of studying the phenomenon of Romanian migration to Denmark arises from the rights of Romanian communities to maintain contact with their country of origin, with the Romanian language and culture. Researching the level of well-being, the level of social and professional integration, the quality of life of Romanians from the diaspora existing in Sweden and Denmark is a task of Romanian sociology, in the context of a united and coherent Europe, in which the rights of minorities must be recognized, but also the principle of affirming unity through diversity, of preserving the original identity of migrants in the new context of the adopting countries.

Regarding the term identity, we can point out that it is “of Latin origin (identitas) and has several meanings, including that of: Set of data by which a person is identified”². So, Identity refers to what is essential, specific, individual, unique, and, by extrapolation, we can talk about collective, group, societal, national, community, continental identity by defining national identity we arrive at the disclosure and understanding of the differences between societies, of the uniqueness of national forms of social life, i.e. of their peculiarities or specificity³.

¹ Cristina Ilie, *Comunitatea românilor din Spania. Dimensiunile discriminării și tipurile de aculturație*, București, University Bucharest Publishing House, 2014; Alexandra Porumbescu, *Migrația românilor în Germania*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2015; Wedad Quffa, *Imigrația românilor în Anglia*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2015; Dan Voinea, *Imigranții români din Statele Unite ale Americii*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2015; Cristina Pescaru, *Comunitatea românilor din Belgia*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2016; Elena Basarab, *Românii din Canada*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2017; Alexandra Deaconu, *Românii din Olanda. Monografia unei comunități de imigranți*, Craiova, Beladi & Sitech Publishing Houses, 2019; Decebal Floroiaica, *Vlahii din Serbia. Servicii sociale și dezvoltare comunitară*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2019; Dumitru Onică, *Însemnări despre Japonia*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2019; Călin Roșu, *Românii din Austria*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2020.

² *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, Editura Academiei RSR, București, 1984 apud Adrian Otovescu, *Conservarea identității culturale în mediile de imigranți români din Europa*, București, “Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române” Publishing House, 2013, p. 73.

³ Adrian Otovescu, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

In general, “social change is a collective phenomenon, which affects the conditions, the way of life and the universe of mentalities of a society”⁴.

Regarding the social change generated by migration, some constants have been observed:

- a) new consumption models appear and the standard of living improves;
- b) emigrants try to develop new economic practices (entrepreneurship) where they use their accumulated knowledge;
- c) identity repositioning occurs – migrants who claim multiple identities, or the “re-invention”/reconstruction of some social/ethnic identities.

INVESTIGATION METHODS

Considering the chosen topic, the objectives, the goals and the universe of the field research, I chose triangulation as a method of approach, that is, the gathering of three methodologies for investigating the studied phenomenon in order to have a more detailed analysis of it. Therefore, we used the sociological questionnaire – quantitative method, the non-directive interview and the life story or social biography, but also the content analysis of some social documents (magazines published by the community, messages of community members investigated on different forums and social networks, letters, e-mails, photos from respondents' personal archives).

“The sociological questionnaire – includes a series of questions, with free or predetermined answers, to which the investigated subjects must answer, and which are elaborated according to the proposed theme. The abusive use of the questionnaire (questionnaire mania) and its absolutization in empirical research, as well as in statistics or cybernetics, was systematically denounced by the American sociologist P. Sorokin (Tendencies and deceptions of American sociology)”⁵.

“The sociological interview – is characterized by the fact that the questions addressed to the interlocutors are not aimed at their quality as individuals, but at the members of the community, and the investigated subjects voluntarily participate in the investigation. It can be directive (when the researcher conducts the interview based on a list of issues, the subject's answers being recorded in an orderly manner) and non-directive (when the investigator can intervene in the sequence and logic of the discussed issues, the freedom of discussion being unrestricted)”⁶.

⁴ Adrian Otovescu, *Migrația internațională*, in Dumitru Otovescu (coord.), *Tratat de sociologie generală*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2010, p. 388.

⁵ Dumitru Otovescu, *Sociologie generală*, Ediția a V-a, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2009, p. 124.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

The concept of life history has known numerous debates regarding its epistemological and methodological status within the socio-human sciences. Regarding the reflections on this concept, two initial coordinates can be outlined, which need to be branched along the way: on the one hand, the ability of life stories to lead to and substantiate scientifically based, rigorous and viable knowledge can be questioned, on the other hand, the researcher's attention must be focused on the methodological valences of the method of using the life story. In other words, *what can we know* and by *what way* (method) or *how can we know*, using the documents about the stories of life, at the same time, contributing to the configuration of such collections.

SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIO-CULTURAL INTEGRATION – BASIC CONCEPTS

Any socialization process has as its final goal social and systemic integration. Socialization is, in turn, the psycho-social process of transmission – assimilation of values, codes and norms in order to train, adapt and finally integrate the individual. *Social/systemic integration represents the set of interactions between an individual/group and a specific environment (professional, educational, community, society).*

Regarding the phenomenon of transnational migration, it “presupposes the existence of stable social relations between persons and groups of immigrants from the country of adoption and other persons and groups (especially family) from the country of origin. So, immigrants are agents of systematic social ties beyond national borders”⁷.

At the same time,

“the positive definition of the immigrant is the statement that he comes from a certain country and seeks to enter another country, with the aim of staying for a long period of time. A strong definition is closer to the specifics of sociological knowledge, because it allows us a more complete assessment of the immigrant (...). The evaluation of the immigrant condition from a sociological perspective allows a complex examination of the phenomenon of migration, helping us to understand the factors, causes, socio-economic and cultural effects of its manifestation”⁸.

The immigrant represents the person who, following a voluntary act, decides to emigrate (from the country of origin) and work in another country in order to

⁷ Adrian Otovescu, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁸ Adrian Otovescu, *Românii din Italia – Monografia unei comunități de imigranți*, București, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2016, pp. 21–22.

improve his quality of life. Regarding the effects of the migration process on people who have voluntarily decided to emigrate, there are not enough studies on the degree of satisfaction of the immigrant, since it is probably assumed that migration automatically brings with it personal and professional fulfillment.

Instead, a series of studies analyze the effects that the migration process has on the citizens of the host society. Bojas⁹ divides these studies into two categories: researchers who believe that immigrants negatively affect the labor market because they threaten the jobs of native citizens; researchers who believe that the effects of immigration processes are beneficial.

Along the lines of the second series, Portes¹⁰ makes certain logical clarifications, namely the fact that the labor market can be divided into several sectors and as such there are several categories of jobs and types of insertion on the labor market.

In the primary sector, Portes includes professions with high qualifications, decent jobs, high salaries, advancement possibilities and in the secondary sector, the category of jobs that do not require a high degree of professional training, that do not have the possibility to group in unions to defend their rights, who have poor working conditions and low wages. According to Portes, depending on the level of training and skills of the immigrants, they can be included in one of the two categories, especially in the second one. Portes, along with Wilson and Shafer¹¹, states that there is a third sector besides the primary and secondary ones, namely the “ethnic enclave”.

The ethnic enclave includes groups of immigrants concentrated on a certain geographical space where there are also businesses where they can work. These ethnic enclaves can become “employers” for other categories of immigrants of different ethnicities, with the possibility of advancement, based on the recognition of the work done.

A person's decision to immigrate also carries with him his willingness to integrate systemically and socially in the new host community/society. Knowledge of the language, compliance with the rules according to which the host society operates are conditions for systemic integration. On the other hand, social integration operates with values, traditions, cultural codes, identities which, in a society of differences, can be elements of distinction as well as bridges of communication with others.

A series of researches have been established as points of support for the current theories regarding migration. Among these researches there are those that focus on

⁹ George Borjas, *Friends or Strangers: The Impact of Immigration on the US Economy*, New York, Basic Books, 1990, pp. 47–60.

¹⁰ Alesandro Portes, *Migration and development: Reconciling opposite views*, in “Ethnic and Racial Studies”, no. 32(1), 2009, pp. 5–22.

¹¹ Alesandro Portes, Steven Shafer, *Revisiting the enclave hypothesis: Miami twenty – ve years later*, The Center for Migration and Development, Working Paper nr. 06–10, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006.

the individual dimension, namely on the voluntary decision of individuals to immigrate. This set of research highlights the social aspects of migration (identity, values, attachment, personal and family relationships). These dimensions of social order in turn train the mechanisms of systemic integration (respecting the rules of institutions, societies where the immigrant works).

CASE STUDIES

I. Narcis George Matache, the Romanian who ran in the local elections in Denmark on November 16, 2021

Romanian Narcis George Matache ran for the Northern Jutland regional council (regionalrådsvalg) elections that took place on 16 November 2021, the same day as the regional and municipal votes across the country. “I arrived in Aalborg in August 2009 from a small village in Romanian Moldova to study Marketing Management at the University College of Northern Denmark. I was among the first 300 international students in the city...” Matache told the Danish newspaper “The Local” which is published in English.

II. Romanian grocery store “ROFood” in Copenhagen, Denmark

The Romanian specialty store in Copenhagen is located right in the center of the Danish capital near the main shopping street “Strøget”. Thousands of Romanians residing in Copenhagen, the “port of merchants” and the city of “Little Mermaids” from the stories of H.C. Andersen, they cross the threshold of the Romanian grocery store every year.

Whether they have an anniversary, or for the big Romanian holidays, Easter and Christmas, or for a simple party with friends, they all come to buy their smoked meats, wines, palinca, sauerkraut, “mici” and “cozonaci” from Mrs. Andreea, from the only Romanian store in Copenhagen.

III. More than 20 Romanian candidates in the local elections in Denmark

- Nordjylland – Narcis George Matache
- Midtjylland – Ioan Rusu
- Vesthimmerland – Andreea Bianca Pascalau Buza
- Morsø – Florina Elena Temes
- Randers – Rafael Andrasescu
- Horsens – Raluca Balogh
- Hedensted – Mihai Bogdan Barbus
- Samsø – Iulian Paiu
- Esbjerg – Daniel Teodor Avram

- Tønder – Alina Racila, Tønder kommune
- Aabenraa – Ovidiu George Nechitoi
- Sønderborg – Marius Smoc
- Fredericia – Ecaterina Pedersen
- Kerteminde – Iulian Macinca
- Slagelse – Raul Puf (A)
- Ringsted – Valentin Costel Andersen
- Frederiksberg – Roxana Simion

For Alina Racila, who campaigns in Tønder, West Jutland, equality of opportunity is a key concern. “Your gender, age, nationality, education or disability should not stand in the way of a good life”, she says.

They want to help foreigners better integrate into this country and improve, they say, the health and education systems. “Several million industrious and ambitious Romanians have gone abroad in recent years, and the political instability in Romania will cause another wave”, analysts say¹².

Narcis George Matache, candidate in Denmark: “One thing that a lot of people have asked me is that they would like to have access to a family doctor who understands them. I want to focus on digitizing the health system. We have the necessary technology so that when you talk to your family doctor, you have automatic translation, no matter what language, so that you can understand each other”. At only 31 years old, Narcis is again running for a seat on the council of one of Denmark's five regions, the northern one. He is already a councillor, the first in history who is not Danish. He promises changes in the new mandate as well¹³.

Ioan Rusu, candidate in Denmark: “More things can change only politically, at least in the field of health. I want better monitoring of pregnant women in the last period of pregnancy”¹⁴.

Ovidiu Nechițoi, candidate: “We who came here from Europe and are like ants, we come, we work, we pay taxes, we are contributors, we are mostly forgotten, because we don't have a representative”¹⁵.

Roxana Simion: “I want to make it so that people learn Danish at work, so that what they learn theoretically they can apply where they work”¹⁶.

IV. Another case study that I propose to research in more detail is that represented by the **Romanian-Danish Academic Association (RDAA)** is an organization of academically educated people of Romanian origin who live in

¹² See <https://danemarca.ro/peste-20-de-romani-candideaza-la-alegerile-locale-si-regionale-din-danemarca-ce-vor-sa-schimbe/>, accessed at November 18, 2021.

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

Denmark, and other people from the community Danish students who are interested in the Romanian language and culture.

The purpose of the Romanian-Danish Academic Association is to promote Romanian identity and values in the academic, cultural, scientific, technical, artistic and entrepreneurial environments in Denmark. RDAA aims to constitute a representative pole of the highly qualified Romanian diaspora in Denmark in dialogue and concrete partnerships with authorities from Romania and the Danish state (professional associations, universities, research centers, Danish companies, etc.). RDAA also facilitates the exchange of ideas and initiatives of Romanian professionals, as well as the attraction of young Romanian talents through mentoring activities. RDAA is an open association addressed to all Romanian experts in Denmark who are active in research and university environments, as well as highly qualified activities.

In March 2016, the launch event of the Romanian-Danish Academic Association (AARD) took place in Copenhagen. Romanian professionals in various fields such as engineering, IT, medicine, research, social sciences and students met at the Romanian Embassy in the Kingdom of Denmark for the official launch of the Association. On behalf of the Romanian Embassy in Copenhagen, Matei-Viorel Ardeleanu participated, as ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark and the Republic of Iceland, as well as two members of the Mission.

V. Case study – Melinda Vișan, Romanian sociologist, emigrant to Denmark since 2011

Melinda Vișan was kind enough to respond to a semi-directive interview about her experience as an emigrant in Denmark. She testified:

“Since 2011, I have been to Denmark for the first time and it was not a premeditated choice, it was about a scholarship, that's how I arrived in Denmark for the first time. My case is an atypical case – I had several periods when I was not only in Denmark, I also traveled to other countries, there were also returns to Romania, but I always returned to Denmark.

No one helped me to emigrate, I found the scholarship by myself, through the faculty where I was enrolled in Cluj, I found out about the scholarship from their newsletter. It is about the Faculty of European Studies from Cluj, I was 25 years old when I chose this scholarship in Denmark. When I left Romania, I had a job as a program manager at the “Work and Travel” Agency, which dealt with all kinds of study or work opportunities abroad for students, especially in America, the USA.

I happily finished sociology in the country, after that I did a master's degree also in the country, in Interactive Multimedia, but I worked tangentially with this field. After that, I reentered Denmark, also with a scholarship, for my master's degree, where, as a result of that master's degree, I was employed at the faculty for half a year as an adviser for international students.

After that there was a short period of unemployment or even longer, then I was hired as a teacher of global perspectives, which is a kind of sociology, but in a more global way. This was happening in Aalborg, Denmark.

Regarding the image of Romania in Denmark, I would say that the general opinion and what appears in the press has a negative trend, somehow in relation to the people who come to Denmark, who basically work on the farm, that is quite a big trend, and obviously with thefts. But this image is not very widespread. With whom I met and with whom I spoke about the image of Romania with those from the more academic field, they have a more positive image, they say that the Romanians they met have a positive attitude towards work, they are very conscientious, and friendly, so it is quite a positive image, at least at the faculty where I worked, where Romanians had worked before me, it was something absolutely positive, I did not feel that there was any discrimination.

The image of these northern countries, as if they are colder... is true, and I think that this also contributes to their reluctance towards any other nation, not necessarily towards the Romanians. It is a more systematic, more latent kind of distancing. If it's a job, it's obvious by your name that you're not Danish or that you don't speak the language...

I speak Danish... In my family I speak Romanian, I am half Hungarian, half Romanian, in my family Hungarian is also spoken, Hungarian is spoken more especially when I am at home. In Denmark I speak English, a bit of Danish with some people where maybe I force a bit or to practice and I realize it is a psychological barrier even though I know I speak English in any context... it is an effort to think that... ok, let me try to speak Danish too... obviously this means a lot to them, I mean they really appreciate it if they see you making any kind of effort to speak their language, because it seems to them that... ah, why speak a language that is only spoken in Denmark... there are only 5.5 million people who speak that language... why would you do that? ... but appreciates... so like that...

What I lost coming to Denmark... I think my social life and friends, not necessarily that I lost them, literally, but it was reduced... you no longer have the intensity of relationships, basically... and that occupies the most space in my heart... What did I win by coming to Denmark? I have finally found a country where I feel that the values I have, I had before I left, are similar to what I discovered in Denmark.

I have foreign friends in principle, most of them... it's also because of the job I have... and in my master's degree I was a multicultural group... I had only two Danish colleagues and there were 70 from other countries"¹⁷.

CONCLUSIONS

All these case studies talk about certain identity, socio-cultural strategies of the Romanians to integrate into the adoption societies, but they also represent

¹⁷ The interview with Melisa Vişan was taken in 2020.

attempts to preserve the Romanian identity, some socio-cultural signs beyond the barriers that could impose certain social stratifications.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Basarab, E., *Românii din Canada*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2017.
- Borjas, G., *Friends or Strangers: The Impact of Immigration on the US Economy*, New York, Basic Books, 1990.
- Deaconu, A., *Românii din Olanda. Monografia unei comunități de imigranți*, Craiova, Beladi & Sitech Publishing Houses, 2019.
- Floroaica, D., *Vlahii din Serbia. Servicii sociale și dezvoltare comunitară*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2019.
- Ilie, C., *Comunitatea românilor din Spania. Dimensiunile discriminării și tipurile de aculturație*, București, The Bucharest University Publishing House, 2014.
- Onică, D., *Însemnări despre Japonia*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2019.
- Otovescu, A., *Conservarea identității culturale în mediile de imigranți români din Europa*, București, "Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române" Publishing House, 2013.
- Otovescu, A., *Românii din Italia – Monografia unei comunități de imigranți*, București, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2016.
- Otovescu, D., *Sociologie generală*, Ediția a V-a, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2009.
- Pescaru, C., *Comunitatea românilor din Belgia*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2016.
- Portes, A., Shafer, S., *Revisiting the enclave hypothesis: Miami twenty – ve years later*, The Center for Migration and Development, Princeton, Princeton University, Working Paper, no. 06–10, 2006.
- Portes, A., *Migration and development: Reconciling opposite views*, in "Ethnic and Racial Studies", no. 32(1), 2009, pp. 5–22.
- Porumbescu, A., *Migrația românilor în Germania*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2015.
- Roșu, C., *Românii din Austria*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2020.
- Quffa, W., *Imigrația românilor în Anglia*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2015.
- Voinea, D., *Imigranții români din Statele Unite ale Americii*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2015.
- <https://danemarca.ro/peste-20-de-romani-candideaza-la-alegerile-locale-si-regionale-din-danemarca-ce-vor-sa-schimbe/>, accessed at November 18, 2021.