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MASTER'S THESIS

International Degree Mobility
A Case Study of Slovak Undergraduate Entrepreneurs in Denmark

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Abstract

The motivation of students to relocate to foreign country in order to achieve quality education is often based on the increasing requirements of the contemporary world (Abdulai et al., 2021) as the well-educated workers represent a driving factor in a boost of financial affluence for upcoming generations (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013). Multiple studies indicate that international students and graduates are beneficial in the Danish labour market, either in corporate employment and entrepreneurship which is currently experiencing its rise (The Danish Ministry of Education and Science, 2018, Saldsieder & Hoag, 2014).

Based on empirical narratives of Slovak undergraduates of the University College Lillæbelt in Odense, this thesis explores the entrepreneurial journey of five Slovak entrepreneurs in Denmark and what role their central-European ethnic origin plays in the Danish labour market.

Despite the various opinion in politics on the issue of foreign workers in Denmark, the need for internationalization of the Danish labour market is also paid attention to as even though a considerable number of foreigners in Denmark are highly qualified, it is not a predisposition for scoring on a labour market, no matter whether their schooling background is from Denmark or abroad. Therefore, the call for diversity in Danish employment has been reinforced over several decades (OECD, 2007).

List of Abbreviations

AP	Academy Profession Degree
PBA	Professional Bachelor's degree
DIS	Danish Immigration System
DLM	Danish Labour Market
DTE	Disadvantage Theory of Entrepreneurship
EU	European Union
IDM	International Degree Mobility
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SU	Student Educational Grant
SDU	University of Southern Denmark
TASR	The News Agency of the Slovak Republic
TCA	Thematic Content Analysis
UCL	University College Lillebælt

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I. Introduction

The international resettlements create a worldwide impact. Whether individuals relocate abroad for reasons of better employment opportunities, higher-quality education, reunifying with the family, or on the grounds of fleeing the danger of war, violence or environmental concerns, the migration influences the course of cultural, economic, and social development across the globe. (Baylis et al., 2020, Kleist & Brincker, 2019). On a European scale, Denmark belongs among the nation-states with rather uncompromising immigration policies (Mitbøen et al., 2018). While politicians with anti-immigratory leanings view migrants as burdens for the Danish economy, security and values, pro-immigration politicians regard migrants as contributors to the potential advancement for the country. (Leblang & Peters, 2022). As a result, frequent political debates on the issue of foreigners residing in the country has been a recurring matter (Hervik, 2019). One of the phenomena Denmark encountered in the area of migration over the past decade is the so-called international degree mobility (IDM) (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013).

Since the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the inflow of students from the EU countries pursuing a full-time tertiary education in Denmark has rapidly grown (Wilken & Dahlberg, 2017). Until the 2022 reduction of English study programs from the Danish business academies and university colleges (The Danish Ministry of Education and Science, 2022), approximately 20 thousand internationals used to arrive to study in Denmark on a yearly basis (Statistics Denmark, 2018a). Based on research, Danish universities and university colleges are classified among the top 500 best universities worldwide. With an emphasis on incorporating theoretical knowledge with practical application, group collaboration and networking skills, studying in Denmark is seen as a valuable investment. This is especially relevant for the students from Central and Eastern Europe since the opportunity to be educated in a more advanced country than their own often promises better career prospects in the future. As for the EU students, tertiary education in Denmark is tuition free and offers a possibility of receiving an educational state grant (SU) after

fulfilling the specific requirements for the student job besides being enrolled in a full-time university study programme (Kremský, 2015, Shkoler et al., 2020, Wilken & Dahlberg, 2017).

In a global setting, the young generation in a pursuit of higher education contributes to the worldwide advancement (Shkoler & Rabenu, 2020) through becoming a source of intelligence and qualifications for every country where the future graduates decide to settle in (Chrančoková & Dokupilová, 2020). In Western Europe, as Sergej Vojtovich (2013) claims, “The level of unemployment derives from the discrepancy in the qualifications and skills processed by the labour force and what the structure of the job market and job opportunities demands” (Ibid., p. 208). Based on diverse set of narratives, the IDM equals potential academic growth, better employment opportunities (Kleist & Brincker, 2019), academic diversity, professional competencies (The Danish Ministry of Education and Science, 2018) and a range of abilities and credentials to operate in a variety of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (Chrančoková & Dokupilová, 2020) and therefore, the urgency to attract educated internationals to stay working in Denmark has never been bigger (Mark et al., 2022).

In the last two decades, the tendency of the young Slovak generation to migrate to western countries to study has grown in popularity. According to the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic (2017), “Approximately 15,000 Slovaks leave their home country every year, which represents 0,3 percent of the population” (Ibid., Chrančoková & Dokupilová, 2020). The reasons behind their departures are not always connected with the job insufficiency or inadequate salaries in Slovakia (Vojtovich, 2013). Slovak students search for a better quality of education, personal and professional development, and potential establishment abroad. As a consequence, the brain drain of the Slovak graduates causes a tremendous loss for Slovakia as the state has financed their primary and secondary education, healthcare and social insurance all their lives which will eventually benefit the host country (Kremský, 2015).

In March 2022, the Slovak government initiated an education grant of an amount of 9 thousand Euros for 1,400 Slovak students with excellent academic percentile who decided to enrol to the Slovak university instead of studying abroad. The universities in Slovakia where the student enrolls himself promised to donate a monthly amount of 200 Euro for the work with the students with

exceptional talents. Peter Golias (2022) explains that “To keep the most talented people in Slovakia is crucial. The reality is; however, every fifth student emigrates from Slovakia. We, as a country cannot afford such a drain of brains” (TASR, 2022).

Historically, the Slovaks who have been able to study in Denmark over the past decade, belong among the privileged group who were able to pursue tertiary education abroad free of charge. However, as a rule, Slovak migrants enter the Danish labour market already as students. Due to insufficient financial resources, the majority of Slovak students in Denmark are obliged to work up to 12 hours per week besides studying in order to receive a SU grant. Despite their professional competences, they often find unqualified employment with a minimum salary. Although they belong to the group of intelligent and competent international students, they often fall under the category of affordable workforce from Central Europe in order to complete their studies in Denmark (Wilken & Dahlberg, 2017).

One of the options of tertiary education in Denmark where a high percentage of Slovaks used to study are academies and university colleges which until 2022 provided numerous study programmes in English. One of the examples of this kind of Danish tertiary education is the University College Lillebælt, or UCL University College, with campuses in Odense, Svendborg, Vejle, Jelling and Fredericia. Its aim is to provide a high-quality education with a focus on the practical application in the labour market. One of the specifics of the UCL are the offered courses with an emphasis on entrepreneurship which as a consequence cause that many undergraduates have a tendency to start their own business in Denmark and abroad (www.ucl.dk, 2022).

I.I. Problem Formulation: Aim and the Research Question

The motivation of students to relocate to foreign country in order to achieve quality education is often based on the increasing requirements of the contemporary world (Abdulai et al., 2021) as the well-educated workers represent a driving factor in a boost of financial affluence for upcoming generations (Mosneaga & Winther, 2013). Multiple studies indicate that international students and graduates are beneficial in the Danish labour market, either in corporate employment and entrepreneurship which is currently experiencing its rise (The Danish Ministry of Education and Science, 2018, Saldsieder & Hoag, 2014). According to the Danish Business Authority (2022),

“The presence of foreign entrepreneurs in Denmark creates economic growth, employment, and global start-up network connections. Talented entrepreneurs reinvent industries, create jobs, and increase the competitiveness of Denmark, already one of the more agile economies in Europe” (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, the research demonstrates that approximately half of internationals leave Denmark within the first 24 months after receiving their academic or professional degrees. This issue has eventuated into numerous discussions resulting in a 2022 reduction of the English study programmes from business academies and colleges which were irrelevant for the Danish labour market (DLM). The graduates' difficulties acquiring employment positions according to their academic and professional qualifications were also one of the core arguments for leaving Denmark (The Danish Ministry of Education and Science, 2018, 2022). As a matter of fact, the issue of international brain drain in Denmark and as a consequence, the financial loss for the Danish government which invested in the EU students with a tuition-free tertiary education. However, the international brain gain in Denmark in a form of entrepreneurship, notably undergraduate entrepreneurship, has not yet been sufficiently explored, especially, the practical experience of undergraduate entrepreneurs with navigating the Danish labour market after completing their studies (Larios-Hernandez et al., 2022, Mosneaga & Winther, 2012, Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021).

As a point of departure of the thesis, I seek to examine how the Slovak UCL undergraduates navigate the labour market in Denmark. Through the empirical narratives of five undergraduates of various professional bachelor's degrees¹ (PBA) from the UCL, this thesis specifically explores the factors which motivated Slovak undergraduates to become entrepreneurs and what role the Slovak ethnic background plays in the Danish labour market.

The disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship offered by Thierry Volery (2007), the concepts of national identity introduced by Anna Triandafyllidou (1998) and social stigma (SS) presented by Gerhard Krug, Katrin Drasch and Monika Jungbauer-Gans (2019) are in the scope of interest which seek to aid with answering the following research question.

¹ PBA in International Hospitality Management; Innovation and Entrepreneurship; International Sales and Marketing (UCL, 2022).

Research Question

- *What role does the central-European origin of the Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs play in navigating the Danish labour market?*

Working Questions

- *What factors influenced the Slovak UCL undergraduates to become entrepreneurs?*
- *What are the experiences of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs with stigma?*

I.II. Overview of the Thesis

The first chapter provides insight into the IDM in association with the Slovak undergraduates of the UCL University College and outlines their reasons for pursuing tertiary education in Denmark. It also points out the issue of the international brain drain in Denmark and briefly mentions the impact of brain drain on Slovakia. The role of Slovak ethnic origin in navigating the Danish labour market, notably the Slovak entrepreneurship in Denmark, is specified in the problem formulation section. The research question along with two working questions is also presented.

The second chapter demonstrates a definition of case study as presented by Bent Flyvberg (2011) and unfolds the case study of the Slovak UCL undergraduates. Moreover, the motivation, process of collecting of data and the 12-steps of thematic content analysis (TCA) are reported.

The third chapter outlines the review of the literature on undergraduate entrepreneurship and how it is linked with our case study.

The fourth chapter introduces the theories implemented in the analysis of the thesis, notably, the disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship offered by Thierry Volery (2007) concepts of national identity presented by Anna Triandafyllidou (1998) and stigma consciousness introduced by Gerhard Krug, Katrin Drasch and Monika Jungbauer-Gans (2019).

The fifth chapter revolves around analysing the identified codes, phrases and themes and summarising the outcomes as a part of the TCA.

The final chapter elaborates on the TCA results, concludes with a perspective on the internalisation of the Danish labour market and provides further suggestions for the future research.

II. Methodology

II.I. Case Study

According to Christian Lund (2014), “A case is an edited chunk of empirical reality where certain features are marked out, emphasised, and privileged while others recede into the background. As such, a case is not “natural,” but a mental, or analytical, construct aimed at organising knowledge about reality in a manageable way” (Ibid., p. 224).

This is only one of many definitions of the case study. To take a closer look at the case study of the Slovak UCL undergraduates and their experience with navigating the Danish labour market, I look to Bent Flyvberg (2011) and his five most common case study misconceptions to which he provides his own perspective as in the following statements (Ibid.).

1. He elevates the case study above the research on the specific topic. In other words, “Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete case knowledge is therefore more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals” (Flyvberg, 2011, p. 304). In the concrete case study of the Slovak UCL undergraduates, we can therefore discover more about how they navigate in the Danish market, whether they feel disadvantaged, stigmatised as entrepreneurs in the Danish labour market in comparison to the general research on the topic.
2. He claims that the case study can be useful for academia although, as he explains “Formal generalisation is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas “the force of example” and transferability are underestimated” (Ibid., p. 305). In the case study of Slovak UCL undergraduates, the empirical narratives collected in the form of interviews play a crucial role in presenting their practical experiences in navigating the Danish labour market as entrepreneurs. Relying exclusively on the scholarly literature without empirical examples from the case can be limited.
3. He promotes utilising the benefits of the case study for the entire expertise, also in the area of as he states, “Generating and testing of hypotheses but is not limited to these research activities alone” (Ibid, p. 306). The case study of Slovak UCL undergraduates can become a foundation for the future research, without any constraints.

4. He argues the case study can be objective. As a matter of fact, it incorporates “A greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification” (Ibid., p. 310). In the case study of the Slovak UCL undergraduates, the bias has been reviewed by two additional individuals, which refrains from subjective evaluation(s).
5. He admits that to make a conclusion out of the case study can be quite complex and suggests that” Good studies should be read as narratives in their entirety” (Ibid., p. 313). In the case study of the Slovak UCL undergraduates, the empirical interviews provide the narratives, which when analysed, provides a valuable recount in the conclusion part.

With this in mind, the research motivation, data collection and the thematic content analysis of the case study of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurship in the Danish labour market will be unfolded in the subsequent section.

II.II. Research Motivation

The initial idea for this thesis was to explore how the Danish national identity changes through the lenses of the ‘other’, notably Slovak migrants in Denmark. After conducting further research, however, I came across several issues Slovaks often experience in the Danish labour market which gained my interest. One of the most common difficulties the majority of Slovaks living in Denmark struggle with, is to find relevant employment after graduation as, despite being highly educated, are stigmatised through the lenses of their central European ethnic origin.

Interestingly enough, all five interviewees, two females and three males in the age group between 25-29 years, are the Slovak undergraduates of the English PBA study programmes which have been reduced in 2022. To investigate the fact, whether they started their own businesses after the graduation as a result of the education focused on entrepreneurship or as an outcome of lack of job opportunities in the Danish labour market, became relevant. To collect personal narratives on how Slovak undergraduates of Danish tertiary education perceive their position in the Danish labour market, whether they see themselves stigmatised or not, play an important role in stirring up potential changes for not only the central-Europeans but the rest of internationals living in Denmark, in general.

II.III. Data Collection

Having a broad social network of Slovaks who are actively involved in the Danish labour market opened the door for a collection of the empirical material in the form of in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews. The primary idea was to plan five interview meetings in person, however, only three interviewees were able to be interviewed face-to face, while the additional interviews were conducted via ZOOM online media platform due to the limited time schedule of the interviewees. The pivotal interviews were conducted in the month of February 2022, while the additional interviews in the month of April 2022. The reason for contacting interviewees twice, was to conduct interviews which would entail empirical narratives of Slovak UCL undergraduates in a more detail as well as provided a space for opening up during the second interview. In order to support the integrity of the narratives, the language of the interviews was Slovak, which was further in a writing process of analysis translated and transcribed into English. The communication with the interviewees took place over a span of three months.

According to Carolyn Boyce & Palena Neale (2006), “In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation” (Ibid., p.3). They are useful in cases when interviewees need more time to describe complex experiences, or for the interviewer to collect an accurate and specific perspective on the issue (ibid.). Since discussing the job search can become a sensitive topic, especially if unsuccessful, conducting interviews with five interviewees created more space to go deeper in the matter as well as discover more about their experiences with studies and life in Denmark. On the other hand, the inclination to one side of the narrative without considering the context in general, can be one of the disadvantages of in-depth interviews (ibid.). Therefore, in order to avoid being biased towards the specific Slovak narratives, I restrained myself from sharing my personal views, ideas or suggestions on the issue of employment during the interviews. To avoid biases even more, the survey in a form of questionnaire among Slovak UCL undergraduates could have been made to demonstrate the major experiences in the Danish labour market. Nonetheless, the depth of the experience of the Slovak UCL undergraduates could have been overlooked and therefore, this method was not utilised.

In the following lines, the interviews with anonymous five interviewees are briefly illustrated while the names are fictitious to simplify the process of analysis. Since the interviews were conducted in Slovak language in order to make it easier for the interviewees to share their authentic experiences in the Danish labour market, the recordings were subsequently translated and transcribed manually. The reason for not using the software was to keep the originality of the narratives as much as possible. The overview of the conducted interviews is outlined below.

(1) The pivotal interview with Peter (fictitious name), took place on the 15th February 2022 via ZOOM online media platform and lasted approximately one hour (appx. I). Peter is a 27-year-old Slovak undergraduate of International Sales and Marketing from the UCL in Odense. He introduces his narrative with his arrival, study and work experience in Denmark and compares them with Slovakia. In the second interview which was conducted 10th April 2022 also via ZOOM online media platform and lasted approximately 45 minutes, he unfolds his entrepreneurship experience and provides a detailed description of his catering business. He describes the business establishment process as well as its advantages and disadvantages and his experience in the Danish market as a young entrepreneur in connection with stigma based on his Slovak ethnicity.

(2) The pivotal interview with Jana (fictitious name) took place on the 21st February 2022 in person, in the coffee shop in Odense and lasted approximately ninety minutes (appx. II.). Jana is 26 years old undergraduate of International Hospitality Management from the UCL in Odense. Jana starts with sharing about her struggles with finding a student job besides her studies which resulted in creating her own cleaning company. Despite the fact, it was not her dream job, she describes how it aided her to sustain herself until completing her PBA. In an additional interview which was conducted on the 23rd April 2022 and lasted approximately thirty minutes, she also mentioned her experience on how she was positioned as an “Eastern-European” worker on the basis of owning a cleaning company. Jana compared Denmark to Slovakia with a hope to return to her homeland in the future.

(3) The interview with Martin (fictitious name) took place via ZOOM media platform on the 28th February 2022 and lasted approximately thirty minutes. Martin is 29 years old undergraduate of Innovation and Entrepreneurship from the UCL in Odense. This interview was very concise as

Martin's replies were quite short and direct. He mentions the reason upon arrival to Denmark, his perspective on Danish education, language and work opportunities. In an additional interview from the 11th April 2022, he shares his opinions on the stigma of Slovaks in Denmark as well as provides his perspective on the brain drain which Slovak undergraduates cause by moving to study/work abroad. As he lives in Denmark with his wife and children, he also illustrates the experience of having a family in Denmark.

(4) The pivotal interview with Zuzana (fictitious name) took place on the 2nd March 2022 in person, at the city library in Odense, and lasted approximately fifty minutes. Zuzana is 28 years old undergraduate of International Hospitality Management from the UCL in Odense. She describes her excitement about her move to Denmark, despite her expectations from her studies were not fulfilled. She points out her need to be creative at her work and how it motivated her to start her own enterprise. In the second interview which took place on the 15th April 2022 and lasted approximately forty minutes, she shares about her artistic agency in more detail, and opens up about the unfair treatment she experienced in her business as a Slovak undergraduate entrepreneur.

(5) The pivotal interview with Jan (fictitious name) took place on the 5th March 2022 via ZOOM media platform and lasted approximately one hour. Jan is 29 years old undergraduate of International Sales and Marketing from the UCL in Odense. He opens up about the difficulty to find employment after graduation and his passion about creating media content from various events. He recounts the years of studying at the UCL, compares Danish education to Slovak education and highlights the main pros and cons of living in Denmark. In the second interview, which took place on the 20th April 2022, he outlines the details of his media business and his take on being a Slovak entrepreneur in Denmark.

Based on these interviews, the steps of the thematic content analysis (TCA) are described in the following section.

II.IV. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA)

To make the qualitative data collected from five interviews clear and concise, thematic content analysis (TCA) was selected. Inspired by the six-phases of thematic analysis (TA) presented by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006), I extended the process of conducting TCA with fourteen phases introduced by Philip Burnard (1991). The main reason for this choice was to use additional phases to check my biases since I, as a Slovak graduate of Danish tertiary education, can strongly relate to interviewees' viewpoints. Since TCA includes additional phases where the analysis is revised by two additional individuals, the analytical discussion tends to become more objective. In addition, Philip Burnard (1991) advises that asking critical questions along the way can improve the actual outcome of the TCA (Ibid.) which has been followed as well.

The first phase of TCA consists of writing down the important ideas the interviewees presented, notably one interview at the time. The interesting facts can be grouped into the so-called "memory joggers" (Ibid., p. 462) which can be continuously revisited during the TCA process. As I decided to transcribe the interviews manually right after the interviews were conducted, I was able to highlight the main points and expressions along the process.

The second phase of TCA involves going through the written texts and ideas again with a purpose to create more specific points. Burnard (1991) suggests discovering unique points of interviewees from each interview. In other words, the ideas which interlocutors make the most remarks on (Ibid.). To make this phase easier, I transcribed the most relevant answers from each interview into tables (see appx.) which helped me to identify the important information by highlighting them with different colours separately from each interview.

The third phase of TCA amounts to reviewing the interviews again while focusing on naming the themes of the significant parts of texts and ignoring the redundant content, the phase which is also called "open coding" (Ibid., p. 462) as the first codes are loosely developed (ibid.). As the tables with three columns were created, I noted initial codes with assistance of the highlighted version of the answers.

The fourth phase of TCA embodies outlining the themes which are related together into a more specific one which summarises the common ideas (Ibid.). In my case, I reviewed the initial codes and attempted to create the themes which encompass the whole message of the interviewees'

answers. For example, instead of the codes such as 'job search, student job, SU' etc. I grouped them into a common theme, or a phrase, 'the Danish labour market'.

The fifth phase of TCA revolves around creating even more elaborated themes while eliminating all those themes which are no longer relevant (Ibid.). In this phase, I reviewed the themes again and focused on the themes which were connected to the IDM, Danish labour market, stigma or comparisons between Denmark and Slovakia.

The sixth phase of TCA deals with bringing in two individuals in the analytical process, when each person develops the codes and themes from all the interviews separately. The outcomes are then compared, examined and changes applied, if needed. The purpose of this procedure is, as Phillip Bernard (1991) explains, "Attempt to enhance the validity of the categorising method and to guard against researcher bias" (Ibid., p. 463). To make the created themes more objective, I invited two former classmates to determine whether the themes I created made sense. Their ideas and our common decision on the themes are written in capital letters.

The seventh phase of TCA incorporates reassessing the established themes and subthemes and modifying them in order to cover all the important elements of the interviews (Ibid.). In this phase, I re-evaluated the themes in connection to their significance. In this phase, I highlighted in bold all the parts of the interview answers which dealt with stigma, or negative experience of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs in Denmark.

The eighth phase of TCA consists of the additional revising process in pursuance of forming an account of themes which are differentiated either through using various colours or similar, in order to simplify the TCA process. Through another round of reviewing themes, I utilised marking the themes with red colour to determine their dominance.

The ninth phase of TCA deals with assuring the interviewees' opinions are paid attention to during a process of separating the bigger parts of the texts into the smaller chunks. The several prints of the interviews are strongly encouraged to be utilised (Ibid.) In this process I copied the most significant parts of the interviews to the new file, where I sorted the themes out according to relevance.

The tenth phase of TCA incorporates organising the separated parts of texts into a new document with the relevant titles and subtitles (Ibid.). In this phase, I divided the main themes with several different colours (see appx.).

The eleventh phase of TCA involves including again the two individuals to review the relevance and the selected themes and subthemes in order to form an objective examination of the interviews (Ibid.).

The twelfth phase of TCA comprises summarising the discoveries from the analysis (Ibid.).

The thirteenth phase of TCA continues with the recapitulation of the discoveries with examples from the interviews while ensuring the true meaning of interviewees' replies is kept (Ibid.).

The final phase of TCA is about determining its structure. The first alternative is to summarise the discoveries with examples from the interviews and describe how they are related to research made on the subject matter and analyse it in the end. The second alternative is to summarise the discoveries simultaneously with the research made of the subject matter. While the first alternative seems less complicated, the second alternative is considered to be more coherent and efficient (Ibid.). The finishing stages of the TCA are further discussed in the analytical part of the thesis.

III. Literature Review

While entrepreneurship has for decades received abundance of attention, the ethnic entrepreneurship has not been paid enough attention to. In this section, will therefore divulge the literature on entrepreneurship in connection to ethnic stigma, particularly Slovak ethnic stigma in Denmark.

According to Thierry Volery (2007), ethnic entrepreneurship can be defined as an association of individuals who came from the same country of origin and can relate to the similar entrepreneurship occurrences abroad. There are several aspects which impact business success, such as entrepreneurial knowledge, financial resources, place of residence, employment offers and ethnicity (Ibid.) Despite the fact that Danish society is frequently ascribed to be quite alike within a framework of creed, nationality, and lingua franca (Rytter, 2019), with the flow of migrants arriving to the country over the past decades, those attributes have been challenged (Barrett, 2018). Since the second half of the 20th century, Danish right-wing politicians have considered migrants as potential dangers for the Danish economy and values. The research demonstrates that the idea of multinational diversity in Denmark has often been presented as precarious for the locals while the idea of societal sameness in terms of appearance, nationality, and culture, has been promoted

as safe for the country (Keskinen et al., 2019, Schmidt, 2019). These ideas, despite not being openly articulated, are expressed more-or-less indirectly through the Danish public narratives (Hervik, 2019, Jensen et al., 2017). In fact, the positioning of migrants is rather hidden behind the political disputes about refugees, foreign workers or international students. By preference, instead of pointing to the dominant position of a specific nation, it calls attention to the differences in cultural patterns of Danes and foreigners (Jensen et al., 2017) and usually highlights stereotypes about the migrants' difficulties with integration to Danish society (Hervik, 2019) and they often tend to be marginalised based on their colour of the skin, cultural background, or religious beliefs. An interesting fact is that the foreigners who share the same colour of skin, religion, and their cultural ties are not diametrically dissimilar from Danes, they become the object of stigma. To exemplify, the migrants from Central and Eastern Europe are often positioned as 'white with lower value' in their positioning on the Danish labour market which in effect, results in being blamed for the so-called "benefit tourism" (Wilken & Dahlberg, 2017, p. 1347) and becoming victims of the "social dumping" (ibid.). According to Gerhard Krug et al. (2019), "In modern welfare states, there are a number of stereotypical beliefs regarding the attitudes of the unemployed to work and other personal shortcomings that are seen as the main reason for why individuals are getting and remain unemployed" (Ibid., p.1). According to Kentosová et al. (2022), the majority of business start-ups were born out of the difficulties of foreigners to get employed within their professional qualifications. The uncomplicated process and vast support belong among the main reasons why foreigners in Denmark initiated their own businesses. However, based on the research, they often consider themselves being stereotyped and unequal in comparison with the Danish entrepreneurs in terms of nationality, language skills or cultural differences. It greatly depends on the background of the foreigners, whether they originate from EU states, notably Central and Eastern Europe, and non-EU countries. To exemplify, eastern Europeans experience a lower degree of difficulties in the Danish labour market than foreigners from the Middle East or Africa as a result of similarity in their outlook and social values (Ibid.). The Slovaks, though central Europeans are often categorised as eastern Europeans, who despite being entrepreneurs, experience stigma. As Lisanne Wilken & Mette Dahlberg (2017) point out that in their countries of origin, "They are positioned as the progressive, Western-oriented, 'EU-loving' segment of society, who are criticising precisely those issues they feel they are made responsible for in Denmark" (Ibid., p.1357). The practical

experiences of Slovak undergraduates provide insights into this problem, which is illustrated in an analysis section in more detail.

IV. Theoretical Framework

As a part of the theoretical framework, the disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship explained by Thierry Volery (2007), the concepts of national identity presented by Anna Triandafyllidou (1998) and stigma of consciousness illustrated by Gerhard Krug, Katrin Drasch and Monika Jungbauer-Gans (2019), are demonstrated in a qualitative analysis of the case study of five Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs from Slovakia living in Denmark. In the following, I explain the theory and the concepts.

IV.I. Disadvantage Theory of Entrepreneurship (DTE)

The core of the DTE is to point out that the foreigners experience unfair treatment in the host country which prompts them to establish their own businesses to generate income. (Volery, 2007). According to Thierry Volery (2007), this is caused by the following factors:

- (1) Insufficient theoretical and practical competencies, i.e. difficulty to master the language of the host country, inadequate level of schooling and professional training (Ibid.).
- (2) Difficulty to integrate into the society, inability to relocate owing to low income, unfair treatment by the host country (Ibid.).

On the other side, the capability of foreigners to establish successful business in a host country is often met with negative feedback as a result of the lack of above-mentioned factors (Hedberg & Pettersson, 2011). However, Saurav Pathak & Etayankara Muralidharan (2022) criticises the DTE with unfolding the following arguments and promoting their point of view. Firstly, they disagree with the statement that entrepreneurship is a result of the unfair treatment and inability to succeed in corporate employment. Instead, they find this reasoning narrow-minded as the experience in the labour market cannot be measured based on one specific statement which disvalues entrepreneurship as such. Secondly, the decision to pursue entrepreneurship instead of playing a part in the corporate employment, can make the foreigners unplug from the host society which can result in isolation and disregard of potential possibilities to grow. In addition, the perspective of foreigners is provided, yet the perspective from the host country is omitted (Ibid.).

As a matter of fact, in the past decades, there has been an increasing demand for advocating the importance of entrepreneurship in the learning institutions. The students' knowledge on the benefits of business ownership is supposed to inspire them in becoming entrepreneurs. To investigate how the graduates navigate in an area of entrepreneurship, Ghulam Nabi et al. (2011) proposed the following aspects to be explored: (1) reasons for establishing the business, (2) entrepreneurship benefits, (3) entrepreneurship limitations, (4) role of education in a pursuit of entrepreneurship (Ibid.) which is covered in the analysis section.

IV.I. Concept of National Identity

Although there have been various definitions by multiple scholars of what the concept of national identity represents, I look to Anna Triandafyllidou (1998) who offered the perspective of the national identity in connection to the 'other'. According to her, the national identity (NI):

- (1) Is represented by both the individuals who originate from the local nation and the individuals who relocate to the nation from various cultural and racial backgrounds. (Ibid.)
- (2) Revolves around the interaction between the natives and the foreigners (Ibid.)
- (3) Is disproved to be characterised by the local community separately (Ibid.).
- (4) Is a reason for recognizing the diversity among the nations to realise its purpose (Ibid.).
- (5) Intrigues that both natives and non-natives comprehend their similarities and dissimilarities (Ibid.).
- (6) Is purposeless, if both local and foreign communities refuse to coexist (Ibid.).

Based on the above-mentioned arguments, she further argues that the research on the NI in connection with the foreigners settled in the nation has not been fully explored. The connection of the NI with a perspective on Danish nationalism is provided in the literature review.

IV.II. Concept of Stigma

In order to belong to the specific group, a person must fulfil the groups' standards, otherwise the acceptance and behaviour of the group toward the individual leads to the 'othering' and stigma. According to Marko Lovec et al. (2021), "Stigmatisation - in the form of explanation, theory or

narrative - supports hierarchical ordering by projecting threat of non-compliance even though stigma is not based on failure to comply as such but on the construction of normality itself” (ibid., p. 894). Erving Goffmann (1963) divides stigma into three basic areas (Crosmann, 2020):

- (1) Stigma of personality which revolves around the behaviour disapproved by the group (Ibid.)
- (2) Stigma of appearance, respectively the colour of the skin (Ibid.)
- (3) Stigma of belonging represents how the individual is affiliated with the group, be it nation or similar which can result in traumatic experience (Ibid.)

In order to take a closer look into the three elements of stigma in connection with the case study of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs in the Danish labour market, the concept of stigma consciousness is suitable to be applied. According to Gerhard Krug et al. (2019), the persons who consider themselves the victims of stigma are often a result of their own perceptions about being categorised in a specific manner which leads to the performance based on the anticipated conduct (Ibid.). To illustrate, an inactive member of the labour market would develop a tendency to be passive in the efforts to find employment, as he would consciously perceive that the society disbelieves in his capabilities to do so based on the ethnicity and stigma associated with the country of origin. This does not mean he refuses to get employed but his perceptions tend to stop him from acting towards his goal (Ibid.).

Krug et al. (2019) further explains that concept of stigma consciousness in relation to being inactive in the labour market distinguishes several factors which have an impact on the ‘stigmatised’ individual: (1) overall wellbeing, (2) choice to stay anonymous which can be influenced by the surrounding pressure, (3) discomfort of receiving unemployment assistance which can lead to low confidence (Ibid.).

In the following lines, the strategy of analysis will be presented in connection to the case study of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs in the Danish labour market and their perception of stigma.

IV.III. Analysis Strategy

The analysis is conducted through using the 12 steps of thematic content analysis. The analysis, based on empirical narrative interviews, is divided into two main sections which are followed by the main themes and sub-themes, and supported by the evidence from interviews (see appx.).

Based on disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship, concepts of national identity and stigma, the themes are further developed in order to answer the research question and the working questions. As a suggestion for the future research, the concluding remarks are associated with the emphasis on internationalisation, which is for many, the response for the international brain drain in Denmark.

V. Analysis

After a careful revision of the themes and subthemes generated from the last two final phases of analysis, the very last phase is about summarising the discoveries and structuring the themes and subthemes from the interviews. As all five interviewees were divided into two parts, I divided the analysis parts into several sections.

The first section focuses on how the issue of Danish tertiary education, respectively the experience of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs with the University College Lillebælt in Odense. This part is divided into themes of *efficiency*, *entrepreneurship-oriented studies*, and *equality*.

The second section delves into the perspective of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs on Danish culture with the theme *people* which is further sub-divided into *reserved* and *patriotic*.

The third section takes a closer look at Danish labour market and demonstrates examples of how the Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs in Denmark consider themselves disadvantaged and stigmatised based on their ethnicity in the Danish labour market. In this analysis, I specifically pay attention to the treatment of Slovaks in the Danish labour market which is subdivided in the areas of Danish *fear*, *belonging* and *nationalism* which is further subdivided into sub-themes *Eastern-European Stigma* and *persistence despite the difficulties*.

The fourth section examines the perspective of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs on Danish entrepreneurship which consists of themes of *language barrier* and *experience with job centre and a-Kasse*.

The fifth section outlines the position of Slovak central-European position versus other foreigners in Denmark, notable the western internationals.

1. Danish Tertiary Education: University College Lillebælt

Based on the conducted interviews, all interviewees mentioned the level of satisfaction with their studies at the UCL from the academic, financial, and practical point of view. The value of high quality, practical and tuition fees education with the possibility to acquire SU grants has been mentioned several times during the interviews. Accordingly, this section is therefore divided into three themes and subthemes with the key words and phrasal verbs highlighted in bold. In addition, on behalf of insufficient space, only the relevant examples from the interviews are presented in the analysis. The additional examples are to be found in attached appendices (appx.).

a. *Efficiency*

With regards to the studies at the UCL, it is obvious from the interviews that Slovaks look up to better education and long for better future opportunities. The theme ‘*efficiency*’ was created as an umbrella for affordability, quality, time management, and practicality, as all these words create an efficient tertiary education in Denmark.

Interestingly, when Slovak undergraduates were being asked about their studies in Denmark, they tended to immediately compare it with their studies in Slovakia. Similarly, as Triandafyllidou (1998) pointed out, the realisation of the national identity makes sense only with the connection with the ‘other’, as it is demonstrated below.

*“I am very **content** here. (...) students can get a **SU grant here besides studies** and therefore more time to use your **time to study** (...). In **Slovakia**, students have to spend most of their free time working, so they can cover basic life expenses and therefore have less time to study, which is supposed to be a priority” (Appx. Ib).*

*“The **education** here is more **practically oriented** and that caught my attention. Also, the fact that **one can get quality education for free**, as most **Slovak** parents cannot afford to pay e.g. British education fees” (Appx. II.b).*

b. *Entrepreneurship-oriented studies*

In the past decades, there has been an increasing demand for advocating the importance of entrepreneurship in the learning institutions (Nabi et al., 2011). Based on the interviews, it is obvious that entrepreneurship played a high place at the UCL and became an inspiration to

establish the business as it is shown in the following examples. Based on DTE, it cannot be assumed that the entrepreneurship ambitions were an only alternative in the Danish labour market. It was instead a motivation to make a difference in a society with new ideas for business as Pathak & Muralidharan (2022) would have approved.

*“It was more of a spontaneous idea which occurred during the subject at the UCL with the name **“Being entrepreneurial”** and I wanted to try it out” (Appx.Ib).*

*“My studies were also useful in terms of a **network which could help me to navigate the business”** (Appx.IIb).*

c. Equality

In contrast with the expectation, there were no signs of stigma in the interviews in relation to the Danish tertiary education mentioned. The theme ‘equality’ covers the positive evaluation about the equal treatment, encouragement and help at the UCL as it was mentioned by Slovak undergraduates as follows:

The teachers see you equally, do not put you down and are there for you if you need extra help with the projects. The environment is also very nice; we had access to different kinds of LABs and there were many events regarding the internships, job, and entrepreneurial opportunities” (Appx.IIIb).

2. Danish Culture

Similarly, during interviewing Slovak undergraduates’ perception on Danish culture, all interviewees replied in comparison with Slovak culture. This fact also supports the concept of national identity which as Triandafyllidou (1998) mentioned, is meaningful only with the connection to other cultures (Ibid.).

a. People

Slovak undergraduates point out the positive attributes of the Danes they know. Besides, they also emphasise that despite their excellent levels of English, they seem isolated at first. According to Triandafyllidou (1998), the differences in both Danish and Slovak cultures form national identity

as it always exists in relation to the other (Ibid.) In addition, the strong affiliation to Danish nationalism demonstrates the strength of Danish national identity, while Slovak national identity is not represented in such a strong connection. In the following examples, the sub-themes are created based on the phrasal verbs in bold.

1. Reserved

*“I think Danes are quite shy but **tolerate different types of culture**. They speak English very well, so it is easy to have a conversation with people no matter if they are young, old or kids. **They are quite assimilative toward us internationals, although they keep their distance and protect their privacy**. The communication with Danes is much more general and superficial, while us Slovaks, we tend to go deeper and talk about personal stuff. Sometimes we can meet for the first time, and we can know about each other pretty much within the first 10 minutes” (Appx. Ib).*

2. Patriotic

*“Danes are both **friendly and cold** if I may say. They smile a lot and are warm, but only to a certain degree if they don't know you. Once they get to know you, they become much more open. **Danes seem to be very proud of their country and nationality and that I appreciate very much. I also like their work-life balance, I find it rather important in life” (Appx.IIb).***

3. Danish Labour Market

While Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs demonstrated a positive perspective on the Danish tertiary education and Danish culture, their perspective slightly varies with their experiences on Danish labour market. According to the observations from the interviews, stigma consciousness is strongly present in the replies of the Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs. As part of the theme below, the most perceived stereotypes / stigmatization, they experience while being actively employed.

a. Fear

The prejudice about Danes who express their worries about foreigners overtaking their jobs have been a part of the anti-migration politics for decades. Although the interviewee does not seem to be concerned about it, the foreigners with the central-European origin, such as Slovak

undergraduate entrepreneurs, are still often seen as the ones who wants to exploit Danish welfare system.

*“I think it was because Danes on this island weren't used to foreign students and probably **thought we wanted to take their jobs** or so (laughing)” (Appx. IIb).*

b. Belonging

Another stigma consciousness feature is found in the view of the interviewee who expressed her opinion on how included she feels to be in Denmark. She mentions that the language barrier is still present, despite she learned the language. From her reply, it can be also observed she does not stigmatize every Danish person, but she still points out that the feelings of not belonging and not being welcome is present.

“I feel right in the middle of being welcomed here and not. I try to speak Danish, but I still feel to some degree of disregard when Danes hear I am international. There are some who have no problems with internationals, but sometimes I don't feel quite sure that I am welcome here” (Appx.IIb).

c. Nationalism

The elements of nationalism can be observed in questioning the value of the nationality. The interviewee looks down on her Slovak nationality as it relates to stigma consciousness believing that Slovaks, as well as eastern-Europeans in Denmark, are associated with negative connections such as stealing, cheating, and exploiting the welfare system. It can be observed that she senses the strong Danish national identity while seeing her own subordinately in terms of the job search. In the examples below, it is strongly visible that Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs feel disadvantaged in the Danish labour market based on their ethnic background. On the other side, despite being stigmatized on the ground of their ethnicity, the perspective eastern-European stigma can be often changed as the strong character trait which was represented in all the interviews is the persistence to work diligently in spite of difficulties as it is demonstrated in last quotation in this section below.

1. Eastern-European Stigma

It might be because I am not Danish, and I don't speak the language very well yet. Another thing is that I am a foreigner from Slovakia and many think that it is an Eastern European country. Slovakia is actually in Central Europe. During my stay here, I heard many complaining that Eastern Europeans steal bikes, use the welfare system or cheat during the exams. This is far from how I see myself or Slovak people but when people in Denmark don't know exactly where you come from, they often put us into the category of "being all the same as Eastern Europeans" (Appx.IIb).

"But when you say you are from Slovakia or any other country which is associated with the East, people categorize you as someone "lower". It can be less cultured, less qualified, less privileged maybe. Coming from a poorer country than Denmark doesn't mean that you are less, but it often feels like it when you look for jobs, for example. Even if you have an education, they rather offer you a low qualified job just to get you out of the system" (Appx.IIIb).

2. Persistence despite the difficulties

"But when I was looking for my first student job, I saw that many owners of the restaurants gonna steal more than work. I didn't get any restaurant job in the end, but I was employed as a newspaper delivery driver. I worked in the nights, studied during the days and slept sometimes in between. It was hard but it helped me to get a SU grant and finish my degree. In comparison to my Danish classmates who did not have to work besides studies, if they didn't want to, I had a limited time for studying and I often felt judged that I could have been more active during the group projects. I probably would, if I didn't have to work besides my studies but I did my best" (Appx.IIIb).

4. Entrepreneurship

As mentioned in the DTE, the establishment of the business is often a result of a failure to find employment in Danish labour market. Similarly, as in the examples below, the language barriers of not being able to speak Danish fluently plays a crucial role in pursuit of entrepreneurship. Another factor which interviews mentioned in relation to creating their own enterprise, was the experience with the job centre and A-kasse in Denmark.

a. *Language barrier*

*“It was very **difficult to find a job besides my studies speaking only English** (...). I sent so many job applications to restaurants, cleaning companies, and newspaper delivery jobs but without any success. That's why I decided to create my **own cleaning company as a business**” (Appx. I1b).*

*“At the moment, I have one remote intern – a **Danish student, who translates the texts from English to Danish, so my firm is more visible on the Danish market. She also takes care of all the communication activities**”(Appx.I1b).*

*I try to spend at least 5 minutes daily and **I always speak Danish in public**, when I call my medical doctor, authorities etc. I also speak Danish with my Danish friends/neighbours. I try to stay active in the language and develop it, but **it is a fairly difficult language**” (Appx. I1b).*

b. *Experience with the job centre and A-kasse*

*“I think that the institutions such as job centers do their job well, but I understand it is **not easy for internationals who don't speak Danish. The problem can be that the internationals might have a high level of education but with low Danish skills, it can be difficult to find a relevant job.** (Appx.I1b).*

“I have friends who left the country because it was difficult for them to find a job here without speaking Danish, but I also know people who stayed and found simple jobs. There can be many reasons. For example, my classmate couldn't find any job after almost 2 years on A-kasse, so he returned to Slovakia, and he found the job immediately. He actually works for a very popular political party now. He said it was relatively easy to be employed there with an education from abroad and advanced English language skills. So, it depends”(Appx.I1b).

5.Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs versus other foreigners in Denmark

Based on the interviews, the Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs think that they are treated subordinately in comparison with the foreigners from the western background. Stigma consciousness is present in an opinion about that western internationals' conditions are easier in

Danish labour market. This perception of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs is based in the narratives which were shared with them. Some interviewees are open to admit that also foreigners with other background than central-European or eastern-European can find employment based on their educational qualifications. However, the observation can be made that the perception of being subordinate in the Danish labour market in comparison to other nations is very present.

Maybe. I have seen that foreigners from England, USA or Canada are treated with respect here. I think it is maybe they do not have the foreign accents like us (laughing). When it comes to international companies, I think they would rather hire a native English speaker from the West than a non-Native English speaker from the East. But maybe it is not like that for everyone. I know a friend from Romania who has a really good job within her education here in Odense. She studied architecture which is probably why it was easier for her to get a job. The field is more relevant compared to others (Appx.IIb).

“So it is easiest to either return to the home country or try some English-speaking country, England, Canada or Australia, for example” (Appx.IIIb).

6. Slovak Undergraduate entrepreneurs

a. Benefits

“There are more opportunities to develop oneself, benefits, especially for the potential business owners. I am a part of Cortex Lab which is an office space for new entrepreneurs with a lot of support and chances to broaden one’s network. I also have my own mentor who helps me with everything” (Appx.Ib).

“Pros: It is relatively easy to set up and there is a huge support from the start-up community. (Appx.Ib).

“My company has grown ever since and I have many customers. So, it started as a student job - working for myself though, but now I call it my own business as I also had to build it up from scratch” (Appx.IIb).

“It was relatively easy to set up all the documentation for the business. I got a lot of assistance from the business community, university and my network. I didn’t need a whole bunch of savings

to start with; the most important part was to gain as much of the network as possible for the promotion and marketing purposes” (Appx.IIIb).

“If someone has ambitions to start his own business, Denmark is a great country for that. I am very happy so far” (Appx.IIIb).

b. Motivation

“I have never had business ambitions, but life can force you to do “impossible”, if you have no other options to choose from” (Appx.IIb).

“Not at all! (laughing) For me it was a necessity, as I struggled to find a job when I came to Denmark and when I finally had some stability, enough hours and stable clients (I was cleaning private houses), I couldn't receive SU anyways (I had the company while I was a student), even though I paid all the taxes as I should – my only option was either to register a company or find another job again. Opening a company seemed like the lesser of the evil and I thought it would be a good experience. Oh how mistaken I was! (laughing)” (Appx.IIb).

The analytical discuss of the thesis can be followed in the conclusion in the following chapter.

VI. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, I could observe that interviewees, when asked about their living in Denmark, were inclined to make comparisons with living in Slovakia. This was a natural reaction, often describing Denmark quite positively in terms of education, while describing Slovakia in a more negative manner.

From the conducted analysis, it is evident that Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs experienced that their central- European origin is often associated with Eastern European origin and stigmatized in Danish labour market. Most of the interviewees shared their experiences on how they were

disadvantages based on their ethnicity, without considering the fact that they are highly educated individuals. Finding their place in Danish labour market as entrepreneurs was for some a necessity, but for some it was a goal to strive for. The University College Lillebælt played a tremendous role in inspiring the undergraduates to pursue entrepreneurship and provide the necessary support for the business set up. The factors which influenced Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs in their selection to establish business here was, according to the interviewees, (1) the simple process of setting up the company, (2) support from the UCL and external help from the start-up community, (3) inability to find an employment before and after the graduation from the UCL.

Regarding the experiences of stigma in the Danish labour market, the Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs encounter stigmatization, however, as based on the narratives without further evidence, I categorize this sort of stigma as stigma consciousness as presented in the theoretical framework. This research creates a basic for further investigation of the issues the Slovak community deals within Denmark as there is insufficient research in this area. This case study of Slovak undergraduate entrepreneurs in Denmark can be developed and explored in more detail, national identity or the role of integration in navigating Danish labour market.

Overall, there is a need to focus more on the internationalization in Denmark. On a global scale, the wide range of occupations insufficiency caused by increasing numbers of elderly society brings pressure on the states to seek job replacements abroad. International work mobility is therefore considered to be a potential solution for covering the shortfall of employees for a variety of professions (OECD, 2007). Even though a considerable number of foreigners in Denmark are highly qualified, it is not a predisposition for scoring on a labour market, no matter whether their schooling background is from Denmark or abroad. Therefore, the call for diversity in Danish employment has been reinforced over several decades (Ibid.). According to OECD (2007), the foreigners and their offspring are often left unnoticed in job application procedures despite their educational and professional backgrounds equal to the ones the Danish citizens acquired (ibid.). The events which encourage establishment of social connections among recruiters and international jobseekers, employment counselling or internship placements, have been applied to resolve this issue (ibid.).

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