

Central and Eastern Europeans Migrants' Subjective Quality of Life. A Comparative Study

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Abstract: There is no general agreement among scholars on the consequences of labor migration on the sending countries. Some argue that the migration would increase the quality of life of the families or communities involved, giving support for democracy and market reforms in these countries, while others share the view that the brain drain and fiscal losses would have long term effects on the sending countries' development. This paper takes another approach, focusing on the migrant persons' subjective quality of life. Using data issued in the first two rounds of the European Social Survey (2002/2003, 2004/2005), the Eastern European immigrants' satisfaction with their lives as a whole and with the social and political environment is measured. They report lower satisfaction with life as a whole, but higher satisfaction with the societal conditions than the natives and other kind of immigrants. Explanation lies in the different sources of these evaluations: when evaluating their overall satisfaction, the immigrants rely on their experiences in their receiving countries, while when evaluating the societal conditions they compare these to those from the sending countries. The fact that they show higher levels of satisfaction with the societal conditions than the other immigrants also supports this hypothesis, because the former are more recent and less accommodated to the receiving society than the latter.

Keywords: *immigration in Europe, economic migration, citizenship, quality of life, subjective well-being, social attitudes, social comparison*

Introduction

The relationship between migration and development is a recent and promising study area³ although there is no general agreement on the main conclusions of the literature. Some scholars share the view that the migration would increase the quality of life of the families or the communities involved, reducing the extent, the depth and the severity of poverty⁴ and providing

³ Ninna Nyberg-Sørensen, Nicholas Van Hear, and Poul Engberg-Pedersen, "The Migration-Development Nexus" *International Migration* 40 no. 5 (2002)..

⁴ Richard H. Adams, Jr. and John M. Page, "Do International Migration and Remittances Reduce Poverty in Developing Countries?," *World Development* 33, no. 10 (2005).

opportunities for better education and health⁵. This, it is argued, would increase the support for democracy and market economy in these countries. Others suggest that we deal here only short-term effects⁶. The brain drain, the fiscal losses, and the lack of the internal pressure towards democratization and development⁷ would have long term negative effects on the sending countries' quality of life.

This paper approaches differently the debate, focusing on the quality of life of the migrants' (which is an obvious effect of social development), measured on the level of the individual. The perspective is not entirely new⁸, but there are not many studies in this research area. We would expect to find a lower quality of life of the immigrants from Eastern Europe compared with the natives. However, any good comparative data, like the New Immigrant Survey in U.S.⁹, lacks on the continent. A new study would be better fitted for this job: the European Social Survey, a very robust and reliable comparative research¹⁰. The first (2002/2003) and the second (2004-2005) waves included relatively high samples than other similar surveys (between 1.500 and 3.000 subjects for each nation) that allow a more reliable comparisons between the studied groups.

The present paper is focused on the Central and Eastern European immigrants. I included under this category all those who came from the post-communist countries in Europe, including those from Southern Europe (like Albania) or from European Post-Soviet countries. I used the subjective quality of life approach that takes into account the effects of different factors that worsen the quality of the migrating individuals. Using data from the first two rounds of the European Social Survey (2002/2003, 2004/2005), the Eastern European immigrants'

⁵ J. Page and S. Plaza, "Migration, Remittances, and Development: A Review of Global Evidence," *Plenary Session of the African Economic Research Consortium, May 29 (2005)*.

⁶ S. Martin, "Remittance Flows and Impact," *regional Conference on Remittances as a Development Tool, Organized by the Multilateral Investment Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank (2001)*.

⁷ N. Stern and N. H. Stern, *A Strategy for Development* (World Bank Publications, 2002), quoted by Ellerman (2005).

⁸ Gordon F. De Jong, Aphichat Chamrathirong, and Tran Quynh-Giang, "For Better, for Worse: Life Satisfaction Consequences of Migration," *International Migration Review* 36, no. 3 (2002), A. C. Michalos, "Migration and the Quality of Life: A Review Essay," *Social Indicators Research* 39, no. 2 (1996).

⁹ Douglas Massey et al., "The U.S. New Immigrant Survey: Overview and First Results from the Baseline Round of the Nis-2003 Cohort" (paper presented at the Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association, 2005).

¹⁰ James McBride, "The European Social Survey," *Irish Political Studies* 20, no. 1 (2005).

satisfaction with their lives and with the social and political conditions will be compared to those of the natives and of the other categories of immigrants.

Subjective quality of life and immigrant life

Subjective quality of life is defined as the way people evaluate the significant domains of their life as a whole¹¹. For example, people can be asked to report their satisfaction with their family, work, community relatedness and so on (all called *domain satisfactions*), or with their life as a whole (*subjective well-being*)¹². There is a common agreement that these variables have a cognitive and an affective dimension that are highly correlated. The way these relevant life domains are evaluated is determined by the individual position in the social system, but also by the personal characteristics (inherited or developed through yearly socialization) or cultural specificity¹³. However, we may consistently use this personal evaluation at societal level as an account of the individual and the societal conditions.

What are the subjective outcomes of the immigrant situation? In a previous paper¹⁴ I detailed three categories of factors that influence subjective well-being of migrating individuals:

Intrinsic (that the immigrant come with). People usually migrate because of their low level of living, and we can reasonably suppose that this reduces significantly their overall quality of life. Indeed, in a recent study, it was shown that the propensity to migrate is associated with lower subjective well-being and evaluation of societal conditions in Turkey and Poland¹⁵. The cultural inheritance is

¹¹ Frank M. Andrews and John P. Robinson, "Measures of Subjective Well-Being," in *Measure of Personality and Social Psychological Attitudes*, ed. John P. Robinson, Phillip R. Shaver, and Lawrence S. Wrightsman (San Diego etc.: Academic Press, 1991), Ed. Diener, "Assessing Subjective Well-Being - Progress and Opportunities," *Social Indicators Research* 31, no. 2 (1994).

¹² Robert A. Cummins, "The Domains of Life Satisfaction: An Attempt to Order Chaos," *Social Indicators Research* 38, no. 3 (1996).

¹³ Ed. Diener and Richard E. Lucas, "Explaining Differences in Societal Levels of Happiness: Relative Standards, Need Fulfillment, Culture and Evaluation Theory," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 1, no. 3 (2000).

¹⁴ Sergiu Băltătescu, "Subjective Well-Being of Immigrants in Europe. A Comparative Study," in *European Identity and Free Movement of Persons in Europe*, ed. Lia Pop and Cristina Matiuță (Oradea: University of Oradea Publishing House, 2005).

¹⁵ Hubert Krieger, "Migration Trends in an Enlarged Europe," (Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2004).

also included by some authors as a factor with some influence here (there is a debate on different meanings of happiness in language are invoked here, and also the propensity of one or another culture towards feelings of happiness)¹⁶.

Acquired (linked with the immigrant experience in their receiving countries). The immigrants accept underpaid jobs or suffer from unemployment, and have bad housing conditions. These are objective circumstances that affect their level of living. The language differences, communication difficulties, loneliness, social isolation and the inability to integrate into the labor force can cause psychological problems such as depression, anxiety or feelings of anomie¹⁷. They also suffer because of their low social capital¹⁸, and perceive more and less acutely the prejudices and discriminations towards them¹⁹, and this increases their dissatisfaction²⁰.

Context (factors varying from one country to another, like the immigration policy and the ethnic/immigrant attitudes of the receiving society)²¹.

All these factors predict that the migrants will display a subjective well-being and also low evaluation of their personal domains. However, as I showed in a precedent paper, the immigrants display higher levels of satisfaction with most of the societal domains (quality of education, of the health services and the way democracy in general) than the natives. I explained it as a social comparison effect: the immigrants positively compare the situation in the receiving countries with that in their sending countries. However, it is known that the evaluation of the societal

¹⁶ R. Veenhoven, "Is Happiness a Trait - Tests of the Theory That a Better Society Does Not Make People Any Happier," *Social Indicators Research* 32, no. 2 (1994).

¹⁷ Bilge Ataca and John W. Berry, "Psychological, Sociocultural, and Marital Adaptation of Turkish Immigrant Couples in Canada," *International Journal of Psychology* 37, no. 1 (2002), Vanessa Smith Castro, *Acculturation and Psychological Adaptation*, Contributions in Psychology, No. 41 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Alejandro Portes, "The Two Meanings of Social Capital," *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 1 (2000), "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1998).

¹⁹ M. Werkuyten and S. Nekuee, "Subjective Well-Being, Discrimination and Cultural Conflict: Iranians Living in the Netherlands," *Social Indicators Research* 47 (1999).

²⁰ A.H. Richmond, "Aspects of the Absorption and Adaptation of Immigrants," *Manpower and Immigration* (1974).

²¹ J Berry, "Psychology of Acculturation," in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, ed. J. Berman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

conditions is also a predictor of their subjective well-being. This would constitute what some scholars would call the “paradox of satisfaction”²².

The present study has the objective to test this regularity in the context of a special immigrant group, composed of those from Eastern Europe. Their levels of satisfaction with their lives as a whole and of the domain satisfactions will be compared with those of the other immigrants and of the natives. The working hypothesis is that the Eastern European immigrants will express lower subjective well-being than the natives, and also compared to other immigrants. The second hypothesis is that the immigrants will express higher satisfaction with the socio-political environment than the natives and also than other immigrants.

Method

I will use data from the European Social Survey, research funded by the European Commission's 5th Framework Program, whose first round was in 2002-2003. The European Social Survey is a brand new and very qualitative research that involves 21 countries with a database of 42.359 cases for the first wave, which included also a migration and refugee module with 58 questions. The second wave took place in 2004-2005 and comprised 45.681 cases and, with few exceptions, the same countries were involved. Measures of subjective well-being and satisfaction with different societal conditions are included, along with questions about the immigrant status of the respondent.

Satisfaction with life as a whole is measured on a 0-10 scale. Satisfaction with socio-economical environment is measured with questions such as: how satisfied are you with the present state of economy in country, the national government, the way democracy works in country. Evaluations of state of education and state of health services are also measured on the same scale from 0 to 10.

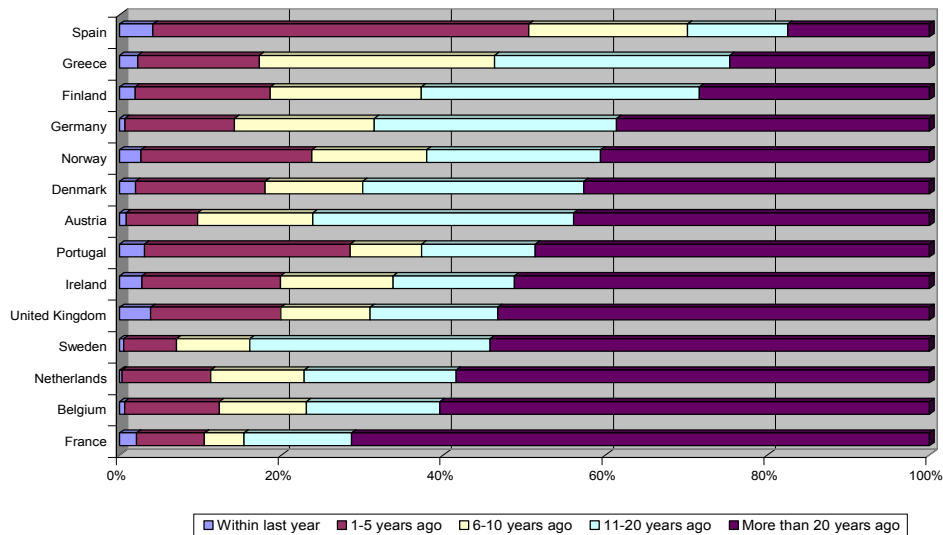
The immigrant status of the interviewed is a problematic measure in this survey because it is not asked directly: “are you an immigrant?”, but “Are you born in this country?” And if the answer is “no” they were asked “how long ago first came to live in country?” The structure of the questions may induce some errors in

²² Bălătescu, "Subjective Well-Being of Immigrants in Europe. A Comparative Study.", Sebastian Rinken, "Condiciones Laborales Y Calidad De Vida De Los Inmigrantes En Andalucía" *Calidad de Vida y Salud* 1, no. 1 (2006).

the case when the citizens did not migrate, but were moved by territorial rearrangement from a country to other. For example, all of those not born in Poland and 90 % of those not born in Czech Republic declared they came in to this country more than 20 years ago, and they are in fact not immigrants, but peoples who lived in Germany before the Second World War.

In order to include a higher number of cases I merged the two files, selecting only the Western European countries involved in the both waves. 56.499 cases resulted in 14 countries: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom and Norway (Switzerland and Luxembourg were omitted because a large part of those not born in these countries came actually social the neighboring Western European countries). The research teams of the remaining countries had also big problems selecting the immigrant category. Spain, for instance, has in the study one of the lowest percents of immigrants. However, we know that it's confronting with new and important affluxes of mainly illegal immigrants from Eastern Europe. It is likely that illegal immigrants could not be found or refused to be interviewed. For those not born in the country, we have an account of the date when they firstly came into the country. This is presented in the next FIGURE:

FIGURE 1. Percent of respondents accounts of the time they came into country for 14 European states. Sources: ESS1,2; personal calculation.



There is still an important gap between older migrating countries like France, Belgium and Netherlands where at least 60 percents of those non-natives stayed for more than 20 years and the newer immigrating countries like Greece and especially Spain where over 40 % came in the last five years.

The respondents were classified in three categories: natives, immigrants from Eastern Europe, and other immigrants. Not all included in the last category may be immigrants. Some special cases still remain – children of EU citizen born, for different reasons, in some other country, or those who migrated from a western European country to another: it was hardly possible, on the basis of the existent questions in the survey, to isolate those cases. “Eastern European Immigrants” will denote here all those who came from the post-communist countries in Europe, including from Southern Europe or from European Post-Soviet countries. Their percents from the total population are the highest in Greece, Germany, and Austria (around 4-5 percents of those interviewed), and the lowest in the other Portugal, Spain and Ireland (under 0.5%), as shown in TABLE 1. The very low percentage of immigrants from Eastern Europe included in the survey is again a sign of the systematic errors in the selection of the respondents.

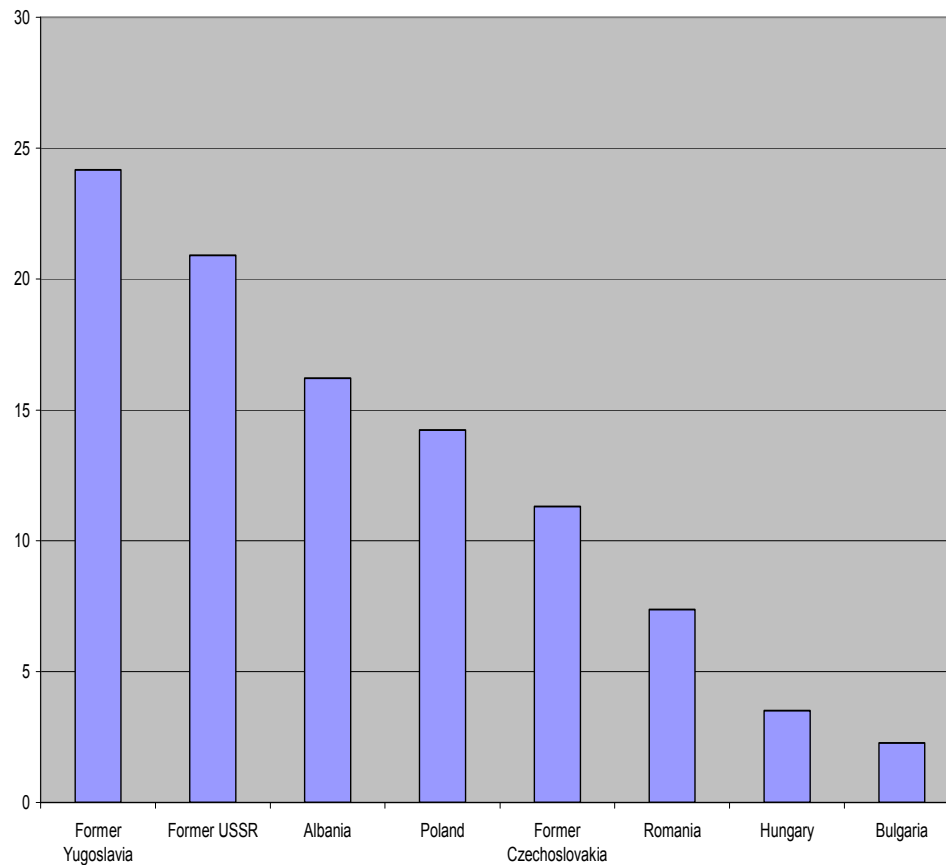
TABLE 1. The immigrant status in 14 Western European countries.

	Native	Immigrant from Eastern Europe	Immigrant from other countries
Finland	97,9	0,8	1,2
Denmark	95,3	0,9	3,8
Portugal	94,4	0,2	5,3
Spain	94,4	0,6	5,1
Norway	94,1	0,9	5,0
Ireland	93,5	0,1	6,4
Netherlands	92,9	0,6	6,5
Austria	91,9	3,7	4,4
Belgium	91,4	0,5	8,1
Germany	90,8	4,4	4,8
France	90,7	0,5	8,8
United Kingdom	90,6	0,4	9,1
Greece	90,2	4,9	4,9
Sweden	90,2	2,1	7,7

Sources: ESS1,2; personal calculation.

With regard to the sending country, the Eastern European immigrants are mostly from post-soviet and Yugoslav spaces. Albania and Poland follow. Only 10 percents of the total of the Eastern European immigrants in the included countries are from the recent EU members, Romania and Bulgaria, which is most probably an underestimation (see FIGURE2).

FIGURE 2. The sending countries of the Eastern European immigrants interviewed 14 European countries. Sources: ESS1,2; personal calculation.



Results

Life as whole

Overall, as we expected, the life satisfaction of those not born in the country is lower than that of natives. For some countries, nevertheless, the differences are not statistically significant. The differences are shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2. Life satisfaction levels and std. deviations in 14 European countries, by immigrant status.

	Native		Immigrant from other countries		Immigrant from Eastern Europe	
	Mean	Std dev	Mean	Std dev	Mean	Std dev
Denmark	8,5	1,5	8,1	1,7	7,0	2,7
Finland	8,0	1,6	7,7	1,9	7,5	2,4
Sweden	7,9	1,7	7,5	1,9	7,2	2,3
Norway	7,7	1,7	7,3	2,0	7,6	2,0
Netherlands	7,7	1,6	7,2	2,0	7,1	1,8
Austria	7,6	2,0	7,1	2,4	7,0	2,3
Ireland	7,6	1,9	7,3	1,9	6,5	1,1
Belgium	7,5	1,8	7,1	2,1	7,8	2,1
United Kingdom	7,1	2,0	6,9	2,1	7,2	2,0
Spain	7,1	1,9	7,0	2,1	7,0	2,2
Germany	6,9	2,3	7,0	2,1	6,4	2,4
France	6,4	2,5	6,3	2,5	6,6	2,2
Greece	6,4	2,3	6,3	2,2	5,9	2,3
Portugal	5,8	2,1	5,7	2,1	5,4	2,4
MEAN	7,3	2,1	7,0	2,2	6,6	2,3

A first remark is that the mean levels in all these countries are situated above the median line: all immigrant status groups report to be more satisfied than dissatisfied with their lives. The rank-order of countries is usual for European surveys, as showed the data from European Value Survey²³ and Eurobarometer²⁴. The Northern countries like Denmark, Norway and Netherlands are on top and the Southern countries like Spain, France and Portugal on the bottom of the ranking.

As predicted, overall, the Eastern European immigrants have sensible lower subjective levels than the natives, but also than the other categories of non-natives. The most important factor that explains this difference is that they came rather recently in these countries, and had not much time to integrate culturally and economically in the receiving country. They often arrived from conflict regions (like those in the former Yugoslavia).

Regarding the countries, only in Germany, Greece and Austria we have enough cases to meaningfully compare all three groups, and in all these countries the Eastern European immigrants have significantly lower life satisfaction than the other two groups. For the rest of the countries except Finland, only a comparison between the levels of the natives and of other immigrants is possible, and in all countries except Spain and Portugal the difference between these groups is significantly in favor of the natives.

Satisfaction with the socio-economic environment

The respondents were asked to report their satisfaction with the five public domains: state of the economy in country, the national government, the way democracy works in country, state of education in country, and the state of health services in the country. The following TABLE shows the mean values and standard deviations for each immigrant status:

²³Tony Fahey and Emer Smyth, "Do Subjective Indicators Measure Welfare? Evidence from 33 European Societies," *European Societies* 6, no. 1 (2004).

²⁴Jan Delhey, "Life Satisfaction in an Enlarged Europe," in *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, <http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/files/EF03108EN.pdf>, 2004).

TABLE 3. Life satisfaction levels and std. deviations in 14 European countries, by immigrant status.

	Native		Immigrant from other countries		Immigrant from Eastern Europe	
	Mean	Std dev	Mean	Std dev	Mean	Std dev
How satisfied with present state of economy in country	4.9	2.4	5.0	2.4	4.9	2.5
How satisfied with the national government	4.5	2.3	4.7	2.3	4.7	2.4
How satisfied with the way democracy works in country	5.6	2.3	6.0	2.4	6.3	2.4
State of education in country nowadays	5.7	2.3	5.8	2.4	5.8	2.5
State of health services in country nowadays	5.4	2.5	5.7	2.6	6.0	2.5
AVERAGE of the five domains	5.2	1.8	5.5	1.8	5.6	1.9

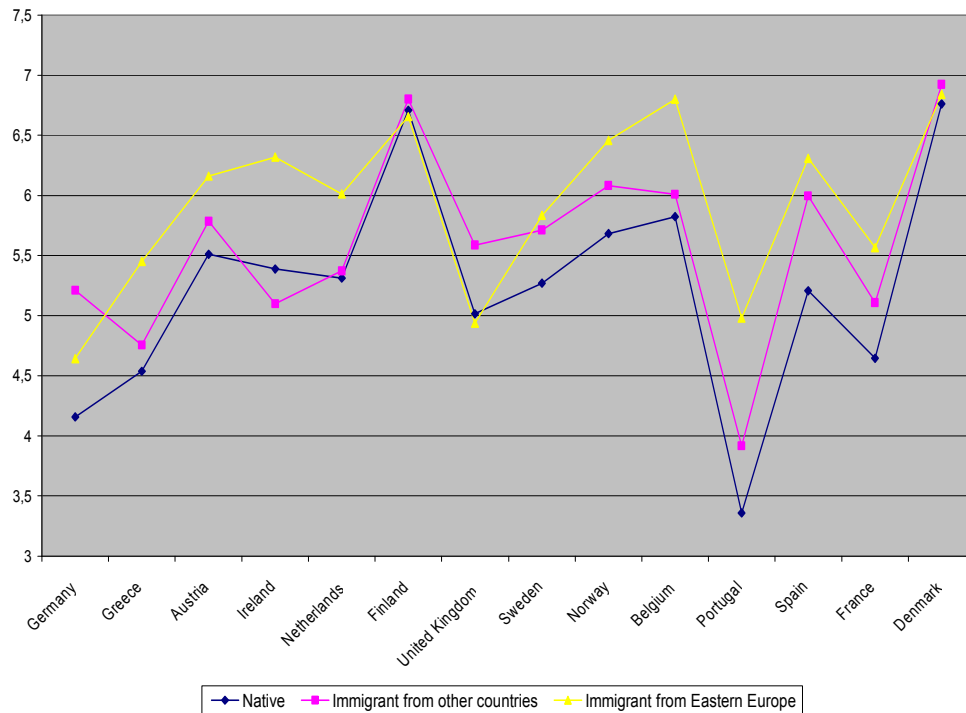
All the domain satisfactions have lower mean levels than satisfaction with life as a whole. The proposed explanation for this is that there is a positive bias in favor of one's satisfaction with personal areas in life²⁵.

²⁵ R. A. Cummins et al., "Developing a National Index of Subjective Wellbeing: The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index," *Social Indicators Research* 64, no. 2 (2003).

Overall, the natives show lower satisfaction (except satisfaction with economy), and the Eastern European display higher satisfaction with the state of education, of social services and democracy than those born in other countries. The last domain satisfaction has also the highest levels, while the satisfaction with the national government is the lowest in all studied groups.

In order to analyze all differences between natives at a time, I constructed a composite scale with all the domains satisfactions. The composite scale was found to be reliable (Crombach alpha coefficients above 0.7 for each country). The values of the composite variable for the three groups are represented in the next figure:

FIGURE 3. Summed evaluation of five societal domains for natives and non-natives in 14 European societies. Sources: ESS1,2; personal calculation.



Overall, in the Northern European countries people evaluate better the five societal domains. As in the case of the life satisfaction variable, only in Germany, Greece and Austria we have enough cases to meaningfully compare all three groups. In all these countries except Germany, the Eastern European immigrants significantly rate better the societal conditions than the other two groups. For the

rest of the countries except Finland, only a comparison between the levels of the natives and of the other immigrants is possible, and in all countries except Belgium and Denmark the immigrants show higher satisfaction with societal conditions.

Conclusions and limitations

It was found that, in most of the included countries, the immigrants report lower satisfaction with life as a whole than the natives. This confirms the previous study based only on the first wave of European Social Survey²⁶. Where the comparison could be made, it was also found that the migrants from Eastern Europe report having lower subjective well-being than the other immigrants. Possibly, this happens because the former are more recently in the receiving countries. Their socio-economic status is rather low and they suffer more from adaptation problems. However, we should take these results with precaution. Even if the number of cases analyzed is high, there still are too few cases to try to further compare subgroups or to control for some variables.

What was called "the paradox of satisfaction" was also confirmed: immigrants generally display higher satisfaction with societal conditions than the natives, and in two countries out of three, those from Eastern European countries are the most satisfied with the societal conditions. The effect can be explained by social comparison and adaptation: the immigrants compare the societal conditions from their sending country with those from the receiving country, and the results are, obviously, favorable to the latter. The other immigrants had more time available to adapt, and the social comparison process give not so strong results.

In both cases, the magnitude of the differences is not as high as we would expect. Actually, the correlation is rather weak. This can be explained by the limitations of the survey program. From different reasons, the fieldwork operators could not contact the recent immigrants, some of them illegal. Isolation of immigrant cases in the samples was also difficult, because the structure of the questions concerning the origin of those interviewed.

This is one of the few European-level comparative analyses on the subjective quality of life of the immigrants. In order to extend the quantity and the quality of the comparisons, we need surveys that include more European countries and more immigrant cases in each society.

²⁶ Bălăţescu, "Subjective Well-Being of Immigrants in Europe. A Comparative Study."

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