

Rural Return Migration: Comparative Analysis between Ireland and Lithuania

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Globalisation is a ubiquitous influence in rural Europe, offering both opportunities and challenges. The liberalisation of travel restrictions, in addition to the growth and development of transport and global communication networks, have contributed to an international mobility that promotes patterns of migration, return migration and repeat emigration from and to rural regions. Return migration in particular represents a stimulating field of research, as thought-provoking as it is diverse. In some regions, migrants return to their native country to play a pivotal role in the economic, social, and cultural vibrancy of a local rural community, while in others, migrants find themselves excluded and isolated. Investigating this diversity of experience, this paper presents analysis of findings from research carried out as part of the FP7 DERREG¹ project. Thirty-six biographies of return migrants (from the west of Ireland and Alytus County, Lithuania) were generated, allowing an understanding of how various life trajectories develop, reasons behind decisions, feelings regarding relocation and re-integration, and the experience of returning to a rural location. Drawing on transnationalism and social network theory, this paper reveals the complexity of contemporary return migration experiences and the similarities and diversities that exist between Western and Eastern Europe. Key issues to emerge include the context dependency of return migrant behaviour and their further life choices, integration, and the shift in migrants' value priority scale from economic to social values.

Keywords: rural; return migration; globalisation

Introduction

'Globalisation' surfaced as the buzzword of the 'Roaring Nineties' as it best captured the increasingly inter-dependent nature of social life on our planet (Steger 2009: 1). Incorporating a variety of discourses, the concept of globalisation not only challenged the 1990s, but continues to create significant social, economic, cultural and ecological challenges, for both urban and rural regions, in the 21st century. In defining globalisation, Steger (2009) suggested that the concept, also could be understood as the inter-connection and inter-

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dependence between localities around the world. Furthermore, Steger (*ibidem*) identified globalisation as a set of processes, which includes the creation and multiplication of networks, the expansion and stretching of social relations, activities and interdependencies, and the intensification and acceleration of social exchanges and activities. These processes also manifest themselves in rural locations, e.g. in the presence of transnational corporations, immigrants, imported technologies and trade, travel and consumption networks (Woods 2011). In recent years, such processes have become a permeating influence in rural Europe, offering both opportunities and challenges. This in turn has led to what Woods (2007) describes as a ‘globalised countryside,’ in which new globalised flows stretch beyond urban areas to encompass rural regions. It is a dynamic that sees flows in rural regions that are not uni-directional, but are *composed of movements into, out of, within and through rural places* (Milbourne 2007: 385), thereby creating a ‘global village’ which in some ways can lose control over its relationships, or conversely can gain more power through globalisation processes (Cid Aguayo 2008: 542).

A key feature of this ‘globalised countryside’ is migration. Pries (2009, 2010) and Faist (2010) differentiate migration and its impacts as being international, re-national, transnational, or globalised. Karakayali (2011) argues that discussions involving globalisation cannot obscure migration, while Castles and Miller (2009) refer to the ‘Age of Migration’ and how the general trends of migration are globalisation, acceleration, differentiation, feminisation, growing politicisation, and the proliferation of migration. Indeed, evidence of extreme increases in cross-border migration patterns led Castles and Miller (2009: 54) to suggest that, *Globalization remains a crucial context for understanding twenty-first-century migration. On the one hand, globalization drives migration and changes its directions and forms, while on the other hand, migration is an intrinsic part of globalization and is itself a major force reshaping communities and societies.* The liberalisation of travel restrictions, along with the growth and development of transport and global communication networks, have also contributed to an international mobility that promotes patterns of migration, return migration and repeat emigration from and into rural regions (e.g. Hillmann 2007; Urry 2007).

Increasingly viewed as a significant area of research, return migration in particular can be contextualised within the wider processes of societal change (Farrell, Mahon, McDonagh 2012). Dustmann and Weiss (2007) suggest that return migration is often characterised by its temporary status. They further suggest that it describes a situation where migrants return to their country of origin as a personal choice and often after an extended period abroad (*ibidem*). A large proportion of the migration within Europe over the last decade falls into this category (*ibidem*). Focusing on the occurrence and increasing frequency of return migration within Europe, this paper explores the diversity of experiences that exist for returnees to rural regions. Unpacking the multiplicity of experiences that exist for return migrants in the context of the western Ireland and Alytus County, Lithuania, this paper identifies the key role played by some returnees in the economic, social and cultural vitality of local rural communities, while also identifying the exclusion and isolation experienced by others. Drawing on research carried out for the DERREG (7th EU Framework Project), this paper utilises results from 36 biographies of return migrants, providing a clear understanding of the diverse life trajectories that develop once individuals return to their native region. Drawing on transnationalism and social network theory, the paper explores the decisions, experiences, and reintegration processes of individuals from two different backgrounds and locations (Eastern and Western Europe), but who chose a similar direction in life, and the potential impacts these decisions can have on the chosen rural areas.

Theoretical approach

Defining the return migration process

To understand return migration, a variety of economic, sociological, political and/or geographical approaches are often transferred from traditional migration research (Currell 2006; Smoliner, Förschner, Hochgerner, Nová 2013). Black, Koser and Munk (2004), for example, identify structural (the situation in the country of origin and in the host country), individual (age, sex and social relations) and political (incentives and disincentives) reasons for migrants to return to their country of origin. Dustmann and Weiss (2007) estimate that the majority of migrants always harbour a desire to return to their native country. Gmelch (1980: 136) defines return migration as *The movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle. Migrants returning from vacation or an extended visit without intention of remaining at home are generally not defined as return migrants*. However, Fihel and Górný (2013) suggest that this ‘traditional’ definition often implies permanency of a return move, which is not realistic in the current era of globalisation and mobility. Drawing on the OECD definition, Fihel and Górný (*ibidem*) suggest that return migrants be defined as persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short-term or long-term) and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least a year. Halfacree (2011), on the other hand, suggests that non-permanent or return migration is increasingly considered routine behaviour, although still a moderately novel area of migration in that a standard definition in national or international policy or law is absent. Nevertheless, for the purpose of the DERREG project research (and this paper); a ‘return migrant’ is defined as one who has returned to his/her place of birth following a period in another country (Farrell *et al.* 2012).

Theorising return migration

Return migration is often viewed as a multifaceted process, academically debated since the 1960s, but with more extensive theoretical underpinnings from the 1980s onwards (Kubat 1984; Farrell *et al.* 2012). Theoretical explorations of return migration have, over time, assisted in how the concept has been characterised and how return migrants are represented. Conceptualisations of return migration very often start with an exploration of the neoclassical approach based on the response of the individual to economic opportunities in other countries (Cassarino 2004, 2008). While relevant in relation to financial needs as an incentive (Hunter 2010), the neoclassical approach is criticised as migrants often miscalculate the financial burden of migrating against the higher incomes expected within the source country (Cassarino 2004). This approach therefore lends itself to the notion of migrants returning with a sense of failure, as their human capital was not rewarded in monetary terms.

The new economics of labour migration (NELM) theory, by contrast, evaluates return migration as returning to the home country after successfully completing a period in a foreign country. However, the success is measured in financial gain with little attention for the social aspects of the migrant’s decision to return. Cassarino (2004) criticises both NELM theory and neoclassical theory for placing considerable emphasis on the financial aspects of the migrant’s decision to return, often to the detriment of social and cultural decisions. Addressing this shortfall, Cassarino (*ibidem*) presents the structural approach to return migration, suggesting that the subject needs to be examined as a social and contextual issue, as well as a personal or financial one. The structural approach can however be criticised for its failure to take both the host and home country into consideration simultaneously (Hunter 2010). This approach fails to consider the difficulties faced by returnees, often related to the length of time spent abroad, in addition to the level of contact maintained with family and friends while away. By contrast, transnationalism presents a theoretical framework

based on solid connections between the host and home country (Cassarino 2004). The ‘cycle of contact’ investigated in transnationalism explores the return migrant’s ability to maintain strong links with the home country, which in turn acts as preparation for the return process. Chacko (2007) argues that transnational linkages due to reverse brain drain have a strong impact on the economic development and globalisation of the receiving home countries.

The networking process evident in transnationalism bears some similarities to social network theory. Social network theory has contributed significantly to a better understanding of return migration, as it views return migrants as actors who draw on tangible and intangible resources to ensure a successful return to their home country (Cassarino 2004). In contrast to transnationalists, social network theorists believe that return migrants need not be dependent on diasporas, but that the process of migration has equipped the returnee with various forms of capital which can be utilised for a successful return to the home country. According to Cassarino (*ibidem*), the reintegration process is made simpler as the returnee has maintained the social structures required to ensure that sufficient information and resources are at hand once the return process commences. Additional to financial capital, social network theorists suggest that returnees return with human capital in the form of skills acquired in a foreign country, in addition to experiences, social networks and knowledge; all of which contribute to a positive reintegration process for the return migrant (*ibidem*). In considering all five theoretical approaches, it is appropriate to draw on de Haas, Fokkema and Fassi Fihri (2014) as they suggest that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all theory,’ and that different aspects of relevant theories should be taken into account to ensure that the heterogeneity of migrants is considered. When analysing data collected for the DERREG project, however, transnationalism and social network theory are most relevant. In considering return migrants in Ireland and Lithuania, these theoretical approaches allow the significance of social networking, human capital, transnational mobility and identities to be investigated with interesting insights emerging. Drawing on transnationalism, for example, allows an exploration of the manner in which Irish and Lithuanian migrants create social groups across borders, which in turn helps them in their return to the home country. Levitt (2001: 213) explores this notion within the context of *a transnational village that emerges when large numbers of people from a small, bounded sending community enact their lives across borders*. Levitt (*ibidem*) also suggests that *migrants and non-migrants create other kinds of transnational social groups through their enduring ties*. Drawing on social network theory, this study aims to ascertain whether the migration process has equipped both Irish and Lithuanian return migrants with various forms of capital, which can be utilised for a successful return.

Rural return migration

Return typologies, according to Glorius (2014: 219), often focus on the impact of return migration on the individual and on, at the *country level, integrating return motives, voluntariness of return and return preparations, as well as the institutional context prior to and after return*. This corresponds with considerations arising in the context of post-accession migration in the EU, namely, the *question of brain return and the return-development nexus (ibidem)*. At the micro level, Glorius (*ibidem*) suggests that the definition of ‘re-migration’ is inadequate, in that it provides little information on the length of time spent abroad or on the definitive nature of the return. In considering spatial factors, Glorius (*ibidem*) suggests that *even though re-migrants may have crossed international borders back to their country of origin, they might not have returned to their place of origin, so the return is not complete (ibidem)*. This scenario applies to rural emigrants, who may choose to return to an urban area rather than to a rural region. Regarding the decision to return, and in particular the decision to return to a rural rather than to an urban area, the work of Klagge and Klein-Hitpaß (2010) and Klein-Hitpaß (2013) offers relevant insights. Their research work analyses the

transformation of the former socialist Poland before and after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, showing that many highly skilled migrants returned to rural areas or smaller cities and not to the larger urban Polish agglomerations (*ibidem*). Unfortunately, a research gap appears to exist in relation to other Central Eastern European countries and a similar deduction cannot be made. What is evident however, according to Klagge and Klein–Hitpaß (2010: 1646), is that rural return migrants contribute to knowledge-based development, but *the idea of a bridging function of social relations has to be scrutinized more carefully*.

Conceptualisations of the rural currently lead to an exploration of the diversity that exists in rural areas; in rural identities, interests and priorities (Cloke 2006; Panelli 2006; Woods 2003, 2011). This contemporary rural diversity, or diversity of place, is often not what many migrants expect to discover on returning to their native rural areas, however. Although many migrants return for family and economic reasons, many also return seeking the mystical 'rural idyll,' which appeals to migrants who are often situated between two places and are seeking to decide on a future trajectory for themselves and their family (Halfacree 1995; Ní Laoire 2007). Discourses of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' also suggest that such conceptualisations need contemplation, particularly when considering migrants who view their foreign location as temporary and their eventual location to be their original rural home (Ní Laoire 2007). Overall, many reasons, such as age, class, and lifestyle choice are presented for rural return migration. However, what becomes imperative for a greater understanding of the return process is to consider the complexity of rural populations and to avoid narrow conceptualisations, in favour of broader considerations (Milbourne 2007).

Methodology

Selection of the sample

Qualitative, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were carried out with 36 return migrants (individually or as couples) between January and November 2010, in both Ireland and Lithuania. The key objective of the study was to achieve 'theoretical saturation,' and as such, all pertinent features of the research were included in the sample and addressed in the interviews (Farrell *et al.* 2012). Once all interviews were completed, and all significant data relating to return migrants' experiences and motivations were obtained, the research methodology used a selection of cases by selective sampling. In the case of return migrants, for example, those selected for interviews returned to Ireland and Lithuania willingly, without any coercion and at their own financial cost (*ibidem*). Respondents were chosen for interviews on the basis of a conscious selection process rather than a random selection. This method of selective sampling was used to ensure that all significant facets of information were included in the sample.

When choosing the required sample of interviewees, the following criteria were considered: candidates of Irish and Lithuanian origin; both male and female candidates; interviewees were professional or non-professional; both individuals and couples were selected; and both long-term and short-term durations of stay were considered. The study included interviews with return migrants from all types of employment backgrounds, including highly skilled migrants, skilled workers (e.g. artisans), as well as non-skilled workers (Farrell *et al.* 2012). Current employment was a key consideration and although the level of education was considered, it was not paramount. An additional key consideration was the information regarding a change in work practices once return migrants were employed in either the west of Ireland or Alytus County, Lithuania. Family dynamic was also considered, and couples with children were interviewed to determine whether their motivation to return was different from their single counterparts. Other family issues were also explored, such as the connections maintained by the migrants while abroad and on their return, and how this motivated migrants to return and how it assisted them once they returned.

The period of stay abroad was also taken into consideration. Depending on the time spent abroad, the study made a distinction between a short-term stay (a period of at least 1 month but less than a year) and long-term stay (a period of at least 12 months). Initially, a pre-test to check the accuracy and feasibility of the guidelines was carried out. Audio recordings of all interviews were made and transcribed in full and used to inform the analysis (Farrell *et al.* 2012). Thematic analyses were carried out on all transcriptions to identify the key themes emerging from the interviews.

Characterisation of the sample

The interviewees chosen for this research were located in Eastern and Western Europe; namely the west of Ireland and Alytus County, located in the south-eastern part of Lithuania. In relation to both study locations, the following table characterises the research sample:

Table 1. Characterisation of the sample

Return migrants	Return period	International destination	Return destination county
19 Irish return migrants			
5 males, 6 females, 4 couples	1994–2009	USA (Boston and New York), Britain (London), Netherlands, Canada	Roscommon/Galway
17 Lithuanian return migrants			
<i>First interviews: spring 2010</i>			
5 males, 4 females	1997–2007	USA (Chicago), Armenia (Yerevan), Ireland and United Kingdom	6 to Alytus County and 3 to Alytus city
<i>Second interviews: autumn 2010</i>			
7 males and 1 female	2003–2010	United Kingdom (London and Derby), USA (Chicago, Lemont and Lakewood), France (San Bone village and Toulouze), Norway (Dramen), Ireland (Castlerea)	Alytus County

Source: own elaboration.

In both the west of Ireland and Alytus County, the interviews sought to establish why the return migrant left the home country, their length of stay abroad, their motivation to return (retirement, problems with integrating abroad, language problems, quality of life, economic stature, personal reasons) and their experiences as return migrants.

Case study regions

Case study selection

Ireland and Lithuania were chosen as the case study countries for this research due to the scale of economic emigration that exists within both countries, from a historical and contemporary perspective. A comparative analysis of the two countries is also relevant in light of Ireland as a significant destination country for many Lithuanian emigrants (Thaut 2009). The case study region of Alytus County, Lithuania, was selected due to its peripheral character as an economically deprived border region. Comparably, the West Region of Ireland is peripherally situated on the Western Seaboard, with the Atlantic Ocean forming the western boundary and the river Shannon forming the eastern boundary. Additionally, and comparably, the Irish case study region

was selected for its NUTS2 status of economic disadvantage. The added value of an international comparison lies not only in the similarities discovered between the return migrants (the differences between the case study regions notwithstanding), but also in the lessons that can be learned from the experiences of both return migrant groups.

County Roscommon, West of Ireland

The first study location was the West of Ireland, a NUTS2 designated region and part of the Border Midlands and West Region of Ireland (BMW) (Figure 1). This study focused particularly on County Roscommon (Figure 2), as representative of a rural Ireland and embodying a history of emigration and return migration (Farrell *et al.* 2012). The 2006 census recorded a population of 414 277 for County Roscommon, which represents nearly 10 per cent of the national population, although population growth, recorded at over 13 per cent, is well below the regional and national average (20.7 per cent and 20.3 per cent respectively). County Roscommon has levels of prosperity around the national average, with greater deprivation in the north of the county. Communities around Athlone and rural areas neighbouring Roscommon town have above-average affluence, but a number of rural divisions in northern Roscommon have relatively high levels of deprivation compared to the national average.

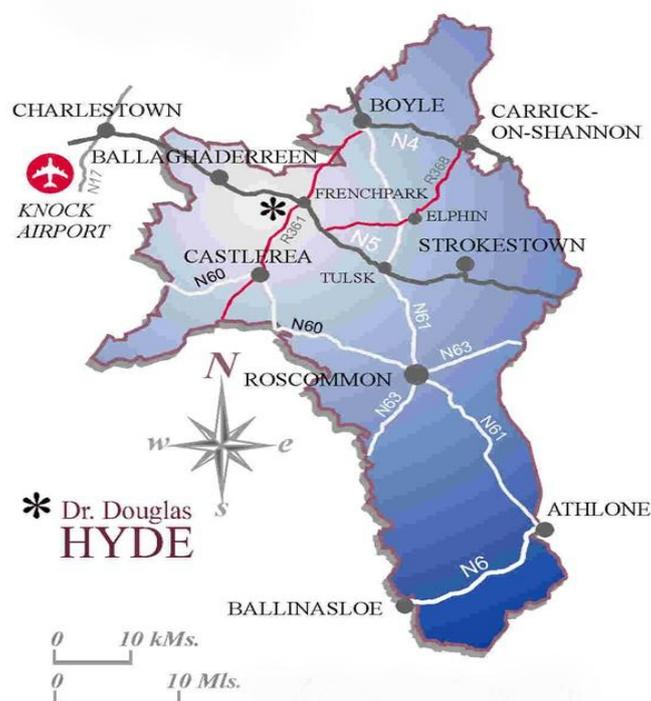
Figure 1. Map of Ireland showing Border Midlands and West Region of Ireland



Source: Border, Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme. Supporting and Enabling Dynamic Regions. December 2010. Online: <http://www.healthgain.eu/casestudy/border-midland-and-western-ireland> (accessed: 27 November 2014).

Return migration is not a recent phenomenon to Ireland. However, return migration trends are increasingly recorded from the 1990s onwards and in particular during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ period. According to Ní Laoire (2008), in a 10-year period from 1996 to 2006, net inward migration to the Republic of Ireland increased by up to 50 per cent. Between 1991 and 1996 nearly 20 per cent of return migrants arrived in County Roscommon per 1 000 population (CSO 2006). Of these returnees, two distinct groups can be identified; the first are individuals who return to Ireland to retire, and the second are descendants of emigrants returning to their native land (*ibidem*). Those who returned came mostly from the United Kingdom and the United States, with many returning to their native rural regions.

Figure 2. Map of Ireland showing County Roscommon



Source: Roscommon County Council. Online: http://www.roscommoncoco.ie/en/Douglas_Hyde_Centre/Directions_Maps (accessed: 27 November 2014).

Alytus County, Lithuania

The second research area was Alytus County, a NUTS3 region located in the south-eastern part of Lithuania, bordered by Poland and Belarus (Figure 3 and Figure 4). As with the West of Ireland, Lithuania and Alytus County in particular have a long history of emigration. Since its independence in 1990, approximately one-fifth of the Lithuanian population emigrated, making it one of the largest net negative migrations per 1 000 population in the European Union (Population Census data 2011). A national population decline is evident in Alytus County, with the region recording the second largest decline in population of the ten counties in 2010. In 2012, Alytus County's population was recorded as 155 203, with 90 726 living in the urban municipality of Alytus County and the remaining inhabitants dispersed across four rural municipalities (Statistics Lithuania 2012). The urban majority is the result of recent urbanisation, but the region is currently still

categorised by the OECD as ‘predominantly rural’ (Eurostat 2010) with the third lowest population density of Lithuanian regions at 28.6 persons per km² (Statistics Lithuania 2012). Alytus County is a region with comparatively low incomes, high unemployment, a dwindling population, and net out-migration. The region currently faces considerable social and economic challenges, which are compounded by a global recession applied to a context of a post-Soviet recovery (Kairyte 2014).

Contributing strongly to this trend is international net out-migration, which, in 2010, saw out-migrants outnumbering in-migrants by nearly 5 000 in 2010 (Statistics Lithuania 2012). This process of out-migration is fuelled by limited economic opportunities in Alytus County, with large numbers leaving to live and work abroad, especially in Western Europe. Due to conventional social networks, countries such as the UK, Ireland, Spain and the USA were often the destination countries for Lithuanians, with Scandinavian countries becoming more popular in recent years. While some migrant workers returned, difficulties in finding appropriate work in the home country often led to repeat emigrations. Although there has been a decline in the immigration figures of foreign nationals into Alytus County, an important new trend is the return migration of Lithuanians who were migrant workers in other parts of Europe or elsewhere. In 2012, over 20 000 people were recorded as immigrating to Lithuania, with return Lithuanian residents accounting for 87 per cent of all immigrants. Changes in health insurance regulations, as an important issue for Lithuanians, are seen as a key factor for this growth. Compulsory Lithuanian health insurance payments for those who did not declare departure encouraged many to do so (as well as to declare arrival on return). It is argued by government, however, that the increase of returning citizens is also influenced by a better economic situation in Lithuania and the continued revival of the economy, which will result in further increases in returning emigrants (*Migration in Numbers* 2013). This view is supported by Garbenčiūtė (2013), who suggests that the home country is rapidly changing with more possibilities for a better quality of life and the ability to work at a higher professional capacity, with access to social services and an improved cultural life.

Figure 3. Location of Alytus County in Lithuania

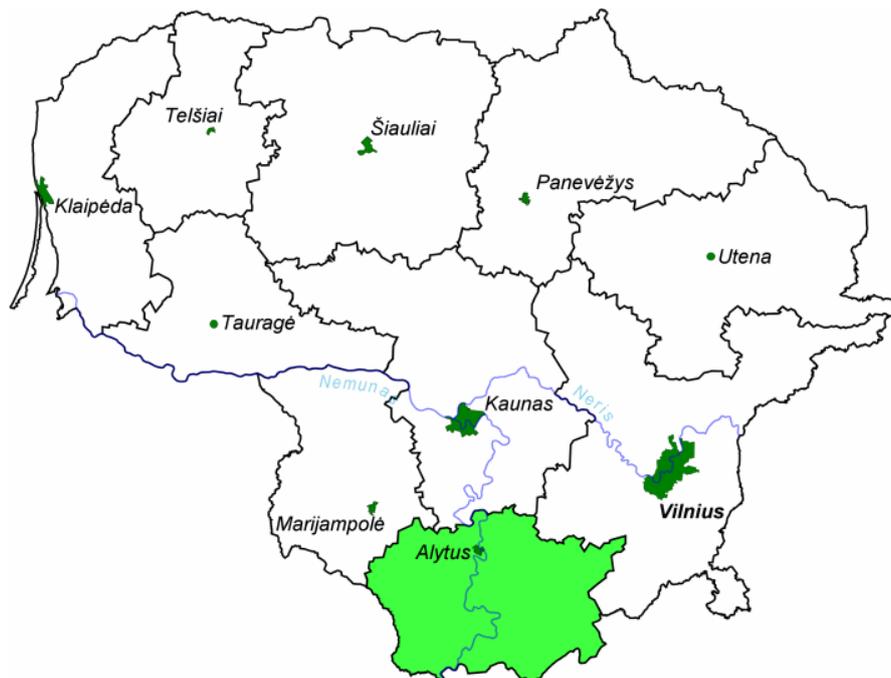
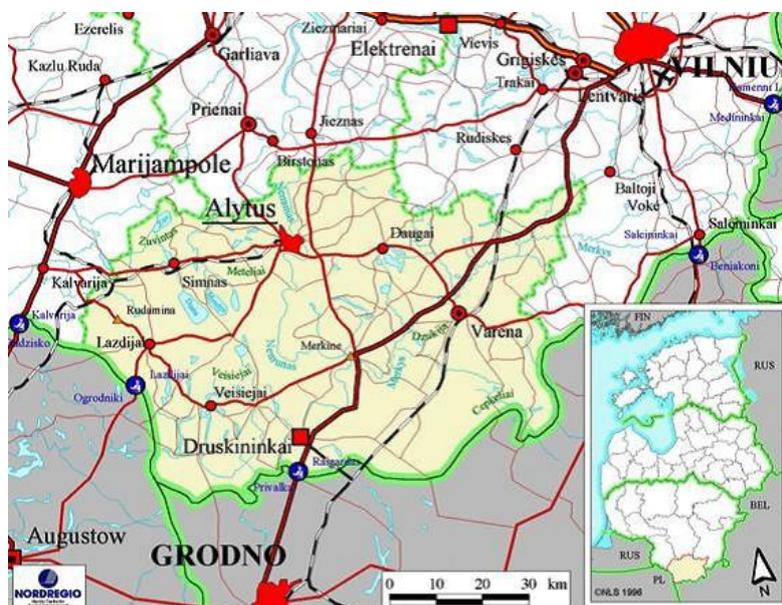


Figure 4. Alytus County – main towns and political borders



Source: Nordregio – DERREG Project.

Results

This remaining section of the paper focuses on the results of interviews held with return migrants in County Roscommon and Alytus County, Lithuania. The purpose, in the context of the theories already discussed, was to gain insight into the movement patterns and the motivations behind a returnee's decision to return to rural Ireland or rural Lithuania. Additionally, results were analysed to determine the significance of the relational aspect of return migration and the role of concepts such as the rural idyll, networking and building social capital in influencing movement patterns.

Original motivation

Economic reasons

A background exploration of both study groups showed that 13 of the 19 Irish return migrants left their home country in the 1980s because of a national recession and high unemployment. All 17 Lithuanian migrants reported leaving their country at a later stage, between 1997 and 2007, although the majority also suggested that an economic depression and high levels of unemployment were the most significant factors in their decision to leave. Previous Irish migration research established that 30 per cent of the Irish population was unemployed during the 1980s and that emigration was a basic reality, rather than an exception (Jones 2003; Ní Laoire 2007; Noble 2013). This study found similar results, with one respondent suggesting that: *There was no work and no money in Ireland in the 1980s, we were musicians and we went to England because our family and friends told us there was work there* (I.11). Another interviewee stated that: *The first time I left was to go to London in 1987. When I left college there was no work here in Ireland* (I.5). Historically, Irish emigrants emigrated with little more than traditional farm, domestic or building skills as cultural capital. By the

1990s, however, almost 30 per cent of Irish college graduates were emigrating to seek employment and gain experience abroad (Farrell *et al.* 2012). This was reflected in the Irish study, as all but 1 respondent had completed secondary level education prior to leaving Ireland and 9 of the 17 migrants had completed tertiary qualifications, to Diploma or Degree level.

In Alytus County, similar scenarios were evident with unemployment and wage differences between Lithuania and destination countries being the central push and pull factors. Figures suggest that 85 per cent of Lithuanians leaving their county in 2010 or previously indicated that they had been unemployed for a year or longer prior to their departure (IOM in Lithuania 2011). This push factor was reinforced by pull factors such as the potential wage increases for emigrants in the main destination countries. Many emigrants experienced wage increases of approximately two to three times higher in terms of purchasing power parity or up to six times in current prices if compared to wages in Lithuania (*ibidem*). The main reason to leave was stated clearly by one of the respondents: *I left because there was no job and money* (L.12). The survey respondents collectively identified a series of ‘goals,’ which many of them aimed to achieve while living and working abroad. These goals included: earning enough money to start a new business on their return; accumulating money for accommodation or further education; and obtaining additional finances to support their families in Lithuania. One respondent in particular noted that: *There are better payments for the same or other jobs abroad* (L.11), while another reported that: *I wished to gain more experience and knowledge while abroad, to try and better myself and my family in a new environment* (L.6). Such responses are comparable with a Lithuanian survey, which found that 86.7 per cent of Alytus County residents viewed their employment prospects negatively or very negatively, and 81.6 per cent assessed the possibility of starting a business negatively or very negatively (RAIT Market Analysis and Research Group 2010). The same survey found that 29 per cent of respondents had at least one unemployed person in their family, with little opportunities for re-skilling and improving qualifications (*ibidem*). Although Alytus County is well developed, the available programmes have not been sufficiently adapted to changing market conditions (Alytus Regional Development Council 2010).

Social and cultural motivations to leave

Economic instability played a key factor in motivating both Irish and Lithuanian natives to leave their home county originally. Both sets of respondents also indicated that additional issues, such as social security and justice, better long-term career prospects and opportunities to experience new cultures and traditions also played a role in their decision-making process. In the Irish context, 12 of the 17 interviewees were motivated to emigrate in the 1980s by family or friends. One respondent reported that: *I was working in hotel and catering in Ireland and I just wanted something different and to see how things were done somewhere else. In fact, my mum is Scottish so I had a lot of friends over there. That’s really, why I chose to go to Scotland. My mother was living in Ireland but her sister my aunt was living there. The security of having family there really helped* (I.4). Although most Irish interviewees agreed that they had a good quality of life prior to emigrating, they were influenced by family and friends who had emigrated previously, and had high expectations of the quality of life abroad. They expected better ‘employment prospects,’ ‘increased income,’ ‘better working conditions,’ ‘opportunities for leisure activities’ and career advancement through enhanced educational prospects. As one individual said: *I left Ireland as there was loads of work in London with better pay and working conditions* (I.5).

Similar responses emerged from interviewees in Alytus County where some suggested that curiosity and a desire for new experiences and/or challenges motivated them to travel abroad. Motivation *to see the world* was alluded to by many interviewees once they had discussed their economic motivations to emigrate. As

with Irish interviewees, an improved quality of life was an incentive, particularly with younger respondents. These decisions are similar to those identified by Conlon (2009), when he pointed to factors including a prevailing depressed economic climate in addition to gaining experience overseas and forming new personal relationships. A common feature among both east and west return migrants was their long-term intention to return to their home county, which was often entwined with a social attachment to their respective countries rather than with economic factors.

Motivation to return

Globalisation increasingly enhances ease of mobility, which weakens the traditional tendency to consider migration as permanent. As such, migration has become more of a circular or return process, with a variety of factors affecting each individual's decision to return. Sipavičienė, Cock and Dobryninas (2009) suggest that such factors can often be grouped into four different headings: 1) failure to integrate into the destination country; 2) priority given to home country; 3) achievement of set goals (to reach an earning target, to get education, to gain experience) and finally, 4) emergence of employment opportunities in the home country due to obtained experience in the destination country. This classification was found useful following the analysis of the interviews for both Alytus County and the West of Ireland, as it became apparent that these groupings bore varying degrees of relevance to both sets of results.

Failure to integrate into the destination country

According to the research, a failure to integrate into the destination country is more typical for emigrants with lower education or emigrants living in the destination country during an economic recession. Although this was not paramount in the decision-making process of many immigrants, particularly in the Irish context, it was significant for four Lithuanians who returned from France because of difficult employment and economic circumstances. One interviewee suggested that: *The main reason to return was due to the end of the job contract. The contract was not extended, but I think this was influenced by the increasing unemployment in France* (L.14), while a second respondent suggested that: *The main reason I returned was due to the bankruptcy of the French enterprise, where I was working. They didn't need us anymore* (L.16). Two further Lithuanian respondents indicated that their return was instigated by a poor working environment and living conditions, in addition to, *missing family and the homeland* (L.10). In theorising this aspect of the respondent's decision to return, neoclassical stance can be utilised: migrants returned to their home country because of a failed experience, particularly in relation to their work environment, and the fact that their human capital was not acknowledged in monetary terms.

Priority given to the home country

This aspect of return was significant to most if not all respondents from both Ireland and Lithuania. In relation to the Irish study, the majority of individuals and couples (9 of the 11 individuals and 1 of the couples) required little or no incentive to return, and many indeed suggested that it had always been their long-term intention to return home to their native country. Although patriotism was important to the Irish interviewees, the key motivation for returning was to be close to other family members, particularly once immigrants had children of their own. One interviewee remarked that: *I knew once I had children whenever it would happen I would come home. I suppose it was always at the back of my mind. I knew I would not stay there forever* (I.12). Jones (2003) previously noted how the attraction of having an extended family in their home country

often motivated immigrants to return. Ní Laoire (2008) likewise identifies the family as a key factor in motivating immigrants to return to their native country. At a more theoretical level, Cassarino (2004) suggests that such motivation is strongly connected to transnationalism, which aligns return migration with a strong attachment to home and the family.

In comparison to the Irish response, Lithuanian return migrants outlined more patriotic reasons for returning to their native country. One respondent who returned from the United States expressed his motivation to return this way: *Being Lithuanian, I never felt myself a citizen of any other country except Lithuania, and in my opinion, citizens have to live in their country* (L.6). Another respondent reported: *I felt like an immigrant in the USA with another language, culture and habits – I felt foreign there. However these feelings were strengthened by the hard job, leaving no time for social integration – life was closed, just work and home* (L.17). Another respondent, a second generation emigrant living in the United States, returned to the homeland of his parents, suggesting that he always felt himself to be Lithuanian: *I was born into a Lithuanian family (in the USA), to which it was very important to preserve Lithuanian culture, language, and traditions, particularly since Lithuania was under occupation. My parents were communicating mainly with Lithuanian society, were dreaming of Lithuania as homeland. As such, the interviewee felt that he was practically programmed to return and be Lithuanian* (L.1). As he went on to explain, it is easier *To be Lithuanian in the natural environment as it does not require an extra effort. I was hoping to create a family with a Lithuanian partner and have the Lithuanian language spoken in my family* (L.1). Such patriotism was strengthened by the occupation of Lithuania during the Soviet era and increased the immigrants' desire to return to their native land, now that their country is independent and free. Many respondents suggested that they had a *longing for their homeland*, with one return migrant in particular suggesting that despite his satisfaction with the destination country, he wanted to return home, stating that: *I missed the homeland, I couldn't imagine myself working in construction all my life and living somewhere else rather than Lithuania* (L.10). However, in most cases the homeland was understood as the place where family and close people reside, as suggested by the following two respondents: *I had nostalgia for Lithuania, family and friends. It was hard to be alone in a foreign country without support and friends* (L.11); *My main reason to return, however, was my wish to live in the homeland, where all my own people live* (L.15). Similarly, Garbenčiūtė (2013) suggests that the environment of the family and other relatives living in Lithuania is particularly important to the migrant community. The decision to return, for many migrants, is often based on the importance of social contacts, with these relationships having a greater effect on return than economic reasons. Additionally, work carried out in 2011 (Barcevičius, Žvalionytė 2012) confirms that the most important factor for Lithuanian return migrants is to return to family, home and friends and to live in their own cultural environment. Over 50 per cent of respondents within this survey expressed this desire. These results are similar to that obtained by Klagge and Klein-Hitpaß. (2010) in their work on return migrants in Poland.

Achievement of goals

Sipavičienė *et al.* (2009) suggest that the achievement of set goals, such as obtaining ample finances to start a business, purchase accommodation, finance further education or to gain satisfactory experience abroad, are often sufficient motivation for immigrants to consider returning to their native country. Similarly, Barcevičius and Žvalionytė (2012) produced research results showing that 40 per cent of return migrants named the achievement of set goals abroad as a significant factor in their decision to return. Interviewees from Alytus County, for example, suggested that returning depended largely on the amount of financial capital they had accumulated. One respondent pointedly said: *Since the reason for my departure was to earn money to start my own business, the reason to return was to establish the business* (L.10). Another return

migrant alluded to the fact that: *The job was very hard, but I earned enough money to return* (L.11). Additionally, three migrants suggested that they returned because they had *to finish studying at home* (L.5, L.10, L.11), and once they earned sufficient funds, they felt compelled to return. Such responses can be aligned with the theoretical framework of new economics of labour migration, in that return was the natural conclusion to a successful experience in a foreign country (Cassarino 2004). This theory emphasises the financial aspects of a returnee's decision to return, placing less emphasis on the social and cultural aspects of the decision. By contrast, Irish respondents placed very little emphasis on the accumulation of finances as a key reason to return. Quality of life milestones such as, having children and support systems at home were key responses, with no interviewees alluding to the accumulation of money as a motivating factor in their return. Irish returnees did suggest that savings were important; however, the social networks that assisted them in their reintegration process were given greater prominence. For example, one interviewee suggested that: *Financially moving home was a terrible move, but the quality of life is better in Ireland, than living in a big town in England and we wanted our children to experience the freedom of rural life* (I.7). In understanding such motivations for return, we can draw on social network theory, as it aids our understanding of that process by viewing returnees as actors who draw together tangible and intangible resources to return home (Cassarino 2004).

Emergence of employment opportunities in the home country

Returnees to both Alytus County and the West of Ireland alluded to employment opportunities, as motivating their return. Additionally, some returnees from both groups suggested that their experience abroad increased their employability at home. For example, one returnee stated that: *The main reason I returned was due to a job offer in Lithuania* (L.12). Four other returnees reported that they found jobs without difficulties. Some Lithuanian returnees suggested, however, that their experience in the destination country did not influence their employment situation at home; in fact, two returnees indicated that they felt a certain level of negativity towards them on their return. One of the return migrants commented that: *In general, the fact that I returned from abroad was not really perceived as advantage by other people. In Lithuania, everybody says we all were somewhere, though in reality very few people return who emigrate for the longer term. There is a big difference between those who lived abroad only a short time and those who stayed longer* (L.4). Similarly to Irish return migrants, three Lithuanian respondents showed keen entrepreneurial skills by establishing new businesses on their return, including an office for cadastral measurements and house design, a rental company of construction tools and equipment, and an internet (on-line) clothes store. These findings are along similar lines to Klagge and Klein-Hitpaß (2010), who argue that return migrants are often investors and innovators and are equipped with various forms of capital, which aid a successful return. This again, is strongly linked to social network theory and the building of various forms of capital to aid a successful return.

Irish returnees also alluded to increased employment opportunities at home, which influenced their decision to return. One individual stated that: *My husband got a job in Ireland with an English company and that was the deciding factor for us* (I.2), while another stated that: *My husband was a builder and work was very plentiful in Ireland because of the building boom* (I.9). A third interviewee declared that: *The Celtic Tiger was roaring at home, so there was plenty of work. This helped me make my decision to return* (I.4). In the Irish context, interviewees returned to Ireland during the renowned 'Celtic Tiger' era, which all but assured them of local, regional or national employment. In fact, in that period Irish unemployment dropped to an historic low of 4 per cent, while economic growth registered twice that of US and four times the rate recorded in Europe. In light of such economic stability, return migrants were highly motivated to consider returning to their native country.

The return experience

Employability: home and abroad

All Lithuanian interviewees worked in a variety of employment sectors while abroad. Jobs in academia, construction, agriculture, trade, the service sector and retail were recorded, with four respondents suggesting the work was physically difficult and working conditions were poor. On their return, most interviewees again worked in a variety of jobs, such as firm managers, a real estate agent, construction workers, a sales agent, website administrator, city artist, mechanic and welder. Nearly all respondents indicated their displeasure at the low wages they were paid on their return. Many reported that low wages prevailed despite the fact that they had obtained a number of extra skills while working abroad. One individual completed tertiary education in the United States; nevertheless, this individual and others felt that their professional experiences abroad were dismissed once they returned and sought employment in Alytus County. In exploring this issue further, some interviewees suggested they had qualifications and professions upon travelling abroad, but to meet their short-term economic goals they took on work in unrelated fields. As such, on their return, this was unrelated to their current employment. Nonetheless, most returnees felt that, overall, the experience had been beneficial to their career advancement with one individual suggesting that: *The main valuable experience was not professional, but communication with different people, discovering a different system, different feeling* (L.4). Those who gained employment in their chosen profession (a firm manager and two individuals in construction) did feel that their employment experience abroad benefited and advanced their career opportunities once they returned. This also applied to individuals who advanced their education while abroad, particularly returnees who took additional courses in computers, bar tending, auctioneering, and lorry driving. These results are similar to a Lithuanian survey, which included two polls with return migrants carried out in 2008 and 2011 (Barcevičius, Žvalionytė 2012) which discovered that the majority of return migrants felt that their emigration experience contributed very little to their search for employment, and 11 per cent suggested it could even be considered an obstacle. Similarly, the study concluded that migrants who obtained work in their 'own field' advanced their careers on their return, but unfortunately the majority of immigrants worked in employment below their qualification grade (*ibidem*). These findings reflect the work of Favell (2008) when he suggests that many migrants from Eastern Europe working in the west accept employment that is beneath their status and qualifications in order to fill a niche in the labour market. Many Eastern European migrants justify this strategy by viewing it as temporary, opportunistic and financially rewarding for their families at home (*ibidem*).

Irish return migrants had a varied experience, in that only 2 of the 19 return migrants failed to gain employment on their return, with one individual suggesting it was a *Lifestyle decision to stay at home and look after my children once I returned to Ireland* (I.5). Similar to Lithuanian migrants, but in greater numbers, 8 of the 17 currently employed return migrants started their own business in areas such as photography, audio recording, mechanical engineering, turf cutting, restaurant, farmer/plumber and painter. All interviewees were of the opinion that the experience, skills and abilities they obtained abroad were invaluable once they returned (Farrell *et al.* 2012). One interviewee, currently self-employed, suggested that: *You learned to toughen up because in another country you learn to do things for yourself; there is no one there to do it for you. You do learn to toughen up and be a bit more thick skinned and not let things get to you* (I.6). Most interviewees (14) were satisfied with their current employment situation except one female who was recently given redundancy notice. All self-employed individuals were anxious about their businesses due to the economic recession and some (5) felt they might have a better chance at 'growing' their business if they resided in an urban area, but none were willing to trade the benefits of rural life for their businesses. All interviewees

felt they had gained skills and abilities abroad that assisted them in their current occupation. Eight of the seventeen interviewees had obtained further education while abroad such as obtaining a haulage licence, a degree in Human Resource Management, a photography course, a plumbing qualification, and ITC and Hotel and Catering qualifications. Others suggested they had gained substantial experience, strength of character and the ability to deal with diverse people and situations. As one interviewee explained: *I feel stronger as a result of being abroad and I've gained a broader understanding of people and how to deal with them while running a business* (I.6). Under the rubric of social network theory, such entrepreneurial activity and enhancement of education and skills while abroad can be analysed as an accumulation of human capital, which can contribute to the successful return of migrants (Cassarino 2004). Additionally, Black *et al.* (2004) alluded to the fact that individuals returning to their native country with enhanced entrepreneurial skills can only be advantageous to a country and even more so to a rural region in need of additional commercial enterprises.

Domestic situation on return

All Irish return migrants were either very satisfied or satisfied with their current living situation in rural Ireland. Some (5) were concerned with the economic crisis in the country and would consider remigration for employment if the situation arose. Nonetheless, no returnee related any feelings of dissatisfaction with their current situation, although some (3) females suggested that they were initially very unhappy after returning to Ireland. As one female interviewee said: *I feel happy now that I am back home, we have a better quality of life here, particularly once we got work, we felt less isolated and more connected to the community* (I.1). There were some similarities in the Lithuanian study, in that the majority of respondents (10) were satisfied with their current living situation. However, in contrast to the Irish findings, 1 return migrant was very dissatisfied with his current arrangements and 4 were not satisfied with their current job arrangements. According to one respondent: *Incomes are lower, but life is better here* (L.11). The positive factors of living in Alytus County were recorded as *Proximity to my family and friends, nice nature and landscape, good leisure, Lithuanian language, accommodation possibilities are quite good, it is less expensive to live here and run a business compared to the cities or abroad* (L.2, L.5, L.6, L.8). The negative aspects of living in the regions were alluded to as: *Lower wages, high prices compared to wages, bureaucracy, improper behaviour among state officials, negative competition, poor salesmen behaviour in the stores (not polite and angry), inefficiency of public and bank officers, selfishness of politicians, lower quality of life, unemployment and peripherality of the region* (L.3, L.5, L.8, L.10, L.11, L.14). A higher level of satisfaction among Irish returnees reflects findings presented by Ní Laoire (2008), which suggest that Irish return migrants often reject living permanently in any particular country other than Ireland. Aspirations of Irish migrants revolve around notions of *citizenship, homeownership, suburbia and family* (*ibidem*: 205). Ní Laoire (*ibidem*) also suggests that such aspirations reflect a normative association of place and life stage and a desire to become permanently rooted in the home country.

Return migrant and reintegration

All Lithuanian respondents were in regular contact with family and friends while abroad, via the internet or regular visits. As such, the return experience was considered neither complicated nor difficult, by most returnees. Comments such as: *There was no need for adaptation, after a few weeks we returned to the usual life we had before we left* (L.10) were commonplace. The majority of Lithuanians returned to live with or close to family members in rural regions where they were born and raised. This, for many, was a very im-

portant aspect of their return experience, and many indicated that returning to their native region and being close to family constituted the success of their return. For many returnees, their circle of friends remained the same and many were happy and indeed enthusiastic to join clubs and organisations such as: *The Local Invalid Association, Joint Democratic Movement, New Party, Return Lithuanians' Association, Rotary (Businessmen's) club and a Women's club* (L.11). However, some returnees returned to their home to experience certain levels of isolation as other family members had emigrated and not returned. One individual in particular stated that: *My family lives in the USA now, I am the only one in Lithuania* (L.10), while another reported that: *Part of my family lives in Germany and part in Lithuania. I am glad that part of my family is in the same region* (L.11). Apart from this negative aspect, the majority of Lithuanian returnees reinserted themselves into their native Alytus County region without too much difficulty or distress. Considering the duration of their immigration, however, the fact that Lithuanian returnees spent on average between one and three years abroad may help explain the ease with which they reintegrated into their home society. Cassarino (2008) argues this point and suggests that the duration and type of the migration experience abroad can have a positive or negative impact on the reintegration of the migrant. Short stays abroad can result in a positive reinsertion experience, although Cassarino (*ibidem*) also suggests that irrespective of the duration abroad, migrants need to return of their own free will, or their return experience may not be positive. In other words, the individuals' personal decision to return can greatly influence the success of their reintegration process.

Although narratives from Lithuanian return migrants described a relatively easy reinsertion process, in fact they alluded to a mixture of positive and negative experiences as they attempted to readjust to their rural and local surroundings. The majority of returnees claimed they did not require assistance from family or friends on their return. One interviewee in particular suggested that: *There was no discrimination from the local people, I did not feel myself as a return migrant. If I did not like returning or if I felt I would need to readapt, I would not have returned or I would leave again* (L.11). Another individual suggested that: *There was no discrimination, everybody was glad I returned* (L.15). There was also a suggestion that: *Lithuania gets closer to western countries, it's becoming better, there is an effort towards better labour relations, the mindset is changing* (L.11). Readjusting to their native rural area did not come as easily to others. Two individuals suggested negatively that: *People looked differently at me, they thought that I am a proud foreigner, you know how rural people are...* (L.12); *I felt that some people were jealous, they thought that I had a good job, good wages and a good life abroad* (L.16). Narratives relating additional negative experiences pertained to bureaucracy, public official behaviour, business taxation systems and peripherality of the region. Two further returnees alluded to experiencing a certain level of 'coldness' on their return. One suggested that while living in the United States he learned to *pay greater attention to people*, but on his return this familiarity was unwelcome, and often appeared *strange or unexpected to local people* (L.4). The other returnee suggested that: *After the lively, crowded, cosmopolitan London things looked stiff at the beginning* (L.8). Drawing on transnationalism and social network theory (Cassarino 2008), the ease with which most migrants reintegrated into their own societies can be attributed to their maintaining regular contact with friends and family at home in addition to drawing together both tangible and intangible resources for their return. Maintaining family contact is described by Jones (2003) as 'social gravity' or the 'pull' of the family at home, a factor that appeared to be evident in the case of most if not all Lithuanian migrants. Additionally, Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pelligrino and Taylor (1998) suggest that the 'branch family' also plays a key role in the reinsertion process as they often facilitate the successful social and economic adjustment at the rural destination.

Notions of 'social gravity' (Jones 2003) and the 'branch family' (Massey *et al.* 1998) were also evident in the narratives of Irish rural return migrants. Similarly to Lithuanians, Irish returnees also maintained strong connections with family and friends while abroad and more particularly during the process of their return.

For example, all but three interviewees sought assistance from family members in finding accommodation, with one individual suggesting that: *My mother set up the rented accommodation before I returned – I found it difficult when I returned with family – family were not as welcoming as I expected* (I.7). Two others found accommodation via the internet, prior to returning to Ireland, while one male returned home and applied for a planning permit to build a house. One female reported that: *Family was very important in finding our accommodation – we really needed family for that. They helped us find it* (I.8). Eleven of the seventeen interviewees currently live in close proximity to family members. Although the remaining six live at various distances from their families, they are still in regular contact. One female and one couple did however experience considerable problems living in close proximity to family. They both spoke of feelings of ‘claustrophobia’ and equated their return experience to living in a ‘gold fish bowl.’ By contrast, one couple moved back to Ireland expecting support through the *family support network*, but instead discovered that the extended family were too occupied with their own lives to become involved in the returnees’ situation, especially in relation to regular or infrequent childcare. As they said: *We expected a lot more contact and help from our families and I’m very disappointed that this didn’t happen – I thought they’d help out more with the children, but they don’t* (I.13).

In addition to family connections, Irish return migrants suggested that their current circle of friends consisted largely of workmates, neighbours and fellow club members. However, many returnees stated that they now maintain strong and close friendships with fellow return migrants. Such friendships appear to be built on ‘shared experiences’ and similar circumstance abroad and on return: *A lot of our generation funnily enough emigrated and returned around the same time so we all had similar experiences* (I.8). There was a very mixed reaction to club or organisational involvement. Three males were not involved in local clubs or organisations and did not see the need to become involved for reintegration purposes. Three females did not become involved in clubs/organisations largely due to family commitments and a lack of time. Only one migrant couple got involved in local activities (GAA²), while the other three either did not see the need for participation, or they had too many family commitments. Participation in local GAA clubs rated the highest as individuals felt that this organisation not only represented rural Ireland but it also allowed them to reconnect with old friends and team-mates. Four females became involved in organisations connected to their children’s school (preschool, national or secondary) which appeared to be an area where parents bond and develop friendships. One male, who rejoined his local GAA club, spoke passionately about the need to become involved in local organisations regardless of what they are. He was not alone in his opinion that living in rural Ireland can be isolating even without the added complication of being considered the ‘returnee’ or the ‘outsider.’ He suggested that local organisations such as the GAA not only allow you to reconnect with local individuals, but they also provide you with a sense of ‘place’ and a feeling of ‘belonging.’ He stated that: *Joining clubs is essential to becoming involved in local communities. They integrate you into a community that can appear initially hostile* (I.3).

Conclusion and discussion

This paper presents an analysis of two case studies: one in West of Ireland with a concentration in County Roscommon, the other in Alytus County, Lithuania. In all, 36 semi-structured interviews were conducted with return migrants between January and November 2010. It was not the intention of the research to perceive these interviews as representative, but rather as individual case studies or biographies of return migrants. The interviews allowed us to understand how various life trajectories develop when emigrants decide to return; the reasons behind their decision; feelings regarding their relocation and reintegration into their home country; and experiences of returning to a rural location. In the West of Ireland, all but three interviews

were carried out in County Roscommon and mostly in the interviewees' home, while in Alytus County, ten interviews were conducted in the small towns and villages of the region and seven in Alytus city, as it was convenient for respondents.

In both study regions, interviewees left their place of origin predominantly for economic reasons and largely by choice. In Ireland, returnees left because of the 1980s recession and a lack of employment, but many also sought new life and employment experiences abroad. This is similar to Alytus County where Lithuanians also left due to economic conditions, in addition to a desire for new experiences and employment. In exploring reasons for returning to their place of origin there were differences and similarities between both case study regions. Like Irish returnees, Lithuanians have a strong 'bond' and 'affinity' with their native country and nearly always intend to return after a period abroad. Furthermore, both nationalities seek out the familiar surrounding of 'home' and the support network of family and friends. In both situations, interviewees felt they had achieved their goals and in keeping with a transnational theoretical approach to return migration, they were 'prepared' to return (Cassarino 2008).

In relation to employment and professional experiences, there were considerable differences between the two regions. In the Irish situation, all but two returnees gained full employment on their return and in most cases their income was similar if not better than abroad. In Alytus County, 3 interviewees failed to gain employment on their return and where they did, their wages were considerably lower. Additionally, professional experiences gained abroad were not recognised in Alytus and in some circumstances, experiences gained were 'frowned' upon and dismissed. The exception was made by those (3) who established their own businesses on return, and those (4) who worked in jobs related to their professions in the destination country (4), suggesting that the experience gained abroad was useful in furthering their career. By contrast, all Irish returnees felt that their qualifications and experiences abroad were key factors in obtaining employment once they returned. Innovative practices also came to the fore in the Irish case study with eight returnees creating new businesses. However, Irish interviewees returned to a strong economy in the last ten years, whereas Lithuanian interviewees returned to a county that is building its economy in the midst of a global economic recession. Within this developing economy, however, Smoliner *et al.* (2013) suggest that return migrants are increasingly important for Central and Eastern European countries; particularly those who are still professionally active and are returning to use their newly acquired knowledge, which they term 'brain circulation.'

Although all Irish returnees were satisfied with their decision to return, some did concede that there was a period of adjustment and insecurity regarding their decision. This high level of satisfaction does not however mean that all returnees were content with their current living circumstances. Some had accommodation issues, employment concerns and recession worries, but in general, most interviewees felt that their concerns were not insurmountable. A higher number of Alytus County interviewees were less pleased with their current living situation, with five unsatisfied and four satisfied. Proximity to family, beautiful nature and landscape, native language, lower business costs, less expensive lifestyle and accommodation were reasons put forward by Lithuanian returnees for their level of satisfaction. Reasons for dissatisfaction included a low quality of life, bureaucracy, unemployment, poor services and negative attitudes. Variations in the level of satisfaction between the regions may be related to the economic situation that the returnees found upon their return. It seems that most Irish interviewees returned during the 'Celtic Tiger' period, providing them with a high level of economic stability. By contrast, interviewees in Alytus returned to an economically disadvantaged region with poor employment prospects and few opportunities for innovative thinking.

In contrast to Irish returnees, interviewees in Alytus placed a high value on involvement in various organisations such as (in English translation) the Independent Thinkers Network, Local Invalid Association, Joint Democratic Movement and the Return Lithuanian Association. In Ireland, returnees had little interest in social networking outside of the local GAA organisation and local school committees. Both groups neverthe-

less placed a very high value on family networks and appeared to have strong connections with family, irrespective of the distance they currently live from family and the length of time they spent abroad.

Return migrants in Lithuania and Ireland had similar, yet different personal experiences upon their return. Irish returnees returned to a better quality of life and limited problems with bureaucracy, whereas many interviewees returning to Alytus County experienced (in economic terms) a poorer quality of life, unemployment, bureaucracy and poor public official behaviour. Both groups experienced episodes of isolation and readjustment, yet Lithuanian migrants appeared to experience a level of 'coldness' from locals that was not experienced by Irish returnees. Commenting on future plans, more Irish than Lithuanians intended to remain in the region; however, this depends largely on the economic recession in Ireland in the coming months and years. In both cases, returnees will consider emigrating once more if the economic and employment situation deteriorates.

Both groups of interviewees offered suggestions for improvements regarding the situation of return migrants in the region. Lithuanian returnees recommended targeting intellectuals returning to rural areas and supporting their positive initiatives and ideas; increasing support for innovative projects of returnees in the region; raising tolerance and understanding of the need for Lithuanians to emigrate, and displaying a level of acceptance with their decision. Some interviewees also felt that the media created a poor image of Lithuanian migrants, but this can be reversed by focusing on the positive examples and the successful return migrant cases. All interviewees, both Lithuanian and Irish, suggested that job creation in rural areas was imperative for the continued sustainability of these regions and as such, government task forces need to consider returnees as a valuable resource that could assist in this situation. Both Lithuanian and Irish returnees emphasised that there is a serious lack of information for returnees. Suggestions put forward by returnees included: information booklets accessible on the internet or collected at airports or at local rural information centres, dedicated websites for return migrants, and rural information centres that provide extensive information regarding the region. Although most Irish and Lithuanian returnees felt that family and friends are a valuable network, they still needed additional information, for example from websites, booklets and information centres. Irish self-employed returnees were adamant that they were a valuable resource for rural Ireland and as such, they needed help and assistance, both mentoring and financial.

In conclusion, both Irish and Lithuanian return migrants appear to have had some similar and some distinct experiences on their return to their country of origin. There is a clear indication from the interviews that the majority of return migrants return with certain resources, in the form of various kinds of 'capital' – human, social, financial, cultural. These resources, according to Cassarino (2008), constitute the tangible and intangible resources that are required to ensure a successful return experience for many migrants. As such, return migrants seemed largely prepared for their return, resulting in a certain level of success in their reinsertion process. What also becomes obvious is that these individuals are a considerable asset to a local rural community, as evident in the Irish context where a number of returnees established local businesses. Nevertheless, many individuals experienced difficulties in finding appropriate help when they needed it, which seems to reflect a restricted interpretation of what counts as a 'need' and a 'resource' in a rural development context. Certainly, at an institutional level, the focus is very much on the development of economic resources, but even here, the interpretation would seem to be a relatively narrow one. While the social capital debate is one that must be treated cautiously in terms of how it is understood and applied, what emerges in this paper is evidence of individuals who have returned with a range of skills and knowledge, which needs to be harnessed and developed as a wider set of resources for rural areas.

Notes

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² The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is an amateur Irish and international cultural and sporting organisation focused primarily on promoting Gaelic games, which include the traditional Irish sports of hurling, camogie, Gaelic football, handball, and rounders.

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