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BETWEEN BELONGING AND FEELING OF STRANGENESS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF RUSSIAN MIGRANT EXPERIENCES IN LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the integration experiences of Russian political migrants in Lithuania, analyzing politics as everyday experience. Migration is understood here not only as an institutional or legal category, but also as an existential process that transforms the horizons of time, language, social relations and belonging. Based on the data of eleven qualitative interviews, four main levels of experience are revealed: the creation of “we-links”, time discrepancies, asymmetries of knowledge and experiences of strangeness. The analysis shows that waiting time in institutions becomes a form of political power that disciplines migrants’ biographies; language barriers reveal that linguistic experience is not only an expression of communication, but also of limitation; the experience of strangeness testifies to limited opportunities for civic participation; and fragmented integration practices indicate gaps in state responsibility, which are filled by non-governmental initiatives and diasporic networks. The results suggest that the fragility of belonging is a structural condition for integration, and the perspective of loyalty in Lithuania is manifested in everyday experiences – from language choices to the fragmentation of social ties. The article contributes to the discussions in the phenomenology of politics by showing that political reality is inscribed for migrants not only through legal decisions, but also through the existential structures of everyday life that determine their relationship with the state and society.

KEYWORDS

Russians in Lithuania, political phenomenology, integration, belonging, strangeness.

INTRODUCTION

Migration, especially forced migration, in today's Europe is becoming not only a geo-political challenge or economic reality, but also an ontological experience that fundamentally transforms a person's relationship with space, time and self¹. Lithuania, which has for some time now become an important refuge point for Russian political refugees, is facing a sociologically unique phenomenon - on one axis, the Soviet experience accompanied by common traumas and recurring patterns of social life (e.g., the state as a "guardian", *blat*, collective identity, life through suffering, etc.) intertwines, and on the other, the development of the democratic world that has prevailed after the fall of the Iron Curtain and is moving at different speeds (e.g., liberal democracy in the Baltic states and the return of authoritarianism in Slavic (Russian, Belarusian) lands). In such cases - intertwining the trajectories of the former own, familiar and new, unfamiliar worlds - the integration of migrants does not take place according to classical socialization scenarios, but unfolds as a fragile and fragmented practice of (re)creation of everyday life, the logic of which is determined not only by legal status, but also by individually experienced time, social connections and spatial experiences.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the attitude of the society and the government towards Russia and Russian-speakers in Lithuania has changed significantly. In 2024, polls showed that about 70% of the population considered Russia to be a real or potential threat to Lithuania's national security. Such trends are accompanied by growing feelings of hatred or exclusion in the Russian-speaking community. For example, LRT/Baltic Research data² show that the average number of people who do not want Russians to live near them has increased from about 6.2% to ~16% in a one-year period. In addition, 74.6% of respondents say that their personal attitudes towards Russians have worsened over the past five years. Such public sentiments - stricter judgments, less comfort in feelings of closeness - partly indicate the potential for alienation experiences towards Russian speakers³. Accordingly, Russian experiences described in this article unfold within a historically, geopolitically and publicly charged context: Russia's role as a former occupying power and its ongoing war against Ukraine shape Lithuanian societal sensitivities, institutional caution, and language politics. This testifies to the dual context for Russian refugees: on the one hand, Lithuania is a refuge for people fleeing the regime, on the other hand, we see growing public skepticism towards Russians in Lithuania. Accordingly, this situation may have an ambiguous impact on Russians living here.

Phenomenological analysis of migration allows us to understand that political processes are not only macro-level decisions, but are inscribed in everyday life - waiting times in institutions, language choices, details of everyday life or the fragility of social

¹ Kristina J. Rathe, "Towards a Critical Phenomenology of Borders and Migration: Introduction to the Themed Issue," *Journal of the Phenomenological Review* Vol. 5, No. 3 (2022) // doi: 10.5399/pjcp.v5i3.1

² "Survey shows growing hostility towards local Russian speakers in Lithuania," *LRT* (2026 January 26).

³ "Growing hostility towards Lithuania's Russians 'alarming and dangerous' effect of Ukraine war," *LRT* (2025 October 7).

networks. As Didier Fassin⁴ and Sarah Willen⁵ show, the state is “inscribed into the body” through the expectation of order, control mechanisms and everyday restrictions. This is especially relevant for the Baltic countries, where migration management is inseparable from geopolitical orientation – turning towards the West and distancing from Russia. Therefore, such analysis becomes a way of revealing political processes: it shows how political orientations and legal regulations are transformed into experienced regimes of relations, language and time. Political phenomenology allows us to analyze the experiences of politicalness and their impact on the success of integration.

In this context, it becomes relevant to raise the question: how is integration experienced when being in the country is not a choice, but is rooted in trauma, a state of uncertainty, and symbolic separation? How do migrants living in Lithuania construct their own social reality when the previous structure of the world – former norms, rhythms of time, codes of relationships – has collapsed?

Despite the growing attention to migration studies⁶, there is still a lack of studies that would systematically reveal the subjective experience of forced migration in political phenomenology, which emphasizes that political reality is always experienced through subjective experience – it is not just ideology or institutions, but the existential structure of everyday life. Therefore, waiting, language, strangeness or the fragmentation of integration are not “side” phenomena – they are a direct experiential expression of the political order. Dominant research usually focuses on structural mechanisms of integration, rarely examining how migrants themselves phenomenologically experience belonging, foreignness and the experience of “home” in a new space. The aim of the research is to phenomenologically analyze the integration experiences of Russians in Lithuania, highlighting aspects of belonging and strangeness. Thus, this article aims to show that phenomenological analysis is not only a theoretical reflection, but also a methodologically fruitful tool, allowing us to understand how forced migration experiences in Lithuania intertwine with broader issues of belonging and everyday experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The political phenomenology direction that has emerged in recent decades⁷ allows us to understand that political reality is not only the sphere of institutions and legal norms, but also the horizon of everyday experience. Political power and orientation are manifested not through abstract discourses, but through how individuals experience time, language, social relations or alienation⁸. From this perspective, phenomenology becomes a method that shows how state policy is inscribed in subjective experience – regimes

⁴ Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2012).

⁵ Sarah S. Willen, *Fighting for Dignity: Migrant Lives at Israel's Margins* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

⁶ Elizabeth Colson, “Forced Migration and the Anthropological Response,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 16, No. 1 (2003) // <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/16.1.1>; Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112 // doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199652433.001.0001; David S. Fitzgerald and Rawan Arar, “The Sociology of Refugee Migration,” *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 44 (2018): 392 // <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041204>

⁷ Steffen Herrmann, Gerhard Thonhauser, Sophie Loidolt, Tobias Matzner, Natascia Baratella (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Phenomenology*, 1st ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2024), 58 // <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003197430>

⁸ Cristina M. Tofan, Ana Hrituleac, Laura-Andreea Măgurianu, “Creating a Welcoming Ethos: Reception of Ukrainian Refugee Children and Families in Romania,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* (2024) // <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2024.2382464>

of expectation, boundaries of communication, possibilities of belonging. Thus, the phenomenology of migration is also the phenomenology of politics, since every integration experience is a reflection of the orientation of the state and the civic order⁹. This approach allows us to capture the subtle but essential experiences of migration that often remain invisible at the level of structural analysis.

Combining the classic phenomenological perspective of Schütz¹⁰ (1944, 1945) with the phenomenology of politics, the study allows us to analyze not only the subjectivity of migrants, but also the state itself as a structure of experience. The state is not just a set of laws or institutions – it appears in waiting lines, language choices, and gestures of discrimination or solidarity. Such an approach reveals that the political is inseparable from the phenomenological: it is through everyday experiences that the individual perceives his or her relationship with power, with society, and with the possibility of belonging. Therefore, in this study, phenomenology is not just a “micro-level optics” – it is a methodological way to understand how political configurations (e.g., dissociation from Russia, gaps in integration policies, positive aspects of integration, etc.) appear in the migrant’s experience¹¹), which helps to understand how the migrant copes with the lack or loss of prescriptions, how temporal dissonance is experienced, how social connections are restored, and how the asymmetry of knowledge between “local” and “foreign” is addressed.

This methodological choice – to base the research on lived, subjective experiences, rather than solely on objective indicators – allowed us to view forced political migration not as a fact, but as a continuous search for integration, characterized by existential ruptures, intermediate states, and symbolic struggles for meaning. Phenomenological insights highlight the fragility of belonging and the dialectic of strangeness. Such an analysis shows that integration – whether into a new group or into a familiar but changed space – is a process in which the individual must reconstruct structures of time, knowledge, and connections. This conceptual framework becomes the methodological basis for empirical research that seeks to understand how migration and diaspora experiences are lived not only on a structural but also on a phenomenological level.

Data analysis was conducted based on a model of four phenomenological dimensions:

- **We-relations.** Emphasizes direct presence of togetherness, which the alien does not yet have. Although a shared past and similar traumas create a favorable context, the common horizon of experience is still quite different, and the question of how to create belonging arises. Politically, this level reveals that the creation of belonging is not just a social process, but a question of civic inclusion – whether the state and society provide space for the migrant to become a political participant¹².
- **Time dissonance.** The stranger does not have a past of the group, and yet does not fully participate in its present. Societies (host and incoming) move

⁹ Thomas Bedorf and Steffen Herrmann (eds.), *Political Phenomenology: Experience, Ontology, Episteme*, 1st ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2019) // <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429259852>; Alex Jeffrey, Lynn A. Staeheli, “Learning Citizenship: Civility, Civil Society, and the Possibilities of Citizenship”: 1–12; in: *Politics, Citizenship and Rights*, ed. Kirsi Paullina Kallio, Sarah Mills, Tracey Skelton (Singapore: Springer, 2015) // https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-94-1_29-1

¹⁰ Alfred Schütz, “The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology,” *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 49, No. 6 (1944); Alfred Schütz, “The Homecomer,” *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 50, No. 4 (1945).

¹¹ Didier Fassin, *supra* note 4; Sarah S. Willen, *supra* note 5.

¹² Engin F. Isin, Greg M. Nielse (eds.), *Acts of Citizenship* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2008).

at different speeds, which is why the person experiences a time dissonance, which highlights that community is closely related to the sharing of time. Phenomenologically, the time of waiting experienced here is a form of political power – institutions, by delaying decisions, discipline migrants' biographies and limit their future projects¹³.

- **Knowledge asymmetry.** The strangers are forced to rely on a different schema from the host group, because they do not have "local knowledge" and bring with them alien experiences, "alien knowledge" that the rest do not have, and at the same time lose the "local knowledge" that the community has accumulated. This asymmetry causes misunderstandings and distances both sides. The stranger cannot share all his experiences, because they are alien or even incomprehensible to other members of the community. This creates a constant interpretative incompatibility. Linguistic and institutional gaps in knowledge indicate not only a cultural gap, but also the boundaries of state policy – who has access to political participation and who remains outside it¹⁴.
- **Experience of alienation.** In both cases, the phenomenon of "familiar strangeness" is revealed – the individual is physically in the community, but subjectively feels separated. This means not only adaptation to changed conditions, but also active participation in restoring the we-relations. This requires a two-way process: the community must accept the newcomer as a participant, and he himself must adopt the new social rhythms and time horizons of the community. This dimension shows that strangeness is not just a subjective feeling – it is a barrier to civic participation, indicating the extent to which the state and society are (un)able to accept the migrant as one of their own in the political community¹⁵.

These dimensions overlap and form a common phenomenological framework that allows for the study of various situations of integration, migration or diaspora. All data were integrated into a generalizing experience matrix, in which individual experiences were systematically summarized according to each dimension (see Table 1). Such a structure allowed not only to recognize individual differences, but also to trace common phenomenological features that connect different narratives into one collective geography of experience.

Although the article does not explicitly investigate loyalty as a predefined analytical category, the concept emerged inductively from the empirical material. The interviews were not designed to elicit declarative statements about loyalty to the state or political community; instead, they focused on lived experiences of belonging, strangeness, everyday encounters with institutions, language, and social relations. In this sense, loyalty appears in the analysis not as a measurable attitude or normative stance, but as an experiential outcome of these everyday interactions. The discussion therefore addresses loyalty cautiously, treating it as an emergent and relational phenomenon rather than a fully theorized or operationalized concept. This methodological choice reflects the phenomenological commitment to follow the meanings articulated by participants themselves, rather than imposing externally defined normative categories. At the same

¹³ Ghassan Hage, "Waiting Out the Crisis: On Stuckedness and Governmentality": 97–106; in: *Waiting*, ed. Ghassan Hage (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Aneta Pavlenko, "Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries," *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* Vol. 11, No. 3–4 (2008) // <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050802269582>

¹⁵ Rainer Bauböck, "Studying Citizenship Constellations," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* Vol. 36, No. 5 (2010) // <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691831003764346>

time, the salience of loyalty in the empirical material suggests that it constitutes an important analytical category that would merit more focused and conceptually explicit investigation in future research.

The empirical study was conducted using the semi-structured interview method. In April-June 2023, 11 qualitative interviews were collected with Russian citizens who left their homeland for political reasons and lived in Lithuania for at least 6 months. The interviews lasted from 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes and were conducted in Russian, taking into account the linguistic needs of the informants and in order to ensure maximum openness and comfort. An important methodological aspect of the study is that the interviews were conducted by a VMU Sakharov Center research fellow from Russia (who wished to remain anonymous). This circumstance significantly increased trust, allowed for the disclosure of sensitive personal experiences, and also helped create a less hierarchical, more equal research relationship. Each interview was methodically discussed with the research leader, reflecting on both the content and ethical dilemmas, and the structure of the questions taking into account the responses received.

The selection was purposeful sampling, focused on various experiences related to forced relocation motivated by political migration. Most of the participants are young or middle-aged (30-45, with one exceptional case – 77 years old) with higher or incomplete higher education, living in Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai, respectively, civically active people, characterized by both professional and cultural involvement in the activities of the diaspora or the host country. Gender balance in the study was evenly distributed (6 women and 6 men). Marital status – some informants are single, some are married or divorced. Current activities – diverse: from studies and internships in the field of human rights, to non-governmental activities, diaspora initiatives, international communication, logistics and cultural journalism. Some informants are currently looking for work or waiting for decisions on refugee status. Period living in Lithuania – from half a year to nine years.

Data collection took place live, in selected safe environments for the informant (cafes, offices or their places of residence). Interviews were recorded in audio format, later transcribed, coded and analyzed using the phenomenological and thematic principles. The study was conducted in accordance with all ethical standards of social science research. Informants were informed in advance of the objectives of the study, participation in it was completely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained orally before each interview. All data collected was anonymized – each study participant was assigned a numerical code that prevents the identification of the individual. The information obtained during the study was kept confidential and used for scientific purposes only.

In recent years¹⁶, Lithuania has experienced a noticeable increase in immigration from third countries, particularly following the political repression in Russia after 2012 and, more sharply, after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russian migrants arriving in Lithuania represent a heterogeneous group, including political dissidents, journalists, civil society activists, IT specialists, and individuals relocating for security or ethical reasons¹⁷. Their legal statuses vary and include temporary residence permits based on employment, humanitarian grounds, family reunification, or other legal categories regulated by Lithuanian migration law. While Lithuania has positioned itself as a

¹⁶ *Immigration* (2026 January 26).

¹⁷ For detailed portrait of the Russian community and the circumstances of life in Lithuania see <https://tmde.lrv.lt/lt/tautiniu-mazumu-kulturos-centrai-ir-tautines-bendrijos/tautiniu-mazumu-organizacijos/rusai/>

place of refuge for individuals opposing the Russian regime, migration governance has simultaneously become more securitized in the context of regional security concerns.

EXPERIENCES OF CREATING BELONGING

From a phenomenological perspective, migration and integration processes open up the question of “we-relations” – how a stranger becomes part of a community. This dimension is not only institutional or legal, it is expressed through direct presence of togetherness, shared time, common language, and everyday interactions. The newcomers initially do not have such connections; although they bring with them a past, experiences, and traumas, they do not necessarily coincide with the experiences of the host community. Therefore, belonging is not given – it is created, negotiated, in everyday situations.

The importance of small interactions in creating belonging

The contours of belonging first appear through small everyday gestures. The second informant’s story about neighbors who brought toys for a child or food (“All the neighbors in our building tried to help us as soon as we arrived. From bringing toys for the child to bringing us dumplings... people still tried to show support and care.” – No2) shows that even simple caring becomes the first sign that a stranger is “visible.” Such actions embody Schütz’s idea that community is not born abstractly, but through living contacts, when everyday life becomes shared. Similarly, the ninth informant mentions the support of landlords and suppliers (“The landlords of the apartments we rented were incredibly helpful... When we were opening a kindergarten all our suppliers tried to help” – No9): even economic ties can become a place of togetherness if they have a moment of concern.

However, these ties are often fragile. The third informant notes that friendships in the work environment arise, but often disappear with a change of workplace (“At my first job, there were Lithuanians, but I only talked to them then; I don’t stay in touch now. At my second job, I made a really good Lithuanian friend, and we still talk. Now I’m at my third job, again with new people. Overall, they’re friendly.” – No3). Belonging here is situational: it is established, but has no guaranteed continuity.

The experiences of “we” in migrants’ testimonies often appear as temporary, fragmented. The third informant speaks of working relationships that break down as the environment changes (“Everyone’s trying to help each other, but since there are no clear leaders or shared plans on how to help people adapt, it ends up that everyone is struggling either alone or just with their closest circle” – No3). The fourth informant observes that even within the diaspora itself, relationships are not stable:

I can’t say that I’m a very sociable person... but I do have some social circle.
<...> “There is a community. People do communicate in it, but... there is a lot of rejection, especially in the past year and a half. (No4).

Such testimonies reveal that belonging is never self-assured – it must be constantly renewed. Phenomenologically, this shows that “we” is a process, not a given. Even among compatriots, togetherness can be fragile, as it depends on sympathies, political attitudes, or a specific historical context.

Levels of Belonging

The experience of belonging in migrants' stories is revealed as multi-level. It is formed not only through personal relationships, but also through organizational, political, and economic ties. The fifth informant emphasizes the help of the partner organization ("Our partner organization in Lithuania helped us move programs, so we can continue working and receive a salary" – No5), which allowed us to continue our activities and receive a salary – this is the institutional level of belonging. At the same time, he tries to get involved in the Russian-speaking community, but at the same time wants to seek a connection with Lithuanians.

The sixth informant talks about the community center he works for "Right now, I'm one of the co-founders and a volunteer at a community center in Vilnius. I also volunteer as a moderator for a large diaspora chat: I keep it clean, make sure it's safe, and check the people who join" (No6). This shows that belonging is also born through civic activity, when migrants get involved in broader social processes. The seventh informant mentions protests in which he expressed solidarity with Lithuanians (No7), while the ninth emphasizes NGO assistance during crises (No9). Phenomenologically, this reveals that belonging is not just private ties – it is formed through structural networks that allow migrants to establish themselves in time and space.

Not all ties of belonging are given – in some cases, migrants actively create them themselves. The sixth informant clearly demonstrates this dimension: he not only got involved in an international organization, but also founded a community center himself (No6). This is the creation of his own space, where belonging is not expected, but actively won.

Similarly, the fifth informant seeks to connect the diaspora with the Lithuanian community (No5), while the seventh, by actively participating in protests, enters a common political horizon (No7). The eighth informant mentions marriage to a Lithuanian woman and activity in Telegram groups (No8), showing that belonging is formed both in intimate relationships and in virtual spaces. This shows that migrants are not just passive adaptors – they become architects of belonging, creating new social rhythms and horizons. This is in line with Schütz's idea that a foreigner, entering a new world, not only takes it over, but also transforms it through his actions and experiences.

The informants emphasize that the main source of information is Telegram groups (No8), not official integration programs. This shows the existence of parallel worlds, but politically, it is a signal that the state does not ensure a full-fledged integration system. When integration is transferred to volunteers or diaspora initiatives, it becomes a sign of civil society's resilience, but at the same time – a gap in state responsibility. This is consistent with Bauböck's¹⁸ insights about the "shifting of civic responsibility" to the non-governmental sector.

Sub-summary

Analyzing the informants' stories, it is clear that belonging for migrants is not a given state, but a constantly developing process. It begins with small everyday interactions – gestures from neighbours, friendly advice, joint work, which for the first time allow a stranger to feel "visible". However, these signs alone are not enough: only the horizon of a common language opens up the possibility for real dialogue and deeper "we-relations".

¹⁸ Rainer Bauböck, *supra* note 15.

These connections often appear fragmented – friendships, work relationships or diaspora ties change, break and require constant renewal. Therefore, belonging is not stable, it is always fragile and dependent on mutual efforts. At the same time, it is formed at different levels: in private relationships, through the help of organizations or institutions, through joint political actions or even economic ties, when concern and solidarity appear. It is important that migrants do not just passively adapt, but also become creators of belonging themselves – they establish community centers, join protests, initiate activities. This dynamic shows that integration is an existential effort to overcome exclusion and enter into the common time and space of “we”. This is a process that requires constant work from both sides – both the newcomers and the host community.

The phenomenon of the we-interface in the context of migration reveals itself as a constant search for belonging: the strangers are initially “without us”, but through everyday experiences, language, friendships, and the help of institutions and organizations, they begin to create a common horizon with others. However, this horizon is not given by itself – it is always fragmentary, fragile, and requires efforts from both sides. Phenomenologically, this shows that integration is not just an adaptation to a new environment, but also an existential process: a constant effort to overcome exclusion and enter into the common time and space of “we”.

TIME INCONSISTENCY IN INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES

Alfred Schütz¹⁹ explains the phenomenon of migration as a situation in which a foreigners enter an already “prepared world”. This world has its own past, rhythms, symbolic orders in which the newcomers did not participate. Therefore, they cannot share either the common past or the experienced events that constitute the “lifetime” of the receiving society. This is how a time dissonance arises – a discrepancy between two time horizons. The foreigner moves with the continuation of their biography, but merges into another society that is already living its own course. Analyzing the stories of migrants reveals how this discrepancy is experienced at the professional, social, cultural and even emotional levels.

Loss of professional and biographical continuity

If you’ve dedicated much of your life to a certain occupation, if you had a calling, or in Max Weber’s terms — a vocation — and it was both creative and expressive... And then suddenly everything collapses and changes, many people — not just me — will be forced to take low-paid, unskilled jobs <...> So even when people get jobs and some income, they still don’t have the opportunity to do what they love. In terms of self-fulfillment — that’s a very big issue. (No1).

These quotes reveal how the biographical line of a migrant is interrupted. The professional vocation, which used to be the direction of life, loses its continuity in Lithuania. From Schütz’s point of view, this indicates a discrepancy between the biographical situation of the person and the structure of the receiving society. Similarly, the experience of the third informant:

¹⁹ Alfred Schütz, *supra* note 10.

When you move, you obviously lose something... The biggest change is that in Moscow I worked on freelance projects, so I had a lot more freedom. Now I have a regular job, a workplace, a work schedule—that's a big shift. Also, my salary is lower, even after conversion. (No3)

The free, creative rhythm of work is replaced by a regulated schedule. This is not only a financial, but also a break in the experience of time: the person's life project loses continuity, becomes a forced "new beginning".

Whenever you move, you obviously lose something... We had our home in Russia, and here we have nothing <...> It is difficult to talk about cultural fulfillment... you cannot compare it with Moscow, where everything is constantly moving. (No2)

This experience shows that home is not only a material object, but also a continuum of time, connecting yesterday and today. Losing a home breaks the horizon of life. Similarly, the rhythm of cultural life in Moscow (intense, diverse) does not coincide with the slower pace of Lithuania. Phenomenologically, it is a mismatch between two "lifeworlds", when the old rhythm does not transfer to a new environment.

I moved in 2014-2015, and it's a completely different situation compared to 2022 or 2023. <...> Our standard of living fluctuated a lot... there was no stability for several years. <...> This transformation was very complex and multifaceted... the process is still ongoing. (No4)

These quotes show that migrant groups experience different time horizons. Earlier waves could plan, while later migrants arrived in crisis conditions, urgently. In Schütz's sense, this means that even among migrants themselves there is no uniform "present time" – some live in a rhythm of preparation, others in a rhythm of sudden rupture. Such heterogeneous experiences of time further complicate the construction of belonging in a common space.

The intersection of personal and social time

The fifth informant emphasizes:

We still have no connections... and no common understanding of how society is structured here <...> We're still missing those connections with Lithuanian communities and journalists... We're trying to build those slowly... but so far, it seems that the Russian diaspora lives in its own bubble. (No5)

Here, the present freezes until new social horizons emerge. This is an in-between time – the past is already lost, the future is uncertain, the present is not established. The sixth informant experienced the tension of legal reform:

I had some mental stress when they were discussing the new law about restrictions on getting residence permits and buying apartments... So I didn't fully understand whether it affected me. (No6)

Legal uncertainty becomes a threat to the future, as biographical plans hang in the balance. This is even more clearly revealed in the story of the seventh informant:

Already six months later I launched a [human rights] project here, my American friends helped me. And all these years I've been working, the project continues. But I experienced stress, a blackout, and memory loss, and now I'm doing

nothing, the project is on hold, and I'm on the verge of being kicked out of Lithuania (I have a work visa). (No7)

This is the extreme experience of stopped time – it is impossible for a migrant to continue the past or plan for the future. In Schütz's terms, it is an existential break, when life time becomes suspended in a state of waiting.

My life changed by itself... I didn't live a family life in Russia, but here I live a real family life" <...> "A lot has changed in Lithuania during the time I've been coming and living here. Including the attitude toward Russians. Of course, the change hasn't been in the most pleasant direction. <...> Usually there's no clear distinction between Russians and Russian nationals. <...> This feeling intensified over time, and especially after the war started on February 24th.... but now it has calmed down a bit. (No8)

Here we see a double time discrepancy. On the one hand, a new positive continuation appears – the time of family life. On the other hand, the change in societal attitudes forces the migrant to constantly adapt to the changing "time of others". Community becomes possible only when these rhythms can be shared – family routine, common moods, historical moment. The ninth informant emphasizes the duration of language learning:

Adaptation took a long time... only after a year or two did we start learning the language <...> Even after nine years, I sometimes encounter words that I don't understand, and I lose hope of ever fully mastering it. (No9)

This experience shows that the discrepancy in time can last for decades: the migrant lives between two times – the past is no longer reversible, the present is only partially assimilated, the future is not yet assured. In Schütz's terms, this is a time of interpretative incompatibility.

Sub-summary

These experiences show that the time of migration is constantly slipping out of continuity. The migrant loses biographical and professional continuity, and at the same time loses his home and cultural rhythm, and the waves of migration further highlight the unevenness of time horizons. Times of waiting and uncertainty suspend the present, and the discrepancies between personal and social time force one to constantly adjust to changing rhythms. Phenomenologically, this shows that community is closely related to the sharing of time: only when personal and collective trajectories are aligned does belonging become possible.

Schütz's theory allows us to see that the migrant's experience is a continuous life between different time horizons. The stranger arrives with the continuity of his past, but loses it; he merges into a society in which he has not participated in the present; his/her future becomes dependent on a legal, social and cultural rhythm that he has not yet learned. Community is therefore expressed as a sharing of time: only when a migrant manages to synchronize his/her time with the time of the local society can he feel "at home". Waiting at the Migration Department or delaying decisions on status is not just a biographical break, but a tool of state power. As Ghassan Hage²⁰ argues, waiting becomes a "resource allocated by the state" that controls migrants' time and

²⁰ Ghassan Hage, *supra* note, 13.

life projects. While waiting is not exclusive to migrants, the interviews show that in this case, prolonged and status-dependent waiting acquires a qualitatively different meaning, as it directly suspends biographical projects and legal security. Thus, experienced stopped time appears as a form of political discipline: through uncertainty, the state regulates to what extent migrants can plan for the future or establish themselves in society.

KNOWLEDGE ASYMMETRY IN INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES

Schütz²¹ emphasizes that a foreigner who has arrived in a new society does not have what he calls “local knowledge” – implicit codes, habits, social rules that community members acquire through sharing time and experience. The migrant brings “foreign knowledge” from his/her biography, but this knowledge is often not applicable in the new environment. This results in interpretative incompatibility: communication becomes limited, misunderstandings arise, and the sense of belonging weakens. Analyzing the informants’ stories, it becomes clear how this asymmetry manifests itself at the levels of political, social, linguistic, and institutional interactions.

Language and terminology barriers

Knowledge asymmetry manifests itself primarily at the level of language – without a common semantic field, real dialogue is impossible. The first informant notes:

The barrier starts to show when you talk about social or political issues, or when the conversation requires specialized terminology — when you move beyond simple, everyday topics. Even for me, a person who grew up in Lithuania and knows a thing or two about it, there’s still a lack of educational knowledge — and even more so for those who just recently arrived. (No1)

Here we see that everyday language allows communication, but in more complex discourses a gap opens up – the migrant does not have enough terminology to fully participate. The second informant emphasizes:

We do not know about [state programs] and we did not use them... If we had known, we would have gladly used them. (No2)

Thus, institutional knowledge becomes inaccessible, because the linguistic form itself becomes closed. The sixth informant reveals another dimension:

At the migration department the staff refused to speak Russian, even though I had selected Russian. They try to talk in English just to show they don’t want to speak Russian. (No6)

Here the institution has the privilege of establishing the communication channel, and the migrants lose the opportunity to express themselves in a way that they understands. This shows that language is not just a tool – it becomes a limitation of experience itself: some have the “right to language”, others only fragmentary access.

The testimony of the first informant clearly shows that belonging cannot be formed without a common language:

Communication only with family... does not allow one to become a full-fledged member of society.

²¹ Alfred Schütz, *supra* note 10.

Communicating only with your family or with people in the same chat group is not just insufficient, it doesn't allow you — in the short or long term — to become even remotely a full-fledged member of society or to understand life in the country you're living in. <...> Without dialogue, there is no understanding. Without that cultural dialogue, you can't achieve mutual comprehension. And for that dialogue to happen, you need a shared language. That language cannot be only Russian or only English. (No1)

Language here is not just an instrument – it becomes a field of common presence. If communication is limited only to the circle of family or the diaspora, the horizon of "we" remains closed.

The importance of language is also indirectly demonstrated by others. The ninth informant notes that it was only after a year or two that he began to learn the language (No9), and the seventh emphasizes that the connection was strengthened by a common linguistic and political statement during protests with Lithuanians:

Socialization depended on my desire and necessity. I didn't particularly need to socialize [before – author's note], because I work completely autonomously and in the interests of my Russian compatriots... <...> Though when the war with Ukraine began, there was a permanent protest near the Russian embassy in Lithuania, and I was invited to speak there. We went there together with Lithuanians. (No7)

This shows that the linguistic level is one of the main condition for dialogue, but solidarity is even more important for deeper belonging. Phenomenologically – only by sharing the language and cultural codes can one share the world.

Another form of asymmetry is revealed when faced with bureaucracy. The third informant says:

I don't know about any state programs... If there were programs explaining how things work – like the tax system – that would help a lot. I got scared that I'd have to pay taxes in two countries. Later they explained how it works, but I only got that info bit by bit. (No3)

Knowledge here is obtained randomly, fragmentarily, so the migrant lives in a constant state of ignorance. The fourth informant says:

I didn't expect any support... the institutions simply enforced the law... There is a lot of fear of saying something wrong, of offending an official. (No4)

This experience is paradoxical – even active civic participation does not provide certainty, because the institutional discourse remains opaque. The ninth informant provides a vivid example:

We did not encounter any integration programs... we were simply hunting for a teacher <...> Despite the fact that we always worked, we were never able to prove that our business wasn't fake... The Migration Department told us: 'No, that building doesn't exist. (No9)

Two parallel realities open up here – the one declared by the institutions and the one experienced by the migrant. From Schütz's perspective, this means interpretive incompatibility: both sides rely on different world codes that do not meet on a common horizon.

When the Migration Department employees refuse to speak Russian (No6), this practice is not just a linguistic barrier – it is a political position that is phenomenologically experienced as traumatic alienation. Language policy becomes a means of directing the state's identity "away from Russian"²², but for the migrant it manifests itself as a voice-limiting experience – stifling, muteness, stigmatization. This reveals that language is both a regime of community and exclusion.

Lack of social networks and professional knowledge gaps

Knowledge circulates through social connections, so their absence further reinforces the asymmetry. The fifth informant says: "We still lack connections with Lithuanian communities and journalists" (No5). This shows that migrants do not only lack language or institutional knowledge – they are simply not included in the networks where information circulates. The eighth informant emphasizes:

The main source of information for migrants is Telegram chats... Lawyers often give contradictory advice. (No8)

In the absence of reliable social networks, the information vacuum is filled by informal channels that are not integrative into host society. Phenomenologically, this means that the migrant's lifeworld is formed in a "parallel space" – not in the fields of local institutions or society, but in virtual communities that maintain only a fragmentary connection with the local reality.

The asymmetry of knowledge is not only a matter of everyday life – it also manifests itself in specialized fields. The seventh informant shares:

There is a gap... only one NGO has ever given a lecture on financial accounting... you inevitably start to invent things [in accounting] either reducing expenses or inflating them. (No7)

Here, even in the professional field, the migrant does not have access to local knowledge, so his activities are based on improvisation. In Schütz's view, this means that the migrant's world of action is not based on "common sense knowledge" but on ad hoc solutions that create a constant sense of insecurity. Such experiences show that the asymmetry continues even where objectivity is needed – in finance, in legal processes – and forces the migrant to live between "invented" and "traditional" knowledge.

Sub-summary

The asymmetry of knowledge in migration experiences manifests itself on several levels. First, language and terminology limit the possibility of participating in a full social discourse: even if everyday communication is possible, higher-level topics remain closed. Second, the institutional world appears to the migrant as a "coded reality" – the rules exist, but they are not explained, and therefore are understood only through trial and error. Third, knowledge is socially structured: whoever has no connections also has no access to local information flows. Fourth, even in professional areas, gaps open up, forcing the migrant to improvise.

Phenomenologically, these experiences show that the migrant's lifeworld is formed between two horizons: the local society, which has its own codes, terminology and institutional schemes, and the migrant community, which creates alternative but limited channels of knowledge. Asymmetry is not only an obstacle to adaptation, but also a

²² Aneta Pavlenko, *supra* note 14.

state of constant incompatibility that the migrant experiences at every step – from everyday language to professional practices.

Schütz's²³ theory suggests that the migrant's world is constantly defined by gaps in knowledge. The foreigner lives in a situation where he is constantly trying to figure out how the system works, but always behind the locals who know "naturally". Therefore, the asymmetry of knowledge is not just a matter of information – it is an existential experience in which one constantly encounters interpretative inconsistencies. Only when there is a space for sharing knowledge – through social connections, courses, institutional openness – can the foreigner begin to synchronize his experience with the horizon of the host society.

THE EXPERIENCE OF STRANGENESS IN THE CONTEXT OF INTEGRATION

The experience of strangeness is central to the phenomenology of migration. Schütz²⁴ defines it as a situation where an individual is physically present in the host society, but does not have full access to its common "lifeworld". The stranger sees but does not fully understand; is with but not together. This creates a paradox of familiar strangeness: the structures of everyday life seem familiar, but their meaning is alien. Analyzing the quotes of the informants, several main modules of strangeness emerge: separation from the locals, separation from one's own community, language and cultural signs as mechanisms of exclusion, and the emotional duality – between acceptance and rejection.

Closed bubbles and the subjective feeling of "outsider"

The experience of strangeness is often born not from external rejection, but from the self-isolation of the community. The first informant emphasizes:

this community - let's call it the Russian-speaking one (those who arrived in the past 400 days) - will have an extremely hard time integrating and assimilating into Lithuanian society. <...> As long as this community remains separate from the Lithuanian linguistic, cultural, and even sports sphere, as long as it stays in its own bubble, it won't be fully understood or interesting. (No1)

The strangeness here is maintained by the community members themselves – being closed in their circle does not allow for the creation of a common "we". The second informant speaks similarly:

We mainly communicate with each other... we have very few Lithuanian friends or acquaintances. When you're an adult, it's a bit harder to build connections... We haven't built a big new circle of Lithuanian acquaintances. (No2)

Here, strangeness appears as an everyday experience: although the migrant's life functions, it does not fit into the local social fabric. The fifth informant defines it even more clearly:

The Russian diaspora lives in its own bubble... we want to go out, share ideas, and have an influence. (No5)

This shows that strangeness is a limitation of horizons: without active exit to another field, belonging is impossible to experience. The bubble provides security, but at the same time maintains isolation.

²³ Alfred Schütz, *supra* note 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Strangeness is not just an external fact – it can be an internal state that persists even with connections. The third informant admits:

Maybe because I still feel like a complete outsider;

We mainly communicate with each other... very few Lithuanian friends or acquaintances. (No3)

Here we see an existential feeling: even when objective conditions are not completely unfavorable, belonging does not occur, because a person perceives himself as other. The fourth informant says:

For me... it's difficult to communicate with some compatriots who moved not long ago – we simply don't understand each other. They don't like me at all and find me strange. <...> The intensity of conflicts within the Russian community is excessive, off the charts... especially bad after the war started. (No4)

The strangeness here is double: the individual is rejected both from the local society and from his own national community. In Schütz's language, it is an "incomplete we": even a common ethnicity does not provide commonality, so a person remains without a horizon both among the locals and among his own.

The feeling of strangeness is also experienced through discrimination or a cautious attitude that permeates everyday life. The sixth informant says:

Many colleagues do not get apartments for rent... the cautious attitude remains. (No6)

This is not an overt experience of rejection, but a constant signal of social distance – a person feels tolerated but not accepted. The seventh informant presents a more acute situation:

A Lithuanian shouted at me in a shop because I spoke Russian... but overall I am satisfied [with living in Lithuania]. (No7)

Here, alienation is experienced momentarily and intensely – language becomes a conflict-provoking sign. However, the informant shows ambivalence: such experiences do not destroy the satisfaction of living together. The eighth informant witnesses an even more painful case:

When I spoke Russian with my daughter on the playground, some parents left. It is very unpleasant. (No8)

In this case, alienation penetrates the most intimate space of the family – it is a moment when the experience of closeness turns into a scene of public rejection. Phenomenologically, strangeness here becomes a "crack" in everyday life, which marks even the simplest situations.

The most radical form of strangeness is revealed when language – the main means of communication – itself becomes a trauma. The ninth informant says:

In the first days after February 2024, it was difficult to speak Russian on the street – I felt as if I were mute. (No9)

Here, language, which is usually a means of connection and togetherness, turns into a sign of exclusion. A person is physically present in society, but cannot express themselves naturally, because their words are already loaded with political and emotional burdens. Phenomenologically, this means a "shut-down presence": the alien is

not only separated, but also forbids himself to speak, because language has become a carrier of stigma. This is an existential form of strangeness – when even his/her own voice becomes a sign of no longer belonging.

When informants describe themselves as “complete outsiders” (No3), this indicates not only an internal state, but also a limited possibility of participating in political life. Accordingly, an “outsider” is not only without a “we”, but also without a civic voice. If migrants remain in “bubbles”, they are separated not only socially, but also politically – their participation in society becomes fragmented.

Sub-summary

Experiences of strangeness in the context of migration show that this is not just an external fact of social distance, but a multi-layered phenomenon. On the one hand, strangeness is supported by community bubbles – self-isolation, which does not allow one to go out into the wider horizon of society. On the other hand, feeling of strangeness is a subjective state: a person can feel like an outsider even with connections. Thirdly, discrimination and caution in everyday situations embody the logic of “social distance”, where being together is always limited. Finally, language trauma reveals its most radical form: strangeness can silence a person, turn their language into a sign of stigma.

Phenomenologically, this shows that strangeness is not static – it is constantly reconstructed in everyday life, depending on language, relationships, and political tensions. The stranger lives between two horizons: their own community, which often remains closed, and the host society, which maintains a cautious distance. The mismatch of these horizons creates a state in which belonging is constantly postponed, and strangeness becomes a constant background.

The experience of strangeness in the life of a migrant is multi-layered: it manifests itself through the closure of communities, the personal feeling of being an “outsider”, discriminatory practices and even the loss of language. Schütz's²⁵ theory helps us to understand that strangeness is not a random misunderstanding, but a structural state: the stranger is essentially devoid of the past of the host community and of participation in its present. Only a mutual process – the openness of the locals and the involvement of the migrants – can transform this experience into belonging.

DISCUSSION: FRAGILITY OF BELONGING AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOYALTY

The data of this study show that the phenomenology of migration is inseparable from the phenomenology of politics. Migrants' experiences reveal that politics is not only institutional decisions or legal norms – it is inscribed in waiting time, language use, a sense of strangeness and the fragmentation of social relations. Thus, the phenomenology of politics allows us to understand that the issue of loyalty is not only a geopolitical, but also a political phenomenon experienced in everyday life. Three levels can be distinguished in the discussion that describe the fragility of belonging. While loyalty was not an initial analytical category of this study, the empirical material suggests that it becomes a meaningful lens for interpreting how experiences of belonging and institutional encounters translate into relations with the political community. Accordingly, loyalty is not approached as a declarative political stance or value-based commitment, but as an experiential and future-oriented relation to the political community that emerges

²⁵ Alfred Schütz, *supra* note 10.

through everyday institutional encounters and the possibility to plan one's life within the host society. By discussing various forms of everyday institutional encounters and by prognosing the extent to which individuals perceive their presence as secure, predictable, and open to long-term life planning, we might better understand the phenomenological perspective of loyalty.

Politics as experience

The waiting time experienced in migration institutions (No4, No6, No7, No11) shows that politics appears as uncertainty experienced in everyday life²⁶. This state is not just a biographical pause – it becomes a disciplinary mechanism when the state regulates the future horizons of migrants.

- **Risk.** Some informants complain about the incomprehensibility of bureaucracy or even discriminatory practices (No6, No9). This suggests that trust in state institutions depends on the extent to which they become not an obstacle but a reliable support. If this trust were strengthened, it is likely that the Russian community would identify more with the state. Meanwhile, prolonged waiting leaves migrants "between horizons", where loyalty is uncertain – they are neither completely "here" nor completely "there". Such a state can foster disillusionment and vulnerability.
- **Perspective.** Institutional reliability can transform this risk – when decisions are clear and predictable, migrants experience the state as a reliable support, and loyalty is strengthened through trust in institutions.

Fragility as a political condition

Fragility is revealed through self-isolation and strangeness. Informants often talk about living in "bubbles" (No1–No3, No5) or about the stigmatized use of the Russian language (No6–No9). Such experiences testify that the horizons of belonging are limited, and the political community remains closed.

- **Risk.** Language barriers (No6, No9) are one of the essential factors of loyalty. If language policy is perceived only as a prohibition or restriction, it reinforces strangeness. If it were experienced as empowerment (e.g. through courses, through bilingual information channels in the transitional period), it would promote belonging and smoother integration. When communities remain closed, and language trauma is experienced as rejection, parallel societies and alternative loyalties are formed. Such a situation can be used for disinformation or geopolitical pressure.
- **Perspective.** Open spaces for dialogue and language policies experienced as empowerment (e.g., courses, transitional bilingual channels) can transform feeling of strangeness into belonging. In this way, fragility becomes an opportunity to expand the boundaries of community rather than a threat.

Civic participation as an everyday practice

Loyalty appears not as an abstract declaration, but as an everyday experience – work, joint activities, civic engagement²⁷. Migrants' participation in protests, community centers or NGOs (No5–No7) shows that even in conditions of strangeness there is a strong potential for active participation in society.

²⁶ Ghassan Hage, *supra* note 13.

²⁷ Didier Fassin, *supra* note 4.

- **Risk.** Some informants participate in protests, community centers or NGO activities (No5, No6, No7). This shows that the potential for loyalty lies precisely in the civic space – if migrants can act together with Lithuanians, their “outsider” status is transformed into the status of “participant”. If these practices remain only in diaspora spaces (Telegram, voluntary groups, No8–No9), they can reinforce isolation.
- **Perspective.** When civic activity spaces become common to Lithuanians and migrants, loyalty is established not by force, but as a result of participation and shared time. In this way, the status of “outsider” is transformed into the status of “participant”.

Phenomenologically, Russian migrants in Lithuania live between fragile dependence and permanent feeling of strangeness. The existence of informal Telegram groups shows that there is an information vacuum in this area. If such networks were not the only sources of information, integration could be strengthened, because people would feel that they belong not only to the diaspora, but also to the Lithuanian state. The risk arises when this fragility becomes established as a closed state – when waiting becomes stagnation, language turns into trauma, and social ties get stuck in “bubbles”. However, the same phenomena also show another possibility: loyalty can grow where the state ensures the credibility of institutions, where language policy is empowering, and civic spaces allow migrants to participate as members of the community. In this way, loyalty appears not as a formal obligation, but as an everyday experience that unites the political community.

Table 1. Generalized individual experiences of each research participants

Inf. Dim.	We-relations	Time dissonance	Knowledge asymetry	Experiences of strangeness
No1	Communication limited to the family circle, lack of dialogue with Lithuanians, therefore no full sense of belonging.	Professional downgrading, forced to work in low-paid, unskilled jobs.	Lack of knowledge about the education system and broader socio-political realities.	Isolation reinforces separation, integration seems almost impossible.
No2	Experienced gestures of help from Lithuanians, but ties are mainly maintained through diasporic channels.	Strong sense of loss when comparing past prosperity with current scarcity.	Lack of information about state programs, difficulties with specialized terminology.	Few Lithuanian friends, the community perceived as hard to integrate.
No3	Built friendships with Lithuanians at work, but the wider community lacks leaders and coordination.	Transformation from freelance work in Moscow to a less qualified and lower-paid job.	Absence of explanatory programs to understand taxes and how the system works.	Feels like a “complete outsider,” with minimal ties to Lithuanians.

Inf. Dim.	We-relations	Time dissonance	Knowledge asymetry	Experiences of strangeness
No4	Limited social ties, many conflicts and rejection within the Russian community.	Continuous instability since migration, the transformation process still ongoing.	Institutional formalism, minority rights activism, fear of making mistakes with officials.	Rejected even within the Russian community, high intensity of internal conflicts.
No5	Supported by partner organizations, active in the Russian-speaking community, but seeking openness to Lithuanians.	Still lacking stronger ties and shared understanding of Lithuanian society.	Few connections with local networks or journalists, limited access to information.	Diaspora lives in a "bubble," closed off but with aspirations for dialogue.
No6	Engaged in NGOs and community center, active civic participation.	Stress due to uncertainty over new laws and their implications.	Language barriers in institutions – refusal to speak Russian, limited English proficiency.	Discrimination when renting housing, cautious attitudes toward Russians.
No7	Participates in community activities and protests together with Lithuanians.	Heavy psychological burden, suspended projects, instability.	Lack of financial literacy training, need to improvise in accounting.	Experienced linguistic discrimination, though overall satisfaction with life persists.
No8	Personal ties (married to a Lithuanian), but also maintains links through Telegram groups.	Major life transformation – family life established in Lithuania, perception of change after 2022.	Relies on Telegram for information, contradictory legal advice.	Negative experiences when speaking Russian in public, unpleasant incidents at playgrounds.
No9	Strong support from Lithuanians and NGOs during crises.	Long adaptation process, language-learning challenges even after many years.	No access to official integration programs, bureaucratic problems with migration institutions.	Felt "mute" when speaking Russian in public after February 2022, deep sense of estrangement.
No10	Built ties with Lithuanians but still feels unsafe due to "guest" status.	Life divided into "before" and "after" migration, radical everyday disruption.	Follows events in both Russia and Lithuania, but only superficially.	Strong ties within family and diaspora, interaction with Lithuanians but dual belonging persists.
No11	Ambivalence in social contact – unsure how much estrangement comes from self or from others.	Sense of stagnation, "in-between" life period with uncertain ending.	Identifies the need for broader integration courses (not only language but also history and values).	Discrimination when speaking Russian, observes a strong shift in societal attitudes toward Russians.

SUMMARY

The analyzed experiences show that in a migration situation, belonging is not a given – it is a constantly renewed and often fragile process, closely related to the dimensions of time, knowledge and strangeness. Phenomenologically, these dimensions form a common “matrix of experience”, in which the foreigner constantly balances between being “inside” and “beyond the border”.

The beginning of belonging is usually revealed in small gestures – in helping neighbors, in joint activities or even in economic relations. Such interactions allow the foreigner to experience the first feeling of “visibility”. However, they remain temporary, because without a common language, a deeper *we-relations* cannot form. Here, phenomenologically, it is revealed that language is not only an instrument, but also a condition for being together: without a semantic field that would connect both sides, belonging does not expand. Social *we-relations* are essentially limited, because everyday interactions with locals are fragmented. This means that Russian migrants cannot experience “being together” as a natural affiliation, and therefore a feeling of strangeness persists even after a longer period of time.

This fragility is further exacerbated by the *dissonance in time*. The stranger has no group past, so his biographical continuity is interrupted: professional vocation or cultural rhythms lose continuity. The present often stops in a waiting mode – until legal conditions are clarified, until connections are established, until the language is mastered. Even after many years, the *dissonance in time* can persist: the strangers live between a past that they can no longer restore and a future that remains vague. In Schütz’s²⁸ sense, this means a constant life “between horizons”, where projects remain unfinished. Russian migrants in Lithuania experience a discrepancy in time – their biographical trajectories (education, experience, past status) no longer correspond to their current situation. As a result, integration is perceived as a permanent “biographical pause”, in which it is impossible to continue the logic of life.

This experience is closely connected with the *asymmetry of knowledge*. The migrant often does not have access to local knowledge schemes – state programs, bureaucratic codes, social networks. Language barriers, unfamiliar terminology or even different legal horizons create interpretive incompatibility. At the same time, the foreigner brings “foreign knowledge” that seems incomprehensible or unnecessary to the locals. This asymmetry not only limits practical functioning, but also maintains exclusion: the inability to share the same horizon of knowledge prevents the sharing of time. Russian migrants find themselves in a situation where the local “set of recipes” is inaccessible to them. They cannot “think as usual”, as Schütz²⁹ described, because they do not have a common interpretive code with institutions or locals. This creates a permanent informational and cultural lag.

Finally, all this intersects in the *feeling of strangeness*. Strangeness appears as closed bubbles of diaspora, a subjective feeling of being an outsider, discrimination or even language trauma. Here the phenomenon of “familiar strangeness” emerges – the stranger is physically present in the community, but subjectively feels separated. This state is not just a matter of passive adaptation: it requires mutual work – the openness of the community and the effort of the alien to adopt new social rhythms. The experience of strangeness is constant – both in the form of external stigmatization and

²⁸ Alfred Schütz, *supra* note 10.

²⁹ Alfred Schütz, *supra* note 10.

self-isolation. This shows that even everyday language or everyday life becomes a sign of alienation, limiting belonging.

In summary, it can be stated that all four dimensions – we-interfaces, dissonance in time, asymmetry of knowledge and feeling of strangeness – do not operate separately, but in an overlapping network. The language barrier is the core of both the asymmetry of knowledge and the experience of strangeness; the loss of biographical continuity is associated with waiting time; the closure of the diaspora supports the dissonance of both knowledge and time. Phenomenologically, this shows that migration is a constant existential work: the foreigner, together with the host society, must create a common time, a common field of knowledge and a common we-interface, otherwise belonging remains fragmented and fragile.

The data allow to state that the integration of Russian migrants in Lithuania takes place fragmentarily: they create mutual connections in the community, but remain separated from the wider social fabric. Phenomenologically, this means that they live in a situation where “ordinary thinking” does not work, so they constantly have to check, evaluate, and interpret new rules. Although they arrive in a post-Soviet environment that seems familiar (the history is known, fragments of culture are recognizable), they nevertheless discover that this “home” has changed, and therefore they experience alienation in “home”. The integration of Russians in Lithuania is not an adaptation that has occurred, it is a presence on the border between a stranger and the host society – between an attempt to integrate and a constant feeling of strangeness. Russians in Lithuania live more between fragile dependence and constant alienation. By strengthening aspects of social ties, language policy, institutional trust and civic participation, as well as by creating sufficient spaces for belonging, strangeness would be transformed into belonging.

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