

Re-Acculturation, Reverse Culture Shock, and Peer Relationships among Young Return Migrants to Poland: Three Case Studies

Powrotna akulturacja, powrotny szok kulturowy i relacje rówieśnicze młodych reemigrantów powracających do Polski: trzy studia przypadków

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Abstract: Young return migrants may experience re-acculturation and reverse culture shock when re-entering peer and school environments in their country of origin. This qualitative study examines how young re-emigrants returning to Poland interpret peer relationships, cultural in-betweenness, and their sense of belonging. Three purposively selected participants aged 15–18, who had returned from the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States, took part in semi-structured, problem-focused interviews. Their narratives were analysed using predefined analytical categories and analytical induction. The cases show that peer environments may either support integration or reinforce social exclusion. Participants described social distance, labelling, language and communication difficulties, limited opportunities to use competencies acquired abroad, and problems rebuilding social belonging and cultural identity. One case indicated partial adaptation supported by family resources and a change of school environment, whereas two cases revealed persistent marginalisation and withdrawal from peer relationships. The findings suggest that re-acculturation trajectories are shaped by the quality of peer relationships, school practices, and access to social support. Although the small sample size precludes generalisation, the study identifies mechanisms to support young return migrants in educational and social settings.

Keywords: return migration, young re-emigrants, re-acculturation, reverse culture shock, peer relationships, cultural in-betweenness, school adjustment

Abstrakt: Młodzi migranci powrotni mogą doświadczać powrotnej akulturacji i powrotnego szoku kulturowego, ponownie wchodząc w środowisko rówieśnicze i szkolne w kraju pochodzenia. Celem jakościowego badania jest ukazanie, w jaki sposób młodzi reemigranci powracający do Polski interpretują relacje rówieśnicze, kulturowe bycie pomiędzy oraz własne poczucie przynależności. W częściowo kierowanych wywiadach skoncentrowanych na problemie uczestniczyły trzy celowo dobrane osoby w wieku 15–18 lat, które powróciły z Wielkiej Brytanii, Niemiec i Stanów Zjednoczonych. Narracje przeanalizowano z wykorzystaniem przyjętych kategorii analitycznych oraz indukcji analitycznej. Studia przypadków pokazują, że środowisko rówieśnicze może zarówno wspierać integrację, jak i pogłębiać wykluczenie społeczne. Badani opisywali dystans społeczny, etykietowanie, trudności językowe i komunikacyjne, ograniczone możliwości wykorzystania kompetencji zdobytych za granicą oraz problemy z odbudowaniem przynależności społecznej i tożsamości kulturowej. Jeden przypadek wskazuje na częściową adaptację wspieraną przez zasoby rodzinne i zmianę środowiska szkolnego, natomiast dwa pozostałe ujawniają trwałą marginalizację i wycofanie z relacji rówieśniczych. Wyniki sugerują, że przebieg powrotnej akulturacji kształtują jakość relacji rówieśniczych, praktyki szkolne oraz dostępność wsparcia społecznego. Choć niewielka liczba przypadków wyklucza uogólnienia, badanie identyfikuje mechanizmy istotne dla wspierania młodych reemigrantów w środowisku edukacyjnym i społecznym.

Słowa kluczowe: migracja powrotna, młodzi reemigranci, powrotna akulturacja, powrotny szok kulturowy, relacje rówieśnicze, kulturowe bycie pomiędzy, readaptacja szkolna



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INTRODUCTION

Young people with migration experience who return to their country of origin must find their place within existing socio-cultural structures and, above all, within their peer environment. During adolescence, peer groups constitute one of the main points of reference, shaping one's identity, sense of belonging and self-esteem. For re-emigrants, however, this environment may become a space marked by tensions, uncertainty and ambivalent experiences (Lisowska 2025, 182).

Re-emigrants often experience reverse culture shock, re-acculturation and a sense of suspension (floating), which manifest in difficulties adapting to social and institutional realities (Żaliński 2022, 129). Upon return, they re-enter relationships that may have evolved during their absence, while they themselves have also undergone changes as a result of living abroad. Encounters with peers frequently reveal differences in communication styles, value systems, leisure practices and interpretations of social norms. Processes of re-acculturation and reverse culture shock are especially visible in everyday peer interactions, which may act as either sources of support or mechanisms of exclusion (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001, 7–8).

In light of these considerations, it appears important to perceive the return of young re-emigrants not merely as a process of geographical relocation, but as a social and relational experience unfolding through interactions with peers.

1. RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

Being qualitative in nature, the study was embedded in an interpretative paradigm whose aim was to reconstruct the ways in which the participants understood and interpreted their social experiences (Janusz-Lorkowska 2018, 26). The research strategy approved for this study enabled the researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis of individual experiences reported by young re-emigrants upon their return to Poland. The analysis was carried out in the context of the following aspects: re-acculturation, reverse culture shock, and the state of cultural in-betweenness understood as functioning between two cultural realities.

The research questions were formulated as follows: how do young re-emigrants experience and interpret their functioning within a peer environment? In what ways do re-acculturation, reverse culture shock and the state of in-betweenness influence their social relationships and sense of belonging?

The following analytical categories were adopted:

- expectations of peer relationships after re-emigration,
- real experiences of contacts with peers,
- the course of re-acculturation,
- experience of reverse culture shock,
- ways of coping with the state of in-betweenness.

The study was based on individual semi-structured, problem-focused interviews. The interviews had a narrative character and were conducted according to a previously developed interview scenario. The interview protocol included questions concerning the participants' return to Poland, their functioning within school and peer environments, their sense of social belonging, experiences of cultural differences, and strategies for coping with adaptation difficulties. The study was carried out in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, from January to March 2026. The selection of the interviewees was purposive, with the experience of re-emigration as a selection criterion (Rubacha 2016, 220). Participants were eligible for inclusion in the study if they were adolescents or young adults, had lived abroad for at least two years, and had returned to Poland within five years preceding the study. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in an environment intended to ensure that participants felt safe and were able to express themselves freely. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Parental consent for participation in the study was also obtained. To ensure compliance with ethical principles, participants' anonymity was protected through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of any identifying data.

The collected material was processed in cycles, each including such stages as data reduction, ordering and verification. The analysis consisted of two steps: determination of significant elements of the source material according to the adopted analytical categories, and verification of the distinguished elements with the use of analytical induction (Rubacha 2016,

258). The analysis led to the identification of recurring semantic categories referring to experiences of re-acculturation, peer relationships, the feeling of alienation, adaptation strategies and the state of cultural in-betweenness. The interpretation of the material focused on the reconstruction of individual trajectories of experiences related by the research participants.

Characteristics of the research participants

Three young people with experience of re-emigration were included in the study:

- Julia (15 years old) – returned to Poland from Great Britain, where she had lived for a few years; she grew up in a Polish family and has a communicative command of Polish. Julia's parents are working educators, who had been preparing their daughter for her return to Poland since the earliest days of her life in the UK;
- Nicola (18 years old) – returned from Germany; she grew up in a bilingual environment and her competence in Polish was relatively limited, particularly with regard to reading comprehension and fluent communication. Nicola's father is of German nationality and her mother is Polish. Nicola returned to Poland with her mother after her parents' divorce. Her family had not planned to move to Poland before that.
- Maks (18 years old) – returned from the United States of America; he spent most of his childhood and early adolescence in Poland, and his emigration to the USA was an intense, although relatively short experience. He relocated to the USA with his stepfather and mother but returned to Poland following their divorce. In Poland, he was exposed to alcohol-related abuse perpetrated by his biological father.

2. RE-ACCULTURATION

Acculturation is a process where a person encounters a new cultural context, renegotiating existing patterns of values, norms and meanings. During acculturation, it is possible to maintain elements of one's culture of origin, to modify them or to abandon them in favour of patterns typical of the host society. An outcome of acculturation is the emergence of new cultural configurations, which are reflected in ways of thinking, acting or interpreting social reality.

Acculturation leads to adaptation understood as the ability to function in a culturally different environment while retaining relative identity coherence (Jurek 2015, 27).

Acculturation is a dynamic and relational process rather than a one-time act, involving both migrant persons and representatives of the host society. The conditions for their co-existence are constantly being negotiated, and the course of acculturation depends on the social context, the intensity of intercultural contact and individual experiences of a person engaged in the process. Acculturation occurs when one relocates to a new place of residence and enters a new cultural space, although it can also be initiated through participation in intercultural educational environments. Its intensity varies, from deep immersion in a new culture to fragmentary and selective processes (Rubacha 2016, 258).

Entering a new cultural context entails transformations in the psychological and social spheres, which in the long term lead to relatively lasting adaptation effects. On a psychological level, adaptation may include gradual shedding of some elements of the previous cultural models and learning competences essential to function in a new social environment. The course of these processes depends on one's personality traits as well as the presence of stereotypes and biases in the cultures that remain in contact (Berry 1997, 54).

The literature on the subject draws attention to the acculturation strategies described by J.W. Berry. They include integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. Integration consists of maintaining one's cultural identity while participating in the social life of the host society. Assimilation involves abandoning one's culture of origin in favour of full adaptation to the dominant culture. Separation manifests itself by restrictions imposed on social contacts while preserving one's own cultural models. Marginalisation is associated with rejection of both the culture of origin and the host culture, which tends to be triggered by experiences of exclusion or discrimination (Adamski 2020, 50). J.W. Berry's model enables us to interpret experiences of young re-emigrants as a process of constant negotiation of one's cultural identity and a search for balance between various systems of values and social norms.

Acculturation is associated with the sense of acculturative stress and culture shock. Contact with different social norms, values, models of behaviour and linguistic codes may lower one's subjective sense of well-being and cause psychological tensions. The response to challenges depends on individual coping strategies, personal resources and community support

(Demes and Geeraert 2015, 316–337). E. Marx (2000) distinguished three strategies for coping with acculturative stress: anticipation, focus on emotions, focus on problems. Based on these strategies, a concept of styles of breaking through culture shock was developed, which has become the foundation for qualitative and quantitative studies carried out in international organisations (Łużniak and Witkowski 2006, 480).

Re-acculturation, a specific type of acculturation, is the process of re-adaptation to the culture of the country of origin after a period of emigration. It differs from classical acculturation in that the individual returns to a culture which is formally their own, but which can be perceived as partially foreign after the migration experience. Returning to one's country of origin forces one to renegotiate their identity, social relationships and ways of interpreting reality (Ward and Geeraert 2016, 98–104).

Young re-emigrants function between two cultural realities – the culture of the country of migration, to which they have already adapted themselves, and the culture of the country of origin, the bond with which in many cases has weakened. Their position becomes particularly significant during adolescence, when one's identity and the need to belong to a peer group are formed. Re-emigration to Poland can give rise to the sense of “being in between”, when one perceives oneself as “own” and “foreign” at the same time. In the school environment, young re-emigrants can experience difficulties regarding education as well as peer relationships, communication, and a sense of being socially accepted (Schuetz 1945, 369–376).

Research on the functioning of children and adolescents returning to Poland after emigration has already been conducted, for example among participants of the cyclical “In the Circle of Islam” sessions organised by the Polish Committee for UNESCO, as well as among teachers of Polish diaspora schools participating in the Summer School of Intercultural Communication organised by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Jagiellonian University. The results were presented in the report titled “(Un)easy returns home?” (Grzymała-Moszczyńska et al. 2015). The project's authors, with the use of a qualitative strategy, analysed experiences of children, teenagers, parents and teachers, seeking to identify challenges that re-emigrant children face when entering the Polish education system. Difficulties in the educational, socio-cultural and emotional spheres, which strongly affect the process of school

and social re-adaptation, were highlighted (Szydłowska, Durlik and Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2019, 171).

Returning to one's country of origin can be an experience as difficult as emigration itself. Re-emigrants often assume that living again in a previously known environment will proceed without any major difficulties. Meanwhile, the social environment has changed and so has the re-emigrant themselves, having acquired new experiences, competences and ways of interpreting the world while living abroad. The discrepancy between expectations and reality can lead to frustration, alienation and adaptation difficulties. This is referred to as a reverse culture shock. It may be particularly strong in a situation of intensive adaptation to life abroad, when the previous environment begins to be perceived as partially foreign (Zakrzewska 2010, 44–50).

Expectations related to one's return to the country of origin can be an important factor influencing the course of re-adaptation. The more realistic the ideas about the life after re-emigration one has, the more likely it is that they will cope well with the adaptation tensions. Conversely, if one is unprepared for the relocation and has idealised the country of origin, the risk of disappointment and emotional disorganisation is greater. The literature emphasises that the preparation for re-emigration should involve not only formal and educational issues but also psychological preparation for re-entering social and cultural relations (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2011, 61).

A significant role in interpreting the experiences of re-emigrants is also played by the model of cultural identity of N. Sussman (2000), which asserts that a stay abroad can lead to changes in how one's own cultural identity is perceived (Szkudlarek 2009). The author distinguished four types of identity changes: subtraction, addition, affirmative and intercultural (global) change. The research by K.S. Tambyah and R. Chang (2006) conducted among people returning after a long-term stay abroad confirmed that changes in cultural identity affect the way an individual functions after return and the course of the social readaptation process.

Coping strategies also play an important role in the process of re-acculturation. Re-emigrants may focus on actively solving problems, seeking social support, or reinterpreting their own migration experiences. Of particular importance is the ability to anticipate potential

difficulties and prepare for new conditions of social functioning. Such measures help reduce the sense of insecurity and strengthen the sense of agency (Titzmann and Lee 2018, 72).

The process of re-acculturation can be associated with the notion of “floating”. This experience is initiated by the decision to migrate and includes such experiences as uncertainty, loss of sense of security and the need to redefine one’s identity and develop a strategy for action. In the case of re-emigration, the sense of floating reappears. A returnee possesses the competences acquired during emigration, but they cannot always apply them in the new-old social environment, because their way of functioning has changed, and the environment does not always accept the diversity of migration experiences (Bron 2000, 119–132).

Because of the complexity and multidimensionality of re-acculturation, experiences of young re-emigrants should be analysed in conjunction with such phenomena as reverse culture shock, cultural identity negotiation and the state of “floating”. These phenomena interpenetrate one another and affect the way young people function in the school, peer and family environment (McGovern and Devine 2015, 37–52).

3. EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG RE-EMIGRANTS – CASE STUDIES

The analysis of the respondents’ narratives enabled us to distinguish different ways of experiencing a return to a peer environment. In the case of one of the subjects, partial adaptation was possible, based on pragmatic adaptation to the prevailing group norms, while maintaining an emotional bond with the country of migration. The other cases show a persistent sense of alienation, marginalisation and withdrawal from peer relationships, leading to social isolation. The analysed narratives indicate that the peer environment can have both an integrative and an exclusionary function, depending on the degree of openness of the group and the ability of re-emigrants to use their cultural and social competences.

3.1. Julia (15 years old)

After her return to Poland, Julia focused on freely entering the peer environment. It was important for her to establish friendly relationships without necessarily explaining her migrant’s biography, and to avoid situations in which she would be perceived as being different. As she

emphasised: “All I wanted was to be normal. So that no-one would ask me where I came from, and why my Polish was somewhat different. I had the impression that as soon as someone found out I had been living abroad, they looked at me differently” (Julia). The adaptation strategy she adopted was to blend into the peer environment and not to stand out from other school pupils. Julia mentioned that “it was better not to stand out. If you don’t, no-one is interested in you. I did my best to speak like others and not to talk too much about England” (Julia).

Julia’s everyday experiences, however, proved that her expectations were difficult to fulfil. Because of her new place of residence, she attended a small village school. The local school’s small community promoted high recognition of every pupil, which made it almost impossible to remain anonymous in a peer group. Julia concluded that “everyone knows everything about everyone else. It is impossible to be anonymous. A few days after I had started that school, everyone knew that I had returned from England and that I took additional Polish lessons” (Julia). She was formally enrolled in a class corresponding to her age, but it was considered necessary for Julia to attend extra lessons in Polish language. This fact became common knowledge, resulting in Julia being permanently assigned the role of a “weaker” person in peer relationships, someone who needed to catch up on schoolwork – “I felt they were looking at me as someone who was not coping at school. Sometimes I had the impression they thought I was worse or less intelligent only because my Polish was poorer” (Julia). Julia experienced labelling and stigmatisation, which limited the possibilities of making friends, despite her expectations. Moving from primary to secondary schools improved her situation. Julia became more anonymous and was not perceived through the prism of her migration past. The new peer environment enabled her to reduce tensions and make acquaintances that were not burdened by her life story.

Julia’s re-acculturation proceeded mainly in the area of instrumental adaptation to the requirements of her peer and educational environment. Owing to her high motivation and the support of her family, she learned to function in the Polish reality, but this process did not lead to full identification with the new social environment. Julia maintains a strong sense of belonging to the British culture, which is an important point of identity for her, and by living in between she has been able to build high self-awareness and reflectivity.

For Julia, the reverse culture shock manifested itself mainly in the difficulties she had adjusting to the norms and expectations of the peer environment. The critical assessment of the dominant patterns of social relations made by Julia testifies to the persistent distance from the reality she encountered. Julia concluded that “In England, people were more open. Everything is somewhat rigid here. I had the impression that everyone was very quick to judge others and you had to be careful about how you behave” (Julia). The peer group remained a partially alien space for her, demanding constant control of her behaviour.

Julia experienced periods of insecurity and disorientation, typical for the state of floating, but over time she developed strategies that enabled a relatively stable existence in a peer environment and partial adaptation. Julia still thinks about her life and education in Poland as a transitional stage, subordinated to the pursuit of a future abroad.

3.2. Nicola (18 years old)

Nicola’s return to Poland was sudden and unprepared, which significantly affected her expectations of a peer environment. She highlighted that “it all happened overnight. Nobody asked me if I wanted to go back to Poland. In Germany I had my life, friends, school, and all this ended suddenly” (Nicola). Her parents’ divorce forced her to face the process of re-emigration. Before her return, she had paid little attention to Polish culture or the Polish language. Nicola worried that she would have difficulties making friends with peers, and that they would not accept her. She did not feel any bond with Poland – “Poland was a foreign country for me. I did not feel that it was my home country. I had the impression that everyone knew something that I did not know, and I could not find my way around it” (Nicola).

Because of a relative language barrier, Nicola was placed two years below her age-appropriate education level, which reinforced the feeling of stigmatisation and social exclusion from the peer group. Nicola explained: “I felt as if my life had reversed. All my classmates were younger than me and I had the feeling that I was somehow inferior. I felt terribly ashamed attending that class” (Nicola). Her relationships with peers were mostly characterised by Nicola’s keeping distance and feeling isolated, and her school experiences contributed to an increasingly intense sense of non-belonging. Over time, anxiety, rebellious behaviours and symptoms of depression appeared – “I did not feel like getting up in the morning to go to school.

I feared to go there. I had the impression that every day looked the same and that I was constantly being judged or ridiculed” (Nicola). The transition to homeschooling enabled Nicola to complete her education; however, it also resulted in a near-complete disruption of her peer relationships. Nicola’s re-acculturation process in the social dimension appears to have been unsuccessful. Nicola was unable to establish new peer relationships, and remained lonely and confused, without a clearly defined group to relate to. Consequently, her sense of identity seems to have become increasingly disintegrated.

The reverse culture shock manifested itself as a more intense feeling of alienation and conflicts with the social environment. The discrepancy between her expectations and the actual relational experiences deepened her withdrawal from peer contacts. Nicola noted: “I felt that everything was against me. I didn’t understand the people, they didn’t understand me, and I felt as if I didn’t fit in anywhere anymore” (Nicola). Nicola remained in a state of floating, not undertaking effective strategies for social reintegration. In her functioning, the sense of loss of security and control over her educational and relational situation became significant.

3.3. Maks (18 years old)

Maks’s fears related to his return to Poland were mostly about the risk of losing his position within the peer environment. The experiences gained in the United States of America provided him with a sense of acceptance, agency and success in social relationships. He said: “Back there I was someone. I had friends, a team, my own place. For the first time in my life, I could feel that people accepted me and did not look at me through the prism of my troubles at home” (Maks). Returning to Poland entailed the risk of re-entering relationships based on stigmatisation and hierarchisation. Before leaving Poland for the USA, Maks had been perceived as inaccessible and as experiencing difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships with others. Peers saw him as a short-tempered person, easily getting into trouble. Maks was unable to establish himself socially among his peers. Essentially, as he admitted, Maks did not create strong bonds with any of the groups he could relate to and had no opportunities to satisfy the need for belonging and acceptance. He felt excluded and misunderstood. Maks mentioned that “Everyone said I was difficult. I was trouble. Even if I didn’t do anything, they still used to look at me as a problem child” (Maks).

In the USA, Maks adapted well to a multicultural peer environment, comprising pupils originating from diverse social and family backgrounds, with varied life experiences. For the first time, he could develop a sense of belonging. This environment enabled him to feel at home, establish stable social relationships and develop a strong sense of identity.

After returning to Poland, Maks soon experienced a disruption in the continuity of his peer relationships. Being identified as a pupil requiring additional support appeared to initiate a process of social marginalisation, contributing to his increasing isolation and withdrawal from peer interactions. His growing frustration and sense of diminished self-worth were subsequently expressed through engagement in risky behaviours and the emergence of emotional difficulties. During the interview, Maks underlined that “Once again I was the one who couldn’t cope. I had the impression that it did not matter what I did because everyone already had a firm opinion about me. I felt that I had returned to the starting point” (Maks).

Homeschooling enabled Maks to complete his education; however, it also resulted in a near-complete disruption of his peer relationships. In the social domain, Maks’s process of re-acculturation appeared unsuccessful. He did not re-establish peer connections or regain a sense of belonging and gradually appeared to internalise a marginalised social role. The effects of reverse culture shock manifested in difficulties accepting the social norms operating within the Polish peer environment and in resistance to the expectations placed upon him. Maks appeared to remain in a state of psychological floating, without progressing to more active forms of coping with his difficulties. His functioning became increasingly characterised by a sense of insecurity, perceived failure, and the loss of continuity in peer relationships.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of experiences of young re-emigrants indicates that a return to the country of origin is not a simple process of social reintegration, but initiates a complex mechanism of re-acculturation, in which the individual reconstructs their own identity, social position and a network of peer relationships. The research results confirm that a peer environment is one of the key areas in which the consequences of reverse culture shock and functioning in-between cultural systems first emerge.

The current study results are consistent with the classical and contemporary findings of research on return adaptation published in international literature. In particular, they correspond well with the concept of reverse culture shock developed under the framework of intercultural psychology (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001), in which it is emphasised that a return to the culture of origin often generates cognitive-emotional dissonance comparable or even stronger than that caused by the experience of emigration. The analysed empirical material reveals the discrepancy between re-emigrants' expectations and social reality, leading to disorientation, an undermined sense of belonging and destabilisation of peer relationships.

The research findings are also consistent with transnational models of cultural adaptation, and especially with the approach proposed by Y.Y. Kim (1988), who conceptualises acculturation as a dynamic, cyclical process, involving both periods of adaptation and identity destabilisation. This study shows that a return to one's country of origin does not mean a regress of the adaptation process; rather, it involves a process of reorganisation in new social circumstances, in which previously acquired cultural competences may lose their functionality.

Particularly important are the references to the research by C. Ward, S. Bochner and A. Furnham (2001), who conclude that a key determinant of successful re-adaptation is the quality of social relationships as well as structural conditions of the inclusion of a re-emigrant rather than his or her mental resilience. The results of our study confirm this mechanism because a peer environment acts as both an area of integration and of exclusion, with the dominant model of the group's reaction determining the adaptation trajectory of an individual.

This case study shows clear variation in the course of re-acculturation. Julia's case can be interpreted as a partial integration strategy, similar to the model of "adaptive biculturalism", described in the literature as one of the most stable variants of functioning after migration (Sussman 2000). At the same time, the persistent emotional distance from the country of origin indicates that this integration is functional rather than identity-related.

On the other hand, the cases of Nicola and Maks mirror the model of marginalisation and social exclusion, described both in the classical concepts of J.W. Berry and in the research on young re-emigrants in the educational context (including research on returning students in the European and Anglo-Saxon systems). In both cases, language barriers, labelling mechanisms and institutional differentiation practices (e.g. placement in a lower grade than

warranted by age) played an important role, being identified in the literature as factors reinforcing educational and social exclusion.

The results of our study are consistent with the findings concerning adolescence as a period of vulnerability to migration experiences. The literature emphasises that this stage in life is associated with an intensive construction of social identity and dependence on peer acceptance, which means that young re-emigrants are particularly sensitive to rejection mechanisms (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001; Sussman 2000). In the analysed cases, limited acceptance within the peer environment seemed to contribute to the persistence of the state of floating, and to reduce the participants' capacity to reconstruct a stable social identity.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the three cases presented above:

- re-acculturation has a relational and structural character and cannot be explained solely by the individual's resources;
- the peer environment acts as a key mediator of the process of adaptation, which is consistent with the results of international research on re-adaptation;
- reverse culture shock is a systemic phenomenon, mostly manifesting itself in social and institutional interactions;
- the state of cultural in-betweenness may become chronic when a re-emigrant lacks social support and is unable to reconstruct his or her group affiliations;
- adolescence is a time in life when the risk of identity disorganisation induced by re-emigration is elevated, which is confirmed by the results of transcultural studies.

In the light of the results of our analysis, it is justified to depart from linear models of re-adaptation in favour of dynamic approaches, which take into account the multi-level conditions underlying the process of re-acculturation. The global literature on this subject emphasises that an experience of migration can be either a resource in one's development or a source of psychosocial risk (depending on the quality of institutional and peer support). The results of the research correspond well with this dual model and demonstrate that this duality is a factor differentiating the degree of social inclusion in the educational environment.

A limitation of the study is its qualitative nature and a small number of cases, which prevents the formulation of broad statistical generalisations. At the same time, the results constitute valuable exploratory material and can be a starting point for further comparative studies, including larger samples and different cultural contexts.

It would be reasonable to take into account in future studies the perspective of teachers, parents and peers, and to expand the research by including an intercultural approach, as this will enable us to compare re-acculturation mechanisms in different educational systems. This would also allow us to better capture both universal and culture-specific mechanisms of adaptation of young re-emigrants.

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