

COMMON TENDENCIES IN THE INTEGRATION OF FOREIGNERS IN SOUTHEASTERN BULGARIA

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Abstract

The current research aims at outlining some common tendencies for the integration of foreigners residing in southeastern Bulgaria on the basis of their attitude to the surrounding environment. 106 questionnaire forms have been filled in by English-speaking foreigners who at the time of the research were residing in the above mentioned region. Most of the respondents (89,62 %) were from the United Kingdom and 66,98% were above 50 and retired. The results point out towards a strong correlation drive between the overall time in Bulgaria and foreign settlers' attitude to life in the country. The longer the time period (> 5 years) the more likely they are to say they don't like living in Bulgaria.

The beauty of Bulgarian nature, national culture and traditions might be an attraction to foreigners but there are other factors such as bad infrastructure, animal treatment, bureaucracy, garbage disposal and other problems resulting in negative perceptions about Bulgaria that might interfere with immigrants' attitude and willingness to settle in the country. What is needed is an effective mechanism for coordination between competent agencies in Bulgaria for achieving a better management of immigration processes, an improvement on legislative level and a better cooperation between state institutions and the non-government sector.

Key Words: Migration, Tendencies, Perceptions of Bulgaria

GÜNEYDOĞU BULGARİSTAN'DAKİ YABANCILARIN ENTEGRASYONUNDA ORTAK EĞİLİMLER

Özet

Güncel araştırmalar, Güneydoğu Bulgaristan'da yaşayan yabancıların entegrasyonu için ortak bazı eğilimleri, sergiledikleri yaklaşımlar temelinde, ana hatları ile çizmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda söz konusu bölgede araştırma esnasında yaşayan ve İngilizce konuşan yabancılar tarafından 106 anket formu doldurulmuştur. Katılımcıların çoğunluğu (%89.62) Birleşik Krallık'tan ve %66.98'i 50'nin üzerinde ve emeklidir. Sonuçlar ülkede yabancı yerleşimcilerin davranışları ve Bulgaristan'da geçirilen tüm zaman arasında güçlü bir korelasyona işaret etmektedir. Uzun zaman diliminde (>5 yıl) büyük olasılıkla yabancılar Bulgaristan'da yaşamayı sevmediklerini ifade etmektedirler.

Bulgaristan; doğası, milli kültürü ve gelenekleriyle yabancılar için çekici olabilir fakat kötü altyapı, hayvanlara muamele, çöplerin imhası ve diğer problemler Bulgaristan hususunda olumsuz algılara yol açarak göçmenlerin tutumlarını etkilemekte ve ülkeye yerleşme isteklerini engellemektedir. Bu doğrultuda göç süreçlerinin daha iyi yönetiminin sağlanabilmesi adına

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gereken; Bulgaristan'da yetkili kurumlar arasında etkili bir mekanizma, yasama düzeyinde bir iyileşme, devlet kurumları ve sivil toplum kuruluşları arasında daha iyi bir işbirliğinin sağlanmasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göç, Eğilimler, Bulgaristan algıları

1. Introduction

It is a fact that in recent years Bulgaria has become the new home for many foreign settlers who have bought properties in the country and decided to live here permanently or use the houses seasonally as their holiday homes. Some of these new settlers are investors looking for a good deal, others are retired people in search of a peaceful life close to nature and a third smaller group comprises of mainly middle-aged families (some of them with children) trying to make a new start and running their own businesses.

At the same time it seems that research on immigration processes in Bulgaria has somehow remained out of the spotlight and that studies conducted so far have focused predominantly on the problems of refugees (Mancheva and Troeva, 2011). Krasteva et al. (2005) are among the first to attempt a systematic exposition on immigration processes in Bulgaria. The research emphasis falls on the new forms of immigration and the integration of ethnic groups from the Far and Middle East, Africa, China, Russia, etc. Kotseva (2010) studies Bulgarian attitude towards foreign immigrants. Meanwhile, the influx of immigrants from Britain and other EU countries has received its deserved attention in the works of several authors (Kanef, 2006, 2009, Ivanov, 2009, Chongarova, 2009, Elchinova, 2010).

Unfortunately, there is no reliable information concerning the foreigners living in Bulgaria. No centralized data base exists and the number of foreign citizens residing in the country differs according to various sources. According to Kanef (2006) unofficially Bulgaria is home to 33 000 Britons living permanently in the country and thousands more who spend their holidays there.

Bulgaria's National Strategy for Migration and Integration (2008-2015) mentions of an increased interest among EU citizens in moving to and settling in Bulgaria. The number of British citizens applying for a long-period residence permit is said to increase with 30-40 % a year and the tendency has remained relatively stable in the last three years (the period in question being 2005-2007).

According to the National Statistics Institute (2011) the foreign immigrants in Bulgaria are 36 723 making 0.5% of the population in the country. Of them 8 444 are EU citizens (23%) and the largest number of new settlers have arrived from the United Kingdom - 2 605 (30.9%), Greece - 1 253 (14.8%), Germany - 848 (10%), Poland - 819 (9.7%) and Italy - 456 (5.4%).

In *Accession and Migration: Changing Policy, Society, and Culture* (2009) Ivanov and Kanef view migration as a crucial social and economic phenomenon and discuss the arrival of British immigrants in Bulgaria. Another research conducted by Elchinova (2010) between 2002 and 2007 studies the British settlers in the region of Veliko Turnovo and the processes of integration and intercommunication. Nazarska and Hajdinjak (2011) divide the immigrants of the 90s into three groups. The first two groups are the largest and include immigrants from China and the Middle East. The third is a new group of immigrants from affluent European countries and the USA. Among the latter there are investors and property buyers and many who stay in the country for a

limited period of time. According to Kaneff (2006) property buyers are attracted by the opportunity to make a low-cost investment and a good deal due to the generally low property prices in Bulgaria and they comprise one of the three main groups of migrants. Some investors would buy directly on the Internet hoping to sell later with a profit. Others, mostly older and retired people who make up the second group, would buy a holiday home and live there seasonally. The third group of permanent migrants represents unsatisfied middle-aged people willing to make a big change in a new country. These new settlers seem to be well-accepted by the local population who believe that their foreign neighbours will be more likely to look after their property maintenance and hopefully revive the social and economic life in the depopulated rural areas. Krasteva (2005) also states that there are no immigrants in Bulgaria living in poor conditions and that there are hardly any immigrants employed by Bulgarian citizens. On the contrary, there are Bulgarians working for immigrants and the latter have to be seen as creating new job opportunities.

In the context of the above Bulgarian villages are becoming an attractive destination to replace previously favored locations in Spain, France, Portugal and Italy that have become too expensive and/or too densely populated. According to Chongarova (2009) Bulgaria occupies the third place in terms of popularity straight after France and Spain, where property prices are much higher and mass tourism has taken over.

2. Material, Methods and Organization of the Research

In the current research the aim of our study is to outline some common tendencies for the integration of foreigners residing in southeastern Bulgaria on the basis of their attitude to the surrounding environment. In relation to the above aim the following tasks have been defined and completed

- Specifying the focus group for the research.
- Determining foreigners' country of origin, age, level of education and period of time spent in the country
- Generalizing some common trends in their perceptions concerning the socio-economic reality in the country
- Tracing the impact of residence period in Bulgaria and the language factor on the formation of attitudes towards the country and the local population.

Several research methods are implied in this study including – historical and theoretical approach, questionnaires, interviews, case studies, statistical analysis and synthesis

The research was conducted in the period 2009-2011 and organized in four stages.

In *Stage One* the focus group was defined and the questionnaire forms prepared. The questionnaires are anonymous and comprise 26 questions (yes/no questions; multiple choice and open questions). We take it for granted that for the purpose of the research and in accordance with the Law for Foreign Citizens in the Republic of Bulgaria (Article 23, Paragraph 1), the respondents have to meet the following criteria: to be foreign citizens who reside in the country for reasons other than tourism and whose stay is either short-term (up to 90 days after the date of entering the country), with limited duration (up to one year), long-term (for initial period of 5 years and possible extension) or permanent (with unlimited duration). In addition, they must be English-speaking foreign citizens and ones that have bought a property and reside in southeastern Bulgaria.

Stage Two aims at finding and locating the foreign settlers for the purpose of which official letters have been emailed to 35 municipality administrations in

southeastern Bulgaria asking for cooperation. Telephone calls have been subsequently made with some municipality representative for further clarification.

During *Stage Three* 106 questionnaires were completed and interviews conducted with foreign settlers in 17 municipal regions – Bolyarovo, Bratya Daskalovi, Brezovo, Kazanlak, Karlovo, Pavel Banya, Nikolaevo, Yambol, Tundja, Lyubimits, Sredets, Madjarovo, Maritsa, Stara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Chirpan and Elhovo.

The final *Stage Four* of the research is analytical based on ANOVA/MANOVA statistical analysis and synthesis for the purpose of outlining some general tendencies.

3. Results and Discussion

Most of the respondents (89,62 %) are from the United Kingdom which coincides with the National Statistics Institute data analysis. The rest of the participants in the research (10,38 %) come from other countries such as Germany, Japan, Spain, USA, Belgium and France. 66,98% are above 50 and retired. 19,81 % are in their late thirties and forties, 5,66 % are people between 20 and 34 years of age and a very small percentage (1,89 %) are under 20. The above tendency can be explained with elderly couples' search for a peaceful and stress-free life and the relatively low prices of properties in rural Bulgaria. It also describes a situation which is very different from the one in other European countries where the number of young immigrants between 20 and 39 years of age is more than 40 % (Vasileva, 2011). In addition 93,4 % of the respondents own a property and live in villages some of which in remote locations with many abandoned houses. Those houses which had been the homes of grandparents were left unattended after the death of the older generation and with the younger ones living in the cities they were soon offered for sale. Being bought by foreigners they are then transformed into holiday homes

Another factor that might be related to the choice of a particular destination is the respondents' educational background. 94,36 % have answered this question (Fig. 1) and around 13 % of them are university graduates. 9,43 % have bachelor and 3,77 % master degree. 20,76 % have graduated from college and 27,36% hold a certificate for professional qualification. 32 % completed high school. It can be argued that a lower level of education is more likely to have an impact on career choices and realization and result in a lower income respectively. We may expect this to be one of the main social and economic drives for migration.

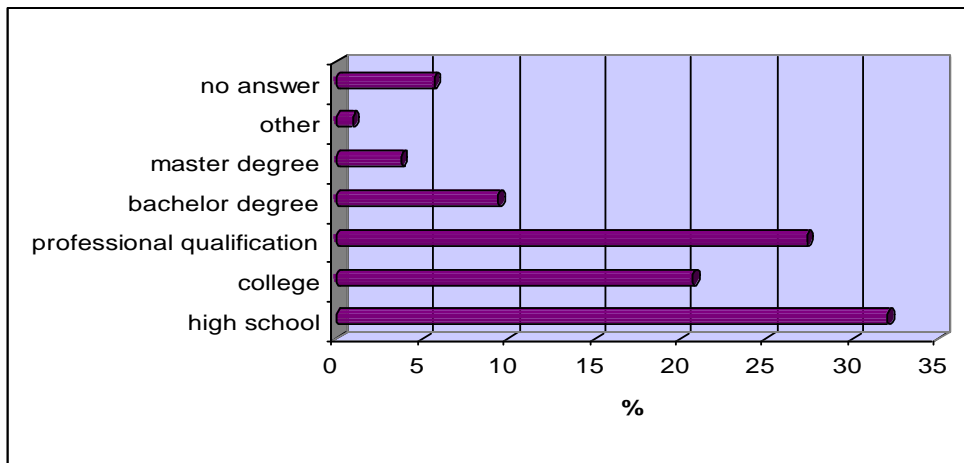


Figure1: Degree of Education

The above assumption is evidenced by the answers pointing out to the reasons for coming to Bulgaria. 39,13 % of indicate the social and economic reasons as being dominant, followed by 26,09 % for Bulgarian nature as the main attraction, family (12,17 %), work (6,09 %), quality of life (4,35 %), political reasons (2,6 %) and others (9,57 %)

Last but not least, depending on the period of time spent in the country, the foreigners in Bulgaria can be divided into several groups in accordance with: 1) the overall time in Bulgaria (from the moment of property acquisition) and 2) the average annual time of residence in the country. Such clarification is necessary bearing in mind the fact that some of the foreign buyers have invested in a property which they may now have had for a long period but actually spend very little time there annually. Hence, it is of particular importance for the purpose of this study to know the exact period of time spent in the country and its eventual impact on the formation of perceptions and attitudes.

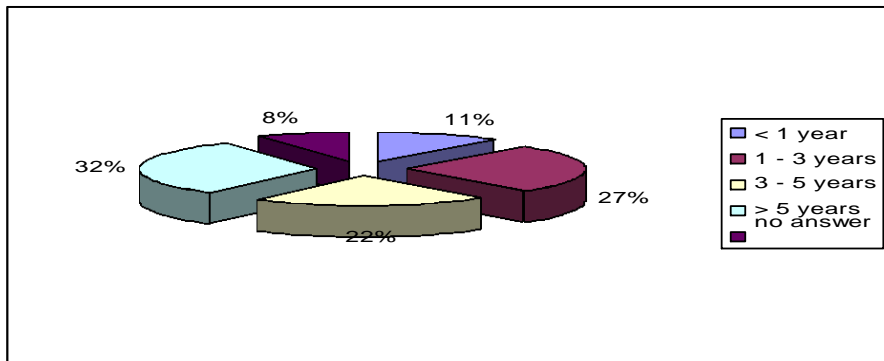


Figure 2: Overall time in the country

Most of the foreign settler (31,13 %) have had a property in the country for 5 years or more (Figure 2). 27,36 % of the respondents have used the house they bought for a period between 1 and 3 years and 21,7 % - between 3 and 5 years. Only 11,32 % say they have had a house in Bulgaria for less than a year and 8,49 % have refrained from answering this question.

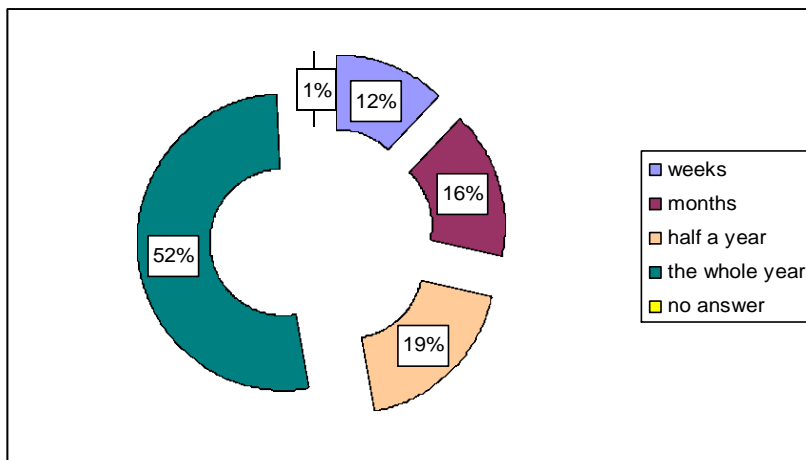


Figure. 3: Average annual time of residence in the country.

The average annual time of residence shows that more than half of the foreigners (52 %) live permanently in the country (Figure 3). Around 16 % reside in Bulgaria for several months and 19 % - for half of the year. Only 12, 26 % spend a couple of weeks in the country.

By applying ANOVA/MANOVA statistical analysis we arrived at some interesting correlations concerning the time of residence and foreign attitudes to life in Bulgaria.

The results point out towards a strong interdependence between the overall time in and attitude to the country. Replies to the question “Do you like living in Bulgaria?” reveal that the longer the time period (> 5 years) the more frequently “no” answers are given ($\bar{X} = 1,18, F=13,28$ и $P < 0,001$). Within a shorter period of stay of up to 3 years respondents answers are positive and they all claim that they like living in Bulgaria.

At the same time, when asked whether they feel optimistic or pessimistic about Bulgaria’s future most of them (66, 98 %) describe themselves as optimists and a very small percentage (6,6%) confess being pessimists. 26,42 % find it difficult to say. Yet, it is worth noticing that the pessimists are among those with a longer period of residence – between 3 and 5 ($\bar{X} = 1,47, F=13,34$ и $P < 0,001$) and more than five years ($\bar{X} = 1,61, F=13,34$ и $P < 0,001$).

The above tendencies probably result from the fact that when living in one place for a longer period of time a person acquires more experience, is able to see both advantages and disadvantages, becomes more critical and realistic and is likely to be less optimistic. Yet, the number of such people in this research is generally insufficient. The answer to the question “What do you like most about living in Bulgaria?” shows that many foreign settlers (30,29 %) like the local people, a good percentage of foreigners admire the beauty of Bulgarian nature sites (27,8 %) and national culture and traditions (21,16 %). Quite a few are interested in Bulgarian history (13,29 %) whereas others enjoy the safety and tranquility of country life (4,56 %), good Bulgarian food (1,66 %) and other things (1,24 %).

An interesting trend is observed in terms of the average annual time that foreigners spend in Bulgaria and its impact on what they like about living in the country (Table 1).

Table 1: Impact of the average annual time spent in Bulgaria on the things they like in the country.

<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Average annual time spent in the country</i>	\bar{X}	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Things they like in BG 1-nature 2-people 3-traditions 4-history 5-tranquility 6-food	a few weeks a year	1,50	5,12	< 0,005
	a few months a year	2,46		
	half a year	1,21		
	permanent	1,71		

The results indicate that those residing in the country for several months a year like Bulgarian people and nature but are also interested in the country’s culture, history and tradition ($\bar{X} = 2,46$; $F = 5,12$ and $P < 0,005$). These people would like to learn more about traditional customs, community celebrations, Bulgarian past and present. With a shorter period of stay (a few weeks a year) foreigners probably do not have enough time to visit places of interest and get to know our country’s history and traditions which subsequently results in a weaker interest. A similar tendency among those with a longer annual time of residence can be explained with the assumption that they might have seen plenty of places and traditional celebrations that they are already getting used to them and hence their sense of curiosity is no longer that fervent.

As far as their perception of Bulgarian people is concerned, 82,35% of the respondents describe Bulgarians in positive terms as “kind-hearted”, “easy-going” and “helpful” and only 17,65% are prone to use some negative characteristics such as “conservative”, “narrow-minded” and “too inquisitive”. It is worth noticing that the statistical analysis points to some correlations between the average annual time of residence and foreigners’ perceptions of Bulgarians (Table 2).

Table 2: Impact of the average annual time spent in Bulgaria on foreign perceptions of Bulgarians

<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Average annual time spent in the country</i>	\bar{X}	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Perception of Bulgarians 1-positive 2-negative	a few weeks a year	1,00	7,57	< 0,001
	a few months a year	1,23		
	half a year	1,05		
	permanent	1,04		

It is evident that when living in Bulgaria for a few months a year the attitude towards local people is more likely to be negative ($\bar{X} = 1,23$; $F = 7,57$ and $P < 0,001$)

unlike shorter periods of stay of no more than a few weeks ($\bar{X} = 1,00$; $F = 7,57$ and $P < 0,001$). It might be that a period of several months is long enough for a more grounded and realistic outlook to be formed which added to previous experience and a constant comparison to social and cultural life in their home country may lead to less positive perceptions of the local population. Within longer time periods when living in Bulgaria permanently or for more than half of the year foreigners tend to be very positive in their perceptions of Bulgarians. They have managed to adapt to the local environment and integrate in the life of the community.

In addition, another factor that might be expected to influence integration processes as well as the formation of certain concepts and ideas about “the other” is verbal communication. Bulgarian language is difficult to master and taking into consideration the fact that the new English-speaking settlers come from a different cultural and linguistic environment they are very much likely to experience a communication problem. What is more, most of the foreigners buy properties in rural Bulgaria where the population consists of elderly people who speak no other language than their native tongue, more often than not in dialectal forms. In order to be able to have a simple conversation with their neighbours or to do their shopping 75,47 % of the respondents say they are now trying to learn Bulgarian and already know a few words. Still, 43,4 % confess of the language barrier being a problem and about 35 % say it is not a real problem in interpersonal interactions. With a very limited knowledge of each others languages foreigners and local people find other forms of interaction in their everyday life and one may wonder if they have reached that stage of “intercultural sensitivity”^{*} in which things such as hospitality, tolerance, sharing and the common celebration of traditional community holidays become more important than words. Thus, despite language differences, people communicate and help each other, exchange greetings over the fence, find out how to grow their own vegetables and plant bulbs and flowers, sit for a drink together in the local pub.

Social and economic factors other than interpersonal communication on a daily basis are the ones to cause some negative reactions. Among the most often quoted answers to the question “What do you like least about Bulgaria?” are poor infrastructure (18,42%) and transport (10,53%). A relatively big percentage of interviewees (14 %) dislike politics and about 7 % are concerned with the inhumane treatment of animals. Bureaucracy issues and problems with the local Roma population receive the same percentage of the answers (7 % each) and around 6 % consider garbage and waste disposal as a serious threat. More than 19 % of the answers fall in the category “other issues” which includes matters concerning poverty and unemployment, low pensions, corruption, dangerous driving, EU integration, road signs, real estate agents unfair deals, etc.

At the beginning of 2011 the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria proposed a National Strategy for Migration, Shelter for Refugees and Integration (2011-2020). The strategy points out that Bulgaria’s role gradually changing from one of a transit country to one that attracts immigrants. The data collected indicates a decrease in emigration movements and a steady trend of increased immigration processes. This means that state national policy is to be prepared for the successful management of immigration including the integration of migrants so that effectiveness and stability are maintained in the long run. At the same time responsible institutions are dispersed in the structures of several ministries and agencies which is an impediment to successful cooperation. There is no centralized unit in charge of development, coordination and

^{*} the term is used by Chongarova (2009)

analysis of government policies with respect to migration. Lack of employee qualification and special training on the questions of migration are mentioned as a drawback. Immigrant integration is a prerequisite for a stable economic development provided there is social unity and multicultural dialogue. Media attention and academic community initiatives are also needed to increase public awareness regarding the goals and priorities of the national migration policy.

4. Conclusion

In the end, the following final conclusions can be drawn:

Foreigners remain generally optimistic about living in Bulgaria, they like their life in the country and the local people and are making an effort to learn the language, A longer period of residence, however, is sometimes likely to result in negative perceptions.

The beauty of Bulgarian nature as well as national culture and traditions might be an attraction to foreigners but there are other factors such as bad infrastructure, animal treatment, bureaucracy, garbage disposal and others that create some negative perceptions about Bulgaria and might interfere with immigrants' attitude and willingness to settle in the country.

An effective mechanism for coordination and cooperation between the institutions in charge is needed for achieving a better management of immigration processes, an improvement on legislative level and a better collaboration between state agencies and the non-government sector.

For a more thorough understanding of immigration and integration processes in the country research in this field has to be expanded to include more participants from within the foreign groups and the local attitude towards these people has to be considered as well.

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