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Thinking citizenship through the lived experiences of highly skilled migrants in Budapest

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Abstract

This study aims to understand and explain the concept of citizenship by analyzing the lived experiences of highly skilled migrants, reflecting on their everyday transnational lives in the urban setting of Budapest. Based on discourse analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews conducted in Budapest in the fall of 2022, the research thinks through lived citizenship experiences to explore how and why these experiences matter for understanding subjective citizenship. This study suggests that the concept of lived citizenship embodies a complex narrative of everyday socio-economic, socio-cultural, and emotional experiences that go beyond what the legal status depicts. Citizenship experiences of highly skilled migrants involve a process of negotiating cultural and moral cosmopolitanism with constructive patriotism in everyday lives in the urban context. The research broadens the thinking on the foundation, manifestations, and operationalization of lived citizenship as experiences of belonging and coexistence, presenting a unique contribution to the production of knowledge about highly skilled migration in Hungary. This article proposes that citizenship entails complex relational dimensions and involves a life-long learning process with continual meaning-making through life experiences that transcends the consequences of individuals' legal status within a given nation-state.

Keywords: lived citizenship; patriotic cosmopolitanism; citizenship experiences; highly skilled migrants; Budapest

1 Introduction

What are the lived experiences of citizenship in actual spaces of transnational contexts? How do migrants narrate them in urban spaces embedded in transnational interactions? To what extent do their subjective citizenship experiences shape their self-understanding as social and political actors? Through seeking answers to these questions, this study explores the foundations for and the manifestations of subjective understandings of citizenship as it emerges in cosmopolitan cities in public and private everyday interactions.

The flourishing scholarly work that examines citizenship through migrants' perspectives within critical citizenship studies (CCS) inquires into the themes of migrants' rights, claim-making, social participation and naturalization practices in different settings (Cherubini, 2011; Lanari, 2022; Martin & Paasi, 2016; Müller, 2022; Cochrane & Wolff, 2022; Kallio & Mitchell, 2016; Pascucci, 2016; Bloch, 2014; Caraus, 2018; Bhimji, 2016). The puzzles around the subject-defining and affective dimension of citizenship and the constitutive processes involved in the emergence of a distinct type of citizen identity remain unsolved. This study aims to propose perspectives for addressing this puzzle through an analysis of the narratives of highly skilled migrants' lived citizenship experiences in transnational settings, where they hold multiple legal ties, develop multi-layered particularistic and universalist attachments, and claim recognition, rights, and respect in national and global contexts. The findings are based on an analysis of narratives collected through 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with EU and non-EU highly skilled migrants in Budapest, Hungary, in the fall of 2022.

The European Union (EU) and its Member States are entangled in scholarly and policy paradoxes concerning migration governance. The EU needs a diverse workforce with specific skills and expertise to boost the economy (Melegh, 2016), which depends increasingly on implementing effective policies that attract global talent (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020). Changes in national policies and the EU Blue Card scheme and the Single Permit, introduced as EU policy initiatives to attract skilled workers from third countries, facilitate the labor market access of highly qualified non-EU nationals, whose numbers are increasing consistently (Boucher, 2020; Purkayastha & Bircan, 2023). Amidst the EU-wide efforts to open up 'Fortress Europe' to highly skilled non-EU nationals, involving embracing a market-driven approach to migration policies (Cerna, 2013; Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2010), EU member states control the conditions of entry and stay and constrain mobility within and toward the EU at their discretion (Cerna, 2013; Boucher, 2020).

Hungary, which has ranked as the most xenophobic country in the EU (Joshanloo, 2024, p. 497), constitutes a significant case for observing the impact of the policy tension between facilitating migration for economic growth and restricting migration for security purposes on the everyday citizenship experiences of highly skilled EU and non-EU migrants. Hungary has been presented as 'the defender of Europe' (Merabishvili, 2023; Kallius, 2016) against migrants from third countries due to a xenophobic and culturalist narrative that mainly targets refugees (Rajaram, 2016; Barna & Koltai, 2019), which intensified after the Charlie Hebdo attack, involving portraying all foreigners as a security threat (Melegh, 2016; Merabishvili, 2023; Rajaram, 2016). In this anti-immigrant political and discursive climate, Hungary implemented policies such as tax incentives to attract foreign investment to boost economic competitiveness and increase productivity (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020; Melegh, 2016; Cerna, 2013). These policies have boosted outsourcing business activities by international corporations, creating jobs requiring specific expertise and skills and increasing demand for skilled workers with lower wage expectations (HIPA, 2019). Hungarian skilled foreign-labor employment policy was designed to prioritize the recruitment of Hungarian nationals by enforcing the national priority rule, which allows for the employment of third-country nationals only on the condition that employers prove that there are no Hungarians or EU citizens suitable for the job, and within the limits of

annual immigration quotas (EMN, 2018). However, due to demographic challenges and the emigration of Hungarians, as new jobs became available, the recruitment of foreign-born workforce from EU and non-EU countries continued (Melegh, 2016; Bisztrai et al., 2020). As a result, Budapest has evolved into an attractive global hub for highly skilled professionals who are portrayed as a homogenous group of economic agents and free movers in the transnational space of opportunities (Bielewska, 2021; Koikkalainen, 2013). By focusing on highly skilled EU and non-EU migrants in Budapest, this study aims to explain how their self-identification and citizenship understanding evolve in a socio-political landscape rife with skepticism and hostility toward foreigners.

The main contention of this study is that highly skilled migrants undergo unique and complex citizenship experiences as members of a highly mobile global community. They engage in multiple constellations of transnational belonging associated with a long-distance relationship with their country of origin and a well-regulated social contract with the country of residence. These are nested processes of individual self-determination (Genova, 2016), constructing hybrid citizens of highly skilled migrants who experience public and private life in different political communities. The study, thus, suggests that migrants' understanding of citizenship is constructed through an amalgamation of legal-political status laden with rights and duties and an identity and multi-layered sense of belonging derived from lived socio-economic, socio-cultural, and emotional experiences within and beyond nation-states in both public and private realms. Within this framework, lived citizenship is conceptualized as lived experiences of being and becoming a citizen through a relational, life-long learning process involving the experiences of belonging and coexistence that individuals encounter in everyday life.

This research contributes to the literature on citizenship and migration in three ways: First, this study proposes that only a holistic approach that involves all the dimensions of citizenship may accurately capture lived citizenship experiences and explain why they matter for the subjective understanding of the citizenship of individuals who perform citizenship beyond the nation-state. Second, this research accounts for the role of the settlement country's socio-political context in shaping citizenship experiences and practices. Third, it advances the descriptive and analytical framework concerning thinking about the foundation, manifestations, and operationalization of citizenship from below, particularly underlining the significance of affective and subject-defining aspects of citizenship and exploring how highly skilled migrants in Budapest navigate and narrate a blend of patriotic and cosmopolitan ideas and emotions while constructing their citizenship understanding.

2 Conceptual framework: Lived citizenship as a lifelong learning process

Migration de-homogenizes political communities, leading to major changes that require the redefinition of the demos and the reconstitution of subjectivities. This indicates a transformative point at which individuals build new legal and affective ties based on multiple experiences, power relations, and policies emanating from the politics of inclusion

and exclusion (Ayata, 2019, p. 337). Migrant experiences, thus, encompass citizenship experiences, molding individuals into unique types of citizens with diverse multi-layered connections and commitments. In citizenship studies, most studies start by approaching citizenship as a legal status, designating the members of a distinct political community, and mainly examining the nature of the relationship between citizens and the state. Recently, the scholarly interest in reflecting on citizenship as a dynamic, imagined, experienced, and practiced concept from below by focusing on the impact of the diversity of everyday life interactions has expanded (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Departing from a state-centered approach toward a citizen-centered approach, critical scholars have investigated citizenship through acts (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), affective practices (Ayata, 2019), and lived experiences (Lister, 2007; Kallio et al., 2015). Critical citizenship scholarship contends that citizenship is not only 'owned' by states but also by individuals, and the complexities of the concept are best understood through the lived experiences of individuals in everyday life (Carranza, 2017; Lister, 2007; Kallio et al., 2015).

Lived citizenship literature offers a generative understanding of citizenship by observing experiences in both public and private spaces, adopting a micro-sociological perspective. Drawing on the significance of the impact of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, studies on lived citizenship explore relational and everyday experiences of individuals constructed within social, cultural, and spatial contexts (Lister, 2007; Hall et al., 1998). Lived citizenship challenges the public-private/formal-informal dichotomy of mainstream citizenship studies, presenting them as complementary (Cherubini, 2011; Lister, 2007). A range of empirical studies employ this conceptual approach by examining the lived experiences of youth and children (Kallio et al., 2015; Wood, 2016), women and LGBTQ individuals (Cochrane & Wolff, 2022), asylum-seekers and refugees (Cochrane & Wolff, 2022; Kallio & Mitchell, 2016; Cherubini, 2011) in terms of their social and political participation. In advancing this conceptual foundation, this study proposes a relational model of lived citizenship to enhance the descriptive and analytical framework associated with the concept.

Based on the empirical analysis, this study conceptualizes citizenship through perceiving the lived experiences of being a citizen and non-citizen in transnational contexts and responding to everyday situations. According to this perspective, lived citizenship is defined as lived experiences of being and becoming a citizen in a relational, life-long learning process involving the experiences of belonging and coexistence that individuals encounter in everyday life. Experiences of belonging indicate the emotional and cultural aspects of citizenship, reflecting one's self-identification, external identification, attachments, and sense of belonging. They refer to the subjective emotional connections that individuals acquire, cultivate, and engage with in public and private settings as members of political communities. Lived experiences of coexistence, on the other hand, pertain more to the public sphere, primarily focusing on the institutional dimension of citizenship. They also encompass a subjective aspect whereby individuals develop specific sentiments towards society, state, and state institutions, influencing their actions and behaviors. The legal-political, social, and economic experiences that individuals undergo throughout their lives in political communities constitute experiences of coexistence.

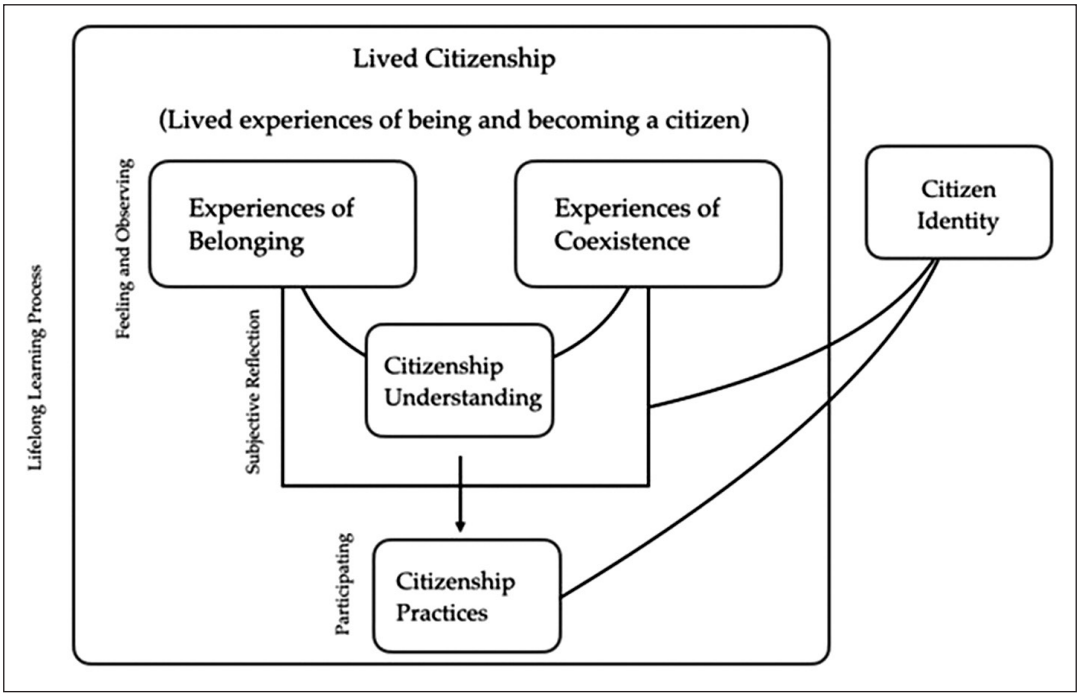

Figure 1 Relational Model of Lived Citizenship as a Lifelong Learning Process

The lived citizenship experiences of migrants indicate a state of living together with differences in a transnational form of conviviality (Samanani, 2022) related to cosmopolitanism through its moral and cultural accounts, as well as patriotism. As a form of emotional attachment, patriotism involves a political act of loyalty to a particular political community with the desire to contribute to its well-being and success (Nussbaum, 2008). Cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, asserts an allegiance to humanity, envisioning a global community where cultural boundaries blur and fostering an appreciation for differences over similarities (Beck, 2006). From cultural and moral perspectives, cosmopolitanism rests on an understanding of the equal worth of all individuals and the fluidity and hybridity of identities (Taraborrelli, 2015), stressing equal treatment and moral obligations towards all human beings (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018). In this sense, patriotism and cosmopolitanism present contrasting spatial attachments and commitments. However, despite this dichotomous conceptualization, they frequently intersect in daily experiences, mutually reinforcing each other (Appiah, 1997). Becoming cosmopolitan is considered a prerequisite for being a better patriot since cosmopolitan sensibilities are often performed as patriotic acts for those who are mobile, participate in global communities, and are open to cultural differences (Molz, 2005). Similarly, one's patriotic adherence to a set of values and sense of responsibility for the well-being of people in a particular community may also be sources of civic and political participation elsewhere in the world. Examining the interplay of

cosmopolitan and patriotic attachments, framed by spatial, temporal, and situational reconfigurations, helps to grasp the emotional and subject-defining aspects of citizenship. It offers insights into how migrants understand and experience citizenship in the everyday diversity of transnational settings by producing a minimal consensus that allows for coexistence with different groups (Samanani, 2022).

3 Research design

To explore the lived citizenship experiences of highly skilled migrants and explain to what extent, how, and why these experiences matter for the understanding and practices of subjective citizenship among highly skilled migrants in actual spaces of the everyday life of transnational settings, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with EU and non-EU highly skilled migrants in Budapest. In this article, 'migrants' refers to persons who are citizens of at least one state but have relocated to another country for employment, family, or education purposes. Narrowly defined, the term 'migrants' covers highly skilled EU and non-EU migrants who reside in Budapest, have completed tertiary education, and are in the labor force or searching for jobs in their countries of residence, being qualified to work in third or fourth-skill level job categories as defined by the International Standard Classification of Occupation (ISCO).

Most studies on highly skilled migrants examine emigration patterns and the migration governance of the skilled in the U.S., Canada, Germany, and the UK (Schittenhelm & Schmidtke, 2010-11; Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2010; Bailey & Mulder, 2017). Very few studies have explored the lived experiences of highly skilled migrants residing in semi-periphery countries where anti-immigrant attitudes and xenophobia prevail, such as Hungary, which has not been considered a popular destination for skilled migrants (Bielewska, 2021; Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020; Koikkalainen, 2013). EU highly skilled migrants are often excluded from research on international migration since they are not classified as within the migrant category that indicates an identification as being the 'other' (Barbulescu, 2015) but as mobile EU citizens (Trenz & Triandafyllidou, 2017). However, both EU and non-EU highly skilled migrants share similar expat lifestyles in Europe, which has become a place of conviviality shaped by the diversification of migration pathways, interconnectivity, intricate integration patterns, and complex practices (Trenz & Triandafyllidou, 2017). By analyzing the lived experiences of both migrant groups from a comparative perspective, this study captures the role of EU citizenship on individuals' citizenship understanding in an EU Member State context.

The participants were contacted through employers and interviewees' networks through snowball sampling. The sample includes 30 professionals (14 women and 16 men) who have been living in Budapest for more than four years. Sixteen interviewees are from other EU countries (13 from Southern Europe, four from Eastern Europe, and two from Western Europe), and 14 interviewees are third-country nationals from the following regions: North America (one), South America (one), Western Asia (three), Central Asia (three), Southern Asia (one), Western Africa (one), North Africa (one), Southern Europe (two), and Eastern Europe (one). They are employees of different international companies

in Budapest, like BlackRock, Morgan Stanley, Friesland Campina, TATA, and Nokia. They work as managers, engineers, finance and accounting associates, and controllers. The majority of interviewees are single individuals aged from 26 to 47. Among them, only one interviewee acquired Hungarian citizenship.

Each interview took around 60 minutes and was recorded based on the consent of participants. As all interviewees' command of the English language was excellent, the interviews were conducted in English, recorded, transcribed, and transferred to MAXQDA for open coding, which requires a close and constant reading of transcriptions. The gender equality and diversity of the sample in terms of country of origin, occupation, and workplace are the other concerns of this research that were considered while selecting the participants to increase representativeness. For reasons of anonymity, the respondents are identified with pseudonyms assigned during the transcription of interviews and the names of the regions where their home countries are located. Following the coding principles of grounded theory, the stages of initial open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Charmaz, 2006) were sequentially employed. These phases involved creating categories, establishing correlations, narrowing the categories down to analyze the data thematically, and utilizing critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

4 Unpacking lived experiences of being and becoming a citizen

4.1 Experiences of belonging

The self-identification and place attachment of highly skilled migrants portrayed as a privileged, in-demand group of cosmopolitans (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020; Bielewska, 2021) who approach citizenship as a commodity (Aker, 2020, p. 49) suggests an interesting case for understanding and explaining to what extent and how this narrative identity interacts with citizenship as a source of identity and belonging. Therefore, the interviewees were initially asked to share how they self-identify when meeting someone new in day-to-day life. Their narratives reveal a tendency to primarily self-identify based on personal attributes, characteristics, interests, and values, frequently employing more universalist attributes and values like simply being a human being or an open-minded person, a world citizen, a European, an international, and a cosmopolitan. Secondarily, they refer to the names of their respective countries of origin as an instant, practical way and an additional complementary attribute of their self-identification:

> I wouldn't say I should identify myself in connection to my country. I deeply feel [this], but it is only a part of my identity. We are all here creating something like an international society. First of all, I am a good professional and a kind-hearted person. (Anna, non-EU, Eastern Europe)

Only one interviewee primarily identified with their national identity, indicating that this factor does not play a central role in interviewees' self-conceptualization. Ethnicity, religion, and gender are also insignificant categories for self-identification, as none of the interviewees referred to these social categories in their primary identification. Never-

theless, some of them emphasized their lack of belief in religion as a way of demonstrating their resistance against external categorization imposed on them based on their citizenship:

> I am not a religious person. It was just attributed to me by birth that I was born into a Muslim family even though nobody was practicing. I cannot say I am a Muslim. I feel uncomfortable when I meet with somebody from my region or the countries where Islam is predominant, and they ask me if I am a Muslim or why I don't fast. (Gulnar, non-EU, Central Asia)

In the quote above, religion as a cultural attribute is directly recognized by others as an attribute of these countries' citizens, irrespective of their personal beliefs, posing a social and cultural challenge to their self-identification processes. The defined identity of the country is inherited by its citizens as a part of their identity, affecting their everyday social interactions, attitudes, and self-perceptions inside and outside the country of origin. Citizenship as an identity 'box,' loaded with cultural, social, and political qualities and characteristics, may become a primary identifier for citizens even though they do not embrace the pre-conceived attributes associated with that category:

> In a new environment, everybody defines you by your country, putting you in a box based on that. Then, you are trying to show that you are better than that box [assumed identity]. You want to encourage the good stereotypes, not the bad ones. (Marta, EU, Southern Europe)

The vast majority either reject any labeling or self-identify with non-migrant categories such as foreigners, foreign workers, or ex-pats that do not directly have racial, ethnic, and cultural connotations. Identification with these categories enables individuals to detach themselves from the migrant identity, which appeared to be an undesired category and a 'heavy word' (Adem, EU, Southern Europe). The reluctance to identify as a migrant appears to be a result of how migration has been narrated within a crisis frame in Europe and the negative connotations of the term 'migrant' linked with illegitimacy and threat in the context of Hungary (Rajaram, 2016; Melegh, 2016, p. 103). A small number of respondents called themselves semi-citizens or temporary citizens. These narratives attest to their willingness to adapt within political communities and enhance their social acceptance, avoiding particularistic racial, ethnic, cultural, or national identifiers, which may trigger social bias. The willingness to blend in is one of the reasons why identification with the country of citizenship takes a secondary position. The use of broader categories such as foreigner, which implies a cosmopolitan condition, indicates a universal foreignness (Agier, 2021) and a state of cultural hybridity that allows them to make claims and act as active social and political actors in local, national, and global spheres (Taraborrelli, 2015):

> I don't like labeling myself or others, but I would say I am a foreigner. I don't like terms like migrants or expats. It makes you feel like you are excluded from the rest of the country. It doesn't feel like you can easily integrate yourself. (Ali, non-EU, Western Asia)

When the interviewees were asked how being a citizen of their country of origin makes them feel, their emotions concerning citizenship appeared to be shaped by their perception of economic success and political stability in the country of origin. Reflecting a disposition of love and care (Nussbaum, 2008) towards their countries, the majority stress their pride, happiness, or love of their country of origin despite referring to at least one negative emotion, indicating a critical patriotic loyalty (Schatz, 2020). Patriotic attachment

also plays a significant role in individuals' decision to acquire another citizenship. For instance, a non-EU interviewee who has been residing in Europe for over a decade and is married to an EU citizen reports that she has hesitated to proceed with naturalization because acquiring the citizenship of another country requires the renunciation of her birth citizenship and challenges her sense of belonging constructed by patriotic affection:

> For me, it is a struggle. I could have done it many years ago. I could change my passport to be a citizen of another country. But it is not easy. You know, patriotic feelings… (Gulzhan, non-EU, Central Asia)

Migrants' attachment to their country of origin or city of birth does not, however, exclude the development of an attachment to the country or the city of settlement. Most interviewees report almost no emotional attachment to Hungary but a very strong connection to Budapest, even though their arrival in this city was random:

> I have a strong connection with the city. I have a sense of belonging to Budapest more than Hungary. I like living in such an international city with professional and personal opportunities. (Milan, non-EU, Southern Europe)

A strong sense of attachment to Budapest and identifying as a Budapestian reflects a form of urban patriotism rooted in the city's distinctive cultural diversity and cosmopolitan features that set it apart from many other Eastern and Central Eastern European cities. As observed with the super-diverse, global cities of Western Europe such as London (Ryan, 2018), Berlin, and Paris (Barwick & Beaman, 2019), the interview data suggests that Budapest offers various opportunities for fostering the process of embeddedness for migrants. The interviewees portray Budapest as a cosmopolitan city characterized by an 'international,' 'secure,' 'calm,' and 'pleasant' environment. It is viewed as a hub of social and economic opportunities comparable to other European urban centers, providing an 'international pink bubble' (Ewa, EU, Eastern Europe) where they can live as cosmopolitans and freely preserve their cultural distinctiveness. They create an expat lifestyle that indicates cosmopolitan conviviality (Duru & Trenz, 2017), and the unique experiences of the interviewees strengthen their connection to Budapest. However, challenges such as the difficulty of the Hungarian language, a decline in democratic values, economic pressure, and rising xenophobia negatively affect the extent of their affinity towards Hungary, making them perceive their presence in the country as temporary. Despite these challenges being reasons for the majority of the interviewees' hesitation applying for Hungarian citizenship, half of the non-EU migrants in this study note that they think about naturalization in Hungary. This is because Hungarian citizenship represents a path to access supranational rights, privileges, and opportunities through EU citizenship (Pogonyi, 2019).

EU migrants in Budapest perceive the EU component of their national citizenship as a form of added value that positively influences their lived legal-political and socio-economic citizenship experience, reinforcing their connection to their national citizenship. As a form of supranational membership, EU citizenship gives EU citizens an identity that differentiates them from non-EU migrants and fosters a feeling of belonging to a secure space with benefits and a broader sense of united solidarity by complementing national citizenship. Some non-EU migrants also feel politically and/or culturally connected to Europe without being an EU citizen:

> Of course, I feel European. I cannot say I'm not feeling European. But, for me, it's more [about] a political understanding than a cultural background. (Ali, non-EU, Western Asia)

In these cases, Europe also represents an abstract region, and identification with regional identities establishes a basis for a cosmopolitan outlook and socio-cultural hybridity, nurturing a shared identity and providing a distinctive perspective in relation to addressing global issues (Schlenker, 2013).

4.2 Experiences of coexistence

The everyday aspects of being a citizen in a complex social and urban context of coexistence with fellow community members, as well as the interactions, engagements, and situations individuals face within the legal, political, and socio-economic realms, shape their understanding of citizenship. The examination of legal-political experiences involves a focus on both institutional and subjective dimensions. The institutional dimension pertains to an individual's legal status, rights and responsibilities, formal and informal citizenship education, and encounters with bureaucracy. In contrast, the subjective dimension involves an individual's sense of security, evaluation of institutions, satisfaction with and trust in the political system and politics, as well as political identification and level of interest in politics. As both dimensions of citizenship are interconnected, they influence each other reciprocally.

Mapping the self-identification narratives of migrants in relation to their transnational context shows that identification with EU citizenship among EU citizens emerges as a higher-order identity than identification with national citizenship. One of the primary factors driving the adoption of European identity among EU migrants is the privileges and benefits that come with EU citizenship status. The latter empowers this group of individuals with notable social, economic, and political advantages and privileges compared to non-EU migrants. Every interviewee who holds EU citizenship emphasizes that being an EU citizen provides them with greater opportunities and facilitates their lives within Europe. Hence, several interviewees prioritize EU citizenship over national citizenship, as they perceive the latter as less significant in the absence of the EU aspect:

> If, one day, my country decides to exit the EU, it will have a huge impact on the trajectory of my life because my status would change. Everything would become much more difficult. I think just the fact that I am an EU citizen makes my life easier. (Ewa, EU, Eastern Europe)

Civic education plays a crucial role in developing an informed, engaged, and responsible citizenry. Most respondents noted the likelihood of having encountered civic education in their school curriculum or at some point in their educational journey, even though they could not recall this exactly. Many interviewees had acquired significant knowledge from their families and from observing their fellow citizens concerning what constitutes a model of a good citizen. There is a consensus among participants regarding the principles that characterize a good citizen. These include active engagement in social and economic activities, adherence to laws, staying informed about political activities, displaying toler-

ance and respect for cultural diversity, voting in elections, paying taxes, and advocating for justice and equality. The interviewees also emphasize that specific socio-cultural norms and values, seen as defining attributes of national citizenship, vary across countries, influencing perceptions of what constitutes a good citizen. Additionally, national governments have the ability to influence the perception of national citizenship and what it means to be a good citizen, drawing on cultural, societal, and political considerations that encompass their political and ideological positions. How political authorities define citizenship and citizens in a country may evoke emotional responses, influencing individuals' self-perception and attachment to that country. As indicated in the quote below, by portraying the adoption of a European influence and mentality as inherently threatening, political authorities in Magnim's country create an 'us versus them' dichotomy and frame citizens who return from Europe as internal others or 'failed citizens' (Anderson, 2013):

> For a foreigner like me trying to come back home and work, you are either considered as a prospective politician [...], or they will put the clamp on you right away to see if you are against the state. As you live abroad, you bring in a European mentality from Europe where more freedom is given to the people. It is seen as a threat; you are seen as a threat. (Magnim, non-EU, Western Africa)

Several interviewees explained that having a formal, legal relationship with a country that has a more structured system in which political authorities act well and the bureaucratic system works efficiently makes them feel more secure and protected in terms of accessing public and private services and opportunities. Being a citizen of such a country or having long-term residence that brings a type of semi-citizenship status grants them the capacity and flexibility to make choices and take action in their daily lives. The efficiency and transparency of public and private services also contribute positively to individuals' emotional connection. The interviews show that a high level of red tape and weak bureaucratic organization in a country may become a driver of emigration, encouraging citizens to look for other countries with better bureaucratic systems. Although the participants generally perceive public services and bureaucratic processes in Hungary as efficient and transparent, they maintain a significant level of skepticism toward public officials and political authorities. This skepticism seems to be rooted in the anti-immigrant stance in the country, which discourages migrants' social and political participation and diminishes their sense of belonging to Hungary, decreasing the chance of integration:

> To be fair, the Hungarian State is pretty transparent, responds pretty quickly... However, the political system is messed up. To be honest, not being able to vote here in the Hungarian Parliamentary election is a good thing. (Jack, non-EU, North America)

> The reason why I don't participate in anything is because I don't feel secure. I always feel like, what if they deport me? That's my first fear. (Sovhona, non-EU, South Asia)

Most interviewees lack trust in government officials and politicians, perceiving them as primarily motivated by personal interests and the interests of specific groups rather than prioritizing the well-being of the public. They convey that their distrust of politics and politicians is not solely rooted in their experiences in their home countries and Hungary, as they generally harbor a distrust towards politicians globally. The level of

trust and satisfaction people have with political institutions, along with their individual experiences, appears to influence the extent of political interest they display. Higher levels of trust and satisfaction may lead to greater engagement, while distrust and dissatisfaction can diminish interest, discouraging political participation. Highly skilled migrants are portrayed as a rarely politicized, highly self-interested group of individuals (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020; Bielewska, 2021). This study reveals that migrants in Budapest represent a wide range of individuals with varying degrees of interest in politics and diverse political identifications. None of them identify as apolitical or present a profile of a self-interested individual who does not care about politics. Nevertheless, some consciously prefer to ignore politics due to the loss of trust in politicians and the political system or a feeling of despair:

> I used to be involved in politics when I was at the university and deeply believed in it. Then, my trust in politics vanished, and I stopped. But I always have my ideals. (Lorenzo, EU, Southern Europe)

An interviewee from a non-EU country emphasized that an individual's perception of citizenship is strongly related to their social and economic experiences in their home country. According to the interviewee, individuals who possess a profound understanding of their homeland, robust backing from particular social networks in their countries, and access to varied opportunities and resources are likely to find satisfaction in their citizenship. Such people may not feel the urge to seek another citizenship or consider altering their existing one, believing that this would offer less. There is a close relation between individuals' perception of their passports as weak or strong documents and their lived social and economic experiences concerning freedom of movement and access to employment, education, and social services. The interviewees note that while being from a respected country enhances social connections, opportunities, and acceptance in Hungary, citizens of countries with negative international reputations due to factors like political regimes, historical and cultural attributes, or socio-economic conditions may feel excluded:

> If you come from a rich country or a country where people have fewer prejudices, you will not be constantly questioned or looked down upon. As a person coming from a country where emigration is high to Western Europe and which people in Europe do not necessarily have a good opinion of for some reason, I sometimes feel that people are distant. (Milan, non-EU, Southern Europe)

EU citizenship, in principle, guarantees non-discrimination toward EU citizens within the EU. Overall, EU migrants enjoy a favorable position within social hierarchies compared to non-EU migrants (Leschke & Weiss, 2023). However, recent studies on the experience of the intra-EU mobility of Eastern and Central European EU citizens have uncovered that they encounter unequal treatment and racialized discrimination within Western Europe's social and economic hierarchies (Lewicki, 2017). Based on the analysis of the interviews with both EU and non-EU migrants, the findings of this study suggest that EU migrants, in general, experience treatment that is fair and equal to that given to Hungarians and other EU migrants when accessing the labor market, education, and social services. Non-EU migrants are more likely to report discrimination in public

and private interactions based on nationality and citizenship, causing feelings of alienation and social exclusion:

> We are third-country citizens, which means that we are going to [have to] deal with things much more than normal people with strong passports. I really don't understand why we are just discriminated against based on our passports. (Gizem, non-EU, Western Asia)

Both EU and non-EU migrants note that once locals realize that they are non-Hungarian or do not speak Hungarian, they may display discriminatory attitudes, non-selectively, in everyday social interactions:

> It does not matter what you are. They don't like you just because you are a foreigner. I think it's a very general concept that if you're an expat, locals might not like you just because you are not a local. (Massimo, EU, Southern Europe)

> I did feel unwelcome on some occasions when I went to institutions. For example, when I was kicked out of the doctor's office with a fever of 39–40 ℃ just because of my lack of knowledge of Hungarian. I would say it happened because I was a foreigner who doesn't speak Hungarian. (Milan, non-EU, Southern Europe)

4.3 Citizenship understanding: Interpreting the bond

Citizenship is not often questioned by people in everyday life since it is considered as taken for granted, an 'inherited property' that transfers membership entitlements through birthright primarily based on nationality (Shachar, 2007). The majority of the interviewees allude to a common experience that while they are in their country of origin, there is 'no need to think about citizenship and being a citizen' (Milto, EU, Southern Europe). However, the interviewees become aware of the implications of their national citizenship when they encounter procedures such as passport controls, applications for work and residence permits, and administrative obligations based on their legal status:

> It was when my application for a work permit was rejected in Hungary. I felt like my world was over. Then, one of my friends reminded me that at least I have a country where I am a citizen and can go back. I knew this before, but I did not realize what I had was such a powerful thing. (Sovhona, non-EU, South Asia)

Interviewees indicate that in everyday interactions, citizenship takes on a subjective meaning encompassing shared social and cultural values and attachments. As exemplified by Lorenzo's remark (EU, Southern Europe), citizenship means 'nothing unless it is not surrounded or linked to particular a culture and common or shared aspects.' When the respondents were prompted to provide three words associated with citizenship, they described citizenship using the words 'passport,' 'belonging,' and 'home.' Citizenship encompasses rights and obligations along with an emotional dimension that involves social and cultural components constructed through relational and participatory processes:

> My citizenship provides me the right to have an identification and build my relationships with states. It builds me. It is like the root of the tree. (Tadeu, EU, Southern Europe)

In everyday life, citizenship becomes a tangible experience that shapes individuals' understanding of their social roles, attitudes, and behaviors as citizens and non-citizens within and beyond political communities, influencing how they think through the manifestations of rights and obligations. It also impacts their feelings, self-positionings, and life paths based on the complex attachments and commitments they maintain, and everyday social interactions. The vast majority view citizenship as a contractual and emotional relationship experienced locally, nationally, regionally, and globally in an intertwined way. They believe that good citizens take responsibility for their actions anywhere they may have an impact, reaching beyond their political community. Many interviewees narrate a form of cosmopolitan convivial solidarity (Duru & Trenz, 2017). They highlight that whenever possible; they act for the well-being and common good of humanity as a whole:

> No matter if I am a citizen or not, as a person and a human being who can make a change and do something good, we need to act responsibly [...] no matter what and where. It is very important for every single human being to be a part of this bigger community. (Shameem, non-EU, Central Asia)

Highly skilled migrants' narratives about citizenship experiences reveal their positioning as patriotic cosmopolitan citizens who reconcile moral and cultural cosmopolitanism (Pogge, 1992; Taraborrelli, 2015; Beck, 2006) with constructive patriotism, marked by critical and reflective attitudes towards their countries and socio-cultural particularities (Schatz, 2020). The findings suggest that the construction of a patriotic cosmopolitan citizen identity through the amalgamation of multiple legal ties and multi-layered belonging enables highly skilled migrants to navigate the complexity of everyday life in transnational settings with cognitive agility. They care for and protect particular social and cultural values, sentiments, and commitments. Their regard for their countries and cultural identity coexists with an appreciation for diverse cultures and a critical stance towards equality. This form of patriotism encourages reflective attitudes toward others, being inclusive and fostering respect for diversity. For patriotic cosmopolitans, citizenship becomes an everyday reality that affects not only their perception of their role and actions within and beyond political communities but also their feelings, self-positioning, and trajectory. They navigate a complex process of blending their attachments and identities to form hybrid selves adaptable to various localities, maximizing the chances of recognition in every context and minimizing social, cultural, and political challenges. Non-EU migrants exhibit this tendency more prominently than EU migrants, as EU migrants' cosmopolitanism is already nurtured by their EU citizenship within the EU context. As the narrative of rootedness signifies a strong patriotic attachment to the country of origin and its particular attributes, and identifying as a world citizen reflects a cosmopolitan stance, the quote below represents the prevailing patriotic cosmopolitan positioning among both EU and non-EU migrants observed in this study:

> I have been living abroad for some years. I still have my roots, but I just feel more like a world citizen. (Sia, EU, Southern Europe)

5 Conclusion

This research investigates the lived citizenship experiences and practices of highly skilled migrants to understand how and why the former contribute to the formation of a specific understanding of citizenship, which, in turn, shapes a distinct type of citizen. The study delves into citizenship experiences and practices that influence the emergence of patriotic cosmopolitan citizens through their intersection and interrelation. In this study, lived citizenship experiences are specified as being the sum of the relational processes of experiences of belonging and coexistence in the public and private realms of everyday life. These categories provide an analytical framework for exploring lived citizenship as the experience of being and becoming a citizen beyond the nation-state. The study highlights affective and subject-defining aspects of citizenship, locating it as an identity and form of belonging alongside legal status, an equally important dimension in a central position.

The analysis of the narratives of highly skilled migrants we interviewed reflects the emergence of patriotic cosmopolitans, harmonizing cultural and moral cosmopolitanism with constructive patriotism. As rooted or patriotic cosmopolitans, they demonstrate critical and reflective perspectives toward their country of origin as well as Hungary, and socio-cultural particularities in both places. They acknowledge humanity as the ultimate unit of moral concern. The emerging hybrid citizen identity is the concurrent narrative by which the self ensures recognition and facilitates social and political participation in global, national, and local contexts, challenging the limits of national identity. The EU and non-EU migrants manage a complex process of blending their multifaceted social attachments and identities to form hybrid selves, capable of adapting to multiple contexts, even in hostile environments with a prevailing anti-immigrant discourse. Through the emerging citizenship understanding, which embraces cosmopolitan values and ideals, the EU and non-EU migrants in this study reconstruct their citizen selves not only within their homeland and Hungary as their country of residence but also within the broader global community. Non-EU migrants exhibit this tendency more prominently than EU migrants, as EU migrants' cosmopolitanism is already nurtured by their EU citizenship within the EU context.

Both EU and non-EU highly skilled migrants develop a strong attachment to Budapest, calling the city their home. This bonding with Budapest is attributable to the city's cosmopolitan setting, which is considered as communicating a sense of inclusion alongside the social and economic opportunities. However, they remain ambivalent about entrenching their affective bond by the acquisition of citizenship in Hungary. This hesitance is triggered by concerns about the implications of democratic backsliding, restrictive immigration policies, and spreading xenophobia. The institutional accessibility and ease of entering Hungary's labor market contrasts with the closeness of Hungarian society, where achieving social recognition requires a certain degree of cultural integration, notably through language proficiency. Both EU and non-EU migrants admit that they occasionally feel excluded by locals, especially in the moments when their foreignness becomes visible through their limited proficiency in the Hungarian language or social manners. Despite these challenges, some non-EU migrants plan to acquire Hungarian citizenship mainly to become EU citizens and enjoy the privileges of the confirmation of being included in the supranational identity, which they deem may also facilitate social acceptance by Hungarians.

In conclusion, this study challenges the conceptualization of the category of highly skilled migrants as a relatively homogenous group of economic actors who are rarely politicized and less willing to integrate. Instead, it proposes considering how they exist as social and political actors with varied experiences and act in global and diverse national contexts based on their subjective understanding. The conclusions of this study emphasize the need for further research to explore the complexity of the consequences of lived experiences in public and private spaces to improve the understanding of citizenship from a comparative perspective.

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Compliance with ethical standards

All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study, which was conducted in accordance with the protocol ref. No. 411 approved by the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects of Bilkent University.

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