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CREATIVE CLASS IN THE BORDERLANDS? THE CASE OF COMMUTING SCHOLARS IN POLAND

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Abstract. Richard Florida claims that members of the "creative class" move to cities, perceived as open and conducive to creative work – a phenomenon which Florida insists is a fundamental economic driver in the Western world. This includes academics and researchers and results in the transfer of knowledge and skills. As the concept of "creative class" was coined in the United States, we may pose the question if it is applicable in other social contexts. The geographical focus of the current paper is on the Polish borderlands. We investigate how international academic commuters, *i.e.* academics travelling to work in Poland from the neighbouring countries, contribute to the knowledge transfer, or more broadly, the "creative transfer". This study, a part of a broader research project involving 100 foreign-born scholars working in Poland, uses a sub-sample of the 16 in-depth interviews with international commuting scholars (as opposed to those who presently live in Poland). The results show that most of the internationally commuting scholars come to Poland strictly to deliver teaching. Focused on this goal, they do not take part in social or cultural life in Poland. Although not earning enough money in their home countries, they do not want to move permanently to Poland. Instead, they use the opportunities given by living near the border. These practices make them more similar to regular economic migrants, rather than members of the "creative class", although some traces of the "creative transfer" can be identified.

Keywords: academic migration, commuting scholars, creative class, creative transfer, highly skilled migrants, knowledge transfer.

Introduction: cross-border knowledge transfer in Eastern European academia

In this paper, we attempt to answer the question of how, if at all, international academic commuters, *i.e.*, academics coming to work in Poland from the neighbouring countries (Mäkelä et al., 2017), contribute to the "diffusion of knowledge", or "knowledge transfer" – understood as dissemination of ideas. As Williams puts it,

> "potentially, migrants are significant actors in knowledge transfer, especially where international borders constitute substantial economic and cultural barriers, and/or

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> where co-presence and corporeal proximity are critical for learning and tacit knowledge transfer" (2007, p. 362).

Typically "knowledge transfer" is defined as "the process through which one unit (*e.g.*, group, department, or division) is affected by the experience of another" (Argote & Ingram, 2000, p. 151). Whilst the so-called "explicit knowledge" is transferred through the process of codified, formal, verbal education, "tacit knowledge" is defined as intangible knowledge, gained through the process of experiencing, training, imitating others, growing up in specific conditions or rooting in a specific community. It includes both the knowledge of "how" to do specific things and the interpretative framework for understanding all social phenomena (Polanyi, 1966, pp. 3–14). Other theorists identified specific types of tacit knowledge: it is embodied, embrained, encultured, and embedded form (Blackler, 2002).

For the study of migration and what we call a "creative transfer", it is especially important that "knowledge has elements that are place- and/or culture-specific, as well as being embedded in specific institutions" (Williams & Baláž, 2008, p. 38). Although we agree with the authors that the notions of "skills", "competencies", and "knowledge" should be distinguished from one another, our main question refers to the broad set of ideas that can be transferred from one academic system to another. We are also building on the notion of "creative transfer", which is rare but does appear in scholarly literature when it is necessary to broaden the meaning of the "knowledge transfer", *e.g.* when the transfer of artistic skills between teachers and music students is being analysed (Triantafyllaki, 2016). Thus, we use the notion of "academic creative transfer" as the ideas in question are not limited to "explicit knowledge" but also different types of "tacit knowledge", and intangible organisation patterns, the diffusion of which is possible in particular through the mobility of scholars. In the case of foreign-born academics, the ideas being transferred include but are not limited to new theoretical perspectives, foreign empirical studies, new methodologies or research sensibilities, new curricula, or new problems.

1. Settled migrants, academic mobility, and creativity

As theorised by Florida, creative class, *i.e.* artists, writers, musicians, scientists, researchers, scholars, and entrepreneurs, "share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit" (Florida, 2011, pp. 8–9). They tend to move to the city perceived as open and conducive to creative work, which stimulates economic growth. In the United States (US), the cities attracting the creative class were, *e.g.* Austin, San Francisco, Boston, or Seattle. Interestingly, Alarcón's (1999) study points out that migrants who value openness to diversity, tolerance, and cosmopolitanism are responsible for the tremendous success of the Silicon Valley (California, US), as compared to Massachusetts Route 128 (US)[1], which is characterised by less diversity. This corroborates Florida's claim that "creativity requires diversity", which is found in places where people of all kinds (in terms of gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, but also occupation) live together, offering different capacities and perspectives to the community and economy (also see Jacobs, 1992; Andersson, 2011).

[1] A technology cluster.

A crucial transfer of knowledge and skills occurs as a result of this cohabitation (Florida, 2011; Florida & Mellander, 2015)[2].

In the Western cultural contexts, traditional, settled, foreign-born scholars are proved to account for innovation and the dissemination of new ideas. A great variety of studies done in the US and Canada show that foreign-born academics are more productive than native scholars; they more often publish highly-quoted articles and devote more time to doing research than to teaching (see Corley & Sabharwal, 2007, p. 909; Webber, 2012, p. 709; Kim et al., 2011). Moreover, the results of the study done by Libaers and Wang (2012) suggest that foreign-born academics are also more effective in applying for research funding, and may therefore be perceived as being more entrepreneurial. In this sense, they are often considered as members of the "creative class" (Florida, 2011; Florida & Mellander, 2015).

The findings of the studies on "knowledge transfer" and "creative class" cannot, however, be easily applied to the Central and Eastern European academic systems (cf. Table 1). First, the Western research projects were focused on traditional migrants – settled employees of selected academic systems. Secondly, the volume of academic migration is much higher in the global centres (*e.g.*, US, United Kingdom) than in the peripheries (Luczaj & Bahna, 2020). Moreover, the foreign-born academics in the West enter highly competitive job markets (Marshall et al., 2009; Brechelmacher et al., 2015), while the competition in the Central and Eastern Europe is much weaker (Luczaj, 2020). Third, in Poland and in other Central European countries there is a relatively high percentage of commuting scholars – circular migrants who span two academic systems – which is rather uncommon in the Western world (Rostan & Höhle, 2014). The fourth main difference between the Western context and the situation in Central and Eastern Europe is that peripheral institutions (Rodriguez Medina, 2014) need new ideas more than their Western counterparts because it is their only chance to gain ground in the global system of knowledge production. As Williams and Baláž put it, attracting "academic and scientific workers is the most obvious way of upgrading a national innovation system via international migration" (2008, p. 125).

One of the (imperfect) indicators of the disparities between "Western" and "Central and Eastern European" institutions are international university rankings. These differences are visible even if Anglo-Saxon countries are not taken into account. On the upper echelons of each widely-recognised ranking (The World University Ranking, Academic Ranking of World Universities and QS World University Rankings) are universities located in Belgium, Germany and in the Netherlands. At the same time, even the best Central European universities occupy distant positions (usually below 200th place). These top universities make local HE systems recognisable, despite many lesser-known universities located in the West.

[2] The theory of the "creative class" was developed by Florida just as his concept was gaining more and more confirmation in statistics. The concept itself, as well as the author, had a lot of supporters and critics. In the end, the reality of the new problems of "creative cities" verified some ideas upon which the general theory has been built. Florida himself admitted that he was too optimistic in thinking that the implementation of the "creative class" paradigm would automatically revitalise entire cities – including all areas and social classes. In his second most influential book, published in 2017, he criticised himself for being too naïve, but at the same time, he sustained the argument that the urban crisis is one of the most significant problems of today (Florida, 2017). Although we are aware of the political consequences of implementing Florida's concept as a regulative idea in the US (also see Wetherell, 2017; Dorling, 2017), as well as the fact that the author deeply rethought this idea in his newest book, we still find the category of the "creative class" (as well as a "creative transfer") cognitively and practically useful in the context of researching academic communities.

Table 1. Knowledge transfer via international migration in Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe (source: created by authors)

	Western cultural context	Central and Eastern European cultural context
Type of migration	Settled researchers	Settled and commuting researchers
Competition	Highly-competitive job markets	Weak competition, staff shortages
Employer's reputation	Globally recognised institutions	Peripheral institutions

The critical analysis of theories and empirical studies on "knowledge transfer" and the "creative class" prompted the research question of this paper*:* How do international academic commuters, *i.e.*, academics coming to work in Poland from the neighbouring countries, contribute to the "creative transfer"? In other words, we investigate whether they are members of the local creative classes or not.

2. Methodology

The empirical material used in this article comes from nationwide research conducted in Poland in 2018 and 2019. This paper focuses on the subsample of the 16 in-depth interviews with international commuting scholars, a phenomenon typical for Eastern Europe (Rostan & Höhle, 2014). All but two lived in one of the neighbouring countries. These interviews had been collected within a broader research project involving 100 foreign-born scholars in Poland.

The method applied in the research were in-depth and biographically-focused interviews (King et al., 2019; Creswell, 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Boyce & Neale, 2006). The interview questions focused on: the motivation for migration to Poland, the development of the respondents' academic careers, their scholarly productivity, their perception of Poland as a country for living, and their plans for the future. Although the sample was not representative, it was stratified according to the official data from the *POLon Register*, therefore, it recreates the structure of the study population in terms of (1) gender, (2) the region of origin, (3) parts of Poland where they work and (4) academic discipline (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and humanities and social sciences (HSS)).

In order to create a database of potential respondents, we applied the onomastic method, which is often used in migration studies (cf. Prandner et al., 2019; Schnell et al., 2013; Czaika & Parsons, 2017; Mucha & Łuczaj, 2018, p. 85; Łuczaj et al., 2020). We were searching through publicly available employee lists ("name-based sampling", see Schnell et al., 2014), which is a well-rooted practice in the research of foreign scholars. This approach has resulted in a list of scholars with the names that seemed to be foreign, which we verified using online sources (*i.e.* websites of universities, professional online platforms such as *LinkedIn* or *ResearchGate* and *Google Scholar* search engine). All these sources enabled us to determine with confidence whether the person pre-placed in the database was actually born abroad.

As it was mentioned before, this study examines part of the mentioned population – scholars who do not reside in Poland permanently but commute[3]. They were hired by Polish universities and migrate circularly for short periods from time to time. The respondents are a group of 16 people, coming from Ukraine (4), Slovakia (4), Germany (3), Czech Republic (2), Belarus (1), and two other small Western European countries. The majority of them were male (10), and the average age was 54 years (the oldest one is 70, the youngest is 33). The vast majority of them had a post-doctoral degree, *e.g.* "habilitation" (12) or a doctoral degree (4). All but one (15) were hired at the Polish public universities. Half of the sample represented HSS (8), and another half – STEM (8). One interviewee was employed in a purely research position.

3. Commuting academics as a "creative class"?

3.1. Cultural capital from abroad – a chance for peripheral regions

As Florida (2011, p. 16) puts it, creativity "requires a supportive environment – a broad array of social, cultural, and economic stimuli. Creativity is thus associated with the rise of new work environments, lifestyles, associations, and neighborhoods, which in turn are conducive to creative work. Such a broadly creative environment is critical for generating technological creativity and the commercial innovations and wealth that flow from it". In our sub-sample, as many as 10 interviewees out of 16 were commuting to the voivodeship (province) located adjacent to another country (Belarus, Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia, Ukraine). None of these regions is known for innovation (see Table 1), based on the Regional Innovation Scoreboard. Out of 10 bordering regions of Poland, five were classified as regions with "modest regional performance" (being a second-worst option, on a 12-point scale from "modest –" to "leader +"), one was "modest +", one "moderate", and three "moderate –" (see Table 2). In the entire European Union, regional income can be explained by differences in innovative performance, and "a laggard innovative performance may thus lead to widening or persistent regional income disparities" (Williams & Baláž, 2008, p. 134). The scores of Polish borderlands do not resemble the optimal institutional environment, even if some big cities located in the borderland region are a locus of cultural and institutional specificity, *e.g.* Lublin, Poland being "an academic centre popular among Ukrainian students, and also a city with a long tradition of cultural relations with Ukraine" (Górny & Śleszyński, 2019, p. 339).

From this perspective, especially if we agree that "all knowledge is personal knowing" (Polanyi & Prosch, 1975, p. 44), the commuting employees can effectively facilitate the co-operation between two organisations:

> "an individual's persistent regular presence in two places makes possible the development of extensive social networks and experiences of social integration that are unavailable to the more 'butterfly-like' mobility of the serial migrant" (Williams & Baláž, 2008, p. 101).

[3] The categorisation was sometimes problematic. For instance, it was unclear whether or not we should include a scholar who lived in Poland from Monday to Friday and spent weekends with his family abroad, while a typical commuter visited Poland for a couple of days once in a while, often also during weekends. Eventually, we decided to include this person.

Table 2. Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2019 (source: created by authors according to data from European Commission and Maastricht University (Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology – MERIT, see Jokinen, 2020))

Border voivodeship	Regional performance group
West Pomeranian	Modest
Lubusz	Modest
Opole	Modest
Podlaskie	Modest
Warmian-Masurian	Modest
Lublin	Modest +
Lower Silesian	Moderate –
Silesian	Moderate –
Podkarpackie	Moderate –
Lesser Poland	Moderate

The commuters have a potential for being knowledge transmitters because they possess adequate cultural capital, *i.e.* the knowledge of cultural norms, tastes, and qualifications (Bourdieu, 1997). By definition, commuting scholars have high skills confirmed by their diplomas and other professional qualifications. These were the beacons of what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as institutionalised cultural capital. In their countries of origin, they occupied prestigious positions and yet were forced to commute due to the unfavourable exchange rate between cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47): "I have a job at [name of the university] I am the head of the department there. I am still here and there" (W45); "I have been in science for 30 years and in [country of origin], I am the head of the department, so in addition to teaching, there is also research" (W56).

Relatively often, the commuters came from socially advantageous circles. At least three respondents had inherited high cultural and social capital from their parents – they were the children of professors and often experienced extended stays abroad during their childhood:

> "My father, a professor, has always supported me in my scientific work, and he was a kind of personal scientific manager for me. [...] I come from a family in which there are more than forty lawyers, including a couple of professors" (W9);

> "I grew up in an academic family. […] Well, I have not 'run away' from that. [...] I have two sons who are adults. […] The second son also works as an academic lecturer" (W56).

The transfer of cultural capital from abroad is associated with the dissemination of what Williams and Baláž (2008) called "tacit knowledge transfer". Through activities such as cooperation among universities, research facilities and businesses or movement of research and development personnel, knowledge that cannot be easily codified is disseminated. Mobile scholars possessed institutionalised and embodied cultural capital which could be transferred. In the next sections, we will demonstrate that this potential remains largely untapped, and discuss why commuting scholars are not always a "creative class".

3.2. Straddles: between countries and social classes

The distinctive feature of commuting scholars from countries neighbouring Poland (Ukraine, Belarus, Germany, Slovakia, Czech Republic) is that they are working simultaneously in both countries (12 of 16 interviewees), straddling Poland and the country of origin much more often than academics from the other parts of Europe and the Global North. Florentina Constantin, researching Romanian workers in Italy, proposed the term "long-time commuting" for this type of migration. She refers to multiannual and permanent commuting which has a background in an encouraging legislative policy (Constantin, 2009). The life story of an academic who commutes every workday to Poland after giving her daughter a lift to school, and then returns to her home country late in the afternoon, is probably the most obvious case of being "caught between two countries". Other interviewees provided us with similar examples:

> "Obviously, sometimes when I am in [home country] I think to myself, I would like to be in [name of the Polish city], but sometimes when I am in [name of the Polish city] I think: I would rather go home. I am already accustomed to this feeling. But you see, it is not emigration in this strict sense" (W52).

> "Straddling" two places makes the life of these migrants more complicated, as there is no balance between the two places. The residence of commuters is always outside Poland, where they come to do their duties in order to return as soon as possible.

You do not want to move to Poland? "No. Well, why, why should I? My family is there [home country] […]. I was born there and I spent most of my life there" (W13); "My wife [nationality], lives in [city in neighbouring country], visits me here [Poland]. I visit her on weekends, as it is not very far" (W16).

Commuting scholars, however, can also be seen as straddling in a different sense, as their professional situation paradoxically resembles both the "creative" and the "working class". The majority of the commuting scholars (11 cases out of 16) admitted that their post at Polish universities is not the only but the second one, and sometimes one of the many jobs they have had. It can even be said that for some of the commuting academics, their work in Poland is of secondary priority – in terms of emotional engagement: "My main position is at [name of the university] but I'm also a visiting professor in [name of a city] and in [name of a city]" (W46); "And in addition, I am a professor in [Western country], and an associate professor at the [name of the university]" (W13).

These interviewees used to work at Polish universities solely for economic and social reasons, and treated it simply as a job to be done to earn an extra salary. Their jobs are undoubtedly the white-collar type, but the precarious working conditions resemble the reality of factory workers, who are often forced to undertake more than one permanent position and go from one workplace to another:

> "I earn better here [in Poland] than at home. What I earn in [name of the country of origin] pays for the apartment, for electricity and so on. These are very expensive and take up almost everything. Caring for a mother also costs a lot of money. My local salary is gone immediately, so without this [position in Poland] […] I just wouldn't be able to do it" (W56);

> "I come in the winter semester, once a month, but in the summer semester I have more classes and I am there every two weeks, coming for three days […]. For 11 years, I travelled from [name of the city] to [name of a Polish city] by bus, and now I go by an Intercity train [...] and come back home by bus, not by train, because then I would have to stay over one more night here [...] and I can't, because I have to go to work" (W45).

The economic necessity expressed here is associated with the dispositions of popular classes, not the intellectual and symbolic elites which university professors belong to in other countries (Bourdieu, 1997). Such a contradiction puts into question the "creative class" status of Central and Eastern Europe commuters. Usually, they are not Florida's well-off professionals, satisfied with their earnings and lifestyle, but people forced to work and commute just as unskilled workers.

4. Linguistic capital: between working language and global language

Another necessary condition to fully exploit the creative potential of migrants is good linguistic and communication competence (Reitz et al., 2014; Mahmud et al., 2014; Turchick Hakak et al., 2010; Turney & Kao, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Ma & Yeh, 2010; Tang, 2015; Almeida et al., 2012; Zikic et al., 2010). In Poland, the dominant language in academia is still Polish, a language of marginal global importance, and it is often not sufficient to master English understood as a global *lingua franca* (Jenkins, 2014).

Half of the commuting scholars consider their Polish as very good (8) and the rest as limited (5) or non-existing (3). The language proficiency of commuting scholars turned out to be closely linked with the country of origin. The vast majority of fluent Polish speakers among the commuters came from other Slavic countries. Moreover, many of them were representatives of the humanities and social sciences, often language scholars, whose fluent Polish is indispensable in their teaching:

> "I am immersed in this language; I watch Polish television series, I study the Polish language. Obviously, I have, as one man said – an Eastern accent. But I study and of course when I talk quickly it is immediately discernible that I'm not a Pole. For me, Polish isn't difficult; I read books and sometimes I forget that I'm reading them in Polish, and not in [the mother tongue]" (W52);

> "I've known Polish since I was a child. Well, I did not regularly study Polish at school, as I'm not Polish – it was rather by watching Polish TV. And then I started to read Lem's books at the beginning of my studies. Lem fascinated me, I learned about him. And my first book by Lem was 'Powrót z gwiazd' ('The return from the stars'). I always read in the Polish language. And then I did a PhD about the culture of the 19th century, and there was Polish literature all over. And then I stayed in Poland many times, on internships" (W9).

At the same time, scholars from the West had limited Polish skills, but usually (though not always) spoke good English. In most cases, a major problem was the difficulty of the Polish language, but one interviewee admitted that he was unable to learn a language of any country he used to teach in: "As you may hear, this is a problem for me to speak Polish. And Polish is very difficult to learn for [nationality]" (W13).

And how is your Polish language? Do you know Polish, the basics, or not at all?

> "No, actually because I also teach in [first country] and [second country] and also all these years in [third country], it's not possible for me to learn all the languages. And the Slavic languages are quite different. I speak English, French, German, and some Spanish and Portuguese, but I have no time to also learn Polish" (W46);
>
> "I'm very sad about this, but I was just very tired after work, and I tried to pick it up a bit, but it's also a complicated language" (W83).

While English may be sometimes sufficient to teach in the Polish academia, the lack of proficiency in Polish restricted the extent to which the commuters could participate in the local debates. Conversely, the commuters from the former Eastern Bloc countries who usually spoke Polish as well as Russian or other Slavic languages were less fluent in English. This made them less able to participate in the global exchange of ideas (publications, conferences) and also forced them to rely on secondary sources, which grounded the peripheral position of the Polish academic system (Warczok & Zarycki, 2016). The commuters from the Eastern Bloc were not willing to invest their time in English language courses, as they were already multi-lingual, and English has limited value in their primary posts.

The "creative transfer" seems possible when a scholar can communicate both in the local language and English (unless English is the local language). Our study shows that most of the commuting scholars in Poland knew either the local language or the global English. Thus, language is another factor possibly hampering the creative transfer to Polish academia.

5. Everyday duties: teaching and limited research and service work

Belonging to the "creative class" can also be judged by the type of work one is involved in. For the majority of the commuting scholars, the main responsibility is teaching classes, advising students, reviewing. They are more lecturers than creative research workers: "I devote 90% of my time [in Poland] to teaching" (W37); "In Poland, my only duty is academic teaching" (W46).

The commuting scholars are very occasionally, if not at all, involved in service and research tasks. The probable cause is the lack of their permanent presence in Poland, resulting in limited possibilities of cooperation which very often requires immediate decisions and dynamic communication: "I do not [have any service duties]. [My work] is teaching only" (W29); "I'm just a member of the faculty council" (W31).

Membership in various boards is the only form of service work the commuters were involved in. Four respondents declared that they are members of the departments' councils. Only one professor was the organiser of the international master's programme. Another professor builds a connection between a Polish university and the institutional network of Western European research and professional institutions. These two interviewees, both from the West, can therefore be classified as creative employees, who contribute to "creative transfer".

These empirical findings shed light on a salient theoretical issue: "the transnational capital", or new ideas, technologies and information that abet globalisation (Zweig et al., 2004, p. 735)[4]. The narratives of our interviewees indicate that they do not possess this type of

[4] The transnational capital, in our understanding of this term, is a sub-type of Bourdieu's cultural capital.

capital, as they are involved solely in local, cross-border cooperation, and do not have broader transnational professional networks. The presented results confirm that the commuting scholars are rather a solution to staff shortages (see Luczaj & Bahna, 2020, 2021). The ongoing reform, however, can soon alter this situation. According to the new legal regulations, there is no longer any specific number of professors and doctors required for each academic programme. Therefore, we hypothesise that the number of foreigners employed at Polish universities will probably drop, especially if the commuters are taken into account.

6. Social life: missed opportunity for informal transfer

A sense of belonging and collegial relations are the *sine qua non* condition for "tacit knowledge" transfer via informal conversations, joint initiatives, and broadening social and professional networks through private relationships. Unlike Florida's creative workers, commuting scholars in Poland have much weaker bonds with the receiving region. They often treated work in Poland as a second, additional, job and usually did not intend to settle there – their commitment was time-limited. This resulted in weak social relations and a sense of collegiality, as well as limited cultural contacts. They often did not build friendships and closer relationships with their colleagues, which could have resulted in getting to know each other's research interests and creating an informal platform for cooperation in joint scholarly projects, based on different types of collaboration and/or mentorship. Research shows (*e.g.* Abramson et al., 2019) that friendship and a sense of community are crucial for success in developing collaborative projects, where the creative transfer may occur.

Moreover, the interviewed commuting scholars do not follow Polish political, economic and social news and do not take part in Polish cultural life (do not go out to cinemas, theatres, restaurants, *etc.*). They are not socially anchored in Poland (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016) (*e.g.* thanks to the ownership of a property), because they stay overnight in various hotels and university apartments. Their private life takes place in the country of origin (or permanent residence), and they are in Poland only professionally: "I do not live here. To feel more Polish, it is necessary to be here and spend a month or half a year" (W45); "Social meetings are unlikely to be happening here specifically. There is no time for that. There is no occasion" (W56);

> "I haven't seen much of [the city], because I was working a lot when I was there, and then I left on Friday afternoons. I left quite early to be in [the country of origin] with my family, so I never had a party over the weekend in [the city], which is a real pity, yes. And then when we went to some restaurant, I visited the city once, but I didn't get to know it as I would have liked" (W83).

Despite this "absence" in Polish everyday life, almost half of the subsample, at least partially identify themselves with the Polish academic community:

> "I have a story, maybe an anecdote [...] There was a jubilee, and I came to one village where a writer lived and worked. There was a big event there, speeches of writers, people, *etc.* And then someone said, 'A professor from – and here was mentioned the name of the Polish university – will now give a speech'. Well, I started my speech, and

> then they said, […]: 'Oh, you see how well this Pole speaks Ukrainian. You can't even hear an accent'. For them, I am a Polish professor and that's it" (W52);
>
> "They see me as part of the Polish professorship, and I also feel aligned with them. So I usually meet up with them. And sometimes they contact me about the research they are doing, you know, we exchange ideas about it, so yes. I don't feel completely isolated, although, of course, my time in Poland is limited" (W46).

These quotations demonstrate clearly that there is a chance for informal transfer of knowledge, but the lack of collegial relations hinders this opportunity and the potential creative transfer is being unused. Various capitals that the commuting scholars possess remain largely untapped because they cannot quite fulfil their potential while straddling two cultures and jobs. The difficult financial situation coupled with the language barrier and the common practice of taking up two academic posts in two different countries result in the commuters being overworked (see Table 3). As presented above, the results of our analysis show that despite their "creative potential", the commuters may be called the representatives of the "creative class" only to some extent.

Table 3. Foreign-born commuting academics as creative class (source: created by authors)

Creative class	International commuters
High cultural capital	High cultural capital
Settlement and local social networks	Commuting and disrupted sense of collegiality
Favourable economic situation – well-paid jobs	Unfavourable economic situation
Professional motivation to relocate and interest in cities – technological clusters and cultural centres	Non-professional motivations to relocate – feasibility of international commuting
English as a global *lingua franca*	Language barrier – Polish and English are required in different contexts
Managerial and non-managerial positions	Non-managerial positions only
Involved in the production and transmission of new ideas	Involved only in the transmission of ideas (teaching)

Discussion: why "peripheral" transfer instead of "creative" transfer?

The results show that the commuting scholars are very different from the settled researchers. These two groups have a lot in common – due to shared qualifications and other indicators of cultural capital, but are very different when other sets of criteria are applied (see Table 4). The commuting scholars usually come to Poland strictly for teaching purposes. Focused on this goal, they do not take part in social or cultural life. Although they do not earn enough money in their countries of origin (or do not have any position there), they do not want to move permanently to Poland, but take advantage of the opportunities given by living by the border. These practices make them more similar to economic migrants, often engaged in dual employment (Quassoli, 1999). Unlike their Western counterparts, they are not being employed by the top institutions (Luczaj & Bahna, 2020), but rather by less prestigious universi-

ties – the peripheries within peripheries. Unlike Western settled professors, the commuting scholars in Poland build bridges between two countries, and yet do not possess "transitional capital", which gets created when the many distinct academic cultures meet. They, however, span two countries and strengthen the relationships between those two cultures. This finding is yet another argument for replacing the old notion of a "brain drain" focused on one-sided advantages with a wider concept of "brain circulation" emphasising the mutual benefits of international migration (Robertson, 2006).

Moreover, this picture of circular academic migration which spans two not-so-different academic cultures calls for a re-evaluation of the concept of a "boundary". In her recent paper, the anthropologist Gershon (2019, p. 414) suggested that this notion can be replaced with "ecotones", or spaces where "two ecological zones coexist in the same place". The transfer analysed in this paper usually spans two peripheral countries, which would not help any of them to join the global academic elite. The ecotone on the Polish-German border is of a different nature, as it spans a rather peripheral (Polish) and rather central (German) higher education system. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised scholars commuting from Germany to Poland did so because they could not find a suitable position at home.

Table 4. Foreign-born academic in the Western and Eastern European context (source: created by authors)

Criteria	Western cultural context	Eastern European cultural context
Cultural capital	High	High
Linguistic capital	High (working language is global language)	Low (working language is not a global language; English is not sufficient outside the classroom)
Type of migration	Settled researchers	Settled and commuting researchers
Type of employment	One main contract	Moonlighting, two jobs as a cultural norm
Employers	Top institutions looking for innovation	Average, often peripheral, universities looking for academic teachers
Main duties	Research	Teaching
Spanning two countries	No, or distance relationship	Yes, due to physical movement and face-to-face meetings
Transnational capital	High, due to global cooperation	Low, due to a lack of stable relations outside the home country and Poland

The presence of commuting scholars in Poland instead of "creative transfer" advances the phenomenon that can be referred to as a "peripheral transfer". It shares most of the characteristics of what has been dubbed "intra-regional" knowledge transfer in migration studies (Williams & Baláž, 2008). This kind of academic exchange provides frequent transfers due to frequent contacts and dense networks. The cost of such transfer is low due to geographical proximity and relatively cheap local transport in Central Europe. On top of that, both tacit and explicit knowledge can be easily transferred due to the lack of serious cultural barriers (linguistic and cultural similarities emphasised by the majority of the interviewees). The most

important problems of this form of transfer are, however, the "relatively low degree of novelty and uniqueness of shared knowledge" and "more limited choice of alternative knowledge sources" (over-embeddedness) (Williams & Baláž, 2008, p. 137). The individuals are not to blame, however, for this failure. The institutional factors (the lack of innovation culture) in their workplaces make it difficult to contribute to the creative transfer since there are not supposed to be innovators, but teachers. Moreover, moonlighting and only short stays abroad make it more difficult to be the "creative class" outside their home country.

Conclusions

The creative transfer to Poland is hampered by the power relations in the global academia, making Poland unattractive for most of the settled migrants and commuters (including outstanding scholars from the neighbouring countries), but also an internal logic of peripheral systems. It has been proved that in regions with low levels of mobility, such as the Polish borderlands, managers and other decision-makers within each subsystem of the economy know each other, and the role of social capital – *e.g.* local ties and knowledge of local customs – becomes more prominent in finding a job and being productive. As Williams and Baláž (2008, p. 142) put it elegantly, "migrants lack the encultured and embedded knowledge to be effective participants in these knowledge transactions". The low transfer is thus the effect of the interplay of individual factors (*e.g.* a lack of language skills, limited transnational capital of foreign-born scholars), local structural factors (*e.g.* closed power circles), and global structural factors (the composition of the global field of knowledge production). For the reasons discussed in this paper, the commuting scholars are not the agents of creative academic transfer, even if they build some cross-border connections and serve as qualified teachers.

Our findings suggest several recommendations. First, the state should promote creative transfer by encouraging universities to hire academics involved not only in teaching but also in research to tap their potential. Special programmes and policies facilitating border crossing and obtaining a residence permit would be very helpful. Secondly, universities should start taking actions to integrate commuting scholars with Polish colleagues, so that they would have a chance to feel like a part of the Polish academic community. Finally, it seems reasonable to start using the linguistic potential of commuting scholars by, for example, encouraging them to teach in their native languages (*e.g.*, Russian, German), which could also be beneficial for Polish graduate students from the entire university or students enrolled in language programmes.

Further research in this vein could take into account different forms of knowledge transfer, *e.g.* the entrepreneurship of academic migrants. The in-depth analysis of the students' and co-workers' attitude to the academic commuters from Central and Eastern European countries (*e.g.*, the feedback on their communication skills, academic knowledge) needs further attention, because it may influence the way they are perceived. Also, the contribution of commuting scholars to the development of curricula should be studied in the future. Furthermore, there are many unanswered questions related to gender differences. In this study, we did not observe a significant gender imbalance in the number of men and women among the commuters (men represented approx. 60% in the general sample as well as in the

commuters sub-sample) nor any significant differences in the migration patterns between the commuting men and women. This may be related to the fact that commuters are usually older (average age: 54) than average international academics (average age: 45), and family life impacted their career choices to a lesser extent. The in-depth analysis of the impact of gender on the commuter's careers would require more interviews with men and women in similar positions, and perhaps also interviews with their family members.

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