Conclusions

The main goal of the present research was to tackle a quite new and relatively understudied migration issue: undocumented and professional migrations of Poles and Bulgarians to Brussels. The relevancy and the need for conducting such a study was dictated by the lack of systematic and in-depth research on undocumented migrations from Eastern Europe and the rudimentary knowledge about Eastern Europeans in Brussels.

The selection of Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels as the main research groups was chosen to provide a basis for comparative analysis of migration practices and future migration and settlement plans of nationals from new European Union member states and prospective EU applicant countries. The numerical presence of these two groups in Brussels also played a role in the research group selection process.

Working towards the goals of 1) providing a broad portrait of Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels; 2) identifying a possible theoretical model for explaining the aforementioned migrations; 3) evaluating the social and occupational position of undocumented migrants in Brussels, we have designed a three stage research. Firstly, it is an exploratory study of the two populations. Secondly, it also involves theoretical research evaluating the powers of social capital theory and cumulative causation theory as an explanation to the migrations under study. Thirdly, it is an exploration of the social and occupational position of these migrants in terms of marginalization and possibility for upward social mobility. In the next paragraphs, we will present a succinct summary of the research results obtain and we will conclude by assessing the methodological grounds for viewing these research findings as valid and generalizable.

In the first part of this thesis, we outlined the historical context of twentieth century European migrations while giving special attention to migrations from Poland and Bulgaria before and after the Iron Curtain. This analysis illustrated the major trends in outflows from the two countries and the factors that created reductions or escalations in the movements of these respective populations. Both Polish and Bulgarian migrations were shown to intensify

significantly after the process of abolishing totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe began and allowed for the free movement of people for the first time in over forty years. Respectively, the occurrence of undocumented migrations from these post-totalitarian countries is linked to the fall of the Iron Curtain and to the introduction of restrictive migration policies by Western European countries, which pronounced Eastern European countries to be safe countries of origin and, thus, no longer granted asylum to applicants from the former totalitarian block. Since economic deprivation and general poverty of the newly liberated countries are high, it is not surprising that migration pressures from Eastern Europe did not diminish, despite limited possibilities for legal migration. Undocumented economic migration has become one of the major income generating recourses for Eastern Europeans and this tendency has persisted continuously since 1989.

The exploratory study of the two populations is aimed at providing a broad portrait of Poles and Bulgarians in Brussels by presenting profiles of the migrants, their motivations for migration, their living and occupational practices in Brussels, plans for future migration or settling in Brussels and the respective steps undertaken for regularizing their status in this country, returning to their country of origin or remaining undocumented for an indefinite time.

Some of the results obtained at this research stage are similar to the finding of other authors who have tackled the issue of irregular migrants in Brussels (Leman, Siewiera & Van Broeck, 1994, Slimane, 1995; Nwolosa-Okanga, 1999; Adam *et al*., 2002). Concordantly with these previous studies, we have confirmed the tendency of undocumented migrants to concentrate residentially in the inner city area, and to occupy housing with substandard living conditions, which is usually shared with other co-nationals. The working activities of Poles and Bulgarians are also primarily concentrated in a few sectors, which traditionally host undocumented migrants, such as construction, renovation, building, food and beverage service industry (horeca) and domestic services.

Having pointed to the fact that past research on undocumented economic migration is still inconclusive and in a rudimentary stage of development, we believe that the remainder of our research provides innovative and revealing characteristics of the

undocumented migrants which, until the present moment, were not advocated by large scale studies with more than a few respondents. We will continue by the presenting the aspects that are similar for both undocumented Poles and Bulgarians. The differential characteristics of the two groups will be summarized afterwards.

The first particularity we discerned is that both undocumented Poles and Bulgarians are economic migrants driven by the need to secure income or to increase their household income.

Secondly, both groups do not constitute the least educated and professionally unqualified segment of society in their respective country of origin. All the migrants in our research population are holders of at least a secondary education. Some are holders of master's and bachelor's degrees, and a great majority of the population has specialized professional training usually in the field of construction, electrical services, plumbing or mechanics, which has facilitated their occupational adaptation and mobility in Brussels. Contrary to what might be expected, once in Brussels, undocumented migrants manage to find jobs in less than three weeks time (unless a job has been secured even before migration took place) and the expansion of work contacts and the creation of a network of satisfied clients who recommend the migrants develops very fast, so that in a couple of months, the migrants do not need to search for new jobs or to advertise their services actively, but instead receive job offers from former or new clients. With a workload of at least 60 hours per week on average, migrants generate quite high incomes, according to their own understanding and needs. An income of between 1500 € and 2000 € per month is secured by most migrants and is viewed as sufficient for surviving in Brussels and for achieving the goals set prior to migration (such as to increase overall household income, or to have an income at all, to support family members, to invest in projects at home such as household renovations, purchasing property or goods, investing in a small business). In this sense, one should not perceive undocumented migrants as belonging to the most destitute and underprivileged layer of society in Brussels based solely on their occupation of cheap and run-down housing and minimal purchasing activities in Brussels. Migrants arrive in

Brussels with a focus on working, having the highest level of income as possible, and saving, and in order to achieve these goals, all expenses are reduced to a minimum.

Similar for both groups is also a lack of or minimum social interactions with Belgians. Contact with the local population is strictly work-related and only a minority of the respondents admit to being interested in socializing with natives. When this is the case, it turns out that the main motivation for such contact is not merely socializing but broadening the possibility for obtaining jobs. In this context, we reveal that undocumented Bulgarians and Poles do not perceive themselves as integrated to the Belgian society. Migrants place a clear boundary between being formally integrated, according to criteria such as having a job, speaking the French (and, in a few cases, Dutch) language, and complying with the social order, and experiencing a subjective feeling of integration. The subjective feeling of integration verbalized as "I am being accepted as an equal human being by Belgians and I am wanted as a friend and company" is, according to the studied population, impossible to achieve in Belgium and, even more importantly, undocumented migrants themselves are not interested in achieving this level of integration. This stems largely from the respondents' orientation towards return to the country of origin or from their personal experience of being a foreigner and occupying the social position of a worker in Belgium, where they are not desired as a friend by the Belgian population, which truncate the possibility for social integration from the very beginning.

Another commonality between Polish and Bulgarian undocumented migrants is their patterns of migration to Brussels and their presence in the city, which is not influenced by the application of restrictive measures such as work and police inspections and orders to leave the territory of Belgium or undertaken deportations. We have stressed that Poles and Bulgarians are the two most often deported groups of Eastern Europeans in Belgium and the first and the third, respectively, most deported migrants in general (Brazilians being in second place). However, all of the deported migrants come back to Belgium within one to sixty days after deportation and none of those who have received an order to leave the country actually leave Belgium. Deportations are, of course, viewed as a nuisance, bringing financial expenses related to interrupted employment and spending on unplanned

transportation, but they are by no means perceived as a factor that can disturb migrants significantly or change his or her plans to work illegally in Brussels. In brief, we conclude that deportation is a rather weak or ineffective measure for reducing the stock of undocumented Poles and Bulgarians in Brussels due to the relatively short distances between the countries of origin and Belgium, affordable transportations costs, and the lack of a visa regime and stricter border controls.

Another motivation for settling in Brussels is shared among Poles and Bulgarians who have children at school age. Families with children expressed a distinct aspiration to bring their children to Brussels for the purpose of education, and those are already residing with their children in Brussels admit to planning on settlement in Belgium for a longer term, or at least until their children graduate from school or university. Migrants with children are also more careful about exposing themselves to situations where their status could be revealed (such as using medical services, avoiding crowded places and noisy places where the police might have regular checks, using public transportation without a valid ticket).

In the above paragraphs, we have outlined the most important similarities between undocumented Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels. In the course of our research however, we also identified a number of differential aspects between the two groups and these are be summarized below.

To begin with, we must recall that our research identified four distinct patterns of undocumented migrations to Brussels: undocumented migrants who plan to settle in the country, undocumented commuters, false students, and migrants who have regularized their legal status in the country after migrating illegally. Major differences, however, are reflected in the practices of settling and commuting migration.

First of all the, commuting practices are much more widespread among Polish nationals. One of the reasons for this is the geographic proximity of Poland to Belgium and the existence of well-developed transportation services between the two countries, which allow for easy and cheap access to Belgium.

Not less important is the fact that Poles perceive the present economic situation of Poland as improving and believe that with the accession of Poland to the European Union, the possibility of improved quality of life and professional opportunities in Poland continue developing, and once the profits of working aboard are not so high, the need for migration will diminish. Indeed, at the time of our research, many of the older generation of migrants (e.g. those who have a history of working in Brussels for over five years) adopted commuting as the main form of migration, viewing the necessity of staying permanently in Brussels as decreasing.

Bulgarian migrants, on the other hand, tend to avoid pendular migration and prefer to work towards the goal of settling in Brussels. The current economic situation in Bulgaria is perceived as very bad and no optimistic vision for future development is present. In this context, the immigrants develop a way of thinking that could be summarized as "I have nothing to lose if staying in Belgium and nothing to win in Bulgaria" and once access to employment has been established, only a serious ailment is a factor that could instigate a possible return. Moreover EU enlargement is not perceived as a positive factor for the development of Bulgaria and is not identified as a stimulus for return migration.

In brief, Poles, with a longer history of working in Brussels, who have achieved their desired goals from migration, tend to return to Poland and to be replaced in Brussels by newcomers (in previous chapters, we dealt extensively on the issue of selling jobs and securing employment and accommodation for newcomers), while undocumented Bulgarian migrants tend to settle in Brussels and to discard the possibility of return migration.

The results obtained from the study of Bulgarian immigrants in Brussels indicate as well that irregular migration flows from Bulgaria persist and indeed are increasing in recent years, and are not diminished by increased internal, or border control. This finding can be related not only to the limited possibilities for economic survival in Bulgaria as communicated by the respondents, but also by the lack of prospects for future positive developments in Bulgaria. Moreover, the prospective accession of Bulgaria to the European Union is unanimously refuted as a factor that can bring economic prosperity to Bulgaria. The undocumented Bulgarians believe that with EU enlargement, Bulgaria will only suffer

another period of transition, which might last too long to bring positive outcomes on an individual or household level. Or, to use the words of the migrants themselves, “The rich will become richer, the poor will turn poorer, and we who have lost everything in Bulgaria won’t have a chance to construct a life”.

A second difference between the two research groups is related to the practices of socializing with co-nationals. The Polish migrants in Brussels have established a strong and functional community, characterized by the numbers of services run by Poles and for Poles, the existence of regular meeting places and very well-developed support structures. Even though not free of charge, Poles in Brussels exchange information about jobs accommodations, use each others help to transport items and money back home, rely on mutual help for domestic needs or taking care of their children. The integration of a newcomer to the employment market and to the social structures of co-nationals in Brussels is in this sense extremely facilitated.

Bulgarian migrants, on the other hand, can be described as loners. They are suspicious of other co-nationals in the city, anxious that communicating with other Bulgarians might have only negative consequences and they are generally reluctant to socialize with co-nationals. Our research reveals that a Bulgarian community in Brussels does not exist nor is it in the process of creation. Bulgarian organizations do not exist and activities organized by the Bulgarian embassy, such as celebration of Bulgarian holidays, are attended by a small number of documented migrants only and by people closely related to embassy personnel.

The practice of avoiding any form of contacts with other Bulgarians, however, has a limited or no impact on their success in getting jobs and securing income in Brussels. This finding offers strong evidence that social networks of migrants are not of crucial importance for the economic success of undocumented migrants. This last point can be used to make a transition to the summary of our theoretical exploration of the degree to which the concept of social capital explains and accounts for Polish and the Bulgarian migrants in Brussels.

Testing the assumptions of social capital theory, or the importance and relevancy of migrant networks and migrant supporting institutions, in the process of initiation and continuation of Eastern European migration to Brussels, we have aggregated evidence that the primary and utmost motive for migration is economic necessity or lack of possibilities for achieving a decent quality of life in the country of origin. It is not due to access to migration networks. In the case of Polish migrants, we discovered that social capital plays an important role in facilitating migration and reducing the cost of migration, but not in initiating migration. In the Bulgarian research group, on the other hand, we failed to detect the operation of any form of social capital and, thus, we have drawn the conclusion that an alternative theoretical model should be adopted if present Polish and Bulgarian migrations are to be better understood.

As a possible alternative model, we have identified and tested cumulative causation theory, which takes into consideration the cumulative impact of both network and non-network factors in the process of initiation and perpetuation of migration movements. The assumptions of this theory were, however, only partly confirmed by our study. We confirmed that factors such distribution of income and a culture of migration (such as the tendency of migrants to get accustomed to the lifestyle of a host country and the respective inclination towards returning to the host country after some years of experience as a migrant) have an impact on the initiation and continuation of Polish and Bulgarian migrations.

Exploring why these two theories fail to offer an adequate explanation of these studied migrations, we identified the reasons to be due to the lack of consideration, by both theories, for factors related to personal motivations for migration, the importance of economic push factors and also the impact of the demand and market for undocumented work in Brussels. As a conclusion, we propose that Eastern European undocumented migration can be better understood, described and predicted in terms of classical push-pull theories of migration if one takes into account personal and household economic needs, the lack of professional opportunities in the countries of origin, and the demand side in destination countries.

As a contrast to the undocumented migrant research groups, we added to the present study a profile of professional Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels, or those who have migrated to Brussels as a result of job transfer or a qualified job offer. This part of the research leads us to another major conclusion: professional migrants are mainly single women and, to a lesser extent, men, who (unless settled with a family) are planning to migrate to another country in the near future due to a lack of possibilities for permanent settlement for professional migrants in Belgium. Impressions about Belgium with regard to this issue do change over time. While in the first two years after arrival, migrants generally have positive feelings about living and working in Belgium, their attitude transforms to a more negative one after longer residence in the country. The negative feelings become more expressed after contacts with Belgian administrative organs responsible for the registration of migrants and issuing of residence cards. Motivations for leaving the country develop stronger in situations when nationality acquisition or permanent settlement in the country has not been approved especially in the cases when, from a legal point of view, the migrant qualifies for both permanent residence and naturalization. In summary, living and working in Brussels is perceived as complicated and hindered by the migration policy towards professional migrants, which is designed to discourage settlement in the country.

The study of the social and occupational position of undocumented migrants and the possibilities for their upward social mobility has brought us to two major research findings. In the first place, we have aggregated evidence that undocumented workers in Brussels cannot be described in terms of a new underclass, but rather in terms of socially marginalized class of people, who serve to fulfil certain labour market needs in Belgium by providing cheap, flexible, and quality labour. Secondly, this research reveals that the social and occupational position of former undocumented migrants does not change after regularization of their status in Belgium.

Foreseeing questions that might be posed in the present study regarding the generalizability and validity of these research findings, in the next section we touch upon

certain methodological issues, pointing to where research data about Polish and the Bulgarian migrants in Brussels can be viewed as generalizable.

One concern is the degree to which the study can provide generalizable results given the adoption of a non-random sampling framework. As has been broadly discussed in Chapter 8, applying random sampling technique in our research was hardly possible due to high invisibility and the lack of previous knowledge or data about the studied population as well as the difficulty of reaching, identifying and researching respondents in a random way. Therefore, we opted for snowball sampling as the method for identifying and sampling Bulgarians and Poles in Brussels. To guarantee maximum coverage and the best possible representation of the sampled population as well as to overcome the weakness of the snowball sampling as a non-random technique, we adopted several systematic corrective practices to allow the viewing of the sampled population as representative for the broader population of undocumented and professional migrants. These corrective practices, which control for the maximum coverage of the population in the sample, include what we refer to as the principle of "maximum diversity of the first respondent". By this we mean that we initiated referral chains in such a way as to guarantee that all types of undocumented migrants with different demographic characteristics and from different municipalities in Brussels have been included in the study. By starting referral chains with each first respondent having different characteristics from the others, we worked towards achieving a full representation of the studied population (See Appendix 5 and Appendix 8). In order to avoid, further on, non-eligible migrants being included in the research, we conducted a short prior-to-research interview with all identified migrants in order to evaluate the degree to which their legal status in the country was one that could be qualified as "undocumented" (see Chapter 8). In this process, we excluded from the research those who were genuine students, genuine tourists, and genuine visitors, including those who may have overstayed the legally allowed period in Belgium but were not involved in working activities and are not trying to stay illegally in Brussels.

In a summary, we can say that with a total sample of 122 Bulgarian respondents and 106 Polish respondents, recruited for research through a controlled snowball sampling, we achieved a maximum variation in the studied population.

A second methodological issue we would like to address is the utilization of a semi-standardized questionnaire as the main research instrument. As indicated in Chapter 6, previous researchers on undocumented migration in Belgium failed to report the research instruments (and usually the research methods) utilized in each study, a practice which does not allow for assessing either the validity or the correctness of the reported research findings (for a more detailed discussion of this issue, the reader should consult Chapter 6, Section 7). Discerning this methodological problem in past research on undocumented migrants in Belgium, the present study had the ambition to address this issue and to provide a semi-standardized research instrument (that is to say, a questionnaire that included both open and closed questions, capable of aggregating multi-fold information on various aspects of the process of undocumented migration, which are usually addressed by researchers in the field). The full text of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix 4 while a comprehensive presentation of the topics covered by this research instrument is provided in Chapter 8, Section 5. By designing and testing this research instrument we can assert that the present research has provided an original guideline for conducting systematic research on undocumented migration in a manner in which maximum information about a broad variety of both descriptive as well as theoretical topics can be accumulated. Moreover, this instrument can be easily adapted for the research on other populations of undocumented economic migrants either in Belgium or in other countries, and thus allow for comparative national and cross-national research.