



SID-0027X0001M0

Date: 17 September 2014
Interviewer: Clara Aguilar Falguera
Respondent: Eva Kourova

Okay, so today's the 17th September 2014. This is Clara Aguilar interviewing Eva Kourova in the West of Scotland Region of Quality Consult for the project Stepping into Diversity. Could you spell your name please?

Spell, EVA KOUROVA

Thank you. Er, where were you born?

I was born in Czech Republic.

And when were you born?

1981.

1991.

81.

81. So you were born during the eighties. Um, how would you describe your childhood in your country?

Well I don't remember much from the eighties because I was born there [laughs] so I don't really remember much. Er, today actually is the Twenty Fifth Anniversary of the Velvet Revolution of the fall of the communism in 1989. At that time I was 8 years old so I don't really remember much from the eighties.*

(*NB – Subsequent email note from interviewee: "I know I said that 17.9. is the anniversary of Velvet Revolution in Czech republic, well it is not. It is 17.11! It was a day before the referendum and I was probably a bit confused.")

But how would you describe your country in those years, your.... when you were very young?

Well that's what I'm saying, like, the 1980s are too small for me to remember what was happening there. I'm too young to tell you about 1980s.

And did you grow up in a small village or in a town?

Yeah. I grew up in a small village close to Susice which is down south from Prague at the German borders.



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And, but could you please describe your..... your environment? How was living in a small village for you?

Oh, well, we.... our house.... the village has got something like 200 residents, yeah. Er, and our house is situated at the very end of the village and so me and my brother we had lots of freedom. We didn't have er, any restrictions as what to, don't know, not to shout and you know, you cannot go out after certain hours and be, you know..... we were never scared when we were young. We had lots of nature around us, a river, fields, woods. And so my memories of er my childhood are quite er peaceful and connected with nature.

And do you think it would have been different if you grew up in a town or in a city?

Er, I work in Govern Hill and I see how er growing up in a urban area is different for the children. They have to be aware of different things. My father used to tell me, you know, be careful when you go a long grass because there could be a snake there, you know. But what the children have to know when they grow up in a urban area is er, don't go away with strangers you know, and they have to be always watched. They have to be always under supervision of adults. So the perception of fear is much stronger in the urban areas than [coughs] when I was born.

Hm mm. And how would you describe your family?

I've got one brother, younger brother, and mum and dad. My brother lives in Vienna. Er, he is married, er to a Czech girl. I live here with a Scottish boyfriend and my mum, she married, remarried so she has got a..... I've got a step-dad now and my father has got a girlfriend. So they live separately. They separated when I was around 17, 18. And they..... my parents never kind of moved too far from where they were born. They are quite settled in the area of the South of Gla..... [laughs] south of er Czech Republic. And me and my brother we live abroad. [coughs]

The wider thing, because they didn't have this important (0:03:55.0) like because they didn't want to?

I think my father is, er, just that kind of guy. He doesn't necessarily like travelling. He doesn't enjoy being in places he doesn't know. He's secular and safe in the place where he is and that suits him. To me it's boring because I know there is so much more you can see and experience but for him it's this, you know, be relaxed and safe.....you know, sign of safety when he knows every single stone around him you know. And for my mum, [pause] I don't know. Er, she works in Prague so she still kind of travels a lot, you know, in the Czech Republic and her and her partner, now husband, they go travelling together.

And regarding to your parents location, what would you highlight that's (0:4:45.0) for example?

What do you mean?

Um, things that they give to you, like values or point of view....

Yeah. Right.



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.....or opinions that you are proud of.

Okay. Er, from my mum I think the most important think I value is er, that she has always been honest. She's open. She cannot..... like whatever she feels, she cannot just put a face on, you know, and behave differently. So she's easy to read, you know, and there is no secrets, you know. And that, I took over from her. I'm very honest. I really think this is her thing. And also she's very empathetic and I don't think I took it over from her but I am after her, you know, a very empathetic person as well. Er, and from my dad, er, that's the connection to nature that he used to teach me since I was a very small, small child and my brother as well. Er, how to do mushroom picking so I can collect mushroom, wild mushroom. And I recently started doing and here in Glasgow again and I discovered that I don't even know why I'm doing things I'm doing. It kind of feels like the memory has always been there. You know, it's like er instinct, you know. Like don't touch this mushroom or this is a..... you know, it's just..... it's amazing. You know, he has done a really good job you know, preparing us [laughs] to survive in the woods basically. Er, yeah, teaching us you know stars and things about nature. So that's what I appreciate from my dad's side, the connection to nature, respect for nature.

And um, after primary school did you go to high school in Czech Republic?

After primary school I went to secondary school in a small village which is 4 kilometres away from my small village. [coughs] And after that I went to high school, to a town which is maybe 30 kilometres away from my small village which is called Klatovy. It's still in the south of Czech Republic.

And after high school....when did you leave your country actually?

Er, I left in 2004 and I finished high school in 2001. Er, and in between those times, 2002, 3 and 4 I lived in Prague.

And how was that experience?

I loved it. But I think people thought that I'm a wee bit weird, you know, coming from a, er like a village person coming to a big city you know. It's like, you know, Glaswegian people going to London and then they laugh at them because they....the words they use to describe things are maybe kind of behind or you know. So at the beginning I think I must have, er, been kinda looking like a weirdo..... we would in Prague. And then I settled and I really enjoyed living in Prague a lot. I think Prague is a beautiful city. It's got lots of clubs, lots of things to do. You know, people live you know actively all the time and it's quite safe as well. You know, I never have problems there so, yeah I was quite confident, kind of being there on my..... not on my own but you know, in travelling on my own and stuff I really enjoyed being there.

And then you lived....er, you left your country and why did you leave?

I kind of felt er [sighs]..... living in Prague..... Prague is the biggest city in, in the Czech Republic and I still wanted to..... I was 21 you know, and I still wanted to experience something else, you know. I knew there is more in life than living in Prague. I got bored, you know, after two and a half years. And so I started asking people. I didn't want to do au pair. I wanted to go..... obviously I have to abroad somewhere and I decided it will be either German speaking or English speaking country because I studied Germany in Czech Republic and then I have one year intensive course in Prague of English. And so I started asking people around but I was telling them I don't want to do au pair, I don't want to take care of small children. I don't feel



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comfortable and I don't think it would be for me. And so it was harder, you know, because for the au pair places you can just go register and they will send you away, you know, everything is kind of done for you. So I had to (0:08:56.0) bid to three months, you know, and then somebody came first offer, you know, a woman who used to have connections with er Glasgow. She was like "Oh, I know this guy. He has got this wee business going. Er, you can go there and work you know, for the first eight months, earn some English.... er, earn some money and learn some English and come home". So that's how I came to Glasgow. It was by chance.

Hm mm. So was it your first time that you were leaving your country? I mean, not for travelling, for [pause], for going and your experience, was it the first time?

It was er..... yeah, to live, that was the first time. Yeah. I travelled before, er, Turkey and Syria, hitchhiking and you know crazy stuff like this but never to live you know. So when I decided to leave Prague and come over here it was the first time I decided to live somewhere else but Czech Republic.

Erm, you studied um, (0:09:52.0). You studied English you said?

Yeah. One year intensive course of English because I had no, no English whatsoever. I always studied only German so I kind of feel like.... it felt like I needed to have some kind of base....basic English at least you know.

And when you came to Glasgow erm, were you able to hold a conversation?

Oh no. No. I was absolutely useless. It was just like I say.... my father didn't need to pay the money for this intensive course because it was like as if I never had nothing, you know. Maybe something of the grammar thing, you know, like how you play with the words, you know, how they go to..... you know, that's good to have this basic background you know, of the grammar but no, couldn't understand. No nothing. Like coming to Glasgow I really didn't think the people were speaking English. I thought it's you know.... they.... it was like foreign, like alien language kind of you know. And plus in my head, the foreign words which were coming to my head they're the German words because that was the strong bit of my brain, you know, knowing like oh this is a foreign language, you have to use those, those words you know. So there was a real struggle. Er, first three months I could not understand nothing. I still remember and I have said that a few times now you know. So I could not understand nothing. After three months I started to understand. Like when I went to a shop and the person asked me "Do you want the plastic bag?" you know. And I understood what she meant, you know, after three months. Er and after eight months I started to be able to speak back, you know. So it took.... it took a long time and I was one of the loneliest times of my life because you cannot express yourself. People assume that you stupid because not only you don't know the culture, you cannot make proper cup of tea because in Czech Republic we don't really care how strong the tea is and how much sugar you put in it. You know, in here it has to be perfect strength of tea, half a spoon of sugar and perfect strength of milk right. I think it's a little bit OCD and I will.... this is my trauma, you know, from the first eight months because people thought like "My God, not only she cannot speak, she doesn't understand. She can't even make a stupid cup of tea properly you know." So that was very lonely. That was.... that was very hard. The first eight months were.

Uh huh. So the language was mainly the, the main problem to face because it was frustrating as you said to communicate yourself?

Yes. Yes.



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And once you were able to talk in English um, which other problems or difficulties did you have to face?

[sighs] Uh, just funny things which kinda pop in my head. It's for example, Orange Walk. Right? When I saw Orange Walk for the first time I wanted to watch it but people were like "No, come on. Let's go away. Let's go. Let's go. Do you know what Orange Walk is?" No. Orange Walk is er, it's er, the Rangers supporters thing.....

Oh yeah.

.....which they can go, they march you know, for the whatever historical figure. Er, so it's, it's kinda sectarianism and it's connected with Northern Ireland kinda problems you know. But the first time I saw it I saw Scottish pride, you know, Scottish songs. That's what it was in my head you know. When you don't have the historic connect or what, you are not aware of what is happening, you really think like, this is good man, this is.... this is the Scottish culture. I'm seeing something native, you know. And the guys were just.... the people I was working, they were disgusted with me you know. So that's just small things when you don't really fit in the culture you know, and you make mistakes kinda, you know and people just don't, don't get it you know. Or one day I came to college as well and I knew this guy was a strong Rangers supporter and I happened to have er a Celtic hat. So I just brought it there to wind him up but a wee bit, you know, just like fun, "like look what I have, ha, ha, ha". He said "Take it down. That's terrible. That's disgusting." And you know, he took it so so seriously you know. So me being naive, pure naive you know, I don't like to wind people up and he..... yeah, so things like that. Small things. But I cannot say that I had any major issues, just people being sometimes nasty in shops and stuff. Just, showing you that you are a foreigner and you should.... you shouldn't be here, you know, especially because you cannot speak proper language, they have to ask you twice what you want you know. So I used to come home sometimes crying. And then I just decided that I er have to kinda stand up for myself you know, and say like Glasgow is mine as much as it is yours. I have been living here for a while and I consider this to me my second home. Er, so now I just don't..... I don't meet with strangers and if they are stupid, like sometimes you go to pub, you know, and I..... I recently I had er, North Face jacket on. And I go to pub. I want to pay him for my beer. You know, it's afternoon, it's not like night, I'm just coming from work. And those two guys sitting there, "Nice jacket". "Oh thank you". And I supposed to you know, have an conversation with me. They start asking..... oh no, I told them.... Sorry, I told them "Oh, thank you. I've had it for ten years. It's a really good jacket, you know, it's lasts." And er, I suppose to having a conversation about the jacket, continuing conversation. "Where you from?" You know, constant.... Instantly like. They hear the accent and they are not interested anymore in whatever they were interested in before. It's like "Oh, she's not ours" you know. So.... and that's a conversation killer to me, you know. It still is. John says, my partner says that I'm too sensitive. I became sensitive and I just cannot be arsed anymore with people like this. If they start conversation with me "How long have you been here? Where you from? How long have you been here and do you like it?" That's me, like this person.... [sighs] I'm not talking to you ever again, kinda, you know. I became quite..... yeah, quite sensitive to that, yeah.

And have you met anyone that, presently, that has asked you this question like where you from now?

It's happening all the time. It doesn't matter how long you have been living here. I know other migrants who have been here for thirty, forty years, you know and they are..... they are also



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saying that people are asking them this question. Those three questions are a conversation killer. [sighs]

Yeah, it's Scottish blood (0:16:30.0) because my accent is very strong I guess and I've asked it many times this question but I think they are..... yeah. I agree. But would you describe yourself as Glaswegian because you've been living here for ten years so....

I wouldn't probably describe myself Glaswegian [pause] but I would maybe describe myself partly Scottish now you know. I don't.... I don't feel the strong connection. I like Glasgow and I have always lived in Glasgow but to me Glaswegian means er, like bad things, you know, so I....

Bad things?

Yeah. I would.... if somebody speaks badly about Glasgow I would always defend Glasgow. I would say that it's also good things happening. But I would not probably describe myself Glaswegian. I feel stronger connection with Scotland as a country than with Glasgow.

Hm mm. And then how would you describe in terms of nationality?

Yeah. But I'm....

Are you Scottish then?

I'm still Czech in my head. I'm still Czech. Er, I think this thing about the referendum tomorrow is quite.... it's a symbolic thing you know, because that's something I cannot really share with my you know, Czech heritage. You know, it has got nothing to do with Czech heritage but it's a very strong thing which is happening now in Scotland and I'm part of it you know. And I think symbolically..... I think, I'm not sure but I think this will symbolically make me feel more Scottish. I think there is..... I'm waiting for this breaking point just now because I have been here for ten years and I think at one point you start feeling more Scottish than Czech. And I think with some people it happens faster, maybe because they want to and with some people it probably becomes you know..... with some people it probably never happens. But I think with me it is just about. [laughs] But I am still proud of my, you know, Czech heritage but er, when I come home, when I go home for Christmas or for holidays I don't necessarily feel Czech anymore. So I'm living in this limbo of the two countries with I think maybe it's maybe..... maybe slightly mentally damaging. But I think because I'm aware of it and because this is my choice just now to be, I'm not in a hurry, to box myself. You know, I'm Czech or I'm Scottish, I'm..... I'm still waiting to see what happens, kinda you know. What flower will it be? I don't know, you know. I'm still (0:19:.01.0) kinda, so I will see, you know, what happens.

Okay. And how often to you go to Czech Republic? For Christmas and holidays?

Yeah, I try to [pause].... My aim is to go home four times a year you know, spring, summer, autumn, winter. And I could if I wanted to, but there are other things I also want to do. So usually I home three times a year. But it's getting so..... because I am fed up of travelling to be honest. I'm quite now, and my state of my life just now, my private life is that I want to settle, I want to have basic life. You know, I am not after crazy stuff and travelling is very tiresome and stressful and I cannot be bothered, you know. So this year I went home just now only once and now I'm coming home for Christmas. And my mum will be coming home soon..... coming over



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here to visit me soon. So [pause] yeah.... I used to like..... you know, I used to be excited about.... I love being home but the travel, you know, becomes quite you know, an issue for me so we'll see. But at least twice a year I think I should be going home for at least ten days, yeah.

Um, how would you describe yourself in terms of religion?

I have no religion but I am respectful to people which have religion unless they force upon me their religion or tell me that they are better than me because they have religion and I don't have.

And what about your family, you parents and grandparents?

Er, my mum..... my father comes from a religious family, Christian Catholics. So er, I think he goes to church from time to time. I think his girlfriend, they are both quite religious but we don't really.... it doesn't come up in a conversation, you know. Er, I have never been baptised or whatever you call it, Christened. My brother has never been Christened. Er, my mum has been but I don't think religion played a very important role in their family.

And was it because of your family, they kind of..... your family or because of your generation?

Er, I don't know. Er, I think Czech Republic, they say that Czech Republic is the most atheist country in Europe probably, because of the communism, because of the 40 years of communism when er religion was not, was (0:21:30.0) was..... and was not really something you wanted to be connected with. So people which were religious, truly religious had problems going to school or going to high school, university. Some priests ended up in concentration camps and stuff like that, working camps. So er, perhaps that's the reason why I, why lots of Czech people are non-religious, yeah.

Um, do you think Glasgow and it's people are respectful in terms of immigration?

What do you mean respectful?

Um, that they are friendly, that they love er different people coming from abroad, that, don't know, they are welcoming?

Well, they love their Italian restaurants don't they? You know, Indian and Pakistani, they love their pakoras and Kebabs. So they love this part of immigration. Er, [pause] when it comes to Eastern Europeans or these people, you know, I don't think necessarily we are being welcome. Er, and er refugees, asylum seekers I don't think they are welcome here either. Of course there is groups of people which will condemn and work for them but I think general..... general....this kind of general attitude which you read in newspapers is not necessarily too welcoming, no.

Hm mm.

But why it should be? You know, it's not just Glasgow. I think it's in Czech Republic it's the same you know. You.... you....you like people from West, you know, America is fine. You know, people from Great Britain are fine. In Czech Republic, German, Spanish, French people they are fine, but people from East, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Russians, you know, Turkish people, Romanians, we don't you know.... it's the same scenario like, we kind of feel threatened by them you know. And the same is happening here. It's not.... I don't think Glasgow is unique, or Scotland is



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unique in this, how they feel about migrants. It depends on where the migrants come from and I think it's er, this kind of variable but natural reaction to migration.

Hm mm. Ben told me you were, you are actually studying a Master in citizenship and human rights.

Hm mm.

So how did you come..... how did you.... why did you choose this? I mean, (0:24:07.0).

I don't..... er, I've been working with (0:24:11.0) since 2008 let's say. I used to work as an information advice person, you know, er giving people advice and doing some..... a wee bit of advocacy for them. And that's how I started to feel that (0:24:29.0) people are being discriminated against. Not necessarily..... well also in the institutions like Department of Work and Pensions and stuff like that. But generally I started to be in touch with, you know, Roma people and I started to feel that they have different life prospects than I do. Just purely because they are Roma. So I started to feel I would like to do something about, you know. And I started defending the Roma people quite naturally when you see somebody. It's not fair, you start kinda, you know, helping them. Er, and that's how I kinda started to feel that I would like to learn more about human rights. And er, when I finish my..... I studied er, social sciences in Glasgow University so I have got Master..... no, I have got Honours degree from that. And I was kinda thinking what to do next, you know, what is the next level. It should be something more specific. I didn't want to do just sociology or anthropology. I wanted to do something else. And there was two courses; one was community development and one was citizenship and human rights. Community development in Glasgow you know, is more about er I think how to in public communities, but I think they teach you more about how to do it. Like they give you the tools to do it you know. Whereas in the course at Caledonian University I do, the citizenship and human rights, it's more about the theory of operation or power struggle and it's still social sciences but applied to, to communitive work. You know, and that's that's..... I really like that. And also to find that it's connected, like it's work based so I have to have two days placement in human rights organisation to be able to study this. I really like that, so that's why I went for that.

How would you describe er, the word community?

The word community. Well, I cannot answer that because just now I am er working on a research and part of what I'm doing now I still think about what is actually community. I know it's a social concept [laughs] and I know it has got lots of..... it's politicised but it's, it's er something which er I cannot answer easily because I'm now thinking about it a lot....

Yeah.

....if you know what I mean. [laughs]

Right. Okay. But erm..... so would you say you are in a community, you take part in a community? Er, yeah, you were going to say.... you were going to add something, to say?

What do you mean? What are you trying to ask?



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Um, you can answer me what does it mean for you because you are doing a lot of research so do you think you take part in a community? You are?

Do you... are you asking me if I think I'm part of a community and what that community would be?

Exactly.

[pause]

Thank you. [laughs]

[laughs] I can question and answer myself. [laughs] Er, I am not part of Czech community. Like, there is no Czech community in Glasgow. There is small Czech community but it's not as strong as Polish community because we don't er, we don't commune. We Czech people are quite proud of being quite independent and it's groups of friends but we don't kinda just form a group like, we don't have a Czech club like Polish have Polish club you know. We don't have that. We just don't do that. So I cannot say I'm a member of Czech community. I'm a member of er, er, National Foraging United Kingdom community and [s.l. Fayres Walk 0:28:10.0]. Er, then I'm a member of er this Yes Campaign thing as well. And er, the last thing, or referendum in general. And the last thing I have got on my Facebook is cats and anything to do with cats. So I'm a member of this virtual cat community as well. Erm, which (0:28:34.0) and crying over. [laughs] Silly stories of rescued cats. Er, and in real life er, I have life and I have got people around me which I will describe to maybe as a community, just a group of people I know, mostly through my boyfriend where I feel safe. And people don't ask me stupid questions and they take me as I am. Er, and they don't make me feel different.

Thank you so much Eva.....

No, that's alright.

....for your time. I don't know if you'd like to say anything else or are you fine.

No, no. Unless you have any more questions.

No. It's fine. It's fine thank you.

No problem.

Transcript ends 0:00:00.0