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Post-Accession Migration in Europe – a Polish Case Study



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Review:

dr Kathy Burrell

Proofread:

Staff

Desktop publisher:

Anna Bugaj-Janczarska

Cover design:

Andrzej Augustyński

ISBN 978-83-7587-702-1

Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”

30-619 Kraków, ul. Turniejowa 59/5

phone (12) 422-41-80, fax (12) 422-59-47

www.impulsoficyna.com.pl, e-mail: impuls@impulsoficyna.com.pl

Edition I, Kraków 2011

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The issue of migration from the recent accession states to the older EU member states has attracted considerable attention from both policy and academic spheres, but relatively little of this work has focused explicitly on the geographies of this migration. This book seeks to connect ongoing work on post-socialist migration within Europe to an exploration of key geographical themes, such as community, transnationality, local and regional identities, mobility and movement, networks, diasporas, local labour markets, cohesion, and integration. It includes papers which reflect not only on academic work, but also on policy and practice engagements within communities, and part of the book will be given over to short articles by practitioners.

The papers published here were first presented at a seminar organised in the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University in June 2009, when Aneta Słowik was based in Newcastle as a visiting lecturer. In addition to financial and administrative support from the School, we gratefully acknowledge the support of the Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies (CRCEES) in the organising of this seminar. We are also very grateful to all those who presented their work at the seminar, and to the others who attended and participated in the engaged discussions during the day.

We are, of course, especially grateful to those who submitted chapters to this publication; without their encouragement and engagement, this book would not have reached publication. Dr Kathy Burrell acted as discussant during the seminar and subsequently reviewed and commented on the submitted chapters. We are tremendously grateful to her for contribution to this volume.

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Scaling Polish Migration: Overview and Observations

The intensification of Polish emigration in the past decade, and most obviously since the 2004 enlargement of the European Union, has had a profound impact on different European countries, both for receiving countries for new migrations, and for Poland itself. Not surprisingly, this ‘new’ movement of people has not gone unnoticed across Europe. Within the UK, for example, there has been considerable public and academic interest in this migration, signalling that the influx of Polish people into the country has been one of the key migration ‘stories’ of the decade (see: Burrell, 2010). These collected papers all consider different aspects of this recent migratory phenomenon; in doing so they touch on interesting and important issues about the multi-scalar (see also: Fortier, 2006) nature of this, and any, population movement. This overview takes these papers as a starting point and explores four dimensions of the scaling of Polish migration: local, personal, national and global.

Local Settings

A key theme running throughout this collection is the acknowledgement of the importance of the local in migration studies. Anne White’s paper explores this from many different perspectives, from the need to be involved in local knowledge networks – changing the bin collection day, for example, is shown to be something which can catch recent migrants by surprise – to the strong place attachments migrants build. ‘Beautiful Bath’ may be particularly easy to love, but the sentiments expressed by the migrants when they talk about how much they like their new locales in White’s study are significant because they

highlight an aspect of migration and settlement which is often neglected. Integration is not always just about interactions with local populations, learning the language and participating in working life; relationships with the **materiality** of place, as well as its meanings and practices (Cresswell, 2009, p. 169), are also key in anchoring migrants in their new surroundings. The emotional dimensions of belonging have a strong material element to them, connecting, or not, to the physical, built and consumed environment.

More generally, migrants' experiences clearly vary enormously from place to place. Polish migrants' participation in trade union activities, for example, is shown to be uneven across Britain. While there has been some success in including A8 migrants in the south, Seller's paper illustrates the scope which remains to reach out to recent migrants in the north east. Services vary too, across place and also across time, as White's paper also shows. These observations, when considered alongside other work which highlights the urban or rural peculiarities of migrants' lives (Datta, 2009; Taylor & Rogaly, 2004), remind us how difficult it is to make national generalisations about the settlement practices and experiences of any migrants. Karczemski and Boer's paper on Polish migrants in The Hague exemplifies this well. There are clearly many similarities between the experiences of Polish migrants across different European countries, but the local dimensions are still fundamental to these experiences. The Hague is a very specific setting, attracting more Polish migrants than most places in The Netherlands, and so offers more opportunities for social interaction but also more chances for migrants to forge their lives outside of ethnic boundaries. Were this research on Polish migrants' networks to be undertaken in a small town in The Netherlands the findings would undoubtedly be quite different.

Work is also clearly another highly localised dynamic of A8 migration movements. While the nature and extent of jobs available will inevitably vary from place to place, Judd's paper also illustrates how important a new migrant workforce can be to broader local structures, in this case care provision. Social integration receives considerable attention among migration researchers, yet an appreciation of the economic 'embeddedness' of migrant labour in local economies is just as valuable for understanding the many local impacts of migration, on migrants **and** the existing populations (for example see: Stenning et al., 2006; for London see: McDowell et al., 2009; for the West Midlands see: Green et al., 2007).

Personal Experiences

In addition to their strong local contextualisations, these papers also offer important insights into the biographical experiences of migration; they are person-centred as well as place-centred. Collectively the papers illustrate the different emotional dimensions of migrating to a new country; the phenomenal role of

trust invested in informal migration networks, the pull of ‘back home’, the personal hopes (‘better pay, better lives’) and motivations surrounding migration and the vulnerabilities migrants navigate once they have moved. Particularly striking is the issue of confidence raised in Judd’s paper. The care workers interviewed for this paper did not display signs of ill treatment by their employers, and nor did they seem to face any serious hostility in their new environments; what they felt was holding them back was a more subtle lack of self-confidence, a loss of the knowledge and security which comes with working and living in a familiar environment. These examples are an important reminder that the difficulties migrants face are not always extreme or related to overt hostility – although as White’s and Karczemski and Boer’s papers illustrate, hostility and the unscrupulous activities of some work agencies have become pressing concerns for Polish migrants across Europe. Instead, the matters which really worry recent migrants can be invisible, unspectacular, and only accessed and understood through the methodologies of biographical research. One very obvious worry, as several papers, and Temple’s in particular, illustrate, is language. The frustration of not being able to learn the new language quickly enough not only poses practical problems for issues such as integration, but again can work more subtly. Being identified as a foreigner immediately, not being able to have the same intricacy of conversation in English or Dutch as in Polish, and not being able to joke as freely, are all undermining aspects, as Eva Hoffman’s work (1998) has so vividly illustrated, of the need to adjust to public life in a new language. As White’s paper also shows, language ability can disrupt family roles too, changing the relative positions of different people within a family unit. Inevitably it is the children who, once in local schools, pick up the new language most easily; strong or weak language proficiency can also pressure established gender roles, either damaging male confidence within the family or alienating women who do not work from non-Polish circles and media.

The personal accounts of the care workers especially also reinforce the importance of the workplace for migrants’ experiences in the UK, both positive and negative. At one extreme, working conditions can be dangerous and inhumane, as evidenced by a shocking recent report by the Equality and Human Rights Committee (2010) on the experiences of migrant workers within the British meat industry. More generally though, the workplace is where most recent migrants meet a wider range of people and form broader social connections (see: Cook et al., 2010); just as the economic dynamics of labour are crucial for local understandings, the social dimensions of the workplace are often central to the personal lives of migrants.

National Specificities

If the local and personal are central to the interests of these papers, larger scalar significances can also be seen in their research and analyses. For all the local foci it is evident that there are sufficient **national** characteristics of Polish migration for this to be a specific category worth researching, rather than treating migration from Poland simply as a component part of A8 migration generally. The national specificities are clear to see, whether through the peculiarities of trade union history in Poland or the commitment to reproducing Polish dishes in the UK. The individual tales of migration are connected within a national prism. These links may be more tenuous for some migrants than others – particularly taking into account the propensity of Polish migrants to distrust each other and practice social distancing, which is perhaps, conversely, a national characteristic peculiar to Polish migrants in itself (see also: Garapich, 2007; Rabikowska & Burrell, 2009) – but it is undeniable that there is to some extent a shared context for these migrants and that their trajectories have certain commonalities. A shared language is one obvious example, perhaps similar to some other European Slavic languages but carrying all the nuances of a particular Polish history (see: Wierzbicka, 1997). Polish parents in the UK, moreover, seek out Saturday schools not only to ensure their children can write a standard Polish ‘properly’, but also to expose them to a distinctly Polish historical and geographical knowledge. While other countries in the region have also been sending countries in recent years, it is Poland which has sent the most migrants abroad, at least among the A8 countries, and it is Poland which has a special historical relationship with Britain in particular. There is then, an important justification for focusing on Poles as Poles, and not as East/Central European migrants. Polish migration takes place in a certain historical context (see: Burrell, 2009), as these papers implicitly reflect.

Global Processes

Finally, underlying all these papers are much larger global processes at work. For all the personal, local and national intricacies of this migration it is important to keep the wider contexts of contemporary international migration in mind. For twenty-first century migration movements the local and global are closely intertwined, whether through the translocal networks and connections that migrants sustain throughout their lives, or through the starker inequalities of the global economy. Judd’s paper on care workers illustrates this extremely well. A developing commodification of care work, or ‘women’s work’, has led to a situation where traditional care-giving roles in western economies are increasingly undertaken by migrant workers, plugging care gaps there but creating new

ones in their wake. This is something which continues to raise high profile concerns – Eurasyllum’s Monthly Policy Interviews of April 2010, for example, stress the problems of brain drain, particularly among highly skilled health workers, for countries such as Malawi and Ghana. The more informal ‘care drain’ must be as substantial, if not more serious, for countries still predominantly sending rather than receiving migrants – and female migrants in particular. The lives of the Polish care workers in the UK therefore hint at other issues. What have they left behind in Poland, and what impact does their absence have there, not just economically, but socially and culturally too (see for example: Fihel & Kaczmarczyk, 2009)?

Other work also reminds us that the desires of Polish migrants to leave home and find work abroad are also part of a much larger movement of labour. Like McDowell et al’s work (2009) research on migrant labour in London illustrates exactly the extent to which global cities such as the UK capital rely on an extremely diverse body of migrant workers; indeed, the current global economy would be unsustainable without such significant movements of people. Europe’s migration patterns appear to mirror global trends in these matters; it is not the movement of people from the global south to the north which we see with Polish migration, at least not in a strict geographical sense, but instead east to west has become Europe’s north/south fault line.

The micro accounts of Polish migration, and the in-depth case-studies which are being undertaken, are fascinating and add so much to understandings of this particular movement of people; it is this research which helps to provide a much deeper emotional connection with what contemporary migration really feels like. However, the wider global perspectives surrounding this migration, and the broader contexts and inequalities which anchor these people’s lives, should not be forgotten.

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Polish Families in England: Decisions about Stay and Return

Abstract

This chapter investigates migration by working-class Polish families since EU accession, with special focus on migration to towns in the west of England. More specifically, I consider how parents make decisions about stay and return, within the context of their overall integration into British society. Following Berry, I distinguish ‘integration’ from ‘assimilation’. I understand integration to mean a state of feeling at home which derives from both being able to operate within British society and also to retain as much as desired of one’s original ethnic identity. My thirty interviewees were often well-integrated in the sense that they were generally happy with their way of life in the UK and satisfied with their own jobs and their children’s schools. Those with children at school were committed to their children’s schooling and reluctant to uproot children for a second time and return to Poland, however unstable the economic situation in England. The main obstacle to integration was the interviewees’ poor knowledge of English. As a result, many had no English friends. Maintaining Polish identity, on the other hand, has become easier since the first interviews were conducted in 2006, even in locations which previously had almost no Polish inhabitants. By 2009 it was quite easy for incoming migrants to build up a circle of Polish friends, and there are many new Saturday schools, delicatessens, etc. However, as in other migrant communities, different family members can experience integration very differently from one another and decisions about return have to be negotiated. Return to Poland for holidays also shapes thoughts about eventual return (both encouraging and discouraging) although, contrary

to the received wisdom that Polish migrants come and go freely, it is hard for some families to travel.

Keywords: Migration, England, Poland, Families, Integration, Transnationalism.

Introduction

This chapter is about the experiences of working-class Polish families in England, and the factors which shape their thoughts about how long to stay. Other researchers have written about more highly-educated and/or childless Polish migrants or, more commonly, examined migrants from a variety of backgrounds (Eade, Drinkwater & Garapich, 2006; Parutis 2006, 2009; Ryan et al., 2007; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2009). However, families are special in many ways, particularly if the parents do not speak much English. Other Polish migrants may come and go, like tourists. If they do not speak English, they may not engage much with British society, especially if they do not need to use public services such as health and education. Polish parents have to use these services and through their children they are likely to meet a range of British people. It is also much harder for them to uproot themselves and so they are likely to stay in the UK.

Large-scale migration by Polish families to Britain began after EU accession. Home Office data suggest that the number of children arriving in the UK doubled year by year from 2004–2006, peaked in 2007 and then began to fall slightly (Home Office, 2009). By the second quarter of 2007 an estimated 170,000 Polish-born children (under 19 years old) were resident in the United Kingdom (IPPR, 2008). By 2008, Polish-speaking children formed the largest group of ‘non-English speaking newly-arrived migrant schoolchildren’ in England (Pollard, Latorre & Sriskandarajah, 2008, p. 27). Looking at emigration to all countries, a Polish study estimated that in 2007 0,34% of Polish school students left the country (Walczak, 2008, p. 2).

The chapter is based on British Academy-funded research which included 115 interviews with Polish women, 82 interviews in Poland and 33 in England; interviews and conversations with key informants; and an opinion poll conducted in Poland. The sources for this chapter are the 33 interviews conducted in England from autumn 2006 to spring 2009¹.

The 30 interviewees (three of whom were interviewed twice) came from almost all regions of Poland, and from locations of different sizes, ranging from Warsaw to tiny villages. The youngest interviewee was about 21 when she ar-

¹ For discussion of the rest of the project findings, and more detailed analysis of the issues covered in this chapter, see: White, 2010.

rived, and the oldest was 39. At the time of interview, 21 women were working and 12 were not². Thirteen interviewees were cleaners (one also a supervisor); six were careworkers; one was a dinner lady and one a self-employed hairdresser. Eight were not working because they had pre-school age children; two were unemployed; two were housewives and part-time students of English. All but two of the interviewees had worked in Poland, but only two (one cleaner and the hairdresser) had worked in their British occupations. The most common Polish occupations were shop assistant (7) followed by clerical/secretarial (5); self-employed (5); dressmaker (3); hairdresser (3).

The main fieldwork sites were the cities of Bath (2001 'urban area' population: 90,144) and Bristol (551,066) (ONS, 2004). In addition, three interviews were conducted in the nearby small town of Trowbridge (34,401) and one in Frome (24,171). Originally I had intended to conduct ten repeat interviews in Britain as well as the ten in Poland, but I did only three, because I saw and chatted with many interviewees in Bath quite often in the months and years following the formal interviews. I met them in my capacity as a volunteer English teacher at a Polish parents' and toddlers' group and Saturday School in Bath.

I chose to interview mothers rather than fathers, in view of their special responsibilities for making decisions about migration with children. In the case of Poles in the UK, my research suggested that such migration usually takes the form of family reunification of wife and children with a husband already working abroad. I also tried to limit my sample to women without higher education because Polish graduates are likely to have language skills, as well as other resources, and I guessed that families of professional people who migrated might shape their livelihood strategies differently. Toro-Morn's interviews with married working- and middle-class Puerto Rican women in Chicago, for example, showed that working-class women followed after their husbands and sometimes only joined them in America after difficult household negotiations. By contrast, 'middle-class women came with their husbands and had an agenda of their own' (Toro-Morn, 1995, p. 718).

I would have liked to have interviewed men and people with higher education. However, since I was doing all the interviews myself, such an expansion (implying several hundred interviews) was impossible. In some cases, I was able to talk to husbands separately. Occasionally husbands, mothers, mothers-in-law and children were present for part the interviews. Sometimes they dominated the conversation, but usually their contributions were restrained and helpful. When different family members had small arguments this often revealed a great deal about decision-making and the dynamics of integration within the household.

² I have counted out of 33, since 2/3 of the repeat interviewees changed their status between the two interviews (one had a baby and the other began work). One of the hairdressers owned her own business, so she has been counted twice in the list of Polish occupations.