Geographies of Young Polish Migrants: Experiences of Community

Matthew Callender
Centre for Children and Youth
The University of Northampton
matthew.callender@northampton.ac.uk
Context

- Since EU enlargement in May 2004, the UK has received one of the most concentrated flows of voluntary migrations in the world today (Pollard et al, 2008)

- The short-term and fluid nature of these migrations have raised significant issues for policymakers (Sumption, 2009)

- The Local Government Association (2008) argues A8 migration favour town and rural locations
Why Northamptonshire?

- Worker Registration Scheme data shows that between May 2004 and Sept 2008;

- There were 894,575 approved WRS registrations nationally
  - 594,500 (66%) were from Polish nationals
  - 44% were aged between 18 and 24 years old
  - 24,295 approved WRS registrations in Northamptonshire

Source: Home Office, 2008
The Urban Lives of Young Polish Migrants Residing in Northamptonshire

- Multi method approach
- Participants recruited from a snowball approach
- Interviews conducted in Polish and English

Narrative Exercise
Case Studies
In-Depth Interviews with Local Service Providers
Preliminary Research Findings

- Motivations
  - Economic
  - Cultural
  - Individual

- Experiences
  - Host communities
  - Migrant Communities
  - Positive
  - Negative
Motivation 1: Economic

- Opportunity to earn a good wage
- Conditions to provide for family
- Limited economic prosperity in Poland

“You have this goal… save some money and go back… you are going to be happier.” (Bogumił in Polish)

“Here you can save some money and still afford to live.” (Zenon in Polish)
Motivation 2: Cultural

- UK viewed as a place to meet new cultures

“It’s a good feeling to meet new people, different cultures because we don’t really have that in Poland. We have just got Polish people.” (Maryla in Polish)

“I can find out about people, a totally different point of view. You wouldn’t have this in Poland.” (Juliet in English)
Motivation 3: Individual

• Sense of adventure

“At that point in my life, it was like an adventure… I had just finished university and thought why not.” (Michał in Polish)

• Education

“I was like mum give me this chance, if it doesn’t work then I can always come back but if I don’t I will regret it.” (Grazyna in English)
Experience: Host Communities

- Contact with host communities limited
- Located into ethnic-specific circles

“When you work in my place, you have loads of Polish around you and it’s difficult to learn.” (Lucjusz in Polish)

“I think it’s really bad. Some [Polish] people are here and they don’t assimilate, they don’t learn anything new.” (Jowita in English)
Experience: Migrant Communities

- Large scale inward migration received mixed reviews
- Trust revealed to be significant dimension to Polish communities
- Idea of community for a few was non-existent

“You find out the next day that the person you was trusting to has done something horrible to you... you are feeling is that my Poland?” (Natalka in English)

“I shouldn’t say it but I feel ashamed that [Polish] people come here without language, for me it’s the most important thing when you live in a foreign place.” (Janina in English)
Experience: Positive

• New beginnings

“You can start everything from the beginning in a new life. You can reinvent yourself because nobody knows you.” (Maryla in Polish)

• Forward Planning

“In Poland, everyone was in a rush and you had to worry about the future. But here I feel safe and I can plan my future step by step.” (Wilhelm in English)
Experience: Negative

- Being ‘homesick’

> "Although I have got my friends here, I will never consider this place as home." (Maryla in Polish)

- Stereotypes

> "You have to fight stereotypes... ‘Polish people are stupid’, ‘Polish people steal your jobs’... you have to prove it’s not true." (Grazyna in English)
Summary

- Range of experiences are diverse, contradictory and insightful
- Idea of community is challenging
- The present is uncertain and temporary, and the future is flexible
References


