



DOING FAMILY
IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT



TRANSFAM: Progress report Work Package 3

Social capital among Polish immigrant families in Norway

Eugene Guribye, PhD Agder Research
Ingunn Kvamme, Agder Research
Barbara Zyzak, Agder Research
Damian Zyzak, Agder Research



Background and aims

The research project *“Doing family in transnational context. Demographic choices, welfare adaptations, school integration and every-day life of Polish families living in Polish-Norwegian transnationality”* is a collaboration between Jagiellonian University, Centre for International Relations (CIR), Agder Research and Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), financed by a Norwegian grant within the Core 2012 Call of the Polish Norwegian Research Cooperation with awards made by the National Centre for Research and Development. The study analyzes population flows between Poland and Norway, contextualized in the broader discourses of intra-European labour mobility and specific field of transnational family studies. The aim of Work Package 3: Social capital among Polish immigrant families in Norway is:

- To establish systematic knowledge about the establishment and maintenance of social capital among Polish immigrant families in Norway as the basic foundation for the planning of public interventions adapted to the needs of Polish immigrant families in Norway
- To further develop the theoretical framework for understanding the role of voluntary associations in relation to social capital among migrants, by gathering information about Polish immigrant families’ relationships with and activities within Polish voluntary associations and Polish religious communities in Norway
- To develop an understanding of the role of social media in the establishment and maintenance of social capital among migrants.

Immigrants need social support to settle and become integrated in the new country. They need social capital, i.e. features of social organization, including networks, norms, and trust that may facilitate cooperation for mutual benefits (Putnam, 2000). Social capital has been regarded as a central condition of integration, social cohesion, economic success, health, language acquisition, career decision-making and the well-being of people (e.g. Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt, 1999; Wilkinson, 1996; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004; Ferlander, 2007; Derose & Varda, 2009; Kumar et al., 2012; Dika & Singh 2002). Communities with more trust, community engagement and well-functioning social networks have also seemed to be better equipped to bounce back after a crisis than fragmented, isolated ones (Vaughn, 2010; Brune & Bossert, 2009; Colletta & Cullen, 2000). Consequently, social capital has become an increasingly popular concept in countries with growing immigrant populations and where

concerns are related to issues such as social cohesion, health, and language acquisition (Coradini, 2010).

Polish migrants have arrived in Norway in several waves. A few Polish migrants arrived in the country after the Second World War, but the first major wave of migrants occurred during the 1980's when communist political repression and martial law in Poland made hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens leave the country. The fall of communism in Poland in 1989 led to increased circular mobility of Polish workers in throughout Europe. In 2004 Poland joined the EU, and Polish citizens were enabled full freedom of movement within most of Europe. Currently, Polish migrants constitute the largest group of immigrants in Norway, numbering more than 80 000 people. Polish migrants can be found all over the country, with around 12 000 situated in Oslo, the national capital (Centre for International Relations, 2014).

Method

The research aims warranted a combination of qualitative interviews, document studies and ethnographic fieldwork methods (including virtual ethnography). Interview guides were completed in early 2014 in collaboration with Frode Guribye, PhD and associate professor at the University of Bergen. His expertise on information technology and the use of social media platforms and virtual ethnography proved very valuable in designing the methodological approach in the study. The interview guides were subsequently tested for validity of questions in collaboration with Polish research assistants in the project team. The tests led to a slight revision of the interview guides.

Informants were recruited by a snowball sampling methodology with a starting point in the social networks of the Polish research assistants, and the project leader. Informants were recruited among Polish migrants who arrived in Norway during the 1980's, and among more recently arrived migrants, as well as Norwegian resource persons who have been active within Polish social networks.

Data collection was completed in late 2014. A total of 16 interviews with an equal amount of men and women were conducted in Norwegian and Polish in Kristiansand and Arendal in Southern Norway. In addition, data collection involved compiling an overview of Polish voluntary associations in Norway, analysis of Polish-Norwegian web sites, and limited participant observation in meetings where Polish voluntary associations participated. We also conducted a literature search in international peer-reviewed journals related to Polish migrants and social capital.

Analysis of this empirical material proceeds with the aid of NVIVO, a software platform for qualitative research analysis. The analysis consists of structuring the data material into several broad categories of themes identified in the interviews, and in accordance with the research questions pertaining to the work package. The main findings from the analytical process were also plotted into a data matrix developed within the TRANSFAM project to share basic findings across work packages.

Preliminary findings

A preliminary analysis of the data material suggests that there are notable distinctions between different Polish migratory waves into Norway, as well as between different social classes in relation to the establishment of social capital. In Norway, there are comprehensive public support mechanisms for newly arrived refugees in line with the country's integration policies, but labour migrants tend to be left to their own devices to a much larger degree since they are expected to support themselves. Consequently, Polish labour migrants need social support to settle and become integrated in Norway.

Poles who migrated to Norway during the 1980's arrived in a different context than later Polish migratory waves to the country. The start of new migration to Western Europe and Norway started after the Second World War and increased in the 1960s with mainly young men looking for work. Between 1975 and 1991, the government issued a formal stop to labour migration to the country when unemployment and social issues related to the labour migrants started to become an issue. In the late 1970s and early 1980s however, asylum seekers started to arrive in Norway, among them Polish citizens facing the hardship of martial law and communist political repression in Poland. Immigration stop notwithstanding, the public discourse on immigrants in Norway at the time was characterized by a general perception of immigration as a resource, framed in what has been labeled "a colorful community" (*et fargerikt felleskap*; Gullestad 2002). Poles were regarded as intellectual, politically active resources. Statistics show that around 40 percent of Polish migrants in Norway before Poland joined the EU had higher education¹. Many spoke English well and were able to communicate well with Norwegians in English, and later in Norwegian. The political situation in Poland made it difficult to travel back to Poland frequently, facilitating the need for language acquisition and building new social networks in Norway. Norwegian resource persons seem to have been a great aid for many Polish migrants in the early phases, especially in relation to the Norwegian welfare system, accommodation and work. This, and long-term residency in the country has contributed to establish more trust with the Norwegian welfare state system and Norwegians in general.

Poles who migrated to Norway after 2004 when Poland joined the EU faced a completely different context. Growing concern over the effects of immigration in the country, had contributed to a change

in the public discourse in which the “kindism” (*snillisme*) and “naivism” of past immigration practices and discourses had come into focus. Immigration-hostile political parties continued to grow in popularity. The public image of Poles also changed rapidly. Post 2004 Polish migrants were primarily craftsmen and industrial workers, and the general public perception of Poles in Norway today tend to primarily associated with tile-layers and plumbers. Statistics show that around 20 percent of Polish migrants in the country now have completed higher educationⁱⁱ. Stereotypical images in a Norwegian tv-series of drinking and stealing Poles involved in illicit contraband activities has made the Polish ambassador in Norway react. He writes that “besides craftsmen that the series focuses on, there are also persons in high positions talking perfectly Norwegian. There are for instance a large group of Polish physicians.”ⁱⁱⁱ The informants in our study report considerable prejudice towards Poles in Norway, not least in a school-setting where some bullying seems to occur, and where the word “*Polack*” according to informants have the same derogatory meaning as “*Negro*”. Language barriers seem to be another major obstacle towards the establishment of social capital. Few individuals within this migratory wave have good command of English. The high cost of public language classes, combined with difficulties in combining high workloads with attending courses, has contributed to make many reluctant to prioritize Norwegian language acquisition. Most of these migrants tend to rely on the help of first and second wave Polish migrants to orientate themselves, settle and acquire jobs in Norway.

Many post 2004 Polish migrants tend to create a “Little Poland” in Norway. Travelling back to Poland has become increasingly easy since the country opened its borders and joined the EU. Transportation is also far easier now: for instance there are direct flights between Kristiansand and Gdansk making it possible to reach Northern Poland in less than an hour. Some children participate in Holiday camps in Poland, and some families still have their own apartment in Poland. Frequent visits to Poland often focus on meeting family members, travelling and shopping, since domestic goods are typically very costly in Norway.

Furthermore, information technology such as social media and Skype has made it easy to follow Polish news and maintain contact with family members in Poland on a daily basis. It is not uncommon that many family members also reside in Norway, helping each other. Polish associations such as Polonia Norweska, and the Catholic Church contribute to celebrate and maintain Polish ceremonies, rituals and arrangements. Some Polish shops are also starting to appear in Norway. While many are well integrated in the Norwegian labour market, there often is little social interaction with Norwegians after work. The particular historical developments in Poland with a history of communist political repression and a weak welfare state also seem to contribute to less trust in the Norwegian welfare state. Consequently, all these processes contribute as barriers toward the establishment of social capital in Norway, making social networks primarily consist of other Poles. The study seems to support findings

from other studies that have found that Polish migrants may both deliberately seek and construct familiarity in their immediate environments by for instance buying and cooking Polish food and having a designated Polish public space to visit (e.g. Rabikowska and Burrell, 2009), and that there is a tendency towards discursive hostility and tensions between old and new waves of Polish migrants (e.g. Garapich, 2007).

The preliminary findings from the study seem to suggest a need for a revision of public integration policies related to labour migrants – where we find the largest migrant groups in Norway. At a minimum, language classes should be made cheaper and more accessible to facilitate social participation.

Dissemination

The study will result in at least one article published in an international peer-reviewed scientific journal to be submitted by June 2016 according to the project plan. Members of the project team will also participate on at least one international scientific conference in 2015, presenting a paper based on the findings from the work package.

Members of the WP3 team participated in a TRANSFAM workshop in Warszawa in February 2014, where initial findings were presented to the project group. Members of the team also participated in a PROJECT KICK-OFF CONFERENCE for the Polish-Norwegian Research Programme in Warszawa in April 2014.

References

Brune, N. E. & Bossert, T. (2009). Building social capital in post-conflict communities: Evidence from Nicaragua. *Social Science & Medicine* 68: 885-893.

Centre for International Relations (2014). Poland- past and current migration outflows with the special emphasis on Norway. *Reports and Analyses* 4/2014.

Colletta, N. J. & Cullen, M. L. (2000). *The Nexus Between Violent Conflict, Social Capital and Social Cohesion: Case Studies from Cambodia and Rwanda*. Social Capital Initiative Working Paper No. 23. The World Bank Social Development Family.

- Coradini, O. L. (2010). The divergences between Bourdieu's and Coleman's notions of social capital and their epistemological limits. *Social Science Information* 49:563-583.
- Derose, K., and Varda, D. M. (2009). Social Capital and Health Care Access: A Systematic Review. *Medical Care Research and Review*, 66: 272-306.
- Dika, S. L. & Singh, K. (2002). Applications of Social Capital in Educational Literature: A Critical Synthesis. *Review of Educational Research* 72(1): 30.
- Ferlander, S. (2007). The Importance of Different Forms of Social Capital for Health. *Acta Sociologica* 50, 115-128.
- Garapich, M. (2008). The migration industry and civil society: Polish immigrants in the United Kingdom before and after EU enlargement. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*,34(5), 735-752.
- Gullestad, M. (2002). *Det norske sett med nye øyne*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Kumar, S., Calvo, R., Avenando, M., Sivaramakrishnan, K. & Berkman, L.F. (2012). Social support, volunteering and health around the world: Cross-national evidence from 139 countries. *Social Science & Medicine* 74 (2012), 696-706.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Portes, A., Guarnizo, L. & Landolt, P. (1999). The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promises of an Emergent Research Field. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22, 2: 217-37.
- Rabikowska, M., & Burrell, K. (2009). The material worlds of recent Polish migrants: Transnationalism, food, shops and home. In K. Burrell (Ed.), *Polish migration to the UK in the 'new' European Union: After 2004* (pp. 211-232). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Szreter, S. & Woolcock, M. (2004). Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 33, 650-667.
- Vaughn, J. (2010). Community development in a post-conflict context: fracture and depleted social capital. *Community Development Journal* Vol 46 No 5:5-65.
- Wilkinson, R. (1996). *Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality*. London, New York: Routledge.

Woolcock, M. (2001). The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes. ISUMA- Canadian Journal of Policy Research 2, 12-22.

ⁱ <http://www.ssb.no/utdanning/statistikker/utinnv/aar/2003-02-26#content>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.ssb.no/utdanning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/norges-innvandrere-baade-hoyt-og-lavt-utdannet>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/Basert-pa-foreldede-stereotypier-om-Polen-7737916.html>