

## **Social Network Evolution during Long-term Migration: A comparison of three case studies in the South Wales region**

### **Abstract**

Ten years after Poland joined the European Union (EU), a sizable number of the once considered short-term migrants that entered the United Kingdom (UK) post-2004 have remained. From the literature, it is known that when initially migrating, social networks, composed of family and friends, are used to facilitate migration. Later, migrants' social networks may evolve to include local, non-ethnic members of the community. Through these networks, migrants may access new opportunities within the local economy. They also serve to socialise newcomers in the cultural modalities of life in the destination country. However, what if migrants' social networks do not evolve or evolve in a limited manner? Is cultural integration still possible under these conditions? Using data collected from three case studies in the South Wales region –Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil & Llanelli- from 2008-2012, the aim of this article is to compare Polish migrants' social network usage, or lack thereof, over time. This comparison will be used to understand how these social networks can be catalysts and barriers for cultural integration. The findings point to the migrants' varied use of their local social networks, which is dependent upon their language skill acquisition and their labour market mobility in the destination country.

Keywords: Cultural Integration, EU Migration, Social Networks

### **Introduction**

The 2004 enlargement to the European Union (EU) added 10 new member states from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) including Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Malta, Cyprus, Poland and Estonia (European Commission, 2013). Even with the 2007 accession of Bulgaria and Romania as well as the 2013 accession of Croatia, the 2004 enlargement continues to be the largest and most controversial enlargement to date. In terms of size, the EU grew from 15 members to 25 members. In terms of controversy, there was concern regarding the introduction of 10 new member states from Old Europe with weak economies to 15 new member states from New Europe with strong economies (Drinkwater, Eade, and Garapich, 2009). As a result of these economic differences as well as their proximity to the CEE countries, existing member states such as Austria and Germany implemented transition policies delaying labour migration from the Accession 8 (A8) countries.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, those countries that did not impose a transition policy on the A8 countries – the UK, Ireland and Sweden - did so because they estimated a low number of inward migration from the A8 countries due to the lack of the similar language and the distance between the sending and receiving countries, which influences

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<sup>1</sup> The A8 include all of the CEE countries except Malta and Cyprus. These two countries were excluded from transition policies due to the small size of their labour supply. Only A8 countries were a part of the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS).

social network development (Dobson, Latham, and Salt, 2009). Due to these factors, the British government did not anticipate a large number of A8 migrants entering the UK.

According to the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS), from May 2004 to April 2011, over 1 million A8 migrants (1,133, 950) entered the UK (ONS, 2012). Throughout this period, 62% of the A8 migrants to the UK were from Poland (ONS, 2012), producing the largest single inflow of migrants to the UK in its history (Baure, Densham, Millar, and Salt, 2007). There are limitations to the WRS data (Gillingham, 2010). Harris, Moran, and Bryson (2012) found that the National Insurance Number (NINo) allocations for Poles from 2004-2009 were 27% higher (with 821,000) than the WRS registrations (597,000) during the same period. In addition, the 2011 census has 579,000 Poles living in the UK, making this migrant group the second largest (after migrants from India) in the UK at that time (Bailey and Sodano, 2012). While the actual figures vary, Poles continued to be the largest migrant group throughout this period.

An array of reports (Drinkwater et al., 2009; Anderson, Clark, and Parutis, 2007; Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly, and Spencer, 2006) characterised the Polish migrants entering the UK post-enlargement as being young, highly educated, willing to take low skilled jobs, highly mobile and planning to stay in the UK for the short-term. Some authors noted the ‘migrant paradox’ with high-skilled workers taking low-skilled jobs (Anderson et al., 2006; Parutis, 2011), others noted that the Polish migrants were starting to set up businesses (Author A, 2014; Harris, 2012; Harris, Moran and Bryson, 2014), yet others focused on the ‘dangers’ of having a supply of labour during a recession and ‘job-taking’ (Whitehead, 2009). Regardless of the positive or negative connotation that research on Polish migrants has taken, academics agree that the aforementioned characterisation of this migrant group from 2004-2009 has changed over time (Burrell, 2010).

Over 10 years since enlargement, many of these once considered ‘short-term’ migrants have remained in the UK and are thriving (Drinkwater and Garapich, 2013). It is expected that anywhere from 50% - 70% of the migrants that entered the UK from Poland since 2004 have stayed in the UK (Pollard, Latorre, and Sriskandarajah, 2008; Drinkwater and Garapich, 2013). This range is supported by the aforementioned NINo figures in 2009 in contrast to the 2011 census figures. Research suggests that, similar to nomadic tribes in the Sudan or flocks of birds blown off-course, these migrants are ‘drifting’ and have no definite plans to return to Poland or

to settle in the UK (Author B, 2010). More recent research (White, 2014) highlights that some Poles return migrate to Poland only to return to the UK to settle.

These long-term migrants are making an impact in the UK - spatially, politically and culturally. Unlike other historic migrant groups to enter the UK, through the use of their social networks and recruitment agencies the Poles are spatially dispersed in rural, urban and semi-urban spaces (Author C, 2013; Trevena, McGhee, and Heath, 2013). In addition, due to the academic, media and government interest in this migrant group, the inflow of Poles post-2004 has had an impact on British migration policy. The UK changed its policies towards EU migrants enacting transition policies for the 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania) and 2013 (Croatia) enlargements (EU Commission, 2013). The UK opened its doors to Bulgarian and Romanian labour migrants in January 2014 and the Croatian labour migrants will be able to enter the UK in 2020 (EU Commission, 2013). In regards to the cultural impact, the British Futures survey conducted in December 2013 highlighted that British workers perceive Polish migrants as 'hard working' and 'making a contribution to Britain'; however, the same survey also reported that British workers perceived Polish migrants as 'not making an effort to integrate' (British Futures, 2013). The findings from the British Futures survey, supported by Long's (2014) work, suggests that Poles are perceived as engaging in the labour market in Britain and willing to economically integrate but not culturally integrate.

Through reviewing three case studies in South Wales, in three different spaces, this article seeks to understand how the migrants' use of their social networks evolved over time and, perhaps more importantly, what that evolution means for their cultural and economic integration in the destination country. The data was collected from 2008-2012 through independent studies in Llanelli, Merthyr Tydfil and Cardiff. While spatial comparisons of migration particularly from A8 countries, are becoming more prevalent (Trevena et al., 2013; Bailey and Sodano, 2012), Wales as a whole is largely underrepresented in these studies.

### **Long-term Migration & Evolving Social Networks**

For all that has been written about social networks by scholars of migration, there are important elements of their operation which remain overlooked (Ryan, 2011). This is especially the case with their temporality. A migrant can be a part of several networks simultaneously that evolve

over time. For example, a migrant can be a part of a transnational social network composed of family and close friends in the country of origin (bonding social capital) while also being a part of a local social network composed of family and friends, both ethnic and non-ethnic (bridging social capital), in the destination country (Ram, 1994; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, and Siara, 2009; Putnam, 2000).<sup>2</sup> In addition, these social networks can be connected. The strong ties associated with transnational social capital through family and close friends – kinship networks- can be used to formulate weak ties in the destination country. However, due to changes in contact, the strength of the ties can change over time with the ties to those in the local social network – friendship network- becoming stronger. As the migrants’ use of these different social networks varies (Ryan et al., 2009; Putnam, 2000), the changing use of the migrants’ social networks during their migration period will be reviewed using the existing literature in this section.

Traditionally, during the initial migration period, migrants find work and accommodation in the destination country using their bonded social networks. In this context, social networks are not motivating migrants but facilitating migrants to migrate to a specific area. Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, and Taylor (1993, 48) state that migrants are more likely to move to another country where there is a social network as it ‘lowers the costs and risks of movement while increasing the expected net return of migration’. It favours increased migration as it lowers the risk for new migrants due to the expanding network. Accordingly, the migrant networks have many roles during this initial phase, mainly as pull factors encouraging new migration through providing short-term accommodation in the destination country and assistance in finding a job (Massey et al., 1993). As a result of their migration facilitation role, scholars of migration such as Garip and Asad (2013) and Ryan et al. (2009) have shown how these social networks serve to direct new migrants to particular localities in destination countries. Patterns observed in other contexts, such as in North America, are evident in post-2004 Polish migration to the UK. Thus, Garip and Asad (2013) show how in nearly all of the cases of Mexican migration to the United States which they studied individuals spoke of how network contacts reduced the risk of migration through the assistance they provided in-country. Similarly, Ryan et al. (2009, 679) report that among new Polish migrants in London many had, at least initially, relied extensively

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<sup>2</sup> Simply, bonded social capital is shared between homogeneous groups while bridging social capital is shared between heterogeneous groups (Putnam, 2000).

on social support from close contacts on arrival in London, and, to quote one participant whose experience was echoed across their sample, ‘Poles helped me to stand on my own two feet’.

Social network usage by post-2004 Polish migrants to the UK has also led to an unusual distribution of Poles across all parts of the UK. London and the surrounding areas have been the principal magnets for migrants coming to the UK, but research has shown how places with no previous history of international migration, such as the South West of England and Northern Ireland, attracted significant numbers of post-2004 migrants from Poland and other CEE countries (Pollard et al., 2008). Rural areas, too, saw sizeable immigration, such as in the Highlands of Scotland, the East of England and West Wales (Author B, 2010). Trevena (2009) was one of the first scholars to note that rural localities can create unique challenges for migrants, particularly due to the nature of local labour markets, which can be seasonal and limited in scope. For example, the food production industry has been one important source of labour for post-2004 Polish migrants and a determinant for their movement to rural parts of the UK. More recently, Trevena et al. (2013) highlighted how the internal mobility of international migrants is not driven by location *per se* but rather by the availability of work and accommodation. As highlighted by Massey et al.’s work (1993), these are services often provided, at least initially, by the migrants’ social network.

For long-term migrants, the composition of the social network can change over time with an increase in bridging contacts or an increase in bonding contacts or both (Ryan, 2007). Migrants that were interested in bonding contacts when initially migrating to have a sense of home, may find that through their own personal human capital development, they outgrow these networks, searching for new contacts (Ryan, 2011). Interestingly, these new contacts might be ‘bonded’ to them through different ways. For example, a Polish migrant may have initially had bonded contacts through fellow Polish family and friends when initially migrating but later acquire bonded contacts in fellow non-Polish migrant friends. Through being fellow migrants, the homogeneity of the bond is maintained yet the diversity of the network has increased. This scenario highlights that similar to a migrants’ upward movement in the labour market when initially migrating (Parutis, 2011), a migrants’ social network is dynamic and may change positively (Putnam, 2000).

The evolution of social networks can be a unique experience that unbeknownst to the migrant is

having an impact on their social and economic progression in the destination country. For example, a network that is solely composed of bonding contacts may not necessarily be positive as it can cut off its members from information about the wider community in which they are living (Anthias, 2007; Ryan, 2011). According to Hickman, Crowley, and Mai (2008), these types of networks have led to negative social capital with the wider community thereby threatening social cohesion. This enclosed social network can become a hurdle for the economic and cultural integration of its members with the local community. Alternatively, an increase in bridging contacts can lead to increased integration (Nannestad, Svendsen, and Svendsen, 2008).

According to the International Organization for Migration (2015), integration can be considered the process of mutual adaptation between host society and migrant. Integration can take several forms including economic integration, cultural integration, and political integration (Penninx, 2005). Regardless of the type of integration that occurs, the process of integration takes time; it is traditionally a feature of long-term migration; and it is greatly enabled by shared language and bridged contacts (EU Commission, 2011). Due to the shared language and bridging contacts, types of integration can be linked. For example, a migrant that has economically integrated with the wider society is more likely to be culturally integrated than a migrant that has not economically integrated. Studies by Ray (2003) and Huddleston and Tjaden (2012) note that cities, as traditional magnets for new migrants, are more likely to provide migrants with the support needed to culturally integrate. In addition, many studies (Penninx, 2005; Collett, 2013) highlight the need for regional and national policy to support integration measures in order for sustainable cultural integration to occur. The cultural integration of Poles in specific parts of the UK has recently become the subject of several policy pieces (Polish Scottish Heritage, 2011; EU Commission, 2011) but the influence of varying social networks has yet to be directly assessed for this migrant group.

This article will focus on the impact of the migrants' social network evolution on their economic and cultural integration in the destination country. As a result, the main question raised through this review of the literature, which will be addressed in this article is: using three different spatial areas, how does a migrants' social network influence the economic and cultural integration capacity of the migrant?

## **Methodology**

The three samples compared in this article were gathered through independent, qualitative studies of Polish migrants in the South Wales region, namely Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Llanelli. Cardiff is the capital city of Wales with a population of 350,000 people (ONS, 2011). The main employee jobs are in the service sector, restaurants and hotels, finance and IT, and public administration (ONS, 2013). The city has a history of migration due to the once prominent docklands. From 2004 – 2011, approximately 2500 Poles entered Cardiff (Radcliffe, 2013). In contrast, Merthyr Tydfil has a population of 55,000 people (ONS, 2011). The town has undergone a regeneration since the closure of the coalfields and it is now a hub for firms in public administration, health and social work (ONS, 2011). Interestingly, the once homogeneous population is home to a large Portuguese and Russian migrant population and, between 2004 – 2011 over 1,000 Poles entered the area. Llanelli (rural) is a town in the wider Carmarthenshire local authority with a population of 81,000 people (ONS, 2011). While estimates vary, Llanelli, a demographically homogeneous town, is reported to have received approximately 1,000 Poles during this period (Author B, 2010). The density of Poles in the small, rural town has been attributed to the meat packing facility in the town and the use of staffing agencies in shuttling migrants to this facility for contractual employment.

Across all three locations - which differed spatially, economically and socially - the samples were collected through snowball sampling, aided by gatekeepers in the local economy of each area. The methods used in each location and the characteristics of the individual samples are outlined in Table 1.

<enter table 1 here>

Both open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used. Open-ended questionnaires were used solely in Merthyr to reach a larger section of the post -2004 migrant population. Semi-structured interviews were completed with post-2004 Polish migrants, across all three locations, to get a better understanding of their social network usage, activity in the Welsh labour market, human capital development and long-term plans in the UK. It should be noted that the studies varied in the language and gender of the interview. The interviews in Merthyr and Llanelli were conducted in either Polish or English, by male Polish researchers, and

the interviews conducted in Cardiff were done in English, by a female American researcher. For the latter locale, all participants were offered an interpreter who was never requested.

In terms of their characteristics, all of the migrants in the three samples migrated to the UK from Poland in the post-2004 period and stayed longer than initially expected (3-6 months on average). In terms of demographics, each sample had a relatively even gender distribution. Beyond these three points, the samples varied significantly. The sample variations exist both between the three South Wales locations as well as between these locations and the profile of post-2004 Polish migrants that was described in the literature. Focusing on the basic demographics of the migrants – age, gender, English language skills, education – each sample had its own unique attributes as evidenced in Table 1. Variations amongst the samples also extended into their employment with migrants in Merthyr and Cardiff employed in both the ethnic labour market and the British labour market. Employment in Llanelli was limited to the British labour market.

The language of the interviews, gender of the interviewer, and nationality of the interviewer could have had an impact on both the sample construction and the participants' responses. For example, as demonstrated in Table 1, the Cardiff sample was better educated than the Merthyr and Llanelli samples but that could have been a result of interviewing only English-speaking Poles. Similarly, female participants may have provided more information to the female researcher in Cardiff due to the shared gender as well as the fact that the researcher was also an immigrant to the region.

## **Discussion of the Individual Case Study Findings**

### *Rural Case*

In Llanelli, social networks were, in a variety of ways, catalysts for migration, stimulating interest in the prospect of work abroad and offering reassurances of in-country assistance. In almost all the cases of participants in the qualitative study in Llanelli, a bonding network



composed of friends, associates or family members provided the initial suggestion of moving to Wales.

During the first round of fieldwork in 2007/2008, it became clear that Polish migrants in Llanelli had largely migrated from particular localities in central Poland, such as Kutno and Żychlin, both of which are close to the city of Łódź. Over 60% of the participants during this period moved to the UK to link up with their network contacts. During the second round of fieldwork in 2010/2011, all of the participants had bonding contacts, including friends and family from Poland, living in Llanelli. Supporting the work of Massey et al. (1993), many of the Poles that participated in the first round of the study (2007/2008), and were influenced by their bonding network to migrate to Llanelli, became the local, bonded network for the next round of Poles that participated in the second round of the study (2010/2011).

The networks which migrants had either accessed prior to leaving Poland or imported with them to Llanelli remained important as they settled into life abroad. Especially in the first months after migrating, the migrants needed to be able to call on family and friends in accessing work and accommodation as well as for financial assistance and, too, for emotional support. New friendships were also forged in-country through bonding contacts made either through work or in the shared housing which many experienced, at least initially. However, many Poles in the Llanelli sample, actively distanced themselves from other Poles outside of their bonded network in Llanelli. In common with research in other parts of the UK and further afield (White and Ryan, 2008; Putnam, 2011), this distancing was driven by a distrust of fellow Poles and by a general sense of competition for scarce resources, notably job openings and better pay. Many, too, had accounts of experiences when they had opened up to others, especially soon after arriving, and they had, as one woman put it, their ‘fingers burned with these so-called “friendships”’.

More than any other factor, however, it is migrants’ competence in English, which placed the greatest limitation on the broadening of bridging contacts, particularly with the local population and, by extension, to access employment in the wider labour market. The majority of participants in the Llanelli sample had limited skills in English before migrating and, generally, most saw this as their principal barrier. One man who had been living in the town for over three years commented that if ‘someone doesn’t know it [English] nor learn it, then it’s final – no chance to

exist in this local society. So, the only thing that remains are those Polish enclaves...one goes to the factory and his boss speaks Polish, his friends speak Polish, and everybody speaks Polish’.

There were few migrants who did not express a desire to improve their command of English. Some had started learning but had given up on formal classes. Most reported they simply did not have time to learn English. Without some competency, however, in conversational, let alone written English, the potential for bridging with the local population, as was widely recognised by participants, was limited. As one man remarked: ‘I would say 85% of the Poles, don’t integrate with the Welsh, because there is a language barrier, to various extents. Maybe the Welsh even would like to [connect with Poles], but they are aware that we don’t speak English, and they just leave it this way’.

In this rural case study, there was neither strong evidence of ‘bonding’ links (beyond the kinship network that facilitated the migration) or of any substantive ‘bridging’ networks with the local population. Eschewing ties with many of their fellow nationals, and limited by their lack of English, most migrants fall back on a close circle of friends to support and sustain them. In a small town in a rural setting, employment opportunities are restricted by the level of English which most migrants possess. In a second study carried out in 2010/2011, interviews highlighted how those with families living in the town, who had joined after the initial migration, were committing themselves to a long-term stay abroad (see also White 2012). Even with the opportunities for accessing additional contacts via new parental networks at their children’s schools, participants reported continuing barriers due to their low levels of competency in English. Despite the lack of employment opportunities, the limitations in communicating with the wider community and the negative social capital acquired (Hickman et al., 2008), many were committed to remaining in Llanelli even when limited competency in English and weak bridging networks leave them on the margins of the local society.

#### *Semi-Urban Case*

For the Poles in Merthyr, approximately 65% of the sample originally migrated to Wales to be near family and/or friends. The same percentage was married or cohabitating when initially migrating and a quarter of the migrants had extended family members living with them or nearby. For the migrants in the semi-urban sample, transnational social networks composed of bonding contacts are of significant importance, particularly when the migrant is initially

migrating as well as when the migrant is setting up a business (in the case of ethnic entrepreneurs in the region). As noted by one migrant: ‘Because my father come here [Merthyr] first, I come too’. Similar to the urban case, bonding contacts in their local social network in the UK were part of an extended transnational network that's included family and co-ethnic friends.

In regards to employment, around a third of the Poles in the sample migrated for pre-arranged jobs with the rest migrating with the knowledge that jobs were available. This knowledge of the labour market was based on the pre-migration reports from their social networks. When initially arriving in the UK, the majority of the migrants looked for and took low skilled employment, whatever their education level. This employment was primarily in the food and meat-processing sector where their local social network, composed of bonding contacts from Poland, were working. This was noted by several migrants: ‘I moved here for financial reasons. I have chosen this place, because my family lived here before and I had prearranged job in Merthyr’ as well as ‘My friend was working over here and she phoned me and said she was working here in the meat factory and so I came to work there’. In the early 2000s, the majority of migrants working in Merthyr’s meat processing factories were Portuguese. After the EU enlargement in 2004, meat processing factories focused on attracting Polish migrant workers to fill their demand to labour in an effort to keep down costs and maintain control of the workforce (Tannock, 2013). As a result, tensions between the two migrant groups’ -Portuguese and Poles- remains fraught, reinforcing bonded network ties, based on nationality, at the local level.

Employment opportunities for migrant workers in Merthyr are generally limited to this sector, largely due to the language skills of the migrants. A small number of factory workers move up the occupational hierarchy into language related support services, but language remains an impediment to upward occupational mobility for most. Despite the difficulties of maintaining their position in the hierarchy of migrant labour, many Poles appear happy with their situation and with employment that gives them a better quality of life and financial security than in Poland. Opportunities to move up the division of labour appear to be a secondary concern and many Poles appear to accept their position with a sense of resignation (Author C, 2013)

Some Polish entrepreneurs arrived in Merthyr with the sole intention of going into business. Increasingly, however, many migrants have become dissatisfied with factory life and for these, as well for those that cannot find employment – entrepreneurship and going into business has

become an alternative that is facilitated by strong transnational networks. In this case, the transnational networks can supply the entrepreneur with a supply chain, funding, and/ or co-ethnic employment. To get the funding needed to start a business, many migrant entrepreneurs had worked long hours in two or three jobs, seven days a week for many months. With a lack of local funding and support some have also looked for and received investment from family members back in Poland. The competition between Polish and Portuguese migrants is also evident in the number of migrant businesses from both communities in the town, and arguably the competition between the two groups has driven entrepreneurship and the quest for space in certain parts of the town. It is also clear that members of the local community have helped the development of migrant businesses by demonstrating a willingness to buy products from migrant shops and support them. As one migrant commented: 'That's why I like it, the locals are interested in what we sell and the national foods. Most of them try different things on holidays so they are not scared of trying something new'. Migrant entrepreneurship became more central to our work in some places as the research progressed and we spoke to people who had once worked in factories; this led to further interviews with migrant entrepreneurs, which were often undertaken as more general follow up interviewees to key issues.

The increased diversity and ethnic heterogeneity has improved the culture and economy of the region. Merthyr now has a range of ethnic shops, cafes and bars that was unimaginable a few years ago. This dramatic increase in ethnic businesses is changing the image and perception of the town, which was traditionally considered an area that was suffering the consequences of economic decline. Asked to explain these developments in Merthyr, one interviewee answered: 'It's more multicultural if you like, which for somewhere like Merthyr Tydfil is quite unusual because the Valleys' mind-set is the norm.' This situation has also contributed to the sense of well-being and satisfaction experienced by many Polish migrants, who appear happy in the area despite their lack of occupational mobility; contacts in the transnational network are again significant.

Similar to the distrust amongst the Poles in Llanelli, the competition amongst the migrant groups – Portuguese and Polish- living and working in Merthyr has restricted the number of non-Polish bonding contacts that the Poles have in their local social networks. However, through adding more Polish stores and having increased contact with the British national population in the region

through this commercial opportunity, the Polish entrepreneurs are able to expand their local social networks to include bridging contacts. It should be noted that the Polish entrepreneurs also have a higher level of English language skills than the Poles that are seemingly isolated in the meat processing plant.

### *Urban Case*

Looking at the entirety of the sample for the Cardiff study, upon initial migration, the Poles heavily relied upon their transnational social networks composed of bonding contacts (co-ethnic family and friends). The contacts in the transnational network provided three distinct services to Polish migrants in Cardiff. First, they were a reminder of home allowing the new migrant to thrive in the destination country while having a support system that was formed through strong ties over an extended period of time. Second, the network was a stabiliser for the new migrants providing them with accommodation, employment or both when initially moving to Cardiff. Third, in some cases, the social network incentivised the migrant to come to Cardiff from another part of the UK or, based on the contacts success, to migrate from Poland to the UK. This transnational, bonded network played different roles at different times for the migrants in the urban case.

During the period immediately following migration, the bonding contacts of the migrants in their local social network in the UK were an extension of their transnational network, including both family and co-ethnic friends. This local social network was a source of accommodation and, in some cases, employment opportunities when initially migrating. One migrant commented ‘My cousin was travelling around the UK and he ended up in Cardiff. He texted me and said he had a job for me. I packed my bags and in two days I moved [to stay with him] and haven’t left since. Because of him being here it was much easier for me to come here. I don’t think I would be brave and come over if I was on my own.’ Other migrants relied on friends from Poland to help them when migrating: ‘Yeah, because of my friend who has been here over 3 years, he found the flat for me and my sister so we moved here as we had a flat so that’s why [we migrated].’ Another migrant noted: ‘My friends told me about how good it was here [UK] and that if I wanted to come work they could give me a place to stay [in Cardiff] so I came.’

For the accommodation and the employment (in the British labour market) supplied by the migrant’s social network, it was largely short-term in that the migrant was relying on their social

network when hitting the ground in the UK and, after gaining local knowledge for places to rent or employers with better hours or wages, moving on. This highlights that many of the urban migrants, similar to the rural migrants, were relying on previous post-2004 waves of migrants to supply them with accommodation and employment. Interestingly, similar to the Llanelli case, many of these migrants became the social network contact for later migrants, supplying future migrants with accommodation and employment opportunities.

Approximately one year after the initial migration, the composition of the migrants' transnational social network started to shift. For example, while the migrants' family in Poland continued to be a source of contact for the home life, the migrant's friends from Poland, still residing in Poland, were the first to lose ties. While advances in telecommunications could support short-term migration, in the long-term, it becomes more difficult for migrants to maintain these connections without face-to-face contact (White and Ryan, 2008). Locally, in the destination country, the urban migrant's social network was also becoming more dynamic with an increasingly diverse group of bonding contacts including new Polish migrants, non-Polish migrants as well as bridging contacts ie. British contacts.

Through interacting with a diverse population in the urban setting, acquiring advanced English language skills and having numerous jobs during their ascent in the labour market, the urban migrants were able to have a heterogeneous social network composed of both bonding and bridging contacts: fellow Poles, other migrants in the UK as well as British nationals. This acquisition of language skills through different jobs was noted by a migrant living in Cardiff for 3 years: 'I worked at a coffee shop then I moved to an office job working for an insurance company. Then I found the diversity officer job in Cardiff...Step by step I got better with my English...My fiancée is Welsh and many of my friends are now from here'.

This also extended to the ethnic entrepreneurs in the sample who were interested in integrating with their British counterparts. For some entrepreneurs such as the salon owner, a diverse social network was of significant importance with employees derived from Polish contacts and customers derived from British contacts: 'We mainly have British customers as the Polish women are here for work so they won't get their nails done.' Interestingly, for both the entrepreneurs and the non-entrepreneurs, this diversification of the social network did not happen quickly and it was greatly linked to the work that they were doing. If a migrant was economically

integrated in the British labour market, that migrant was more likely to have a diverse social network, composed of bonding and bridging contacts, due to the interaction with a diverse population. As demonstrated by Nannestad et al. (2008), these bridging contacts in particular can lead to increased integration.

### **Comparison of the Case Study Findings**

The findings from each of these three case studies highlights the impact of the migrants' social network on their ability to develop their human capital, which can be a catalyst or a barrier for economic and cultural integration in the destination country. For example, the migrants in Cardiff added more diverse groups to their local social network including other Poles, non-Polish migrants and British nationals. This did not happen quickly and major events occurred over this period including employment changes and language acquisition. In contrast, the Poles in Llanelli were hindered by the feeling of being outsiders amongst a homogeneous population and the safety provided by their closed social network. In Merthyr Tydfil, the experience of the workplace and tensions with other migrant groups facilitated strong Polish networks, which were enhanced through strong competition between entrepreneurs.

Many of the migrants in the urban case sought to add non-Polish migrants to their social network first before adding British nationals to their social network. This step-by-step addition could be a one-off case; however, in contrast to the situation in Llanelli, the lack of non-Polish bonding contacts could highlight yet another reason why the Poles were unable to include bridging contacts into their social network. In addition, that the social network composition changes, regardless of the steps taken to augment it, are an indicator of economic integration and possible cultural integration for this migrant group. Taking this argument a step further, this would mean that a migrant with a diverse range of individuals – both bonding and bridging contacts – in his/her social network is more likely to have acquired this group through partaking in a range of activities. As a result, these migrants are more economically integrated and, with time, culturally integrating with the wider society.

From comparing three case studies located in three different spatial areas, the question arises of whether the spatial variations have more of an impact on migrants' ability to culturally integrate than the composition of their social network. From the overall findings, the space –urban, semi-urban, rural - in which the migrant is based and the composition of the migrant's social network

are intrinsically linked, reinforcing one another. The migrant's social network provides the opportunity or the barrier for change in terms of acquiring advanced language skills and experiencing new opportunities that are integral to cultural integration. If the migrant is based in a remote area, such as Llanelli, working with co-ethnic migrants in a meat-processing plant, with a closed social network of bonded contacts, there is little interaction with the surrounding community, which discourages engagement and integration. Alternatively, if the migrant is in a more urban environment, such as Merthyr or Cardiff (see Ray, 2003; Huddleston and Tjaden, 2012), with opportunities for employment working side-by-side with other non-Polish migrants or with the British public, has regular interaction with a diverse population, the migrant is more likely to engage with the surrounding community and begin integrating with it.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this article highlight how the evolution of migrants' social networks in-country has an impact on the migrants' economic and cultural integration into the society in which they are staying indefinitely and possibly settling. All of the migrants in the samples in the South Wales region start their time in the UK with a social network consisting of bonded contacts. Those migrants with greater levels of competency in English are able to forge bridging networks with new non-Polish friends and contacts in the localities into which they have moved. This could be due to having employment opportunities alongside non-Poles or being a part of a diverse community. For those migrants with limited English language skills, or with little opportunity to develop their language skills, it is difficult to break out of networks which pre-date migration or those which build small groups of other Polish migrants.

Based on these findings, this article contributes to the current literature in the following three ways. First, studies and articles on Polish migrants in Wales, especially those that account for spatial variations, are growing but still much less than the number of commensurate research studies that are being conducted on Polish migrants in London or England more broadly. Second, while social networks have been reviewed extensively the evolution of the migrants' social networks over time has received less coverage. Third, with the longer term stay of the Polish migrants in the UK, cultural integration is increasingly important and has been the subject of policy (see Polish Scottish Heritage, 2011). However, the factors which influence the integration of the migrants, from the migrants' point of view, has yet to be done.



Even with these contributions to the existing literature, the authors acknowledge that there are three limitations to the studies presented in this article. First, while there are sufficient commonalities between the three studies used in this article – dates, topic, participants – the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher outlined in the methodology could have been better aligned. Second, these findings can be applied to post-2004 Polish migrants in the South Wales region; however, it would be difficult to generalise them to other regions given the variations in spatial areas that are composing this region. Third, this article has taken the position that migrants are freely and openly able to integrate with the local society and has not considered resistance that migrants may face from the general public and politicians to integrate (see Bogardus, 1959).

Addressing integration from the migrants' point of view was not an oversight; rather, it was driven by the data that is available from the three studies. Nonetheless, the sentiment from the general public and from politicians regarding the cultural integration of Polish migrants into British society in 2016 is mixed. For policymakers, on a national level, the mobility of EU citizens, and specifically their migration into the UK has become a major public policy issue over the last decade, with increased resistance to migrants in the UK since 2013. With no limits on the time migrants from EU member states may remain in the UK, the refugee crisis spilling over in Europe and the Brexit referendum, the overarching sentiment is that migration (even if authorised) is a problem that needs to be controlled. As the general public and concerned politicians have become more hostile to migrant groups, the need to encourage integration is of the utmost importance.

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