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To Be an Immigrant in Poland
An Analysis of the Experiences of Immigrants from Non-EU Countries

Abstract: This article analyses the experience of immigrants who have migrated to Poland from the point of view of the major social dimensions of this experience: the organisational dimension which involves the immigrant's relations with various formal public and civic institutions, the economical dimension which determines the immigrant's material standard of living, the socio-cultural dimension which involves the immigrant's relations with members of the receiving society and the identity dimension which involves the immigrant's empowerment and self-identification. The emergent reconstruction of immigrants' vision of social reality uncovers many subjective meanings, positive and negative emotions, heterogeneous experiences and individual strategies of coping with the status of "being an immigrant." This analysis is based on the assumption that differences in immigrants' focus on the different social dimensions and the resulting hierarchy of importance of the dimensions are a very powerful indicator of an immigrant's conditions of life in a given country.

Keywords: immigrant' experience, identity dilemmas, integration, qualitative research, voice of immigrant.

Introduction

Information on the functioning of immigrants in various countries and the resulting integration policy rationale have traditionally been based on various quantitative analyses. On the one hand, immigrants themselves have been analysed (e.g., number of entries into the country, national and religious structure and other demographic parameters, number of unsuccessful and successful applicants for work or residence permits). On the other hand, this knowledge is gleaned from other data concerning the receiving country (e.g., numerous surveys of social attitudes towards various socio-economic phenomena. The increasing numbers of immigrants from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe in Western societies and the numerous barriers to integration and failures in this area have sensitised researchers and decision makers to the fact that immigrants cannot be just objects of intervention of integration policy, they must be active co-authors and participants of such policy. This "empowered" approach to integration has encouraged social scientists to pay more attention to qualitative research where the statements of immigrants themselves are analysed.[1] In this case the researcher's main goal is not to describe the immigrant's functioning in various spheres

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[1] This research approach is now frequently adopted in e.g. studies of traditional and novel forms of discrimination of immigrants in Europe, one of the major determinants of immigrants' failure to integrate.

of life from the external observer's perspective but to reconstruct the immigrant's own vision of social reality on the basis of his/her utterances. This perspective allows the researcher to uncover subjective meanings, positive and negative affect, variety of experience and ensuing individual strategies of coping with one's "immigrant status."

The empirical analysis presented in this article is based on reports obtained from immigrants from non-EU countries[2] within the requirements of three research projects prepared and conducted within the research paradigm presented above. The projects were: the Polish part of *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and Politics of Racial Discrimination*; *Workpackage 2: Immigrant Voices* and two studies of immigrants from Ukraine and from outside the European Union, *Migration from Ukraine to Poland* (Bieniecki, Bojar et al. 2005a) and *Immigrants on the Polish Labour Market* (Bieniecki, Bojar et al. 2005b).[3]

Immigrant Experience—the Foundation for Analysis of the Situation of Immigrants' in Poland

This article looks at the experience of immigrants to Poland from the point of view of the most important social dimensions of this experience: organisational, i.e., the immigrant's relations with various formal public and civil society institutions; economical, i.e., the immigrant's material living conditions, socio-cultural, i.e., the immigrant's relations with the receiving society, and identity, i.e., the immigrant's empowerment and self-identification. These dimensions have been distinguished for analytic purposes but of course they continually interlock in social reality to produce an individual pattern of "being an immigrant" in each separate case. Each dimension of immigrant experience is affected by such factors as age, education, length of stay, fluency in the receiving country's language and familiarity with its socio-cultural reality.

The organisational dimension has to do with immigrants' relations with various institutions of the receiving country, beginning with relations with representatives of the country issuing the documents needed to cross the border,[4] through the actual

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[2] This restriction was introduced because different legal regulations apply to non-EU citizens and also because it has been found that the problems facing this group of immigrants are different from the problems facing other foreigners.

[3] The research reported in this article was based on a qualitative methodology. All the empirical material was gathered by means of the Focus Group Interview (FGI) and the Individual Deep Interview (IDI). Within the framework of the international research project *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and Politics of Racial Discrimination; Workpackage 2: Migrant Voices* a research team headed by Jolanta Supińska conducted 8 FGIs and 11 IDIs in Warsaw, Zielona Góra and Lublin in 2003. Material concerning immigrants from non-EU countries, USA and Canada was selected for the purpose of the present analysis.The analysis was also based on interviews conducted within the framework of two studies of immigrants from the East, *Migrations from Ukraine to Poland* and *Immigrants on the Polish Labour Market*, conducted by the Institute of Political Studies in 2005. In the first of these two studies 20 IDIs were conducted with economic immigrants from Ukraine. In the second study 20 IDIs with immigrants who were not EU, US or Canadian citizens were selected. The purpose of all three studies was to gather a sample of immigrant reports on various aspects of their functioning as immigrants.

[4] Of course the situation of refugees whose first contact with the receiving country only takes place once they have (often illegally) crossed the border differs significantly from the situation of individuals who do not need to apply for entry visas.

crossing of the border when they come in contact with the immigration and customs officers, to the institutions which are responsible for legalisation and prolongation of residence permits and the issuing of work permits. Later on immigrants usually relate to other public institutions such as the health service, policing service, educational institutions, social welfare institutions in the broad sense, etc.

Immigrants also come into contact with other important institutions and although these are not public institutions, they operate within a state-imposed framework. These include banks, nongovernmental helping organisations, the private health service or private schools. Relations with these institutions also affect immigrants' appraisal of their situation in the receiving country (Weinar 2005).

The next important dimension of immigrant experience is the economical dimension. It determines actual living conditions which include: housing conditions and financial resources which allow immigrants to support themselves and their families and to satisfy their basic needs. On the one hand, these conditions depend on the receiving country's socio-economic situation (the situation on the labour market, social policy). On the other hand, successful navigation of this dimension is also determined by factors which affect immigrants' social status such as education and occupation. Depending on these factors, immigrants have a greater or smaller chance of entering the Polish labour market, changing jobs, improving their qualifications or professional advancement.

The socio-cultural dimension determines the immigrant's "inculturation" to the new culture and new social environment by developing social ties. Immigrant experience in this domain is gained in day-to-day interpersonal relations in the neighbourhood, at work, in public transport, in the shops and in the street. Depending on how satisfactory or stressful these relations are, the immigrant will develop different individual strategies of conduct in his/her interpersonal relations and the receiving environment. These factors also determine how comfortable immigrants feel in their new surroundings and how they appraise the receiving country: is it friendly or hostile, easy or difficult to live in? (Ząbek 2002).

One of the important determinants of the ease of socio-cultural adaptation is the degree of similarity/difference between the culture of origin and the receiving culture and the immigrant's ability to adapt to different or even very different values, norms of conduct and social role patterns. Another important factor is the new environment's approach. Where does the receiving society's attitude fall between two extremes: forced assimilation and acceptance only on the condition that the immigrant will become increasingly similar to members of the receiving society on the one hand or exclusion, stigmatisation and marginalisation on the other hand? (Janicka & Bojanowski 2006; Iglicka 2003).

Interpersonal relations also affect the changes in identity which take place in the consecutive phases of adaptation to the new environment. These processes involve the identity dimension of the immigrant's experience. This dimension manifests itself in the need to answer the question "who am I?" This question signifies deep reflection on one's own identity, the need to define one's attitude towards ones own original culture and the culture of the receiving country and the resulting choice of

various strategies: from complete assimilation through integration to isolation and withdrawal (Kłoskowska 1992; Budakowska 2005; Mamzer 2003). The intensity and vector of identity dilemmas depends not only on the immigrant's psychological and socio-cultural characteristics but also, to a large extent, on such characteristics of the new social environment as cultural proximity and receptivity or the intensity of discrimination and marginalisation of the immigrant by the new environment.

The foregoing dimensions of immigrant experience provide the structure for the following analysis of the immigrants' own reports. This analysis enables the detailed characterisation of the different dimension of the immigrant's social life. Its most important outcome, however, is its ability to suggest which of these dimensions have the greatest impact on the immigrant's situation in Poland from his/her own perspective. In other words, we assume that the salience attributed by the immigrants to each of the different social dimensions and the resultant hierarchy of their subjective importance is a very powerful indicator of the specific conditions of immigrant life in a given country. Of course in specific, individual cases other individual factors such as age, education, cultural distance will co-determine which dimension will be decisive for the immigrant's situation and well-being in the receiving country but in this case the researcher is focusing on the general picture which emerges from the analysis of the interviews with representatives of a specific group or category of people. [5]

The order of presentation of the different dimensions is determined by the empirically-based, relative "salience" of each dimension for the immigrant's situation in Poland. We will begin with the one relating to the immigrant's most "traumatic" experience. When discussing each dimension we will highlight those phenomena which absorb the immigrants' attention most.

Immigrants' Relations with Public Institutions

The dimension which most immigrants indicate as the most important one from the point of view of their situation is contact with various public institutions and their representatives. The most important and most frequently mentioned institutions are the ones which are decisive for the immigrant's residential status and the ones which regulate the principles of functioning on the labour market. Immigrants' experiences and expectations with respect to normalisation of their residential status differ depending on the motives of their migration to Poland and their plans for the future.

Very many immigrants come to Poland from former USSR to work and earn money and have no intention of settling in this country. They usually come to Poland alone, leaving their families in their home country, and treat their stay in Poland as a transitional solution to financial hardship. Their strategy is as follows: take advantage of short- or long-term residential visas and return to Poland repeatedly. The most im-

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[5] The preliminary results of analyses conducted in other European countries within the framework of the project mentioned earlier suggest that this type of analysis is a good point of departure for comparative research. Such comparative analysis will be performed when all the data from participant countries have been collected.

portant problem for these people is that they must leave the country within the legally defined term and apply for another visa. The greatest inconveniences are contacts with the immigration and customs officers and uncertainty due to the fear of control of the legality of their stay in Poland. Most interviewees had negative opinions concerning their experiences at the border. The problem they mentioned most frequently was the way Polish immigration and customs officers treated them. They also complained of lack of clarity of the criteria of visa refusal or refusal to allow them to cross the border. Despite the introduction of visa regulations the situation is not any better because—according to the immigrants—these regulations are variously interpreted and the final decision depends on the concrete immigration officer (Bieniecki, Bojar et al. 2005a).

The next, smaller group of immigrants are those who want to settle in Poland for longer or for good. To do so, they must prolong their residence visa regularly and apply for a temporary or permanent residence permit[6] so that they have the opportunity to develop permanent ties with Poland or, in other words, to develop stable, long-term living strategies.

The material we gathered suggests that for both these immigrant categories relations with various institutions are the most traumatic aspect of "being an immigrant in Poland." Immigrants usually describe their contacts with institutions in the context of officials' attitudes and legal regulations.

Some respondents mentioned the officials' improper behaviour towards supplicants: briskness, arrogance or simply ignorance.

In Germany, in France or in the States even officials will not show their dislike because there you have political correctness. And you can even lose your job if you behave that way. Whereas in Poland political correctness has not developed yet. It takes time (Mongolia, F, 31–40, higher, 10).[7]

I many cases, respondents who mentioned bureaucracy and public officials' inappropriate behaviour pointed out that not only immigrants were affected this way because Polish citizens were also mistreated in various public institutions. This—they felt—was caused by the typical weakness of all organisational structures in Poland. It is also worth noting those responses in which respondents pointed out that, compared with 10 or 15 years ago, the situation had improved: information was more complete and accessible and officials were more properly trained to deal with immigrants.

As far as the legal regulations regulating the granting of residential visas, temporary residence permits or permanent residence permits are concerned, the immigrants mention the following problems most frequently: incomplete information concerning the required documents and procedures, unclear, complex and unstable legal regulations and the resulting opinion that officials responsible for immigration are incompetent. The respondents quoted many examples supporting this opinion. They call the demands made by immigration officials "absurd" and often impossible to meet.

And once in every two years you have to travel through the whole of Poland and the whole of Ukraine to get this little certificate that I haven't been tried in Ukraine, (...) although its enough to look at my passport

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[6] And eventually apply for Polish citizenship.

[7] All citation from immigrants, where it was possible, indicate country of origin, age, sex, education, number of years spent in Poland.

to see that I haven't crossed the border even once. I think this is completely absurd. That I haven't stolen from the bank but how could I possibly do that if I never crossed the border, right? (Ukraine, F, 31–40, 4).

The procedural setbacks associated with legalisation of their stay in Poland deepen the immigrants' feeling of uncertainty and instability and make it more difficult for them to develop long-term living strategies relating to Poland.

I met a girl and I want to be with her and marry her but I can't very well do that because this paper business is never-ending, this court here, we paid 360 zloties but nothing seems to have moved so far (...) they are holding us up but a man is not air, he is a living being and he begins a second life (Armenia, M, 21030, secondary, 7).

The situation is often conducive to the sometimes very radical opinion that the legal system in Poland is constructed in such a way as to limit immigrant settlement in Poland as far as possible.

Add to this the need to change your passport every five years and I know of cases when people have to go and change their passport although they have already been in permanent residence here then they come back without this passport because not every office issues passports but their length of stay here is no longer valid. (...) This new passport is all that counts. (...) You have to wait another five years then apply for citizenship once again five years later. People are going crazy and losing their hair (Ukraine, F, 41–50, higher, 7).

Another frequently mentioned and important problem is the belief that immigrants from the East and West are treated differently. Newcomers from both East and West commonly feel that immigration officers treat people from the East much less seriously although immigrants from the West are more prone to interpret this difference in terms of greater competence and experience in contacts with a more modern bureaucracy and better knowledge of legal regulations.

I will return to the problem of differential treatment of immigrants from the East and West later when I discuss the immigrants' socio-cultural experience.

Immigrants have numerous negative experiences such as disrespect and a condescending attitude in their relations with such public institutions as the police, municipal guards, ticket controllers. Immigrants from the East (especially former USSR countries) and foreigners who look different also run a much higher risk of discrimination by Polish law enforcement officers.

I had unpleasant incidents with policemen. For example, here I am travelling home in the evening and all Polish people can travel home safely. But if they see a foreigner, they stop him. Are all your documents in order? They are looking for fault. (...) And if you can't speak Polish properly, you're in trouble. They use words which you don't understand so as to pick on you (Congo, M, 21–30, higher, 5).

The most frequent forms of bad behaviour are disrespect of the immigrant, exceeding one's authority, refusal to intervene, but also disrespect and humiliation of female immigrants from the East. [8]

I had this confrontation with a policeman (...) I was shocked, I was treated like, well to put it short, a whore (...) They could do this to me because I was an Ukrainian (...) If I were Polish things would be different, a 100% percent different (Ukraine, F, 35, higher, 5).

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[8] Not only functionaries are guilty of such behaviour. Women from former USSR countries are susceptible to intrusive and often vulgar taunts from other men who automatically assume that they are prostitutes.

The negative attitude of law enforcers towards immigrants may be attributed not so much to a superimposed cultural pattern of behaviour towards foreigners as to a generalised negativity flowing from personal experiences with many immigrants who are in Poland illegally, do not have valid documents, are not registered and work in the grey area.

Since many Poles also have negative experiences with these authorities it is difficult to say for sure whether this phenomenon is rooted in xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants or whether it is caused by the authorities' tendency to abuse their authority in their relations with people they control. The large number of complaints from Polish citizens suggests that the latter hypothesis may be true. Obviously, however, immigrants are particularly vulnerable to abuse because of their poor command of the Polish language and lack of familiarity with Polish law.

> I had a lot of unpleasant encounters with controllers. When I came over for the second time I hadn't a ticket for my luggage. I had a monthly ticket, but not for luggage. It's different back home. You don't pay separately for your trip and for your luggage so I didn't know those were the rules. And I couldn't speak Polish very well. They took 20 dollars and 40 zloties. (...) These were big guys and I was so small—how was I to stand up to them (Ukraine, F, 22, vocational, 10).

On the other hand we must say that the respondents were quite positive about various public institutions and nongovernmental organisations which are responsible for immigrant affairs. Refugees and expatriates returning to Poland to settle usually said that these institutions had been helpful. Their experiences were mainly positive and contributed greatly to their adaptation although the more educated and receptive ones had much less difficulty finding a job and developing good relations with the Polish social environment.

The Immigrant Enters the Labour Market

Not only the institutions which are responsible for the immigrant's residential status are important. Equally important are those institutions which are responsible for the immigrant's entry into the labour market. The respondents' reports lead to several basic conclusions concerning their perception of the ease of entering the labour market depending on their country of origin, residential status, education and professional qualifications. Those immigrants whose residential status is regulated, have higher education and are highly qualified do not usually have any trouble finding a job. This applies particularly to the professions and managers who do not have to apply for a work permit individually or can be employed on the basis of separate legal regulations (Bieniecki & Frelak 2005).[9]

Some of these people are confronted with the barrier of professional corporations which foreigners must ask for permission to work.[10]

> My father is a doctor and he had great difficulty getting permission to work in his profession. (...) I think he went through all the existing courts together with the supreme one in Warsaw but he was forbidden to

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[9] For example, foreign journalists who work in Poland.

[10] Mainly physicians and lawyers.

practice but of course he won with all these courts somehow, the Warsaw one too, and he was once again allowed to practice (Russia, F, 21–30, student, 8).

Immigrants find it very difficult to understand why they cannot practice their profession, particularly when they studied and qualified in Poland, or why they have to pass a Polish language examination although they went to school in Poland and graduated within the Polish educational system.

Another group is the group of immigrants who are given permission to open their own business in Poland. They often find a market niche for themselves: bars, restaurants serving oriental food, translating and interpreting agencies, natural medicine centres. In many cases, however, immigrants feel that a firm of their own or self-employment are the only way to gain access to the Polish labour market following a series of unsuccessful attempts to find a job in existing firms (Bieniecki, Bojar et al. 2005b).

But this form of entry into the labour market is also replete with difficulties and obstacles which, the immigrants feel, are discriminating them vis-à-vis Polish entrepreneurs.

> I don't know why they decided that I can't survive on 300 zloties a month and must have 1300 a month. Why can a Pole survive on 300 zloties a month but not me. I pay taxes legally here yet I'm not allowed to live on 300 zloties a month—because that's what they decided. Why are Ukrainians or foreigners faced with such restrictions? (Ukraine, F, 31–40, secondary. 4)

A third group of immigrants are people (usually from non-European countries—former USSR, Asia and Africa) who are looking for a legal way to earn a living. It is this group which has the most frequent contacts with labour exchanges and their staffs. Time and time again, these respondents complain of the complicated and confusing legal system, inefficiency, lack of reliable information concerning essential procedures and documents needed to apply for work permits, unfriendliness. Officials are often felt to be impolite, incompetent and hostile.

> It's important how the officials' treat us. Whenever I go to the labour exchange I want to run away. Everybody stared at me. I felt very uncomfortable. (...) The officials were confused. They didn't know how to talk to me. All these people looking at me (Congo, M, 31–40, higher, 13).

According to the immigrants, the Polish employment regulations are so complicated and the procedures are so vague and slow[11] that they discourage potential employers from hiring foreigners (Gmaj 2005).

All this means that many immigrants who would like to work legally withdraw to the grey area because they are unable to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles. In addition to this, many immigrants from the East come to Poland already intent on working illegally and do not even try to gain permission to work. Those who work in the grey area are beyond the control of the institutional system and therefore run the risk of serious abuse (e.g., disrespect of contracts by employers, lack of pay for working overtime, poor conditions of work). Immigrants who decide to work illegally rarely find jobs compatible with their qualifications and their occupation in the country of origin.

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[11] Queues, lack of reliable information, incompetence, long procedures, lack of clarity concerning decisional rules.

One regulation which raises particular concern is the one which says that a foreigner may only be employed if no appropriately qualified Pole is willing to take the job. Immigrants often feel that this regulation is an example of discrimination on the labour market, especially when they themselves have made a great effort to find the position.

> I remember looking for a job. I traversed the whole of Warsaw. I found the job myself. (...) I was surprised when this official, the law that is, he told me that I must advertise for a certain time. (...) the employer must advertise in the newspaper that he wants to employ someone. If he can't find a Pole for the position within a fixed time then he can hire me. (...) But they did find someone. (...) So I was discriminated against because I believe that if I am looking for a job, for example, then I've made an effort. I found this job and I'm the one qualified to do it, I'm here legally, all my documents are in order. I think that I should get the job no matter where I come from or what my residential status is (Congo, M, 21–30, higher, 5).

Immigrants agree that the procedure of applying for a work permit is the most cumbersome one and the one they perceive as the most discriminating. Employers and co-workers are more tolerant and less discriminating.

The "Experience of Being Different"

The analysis of the interviews with immigrants revealed that, as far as their evaluation of their immigrant status is concerned, the quality of their relations with public institutions is particularly important. But in addition to relations with formal organisations and institutions, their experience is also shaped by their day-to-day contacts with "ordinary people" whom they meet in many different social situations: at work, in their neighbourhood, in the street, in cafés and cinemas, at social events.

The "experience of being different" is an important part of immigrants' social relations. If we analyse what they say about this we can plot a map of "differences." According to the respondents, these differences have a significant effect on their perception of the receiving society and this in turn affects the way people treat immigrants.

The first point on this map is the immigrants' belief (already mentioned) that officials have a different approach to immigrants from the East and immigrants from the West. This difference is even more pronounced in the community's perception and treatment of immigrants from Eastern and Western Europe. The respondents say that Poles respect and admire Western citizens but are condescending towards immigrants from the East.

> I think that in general Poles are more tolerant of the West, of Germans. I, say, had a case that when I spoke to my child in Russian someone walked up to me and asked why I was talking to him in Russian like this. Listen, if I were German you'd be kissing my backside because you want so badly to join the European Union, you simply love the Germans, English and French. Whereas everything beyond the eastern border is just shit for you (Russia, M, 31–40, secondary, 8).

The most salient aspect of this experience of being different is use of the stigmatising cultural-linguistic category *Russky*. All immigrants from the East are called Russkies, no matter where they come from.

Everything beyond the eastern border, no matter whether it's Kazakhstan or someone, for them they're all Russkies, its not important whether he's from Georgia, everyone who lives there is a Russky, be he black, white, yellow or orange—all Russkies. All the worst things come from there (Russia, M, 31–40, secondary, 8).

In the cultural sense, this name applies to a category of people from the system associated with the USSR and rejected by Polish people and it signifies a certain type of "Russian person." The majority of immigrants from the East, especially those who live at the borderland, are poor people who will do the most menial jobs for very little pay. The generalised "Russky" image is often constructed on the basis of references to this social category.

One particular manifestation of this stereotyped image of immigrants from the East and the resulting social distance is the way people react to the soft, eastern pronunciation. [12] The following response illustrates this problem well: the interviewee declares that she has not been maltreated but this may have been due to the fact that she could easily pass as a Pole because she spoke the language fluently and had a Polish name. The interviewee tellingly says that this was her "saving grace."

All in all I never felt inferior here. I've been here four years. (...) The fact that I speak Polish very well and have a Polish name was my saving grace. It's hard to tell the difference. And maybe that saved me a bit. But I never had any trouble (Ukraine, F, 21–30, student, 8).

Poles often think of the countries of origin of immigrants from the East as not only poor countries but also culturally backward ones.

I travelled with a group of children who were to spend their holidays in Poland. Polish 12–13-year-old children asked me: do you have television, electricity, where is Ukraine? (...) Ukraine does not lie in Africa. Ukraine lies next to Poland. Ukraine has not run very far away from Poland, there are universities there; but these children asked me whether we have television at all? Pure ignorance. Then this has its consequences in adult life (Ukraine, F, 25, higher, 4).

Although immigrants from Eastern European and non-European countries often feel that these national stereotypes are unfair and unjustified, they often feel that Poland is a more civilised country—a more orderly and aesthetic environment, with more cultured interpersonal relations.

I liked it here very much. The children looked different, nicer. They dressed differently. had toys and things. Not like children in Ukraine. I always tried to bring the children something from Poland, some present. I liked the older people very much. They look different here than in Ukraine. I remember my first impression, it so happened it was Sunday. And these grannies were dressed in white blouses and the granddads also wore white shirts, and they walked to church. Well, they look different. And it was very nice (Ukraine, F, 41–50, higher, 7).

It looks as if cultural differences rooted in different religions, customs or interpersonal relations are much less important for the way the Poles and immigrants relate to each other. They rarely lead to serious social controversies or conflicts although some immigrants emphasise the fact that they sense a difference and feel that their

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[12] It is noteworthy that the former typical attributes of the immigrant from the East, i.e., their typical mode of dress, checked shopping bags and gold teeth are now rare. Hence the only "signal" that one is dealing with an immigrant from the East is his or her "soft, lilting accent."

own nation is more direct, altruistic and spontaneous. Poland and Poles are felt to be a western society which, as opposed to eastern societies, is more materialistic and prefers high standards of living, individual achievement and self-actualisation rather than communitarian values.

Not only did respondents make a distinction between immigrants from the East and immigrants from the West. They also mentioned physical differences, i.e., different anthropological features and skin colours. The most frequent reaction to such differences is "staring."

> This is not observing. I would call it staring. It is embarrassing. I see not point in it—look once, but not all the time (Zambia, M, 31–40, higher, 10).

Time and time again the immigrants mentioned being the object of attention because they were physically different. Such reactions were largely due to the "untypical" situation when a person of a different skin colour is rather rare in a homogeneous society. Immigrants from Africa and the Far East, particularly the Vietnamese—the most numerous group of Asians—experience this excessive attention. The respondents found this excessive interest in their different looks rude to say the least and said that it was especially pronounced in the eighties and early nineties when, unlike today, there were very few immigrants of a different skin colour in Poland.

> Well, there was this unpleasant name-calling, e.g., Chinese. (...) I think that this was a reaction to novelty. Novelty... something exotic. Some people cannot express it somehow. And all they can do is behave in such a (hesitation) rather primitive way. (...) Nowadays there are many identical people here in Warsaw, say, and so people do not react as they did then. But in 90, 91, 93, it was worst then (Vietnam, F. 42, student, 11).

Most reports of responses to physical difference refer to behaviour in the street or situations when immigrant children went to school for the first time. Interest in physical difference takes on various forms: from "gaping through unpleasant words to physical aggression in response to difference" (Flam 2006).

A more general conclusion emerges from the analysis of immigrants' reports of their relations with Poles, i.e., a process which we may call "coming to terms with strangeness" seems to be taking place. The more contact people have with the immigrant and the closer that contact is, the better the chance of developing positive relations. The respondents' opinions about their relations with the direct environment—at school, work, home—usually support this conclusion. These opinions are generally very positive.

> There are walls between me and the Poles which will be difficult to scale. It's really been hard here. I wanted to get to know people where I was living and I did (...) I got to know people I was afraid of and am still afraid of. In the end, they became my best friends. They respect me (Vietnam, M, 45, secondary, 30).

People who do not know the immigrant personally are more inclined to respond aggressively. We must remember, however, that there are still relatively few immigrants in Poland and hence there is much less negativity than in many Western European countries where there is more competition on the labour market and for social welfare resources. [13]

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[13] It is also probable that, due to the small number of immigrants, immigration has not been a significant element of political programs and public discourse as it has been in other countries where it has become a serious social issue and a central theme in political debate.

The second important conclusion which flows from our analysis of social relations has to do with adaptation to Polish society. The interview material suggests that the more thoroughly immigrants merge with the environment by relating to it in various ways, speaking Polish and showing interest in "Polish affairs," the better the social relations between representatives of the receiving country and the immigrants. The model which Poles seem to be most willing to accept is not complete assimilation which forces people to reject their own national and cultural identity but rather the ability to integrate within the existing social framework.

Identity Dilemmas and Self-organisation of Immigrants

The most salient dimension in the foregoing discussion is the one which relates to identity and frequent situations where immigrants ask themselves: who am I? How do people perceive me and how do I want to be perceived?

> When I came to Poland I began to feel as if I were a stranger. Something like that. And then I felt the need to identify either with this nation or that nation or any social group for that matter because people very often asked me "who do you feel you are?" or "who are you really?" And I eventually began to wonder which side I was on, this one or that one. You cannot be at the borderline. And then I think to myself that (...) I began to be more aware who I am (Belarus, F, 20, student, 2.5).

This quotation is a good illustration of the identity dilemma which confronts every immigrant who associates his future with the receiving country for some time or even for ever.

Qualitative research provides insufficient grounds to say how frequently immigrants select various identity strategies but it does suggest that these strategies vary and that certain contingencies are more conducive to some strategies than to others.

> I was always a Pole back home in Kirghizia. I have a Polish name. Here I'm taken for a Russian all the time, to this day (Kirghizia, F, 51–60, higher, 11).

This comment tells us about an experience which is typical for repatriates who feel they are Polish when they come to live in Poland but are treated as Russians by their Polish environment. Despite these negative experiences, however, they feel that they are "Poles who landed abroad, away from their homeland, due to some historical turmoil" (Chodnicka & Więckowska 2004).

Immigrants who do not have Polish ancestors often choose one of two identity strategies: they either decide to retain the status of visitors or they strongly identify with Polishness. In the former case, their identity and identification remain relatively intact in the new environment: "I'm proud to be Russian. I never said I was Polish although my mother is Polish. But I was brought up in the Russian tradition" (Russia, F, 23, student, 6). In the latter case, powerful identification often implies use of the concept of "second homeland."

> I used to read about this second homeland thing by I never quite understood what these words really meant until I came to Poland. Poland has become my second homeland, no matter whether Poles are good

or bad or well, I don't know. Good mannered or not good mannered. I tolerate it all and like it all and I like those drunkards on the streets and those drug addicts and those intelligent types and it hurts me to look at it all because I treat it like it was my own (...) because my home is here and because my children speak Polish and my younger daughter doesn't speak Armenian, she was five when we came here and she doesn't know the Armenian characters and is always so busy that she never had time to learn, she only speaks Polish, here are our friends say, our close friends, my life is here (Armenia, F, ?, higher, 8.8).

Usually, however, before immigrants adopt a specific identity strategy, they go through a period of often dramatic efforts to identify themselves and their place in social space.

And here I was, one foot here, one foot there, for seven years. We want to be at home because we haven't enough to live on and cannot work and we like it here but this isn't quite our home. Not because we don't like it here but because our roots are there at home in Ukraine. We have families [there], we have friends. Our daughter should be at school by now. We have this fear of what culture [our daughter is going to learn], what you said about your daughter, that she doesn't have this, well, this is a tragedy if a person doesn't have any culture, any completeness (Ukraine, F, 42, higher, 7).

This process does not always end with the decision to stay in Poland for good or go back home. It sometimes leads to the decision to emigrate further in search of a place which will satisfy the immigrant's needs and expectations better.

I mean to finish my studies here first then see how it is in the west. Because I would like to see, to find a job in the west. I certainly won't go back to Ukraine because I see no future there, it's all right as long as you have money, but to have money I'll either stay here but certainly not in Zielona Góra because the chances of finding a job here are very small indeed (Ukraine, F, 21–30, student, 8).

This excerpt exposes yet another phenomenon which shows up clearly in the interviews. We may call it economical rationality. Often immigrants, when asked to rate their chances of staying in Poland for good, do not mention their social relations with Poles. They motivate their decisions in terms of their chances of finding a satisfactory job and obtaining residential status which would allow them to develop and implement long-term living strategies.

In my case I can hardly be pleased with my stay in Poland because when I came to Poland eleven years ago I thought that when I finished university all the options would be available to me and I would settle down but that was not the case (Senegal, M, 33, higher, 11).

In addition to these individual attempts to solve identity dilemmas, self-organisation has a great effect on the immigrants' well-being in the receiving country. Immigrants know perfectly well that in countries which have a long tradition of immigration, immigrant communities develop large networks and powerful public and civic organisations are an important social and political force which participates in the public debate on the role and place of immigrants in the state and the community. The interview material suggests that, as far as Poland is concerned, self-organisation is still in a fledgling state yet immigrants are becoming increasingly aware of the need to develop their own representations and know that these representations should encourage internal consolidation on the one hand and represent the immigrant community before the state and its institutions on the other hand (Bieniecki, Bojar et al. 2005a).

(...) when I look at my friends I see that there is a lot of ignorance, they are afraid to go to institutions, for example, to arrange things, there is no legislation to make it easier for foreigners (...) This is a relatively new association and thankfully they published this brochure for us saying where to go and how much things cost (...) This is our life belt... (Mongolia, F, 31–40, higher, 6).

Immigrant associations not only help to support national culture by organising various cultural events or language courses and publishing press. They are also beginning to play an increasingly important role as mediators between immigrants and public institutions.

Conclusion

To summarise this presentation of the abundant material on how immigrants perceive Poland as a migration destiny, let us formulate a few general conclusions concerning the different dimensions of immigrant experience. Obviously, negative experience relating to relations with public institutions, especially those ones which are decisive for residential status and permission to work in Poland, dominate their story. Opinions concerning the approach of these institutions to immigrants are one of the most important criteria for the evaluation of the receiving country as a whole and its various institutions. Immigrants know that the outcomes of these "encounters with institutions" will largely determine their place in social space by either "including" them as legitimate members of the community or "rejecting" them as "strangers" or "inferiors" who are not entitled to share the community's rights.

Social relations are a second important area of immigrant concern. The most salient problem here is sense of "strangeness." This sense is strongly experienced by immigrants from the former USSR and it is negative. This negative treatment of immigrants from the East is the dominant socio-cultural experience.

As far as the identity dimension is concerned, although identity dilemmas and related emotions are powerful among the interviewees, nothing in the material suggests that identity-related problems are determined in any specific way by the place where they arise. Rather, they are typical for immigrants everywhere. On the other hand, certain specifically Polish elements show up in reports of the weak, fledgling nature of self-organisation processes in Poland.

The phenomena which attract the attention of the interviewed immigrants seem to support the proto-immigrant nature of existing institutional solutions and social relations. This is because immigration is a relatively fresh phenomenon in Poland. Slightly more than a decade is too short a period to develop tested institutional solutions and a consistent immigration policy. On the one hand, the scale of immigration is not large enough to force policy decision makers to take radical steps and on the other hand models adopted from Western European countries are often mere abstractions with little relevance to any real social problem. This is because Poland, as opposed to many Western European countries, does not have a large and continually increasing immigration. Examples of improper treatment of immigrants, mentioned by the interviewees, are often interpreted in terms of lack of appropriate social patterns

of conduct in the face of "cultural difference," even by the respondents themselves, rather than in terms of ideologically based and institutionally reinforced intolerance and discrimination.

When evaluating the problems of immigration in Poland we must also remember that we are largely dealing with first-generation immigrants. These immigrants often feel that they are immigrants rather than Poles for the rest of their lives. They feel that they are guests, not members of the community. Interviews with the children of immigrants who are now in the Polish educational system suggest that the next generation has a large chance of feeling that they are completely legitimate members of Polish society. In short, in the sociological sense, immigrants are neither a group of communities or more or less organised interest groups. Rather, they are a collection of similar individuals.

To conclude, we may say that immigrants in Poland construct their reality around two basic attitudes and hence two types of values. The first one is pragmatic and refers to their legal and economic status. This status determines the vital stability of the immigrant and his/her family. This is why immigrants are extremely concerned about their lack of formally regulated status in Poland. Until they have a document certifying their right to live in Poland for good and work in this country, they have an acute sense of instability and cannot develop long-term living strategies. This is why immigrants' experience their most intense emotions when they relate to institutions which decide about their residential status.

The second attitude is dignity-related. From this perspective, the immigrant's vision of reality is organised around experiences relating to all those situations in which they are unequally treated. This is why the belief that immigrants from the East and West are differently treated evokes such intense emotions.

Both these attitudes are exacerbated by the feeling that, being immigrants, they are not a significant part of Polish institutional and social reality but simply a "troublesome" margin.

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