

Tom 13/2021, ss. 359-380
ISSN 0860-5637
e-ISSN 2657-7704
DOI: 10.19251/rtnp/2021.13(15)
www.rtnp.mazowiecka.edu.pl

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Płock as a city of ‘immigration’ and ‘emigration’ in 2019

Płock jako miasto ‘imigracji’ i ‘emigracji’ w 2019 roku

Streszczenie: Polska jest krajem z długą historią emigracji, ale dzisiaj ma ona także nową tożsamość jako “kraj imigracji”. Artykuł prezentuje wyniki badań przeprowadzonych w 2019 r. wśród 26 Ukraińców i 6 osób z innych krajów, pracujących w Płocku. Analizuje przyczyny ich decyzji o przyjeździe właśnie do Płocka, a nie do innego miasta. Poszukuje także odpowiedzi na pytania, dlaczego zostają albo – w przypadku Ukraińców – kilka razy wracają do Płocka, nie szukając pracy w innych miastach.

Słowa kluczowe: imigracja, Płock, Ukraińcy

Abstract: Poland is a country with a long history of emigration, but today it has a new identity as a ‘country of immigration’. The article presents findings from my research in 2019 among 26 Ukrainians and six other foreigners working in Płock. It analyses the reasons why they came particularly to Płock rather than to another city, and also why they have

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remained there, or – in the case of the Ukrainians – return several times to Płock, rather than seeking work in other cities.

Keywords: immigration, Płock, Ukrainians

Introduction

As countries become more prosperous, they often undergo a ‘migration transition’ and gain net immigration: more people arrive in the country than leave. This has occurred, for example, in Ireland and Spain, both countries with a history of emigration. Poland is currently undergoing a similar migration transition. Although statistics are unreliable, it is clear that plenty of people still leave Poland to go abroad. At least two million Poles, for example, were estimated to be ‘temporarily’ living elsewhere in Europe in 2020 (GUS 2021). Yet the number of foreigners arriving in Poland has also been increasing rapidly over recent years, and by 2020 may have totalled over two million, most of whom came on temporary permits. Ukrainians are the largest nationality among migrants arriving both to study and work (Górny et al 2019, GUS 2021).

Although studies of migration transition tend to have a national focus, my article is based on a project which examines Poland’s migration transition at sub-national level, comparing the experiences of three medium-sized cities: Płock, Kalisz and Piła. Receiving country scholarship recognises the significance of city-level factors for migrant integration: for example, Alexander (2003), writing about West European cities, suggests that cities formulate their policies based on different perceptions of ‘the stranger’, and that these often become more liberal over time as cities become more accustomed to housing migrant populations. Receiving country scholars tend to ignore the fact that the very same ‘receiving’ cities may be also ‘sending’ their own migrants abroad. They have a double, receiving and sending identity. It is this double identity which constitutes the overarching theme of my current research project.

However, this article has a narrower objective. It investigates the question: Why do foreign migrants come to Płock? Apart from its academic interest, as a contribution to research on why people migrate, the topic also has policy implications, since understanding migration motivations is essential for local authorities to form a clear idea of how to help migrants integrate successfully into their new surroundings. This article considers both how migrants chose Płock and what they thought about staying on in the city.

Literature review and theory

Much migration research is devoted to understanding why migration happens. A complex bundle of factors are involved, and reasons are often highly individualised. Nonetheless, migration motivations also possess certain universal features and it is these common patterns which cause scholars to write about 'migration theory'. The narrower question of why people migrate to particular destinations is often answered with reference to Dual Labour Market Theory (Piore 1979), a type of 'pull factor' approach, which posits that receiving country economies become dependent on migrant labour for unpleasant and low-paid jobs and that this explains why they attract migration. Increasingly, researchers appreciate that pull factors can also include 'lifestyle' reasons, explaining for instance the attraction of sunny Spain, France and Bulgaria to North-West Europeans or the reputation of cities like Berlin, Dublin or London as 'fun' places for young people (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014). Other explanations focus more on networks: migrants choose a particular destination because they already know someone there, either a family member or friend whom they want to join for emotional reasons, or simply someone who can help them practically when they arrive and thereby lower the risk of migrating.

As more people migrate, a local migration culture forms in the sending community – a culture which includes assumptions

about preferable destinations. For example, thanks to a mixture of labour market, lifestyle and network factors, UK and Ireland rapidly became popular destinations for migrants from all parts of Poland after 2004, even though the norm in different regions in the 1990s had been that Germany, Belgium or the USA were the preferred destinations (Pszczółkowska 2015, White et al 2018: 19).

My own previous work combined investigation of networks and migration cultures with a livelihood strategy approach (Ellis 2000, White 2017). The approach understands ‘strategy’ as the weighing up of pros and cons which precedes the decision to migrate – the comparisons migrants make between, for example, migrating solo or with their children, or between using an agency or responding to invitations by friends. This approach to interviewing migrants can also be applied to discovering why they chose particular destinations: for example, to understand why a young Polish migrant might choose Ireland *circa* 2004 with no job fixed up in advance, in preference to a more conventional destination such as Belgium, even if this came with a specific job offer via a friend of their parents. Such decisions are often made within the context of a particular migration culture: for example, that it is socially acceptable for Polish or Ukrainian women to leave late teenage children to become care workers in Italy or Germany (White 2017, Solari 2017).

Migration motives are often complementary: for example, many people go abroad to work *and* have an adventure. However, in some circumstances different motivations compete. For example, it might make most economic sense to migrate to Place A (for example, the capital city), yet networks and/or lifestyle preferences take migrants to Place B. Moreover, the sending location is also significant, partly because of networks linking specific sending and receiving destinations, but additionally because migrants tend to contrast and compare their location of origin with specific destinations abroad and form preferences based on these comparisons. For example, if they have a self-

identity as someone from a village or small town they may exclude large cities as destination options (White 2013).

Although research on migration motivations and on migrants' lives abroad usually constitute separate branches of migration research, it is difficult in practice to separate the two. Once someone has arrived in a place, they have to be motivated to stay there, rather than return to their country of origin or move somewhere else. The specific place is important: as Toruńczyk-Ruiz and Brunarska (2020: 3205) observe in their study of place attachment among Ukrainian temporary migrants in Warsaw, 'Psychological integration does not have to occur at a national level, but can start from a feeling of belonging in a particular location'. Once again, a process of making comparisons ensues. The migrants evaluate their new place of residence, reflecting on contrasts they see between it and other places they know, and drawing certain conclusions which become part of their overall attitude to the place. Sometimes this leads to increasing place attachment (Gustafson 2001: 14). To feel at home, their lives in the new place do not necessarily have to be strikingly different from those in their location of origin, as long as they feel positively disposed towards being there. In fact, for many migrants, it is probably the humdrum routine of everyday life which helps them become attached to the new place. Osipovič (2010: 174) writes that

One can argue that by following everyday routines – going to shops, banks, work, playgrounds, using public transport and familiarising themselves with the surroundings and its inhabitants – newcomers domesticate the local landscape and create a sense of neighbourliness, a sense of possession of space, of being “at home”.

As I argue (2011:24) with respect to migrants from depressed locations in Poland who had moved to the UK: 'probably the most important anchor keeping interviewees in specific locations was steady employment'. Recently, Aleksandra Grzymała-

Kazłowska has developed the concept of ‘anchoring’ with regard to Ukrainians in Poland. Brzozowska and Grzymała-Kazłowska (2017) suggest that, since most Ukrainians can legally only be temporary migrants in Poland, the anchoring metaphor is appropriate to describe how people find things to tie them to a place even if they expect to move on later. Like myself, they found that it is often the job which acts as the most important anchor. Toruńczyk-Ruiz and Brunarska (2020) also indicate the significance of having some Polish friends in helping even temporary migrants feel at home in Warsaw. Ager and Strang (2004) use a concept similar to ‘anchoring’ when they write about ‘sufficient’ integration. For a temporary migrant manual worker, a steady job and a small group of friends – preferably including locals as well as co-ethnics – may constitute ‘sufficient’ integration, while advanced knowledge of the local language is not essential.

My article title uses the words ‘immigration’ and ‘emigration’, but in inverted commas to indicate their complexity. These terms are commonly used in statistics in English and Polish, and in Polish also in many other contexts. In English, by contrast, ‘immigration’ has long had negative connotations (Watson 1977) and is commonly used by anti-migrant politicians and media. Both terms in English also imply migration for settlement. For these reasons I will avoid using them in my article. It is often claimed that the twenty-first century is an age of ‘mobility’, when a great deal of migration is short-term and experimental. This is facilitated by the internet and cheap travel. Networking also happens faster and more efficiently; for example, in my book *Polish Families and Migration since EU Accession*, I showed how working-class wives, thanks to the affordability of short trips to other EU countries, make ‘inspection visits’ to their husbands abroad before deciding to reunite their family in the West. Being an EU citizen confers special mobility rights. The circular migration of labour migrants from Ukraine to Poland, linked to visa requirements, might seem to be a different phenomenon from the privileged mobility of EU citizens.

However, Ukrainians use networks and engage in experimental migration in very similar ways to Poles (White 2020).

There exists a burgeoning literature on new migration to Poland, particularly mass migration by Ukrainians. According to migration network theory, the larger the migrant population, the greater its diversity. Andrejuk (2017: 250) emphasises 'the diversity of the Ukrainian population in Poland'. Ukrainians come to Poland to work or study, or for family reasons; they come from different geographical regions and from various social backgrounds. It is possible, however, to make a few generalisations, notably that Ukrainians choose Poland for the higher pay, not because they are unemployed in Ukraine (Górny and Jaźwińska 2019: 19). Much of the literature on immigration to specific locations in Poland focuses on Warsaw, and to a lesser extent Wrocław, Kraków and Lublin, where foreigners until very recently have been particularly concentrated. Nowadays, as foreign migrants fan out within Poland, so researchers are beginning to investigate new migrant destinations. Górny et al (2019), comparing studies of Bydgoszcz, Wrocław, Lublin and Warsaw, conclude that Ukrainians arriving in provincial cities are more likely than those to Warsaw to use employment agencies, but also that Ukrainians in Wrocław and Lublin are more likely to plan to settle in Poland.

Research design and methods

My own study looks at three medium-sized cities, all *województwo* capitals until 1998. I was not expecting to find some 'average' Poland, but rather to understand the different combinations of variables which may be important in shaping migrant motivations and experiences in different locations. I chose Płock as an example of a city that scores highly in various city rankings; is a tourist destination with many attractive features which might encourage settlement; has a strong industrial identity centring on Orlen; but at the same time experiences slightly above average unemployment and plenty

of out-migration, often internally within Poland. Medium-sized towns have certain features typical of big cities (in some cases, for example, a liberal administration) but other characteristics of a small town (such as limited opportunities for graduate employment). In 2019, net migration for permanent residence was -402 internal and +7 international (Urząd 2020: 1). According to the Płock branch of ZUS, 4658 Ukrainians were registered in the Płock area in December 2018; this includes people working in agriculture outside the city (Portal Płock 2019). My enquiries at the city's three universities suggested there were only a handful of Ukrainian students.

I made three visits to Płock between February and September 2019, conducting loosely-structured interviews in Russian, Polish and English with 32 foreigners (26 Ukrainians and 6 others) and 16 Poles who had either returned from living abroad (14) or visited close relatives in foreign countries (2). Two of the non-Ukrainians came from elsewhere in former USSR and the others from countries on four different continents. Two non-Ukrainian interviewees were entrepreneurs, three were teachers (one part-time) and one a full-time parent. Of course the number of non-Ukrainian interviewees is tiny, but Andrejuk's (2017) research suggests that this is a not unusual sample by occupation. The Ukrainian interviewees had held a variety of occupations in Ukraine including teacher, kindergarten worker, policeman, nurse, hairdresser, shop owner, shop assistant, warehouse operative, welder and agricultural worker. In Poland, they were working in construction or a factory. The 25 recently arrived Ukrainians all lived in accommodation provided by their employers. In the interviews, we discussed how and why they had chosen to migrate to Poland and Płock; their impressions of Płock compared to Ukraine; their experiences of settling in to life in the city; and their transnational practices and networks.²

I also interviewed key informants, based in different institutions and organisations in Płock, about its labour

² We also discussed Polish migration, but this is not relevant to the current article.

market, foreign workers, international students and bi-national families. I consulted Płock and other Polish media as well as Ukrainian websites advertising job agencies and giving advice to Ukrainian workers. Finally, I had many casual conversations about migrants with other Polish people whom I happened to meet during my stays in Płock.

The project received ethical approval from UCL. The most problematic ethical issue – especially in the case of this article written primarily for a Płock readership – concerned anonymisation. I had to make difficult decisions about how much detail to hide. I have concealed the workplaces of all interviewees and the country of origin of the non-Ukrainians. Often, it seems, there may only be one or two citizens of particular countries living in Płock, and individuals could be too easily identified. It is a shame to lose this nuance, because it is the unique features of particular countries and places, contrasted with Płock, which shape migrants' process of anchoring in the city. During interviewing, I also experienced some dilemmas when establishing rapport with the interviewees, especially the Ukrainians. I wanted to highlight my 'insider' credentials, as someone knowledgeable about Poland and Ukraine and with a *Kresy* family background, but also had to establish myself in their eyes as a neutral observer who wanted them to feel comfortable expressing critical views (if they had any) about Płock and Poland. This did not always succeed, as illustrated in the following dialogue, translated from Russian, where the flattery ended up being directed at all Europeans:

Natalia: My husband liked it, there's lots of greenery here in your country (u vas).

Anne: It's not 'here in my country', because I'm from England!

Natalia: Well, here in Europe.

Unlike my first article on Płock (White 2020) the current article discusses the stories of all the foreigners I interviewed, not only the Ukrainians.

Why Płock?

Apart from Ukrainians, and some Belarusians, Russians, Georgians and Vietnamese people working in factories and on building sites, in 2019 there seemed to be no real migrant ‘groups’ living in the city. The local authorities had no policy of attracting migrant labour to the city, so the presence of individual migrants depended on chance (in the case of family migrants) and a combination of migrant networking and employer/recruitment agency initiative (in the case of labour migrants). From my interviews, casual conversations and talks with key informants I picked up information about the presence of individuals from countries around the world, for example Turkey, Egypt and Czechia, who were married to Poles and living in Płock. However, since the children of these bi-national marriages were Polish they tended not to show up in statistics; this is a largely invisible collection of foreigners. (This does not mean they were completely ‘integrated’: my interviews showed that it was possible for non-Slav spouses to live in Płock for many years and never fully master Polish, especially written Polish.) There are also some foreign engineers working in and around Orlen. Pilgrims come from as far afield as the Philippines, and Płock, as a picturesque and historic city, also attracts other tourists. As a result, foreigners can be spotted in the city centre and hotels, but foreign residents are somewhat hidden. Jacek, one of my Polish interviewees, made a revealing comment:

In all my years in Płock, and I was born here and worked here all my life, I've met barely any foreigners, whether working here or just passing through. I even don't see the Ukrainians. They are somewhere, I don't know, in factories or shops, but I don't meet them.

Non-Ukrainian family migrants

Bi-national marriages in Poland have begun to receive more scholarly attention, particularly with regard to Ukrainians (Brzozowska 2015). They are an obvious consequence of extensive international migration by Poles in recent years, including a certain amount of return migration by Poles, bringing their spouses with them to Poland. The six non-Ukrainians in my sample were all married to people from Łlock; however, only one had met their spouse in the city, and in most cases they became acquainted abroad. Hence their family livelihood strategies combined their own migration to Poland with their Polish spouse's return migration. As many studies have shown (White et al 2018: 21), Polish return migrants tend to return to their home locations and existing networks, which helps explain why these families settled in Łlock rather than elsewhere in Poland.

Family migration is a complex phenomenon which often involves negotiations and compromises between the parties. The fact that interviewees were married to Poles explains only half the story: a complete explanation for their presence in the city needs to take into account why the couple decided that it should be preferred over other destinations, either the foreign spouse's country of origin, a third country, or another Polish city. Such discussions always have a power dimension: some family members' interests can be prioritised at the expense of others (White 2017).

Five of the six non-Ukrainians originated from cities of over one million population – often capital cities – and this helped shape their perceptions. In some cases their migration occurred in steps: the couple originally lived abroad after their marriage, but moved (back) to Łlock, in one case for example because of reluctance to put the children through the demanding education system in the Asian country where they had been living, in another because their rural region in Western Europe was considered to offer fewer business opportunities than Łlock.

Others originally moved from abroad to villages near Płock, but later relocated into the city itself, so the Polish village was a further point of comparison. One Polish spouse was still a full-time migrant, a posted worker who moved between different countries and who had originally arranged for his non-EU wife to live in a Western country, which she did not like, moving to Płock to be close to her stepchildren. Another case was different again, since the interviewee had moved to Płock as a teenager to follow their mother but then married a schoolmate from the city.

Often the interviewees described Płock as possessing positive attributes which distinguished it from both their home city and Warsaw. The city was said to enjoy a ‘sense of community’, to be safer than Warsaw, and to have a slower pace of life, with friendlier and more patient people. One Slav migrant said that they had experienced no anti-Russian feeling, and had been quickly accepted by local Poles, unlike their earlier experiences living in a local village. The local authorities were praised for making the city centre attractive, and the fact that ‘cultured people’ visited Płock was also seen as an asset.

In all cases, the Polish spouse’s job and/or family were located in Płock, and this seemed to be discouraging interviewees from moving to another Polish city, such as Warsaw, where they could in some cases almost certainly have obtained better employment, for example by using their foreign language skills or having more opportunities to sell their artwork.

Interviewees in several cases had an imperfect knowledge of Polish, especially written Polish. Although one interviewee asserted that he was able to conduct his business affairs at the city council offices in English, the migrants had not been offered any language tuition locally and depended on their spouses and children for linguistic support. However, through their families they were somewhat immersed in local society. Hence, for example, they were aware of the extent of internal migration away from the city, which one interviewee described as a ‘ghost town’. Some interviewees also picked up on local anxieties about pollution from Orlen, and this coloured their feelings about the

wisdom of remaining in the city. There were some complaints about typical small-town characteristics such as nepotism and 'closed' attitudes towards outsiders. Some children who were born in other countries had problems with racism on arrival, particularly one Asian family, but in all cases these were said to have been overcome.

Overall, it was clear that the six interviewees were fairly well 'anchored' in Płock. This was not thanks to any support from the local authorities or NGOs, but predominantly because of their family ties and acceptable – if not ideal – employment. It seemed that they were unlikely to move out of the city. If they did, it would be only into the rural suburbs, where two families were building houses. However, this did not mean that they were fully integrated and – as often seems to happen in migrant families – the foreign spouse was sometimes quite dependent on their family linguistically and hindered by Polish language problems from realising their full potential and making a more satisfying career. This would have benefited both the migrants and the city.

Ukrainians

The interviews with Ukrainian labour migrants revealed a predictable range of migration motivations, such as one might find for example among Poles in Western Europe: earning money to buy a flat or help children through higher education, or simply to patch holes in the family budget; in some cases, interviewees had debts they could not repay on a Ukrainian wage. However, occasionally it seemed that persuasion by a friend or family member was the decisive factor, and in some cases family reunification was clearly more significant than economic motives. Specifically Ukrainian factors – also predictable from existing literature – included worries about inflation and corruption, the war in East Ukraine, and reduced opportunities since 2014 to work in Russia (as three of my sample had done in the past). It was clear that, as other analysts have observed,

migration cultures were indeed changing in central and eastern Ukraine, so that not only was migration a commonplace livelihood strategy, but also Poland rather than Russia had become the ‘normal’ destination. When migration becomes so normalised, it becomes possible for even inexperienced people to ‘try out migration’; hearing my interviewees using this word (*poprobovat’* in Russian) reminded me of exactly the same turns of phrase (using the verb *spróbować*) that I had encountered among Polish migrants in the years after 2004. The fact that the Ukrainians were restricted in how long they could stay in Poland on any one trip enhanced the sense of experimentality.

With one exception, the Ukrainian interviewees had been working in Płock only recently, arriving in 2016 at the earliest. They came from all parts of Ukraine except Kiev, and many had lived in cities larger than Płock, including the largest cities such as Kharkiv and Dnipro. With two exceptions, they did not possess residence rights in Poland. The remaining 24 individuals were therefore destined to remain circular migrants for the time being. These 24 divided between people who had worked elsewhere in Poland before coming to Płock and those for whom it was the first destination. In the latter case, they had usually visited nowhere else in Poland and had no points of comparison with other Polish cities; their interviews tended to conflate Płock with Poland.

It was striking that with one exception (a small town near Gdańsk) the characteristics of other Polish towns were never mentioned by Ukrainians who had relocated to Płock from elsewhere in Poland. Their motivations to move to Płock were entirely connected to wanting better jobs, conditions and wages, and/or the opportunities offered by friends, family and agencies. Some of the more travelled migrants had horror stories to tell about a string of bad experiences elsewhere in Poland: of jobs finishing abruptly, wages not being paid, and unpleasant working and living conditions. For example, before coming to Płock Tatyana had worked in Warsaw cleaning a hospital for 10 zloties an hour and paying 400 zloties rent for hostel

accommodation with bedbugs; the agency then moved her to a small town outside Warsaw where she worked in supermarket warehouse and hurt her back. Olga had worked in four different places, including Warsaw, up to 20 hours a day, sometimes outdoors, and for one week for no pay in an understaffed factory where each Ukrainian was expected to do the work of three. In such interviews, Płock was often presented as a safe harbour – a place where they could finally stay for the entire duration of their work permit, and come back to on subsequent migration trips.

Górny et al (2019: 40) found that among Ukrainians surveyed in Bydgoszcz the two most common ways of finding out about job opportunities had been through agencies (40% respondents) and directly through other Ukrainians who had worked for the same employer (also 40%). This was a very different situation from in Warsaw where social networks were more important (Górny et al 2019: 58). In my own sample of 24, eight had successfully used agencies – based in both Poland and Ukraine – to find their current job in Płock. Three of these eight were friends or friends of friends with the agency managers, so this was some reason to trust them. However, for previous jobs, four other interviewees had also used agencies, sometimes unsuccessfully, being cheated or finding unsatisfactory employment, before moving to work in Płock on the recommendation of friends, family and chance acquaintances.

Górny et al's research does not uncover whether migrants using an employment agency were willing to be sent to any destination which had a suitable job. My impression was that this was indeed the case. Kolya, for example, said 'That's how it turned out – it's all the same to us where we go'.

Altogether, however, more than half the sample, including two-thirds of the factory workers, came to Płock on the recommendation or invitation of family and friends. Hence they did have a particular motivation to move to Płock. Sometimes this was purely emotional, as in the case of women inviting their best friends or husbands their wives (although in one case the

husband was based in a village, and the wife, used to city life, insisted on living and working in Płock during the week). The other main draws were security of employment and rent-free and pleasant hostel accommodation, with small rooms suitable for families, including not just couples, but also siblings, nephews and nieces, and parents with their adult children. Two female interviewees, disliking the heavy factory work, had tried to move away from Płock, but returned because they could not find better conditions elsewhere.

Considering that circular migration in other countries is often performed by individuals without their family members, it was striking that family members were living together in Płock.³ Płock may be quite typical in this regard: my reading of Ukrainian internet sites suggests that there is indeed a demand for jobs with accommodation for married couples, and this was confirmed in surveys by the Gremi Personal centre which ‘note a dramatic increase in demand for vacancies for married couples. According to the Gremi Personal surveys, about 15% of respondents plan to move to Poland with their families’ (Zarobitchany.org).

The interviewees were making themselves at home in small ways. In keeping with Toruńczyk-Ruiz and Brunarska’s (2018) findings on Warsaw, making Polish friends was important in promoting their attachment to the city, and many did mention having at least one friend among their Polish co-workers. They reported that the co-workers were picking up some Ukrainian language. For example, Svitlana claimed ‘They already understand us well, because they’re hearing Ukrainian all the time... We understand each other with no language barrier. Larisa said ‘They listen and learn our language. If we gather on the street, we’re having a chat outside, we start laughing and telling stories, they ask us to repeat what we said, they’re drawn into the conversation... There’s no sense that “I’m a Pole and you’re a Ukrainian”’. It seemed, however, that the co-workers

³ I discuss both family reunification and attitudes towards Ukrainians in more detail in White (2020).

were often not from the city itself (suggesting that local residents did not want to take heavy and unpleasant factory jobs) and/or were themselves circular migrants, in Płock between spells of work abroad. Those Ukrainians who lived in the factory hostel also tended to have friendships there, including with migrants from other FSU countries.

However, few interviewees were very confident in Polish, especially written Polish, which limited their opportunities for engaging with local society outside the factory setting. They had not been offered any opportunities for Polish language classes, as for example provided by Caritas in my second fieldwork site of Kalisz. Nor did they engage with churches, which could have provided pathways into local society. The Orthodox church catered mostly for well-established local residents. One Roman Catholic church had tried to organise Greek Catholic masses in Ukrainian, but given up the project because they were unable to attract a sufficiently large congregation.⁴

Since the Ukrainian interviewees did not have their own home in the city and most worked indoors, they appreciated having green spaces where they could relax: many said they spent spare time on walks along the riverside, several mentioned the zoo, and one had enjoyed walking around a beautifully maintained cemetery. Pollution was not a concern – perhaps reflecting the fact that they did not mix with Polish people as much as the non-Ukrainians and therefore failed to pick up on concerns about Orlen. In fact, Płock was contrasted favourably with Ukrainian cities where pollution was more visible. For example, Zinaida remarked: 'In Płock we walk around and we don't see any deposit on the buildings, roads, railings. In Mariupol there's red-black graphite microparticles deposited everywhere.'

The interviewees emphasised their overall sense of safety and security. For example, Bohdan commented: 'In Ukraine people just cross the street wherever they feel like it... As for

⁴ Based on information from priests at the two churches.

drivers, I don't even expect them to stop. But here if you just walk towards a crossing they already put on the brakes. In Ukraine you have to walk out into the street before he stops.' Very few had encountered anti-Ukrainian attitudes – although (judging from the Facebook site Portal Płock) these do exist in the city as they do elsewhere in Poland. Nonetheless, my interviews tended to regard Polish anti-Ukrainianism as a 'Warsaw' problem. Although one Russian-speaking interviewee complained of anti-Russian attitudes, others reported having casual conversations in Russian with middle-aged and older Poles who had learned the language at school, as well as being able to use Russian at the bank or travel agency.

Overall, the Ukrainians divided between those people who wanted to stay in Płock at least for the medium term and those who might want to move on further. Only one individual was committed to returning to settle in Ukraine. The first group, mostly middle-aged women, highlighted their sense of security, their social contacts, the convenience and cleanliness of their accommodation, the city's attractiveness and the geographical 'closeness', as they perceived it, of Ukraine. For others, however, Płock was construed as a stepping stone towards Western Europe, a salutary reminder that statistics about 'immigration' to Poland partly reflect a kind of staged transit migration to the West. Only two interviewees – who considered Płock too small and quiet compared to big cities in Ukraine – saw Płock as a stepping stone to larger cities in Poland. In fact, a number of interviewees had already tried working in Warsaw and decided that they were better off in Płock.

Conclusion

In recent years, increasing numbers of migrants have been arriving to live and work in Poland, although in some places they are not yet very visible to established residents. Płock seems to exemplify this trend and can be considered a 'city of immigration'. On the one hand, as a result of more Poles

migrating internationally, more bi-national marriages occur and more foreigners come to Poland with their spouses. On the other hand, Ukrainians and others work temporarily in Płock, filling gaps in the labour market.

My six non-Ukrainian interviewees were married to Poles, yet this on its own did not explain their presence in Płock. Some interviewees could equally well have settled in their country of origin, or a third country, where they might have earned higher salaries. Their various reasons for settling in Poland included non-economic motives, for example connected to their children's education. Like most Polish return migrants, their spouses chose to return to their city of origin, explaining why they were in Płock rather than elsewhere. One common feature of these families was that they seemed likely to remain in Płock because of the Polish spouse's job and/or family ties. However, this did not mean that the interviewees were entirely integrated. In fact, if they were not native speakers of Slavonic languages, they lacked confidence writing (and in some cases reading) Polish: an obstacle to their career prospects, particularly in view of the limited demand for foreign-language specialists in a medium-sized city like Płock.

For the Ukrainians, Płock was a chance destination. They did not come to Poland on purpose to come to Płock, but because they were offered a job in the city by an agency or were encouraged by other Ukrainians to come to work in a particular factory in Płock which offered pleasant accommodation suitable for couples and extended families. It seems to be typical of Ukrainians in Poland today to be increasingly interested in family migration. It was noteworthy that a number of interviewees, having experimented with different workplaces in different Polish cities, ended up repeatedly coming to work in Płock, because of the better conditions. They chose Płock as their temporary home. The middle-aged women in particular seemed to be anchored in the city: they appreciated the security of their jobs and accommodation and seemed satisfied with their web of acquaintances, usually including some Polish workmates. Not

surprisingly, it was the men and younger women who more often aspired to move still further West in pursuit of higher earnings.

Some children of family migrants had encountered racism upon their arrival in local schools, but overall the family migrants felt accepted and at home in the city. The Ukrainian construction workers whom I interviewed did not interact much with local people, but Ukrainian factory workers seemed to have had generally good experiences working alongside Poles, and their friendships with co-workers contributed to their overall positive assessments of the city. They were aware that Ukrainians encountered hostility in Poland, but tended to regard this as a feature of other places, not Płock itself.

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