



PROJECT REPORT SUMMARY

EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF AGED 50+ POLISH EXPATS IN GREATER MANCHESTER

DOŚWIADCZENIA I WYZWANIA DLA POLSKICH REZYDENTÓW PO 50-TYM ROKIEM ŻYCIU W GREATER MANCHESTER



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Background

Europaia is the only registered charity in Greater Manchester to work exclusively for the European Expats on Greater Manchester. According to the 2011 census over 100,000.00 Polish nationals are living in Greater Manchester. There is a small percentage of this population that's ageing and in need of additional support on how to age in a foreign country with language and cultural barriers. Our past experience of working with over 50 people in Salford through another project lead us to propose a research on identifying the challenges of over 50 Polish nationals living in Greater Manchester. This is the first research to focus solely on Polish nationals and their challenges. We are grateful to Ambition for Ageing for funding this research and Dr Hannah Wadle for conducting and writing up the research. This document is a summary of the research findings. Europaia is in the process of seeking funding to complete a paper reporting on the research findings in fuller detail.

Subject and Research Purpose

The research explored the situation of Polish nationals in Manchester over the age of 50 who moved to the UK as EU migrants after 2004. This summary of findings is based on narrative interviews with individuals of this group, on conversations with community activists, on ethnographic field trips to different sites of the Polish community in Manchester, and on group discussion protocols from community socials that were organized as part of the research project. The findings give insights into the life-worlds of people, who migrated at a later stage of their lives and are confronted with the issues that come with ageing and with adapting to life in a different country. All together, the voices of 19 individuals are referred to. It is thus a qualitative study, with no claim to be comprehensive, but aims to point at emerging vulnerabilities as well as assets. As a result of better awareness of the challenges and resources of the 50+ Polish post-2004 residents of Greater Manchester, community organisations and policy makers will be able to create tailored and sustainable support structures.

Introduction

The research was carried out in three main ways: loosely guided telephone conversations with individuals or couples over thirty minute up to two hours; field trips and face-to-face conversations in different "Polish" sites of Manchester or in private homes; and social group meetings for Polish individuals over the age of 50+ organized by us under the name "Ławeczka pod jabłonią" (The bench under the apple tree), during which people engaged with each other and we discussed particular, age and migration/related topics in focus group conversations.

Case Studies

The research findings are illustrated by four case studies presented as annexes of this summary of findings, which refer to different parts of the research project. The first two

(CS001 & CS002) exemplify conversations with seven individuals from different areas of Greater Manchester, some of them are working, others are retired, exploring the present life worlds of the interviewees and their narratives of migration. The third case study (CS003) exemplifies the part of research that takes us to different community sites in Manchester, where Polish residents can speak Polish and practice some form of what might be called “Polishness”. Findings from this part of the research included descriptions of ethnographic visits to these sites, conversations with some of the individuals who are in charge of running them as staff members or volunteers, and portraits of encounters with Polish community members the researchers met in these sites. The final case study (CS004) comes from the discussions during the social events for 50+ Polish peers, which were organized by the research team at Europaia Manchester as part of the project. These discussions are starting points of a new conversation between the 50+ Polish community members and community organisations in Manchester. The conclusion shows that throughout the analysis of their findings, the researchers developed suggestions that responded to the challenges and needs that can be seen to emerge from each case study.

Conclusion: Emerging Themes and Recommendations for Action

The conclusion draws out the common threads between the presented case studies. It assembles a picture of the assets, challenges and needs of the target group as well as providing suggestions around how to work with these as a community organization or from a policy making point of view.

Assets and Values

Intra-family Solidarity

Assets of the community that were identified in this research included a strong sense of solidarity, particularly within the family: individuals come to the UK to support their children by helping out with the grandchildren, supporting their families in Poland, or caring for their elderly family members. While we identified a desire for intra-ethnic solidarity, it also became apparent that this longing for solidarity within the Polish community is something our target group feel a strong lack of. Interviewees give different reasons for this: some feel it is dangerous for Poles to admit they are Polish and represent the community in the times of post-Brexit hate crime, some have found cultural differences between British-born second generation Poles and Polish born post-2004 migrants over the age of 50, others have mentioned the level of integration and socio-economic differences as a reason for tendencies to distinction within the Polish community. This is particularly challenging for single individuals without a local kin-support network. Helping the community to foster intra-ethnic solidarity while keeping it open to engagement with other groups and individuals in the diverse city is thus a key task for community organisations. Intra-ethnic solidarity is also the basis for

organizing language specific support groups, community spaces, child-care and day care for the elderly.

Sense of Equality and Resilience

A further complex of assets that results from the interviews varied experiences of political regimes, of being a citizen in them, or even fighting in the opposition movements: in a socialist state, in a new democracy, in the EU, as EU-citizens in UK, as post-Brexit EU-citizens in the UK. This wealthy experience gifts many of them with a nuanced and critical perspective on current political events, but also on ways of organizing society, on working conditions and management, on welfare systems and national bureaucracies. This experience leads some to speak up against nationalist patriotism and homophobia within the own ethnic community. Others, thanks to this experience, take notice of unequal treatment at work and become passionate about workers' rights. Most individuals show an incredible level of resilience in navigating different systems and finding a way of making a living, even at a higher age. The political awareness of different ways of governance and civic values of the studies community, as well as people's passion for equality and citizen's rights should be valued more socially through tailored projects.

Home-making and Care for Domestic Space

Another important asset that manifested through the interviews within the 50+ migrant community, is the ability to turn places of residence, even if they do not seem attractive in the first place, into real homes and to take good care of them. Such home-making activities includes a great deal of creative imagination, manual skills, and a sense of care for the domestic. Community organisations or local councils could draw on this asset and encourage it for shaping the look of neighbourhoods and communal spaces beyond the home.

Shared Challenges

The study also identified a number of shared challenges that emerged from the conversations with the 50+, post-2004 Polish residents of different parts of Manchester. The central challenges among those with the largest impact in other ones concerned three specific areas: communication in English, people's economic situation, and health issues - physical and mental. These areas of struggle played into other domains people were struggling with, and amplified them: these domains were navigating the complex transnational- Polish, EU, and UK pension and welfare legislations, finding one's way in the urban transport network, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Command of English

Communicating in English is one of the most significant barriers for 50+ Poles and it distinguishes them from younger generations of Poles. This has to do with the lack of English language education in Poland during Socialism, with tight work schedules, with some individuals' lack of self-confidence as language learners at a higher age, and with economic

difficulties to finance language education. For different groups of individuals, (such as working professionals, interested, advanced learners with anxieties, and individuals without any knowledge of English and no confidence in learning) different approaches to addressing the communication barrier and anxieties around speaking English may prove fruitful.

Financial Struggle

Financial struggles affect many community members, but are most concerning when they threaten people's ability to afford housing. Homelessness is a common fear, but also an experience of some interviewees; its prevention should be addressed by such community organisations and ethnic peers who have a deeper cultural understanding of people's moral relationship to money and their economic resources and struggles.

Physical and Mental Health

Physical and mental health is the third, key area of challenge that the participants of the research mentioned and tends to lead to financial struggles and social isolation. While these effects are commonly experienced as a result of illness for individuals over the age of 50, the experience of social isolation is a bigger threat, if the person has a weak command of English (or has lost the ability to speak through illness). Support groups are very beneficial to people's mental and physical health, but they are usually assuming the patient's command of English. To reduce the stress levels and sense of isolation among non-native speakers, it may be an idea to initiate native-language health support groups/ day care centres/ rehab groups, or groups that are particularly supportive to non-native speakers.

Welfare and Legal Advice

An area, the target group urgently needs qualified support with are legal, welfare, workers' rights issues: these issues include pension schemes; state support for EU-citizens, UK residents, and individuals over the age of 50 or 60; rights of workers for employment agencies; legal measures against discrimination and hate crime; residency in the UK. Brexit is a topic we should not exclude from the discussion: As we are dealing with a vulnerable group of people, whose vulnerability will most likely increase rather than decrease in the coming years, it will be very important that peers, community organisations, and political agents give them a voice in the Brexit negotiations. Their right to stay in the UK and receive access to public care, especially, if their kin and potential carers are permanently residing and working in UK should be a central point on the political agenda of anyone supporting that group. The case of the studies group of Polish nationals could be exemplary for a larger group of EU-citizens over the age of 50, who arrived in the UK after 2004 to support their families in the UK, and draw attention to the need to protect the rights of these individuals in the Brexit negotiations.

The report emphasises the necessity of different community organisations working with the 50+ Polish community to learn from each other, build a network, and collaborate on creating valuable urban infrastructures that are complimentary to each other and support the

concerned individuals and their community. Rather than each organisation feeling the pressure to offer everything and go into competition with other organisations across Manchester, it might be more beneficial to foster the particular expertise of each organisation in supporting the target group.

List of Emerging Domains of Intervention and Suggestions for Action

As a conclusion of the research, the author hence interventions in the above mentioned areas and a number of others. The following list indicates the domains in which action is required to support the participants of this study, their peers, and also their families. The list further provides some suggestions for possible actions that could be taken and projects that could be developed by community organisations or policy makers. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list of all project suggestions provided in the report.

1. Domain of Intervention: Legal Concerns, Welfare, and Housing

Suggestions for Actions:

- Run individual welfare and legal advice sessions in Polish language
- *Certified translations of relevant documents published by the government*
- Creation of bilingual thematic dossiers on: pensions, agency work, workers' rights, housing in the UK, banking, reductions for 60+ residents, educative workshops to these dossiers
- *Initiation of a housing fund with emergency micro-credits*

2. Domain of Intervention: Learning, Language, and Urban Mobility

Suggestions for Actions:

- Promote life-long learning and change attitude towards late language learning together with community members
- *Develop and run a targeted language-course for +50 Polish migrants (Polish speaking teacher, managing everyday life in the UK)*
- Create resources for Polish speakers that facilitate urban mobility, the use of public transport and orientation in the city
- *Campaign for a more accessible bus network*

3. Domain of Intervention: Health Community

Suggestions for Actions:

- Work together with the NHS to create health peer support groups in Polish language
- *Identify Polish-speaking online health support groups*
- Set up individual "homesickness" talking sessions
- *Initiate a conversation about first-language care groups for dementia and memory loss patients and other patients without English skills*

4. Domain of Intervention: Social Engagement, Recreation, and Activity

Suggestions for Actions:

- Create a directory of recreational groups and cultural associations

- *Link individuals from the target group up with existing recreation groups and help them (with volunteers) to start going to them*
- *Run a regular social groups with different types of activities for 50+ community*
- *Support the organisation of peer-led care groups (elderly, children)*

5. Domain of Intervention: Political Campaigning and Storytelling

Suggestions for Actions:

- *Give 50+ Polish post 2004 migrants and retirees in the UK a voice through Political campaigning for their cause and their representation during Brexit negotiations*
- *Raise awareness interventions about hate-crime, tenancy rights and workers' rights and get community members involved to become ambassadors*
- *Run cultural events that show the group in a positive light*

6. Domain of Intervention: Urban Infrastructures, Networks and Collaborations

Suggestions for Actions:

- *Create a working group of all community centers and institutions that work with Polish 50+ individuals*
- *Use the group to map existing services and build new ones, create an internal and external platform to communicate new services and initiatives for the 50+ community*
- *Collaboration with public transport companies in Manchester on improving the language accessibility of bus services*
- *Support planning activities for new Polish community infrastructures - large and small*

Female, 66, Greater Manchester - Ref. CS001

**** is the first person I speak to on the phone. I receive her number from the Europaia network and am told, she would be happy to talk to me. It is still wintery cold and dark in the evenings when I call her and maybe what she tells me is coloured by the experience of a long winter.

******'s living and economic situation**

**** lives in a flat in Greater Manchester with her husband and their little dog. She rents the flat from a Polish man, who manages the properties of a landlord from London who is also Polish. She assumes that her landlord is from the old Polonia, she can hear his English accent coming through the Polish. Zosia first used to live in Manchester, in a house, but it seems that they had to sell the house. Now she and her husband pay 400 GBP for the rent, 370 GBP comes from their housing benefit, the remaining 30 GBP they have to add from their own wallets. They are struggling to survive on the meagre pensions they receive – she receives 100 GBP, her husband receives 205 GBP per month. Her husband gets an addition 11 GBP per month to care for her – just enough to pay the electricity. She has stopped doing any baking: it is too expensive to buy all the ingredients and then pay for the gas that is needed for the oven. Cooking again is a different story: she cooks for herself and her husband rather than buying ready meals or going out for dinner – it is cheaper and tastier. **** hardly ever buys new clothes, just occasionally she goes into Primark to get something. Usually she purchases clothes in one of the charity shops. However, there is one thing, she always affords: the flat is warm, because one thing she and her husband do not budget on is heating.

Health care

“In the UK, people take really good care of those who are sick”

“I go there, wiggle my legs a bit and go home – that’s it. ...I can’t say anything.”

**** has more experience with health care in the UK than she would like to: shortly after moving, her son was diagnosed with cancer. He received extensive treatment and was given much more support than what she would have gotten in Poland for him. Unfortunately, he passed away in the age of only 36. **** praises the UK health service and finds that the culture of taking care of sick people is much more developed and better in the UK. She also received treatment herself – she was given a bypass, as she had troubles with her arteries. She is waiting for another, similar operation in the near future.

In the meantime she is attending a regular rehab class, the only regular outside appointment that she goes to: **** experiences these rehab classes with a certain discomfort. This is not because of the physical activities they are carrying out, but because of the sense of foreignness that overcomes her as soon as she enters the group. She is the only non-native speaker and with her lack of English

skills, she struggles to settle amongst the others: “Maybe they are making fun of me, I have no way of telling,” she says and explains me that she mistrusts what others say, and is constantly worried they might gossip about her. Rather than experiencing the rehab class as a friendly social environment, to her it becomes a fairly unpleasant routine: “I go there, wiggle my legs a little, and then go back home. That’s it. What else should there be, I can’t communicate with the people there, I can’t say anything”. The rehab is not the only setting, in which she feels that way. The lack of English languages skills proves to be a large barrier to her on a daily basis. **** did previously attend an English class, but gave up quickly – she couldn’t follow the teacher who was only using English, without any guidance in Polish.

Everyday engagement, local authorities, and English language

“We are here in their country, not they in ours, so they expect us to adapt and learn their language, learn English”

She tells me that she often finds herself in situations – in the bus, in the shops, or elsewhere in public, in which she would like to say something, but is incapable of doing so. She remains silent, because she lacks the language skills. She and her husband never go to a café, pub, or bar – besides from it being expensive, they wouldn’t know what to do there, they would feel really foreign. The UK is not ****’s first country of migration – she has previously lived in Vienna. She knew some German then – and she finds she mixes up German and English, confuses them and in the end doesn’t know what to say anymore. “Ten years I have lived here now, and I don’t speak the language”, she notes. There are a few runs she feels confident to do by herself outside the house: shopping at Lidl, taking the bus with her bus pass, pay the electricity bill. She regrets that she isn’t able to meet anyone in the neighbourhood, can’t participate in any activities, and does not understand much of the paperwork that is coming in from local authorities. Not knowing the legal framework and the regulations upon which the paperwork is based bothers her and leaves her in the dark: “Who knows, if I understand well, that it is this or that they want from me and not anything else...”. She would welcome for more availability of resources in Polish or services that could help her with understanding the communication with local authorities. She would like UK authorities to treat Poles like people - not like rubbish, or left-over trash. “I wonder, whether other ethnic groups, other foreigners I see on the bus, Arabs, Africans, Chinese, are also experiencing this, and how they feel treated by the authorities”, says ****.

The lack of language skills seem to be to most striking limitation to ****, together with the economic limitations and her limitations in mobility due to her leg problem. Her home environment does not help with language acquisition, she says. Everything is in Polish – she and her husband speak Polish, they watch Polish television, and the people they contact, their family, are Polish.

Work and social networks, and relations to Poles in UK

Before her leg problems got worse, **** worked as a cleaner in a hotel, together with other Polish women. She did not understand the manager, but there was always somebody who translated for

her. Since leaving work, the only people she meets in person in the UK are the family members of her husband: his sister, his nieces, and grand-nieces. Her own daughters are in Vienna and in South-Poland. She is proud of them, because they work “on contracts”, legally, and thus won’t get into trouble with the state. With her sister-in-law, **** communicates vis Skype, she is paying for the internet and therefore Skype is for free. It is however the only application she can use on a computer. **** would like to learn more about using the computer, however, she could not imagine doing this in English, it would need to be in Polish. We come up with the idea of offering a computer course in Polish language.

While having no access to the non-Polish speaking community, she also struggles trusting the Polish community: she has made bad experiences with them and finds that there is a lack of solidarity between Poles.¹ **** admires and envies the solidarity between people from former Yugoslavia, which she experiences in Vienna. She would wish for Poles from different economic and educational backgrounds to treat each other as equals, on eye-level, and not look down upon each other.

Boredom and occupation

“I sit at home and don’t go anywhere”

The main thing **** does according to her own description is “siedzieć“, it to “sit around”. The expression of “siedzieć“, “sitting”, is used both to refer to people who lack any kind of occupation or drive, or also to prisoners. To say about someone that this person “siedzi” can – depending on the context mean they are bored at home with nothing to do, or they are in prison. The notion that somebody “siedzi” (in the sense of boredom) is often used in Poland to describe the existential state of older people, particularly of women. With its double meaning, it alludes to a prison-like isolation, stagnation and a resulting lack of movement, drive, and of motivation. “Siedzi” stands in contrast to “chodzi do...”, in translation, “somebody goes to...”, which is used to say somebody is visiting people in the neighbourhood on a regular basis to have chats, plot and gossip.² Having somebody to go to provides almost a second home – with a steady dialogue, a warm cup of tea, and a chair. In the traditional blueprint of ageing in Poland (and many other places), after finishing work life and mothering duties, the public presence of women is more and more reduced, especially with financial restrictions of the small pensions. The phenomenon of “sitting around” is a symptom of a lack of opportunities to be active, mobile, sociable as an older person and pensioner.

¹ The lack of solidarity between Poles is a very frequently mentioned theme in many conversations with Polish interviewees.

² In the village in Northeast Poland, where I conducted my research between 2010-2011, both notions had negative connotations – one was associated with loneliness and the other with gossip, bad company and sometimes also alcohol. Some local women would for instance actively refrain from “going to...” particular people locally, because they disapproved of their neighbours’ ways of socialising. However, most women would have somebody they “went to” during the daytime, for a chat and cups of tea and coffee. Men in the village were more active around the house throughout the year, even in winter. They would meet in improvised dens or corners outside in the village to smoke, and often to drink. Those men who did not drink, would find themselves mostly excluded from the male community.

******'s suggestions**

- **** suggests a programme, in which older women receive DIY work, which they could do at home - occupy themselves, pass time, and earn a little bit on the side. The work would be delivered to their doorstep and picked up there again, once it was finished. *“This would be something for older ladies who are bored at home and would like to occupy themselves with something, let’s be honest”*, she notes.
- Another suggestion comes to ****’s mind: she has many DVDs in Polish that she does not watch anymore. She offers to donate them to Europa and encourages us to arrange film screenings with these DVDs.

Despite her interest in attending our community events, **** has not been able to come and join any of the three community events we organised. Her sister-in-law said, she had health problems. It would thus be important to develop some form of socialising and connecting with others that is not exclusively place bound, and can, for instance also be joined via skype for people with mobility problems.

Male, 51, Greater Manchester - Ref. CS002

The first time I met **** was at a community meeting organised by Europaia. Back then, we were chatting about his theatre project – he is the author of a drama script on migration that he was hoping to rehearse and perform with a group of people. When I call **** this time, it is after his work, around eight o'clock in the evening. He has just come back from shopping at Tesco's where he got his week's groceries and a set of headphones, since his old one was broken. During our conversation he unpacks his shopping bag, prepares dinner (he puts chicken nuggets in the oven and washes small tomatoes), and then sits down with a cigarette on the balcony, greeting his neighbours as they walk past.

******'s Living Situation**

"I would be a fool to complain about what I have. Without help I would not be where I am now"

**** lives in a council flat with a little balcony in Greater Manchester. His neighbours are other Polish residents, and there is also an English neighbour and drug addict, whose habit it is to pop into ****'s and ask him for whatever household item or grocery he needs at the time. It is the first flat **** received since splitting up with his wife in 2013, two years after the couple had come to the UK. He hasn't considered changing it, and is content and grateful for what he has got: The circumstance of splitting up were dramatic – **** experienced homelessness. He landed on the streets, where he lived for two months. In the same year, he had a severe accident with his shoulder and had to go through surgery, where he received a shoulder replacement. Five years later, he now works in a factory in 15 minute reach from his flat, the shops, too are just a walk away. These circumstances explain his sense of gratitude.

Language and migration

"Wholegrain rice – trudne to słowo (that's a difficult word)"

"Even in Polish I sometimes look at the wall, but can't think of the word wall in Polish – I have it on the tip of my tongue, it is a strange condition of mine"

**** never wanted to move to another country, because he was already struggling with his native tongue back home. He then left anyway, despite his difficulties with language. While he struggles with English, still, he does not seem too upset about it – in the end he manages his life well and is mostly content: he has work, social contacts, and a family life. At work he is the only non-native speaker and in the beginning, he says, he was quite an exotic creature for others in the company. There was no other way of communication between him and them than watching and gestures: he had to watch his co-workers do the work he was supposed to carry out in order to understand his duties on the shift. In the end, his technical skill and quick understanding of the entirety of the production process made it possible for him to work and meet the expectations of the employers.

****'s little son does not speak Polish, he is now native in English, but that does not bother ****. His entire family is spread across Europe, Germany, France, Spain, the UK, and he is proud to be member of an international family, not of a Polish clan, in which the members have to stick to the pure Polish heritage to feel they have an identity.

Work

"I used to love working 'na wczoraj' (for yesterday, under big pressure) and I still do"

"I don't have a problem with my health in my job. Ok, sometimes my shoulder hurts like hell, but I can handle it."

Work is one of the domains from which **** draws a feeling of confidence and which he identifies with. He presents himself as a very hardworking person, who enjoys working under pressure and making extra hours. On the day of the interview, he stays at the factory longer than expected, and in the week prior to the interview he had worked 51 hours. The weekend following our conversation, he was planning to work again, too. ****'s main job is for a factory that produces parts - connectors, tubes - for sanitary facilities from scratch. His duty is to finish the parts – smoothing the rough edges of the casts that come out of the moulds with sand paper and then painting them in red. After working there for an agency over a period of 13 months, he has recently been offered a permanent contract in the company. He tells me with some pride that, in fact, he was selected over a much younger, less experienced, English applicant. **** emphasizes that he gets along very well with his co-workers, especially with a man called Colin, with whom he shares banter and likes to engage in cynical joking. When I ask him about his health and the condition of his shoulder at work he first says it does not bother him at all, and then notes, that well - sometimes it hurts a lot - but that this did not affect the outcome of his work. In his second job he works as cleaner with large, professional cleaning machines. ****'s values of hard work, toughness, and taking oneself not too seriously suit his life situation, however, they might also, long-term be harmful to his health, if he overworks and maybe does not take his physical health and recovery seriously enough.

Despite his hard work and the many hours he works every day, **** seems to be struggling with the financial resources he needs as a father. He, for instance, mentions the difficulty of covering the transport costs (forty pounds) to Macclesfield, from where he picks up the children every second week. At the same time, his children are the ones to anchor him in the UK.

Friendships and family

"My children are here, so I will definitely stay in the UK."

"When I met my old school friend in a pub in Poland after 20 years' time, it felt as if we had met just the previous day. This friend now lives in Newcastle."

**** has two children from his marriage, one adult daughter, who will start university shortly- she will study textile design, and a boy, who was born around the time he and his wife arrived in the UK in 2011. He sees his children regularly, every second weekend, and also rings up his son in the evenings. When we finish our conversation that day, it is, because **** still wants to make this phone call to his son. If splitting up with his wife was a shock to him at first, he now is happy that they did it. Thanks to his family and children in the UK and despite the divorce, he feels very rooted in the country.

I ask him about friendships and about a person, with whom he can speak about anything that happens to him in life. He tells me about an old friend of his with whom he first went to school and then was active in the political underground in Poland, before their paths separated. After 20 years, the two men rediscovered each other on Facebook and arranged a meeting in a pub in their hometown in Poland – the conversation felt as if they had never lost contact. Since then, they keep in touch, speaking on the phone regularly and visiting each other. “We know everything about each other, even the sizes of our ...you know what...” His friend then, too, ended up in the UK, in Newcastle. He came to visit **** three times, however, **** has not yet travelled up to Newcastle. These deeper social networks that reach into shared pasts and are built around in-depth conversation and socializing give **** a sense of rootedness and stability, the only challenge is that they are not in a closer proximity to his work and flat. If he could choose, he would have his friends and family live in the neighbourhood.

******'s relation to newly patriotic Poles in the UK**

“So, I say, you buy rice in the Polish shop, too? Because it is Polish? Where does it grow, your rice – in Poznań maybe?”

“Bóg, honor, ojczyzna... Well, I don't see you in church, so God can be taken off that shirt, do you support your homeland in any way? So cross out ojczyzna, too. And After I saw you kicking that cat just then, I don't think you qualify for honour either.”

“You call me a leftie? Think about it: my world view gives you housing, allows your wife to spend more time with the children, gives you a pension when you are old, allows you to be in this country. Your world view led to World War II.”

**** speaks about his problem to comprehend and empathise with some parts of the Polish (UK) community – namely those, who engage in a particular, nationalist type of patriotism that he cannot bear: it includes wearing national colours of football tricots, wearing slogans such as “Bóg, Honor, Ojczyzna” (God, honor, fatherland), exclusively shopping in Polish shops, or also posting right-wing, discriminatory contents and opinions on social media. He gives me several examples, of how he tends to react to and oppose this “trend” of national patriotism and how he shows people that their patriotism is problematic.

The background of his attitude lies in his past as political activist in the Polish underground in the last years of socialism. “I was one of those people, whom they told ‘proszę wychodzić pojedynczo’,

please come out one by one, a classic sentence to be uttered by the police force. I fought for the freedom of Poland, I am done with patriotism, I don't need it, these new patriots haven't done anything, they just follow a trend of narrow-mindedness and stupidity". ****, as a member of an older generation and a previous political/civic activist thus somewhat polices radical tendencies in the Polish community. He also challenges and opposes 'memes' posted by some of his compatriots on Facebook and other social media. Using his native language and life experience, he acts thus as a civic activist within the Polish community and shows strong assets in working against nationalistic radicalisation, homophobia, racist extremism and for critical debate, democratic participation, and courage to oppose increasingly mainstream views.

Spirituality, faith, Church

**** goes to Roman-Catholic mass every Sunday, and Sunday has become a sacred day to him that he devotes to his spirituality. He believes however that faith is a private matter and should not be muddled up with the state. Many of his friends are atheists and he is fine with that. To him, however, there are so many bad things in the world that it is important to focus on the good ones, and faith helps him with that.

Arts and Creativity

****'s creative engagement as a director and writer of theatre scripts is ongoing, but because of his time-consuming work and family obligations he is not active in promoting and setting up a theatre group. Regular commitments are tricky to handle for him. He is waiting for people to come to him rather than putting himself out there. He works with two women on an irregular basis, who he believes, would make good actresses for the piece, some others are interested, but their husbands tend to get jealous and so the women refrain from participating in the acting. I suggest we could organise a drama class in the context of our project, but he keeps adding distance and I can see that he fears over-commitment.

The notion of starość (older age) and 50+ Group meetings

"I think you shouldn't use the word starość, old age. It really, really puts people off! I tell you I am 51 and I am starting to fall apart, my body, I mean. Druga młodość?, that sounds better. Actually, I like it."

**** was interested in attending the 50+ meetings whenever we organised them, but he was always too busy to attend them. While is reluctant to commit organising anything for the group members himself, he will keep his eyes out and attend the next time we organise something. He gives some advice about the name of the group and adds words of caution regarding the notion "starość", old age, which immediately has strongly off-putting effects.

What we can see from this reaction is that ageing is a highly stigmatised process in Poland, and people have no interest in being associated with older age, it fills them with strong feelings of repugnance. While short term this means that in organising such a group we should avoid the notion "starość", long term it means we should give opportunities to deconstruct the (cultural) rejection

of ageing, re-visit it together in the group, and to come to more positive, or at least balanced reactions to the notion of old age.

Male, Leader at a Greater Manchester Church - Ref. CS003

***** welcomes me in his premises on the ground floor behind the Catholic Church. I can hear a cleaner hovering the fully carpeted interior of the flat, a dark red patterned carpet muffles the hallway. The priest leads me into a meeting room with a big table and maybe ten chairs around it. On the wall, there is a single, white icon of Christ. ***** could be in his mid-forties, he has very short hair, wears a light blue shirt with white collar. His small eyes are alive, attentive, confident as if used to looking into other people's eyes, giving them shelter and comfort, facing people's difficulties, questions, trauma.

I speak to ***** as a person of contact for the Polish community, and as an expert about problems in the community. I address him with the assumption that he will feel most comfortable in this role, however I should have asked him that, rather than assumed it. During the conversation I also raise questions about his own experiences and his biography, questions that he sometimes answers, sometimes is very short-sentenced about.

“Male, construction entrepreneurs, wy-outowani: praca i praca (excluded: work and work)”

In *****'s eyes, the majority of post-2004, +50 Polish migrants is male and works in the construction business- often as entrepreneurs of their own businesses. “These people have been pushed off the grid (“wy-outowani”) in Poland by a younger work force”. They are still in a working age and come to the UK to work there – and work very hard. ***** assumes that the life of most of these men exclusively evolves around work. It is interesting that he does not mention female +50 migrants and the phenomenon of the “flying grannies”³ – I wonder whether women over the age of 50 are not visible in his Parish, or whether he sees the community more through a male perspective (in fact, it would be interesting to make a statistics of Polish churchgoers on Sundays over the period of a year).

“You could say, the culture of thriftiness narrows people's horizons”

***** does not know of any regularly gathering or organised social group for members of the age group of our research. The only opportunity to meet the target group he sees in the coffee mornings after the service on Sundays at the Parish. He welcomes me to participate in these informal social gatherings in the community room of the Catholic Church, and to start talking to people. I attend the gathering the following Sunday. His suggestion as to why there might not be a group, goes as follows. According to ***** , this has to do with people's upbringing and understanding of well-being. Younger Poles in the UK might go out to town or to dance in discos. The older generation, he believes, have learned to live thriftily, “oszczędność” (thriftiness) is an

³ Cf. Kilkey, Majella and Bielewaska, Agnieszka: Polish grandparents face uncertain family future in UK. Europastreet.news, available online: <https://europastreet.news/polish-grandparents-face-uncertain-family-future/>, published in August 2017.

important value in Poland. According to *****, many people aged 50 and over never had the prior experience of living a “swobodne życie”, a life without economic, cultural and social constraints. Rather than going out to the cinema and cultural events, or to buy a meal, they prefer saving money: they use the money to build or renovate houses at home, to buy household items or other items of consumption. He reckons that most people from the group he is thinking of do not go on day trips, exploring the surroundings – he thinks that they do not take trips to Leeds, Liverpool, to the Lake or Peak District. ***** is critical of this moral framework that he observes: “They work for consumption only. You could say that this narrows their horizons.” This attitude has other effects that concern ***** directly: “People don’t take enough time for their spiritual development”.

Re-discovering spirituality and religious identity

“It is not about culture alone, culture isn’t enough”

After a period, in which post-2004 migrants have neglected their faith, he now however feels their returning demand for rediscovering spirituality. “They are realizing that they are lacking something”. He has many community members who are returning to their faith and rediscovering it consciously. Rather than perceiving going to church as a mere cultural activity, something one does as a Pole, they seek spiritual education, bible studies. What does it mean to be a Christian Catholic is a question they ask themselves, also in the context of multi-religious Manchester. This enquiry within the community has changed *****’s work patterns, shifting his working hours to the evenings and weekends, when his community members finish their work.

Community and the Parish post-2004

“We cannot stretch the walls of the Parish much further”

I am curious about how protective ***** is about the Polish Parish being the host to a large number of Polish community groups, including the scouts and a Polish folklore dance group. Would he welcome other, external initiatives, or is he cautious about them? I quickly learn that the Parish is struggling to host all the different groups and is tired of being the only Polish Centre in this area of Manchester. In the Priest’s view, there should be a secular cultural centre for the Polish community somewhere close by (Centrum kulturowo-oświatowe). The church could then be focusing on religious education, gatherings, and festivities.

This need for a Polish hub only re-emerged after 2004, with the EU-migration. Through this, the Polish Parish experienced a big boost. As mentioned earlier, prior to Poland’s accession to the European Union, the Polish community in Manchester was dying out - the post WWII-refugees, some of whom had still experienced forced migration and labour camps in Siberia were ageing, and the younger generation of Poles had assimilated and moved away. I ask about Solidarność migration to Manchester in the 1980s, and he explains that at that time, London was the more

popular choice for Polish migrants. The priest recommends me and Europaia to get in touch with the Polish Consulate of Manchester and to draft a project with them: designing the concept for a Polish cultural centre in the city.

Comparing Polish migration to the UK and Germany

Before coming to the UK, 9 years ago, ***** was in a Catholic Parish in Westfalia, in Germany, also working with Polish migrant communities. I ask him to compare his impression of people's needs and challenges, and of the nature of the Polish community in Germany.

***** notes that there is a different sense of trans-border mobility in Germany to the one in the UK. There might be cheap flights from the UK to Poland now, but in Germany, Poles take their cars, and particularly, if they are from the West of Poland, they travel back to their places of origin, to their families more frequently. He feels that people in his Parish in Manchester are less connected to Poland than those in Germany, who live truly transnational lives. He also has the impression that Polish citizens find it easier to integrate and adapt to Germany and the German way of life – the organization of society, the “ordered approach” to life and culture. In the UK, he reflects, Polish migrants tend to struggle with the multi-cultural environment. I wonder, whether he is also talking about his own experiences and feelings here.

Another aspect that we tend to neglect when looking at Polish migrant communities is the fact that Poland is a diverse country with strong regional cultures that are shaped by the history of the division of Poland and by different natural environments and industries. In Westfalia, there were many migrants from Silesia, Great Poland and Pomerania, the West of Poland, here, in Manchester and generally the North of the UK, he guesses, are more Poles from the Eastern parts of Poland – from poorer, less connected areas. I wonder in how far this analysis is correct – it would be useful to look out for regional migration statistics and see, which locations people are really choosing and why. Regardless of whether the Priests' analysis is accurate or not, it points at a Polish tendency of looking down at the Eastern parts of Poland and at common stereotypes about Eastern Poland as less organized, and the Eastern population as less capable of making a living and thriving than populations of the West of Poland.

Own experiences

“I am on a mission to support the Poles in the UK”

When I ask ***** about his own experiences of living in the UK and being a work migrant in Germany and Poland, he tells me that his mission in the UK is to be there for the Polish community abroad and to provide spiritual support to them. He emphasizes mission rather than talking about choice and I have the impression he has his own struggles with living in the UK. “I have always been a migrant”, he says, and explains that his is originally from Silesia, then went to university in Poznań, then worked to different regions of Poland for his training as a priest, before leaving to Germany and later the UK. In his holidays, he has the opportunity to share his experiences with other Polish priests who are on mission in the UK, and there are also retreats organized for all

priests who work across the globe in different parts of the world. He says that what he told me about the his experiences of Polish migrants in the UK resonates with conversations he has had with his Polish colleagues in the UK on such social gatherings.



Group meetings: “Ławeczka pod jabłonią”, “The Bench under the Apple Tree”

As part of the research endeavour and in order to begin the collaboration process with the +50 Polish community, we decided to initiate a group and invite people to participate in a series of peer-group gatherings. Between February and April 2018 we ran three meetings with further meetings to come. The attendance to the meetings was low, reaching from two to four members of the +50 community, plus the children and grandchildren who came along with them and our team of volunteers. There were different reasons for the low attendance, including the mobility of the group members: their hyper mobility of travelling to Poland when we were meeting, and their lack of mobility within Greater Manchester to get to the meeting.

In Male, 60, Greater Manchester - Ref. CS004

comparison to my younger years I am now more... “self-reflexive”

***** came to the UK of the 14th May 2004, immediately after Poland’s accession to the EU and after the collapse of his relationship, from which he has two children. Unlike most Polish re-settlers at the time, he chose to avoid London and to go to Manchester instead. He took the only coach to Manchester from Poland and was the single new migrant in it; the others were Poles from the former Polonia, who had lived in Manchester for decades.

***** found different jobs, usually hard, physical work, his colleagues are mostly younger men. When he goes back home in the evenings he thinks: *“how tired are they, and how tired must I be!”* He finds it difficult to get into any other kind of job in British society, because Poles are associated with physical labour: *“we get the opportunity to work in the jobs that people want to see us in and then we come to fit the picture they have of us.”* Nevertheless, he is trying to see the positive sides of what he is doing and the good effects that the daily exercise has on strengthening his body. This allows him to be content with what he has got. In the questionnaire ***** indicates his wishes for the future: finding a partner and being able to support his family financially.