Polish Return and Double Return Migration

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Regional surveys indicate that about half the Poles who migrated since 2004 are living back in Poland. However, surveys of returnees also suggest that most are not committed to settling. This article explores why, looking at re-integration problems common worldwide, but also at the specifics of post-communist Poland, such as regional inequalities, job insecurity and low social trust. Although many returnees will continue to migrate temporarily, for others (notably those aged around 30) the experience of failed return to Poland inclines them to settle abroad. Such double return migrants engage in new, less transnational livelihood strategies, integrating more abroad and burning bridges back to Poland.

THE EXODUS OF POLES TO WESTERN EUROPE IN THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY following EU accession was followed a few years later by Polish and UK media assertions that they were returning to Poland. Anecdotal evidence suggests that—until the publication of the 2011 UK census data proved the opposite—many British people assumed Polish migrants had generally settled back in Poland. This article briefly discusses the causes and scale of recent returns to Poland, arguing that recession in the West is not the main cause of returns and that in any case returns are fewer than often suggested, especially when compared with the number of new arrivals. However, the main focus of the article is on what happens after return. ‘Return’ is often assumed to be definitive—the end of migration—but this is far from true. Most surveys of Polish returnees in Poland suggest that the majority are not committed to settling back in Poland. Instead, they keep their options open, or actively plan to return abroad. Why is this happening? Do they have problems re-integrating in Poland and, if so, to what extent are these specifically Polish and post-communist problems, as opposed to the kinds of problem which returnees everywhere might expect to encounter? Even if many returnees continue to engage in temporary migration to the West, can we expect there also to be returnees who will leave Poland for good?

In order to explore these issues, the article mentions some general reasons why returnees in all countries can find it difficult to re-integrate, before addressing more specific Polish and post-communist reasons why returnees might want to go back abroad. The discussion takes into account the potential for continuing temporary migration—as well as the many types of ‘migrant’. Some former migrants are more likely than others to stay in Poland. The article to
some extent focuses particularly on migration between Poland and the UK, although this is also set in the wider context of migration to and from Western countries in general.

The article is based largely on two research projects: firstly, my interviews with 102 Polish mothers (including 19 returnees) (White 2011) and secondly, my recent project ‘Polish Double Return Migration’. White (2011) explored why so many Polish families with children were arriving in the UK and discussed factors influencing their decisions about how long to stay. I interviewed Polish mothers in both the UK and Poland about their own migration experiences, migration from their local areas in Poland and the merits of migrating as a whole family, instead of one parent working temporarily in the West. Interviewees in the UK were also asked about their integration experiences, links to Poland and thoughts concerning return. UK-based interviewees came from all over Poland; interviews in Poland were conducted mostly in the small towns of Sanok and Grajewo. A specially commissioned opinion poll in the Podkarpacie region corroborated the interview evidence that whole-family migration is increasingly considered to be ‘better’ for children (White 2011, pp. 15–18). For the ‘Polish Double Return Migration’ project I interviewed 20 returnees in Poland, seven in the prosperous cities of Warsaw and Poznań and 13 in the economically contrasting small north-eastern town of Grajewo, as well as 12 double returnees in the west of England (Bath, Bristol, Corsham and Weston-super-Mare). Interviewees were from a range of social backgrounds and ages (from 19 to 60); men and women were represented equally. Interviews were loosely structured around the topics of migration motives and labour market experiences, and interviewees chose whether to speak English or Polish. The article also draws on several years of participant observation as an English teacher at the Polish Saturday School in Bath, providing contact with a variety of local Polish people and additional evidence to back up the findings of the narrower research projects. Secondary sources include Polish internet forums and scholarship on return migration. The quantitative and qualitative studies by the Centrum Doradztwa Strategicznego (Centre for Strategic Advice—CDS) in Kraków, which draw on much larger samples than mine, were particularly useful for cross-checking the reliability of my own findings with regard to returnees based in Poland.

Return to Poland—advantages, myths, statistics

Polish return migration from the United Kingdom is significant both for Poland and the UK. With regard to Poland: migration scholars and governments alike tend to feel that return migration is beneficial for sending countries. While emigration often entails ‘brain drain’, return means ‘brain circulation’, as migrants return enriched with new ideas and skills. In addition, they may invest money earned abroad in their country of origin. However, although ‘in theory migration can be a real stimulus to home-country development’, this is not automatic and often requires special policies on the part of the origin country (King 2000, p. 27).

1There were actually 13 interviewees, but since I interviewed Judyta and Dariusz together I have counted the couple jointly as a single interviewee. All interviewees have been given pseudonyms, except Przemysław, who did not want one. I have also anonymised the place of interview, where this was in the UK because Corsham and Weston are small towns where the interviewees might be recognised even if their names were changed.
In the case of contemporary Poland, return migration seems desirable. Gaps have emerged in the Polish labour market, with shortages of, for example, anaesthetists and roofers (Goślińska 2006; Kaczmarczyk 2010, p. 177). More generally, Poles have been working across the whole of western and southern Europe in recent years and Poland could presumably benefit from know-how gained during this experience. Finally, the Polish population is ageing quite noticeably, begging the question of how it can be replenished with younger members. Poland has many young migrants: more than a quarter of 25–34 year olds in a 2011 national survey of Poles currently in Poland had worked or were employed abroad (Roguska 2011, p. 3). The departure of so many young people may be regarded as a particular loss for Poland, demographically and economically.

For Poles who view economic migration as shameful, return constitutes a symbolic affirmation of Polish collective identity. The passions that can be aroused around this topic were illustrated in 2006, when the conservative Kaczyński government tried to promote return, provoking media opponents to launch a billboard campaign with slogans such as ‘Plumbers, don’t return from France!’ and ‘[Bus-]drivers, don’t return from England!’ Both Kaczyński’s Law and Justice Party and its liberal rival, the Civic Platform, made the return of Polish migrants part of their election campaign, offering similar programmes to support returnees and actively encouraging return (Szczepański 2010, pp. 22–23).

In fact, since 2003, the Polish government had been developing policy to encourage return migration, in the hope that an increasingly prosperous Poland could emulate Ireland and attract back its émigrés (Szczepański 2010, pp. 17, 23–25). The return of young people from the UK and Ireland was particularly important because Polish migrants to those countries were younger and more highly educated than Polish migrants to other European countries. Overall, the UK is important to Poland because, since 2006, it has been the most popular destination country for Polish migrants.

Polish migration is important for the UK because Poles now form roughly 1% of the UK population: in the 2011 census, 546,174 people in England and Wales claimed Polish as their main language, making it the second most commonly spoken language in the UK. Poles contribute substantially to the UK’s net population growth, since their birth-rate is much higher than the birth-rate in Poland; and they work in all sectors of the UK economy. Given their positive contribution to the UK economy (Somerville & Sumption 2009, pp. 37–40), their loss would constitute a problem, even if certain political parties and sections of the media have seemed to welcome the prospect of Polish return migration.

The economic and political significance of Polish return migration makes it important to study, especially in view of the abundance of misleading analysis. Politicians and journalists in both countries often apply simplistic migration theory which ignores the fact that migration decisions are made by individuals. Poland escaped the recession which afflicted the UK and the rest of Europe. Registered unemployment, moreover, halved in Poland.

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2011 census data showed that the percentage of the population aged under 18 had fallen from 23.3 to 19.2 since the census of 2002 (GUS 2011).


5This includes trying to facilitate return, such as in the case of London’s Westminster Council paying the airfare for Poles who volunteered to return (John Sparkes, ‘Poles Apart’, Channel 4 News, 7:40 pm, 10 September 2006).
between 2004 and 2009 (GUS 2012a). This contrast between the UK and Poland led commentators to suppose that return *en masse* must indeed be taking place: ‘As the country slides deeper into recession, the building trade contracts and the pound plummets against the zloty, there is little reason for many of the estimated 700,000 Poles who flocked to Britain after their country joined the EU in 2004 to remain’ (Harrison 2009).

However, evidence from Polish research among return migrants suggests that Harrison’s expectation was unfounded. Only an estimated 10% of the roughly 1.1 million who have returned to Poland from other EU countries did so because they lost their job (Grabowska-Lusińska 2012). Unemployment among Poles in the UK in mid-2011 was only 5.5% compared to a 7.8% UK average and just under 12% in Poland (ONS 2011a, p. 2; GUS 2012a). Moreover, to assume that rising unemployment in the UK, and a growing Polish economy, automatically lead to migration from the UK to Poland is to apply a simplistic economic model of migration. Such arguments ignore the reality that the most common economic motive for migration is higher wages in the destination country, not the overall trajectory of GDP. Hence, since wages are still much higher in the UK than Poland, migrants might well prefer temporary unemployment abroad (especially with unemployment benefit) over returning to Poland.

In addition, migrants make decisions on microeconomic, not macroeconomic factors. There are many poor localities in Poland and national economic growth may not seem very relevant to potential return migrants from such areas: they will not go back to individual places where they cannot achieve decent livelihoods. In addition, return, insofar as it occurs, more often results not from failure—losing one’s job—but from the successful completion of a migration plan to boost the household’s finances, for example, earning money to buy a car or flat (Iglicka 2010, pp. 80–85; Grabowska-Lusińska 2012).

Finally, contemporary migration scholars recognise that migrants often have non-economic motives. Attachments to particular people, places and lifestyles all help determine migration decisions. Indeed, many scholars of return migration suggest that here non-economic factors tend to predominate over economic ones (King 2000, pp. 15, 17). Given the issues just discussed, it is not surprising to discover—on the basis of qualitative evidence—that some kinds of Polish migration, such as family reunification, continue despite hard times in the UK; and that if Polish migrants return home it is for a mixture of reasons (White 2011, ch. 10). The mix of motives cannot be easily separated: for example, people return to Poland ‘because’ they fulfilled a personal economic plan and earned some money, but on a deeper level they return to Poland because this is where they feel at home. The most common reasons for return to Poland in one 2008 survey were ‘homesickness’ (36%) and ‘family and friends in Poland’ (29%) (Frelak & Roguska 2008, p. 14). A large 2009 survey in Małopolska found that ‘private and family reasons’ were most commonly named ‘chief’ reasons for return (CDS 2010a, p. 93). The authors of the Małopolska report comment: ‘Economic factors like the higher standard of living and better wages incline

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6However, according to Izabela Grabowska-Lusińska, in EU countries other than the UK and Sweden migrants have been more hit by unemployment than have local people. ‘Post-accession Return Migration to Poland: Trends, Strategies and Support Mechanisms’, Skopje 2012, available at: http://www.migrantservicecentres.org/userfile/roundtable_Izabela%20Grabowska%20Lusińska.pdf, accessed 1 August 2012.

7Seasonally adjusted GDP growth was 4.3% in the third quarter of 2011, well above the EU average (GUS 2012c).

8Grabowska-Lusińska and Okołski (2009), pp. 208–13 provide a helpful summary of various survey findings about return intentions.
people to stay abroad, but psychological and social factors make them want to return’ (CDS 2010a, p. 96).

With regard to the scale of return: perhaps around half of Poles who migrated after 2004 were to be found living in Poland at any one time over the last few years (Bieńkowska et al. 2010a, p. 21; 2010b, p. 13; Gruszka et al. 2012, p. 11). However, this does not imply an absence of Poles in Western Europe; the Polish Statistical Office estimated that at the end of 2011 some 1,754,000 Poles were residing temporarily elsewhere in Europe, compared with 1,925,000 in the peak year of 2007 (GUS 2012d). UK data suggest that the number of Poles resident in the UK continued to rise through 2008 and 2009 (ONS 2011a). Qualitative data discussed later in this article suggest the presence of numerous ‘double return migrants’ who went back to Poland only to return abroad.9 If Poland still has net migration to the UK and Europe more widely, one can sensibly guess that it is not doing a good job at keeping its return migrants. Although it is impossible at present to establish the actual scale of double return migration from Poland, surveys in Poland itself capture the double return potential (the number of returnees who say they might or definitely will return abroad; see Table 1).

The five surveys are not completely comparable, given that the three regions (centred on Wrocław, Opole and Kraków, respectively) have different migration patterns, including different types of temporary or circular migration, and also the fact that the question about whether the interviewee would return abroad was framed within different time periods. It was not surprising that the survey which asked about leaving Poland again within a year—a relatively short period—was also the only one in which over half of respondents seemed committed to staying in Poland.

A further problem with quantitative data, in general, is that it cannot catch the contradictoriness and nuances of potential migrants’ actual thinking about the future. Qualitative data suggest that returnees often hesitate and change their minds. Additionally, rather than having only three categories it would be more satisfactory to think of a spectrum ranging from absolutely confident of staying in Poland to absolutely sure of return. (See Table 2, where the interviewees in my project are arranged in roughly ascending order of double migration potential.) There might not be many returnees at either of the ‘absolutely confident’ poles. According to the authors of the ‘Kierunek Małopolska’ report, ‘Even those [participants in in-depth interviews] who plan to stay in Poland do not exclude the possibility of going abroad if they have a good opportunity in the form of a job offer, or are forced to take such a step’ (CDS 2010a, p. 111). One of my most ‘settled’ interviewees, for example, acknowledged ‘We know that if something happens here and we lose our jobs and cannot find any other job we would be forced to go abroad and find a job’.10

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9The term ‘double return’ coined by White (2011) is appropriate because return abroad is no less ‘return’ than return to the origin country. Migrants talk about ‘return’ to the place they miss when they are away from it. My interviewees often missed being abroad when they were in Poland and felt that they ‘returned’ when they went abroad again. The phrases ‘secondary migration’ (Black & Gent 2006, p. 25) or ‘yo-yo’ migration (Margolis 1995, pp. 32–33) are sometimes used instead, but insofar as there is a conventional label for this phenomenon, it is ‘re-(e)migration’. However, this is unhelpful for several reasons; ‘Emigration’ is no longer commonly used in English language scholarship, so ‘re-emigration’ sounds quaint; ‘re-migration’, on the other hand, is confusing and is in fact used as a synonym for ‘return’ to the origin country by some scholars (CDS 2010a, 2010b; Iglicka 2002; Razum et al. 2005). My research description for interviewees referred to ponowne wyjazdy (new departures or expeditions [abroad]), the term which is colloquially used for the phenomenon.

10Author’s interview with Marta, Warsaw, 22 March 2011.
Re-integration of Polish return migrants in comparative perspective

The integration of foreign migrants and re-integration of co-national returnees have much in common. The scholarly literature on migrant return to a range of countries emphasises the difficulties experienced by returnees attempting to re-integrate into their country of origin (King 2000). Integration—of both foreign immigrants and returning co-nationals—proceeds on three levels. The state often needs to take measures to ensure socio-economic integration, such as access to housing and education. It may also have a role in improving public images of migrants—for example, through myth-busting programmes such as those in Glasgow and Barcelona.11 The receiving society needs to make migrants feel welcome and adjust to their presence; if the migrants are co-nationals, the ‘receiving society’ includes the return migrants’ family, friends and neighbours. The latter may not welcome returnees with open arms. A recent literature survey by the International Organization for Migration suggests that ‘A better understanding of the values—positive or negative—attached to returning migrants would be a first step towards devising effective policies and communication strategies on return’ (IOM 2011, p. 17).12 Finally, newcomers themselves have to make the necessary cultural adjustments, and in the initial stages this may be even harder for returnees than for migrants in a foreign country (Bien´kowska et al. 2010b, p. 137). Integration is likely to be more successful if the returnee is prepared adequately for return (Cassarino 2004). This applies to all spheres of integration. To some extent preparedness links to duration of absence, which should be long enough for the migrant to have gained something from migration to invest upon return, but not so long that he or she is estranged from the home society (King 2000, p. 24). Since recent Polish return migrants have lived on average for two years abroad (CDS 2010a, p. 27; Grabowska-Lusińska 2012), one might assume that they are well prepared to return, at least in this respect.

In today’s world, integration is inseparably linked to transnationalism. Migrants can maintain multiple connections with the country they left behind, communicating with friends and family, paying visits, keeping up with national and local news and generally

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12 Literary and cinematic representations of the non-acceptance of return migrants even include cases of murder by former neighbours: Laurie Lee’s Cider with Rosie (set in 1920s England) and, in twenty-first century Romania, the hero of Mundruczo’s 2008 film Delta.
### TABLE 2
**Double Return Intentions of Interviewees**

#### Group A: Interviewed and probably settled in Poland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason to work abroad</th>
<th>Reason to live in Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marta, Marianna, Damian, Konrad</td>
<td>Good jobs in big cities; married or live with partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Successful businesswoman in Grajewo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Happy family life and adequate livelihood in village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomasz</td>
<td>Feels too old (at 60) for further migration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Group B: Potential double returnees (in roughly ascending order of likelihood of return abroad)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason to work abroad</th>
<th>Reason to live in Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mariola</td>
<td>Loved life in USA; would ‘go back tomorrow’ with family</td>
<td>Lives and works in Grajewo, three children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryszard</td>
<td>Unemployed, poor, enjoyed working abroad</td>
<td>Tied to possessions in Grajewo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugeniusz, Lech</td>
<td>Only semi-employed, need money, experienced migrants</td>
<td>Many children, self-built family homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>Exceptionally poor, used to living abroad</td>
<td>Small child, complex family life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janusz</td>
<td>Unemployed, poor (no savings from previous migration)</td>
<td>Lack of confidence, mother in mid-60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan, Paulina</td>
<td>Unemployed/student, like working abroad</td>
<td>Tied only to parents, friends (aged 25 and 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marek</td>
<td>Loves London (where has worked), is gay</td>
<td>Finishing degree in Poland; has partner, good job in city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Experienced migrant, post-return frustration</td>
<td>Grandmother is ill, no other ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wojciech</td>
<td>Considers he lives abroad (double-returned in 2004)</td>
<td>In Poland temporarily for family reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Experienced migrant, post-return frustration</td>
<td>Did re-migrate shortly after interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Expect to return, no concrete plans yet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason to return abroad</th>
<th>Reason to live in Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerzy</td>
<td>Good job in UK to which could return; wife loves UK</td>
<td>Wife, child, friends, places, pastimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Hope to return for temporary work abroad within next six months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason to work abroad</th>
<th>Reason to live in Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iwona</td>
<td>Unemployed, needs money, much prefers life abroad</td>
<td>Disable husband, teenage child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zbigniew</td>
<td>Has job (and too old to find one in Poland)</td>
<td>Very poor job in UK; adult children in Poland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Interviewed in UK before return to Poland, anticipates that business failure in Poland would lead to double return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason to return abroad</th>
<th>Reason to live in Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerzy</td>
<td>Good job in UK to which could return; wife loves UK</td>
<td>Wife, child, friends, places, pastimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Group C: Double return migrants interviewed in UK, in roughly descending order of likelihood to return to Poland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason to return abroad</th>
<th>Reason to live in Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wiktoria (19)</td>
<td>Likes working in UK, applying to UK university</td>
<td>Has not excluded possible career in Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zbigniew (60)</td>
<td>Has job (and too old to find one in Poland)</td>
<td>Very poor job in UK; adult children in Poland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The remainder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Reason to return abroad</th>
<th>Reason to live in Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joanna, Andrzej, Ewa, Arleta, Lucja, Judyta/Dariusz, Kinga, Leszek, Przemyslaw</td>
<td>Seem likely to stay and are pursuing strategies to (re)-integrate in the UK. All have families in the UK.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
living in two cultures at the same time. In some ways this transnationalism makes it easier both for them to live abroad, and to return home, since wherever they live they still feel connected to the things and people they appreciate in the other country. The following quotation is from a Polish returnee, but could have been made by a young EU citizen from any country:

I didn’t miss Poland when I was in Ireland—at all. No, it was like you book a ticket for your flight home, it takes you hour and a half to fly back home to Poznań. So I was basically coming back like every other weekend. ... I made a lot of Irish friends. And to be honest [now I’m back in Poland] I don’t actually miss them, you know? It’s like now in the Facebook you have contact with everybody. Every day you have Facebook, you have Skype, you can talk to anybody anywhere in the world anytime. So it’s not like actually I miss them. I speak with them every other week or so.13

Such migrants can slot back quickly into their home communities:

[I didn’t have problems re-adapting] because I still had lots of friends here; I knew my city. ... [When in Ireland] I was coming back to Poznań five, six, eight times during a year. ... It wasn’t like, I’m not sure who said that, after a year you’ve no one to come back and after two years you’ve no place to come back. ... Not with me!14

Integration, in the sense of feeling emotionally comfortable in a given society, can therefore be promoted by transnational practices. This means that it should be somewhat easier for today’s returnees to adapt back to life in the origin country, although there is also a danger that returnees will acquire a false sense of confidence, assuming that they know all about their place of origin, and then being upset when they discover it has changed in their absence (Szymanśka et al. 2010, p. 80).

With regard to the public sphere, governmental and non-governmental (often diaspora) organisations can provide assistance to would-be return migrants while they are still abroad. Since, as mentioned above, return migration is often viewed positively by the governments of sending countries, such initiatives can be seen as a wise investment. Jamaica, the Philippines and Ireland, for example, have encouraged return migration by offering support to returnees (Duszczyk 2007, p. 15; Grabowska-Lusińska 2010c). Preparation can include offering factual information about bureaucratic formalities, job opportunities, etc., as well as providing emotional support. Examples include projects by non-Polish NGOs such as Crosscare, the ‘social care agency of the Dublin Archdiocese’ (Bieńkowska et al. 2010b, p. 87); Polish NGOs abroad, such as the controversial BARKA,15 which facilitates the return of homeless Poles from London; and governmental/NGO partnerships, such as the website http://www.wracajdopolski.pl, run since 2010 by the British–Polish Chamber of Commerce and Hays, in partnership with the European Social Fund and the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

In 2008 the Polish government, concerned about the potential for mass returns from recession-stricken Western Europe, began taking more active steps to help returnees (Lesińska 2010b, p. 5). The approach was deliberately reactive, providing support on

13Adam, Poznań, 9 November 2011.
14Konrad, Poznań, 8 November 2011.
15See the website: barka.org.pl.
request, rather than actively encouraging return (Szczepański 2010, p. 28). With the help of migration scholars, in November 2008 the government launched its own website.\textsuperscript{16} By June 2010 the website had received more than 650,000 hits and its experts had replied to over 4,000 queries (Szczepański 2010, p. 31). The website, which is organised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, with EU funding, continues to operate, despite Polish government recognition that the scale of return has been less than anticipated and the consequent scaling down of its 2008 programme of activities (Szczepański 2010, p. 35).\textsuperscript{17} The website offers a wide range of information and advice on both national and regional levels, and states its objective as ‘giving advice [to Poles planning to return to Poland] on how to overcome possible practical and bureaucratic obstacles’.\textsuperscript{18}

Re-integration once the migrant returns to Poland takes place in various spheres. Based on its study of Silesian returnees, the CDS in Kraków recommended the following measures. First, the provision of information should be improved by giving advance warning of potential problems such as culture shock, setting up an information website and physical information points, and establishing a regional system for monitoring migration. Secondly, labour market measures should include training and professional advice for returnees, a better system for recognising foreign qualifications, and improving the image of returnees among employers. Thirdly, attention should be paid to the well-being and psychological comfort of returnees, for example by providing support groups based in job centres and discussion groups meeting in returnees’ homes. And fourthly, educational measures should include support for migrants’ children and for returning academics (Bieńkowska et al. 2010b, pp. 78, 88).

The labour market is the main locus of re-integration. Returnees can feel ‘disoriented’ in the job market (Bieńkowska et al. 2010b, p. 117; CDS 2010a, p. 29) either because they have been away too long,\textsuperscript{19} or because they left Poland when they were young and have never worked in Poland. Some job centres run seminars for returnees to help them understand the current state of the local labour market and frame their \textit{curricula vitae} (CV) appropriately, presenting skills acquired abroad in the best possible light.\textsuperscript{20} Overall, it seems that there is quite a lot of advice and support available to returnees, from different governmental and non-governmental agencies, although it could sometimes be better publicised (Bieńkowska et al. 2010b, p. 95). Service providers face a number of dilemmas. It would seem more efficient to provide advice on a national level, yet individual regions and districts can have different requirements, for example with regard to the paperwork needed to obtain unemployment benefit. There is also the issue of how far returnees should be offered separate services, and in fact it seems that usually job centres do not distinguish between them and regular job-seekers. On the one hand, returnees have some particular

\textsuperscript{16}See \url{www.powroty.gov.pl} (from 2011 powroty.zielonalinia.gov.pl).


\textsuperscript{18}Available at: \url{Zielonalinia.gov.pl}, accessed 4 August 2012.

\textsuperscript{19}There is a direct correlation between length of absence and disorientation on the Polish labour market (see Bieńkowska et al. 2010a, p. 79).

\textsuperscript{20}Author’s interview with Magdalena Myślińska-Walczak, EURES assistant, Poznań WUP (regional job centre), 10 November 2011. See also the information about Poznań WUP in Bieńkowska et al. (2010b, pp. 121–22), and about other provincial initiatives (2010b, pp. 100–1).
needs; on the other, there is an awareness that sections of the local population resent special
treatment awarded to return migrants (Bien´kowska et al. 2010b).

As already suggested, in addition to the state, the receiving society also has
responsibilities to integrate migrants. To the return migrant, in any country, family and
friends can seem wrapped up in their own affairs and incapable of empathising with the
migrant’s experiences abroad. As one returnee in my sample complained: ‘My whole life in
Ireland was like swept away. You’re like nothing, zero. . . . They will never understand
us’.21 Some non-migrants are prejudiced against migrants and returnees, assuming that they
are disloyal or ‘born losers’ (nieudaczniki)—leading to suggestions that cautious campaigns
to improve their image could be helpful (Bien´kowska et al. 2010b, pp. 133–36).

Potential employers also do not always understand return migrants. They can hold general
stereotypes about returnees, but they also have specific reasons for anxiety: how should they
interpret the returnee’s foreign CV; will he or she be arrogant and have expectations
the employer cannot meet; will the returnee go back abroad? (Bien´kowska et al. 2010b,
pp. 32–35, 118–19; CDS2010a, p. 104). In my sample, for instance, Marianna described
her boyfriend’s problems:

People who were recruiting him, they were asking him about living abroad, and the question is why
you came back to Poland. What was first question. And when he was telling them what he was doing
there and what is his experience, they were unhappy that he was like, I came back from Ireland, and
I have better knowledge than you have. Some of them were very aggressive.22

For the returning migrant, acculturation typically proceeds in stages, with initial optimism
succeeded by a period of depression and frustration (‘reverse culture shock’), often resolving
into acceptance, even if ‘there can be no return to the status quo ante’ (King 2000, p. 20). There
is a danger that the return migrant may be impatient and give up too early, while he or she is still
in the phase of finding everything difficult. Alternatively, he or she may become depressed for a
long time. This is particularly likely if the returnee cannot make the transition from stop-gap
employment—as the first job often is—to a job of their choice. Becoming stuck in this fashion
can easily prompt nostalgia for the country of migration and thoughts of returning abroad. Since
unemployment benefits are not generous in Poland, returnees who cannot find a job quickly
before they exhaust the savings they brought from abroad may feel they have little choice but to
migrate again, although some job centre employees feel that returnees are too quick to give up
hope and should display a more realistic appreciation of how long it takes to find a decent job in
Poland (Bien´kowska et al. 2010b, p. 87).

Transnational practices, such as keeping in close contact with friends and family abroad,
promote continuing mobility even after the migrant’s main base shifts back to the origin
society. (Return) migrants who engage in transnational practices often display a positive
attitude towards mobility and keep open the possibility of migrating again. Black and Gent
(2006, pp. 32–33) argue that return may be most ‘sustainable’ precisely when it is not
permanent and final.23 The term ‘liquid migration’ (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2009,

21Sara, Warsaw, 23 March 2011.
22Marianna, Warsaw, 22 March 2011.
23The description of return as ‘sustainable’ was coined with reference to the return of refugees to former
Yugoslavia (Black & Gent 2006, p. 24), but many markers of sustainability are equally appropriate to all
returnees.
p. 222) is sometimes applied to this Polish tendency to come and go, although it would be misleading to suppose that it is always a smooth process or a strategy of choice. As the profiles in Table 2 suggest, the potential double returnees in my sample (Group B) were simultaneously pulled abroad by economic factors (with some degree of adventure-seeking) and tied down to Poland by family commitments. They were not well integrated into the Polish labour market, but they were mostly integrated emotionally and culturally into Polish society. Moreover, potential double returnees may wait a long time for a good opening abroad, if they lack foreign language skills and feel dependent on invitations from friends and family.

Types of Polish return migrant

The likelihood of re-settlement back in Poland depends partly on socio-economic factors and partly on the characteristics and perceptions of different types of returnee. Although rigid migrant typologies are usually unhelpful, it is possible to make some generalisations, while recognising the potential for overlapping types and individual transitions from one category to another. For example, that half of the Polish returnee population which plans to leave Poland or might consider re-migrating can be further roughly divided into circular migrants with established mobile livelihoods, for example, doing farm work in Western Europe every summer; and people with ‘one-off’ experiences of migration who, on becoming double return migrants, might eventually settle abroad.

The Małopolska project found that less well-educated migrants were more likely to return to Poland than graduates: 31.1% of migrants from the region were graduates, but only 24.2% of returnees (CDS 2010a, p. 27). This seems to be in keeping with the findings of the general return migration literature, which suggests that ‘the migrants with the most drive and ambition, who succeed in the destination country, are those who are least likely to return’ (King 2000, p. 13), although the best educated migrants are not necessarily also those with most drive and ambition. Overall, these latter are clearly the people whom it would be most useful for Poland to ‘keep’, and returnees with useful skills or money to invest might potentially be more successful at re-integrating into Poland than returnees with neither. The Małopolska study identified four types of return migrant: ‘investors’ (34%); ‘professionals’ (9%) who had enhanced their skills while abroad and were using these skills in Poland; ‘agents of change’ (24%) with both money and skills; and ‘tourists’ (33%) who returned with nothing but impressions (CDS 2010a, p. 29). Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski (2009, p. 213) draw a similar contrast between migrants who had originally gone abroad because they were attracted by opportunities to improve their skills, for whom return is carefully planned as a logical continuation of their career, and lower-skilled migrants who felt pushed to leave Poland for economic reasons and had less to come back to. Even if they had met their target in terms of earning money, for example for a car or flat repairs, they might find it harder to settle back into the Polish labour market.24

The danger is that, after return, plans might not work out as expected. The more highly skilled migrants might not be satisfied with their new careers in Poland and the investors

24Klagge et al. (2007) found that ‘highly-skilled return migrants’ were indeed more likely to stay long-term in Poland, although their sample of 1989–2002 returnees obviously has somewhat different characteristics from more recent return migrants.
might fail in their business enterprises. ‘Agents of change’ and ‘investors’ returning to other societies have often found their ambitions frustrated where local conditions are insufficiently developed to support their business projects (King 2000). As for acculturation, here too it may be the case that being better educated is not necessarily an asset when it comes to re-integrating back into Poland. One might assume that migrants who spoke only Polish and had not really enjoyed their stay in the West—where they went simply to earn money quickly—might compare home more favourably to abroad, and adapt back to Polish life more quickly.25 than migrants who had spent time and money socialising and travelling while they were abroad.

Life-stage is also important for migration decisions. Since decisions are often made on the basis of ties to particular people and places, opportunities and incentives for mobility vary considerably according to life-stage. This affects return as much as it does the original migration journey (King 2000, p. 15). A large number of Polish migrants to the UK and Ireland were young when they left Poland—typically childless and in their 20s. They regarded migration as a ‘gap year’, full of travel and new experiences. By the time they approached 30 (if they had not already married and settled down abroad) it was natural to think about settling down in one country or another. The maturing of this generation perhaps represents a window of opportunity for Poland to regain some younger migrants.

I love Ireland, it’s a beautiful country, it’s a beautiful island and it was the best four years of my life. And then after four years I began to miss Poland again. But it wasn’t actually missing Poland, it was more like: OK, I’m 26 right now (I was 26 in 2008) and it was like OK, now I should do something with my life, right? I’m going to either stay in Ireland or go back to Poland and then I’ll start a family or whatever. And I came back.26

Probably one of the most common reasons for return is to be with partners and children in Poland; this is because there is so much solo parent migration. During the 1990s many Polish people—especially men—became ‘settled in mobility’ (Morokvasic 2004), working abroad alone while the rest of the family remained in Poland (Frejka et al. 1998; Iglicka 2001; Wallace 2002). Many thousands of Polish parents still engage in such circular migration. Nonetheless, it can also stop, when, for example, children become difficult teenagers and parents decide the father’s presence is needed in Poland. Conversely, and increasingly often, the father may return for a final visit to Poland to take his family abroad. After this, they tend to return for short visits only (White 2011). In the ‘Kierunek Małopolska’ survey 15% of intending double return migrants were going abroad with their whole families, and 30% were going to join relatives abroad (CDS 2010a, p. 119). However, despite the increasing popularity of family reunification abroad, there are also plenty of failed attempts at reunification, when the second spouse to migrate—usually the mother—becomes a return migrant. She returns to Poland after a short time abroad because she does not like being a migrant, or feels too attached to family, friends or her job in Poland. In some cases the husband also comes back; if he does not, the marriage may fall apart. Lone mothers

25Cerase (1974) refers to this as the ‘return of conservatism’. However, my interviews with returnees suggest that even the most conservative nonetheless have some positive impressions of life abroad and were changed in some way by their migration experience.

26Adam, Poznań, 9 November 2011.
also work abroad, leaving their children in Poland for short periods, usually with their own mothers; in this case, too, there is a strong incentive for the mother to return to live in Poland for good (White 2011).

Another powerful—though sometimes temporary—reason to return to the origin country is to care for ill or ageing parents. This is particularly prevalent in societies such as Poland where it is expected that older people will be cared for by their children, not by the state or in private institutions. Finally, retirement is a classic cause of return migration associated with a particular life-stage, although retirement migration often proves unsustainable, in Poland as in other societies. Today Polish retirees can also migrate in the opposite direction, especially if their adult children are living in Western Europe. After some years of coming and going between Poland and the West, working in Poland but paying (sometimes extended) visits to their children abroad, they may decide upon retirement to settle with their children (White 2011).

Transnational networks cause migration in the sense that their members, both migrants and those who stayed at home, actively persuade or request friends and family to join them abroad or in Poland. Would-be double returnees with poor social capital, not having such invitations, can become marooned in Poland. This happened, for example, to Zbigniew, aged 60, interviewed in the UK. In a small Polish town—not located in a region with high migration—he had been unable to access the internet and had no friends who could invite him back to England. Hence he felt he could only wait for a lucky chance.27 By contrast, in Polish regions with high migration, returnees may be under pressure to migrate again, even if they had not particularly planned to do so. This is because they are invited (‘tempted’, to use the common expression) by close friends and relatives, and also because there is a prevailing local norm that invitations, especially to the USA, should not be turned down (White 2011, ch. 5).

My husband’s been working abroad more or less all the time since we got married. … First my dad took him to Germany, we have family in Germany, so. Well, later [sigh] he went to the USA, because his sister is there. … And just now he’s been in England. A friend suggested it to him, and off he went. He was tempted by the opportunity.28

One might hypothesise, therefore, that there will be more double return migration abroad from parts of Poland with rich migration networks, based on a high volume of migration. As for the original return to Poland, migrants apparently return to all destinations, since return to Poland most often means return to one’s home locality;29 and this is an increasing trend (Klagge et al. 2007; Grabowska-Lusińska 2010b, p. 56; 2012). The Małopolska project found that almost every migrant who returned to Małopolska originated from the region, and about 90% returned to their home town or village. The figure was 92.9% in the case of Kraków; 7.3% of residents of other towns in the region moved to Kraków on their return to Poland (CDS 2010a, p. 100).30 If Polish migrants chiefly return because they missed their

27Zbigniew, UK, 3 October 2011.
28Magda, Sanok, 10 September 2008.
29However, there is evidence that central and western regions received more return migration in the years 2002–2008 than high-sending peripheral regions (Anacka 2010, p. 21).
30All 32 returnees in my own project (see below) had returned to their home towns (or those of their spouses/partners), although one later moved to Warsaw.
families or friends, or because they left their household in Poland to temporarily earn money for their family abroad, this pattern is hardly surprising.

Post-communist Poland: socio-economic factors affecting the sustainability of return migration

As other studies of return migrants have pointed out, returnees compare the situation in the origin country and abroad and they feel they have a special wisdom: ‘It’s only now that I can see the bad sides of Poland, Poland’s good and bad sides, and England’s good and bad sides’.31 ‘I made a move, I returned here [to Poland], but the positive side is that I know the way it is here, and I said I don’t like it ... but it helps you to sort out your mind’.32

Interviewed returnees made many comparisons which were favourable to Poland—mentioning its beautiful cities and landscapes, climate, food—and they often seemed to have a strong sense of ethnic identity and attachment to Poland in the abstract. However, the chief specific reason to choose Poland over life abroad was individual attachments to family and friends. The factors discussed in the following section are those more general aspects of life in contemporary Poland, which on the whole tended to be compared unfavourably to migrants’ experiences in the West. The section explores political and social trust; geographical inequalities; and a range of problems associated with the transition to a market economy. All these phenomena can be found in other post-communist countries, but unsurprisingly Poles tend to think of them as being ‘Polish’.

Mistrust of politicians and government officials, though perhaps declining slightly in recent years, seems to be an enduring legacy of the communist regime (Giczi & Sik 2009, p. 65; EC 2009, p. 50; 2011a, p. 52).33 Poles do not necessarily believe government assurances that the Polish economy is sound. As one interviewee commented, Polish economic growth was ‘just statistics’.34 Only 22% of Poles surveyed in January 2012 considered the general economic situation to be ‘good’ and across the whole post-communist period this figure has never reached even 40% (Omyła-Rudzka 2012, p. 5). Hence it is not surprising if Poles are not persuaded to return to Poland by positive statistics and government reports. Frelak and Reguska’s spring 2008 survey of returnees showed that only 3% returned because of ‘improvements in the Polish economy’. ‘Kierunek Małopolska’ (CDS 2010a, p. 96) found that only 1.4% of survey respondents in 2009 cited ‘positive changes in Poland’ as their main motive for return, while in-depth interviewees in the same project hardly ever referred to these when explaining their return motives.

I think that the [Polish] media are politics-driven because I remember when we were coming back media were saying that Polish people are coming back because there is so bad [a] situation in Ireland ...35 [and the] Polish government claimed that there are so many job opportunities here in

31Ewa, UK, 5 April 2011.
32Sara, intending double return migrant, Warsaw, 23 March 2011.
33In spring 2009, 71% of Poles tended not to trust their national government, and 21% to trust it, cf. EU averages of 63% and 32%. By autumn 2011, when trust across most of the EU had fallen, the Polish figures were 62% and 29%, compared with EU averages of 67% and 28%.
34Wiktoria, UK, 12 March 2012.
35See Krings et al. (2009) for discussion of returns to Poland resulting from the Irish recession: they conclude that the scale of returns was exaggerated and that many returns cannot be directly linked to the economic crisis.
Poland. That’s not true, definitely it wasn’t true, no, no. I think it was just a trick to gain new taxpayers! ... I was disappointed with Polish government who was saying that Poland is now second Ireland.36

On the other hand, there is a minority of Poles who believe that the Polish economy is doing well, and even if this is not the ‘main’ reason to return, positive assessments and a degree of optimism shape their return decisions. A 2007 survey of Poles in the UK and Ireland asked if the statement ‘I keep a careful eye out and am waiting to see if the situation improves before I return’ described their own behaviour; 49% did not keep a hopeful eye on the situation, but 40% did (Garapich & Osipovicˇ 2007, p. 25). Probably much depends on the skills and education of the returnee: if they feel they can depend on themselves to get a job in one of the growth areas of the Polish economy, this promotes return migration confidence. Of intending returnees in another large survey, 32.6% took the optimistic line ‘I’m a professional so I’ll definitely find a job’ (Dwornik 2008, p. 3). A similar sentiment was voiced by my interviewee Konrad: ‘Technical degree with knowing of English and knowing lots of people here, it’s not impossible [to find a job]. I wasn’t worried, at all. I knew that I’m going to find something interesting sooner or later’.37

Distrust of the state is sometimes linked to a conviction that it does not really defend the interests of its citizens. This factor was most prominent in the story of Andrzej, who left Poland for the second (and final) time after having an industrial accident and struggling to live off a disability allowance, topped up by his foreign savings.38 Other double returnees expressed similar sentiments:

You could fall down the stairs and injure your back … but the state, the government won’t help you. There just aren’t any benefits. ... You go back to Poland and it’s scary because you don’t know what could happen tomorrow. If something happens I simply don’t exist as far as the state is concerned. No one will look after me.39

Another aspect of many post-communist societies is low social (generalised) trust: the belief that you should not trust strangers because they may not wish you well (Wció´rka 2008; Giczi & Sik 2009; White 2011, p. 80). This affects return migration in at least two ways. On the one hand, re-integration is hindered by the perception that Polish strangers—especially officials and shop assistants—are hostile and rude. Many interviewees commented on this phenomenon.

I was very surprised at the atmosphere in Poland, like, again I saw the people which were kind of grey, like they will be sad, in a hurry. It was like I had a comparison to life in Ireland. ... Sometimes I was, forgot that we are in Poland. And I was discussing about unpleasant, well, the ladies in the stores. They were very rude sometimes, yeah. And I commented it. I was discussing it with [my boyfriend]. Aloud. I forgot that I’m not in Ireland.40

36Marta, Warsaw, 22 March 2011.
37Konrad, Poznań, 8 November 2011.
38Andrzej, UK, 15 March 2011.
39Ewa, UK, 5 April 2011.
40Marianna, Warsaw, 22 March 2011.
However, Polish young people are more trusting than their elders (Giczi & Sik 2009, p. 76), a phenomenon which Marta also claimed to have noticed in Warsaw and attributed to changes in Polish society as a result of migration: ‘I think that in Warsaw people are more friendly because there are many young people who are not like that, who know how it is like to be abroad and they are bring some good types of behaviour from there’.41

Low social trust may reduce return preparedness (and therefore potentially also return sustainability), since Poles may find it difficult or may simply prefer not to try to use formal channels to gain employment before they return to Poland.

I had the feeling that I was just dropping my CVs [sent from the UK] into a bottomless pit. In they go and nothing comes out. . . . So I decided that when I got [home] to Krzeszowice I would get in touch with all my contacts and just go round places asking. (CDS 2010a, p. 98)

Almost all my interviewees had waited to find a job until they returned to Poland. The feeling that it is better to look for work on the spot, where one can use one’s informal channels, would seem to help explain the speculative quality of much Polish return migration. It reflects the apparently universal belief that personal connections are helpful or even essential to secure good employment: once again, a very typical aspect of post-communist societies. However, it is obviously taking a risk to come back with no job fixed in advance, especially given that a returnee’s social networks are probably weaker than when he or she originally departed from Poland.

Klagge et al. (2007, p. 8) emphasise the significance of the regional context in determining the ‘beneficial impacts of return migration’, given that some regions are better prepared, economically and institutionally, to receive returning migrants. Disparities between different regions are marked in post-communist Poland.42 Only Mazowieckie region, around Warsaw, has per capita GDP above the EU average; five other regions are similar to most of central Europe (or Wales); the remainder are in the bottom 25%, similar to south-east Europe (EC 2011b, p. 76). Within regions, too, disparities are marked, as is evident from unemployment figures across Poland (GUS 2012b). At the end of February 2012, registered unemployment was 13.5% nationally, but over twice that figure in many parts of Poland. With reference to some of the places mentioned in this article: it stood at 4.1% in Poznań, 5.4% in Kraków and 23.7% in Grajewo county (GUS 2012b). Size of settlement is important. A national survey in March 2009 discovered an exact correlation between size of settlement and level of optimism about the possibility of finding a job on the local labour market. Those believing it would be ‘difficult’ or even ‘impossible’ to find a job locally included 79% of villagers, 67% of small-town residents, 58% in medium towns, 47% in smaller cities and 24% in cities with a population of over 500,000 (Wciórk 2009, p. 7). Although both Poland and individual Polish regions present a complex map of pockets of prosperity and stagnation, the bigger cities stand out as ‘growth islands’ (Klagge et al. 2007, p. 17).43

The most successful interviewees were working in Poznań and Warsaw, not small towns such as Grajewo and Sanok. In some cases they had jobs with equivalent status and salaries to those they had possessed while working abroad. Marianna, for example (after an initial

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41Marta, Warsaw, 22 March 2011.
42See Klagge et al. (2007, p. 17) for a review of the literature on spatial inequality in Poland.
period of stop-gap work in the shadow economy, receiving low wages) was now working in Warsaw for a large company with the same salary as she had received for her high-powered job in Ireland. She was a good example of a ‘professional’ who had discovered her métier (in sales) while abroad and then built upon it, using the special opportunities available in Warsaw. Konrad was a similar case: a keen climber and sailor, he had begun working in an outdoor shop while in Ireland, risen to a managerial position, then (again after some stop-gap work) become the manager of a shoddy outdoor shop in Poznań which he had managed to completely turn around.

Returnees to Polish cities sometimes made clear that they would never have returned to different places, whether for economic or sentimental reasons:

I admire people who decided to come back to Poland and they are from very small towns in the regions that there are even 25% of unemployment. Because there are such districts in Poland. I wouldn’t be so brave. Because here I knew even though it was a hard time for the economy I knew that sooner or later I will find something.  

I wouldn’t probably go back to any other city in Poland. . . . If I wouldn’t be coming back to Poznań I could come back to Berlin, London, wherever. . . . I wasn’t leaving Dublin or Ireland, I was coming back to Poznań. That’s the difference. . . . I was coming to Poznań because I want to live in Poznań.  

However, returnees with less personal and social capital, and dependants to support, can be defeated by their attempts to re-settle in big Polish cities. Andrzej (aged 40) returned to the West from Gdynia convinced that things in Poland would not improve ‘in my lifetime’. Other double returnees interviewed in England had returned from different big cities—Kraków and Wrocław—in a similar state of pessimism, having failed to find jobs (or in one case run a business) which paid enough to support their young families.

Double return migrants from medium-sized cities reflected on their disappointment that urban regeneration in recent years had brought insufficient real improvement for them to find an acceptable livelihood.

We decided give Poland a chance and just come back and see what we’re gonna see there . . . because obviously I left Poland in 2007. So I thought maybe after three years, something’s changed. On the market . . . I was obviously coming back home at Christmas, like for summer, so I knew they were opening like galleries, shopping centres and stuff, so I thought maybe if they are kind of developing themselves like city they might have a new job prospects. . . . But I came back and Opole is like such a small city and there’s no new development and no new companies at all.  

Kinga and Piotr prepared for their return to Zielona Góra in 2009 with exemplary thoroughness, first earning enough money in England to buy a flat outright, then acquiring a bank loan on the security of their flat, so they could establish a restaurant. Piotr had discovered a talent for cooking while working in restaurants in the UK and felt he had a good knowledge of the business. Kinga’s parents were prepared to look after their grandchildren.

41Marta, Warsaw, 22 March 2011.  
45Konrad, Poznań, 8 November 2011.  
46Arleta, UK, 7 April 2011.
Over the five years of their absence, Zielona Góra had appeared to be regenerated, as a result of EU investment. However, despite all these promising preconditions, the couple simply could not attract enough custom to their restaurant. Kinga felt that there were not enough people in Zielona Góra who could afford to eat out. They became bankrupt, and returned to Britain.47

Those who returned to smaller towns in Poland rarely made much effort to move to a Polish city, in keeping with the general tendency within Poland today to prefer international to internal migration, and to be put off by high rents and the cost of living in Polish cities (Iglicka 2008, p. 65; Kowalczuk 2010; White 2011, ch. 3). ‘Perhaps we did think about it [moving to Wrocław from a town 70 km distant], at the start. But Wrocław is very, it’s a nice, developing city, and if we had worked in Wrocław of course, but life in Wrocław is much more expensive’.48

Immobility was compounded by the fact that the returnees I interviewed had often returned to live in their own accommodation, sometimes left behind when they originally went abroad, sometimes purchased or built with money earned in the West. On the whole one might expect that the housing shortage in Poland would be a ‘post-communist problem’ discouraging the settlement of returnees. If they do not own housing, returnees typically live with parents—often not an easy situation after independent life abroad. However, it seems (insofar as my two samples are concerned) that in fact many people had their own homes. This was a major return motive. As King (2000, p. 27) observes, it seems that in other societies, too, return migrants often occupy their new homes only briefly before giving up and migrating again.

Problems on the labour market were the main reason for unhappiness among my interviewees. As among return migrants everywhere, low wages were a particular cause for complaint:

I feel like you know that my salary is not enough for the input which I give to the company, right? And I was working as a barista in Dublin for the four years. And I really like coffee, I like making coffee, and I was getting so much money from them that coming back here was like Oh my God. I mean I was making more money a week in Dublin than I’m making here for three months. So you know it is kind of strange, right? I manage in Poland, right, but I think that I will be leaving soon again. I just don’t feel comfortable, you know?49

Specifically ‘post-communist’ problems included those facing small businesses. Paradoxically, one returnee felt that it had been easier to operate as a private craftsman in the communist period than in the twenty-first century.

I returned, and I was disappointed. When I was a roofer here in Grajewo there were just a handful of firms doing that. There was me, perhaps two others, and that was it. And over those ten years so many of those businesses had sprung up that I just couldn’t prosper. So I had to give up.50

47Kinga, UK, 29 December 2011.
48Judyta, UK, 19 August 2011.
49Adam, Poznań, 9 November 2011. He had a job with an international company in Poznań.
50Ryszard, Grajewo, 2 May 2012.
Other problems mentioned by interviewees can be summarised as follows: difficulty finding work without connections, especially for women (who—according to survey evidence—are more likely to be unemployed upon return from abroad); job insecurity; quality of work and working conditions (long hours and authoritarian management styles). All these problems had been complained about by interviewees in my previous project, even those who had never moved from Poland. The following extracts illustrate some common motifs.

Przemysław had gone to school in Ełk, moved to England to work, then returned for personal reasons to the city of Białystok in 2011. Though only 20 years old, Przemysław had plenty of work experience, was very determined, sought work energetically and was prepared to do any job. In the end he could only find a job as a travelling salesman, which he left because it turned out to be a scam. Reflecting on his failure, Przemysław ascribed it primarily to the fact that he had no acquaintances in Białystok. He did not even try registering at the job centre:

... because my friends [in Ełk] are registered at the centre and they don’t have any work there. There just isn’t anything at all. ... That job centre is not like here in England where there are jobs available and you go and look at the advertisements. There are two cards on display in the whole Centre and one of them for example is for a welder or something and you need the qualifications. There just aren’t [jobs], there are so many unemployed people. It’s a nightmare ...

When asked what work his friends in Elk did he replied:

One friend delivers pizza. Another works for his father on a building site. Another has a firm which he inherited from his father, everything is in the family. As they say, your family won’t let you down [co w rodzinie, to nie zginie]. Some are at university. ... People who graduate have nowhere to work unless they have contacts: the key word today is contacts. If you have contacts you can get any job you want. ... As soon as someone leaves a job then everyone gets in touch with their friends, perhaps someone would like that job. And only afterwards they advertise it. Everyone wants someone they can trust.

Arleta had an equally frustrating experience in Opole:

I thought you know maybe when I get my degree [in tourism] from England it will be easier to find a job, right? And I was looking for a job for about three months and I registered at this, you know, Jobseekers and such, and I think I went for like three interviews, or something. But I knew I could be living in England and earn three times more money that they were offering me in Poland, and then they couldn’t offer me a permanent position, only like temporary. ... There was one offer at the hotel but as soon as it appeared after ten hours it’s already gone because so many peoples are looking for job and it’s very hard to find something. And if you don’t know people in the ... company, it’s much harder to find it because obviously they’re going to tell their friends, you know how it’s working, so. ... And in Poland like for the degree you know how it is, so, it’s much harder, so everybody are students, so you are not really different than anyone else, and here [in the UK] not

51 A large survey in 2011 revealed that 22.9% of women who had migrated during the last four years were unemployed, compared with 14.8% of men (Strzelecki & Kotowska 2011, p. 142). In general, women in their 30s and older often cannot find jobs in Polish small towns and villages; see White (2011, pp. 46–48).

52 Przemysław, UK, 2 June 2012.
so many people go to study so when you’ve got a degree even when you are from another country it’s much easier to get a job.53

Arleta spent three months looking intensively for a suitable graduate job in Opole and to a lesser extent Warsaw and Wrocław, but only the one suitable job (in the hotel) came up during the entire period. One might accuse Arleta of being hasty in her decision to go back to the UK after three months, yet she was persuaded to do so by her mother, who had been keen for Arleta to return to Poland and supported her emotionally during the job hunt. Even the mother, based as she was in Opole, ended up despairing that Arleta would be able to find something suitable (given her lack of useful personal connections in the tourist industry).

Other interviewees also commented on the numbers of graduates chasing jobs in Poland and the contrast with the situation in the UK and Ireland, where university degrees were not always needed for white collar work. Another theme which comes out in Arleta’s account is the fact that she was only offered jobs on short-term contracts. The prevalence of such contracts contributes to widespread anxiety in Poland about job insecurity. In January 2012, for example, 36% of Poles employed in Poland were concerned that they might lose their jobs (Omyła-Rudzka 2012, p. 11). The perceived precariousness of employment in Poland features prominently in migrant accounts, contrasted with the assumption that one can find secure work in the West. For example, Joanna and her husband had returned to Bristol after six months struggling to make a livelihood in Poland, largely because they knew they could return to secure work in England at a care home.54

Perhaps rather surprising is the prominence given by some interviewees to working conditions; however, these seem to be important to double return migrants. Among reasons to return abroad, cited by would-be double return migrants in the Małopolska study, attractive working conditions abroad came third after target earning and better pay (CDS 2010a, p. 118). Where my own double returnee interviewees had worked after their return to Poland, their complaints tended to focus on how hard people were expected to work, and the authoritarian and unreasonable attitudes of managerial staff.

Dariusz: I worked as a manager in [an international supermarket chain]. But the work turned out, how to say, different from in the UK.
Judyta: Different working conditions, they treat employees differently.
Dariusz: … with less respect, the working hours were long … I spent 12 hours at work, and every weekend …
Judyta: He couldn’t spend time with his family, he had work in his head the whole time, they would phone from work to tell him to come in.
Dariusz: I couldn’t get used to the Polish mentality, how the managers treat people and how they spoke to me. It’s unthinkable, people have just 15 minutes for a break, how do they manage? Often the cashier has no break at all, can’t go to the toilet.55

Leszek, with experience as an engineer in different companies in both Poland and UK, remarked:

53Arleta, UK, 7 April 2011.
54Joanna, UK, 21 September 2010.
55Judyta and Dariusz, UK, 19 August 2011.
I think that it’s considerably more congenial to work here in England. Firstly because here, because in Poland work is much more stressful, secondly for economic reasons that you earn much less there, and thirdly because I also think that employers treat their employees differently. Here, more, they treat the worker with more respect, they take him into account more, they appreciate the time he spends at work.56

This focus on the Polish workplace as the site of exploitation may seem paradoxical given that exploitation at work is a widespread ‘migrant’ experience, but the complainers had had largely good experiences at their workplaces abroad. Anna Cieslik (2011, p. 1380) comments, with reference to highly-skilled Poles deciding not to return from the UK:

Migrants are also influenced by their employment conditions, which include relationships with co-workers and the boss, the workplace atmosphere, job security, and the possibility of advancement. … It is important to understand that work quality is relative. While some have claimed that the British labour market is marked by increasing precariousness and insecurity (Crompton et al. 1996), the experiences of Polish migrants are different. They compare their jobs in the UK with their previous employment in Poland, and make decisions on the basis of this comparison. The work environment in Poland, and in most post-socialist countries, is frequently permeated with anxiety and insecurity (Giordano & Kostova 2002). In comparison, British jobs indeed appear more secure.57

Closing options to return again to Poland a second time

As suggested above, many interviewees—particularly those aged around 30—expressed the wish finally to settle down somewhere, even if that place was abroad rather than in Poland. ‘[If we went back to the West] Then we know that we would have to stay there for good, because it doesn’t make sense to start your life for the third time’.58 ‘Definitely we’ll be in the UK for a long, long time, because, well, it’s obvious that children can’t be continually chopping and changing. … We’re really used to where we live [in England] and it would hard to change again, perhaps it’s not in our genes …’59

There are double return migrants of whom one can say that they probably will never go back to Poland. This is indicated by the fact that they completely change their strategies the second time they are in the West: they do not save money against a future return to Poland and they become more focused on integrating into the receiving society. As Dariusz put it, ‘I’m here, in this country, so I want to live within the parameters of this country’; his wife Judyta commented ‘Before, we weren’t completely sure whether we wanted to be here, or there. We didn’t invest in life here’.60 Kinga and Piotr, on their return to England, decided to stop focusing their energies on saving money; to spend as much time as possible with one

56Leszek, UK, 22 May 2012.
58Marta, Warsaw, 22 March 2011.
59Joanna, UK, 21 September 2010.
60Judyta and Dariusz, UK, 19 August 2011.
another and their children, and to organise their work around these priorities; to spend money on out-of-school classes and activities for their children; to undergo training (and improve their English) in order to apply for more interesting jobs; to watch British, rather than Polish television; and to make more British friends.61

Ewa observed, ‘Now we live quite differently. For the first time I feel I can breathe, we can plan outings, it’s completely different. Back then, we came just to earn money … now our thoughts aren’t centred on Poland, we’re living here in England’.62 Leszek had adopted a similar change of strategy when he returned to working in England after experimenting with work in Poland:

Before, when I lived for a year in England and worked in the office, just after I graduated, somehow I just exclusively concentrated on my work and I was a bit separated from the whole British environment. I was more focused on my family and work and that was the end of it. Now, first of all because I want to improve my English, I’m trying to make more friends, English friends, and somehow operate within British society.63

A number of interviewees had already managed to change their jobs and move out of typical migrant employment into the regular labour market. Dariusz had switched from a job as a warehouse operator to working as an accounts manager, while Kinga from moved from waitressing to a job as a learning support assistant in a primary school, and Ewa from waitressing to becoming a trainee hairdresser.

Conclusions

Polish survey evidence shows that many recent return migrants may not settle back in Poland. There appears to be a category of Poles for whom failure to re-integrate in Poland prompts the realisation that ‘home’ is now in a foreign country. Hence they decide to ‘return’ to live permanently abroad. Often these migrants belong to that generation of young people who went abroad soon after EU accession and now, aged around 30, wish for some stability in their lives. Evidence from the UK suggests that when they return abroad, these double return migrants adopt livelihood strategies which involve burning bridges to future return to Poland. They stop saving money, to some extent neglect their Polish social networks in favour of British ones, and invest in children’s UK education.

Other return migrants will keep their main place of residence in Poland, but do not exclude the possibility of further spells of work abroad, particularly if they live in economically depressed regions. The decision to stay in Poland usually seems to be connected to family reasons: returnees go back to the place they consider to be their home. Since family reasons can apply to anyone, returnees are of all social backgrounds and ages. If less well-educated Poles are somewhat more likely to return to Poland, this may be because parents working abroad without their families are often from manual worker backgrounds, and their spouses and children in Poland constitute a powerful incentive to come back.

61Kinga, UK, 29 December 2011.
62Ewa, UK, 5 April 2011.
63Leszek, UK, 22 May 2012.
It is clear that most migrants do not return to Poland because they believe the Polish economy to have improved substantially in recent years. Often they are particularly pessimistic about prospects in their local area. There are opportunities for well-qualified young people in big cities, but older and less well-qualified Poles do not see openings for themselves and, if they live in depressed localities, are reluctant to move within Poland to live in the richer cities. If they cannot find a suitable job in their Polish home town, they often prefer to return to the West. Indeed the apparent continuance of net migration to the UK throughout the whole post-2004 period suggests that the UK is still perceived by many Poles as the more attractive place to work. Although there is an array of provision and advice for would-be and recent returnees, the Polish job market can seem discouraging, given widespread job insecurity and low wages. Many Poles seem to be convinced that jobs are only available through personal contacts, testifying to continuing low levels of social trust and a preference for getting things done through informal channels. Like regional inequalities and the shadow economy, these are also indicators that in some respects the ‘transition’ from communist rule is an unfinished process.

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