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Final Report: Linking Northern Communities socially, culturally and economically - East European Immigration in Scotland

Main objectives and context

Since 2004 Scotland has seen a wave of migration from East Central European countries that acceded to the EU. In contrast to much of the rest of the UK, in Scotland low birth rates and out-emigration still create gaps in the labour market, particularly in rural areas, which these migrants have been encouraged to fill. The aim of the project was to examine migrants' cultural, social and economic identities and the attitude of Scottish society itself: how do both sides adapt to the challenges of integration? How do the attitudes and reaction of Scottish society to migrant settlement influence integration processes? The objective was to compare and contrast the experiences of such processes among different national groups and explore the potential for social, cultural and economic growth in Scotland. This was achieved through a range of inter-connected activities, including public engagement events, seminars and a schools outreach programme.

Insights resulting from the programme

The project generated a range of insights and further research questions. Although for practical and logistic reasons, given the short time frame, these have been gained primarily within a Polish-Scottish context, they are likely to have much wider relevance.

Some of the **obstacles** to integration most frequently identified throughout the project are:

- Lack of language skills
- Social isolation, particularly of family members not in work but looking after the family
- Introvert migrant networks inhibit closer contact with local communities in Scotland
- Qualification mismatch restricts access to job market and 'mainstream' society
- Clash of expectations and cultural misunderstandings
- Differences in cultural norms (social, political, religious etc.)
- Difficulties expressing emotions in a foreign language

Aspects that **support** integration and intercultural contact include:

- Families more likely than single individuals to grow local roots
- Children frequently make social contacts for their parents and communicate for them



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- Government and local authorities provide services in collaboration with migrant networks
- Charities and other NGOs work with migrants (e.g. mental health, anti-suicide initiatives)
- Knowledge transfer initiatives, academic involvement
- Local and social media more positive about migrants than national (UK) media
- Networks bridging national and cultural divides (e.g., PAA involvement with local community, radio, Polish-Scottish choir, churches, childcare, Scottish-Polish heritage trail)

However, given that the primary focus had to be on one particular migrant group, and in specific urban contexts, much more research needs to be done on a comparative level, so that differences in local and regional policy-making within Scotland can be better analysed and informed conclusions drawn by policy-makers. Comparison here refers not only to the different migrant groups that have arrived here since 2004 and the relationships between those newcomers and established migrant groups from the same national background, such as Poles and Lithuanians arriving during the 20th century. It also extends to local and regional comparisons both within and between these groups. There is a particular need in future to focus on non-Polish immigration and integration and compare the results to the already existing much larger body of research on Polish migrants. Several projects on the Slovakian and Romanian Roma and Lithuanians exist, but these need to be extended and approached in a more systematic way so that they can yield useful information about the heterogeneity of the integration experience in Scotland, which links up migrants with their respective local Scottish communities.

Main outcomes and (expected) impact

As well as a number of successful events in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness, the project has produced two academic papers, one policy-briefing and oral policy advice for the Cross Party Group on Poland in the Scottish Parliament (with NGO and charity representatives present). There are blogs (see below) on each of the three seminar/roundtable events. School projects were undertaken with migrant and local children in P4-7 classes (Walker Road, Sunnybank and Riverside, all in Aberdeen, and Inverness Polish Saturday school). At present this part of the project is likely to have the strongest impact in the foreseeable future, as is already evident in the recent success of one Aberdeen class of pupils lobbying the local bus company to create a Wojtek bus similar to the one running in Edinburgh.

The 2015 May (formerly 'Word') Festival at the University of Aberdeen also featured readings to school groups and to families, by authors Jenny Robertson and Aileen Orr, of their books on Wojtek the Bear Hero. The singing of the Polish-Scottish choir during the festival and for the Polish radio station (as examples of practiced integration measures), the appearance of academics during Polish business training events (by Martin Stepek and Robert Frost at 'ASBIRO' business workshops) in



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October 2014 in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh – all point towards the successful dissemination of the project. Additionally, new contacts have been made with scholars from Glasgow, Manchester and Cardiff, on non-Polish migration, such as the Slovakian and Romanian Roma for future follow-up funding applications.

Prime Example for Impact: Wojtek Primary School Engagements in Aberdeen (Liz Curtis, Aberdeen)

As part of the schools outreach programme we have worked with teachers in three primary schools in Aberdeen; Walker Road Primary, Sunnybank Primary and Riverbank Primary. Each school has engaged differently in the way in which they have approached exploring the story of Wojtek the Bear as part of children's learning. The first two schools began the project on Wojtek in February, and Sunnybank is in the final stages of their work. Riverbank School has only just begun. In addition to the three primary schools which expressed interest in working with us, we have been collaborating with Aberdeen Urban Studies Trust and Aberdeen City Council's Reading Bus.

Walker Road School has used the story of Wojtek the Bear as a context for literacy based projects with a P4 class and P5&6 children who attend English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes from an initial workshop led by Katarzyna Przybycien, Heriot Watt University's Public Engagement team. The EAL team is developing the use of the Wojtek story as a context for developing English literacy skills. The staff and pupils also worked with the Aberdeen Reading Bus and visual artist Kirsty Aitken to create their own animations of the story based on black and white paintings of characters and scenes from the experiences of Wojtek and Polish soldiers during WW2.

At Sunnybank School a class of P6 children also participated in 2 workshops led by Katarzyna Przybycien, one on the story of Wojtek and the other based on the Great Map of Scotland. They have read Jenny Robertson's Wojtek the Soldier Bear as part of a wider project on WW2. They have had the opportunity to meet Jenny Robertson and to talk to her about her novel. The pupils have completed first drafts of Research Units on Wojtek to accompany an existing set of investigative units for Aberdeen Urban Studies Trust's WW2 Experience Programme which will be used by school classes from Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire who participate in this programme. The P6 class teacher at Sunnybank School commented that pupils learned about WW2 through the story of Wojtek as an alternative context to the Home Front as a starting point and allowed the class to look at the war from a different angle getting the Polish perspective as well as a British one.

The EAL lead teacher at Riverbank Primary school has organised an artist to create a large scale 3D model of Wojtek which children at Riverbank school are going to complete.



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Key recommendations for end user / policy communities

Presentations on the project were delivered to the Cross-Party Group on Poland and discussion held with COSLA representative. These contributions will hopefully influence the evaluation of integration practices, as well as raising awareness for local policy implementation. A specific focus here was on the need for a holistic approach to education at all levels, incorporating especially language, history and culture.

In schools, teachers' awareness of migrant children's problems with integration, isolation of families and specific national contexts has been raised through discussion of the Polish example and the Wojtek project. Knowledge exchange with COSLA's Strategic Migration Partnership has benefited our own project but also helped local authority representatives to contextualise and historicise specific problems, particularly within the Polish community. COSLA was present with a representative at one roundtable, and follow-on peer briefing at the end of the project.

Planned follow up activities

We will continue membership of the Cross-Party Group on Poland and participation in the ESRC project at the University of Glasgow and GramNet, as well as collaboration with academic networks with Lithuania, Poland and Latvia. It is planned to apply for follow-up funding for a distinct event, which is currently being planned to take place in November 2015 in the Scottish Parliament lobby: a showcasing of Polish schools and Polish Highers, as well as initiatives of bilingualism, talks by both academics and public stakeholders involved with the East European migrant communities. Members of the project core group also had invitations extended to them due to the success of the project and its dissemination, such as the organisation of a public reading to school classes and families of the Wojtek stories by Jenny Robertson and Aileen Orr at the 2015 University of Aberdeen May Festival, and the request to organise another public event during the 2015 Being Human Festival at the same University (planned for November 2015).

The most promising part of the project in terms of REF impact, given changes to the impact definition considered by HEFCE and the funding councils, which extends impact to primary/secondary education, is the schools programme. Liz Curtis is to develop this further. There is potential impact if we gain follow-up funding to lobby for the continuation of the Polish Highers and a conscious decision by the education minister of Scotland to support opportunities for Polish-speakers, due to the increasing role of the language (largest linguistic group in the UK) for education. Additionally, we want to make it possible for teachers of Polish and Polish teachers to be able to practice their profession in Scotland, which current regulations prevent. The CPG on Poland is the most effective forum by which such impact could be achieved. There will be close cooperation with the Polish consulate in Edinburgh on this issue.



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The experience of cultural awareness-raising in primary schools in Aberdeen can be rolled out through teaching materials, so that more migrant and Scottish pupils reap the benefit of the intercultural story of Wojtek as a tool to get them talking about identities and heritage. Publicity for mental health charity (Feniks and See Me), Polish Saturday Schools, promoting and helping integration (Polish-Scottish choir), undermining negative press coverage and opinion about East European migrants, providing COSLA with additional context and information in their development of migration strategies at a local level.