MIGRATION AND THE LIFE COURSE: POLES IN IRELAND

Justyna Salamońska
University of Chieti-Pescara
Overview

- Selected themes in youth migration literature
- Introducing Qualitative Panel Study
- Trajectories of Polish migrants in Ireland and beyond

Funding:
- Trinity Immigration Initiative
- SCIP, Causes and Consequences of Early Socio-Cultural Integration Processes among New Immigrants in Europe
- Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences
- Fondazione Cariplo
Why life course?

- Life course ‘a series of role entries, trajectories, and exits that constitute people’s biographies’ (Moen and Sweet, 2004: 210)

- Most research offers cross-sectional overview of migrants at different points of the life course, e.g.:
  - Intra-European migrants (Recchi and Favell, 2009)
  - Changing sets of priorities (Bozkurt, 2006; Scott, 2006; Favell, 2008; Benson, 2010)

- ‘Not surprisingly, the highest peak in the migration profile coincides with the transition from education to work; this is the point in the life-course at which individuals are likely to be, and to need to be, most geographically mobile.’ (King et al., 2004: 62)

- Focus on young movers with ‘middle-class’ background and Western world

- Migration for work and life style
Work motivations

- Migration as an articulation of agency in the labour market (Williams, 2005)
- Career and employment motivations (King and Shuttleworth, 1995)
- Escape from ‘hierarchical, nepotistic or arbitrary career paths’ (Favell, 2008) and from temporary and atypical forms of employment (Conti, 2008)
- Career experimentation and self-development (Conradson and Latham, 2005)
- Risk relatively low
Rite of passage to adulthood versus extended adolescence

- Contemporary transitions to adulthood lengthened, precarious and more complex, differentiated and individualised (Bradley and Devadason, 2008)
- Periods of international travel have become an element of reaching adulthood (Favell, 2008; Grabowska, 2003; Eade et al., 2007)
- But mobility may be used in order to ‘live a little’ before returning to the settled life of getting a steady job, a mortgage, and setting up a family (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Boyle, 2006)
- Work instrumental; it gives financial resources
  - to become independent from family (Ní Laoire, 2000)
  - to finance certain life style (Boyle, 2006; Scott, 2006; Polish migrations: Koryś, 2003; Eade et al., 2007)
  - to travel and experience different cultures (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Trevena, 2010)
Migration as ‘Grand Tour’

- ‘Grand Tour’ provided upper-class distinction as well as an educational experience.

- Contemporarily, travel project aimed at exploration not only of the specific geographical location, but also one of self-exploration and self-realisation (life style, career, etc. – cf. Kennedy, 2010), giving self-confidence (Williams and Baláž, 2005).

- ‘[T]ravel is constructed as ‘good’ in the sense of broadening one’s mind, gaining maturity and independence, and the opportunities it offers’ (Ní Laoire, 1999: 236).

- Friendship migration networks (Conradson and Latham, 2005).
Migration as an escape

- Opportunity to ‘move, travel, live, work, study, and retire without frontiers’ (Favell, 2008: 3) is a feature of European citizenship.

- But also negative freedom:
  - ‘desire to escape motif’ in the case of Irish migrants constructed in reply to ‘the claustrophobia and conservativeness of rural Ireland’ (Ní Laoire, 2000: 240)
  - Italian graduates leave behind a traditionalist and backward environment and local ‘mentalità’ (Conti, 2008)
  - migration of young Poles as a ‘holiday’ (Fabiszak, 2010)

- Gender dimension: social pressures are more pronounced in the case of women (for Polish migrations: Coyle, 2007; Siara, 2009)
Staying, returning, moving on?

- Shifting the focus from a specific time point to a period of time in order to examine settlement and mobility in the context of individual life courses.
- Migration often not a one-off decision but rather an ‘ongoing calculation’.
- If migration is perceived as an opportunity to ‘live a little’, return/moving on may be constructed as another life-stage event, e.g. return to well-defined work and family trajectories (cf King et al., 2011).
- ‘…decisions concerning migration are also based upon how people think about and construct different places, and this also depends to a degree upon the life course. Combined with this, places can become ways of talking about and imagining age and the life course … In imagining their future, for example, people may envisage themselves in places that are understood as more or less suitable for their ‘age’.’ (Gardner, 2002)
Data

- Longitudinal research best suited to understand migration processes, especially in relation to gender issues and the life course (King et al., 2004).
- Qualitative longitudinal research allows tracking changes, but also understanding what lies behind this change, i.e. how decisions around geographical mobility are negotiated across individual biography.
- Qualitative Panel Study (Migrant Careers and Aspirations) with six waves of interviews.
- Fieldwork started in 2008 in Ireland and finished in 2010 in Ireland/Poland/France.
- Sample of 13 Polish migrants in Dublin:
  - Seven males and six females
  - Aged from 24 to 37
  - Third level educated
  - In white-collar employment
Timing of the move

- Most participants without family commitments, only starting professional careers – costs and risks of migration relatively low
- Time-specific triggers, e.g. education to work transition, break-up of a relationship (cf King et al., 2011)

I searched for some job abroad, mainly in order to learn English. And I thought it was the only opportunity when, you know, I didn’t have a family burden and so on. It was the only opportunity to do something before I started some job. Because if I started a job in Poland then it would be hard to move, because of some career, something like that. ... that was a moment that I could move ... to visit some places in the world, and then go back and start something serious in Poland.

... And why did you want so much to leave Poland...

Because my wedding was cancelled and that wasn’t my fault. So you know, I wanted to change the environment completely so that nothing reminded me... So that was some sort of escape, you know, and also something new.

Maria, wave 1
Multiple facets behind migration decision

- Dissatisfaction with work
- Leaving parental home
- Escaping social pressures
- Minimalisation of risk related to redirecting career path
- Availability of friendship networks

[At work] the atmosphere ... was really not a good one. And besides that... I worked for four years in this office and there was no chance for any kind of promotion... Raises, you know, on a kind of symbolical basis and the boss could even say to you: ‘be happy that you are getting your money on time’, right? And besides that ... I moved back with my parents and I thought, that I am too old to live with parents. There was no chance of buying something on my own... And I have graduated from college, the piece of paper went to the drawer, because in Poland there was no chance of going to work as an engineer as I would have had to go down from the salary of two thousand to eight hundred, and I didn’t want that, and... And I also tried, but nobody wanted to hire me. Because the course was part-time, and it’s not college, right?

Dorota, wave 1
Most QPS participants had jobs in Poland before leaving (cf Kaczmarczyk and Okólski, 2007)

Economic reasons crucial for migration from East to West, but jobs also as means of financial and personal independence

Finding employment also giving self-confidence

Work instrumental to finance hobbies, free time activities, travels

But the thing was that work was also the reason for which I came here. Because I was earning very little ... So when I graduated I had a feeling that even if I earned, the money I got were not enough even to strike out on my own. ... I wanted to be financially independent, to support myself and not to stay with my mum.

... this job (in Ireland), it gave me more self-confidence ... So here I have an opportunity to live the way I want to live, and not that I’m forced by the circumstances to do what I must and what I don’t want to.

The plan is to... for the moment I have to check out additional studies ... go to Italy, come back, earn money, sign up for salsa, tango, gym, generally organise my time. ... in order to enjoy my life.

Anita, waves 1 and 4
Migration as an exploration of the world and self

- Work necessary to move, but migration constructed around learning experience, self-development (cf Fabiszak, 2010)

  I wanted to continue with exploring the world. That was one of the reasons. Secondly, well, I wanted to improve my financial situation as well, because my financial resources were shrinking.

  Rafał, wave 1

  ... job I had in Poland was not that bad. In reality I left for adventure, to see how it was over there.

  Kamil, wave 6

  (about migration experience) positive, very much so, positive, because you always learn new experiences and it teaches you resourcefulness.

  Ula, wave 6
The move abroad initially perceived as leading to independence and adulthood may provide with financial independence that allow a holiday from traditional life commitments.

Transition to next life stage and ongoing mobility calculations

Migration constructed as holiday time and associated with freedom

I’m on a long holiday. I don’t know, basically all the time I’m here temporarily. …. And yes, I’m here only for a while, even if it gets longer and longer

Asked about changes in Poland: Unfortunately people die … My cousins they have babies… I feel a bit, I feel a bit like time has stopped for me. I feel like, I don’t know, like I was still in university, you know, kind of prolonged student time. And they, I don’t know, they move forward with their lives. I don’t know, I probably wouldn’t want it yet.

Ula, wave 6
Gender dimension of freedom – Natalia’s story

- Decision to stay in Ireland was a provisional one and revisited with the changing circumstances (personal situation, but also recession in Ireland)
- Geographical mobility as a strategy leading to operating in an undefined transnational, rather than defined localised space, ‘out of time’ of social pressures and roles, important especially for women (cf Favell, 2008).
- Frames of reference matter
  
  You know, I go back to Poland and what, I will get 570 zlotys from social welfare? I would have to go back to my parents. And my parents live in a village, you know, the kind of post-State Collective Farm village, you know, you can basically start to cry.

  ... in Poland it is like, you know, that you are 29 years old and you have to do this and this and that. And you know, if I move to Poland and I am 29 years old and I am not married, I just lost my job, I have no savings, then I am, you know, the biggest loser. While in here... It’s cool, no problem with that... I suspect that it would be difficult to go back to Poland with all of this. Because all of my friends... Most of my friends got married, all of them are pursuing some kind of careers somewhere and I don’t know if I would be able to suddenly fit into all of that. ... That is why it would be weird to go back there. Because everybody would stare at me and keep saying: ‘what is wrong with you, girl?’... I mean I have no problem with it. But I think that I would start to have it if I suddenly move to Poland.

Natalia, wave 4
**Time to grow up? Paweł’s story**

- **Migration as taken-for-granted stage in the life course**
  
  *…if you are young then you have to go somewhere*

  Paweł, wave 1

- **Stay in Ireland - ‘out of time’ of pre-planned career and life trajectories**
  
  choosing provisionality (Paweł worked on temporary contracts as an engineer; when the recession hit he applied for a bike courier job)

- **In contrast, return may be constructed as a passage to the next stage in life, towards traditionally designed life course.**

  Paweł, turning 30, remarked that he was:

  *… slightly too old to be riding a bike. Yes. If I was twenty something, 22 years old then... It would be great, I really wouldn’t change that job. Regardless the fact that you earn a little, but you can still save something. And… I wouldn‘t move from here, maybe I would go to another country to be riding a bike.*

  Paweł, wave 2

  On his return to Poland he married his partner and took up an engineering position with public sector company
Conclusions

- Youth migration literature focusing on the Western world; Poland in the 2000s:
  - Difficult situation on the labour market (high unemployment, especially among young people, low wages)
  - Decrease of migration costs
  - Cohort of baby boomers entering labour market
- Mass migration in the 2000s: to large extent younger cohorts, relatively well educated
- Mobility possible because of employment opportunities in the destination, but migration project encompassing life style
- Mobility associated with self-exploration, learning, escape from social pressures
- Mobility also a way to move to the next life stage