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# Narrating Migrant Workplace Experiences: Social Remittances to Poland As Knowledge of British Workplace Cultures

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*This paper explores how the workplace experience of migrants helps to determine part of the social remittances they can make to their country of origin. The social remittance literature needs to pay more attention to work as an element of the migrant experience. Focus is placed on public internet forums related to newspapers in Poland because these are a very open means of communicating experience to the public sphere. To support the analysis, UK census and other data are used to show both the breadth of work done by Polish migrants in the UK and some of its peculiarities. This is then followed with a more qualitative analysis of selected comments from the gazeta.pl website. The complexities of both the range of migrants' ideas about their work and also the analysis of internet-based newspaper comment sites as a form of public communication are shown.*

*Keywords: workplace; social remittances; post-enlargement migration; internet; UK*

## Social remittances and the importance of work and the workplace

This paper poses the question of how the workplace experiences of Polish migrants in the UK might contribute to a neglected form of social remittance transmission, namely the workplace experience. Our aim is twofold. First, using UK census data, we explain the broad context within which Polish migrants have navigated the UK labour market. Second, we demonstrate how migrant narrative involvement in internet discussions in Poland might remit information about the comparative experiences of work. In doing so, we also point to the methodological benefits of blending top-down quantitative data with bottom-up qualitative narrative material when analysing particular nuances in migration research.

It has been argued that paid employment no longer plays the central role in defining our being and the nature of society that it once did (Grint 2005). But if this claim is of questionable validity for the mass of the population it is certainly dubious for those who engage in voluntary international migration. We know that a key motivating factor in migration is the search for better work. This may be a job itself, if the home society is characterised by unemployment; it may be better paid work; or, as Cieslik (2011) suggests, it may be a search for better work conditions. Paid work also creates the basis for the economic remittances that have

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until recently been the almost exclusive focus of work on remittances. In the case of Poland these economic remittances have, in the years since 2004, grown to become the equivalent of some 1.5–2 per cent of GDP with a peak of 2.5 per cent of GDP in 2006–2007, playing an important role in the economy as well as supporting the families and communities that the migrants leave (Barbone, Pietka-Kosinska, and Topinska 2012). World Bank remittance data suggests that in 2011 Poland received US$7.6 billion of remittances, of which Polish remittances from the UK were US$1.3 billion (nearly one-sixth), second only to the US$1.5 billion from Germany and slightly ahead of the US which was in third place as a remittance source in 2011. Direct migrant economic remittances from the UK to Poland appear to average some US$ 2 000 per employed Polish migrant which, for the individuals involved (some will be sending more, others less or none), will equate to several weeks' wages (authors' calculations from World Bank database). In economic terms, then, work matters for the story of migrants and for an understanding of the experience of migrants themselves.

But we want to suggest that, directly and indirectly, it is the workplace that also occupies a key element in the transmission of social remittances. Following Levitt's original study, social remittances have been seen as combinations of the ideas, know-how, practices, behaviours, identities, etc. that migration allows to flow between people and communities in receiving and sending countries (Levitt 1998). However, it is striking how little attention is paid to the workplace in the social remittance literature. In Levitt's original study, work and the workplace featured intermittently but was not a central focus. By the time of her co-authored 2011 piece it had all but disappeared (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). In this, however, she reflects the more general social remittance literature. Yet work is hugely important in its own right. The employment relationship means that the migrant has little choice over how they interact. They must engage. They cannot 'opt out' and ghettoise themselves as migrant critics claim happens in society at large. They must get along or at least learn enough to survive. In this way the workplace offers on a daily basis an intensity of experience that is rarely encountered in non-work sites. But even if we are more concerned with social remittances born of a wider engagement with the new society, then work is an important means by which migrants negotiate this new world. It may be easier, for example, to ask a work colleague for information and advice about the nature, opportunities or problems of the new society and to trust their answers than general acquaintances. No less, hostile relations at work may negatively affect engagement with society at large.

Fortunately forms of work-related and work-derived social remittances are discussed in some of the literature on the workplace, labour relations and international trade unionism, though the term itself is rarely used – perhaps because commentators in this field are not aware of it rather than because they deliberately avoid it. In the UK, for example, scholars interested in migrants in the workplace and workplace trade unionism have discussed the links between organising strategies and means of communication between Polish migrants within Britain and between organisations and individuals in the UK and Poland, and there have been attempts to theorise forms of what some have called 'distributed discourses' (Martínez Lucio and Walker 2005; Fitzgerald, Hardy, and Lucio 2012). Cieslik (2011) has looked at the ways that Polish migrants think about the non-pay aspects of their work in the UK in comparison with their perception or experience of the workplace in Poland. Galasińska (2009, 2010) has looked at the narratives of Polish economic migrants as they appear on an internet forum.

How then does the workplace mould the migrant experience? There is, of course, no single UK workplace. The UK is an economically more developed society than Poland. Agricultural employment takes up only 1 per cent of the labour force and manufacturing 9 per cent. Most native workers are employed in the various forms of the service sector. Within these sectors people find employment in a wide variety of organisations and an even wider variety of workplaces. Some 28 per cent of UK workers are employed in enterprises of less than 50 employees. A further 18 per cent work in enterprises of 50–249 employees; 18 per cent in those between

250 and 2 499; and 41 per cent in enterprises of over 2 500 (ONS 2013c). Migrant workers are more concentrated. Some 29 per cent of workplaces employ non-UK nationals and in 9 per cent of workplaces migrants make up at least 25 per cent of the workforce. But in most workplaces migrants will be in the minority, and it seems likely that most migrants of any particular nationality will work both with migrants of other nationalities and with many native-born workers. In this sense the 'national migrant gang' system, which does exist, and examples of which have received a lot of publicity, is not remotely typical of the experience of most migrants (Strauss 2013). The overall conditions in UK workplaces reflect the amalgam of different economic structures, work traditions, conflicts, cultures, management strategies, and so on. Although there is much discussion of the increasing precariousness of work in the UK and the development of a dichotomised (or 'hour-glass') labour market with a mass of unskilled and migrant labour at the bottom, the overall situation in UK workplaces is still relatively good. (It is important here to look at the data produced by both the UK Labour Force Survey and the periodic Workplace Employment Relations Survey [van Wanrooy, Bewley, Bryson, Forth, Freeth, Stokes, and Wood 2013]) This is certainly the case compared to Poland in respect of pay, conditions, social protection, flexibility, etc.

This creates an important contrast. What might appear a poor workplace to a native-born worker may seem a better one to a migrant, even if in skill and education terms they are taking a step down. But once migrant workers become more fully acclimatised and socialised they then make the same judgements as a native-born worker. This might be evident not only in what migrants say but in how they act. Dawson, Veliziotis, and Hopkins (2014) have shown that, for example, rates of absenteeism of new Polish migrants at work in the UK are lower than those of native-born workers. This might be a product of gratitude, a determination to appear useful or simply fear of losing a job. But over time the absenteeism rates of migrants converge with those of native-born workers as there is an implicit learning of 'the rules of the game' and changing expectations about what is appropriate behaviour at work and what is not. We might expect, therefore, changes in migrant attitudes to the UK workplace, the longer their immersion in UK life. Equally we must recognise that attitudes about the society from which migrants come may be less dynamic because, as their experience of that society recedes in time or becomes more distant, so their comparative appreciation (or lack of it) may be more 'frozen'. The migrant experience that forms the basis of both economic and social remittances may also be affected by shorter-term economic fluctuations. Dynamic elements of disorientation, therefore, always exist in both directions as migrants move between societies, and the more so the longer the gaps in movement.

A recognition that migrant workers and native workers may make different but changing judgements can help to guard against the tendency in some accounts of social remittances to uncritically pose the more advanced society as 'good' against the 'bad other', as well as to encourage us to examine what is the basis of any difference. So, for example, when comments are made about the UK workplace being more collaborative and collective, whereas the Polish workplace is hierarchical and controlled, this might be explained by the 'superior work culture' in the United Kingdom. But it could equally be explained by a different management strategy towards the same end of higher output and profit or some other more critical explanation.

If workplaces and workplace cultures are dynamic, then they are also complex. All workplaces are built around formal and informal elements. The formal express more what is supposed to happen, the informal express the more authentic lived experiences. Both of these elements can be reflected at the level of the organisation and are embodied in its technologies, processes, culture, collective bargaining, etc. But they also operate at the level of individual relations between workers and co-workers, workers and managers, status hierarchies, tensions and conflicts. There is, therefore, a complexity to all organisations and workplaces and a variation between them that generations of organisational and workplace sociologists in the UK have sought to understand (see Edgell 2012 for a survey).

## Research design and methodology

Our approach in this paper is to bring together two types of data: descriptive statistics and qualitative internet forum data drawn from a major Polish newspaper website. This approach was informed by the interdisciplinary character of migration study and a desire to combine methods in order to capture the complexity of the field. Our descriptive statistics come from UK census data which supersedes earlier accounts based on the first registration of migrants under the temporary Workplace Registration Scheme. UK census data has a high level of reliability both because of the care with which the census is taken and the various quality checks made (see, for example, ONS 2012b). Polish migrants form a large group and were a major subject of interest in the 2011 census, though detailed data is still emerging. The published census data (and that in the detailed reference tables on which we also draw) enable us to get a better, if still incomplete, sense of the various labour-market trajectories of Polish migrants in the UK. While it is common to preface qualitative studies with some descriptive data, there is usually a mismatch between the scale of the number of Polish migrants and the tiny and often specialised nature of the groups used in qualitative analysis. Crucially we use the descriptive data to show the wide variety of regions, economic sectors and hierarchical occupational levels in which Polish migrants can be found. Our data will show the relative lack of segmentation of Polish migrants and their movement within the labour market, both horizontally and vertically. This enables Polish migrants to experience a wide range of workplaces both by sector and region. It is this breadth of experience illustrated in our descriptive statistics that we believe lends additional interest to the qualitative data drawn from the forum on the Polish website that we investigate.

The ephemeral nature of comments on internet forums might seem to make them a more dubious source of evidence for analysis than, say, the writings of established commentators or the detailed knowledge that can be gained in interviews. But our choice of data collection for the second part of the study was informed by two interrelated methodological approaches to online data. Firstly, we were driven by media studies research into 'citizen/participatory journalism' (Domingo, Quandt, Heinonen, Paulussen, Singer, and Vujnovic 2008). While we should not exaggerate the extent to which the internet is a democracy of opinion, such forums give us access to a much larger volume of comment and opinion than has hitherto been available. Crucially, those who contribute are engaged in a much more obvious act of self-creation of opinion and comment. Newspapers and their writers, for example, have always claimed to be the voice of their readers and wider public opinion. They try to create opinion by evoking a rhetorical subject whose views they claim to reflect. The interview, on the other hand, is a much more intimate way to find evidence – so much so that it involves a significant act of co-creation between the interviewer and the interviewee. Interview studies involve such small numbers that we can never be sure about the impact of interviewer selection bias in the sample (as opposed to in the selection of data from the interview themes). Interviews too are affected by power asymmetries between the interviewer and the interviewee and the problem of social desirability bias in responses. To avoid such problems our second methodological influence is the rapidly growing postulate of ethnographers about the value of extending fieldwork to the internet in order to capture the rapidly changing sphere of people's social and cultural activity (Postill and Pink 2012). This seems to be particularly important in the case of post-enlargement migrants, who are themselves heavy internet users and computer-mediated communicators (Metykova 2010; Pustułka 2015).

With internet forums the decision to contribute, how to contribute and what to say is much more in the control of the contributor, although of course they are affected by the society of which they are a part. The result is 'the din of small voices', each calling out to one another and to passing readers (Hargreaves 2005). As an activity and a source this may not be without its problems but it is certainly different in volume, accessibility and, to some extent, in kind from the other types of qualitative data and it is certainly more than

a cacophony of noise. Individuals freely post their opinions and comments on such sites but using their contributions still creates some problems of informed consent, anonymity, and participation, which cannot be overlooked (see for example Sharf 1999). In analysing our data, we therefore follow the British Sociological Association's suggestions (2002), even though the material cannot be seen as sensitive. Although analysis of such data is still relatively new and underdeveloped as an ethnographic field, it seems to us equal to longer-established ones and therefore valuable both in terms of triangulation and in its own right.

To this end we focus on the web portal *gazeta.pl* (www.gazeta.pl), which hosts the online version of the leading Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (www.wyborcza.pl). *Gazeta Wyborcz*a was started in 1989 as part of the transition from communism. Over the next two decades it rose to be Poland's bestselling newspaper before its hard copy circulation fell off heavily in the 2010s. But in terms of authority it has retained its high status; it has also played a leading role in creating spaces for discussion on its website and it remains a pole of attraction for Polish migrants abroad. For our study we used a shorter, more 'approachable' and more popular online version for comments, *gazeta.pl* (www.gazeta.pl). Those who register get the opportunity to comment on the vast majority of articles available online. These pages contain some 10 000 forums and over 150 million posts are accessible at any one time. The largest forum on the server alone has over 3 million posts.

Data drawn from internet forums give rise to problems of their own. The self-selection bias in terms of contributor (and reader) is important. To contribute one must have the means (information technology and internet access), the skills and the motivation. Migrants and their families at home seem to prioritise the acquisition of mobile phones, computers and other tools of information and communications technology (Pustułka 2015). But there is a larger digital divide from the rest of the population in Poland reflecting economic activity (or inactivity), educational levels and age although surveys suggest that as many as two-thirds of all Poles surf the net at least once a week. Nevertheless, the potential readership is significantly less than the whole population.

The analysis of the nature of website forum comments itself needs some consideration. If we can access the thoughts of contributors that are less mediated than those of interviewees, we usually lack as much access to knowledge of the age, gender and occupation of the forum's participants. Those who actively contribute must be readers but it does not follow that all readers actively contribute. The evidence is that only a small minority do. The forum's 'participatory culture' (Shifman 2011: 19) also complicates our understanding of how or whether at all potential social remittances are received by forum co-participants. Participation is low-cost and can be more or less anonymous. This allows some to adopt stances and say things that they might not say in another context or with less thought for the consequences. While helpful to the researcher in one sense, this can produce an element of stylised debate and mutual provocation. Nevertheless, the 'virtual co-presence' (Urry 2002: 256) of migrants and non-migrants on the forum facilitates and conditions exchange between the two groups.

As this part of the study is based on a bigger and developed research project running for more than 10 years (Galasińska 2009, 2010, forthcoming) we only briefly summarise its methodology. First, all articles regarding post-enlargement migration were picked up from the *Gazeta.pl* portal. Second, readers' comments posted within one week of the publication of every selected article were saved. Then, in order to deal with the vast number of comments we used a data-driven, bottom-up inductive analytical approach. We selected a number of leading themes/categories or macro-topics in an open coding process. A subsequent reading and re-coding of initial categories allowed us to find additional, more detailed sub-themes, up to the point of a saturation of codes. We validated our analytical approach by juxtaposing the findings with interview material collected during an ethnographic project on re-migration (for details see Galasińska, forthcoming). In this text we focus exclusively on comments representing the macro-topic of work and work relations in the United Kingdom and Poland. These posts were found in threads that usually developed out of responses to reports of events, issues

or opinion pieces found on the website and in the main paper. The posts were made over time (2009–2015) but there seems to be little difference in the nature of what was discussed or how. Having selected the macro-topic of work we identified distinctive sub-topics in relation to a work/social remittances nexus using in-depth scrutiny techniques, such as repetitions, analogies and above all similarities and differences (Ryan and Bernard 2003: 89–93). This part of the analytical process allowed us to categorise our pool of data further and to identify 'typical' representations of: positive and negative evaluations of work in the UK; an assessment of working practices delivered from both migrant and returnee perspectives; and working while studying.

In what follows, we review the evidence of the role of Polish migrants in the UK labour market before looking at how social media create the basis for the transmission of information and social remittances. We then use the data we have collected to explore some of the issues raised in discussions about the nature of UK workplaces and their relation to workplaces in Poland.

## UK workplaces and Polish migrant workers

We have suggested that too often migration is seen as a movement between two static states. In the receiving country this is reflected in the emphasis on the ways in which, at least in the first generation, most migrants get stuck at the bottom of the labour market. But migration is dynamic – the migrant leaves a society in motion and comes to a society in motion. Migrants are in motion themselves as they leave, move, settle and then either return or make their lives in the new society. They also increasingly inhabit transnational spaces supported by improved means of communication. To make sense of this dynamism and the changing patterns that it leads to it is important to analyse the data we have about the evolving patterns of migrant jobs and any variation that exists between migrant groups.

According to the estimates of the Polish Central Statistical Office the stock of Poles abroad rose from one million in 2004 to 2.27 million in 2007. The economic crisis pushed down numbers to 2 million in 2010 only for them to rise again to 2.2 million by 2013. Some 80 per cent of this stock of Poles abroad was to be found in the other EU 27 countries, with the United Kingdom the major destination. The UK's share of other EU 27 stock of Poles abroad rose from 15 per cent in 2004 to some 30 per cent – in absolute terms a rise from 150 000 in 2004 to 690 000 in 2007. Numbers then fell to 580 000 in 2010 but rose again to 720 000 in 2015 (CSO 2016). The pull of the UK reflects the ease of moving there. The UK, along with Ireland and Sweden, allowed more or less free movement on EU accession. There was also a pre-existing Polish diaspora which, although small (61 000 in 2001), was larger than that of other accession countries. But the biggest attraction was not simply the UK wage differential but the UK economic model, which was generating a high demand for labour and offering more low-skilled, entry-level jobs. This was combined with a willingness on the part of employers to take on migrants and an open attitude to migrants (without minimising real elements of discrimination and notwithstanding the anti-migrant rhetoric in some quarters) in the workplace and society at large.

To get a proper sense of what is involved what we would really need is to undertake a prospective cohort study. A large random sample would be taken of people and then their life courses as migrants tracked over the years. We could then see who migrates, who returns, who stays, who is stuck, who moves sideways and who moves up (Burrell 2010; Frattini 2014; Aziz 2015). But the costs and complexity of such cohort studies make them rare in the social sciences. Instead we have to make do with non-random retrospective cohort studies where small groups are asked about their past. While these can yield valuable insights they suffer from huge problems of selection bias. They are usually based on groups that share a distinctive characteristic, such as the highly skilled (Cieslik 2011), Polish graduates switching (Szewczyk 2014), experiencing downward occupational mobility in the UK (Parutis 2011; Trevena 2011); students; building workers (Datta and Brickell 2009); or those at the very bottom of the labour market. The samples within these groups are then small and

are commonly created for the convenience of the researcher. This obviously poses the problem of how representative any conclusions drawn from them might be.

Building a more adequate statistical framework for analysing the migrant experience therefore depends on the exploitation of larger-scale state-generated data and the researcher should make no apology for this. But even analysis based on state data can founder in the face of the complexity of the migrant experience and not least their role in the labour market. To do this, ideally we need detailed workplace and labour-force data that looks at the status of migrants within the workplace. But this data does not exist in the forms that we would wish. The UK Labour Force Survey is available but with a panel of 60 000 this is not detailed enough to satisfactorily capture the differences between migrant groups from different countries of origin, though it is successfully being used to look at larger groupings (Frattini 2014).

In its absence we have to tease out the pattern of work done by migrants in general in the UK, and Polish migrants in particular, from other types of data. When the large-scale migration of Polish workers to the UK began, a key source for the analysis of its relationship to the labour market was the Worker Registration Scheme (Garapich 2008; Burrell 2009; Drinkwater, Eade, and Garapich 2009; White 2010; Düvell and Garapich 2011). The scheme ended in 2011 but even while it was in place, registration was based on first employment and was also incomplete for a number of reasons. These data therefore miss the issue of any dynamism in the labour market.

There has always been a considerable gap between what migrants intend when they arrive and what they actually do. Historically the migration decision tends to be thought of as temporary but for many it becomes permanent, sometimes without the migrant being fully aware of the longer-term consequences of the decisions that they are making. Louise Ryan (2015) in a recent account quotes one of her female Polish interview subjects as asking herself of her decision to stay in the UK, 'Whaaaaat! How did that happen?' But what from the perspective of the individual migrant might seem to be a product of chance and good or bad luck might, at an aggregate level, be revealing of more interesting societal, labour-market and workplace patterns. Such patterns will be the outcome of structures and a degree of agency from the migrants themselves and the ways in which structure and agency interact.

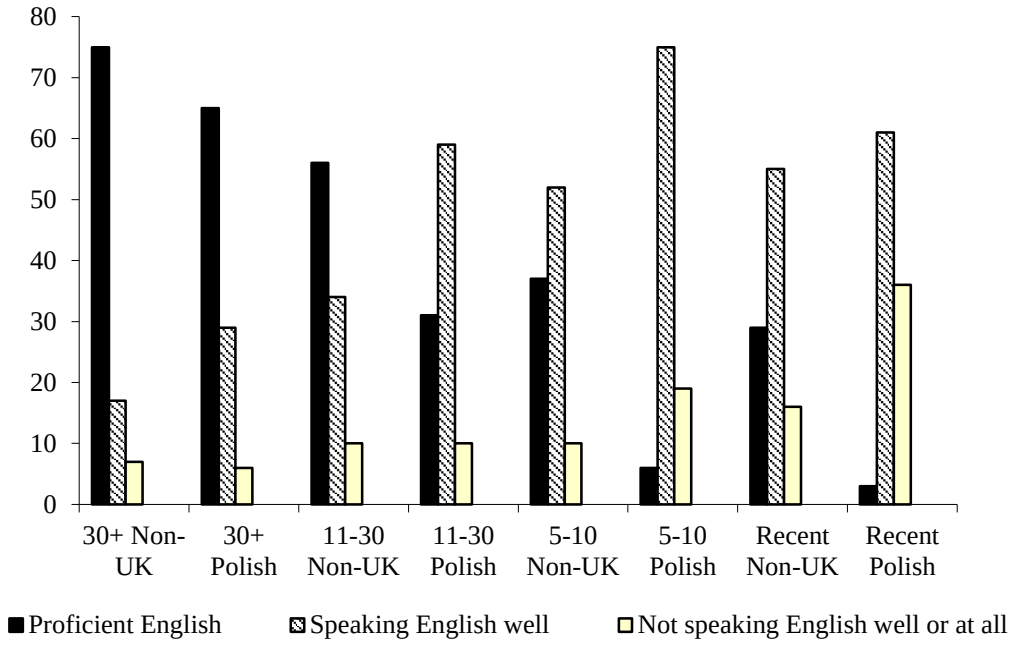
Fortunately, the census in 2011 has provided a mass of alternative data of the stock of Polish migrants, defined as long-term (over a year) migrants to the UK, and based on whether they were Polish born and/or held a Polish passport. These data allow us a better, if still imperfect, sense of what has happened in work terms as Polish migrants have established themselves in their new country.

The broad characteristics of Poles as migrants to the UK in particular need only be briefly sketched here. By the time of the 2011 census the 579 000 Poles in the UK made up 7.7 per cent of the total foreign-born population. Just over 90 per cent of those Polish born had arrived in the last decade compared to 50 per cent of the total foreign born (ONS 2014). These Polish migrants have mainly been young. In gender terms they are roughly 49:51 male/female. Their relative youth and the conditions that they are leaving behind in Poland means that they have uneven work experience when they arrive, though the very act of migration suggests also that they form part of a more dynamic group.

We also know that they are relatively well educated. It is true that as migration has become more 'mass' so there has been a decline in the share of Polish migrants with the highest qualifications. But even though Polish qualifications do not equate directly with UK ones, the evidence suggests that the Polish cohort has a relatively good educational level in terms of the formal mapping of qualifications and, some would argue, a better one in terms of certain skills (ONS 2014). More importantly, Polish migrants also appear to be rapid learners especially in the area of language. Many come with some English language skills, however primitive, and, contrary to claims in UK populist discourses about ghettoisation, these seem to improve rapidly with relatively high levels of immersion in UK life. The census data which are the basis for Figure 1, albeit based on self-report,

show that most migrants in general, and Polish migrants in particular, acquire basic language skills that enable them to have broader labour-market opportunities.

**Figure 1. Language proficiency by country of birth and length of residence for those aged three years and over, England and Wales**




Source: Calculated by authors from ONS (2013a) and reference table BD0059.

It is when we turn to the data on employment patterns that more interesting facts emerge. As we might expect, given their relative youth and the importance of work in the migration decision, over 80 per cent of Polish migrants in the last decade who were in the UK on the census date were in work. This compared to overall UK and foreign-national rates of some 60 per cent (ONS 2014). But contrary to what is often claimed about there being a divided labour market for native-born and migrant workers, the UK census confirms that what is interesting about Polish migrants in Britain is the diversity of their workplace experiences.

Diversity of experience is apparent in geographical terms, at the level of sector of employment and occupation. This seems to be in line with suggestions that migrant journeys for some groups are far more diverse than they were in the past. As Jane Hardy has written, while some migrants are employed,

> *on the fringes of the labour market… the reality is that CEE migrant workers are central to British and Irish capitalism and directly (or indirectly) employed by some of the largest companies. Although there is no doubt that some employment agencies are run on a semi-criminal basis, others such as Adecco are large transnational corporations themselves* (Hardy 2009: 91).

This has important consequences for the analysis of both economic remittances and the social remittances that we are interested in. A broader range of migrant experiences means that there is a broader basis for information flows and less chance of them being distorted, for good or bad, by less representative experiences.

Let us consider first the geographical distribution of Polish migrants. Table 1 shows the distribution of the population at the census date by region. It distinguishes UK-born, non-UK-born and Polish-born people in the UK using the census data and the distribution of the post-accession cohort in particular.

**Table 1. Regional distribution of the UK, non-UK and Polish-born population in 2011, England and Wales**

| Regions of England and Wales | % All | % UK born | % Born outside UK | % Polish born | 2004/2010 Polish cohort |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| East | 10.4 | 10.7 | 8.6 | 10.7 | 11.1 |
| East Midlands | 8.1 | 8.4 | 6.0 | 9.2 | 9.9 |
| London | 14.6 | 10.7 | 40.0 | 27.3 | 23.3 |
| North-East | 4.6 | 5.1 | 1.7 | 1.5 | 1.6 |
| North-West | 12.6 | 13.3 | 7.7 | 9.0 | 9.6 |
| South-East | 15.4 | 15.6 | 13.9 | 14.0 | 14.1 |
| South-West | 9.4 | 10.1 | 5.4 | 7.8 | 8.3 |
| West Midlands | 10.0 | 10.2 | 8.4 | 9.1 | 9.7 |
| Yorkshire | 9.4 | 9.9 | 6.2 | 8.3 | 8.9 |
| Wales | 5.5 | 6.0 | 2.2 | 3.1 | 3.4 |

Source: ONS (2012a).

As can be seen, London exerts a huge pull on the non-UK born. (It also has a lot of migration investigators who use the local foreign born as their sample.) But its dominance is much less significant for the Polish born and even less so for the most recent cohort. Similarly, while Polish migrants are under-represented in the North-East compared to other non-UK-born they are relatively over-represented in all other regions compared to the non-UK-born as a whole. The geographical spread of the most recent cohort is even broader. In the East of England and the East Midlands the share of Polish migrants is slightly higher than the share of the UK-born population living there. But given that only a fifth of all Polish-born in the UK live and work there, the attention paid to towns like Boston and Peterborough in East Anglia as archetypical examples of destinations for Polish migrants is not helpful (see also Trevena, McGhee, and Heath 2013). It is perhaps time, therefore, to look more carefully at the geographical diversity of Polish migrants in the UK and the variety of their local experiences.

The diversity of work experience of Polish migrants by sector is no less apparent in the census data, belying claims that most migrants are concentrated in particular industries. Table 2 breaks down the distribution of migrants by economic/industry sector and compares the UK-born, Polish-born and those born in the other eight EU accession countries of the 2000s. Because agriculture is such a small employer, the higher share of Polish migrants in agriculture is not significant. As many commentators note, the really big areas of over-representation are manufacturing industry and distribution, hotels and retail. Some 45 per cent of Polish migrants work in these sectors compared to some 30 per cent of the UK-born population. But these sectors are themselves large and diverse. (It would be interesting, for example, to further break down the manufacturing sector.) Moreover, over half of the Polish migrant cohorts do not work in them. Table 2 also shows that the biggest area of relative under-representation is in public administration, education and health where the share of the UK born is 30 per cent and the Polish migrant cohort share some 12 per cent. Given the more specific nature of jobs in this sector and the qualifications needed for them this is hardly surprising. But even so, the 12 per cent of Polish migrants employed there represents a significant number. And the under-representation of Polish migrants here is not a sign of their difficulties in getting 'white-collar jobs'. Interestingly the share of the Polish migrant cohort in banking, finance and insurance is very close to the UK-born share of some 17 per cent.

**Table 2. Distribution of UK-born, Polish-born and other A8-born by economic sector in 2011, England and Wales**

| Industry | Country of birth | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | UK | Poland | Other A8 |
| All categories: Industry | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| A: Agriculture, forestry and fishing | 0.9 | 1.0 | 1.3 | 1.5 |
| C: Manufacturing | 8.9 | 9.1 | 18.5 | 11.0 |
| B, D, E: Energy and water | 1.5 | 1.6 | 1.3 | 1.0 |
| F: Construction | 7.7 | 8.1 | 9.5 | 10.9 |
| G, I: Distribution, hotels and restaurants | 21.5 | 21.0 | 26.6 | 26.6 |
| H, J: Transport and communications | 8.9 | 8.6 | 9.7 | 8.4 |
| K, L, M, N: Financial, real estate, professional and administrative activities | 17.2 | 16.8 | 16.8 | 18.7 |
| O, P, Q: Public administration, education and health | 28.4 | 28.8 | 12.3 | 16.8 |
| R, S, T, U: Other | 5.0 | 5.0 | 4.0 | 5.1 |

Source: ONS (2013b); ONS (2012) Census Table CT0076.

**Table 3. Occupational distribution of UK-born and Polish-born in 2011, England and Wales**

| Occupation | Country of birth | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | UK | Polish | Other A8 |
| All categories: Occupation | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| 1. Managers, directors and senior officials | 10.8 | 10.9 | 4.4 | 6.4 |
| 2. Professional occupations | 17.4 | 16.7 | 6.5 | 10.4 |
| 3. Associate professional and technical occupations | 12.7 | 13.0 | 5.4 | 7.1 |
| 4. Administrative and secretarial occupations | 11.4 | 12.0 | 5.7 | 6.9 |
| 5. Skilled trades occupations | 11.5 | 11.9 | 15.9 | 13.9 |
| 6. Caring, leisure and other service occupations | 9.4 | 9.4 | 7.9 | 9.6 |
| 7. Sales and customer service occupations | 8.4 | 8.7 | 4.8 | 5.1 |
| 8. Process, plant and machine operatives | 7.2 | 7.0 | 17.9 | 11.8 |
| 9. Elementary occupations | 11.2 | 10.3 | 31.5 | 28.7 |

Source: ONS (2013b), ONS (2012) Census Table CT0076.

Table 3 shows the census data on occupations. Because most Polish migrants are recent arrivals in the UK and start by doing entry-level work in the labour market then, even allowing for a degree of occupational mobility, we might expect Polish migrants to be more concentrated in lower-income and lower-status jobs within the different sectors. This table shows that this is so with nearly half of all Polish migrants in elementary occupations or working as process, plant and machine operatives. But again the other half of the Polish migrant workforce has a much more diverse occupational distribution with over 10 per cent of this group to be found in the higher levels. Nor does it seem true that, as some have suggested, Polish migrants in the service sector are to be found primarily in backroom functions. While they might initially find jobs there, rapid language acquisition creates the basis for a much more diverse occupational pattern where a person might progress in a UK restaurant or pub and move from, say, working in a kitchen to bar and waiting work to some type of junior management. The occupational census data therefore is suggestive of significant movement of some

migrants from the first jobs that they get, and it supports some of the recent discussion suggesting that possibilities of moving both up and sideways exist and that some are able to take advantage of them (Frattini 2014; Aziz 2015).

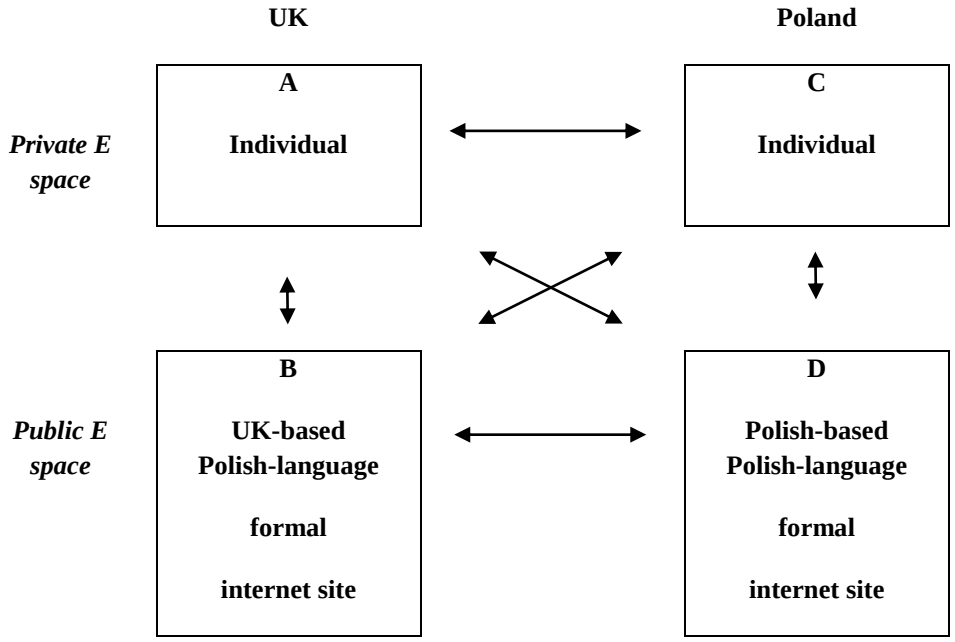
In summary, if the UK workforce is diverse and only a minority of workplaces employ migrants, Polish migrants since 2004 have still experienced a comparatively broad range of geographical locations, industries and occupations. Our data also suggest some significant mobility within the UK. While some Polish migrants have undeniably got stuck at the bottom of the labour market the overall pattern suggests a degree of movement within a relatively short period in terms of the migrant life course. It is important then to build on some of the insights that can be found in the literature that is beginning to pose the issue of migration in more dynamic terms. It is not just that the experience of Polish migrants varies – it seems to vary more than 'the migrant average' in systematic and dynamic ways that are then reflected in the specific geographical, sector and occupational patterns of work. But this is important too in developing any discussion of how social remittances relate to the workplace and work. Although individual migrants have specific and narrower experiences in workplace terms, it may be that the breadth of the workplace experiences of the Polish cohort as a whole is also important.

## What's going on – migrant discussion

Migrants have always struggled to maintain some contact with their families and places of origin, trying to find ways to send back money and information as well as to maintain emotional ties. Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) in their classic study of the Polish peasant depended in part on the analysis of letters which testified to continuing contact and embodied elements of social remittance transfer a century ago. But the advent of electronic communication has changed the forms, frequency, intensity, and immediacy of contact, allowing much closer relationships to be maintained. There is a growing discussion of the ways in which different migrant communities use cyberspace to maintain contact and the different types of economic and social remittances that can be transferred through it (for example, Bernal 2005; Panagakos and Horst 2006; Dimenescu 2008). White and Ryan (2008) investigated Polish migrants' use of the internet in networking within the UK and Janta and Ladkin (2013) have looked at its role in job hunting for migrants in the Polish case. On the other hand, Siara (2009) has explored Polish-UK migrant gender identity and ethnicity as manifested on internet forum discussions while Galasińska (2010) scrutinised such forums in order to monitor transnational dialog between migrants and those who stayed behind (see also Galasińska and Horolets 2012).

To make sense of the different forms of electronic communication in Figure 1 we divide communicators into individuals using direct communication and indirect communication through formal websites, whether run by organisations or enthusiastic amateurs. The larger part of communication takes place in the private E space between individual and individual (A–C), both within each country and between the UK and Poland, through the exchange of e-mails, texts, pictures, or face-to-face contact using Skype, Google hangouts, etc. In the public E space, formal sites have also grown and it is these that we are interested in. Some of these have been created by organisations, including more traditional media outlets, others operate on a less professional and more intermittent basis.

**Figure 2. Polish-language electronic information flows for potential social remittances**




While those in Poland who speak English have access to both Polish- and English- language websites, we are especially interested in the communication flows in Polish on Polish-run websites. As Figure 2 shows, these websites can be UK based. The number of Polish websites in the UK seems to have risen and fallen as the interest of those running them changes. But a significant core has been sustained because they started with or gained a commercial basis or because of the continued commitment of some individuals (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012). In this article we are interested in those communications that take place in the public E space between individuals and the formal Polish-based and Polish-language site of *gazeta.pl*, along the A–D axis as well as the C–D axis. It is to these in relation to work themes that we now turn.

*Positive images of work in the UK*

Our first examples stress the positive experience of work in the UK (see also Galasińska and Kozłowska 2009; Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009: 203–204). In particular, website users praise British managers as more humane than their Polish counterparts. Comments 1 to 5 present a comparative world in which work in the UK appears relatively stress-free and workers feel appreciated by their bosses. Interestingly, financial gratitude is only mentioned at the end of these examples.

**Comment 1** *After two years of contact with the 'West' I now simply see the cultural differences, and as can be seen nowadays, work is an important thing. People there live during work and don't just rush, when they go on break they eat lunch instead of gulping it down because the break is ending (not including foreigners), relationships with bosses are interpersonal rather than a constant struggle. I won't mention the ratio of income versus expenditure because that obviously doesn't require a comment*.

**Comment 2** *My husband works in his own field and has much more room for manoeuvre than in Poland where someone was constantly hanging over him, his boss is humane, he'll chat with him, ask what's wrong*

*when he sees that my husband has a sour face, offers help, etc. He's valued and hears that he's a valuable worker and that the company appreciates him at least several times a month. This also translates into finances.*

**Comment 3** *Some more about the local bosses:*
*You address them by name (instead of bowing)*
*You can totally have a laugh with them and talk about things outside of work (instead of curling up in a ball behind your desk out of fear)*
*They show interest in you as a person (e.g. ask about your plans for the weekend)*
*They understand that first and foremost you are a person, and then an employee (instead of shouting like what is this meant to be, your child is ill???)*
*Birthday or other holiday celebrations are obligatory (cards, group outings to the restaurant/pub)*
*They really value your merits and reward them, but they make sure you do the work they expect from you*
*An employee's rights are very broad (e.g. a few formal warnings before they fire you)*
*A lunch break is always a lunch break!!!*
*Etc., etc., You could recite these for an infinite amount of time.*

If Giddens's broad definition of work as human activity 'which has as its objective the production of goods and services that cater for human needs' (2001: 376) is taken as a benchmark for analysis of these first comments, then one could argue that Polish migrants live and work in the UK in a sort of parallel universe. As these comments show, the main appreciation of the British workplace is related to an interpersonal relationship with managers. All three forum users praise their bosses for their soft managerial skills, their ability to not impose hierarchy as well as the treatment of employees as human beings rather than as workers only. Polish migrants in the UK tend to mention work–life balance as one of the main factors of satisfaction from their migratory experience (Galasińska 2010). The examples show too that work–life balance, with a stress on the 'life' part of that opposition, is achievable also within a workplace itself. That is depicted for example by commentators 1 and 3, who touch on the importance of lunch breaks (see also Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009: 204).

Interestingly, there is nothing in these comments to suggest either the sector or the occupation of the authors, so one could argue that such conditions at work might be more associated with high-skilled/office jobs. However, as the next example shows, more stress-free working conditions and respectful treatment by managers are seen as common also at the bottom of an employment ladder.

**Comment 4** *I was in England for about 2 years... my return to the motherland was planned... how long can you take as a proverbial dish washer, although I generally liked that job. There was no rush, no stress, respect for the employee, etc. Depression hit after returning to Poland.*

The ending of Comment 4 is also revealing with its story that return to Poland and confrontation with the life there, (probably) including experience in the Polish workplace, was depressing. No details are given as to what caused such feelings, but the next comments (by a different forum user) shed some light on this. This example is constructed almost as a mirror image to the previous one. First we learn that depression was a part and parcel of work in Poland and that both respect and job satisfaction had been achieved *after* migration to the UK. Second, while the author of Comment 4 worked in the UK in a low-status job that gave him satisfaction, the presumed high status of a doctor working in the Polish health service (Comment 5) not only did not guarantee satisfaction, but made him depressed.

**Comment 5** *I worked in Poland after having finished studying medicine for almost 5 years. In the last two years I worked two full-time jobs at about 250–300h a month to make ends meet. Day in, day out, night shifts, and a tram in the morning to the next job. And that's how I worked myself to clinical depression. Last year, after starting treatment on the brink of complete exhaustion, I made the difficult and risky decision to leave the country. I left my friends, both jobs, and I put everything on the line. Within less than a year in Great Britain I got a managerial position in an excellent pharmaceutical company with little effort. I get paid well, live in a beautiful town, I'm happy and smile to myself about going to work every morning. It wasn't easy – I arrived here with two suitcases, but I gritted my teeth and it worked out! Exactly a year ago, the position I was in was the polar opposite. My country trampled over me, led me to the brink of frustration and mental breakdown. Here, I hear warm words every day, I'm respected and met with a smile. Nothing to add, nothing to take back. I really recommend it! Learn a new language – English, German, Swedish, and run away, because you can live a normal life. Any how I'm not the first to have said this.*

Since a cynic might see such comments as advertisements for work in the UK we have quoted several comments to reflect what is being said. While the migrant in the last comment explicitly defines the UK work experience as 'normal' to the detriment of that in Poland (see Galasińska and Kozłowska 2009), it is true that all these comments suggest the positive UK work experience. This is associated less with formal rules than with the wider workplace culture and human relationships. Interestingly, however, none offer speculations as to why these differences exist so that while the idea of an alternative work culture is posed, for readers in Poland ideas of how it might be achieved there, or was achieved in the UK, are not presented. Indeed, the last commentator, with their recommendation to migrate, seems to pessimistically imply the difficulties of change in Poland.

This positive appreciation of the experience of the UK workplace is at variance with the popular view which sees migrants as stuck at the bottom of the labour market. It makes more sense in terms of the range of migrant work experiences that we discussed earlier. Our third comment also shows a commentator alluding to the way that what goes on in the workplace can also open the door to a wider range of information beyond the workplace. But as Comment 4 shows, even work in the low-status position of a dish washer can be seen to be better in the UK than such a job would be in Poland. But such a positive appreciation of the UK workplace is also at variance with the view that neo-liberal policies and migration have undermined conditions for the UK workforce. Such comments might prompt us to ask what is real and what imagined about the work experience of both native and foreign-born workers in the UK. But since our focus is here on what is transmitted to Poland we now turn to comments that describe how the migrant work experience negatively conditions the experience of work in Poland if migrants return.

### *Negative description of work in Poland upon return*

The website we researched also offered voices of returning migrants who describe their experiences of work in Poland upon their return from the UK. The negative comments of the low-status dish washer cited earlier suggesting that *depression hit after returning to Poland* are developed in the narratives of other contributors.

**Comment 6** *At work – not appreciating so-called 'soft skills', lack of teamwork skills, negotiation, compromise, hierarchy and the demand to be available 24/7 (I know from stories), a lack of rules such as 'work–life balance' and 'a rested employee is a better employee'.*

**Comment 7** *I came back after 6 years in the UK. Lots of things annoy me.*
*1. I can't go to work on a Sunday/public holiday for double the pay – in case I wanted to amend my budget :-)*
*2. The only thing that matters at work is the short term, for today, if I were to serve a client who didn't buy anything that day, but came back later because he was satisfied with the professional service – it wouldn't matter. If 'Kowalski' doesn't buy anything, then ignore him and onto the next one!! In the UK EVERY client is important!!!*

These comments reinforce the idea that workplaces in Poland are pressured ones but that this pressure is often counter-productive. Again there is no consideration of why this is so. Our commentators simply suggest what is missing and some of the issues faced by workers in Poland. Given the incorporation of 'Western human resource management' rhetoric into discourses in the transition countries as the European Union has expanded, as well as the role of foreign direct investment in allegedly upgrading and changing the workplace, this stress on the lack of 'softer skills' might seem redundant. But both outgoing and returning migrants suggest more limited evidence of changes in practice in Poland. Existing study of forum discussions suggests that non-migrants tend to agree with migrants when comparing cultural differences between two countries and that, more often than not, they are united in mutual complaints about their home country (Galasińska 2010). Although crucially for the social remittances argument those who send back information cannot control how it is received, the reader would certainly get a strongly critical view of the Polish workplace in comparative terms.

*The Polish manager abroad*

This broader message can be reinforced in other ways. Some comments discuss what happens when a manager from Poland moves to the UK to manage workers, especially Polish workers. The same sense that the Polish manager lacks crucial skills and compounds his or her problems occurs. One comment sets out more fully what this might mean:

**Comment 8** *Usually Poles work well – newcomers work too fast – but that isn't a reason to fight – all you need to do is explain to the new person that there's a different work culture here. When they brought over a new manager from Poland he started to rush people and get in the way of work, as well as talking to us in Polish in front of the others. So I explained to him in English that, sorry but this isn't Poland, and just because he finished a year of studies at a so-called Marketing school in Poland that doesn't mean that there aren't other Poles working here in normal positions, with normal University degrees, and that he was getting in the way. I had to explain to him that he can't harass people and boss them about in his Polish style, because this is England, and sorry but you have to show respect to your employees and have to be capable of something and not get in the way of work, and if he doesn't like it then he'd better go back to Poland. The Polish manager complained a lot, he didn't like the English food but unfortunately instead of cooking for himself, he just bragged about how his wife cooked for him in Poland (despite the fact that in the area there were plenty of worldwide products available, and you could cook yourself anything you wished). After a month of complaining he returned to Poland, and the senior manager told us that he could see that we were doing just fine by ourselves (the English workers made complaints about the Polish manager, and also said he was treating the Poles badly), and in reward we weren't going to have a line manager so we could calmly get on with our work the way we already were.*

Responding to this another contributor added brutally:

**Comment 9** *I wouldn't be surprised at all if the person in charge of the change was also a Pole wanting to prove himself to his English bosses...*

Data collected by researchers of post-enlargement migrations suggest that Polish migrants tend both to keep close contact with fellow migrants and to use networking and socialising for different purposes, but on the other hand they want to distance themselves from other Poles claiming that relationship between Poles abroad is ridden by jealousy and mistrust, as in the famous Polish saying '*Polak Polakowi wilkiem*' ('a Pole is like a wolf to another Pole'). That is particularly common in narratives about the workplace, where Poles tend to compete among themselves in order to impress their British managers and to gain some 'points' towards their possible promotion – an echo of this is depicted in Comment 9.

However, what we find even more interesting for a social remittance argument in the above exchange is a 'counter-narrative' (Andrews 2004: 2) of that popular belief. In the first sentence of Comment 8 the author elegantly, competently and with the sharp eye of a sociologically aware observer explains the social dynamics of the workplace, especially in relation to newcomers. He uses the verb 'explain' several times in his account as a means of passing his knowledge of different working practices to both newcomers and new Polish managers in the UK. This comment is an interesting example of how social remittances are circulated on a dual level, first within the country of residence, and at the same time from the country of residence to the home country in the form of a reader comment on this newspaper website forum.

So far the UK workplace has been described and accessed by forum commentators with enthusiasm and in a very optimistic manner, with the modest exception of the Polish manager example. But even this story ended well for Polish migrant workers. It would be naïve to think that the very positive picture of work and working practices presented on the forum is the only one there. The forum also offers a more complex representation of that topic.

*Negative images of work in the UK*

Some website users share their concerns about working conditions in the UK. They mention mainly problems related to 'zero-hours contracts', health and safety, and workers' rights. Our first example reflects a degree of anger about conditions in a workplace and the poor local management response.

**Comment 10** *The incident described in the article doesn't surprise me at all. I personally know the case of a Polish woman who had an accident at work because the work she was doing was too physically demanding for her, and in breach of health and safety regulations in Great Britain. She ended up in hospital after the accident and didn't work for a few weeks by doctor's orders. The company she works at didn't even document the incident – her bosses are treating the accident as if it was her own, private affair, and the fact that it happened during work doesn't make any difference to them.*
*In the context of these events, Cameron's [the British Prime Minister at the time] remarks are like Satan's laughter over the coffins that our countrymen will be returning in after they've completely lost their strength working to build the might of the United Kingdom. Or maybe not so Great Britain but rather Great Bullshit?*

If the circumstances were as described, then the failure to record an accident would be a potentially serious issue in the UK, though how much actual under-recording of workplace accidents takes place is debated by specialists. But while the comment reflects anger, its failure to refer to any means of challenging the company's deficiencies also implies a degree of powerlessness. This suggests the lack of active agency or the 'giving up' attitude on the part of some groups of Polish migrants (and also returnees) found in other studies. In their

studies of forum discussion by returnees Galasiński and Galasińska (2010) argued that a 'giving up' attitude is the result of adapting to Polish culture upon return. As social, cultural and economic change in post-communist Poland have a different pace and different dynamics, some remnants of the communist 'let it be' culture prevail, and they overwhelm potential new social practices of returnees. Karolak (2016) discovered similar ways of coping with reality in his study based on returnees' biographical narratives. For the social remittance argument this comment is important as a potential instruction for those who would like to learn from others' mistakes. It is also crucial in understanding that some social remittances, even though transmitted and circulated, could be lost or that they might be not acquired at all.

Our next comment, too, reflects anger about the work situation of low-paid staff in general, and migrant workers in particular. Sports Direct is a giant UK sports clothing retailer which has been at the centre of controversies in the retail sector over working conditions and contracts for its, primarily young, staff.

> **Comment 11** *Long time ago I tried to get a job at Sports Direct in London and they also offered me a so-called 'zero-hours' contract. Thank God I found a cool job somewhere else in the meantime, however even today I get angry when I remember their terms. No certainty as to tomorrow, maybe you'll get more hours, maybe not... and when you go shopping you wonder whether, if you buy these shoes today you'll die of hunger in a month because of them... The life of an immigrant is difficult in the beginning...*

But hostile though this comment is, the writer also gives the story a more positive tone in recognising that such jobs may only be entry-level ones for some migrants. The uncertainty that exists for those workers caught at the bottom of the labour market in precarious jobs is also brought out in the next comment.

> **Comment 12** *I study and work in the UK. My contract guarantees 4h of work minimum in a week, providing that one is available to come into work almost 24/7. Work timetables are posted on Sunday for the next Monday, and each week is different with regards to the hours and days. My manager often calls me to come into work in an hour because he planned the timetable wrong... I work as a waitress and all of the contracts I was offered had the same characteristics. I appreciate that thanks to my job I can financially support myself. But it's a very stressful situation – organising my private life, hobbies, illnesses, credit, or planning anything becomes very complicated. My friends (those who aren't students) could probably go back to Poland instead of complaining, but I'm not surprised that they just accept what they have and don't want to start 'their life' again.*

But the ambiguities created by the structure of the UK labour market are set out more fully by another commentator who explains the decentralised nature of workplace rules with some confidence.

> **Comment 13** *Britons have probably the most flexible job market in the EU. Even job contracts are completely flexible, i.e. the time periods for giving in your notice or calling in sick are agreed upon by both sides and not through laws. The only things that British laws guarantee are the right to minimum wage and holiday time off work. The rest is an agreement between both sides, e.g. some companies pay you during your breaks, others don't, similarly with sick leave – some do and some don't.*
> *And zero hours or a job through a temp agency is just maximal flexibility. But that's why 2 million workers from the East settled down in the UK. If laws relating to work were more rigid, e.g. a lot of bureaucracy involved in hiring people, or if you had to give in your notice a long time in advance, then hardly anyone would find a job in the Isles.*

Both extracts 12 and 13, although capturing quite depressing and negative aspects of work practices, conditions and regulations in the UK, also show a very detailed knowledge of the system itself. This is evidence of learning through work and even the bleak picture of employment law gives some interesting information regarding the perceived lack of bureaucracy and the potential ease of movement across the job market in the UK. That is certainly important knowledge for (potential) newcomers who want to find a job in the British job market.

*The downside of study as introduction to work in the UK*

It is often argued that migration for educational purposes is especially useful and educational experiences can form a positive part of social remittance flows. This argument obviously appeals to those in education itself, and the relative ease of using students as a research group either while they are studying or in their subsequent jobs also creates a situation where attention is given to the educational experience as especially formative in terms of social remittances (Grabowska-Lusińska 2012). It is therefore interesting to find some comments which suggest a more sceptical approach.

> **Comment 14** *I also completed University in the UK. I have to say it was a complete bust. The level of education was tragic. After finishing your studies you can take that piece of paper and wipe your you-know-what with it. And that's because there's no link between education and work in England. You finish university and no one hires you because you don't have any experience. But no one will give you experience because it's cheaper to hire an immigrant who already has experience and will toil morning to night for half the price. So you can shove your diploma where the sun doesn't shine. 70 per cent of students in the UK will never find a job in their field, while the average amount of time it takes to pay off loans is 30 years. If anything then only private vocational courses but never university, not in a million years.*

While this comment will hardly endear the commentator to those who stress and sell the value of high education mobility, it does (even if unfair), happily point for us to the possibly greater value of direct work experience as a creator of some types of social remittances than formal higher education.

*Rejecting the host society*

As we stressed earlier, the context of the comments that we are recording here was an often heated and polarised debate. We should, therefore, also recognise that, although not typical, some of the comments by migrants did reinforce more hostile local attitudes.

> **Comment 15** *I worked and studied in England and I think it's more of a third world country than a European one. The moronic (Anglo-Saxon) society thinks the world revolves around it. It's difficult to get promoted there because they prefer their own mentally handicapped faggots.*

Here not only is 'England' counterposed to 'Europe' (*sic!*), it is diminished as an economic model (it is 'more of a third world country'), and attacked for arrogance. But beyond this, what is sometimes called social liberalism and policies of equal rights in the workplace are now redefined as discriminatory against able-bodied heterosexuals (males?). Here the workplace experience is used to reinforce the traditional tropes in the discourses of the right. As we know, social remittances do not have to be 'positive' and the information and emotions transmitted about the workplace speak to another debate that has divided people in Poland (Binnie and Klesse 2013). But, ironically, the commentator tries to legitimise their position not by reference to a local

'Polish' norm but as part of a sounder alleged 'European' norm, showing how the migration experience encourages even those who are hostile to perhaps unconsciously recast arguments in a wider form.

## Conclusion

The aim of our paper has been to make a case for incorporating a greater concern with the workplace in the discussion of social remittances. Thus we have explored two methodologically different, but mutually complementary sets of data, which have allowed us to contextualise a form of social remittance discussion both through statistical investigation and qualitative inquiry into bottom-up discourses of the public sphere. We have argued that to fully appreciate such discussions we first need to know who the migrants are and where they work. To this end we have set out the broad structure of the experience of migrant workers from Poland in the UK as it has emerged from recent UK census data, showing that this is far wider than is often appreciated. As these workers get jobs and build careers so their experience becomes more varied. Their successes and failures can then be fed back as social remittances in a variety of ways. Exploring virtual social practices, we have drawn on illustrative comments made about the migrant work experience in the United Kingdom on an internet forum. Focusing on the readers' debate on the online version of *gazeta.pl* we discovered that both migrants and returnees willingly, readily and without prompting want to share their knowledge on British workplaces. Thus we consider readers' comments as another channel for a spontaneous transmission of social remittances.

The qualitative thematic analysis shows the broad experiences of work which influence internet users, and this supports our findings of a wide distribution of Poles in the UK labour market. There is evidence in our discursive data of a broad evaluation of work culture (both positive and negative) as well as knowledge of legal guidelines in relation to work. Such knowledge is shared by migrants (and returnees) both transnationally as well as within the country of residence. This demonstrates the complexities of the direction as well as the dynamism of flows of social remittances with regard to work. However, evidence of how all this is received is less clear. There are some instances of engagement in direct exchanges between forum users in our material, but the regimes and practices of participation and comment did not allow us to draw definitive conclusions. But, as we discussed in the analytical part, a comparison of our findings with existing scholarship allows us to be cautiously optimistic that sent information is received. The issue of how it is (or might be) comprehended and/or used by a potential recipient is a problem in need of more thorough investigation in the future.

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