

# The Labour Market Mobility of Polish Migrants: A Comparative Study of Three Regions in South Wales, UK

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*Since Polish migrants began entering the UK labour market in the post-accession period, there has been a significant amount of case study research focusing on the impact of this large migrant group on the UK economy. However, ten years after enlargement, there is still insufficient information regarding the labour market mobility of Polish migrants residing in the UK for the longer term. The available research on this topic is largely concentrated in urban settings such as London or Birmingham, and does not necessarily capture the same patterns of labour market mobility as in non-urban settings. Using qualitative data collected in three case study locations – urban, semi-urban and rural – in the South Wales region from 2008–2012, this article has two main aims. First, given the proximity of the case study locations, the article highlights the diversity of the Polish migrant characteristics through the samples used. Second, using trajectories created from the data, this article compares the variations among the labour market movements of the Polish migrants in each sample to determine what characteristics influence labour market ascent. Through this comparative trajectory analysis, the findings from this article point to the relative English language competency of migrants as the primary catalyst for progression in the Welsh labour market across all three case study regions. The secondary catalyst, which is intertwined with the first, is the composition of the migrants' social networks, which enable, or in some cases disable, labour market progression. These findings have significant implications in the national and in the supranational policy sphere regarding the employment of migrants as well as their potential for cultural integration in the future.*

*Keywords:* Polish migration; labour markets; trajectory

## Introduction

A significant amount of attention has been paid to the population of Polish migrants that entered the United Kingdom (UK) in the period after Central and Eastern European (CEE) member states joined the European Union (EU) in 2004 (Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly, Spencer 2006; Krings, Bobek, Moriarty, Salamonska, Wickham 2009).<sup>1</sup> This attention is largely due to the number of Poles that entered the UK from 2004–2011, with estimates ranging from 250 000 to 1 million Poles (Booth, Howarth, Scarpetta 2012). With no major connec-

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tions to previous Polish migrant groups in the UK (White 2011; Garapich 2008, 2011), this influx of migrants came as a surprise to policymakers who originally expected between 5 000–13 000 Poles to migrate to the UK (Dustmann, Casanova, Fertig, Preston, Schmidt 2003).<sup>2</sup> This estimation was the reason that the UK government allowed CEE migrants to enter the UK labour market immediately after enlargement. In comparison, countries such as Germany and Austria implemented seven-year transitional arrangements to reduce the expected influx of CEE migrants post-enlargement. The large influx of Poles into the UK during this period tends to be attributed to the high unemployment and low wages in Poland around 2004, compared to migrants' potential earnings in the UK given the strength of the economy at that time (Drinkwater, Eade, Garapich 2006; Eade, Drinkwater, Garapich 2006). To put this into perspective, in 2004 Poland had the third lowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of all of the EU member states (25) and the highest unemployment rate of the CEE countries, with 18 per cent unemployment (Drinkwater *et al.* 2006; Eade *et al.* 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the size of this new, legal migrant population, academics and policymakers have also focused on the characteristics of this migrant group, describing them as economically motivated, young, well-educated individuals who would enter the UK for a short term, work in low-skilled employment and return to Poland (Anderson, Clark, Parutis 2007; Anderson *et al.* 2006; Mackenzie, Forde 2007). As these migrants were largely considered well-educated individuals who, despite their education levels, took low-skilled, often 3D – 'dirty, dull, and dangerous' – jobs, the term 'migrant paradox' has been used extensively to describe their actions in the UK labour market (Favell 2008: 704; Anderson *et al.* 2006; Parutis 2011). Because of this characterisation as well as previous migration patterns to the UK, it was expected that the majority of these migrants would migrate to cities for a short period of time, earn some money, and return migrate. Ten years after enlargement, through qualitative and quantitative studies, academics have a better understanding of the characteristics and the actions of this migrant group.

Over time, research on this large migrant group has begun to highlight the variations in the post-2004 Polish migrants' characteristics and motivations, particularly regarding their decision to stay in the UK longer than originally expected. Research on post-2004 Polish migrants has focused on migration to a variety of locations throughout the UK, including cities such as London (Eade *et al.* 2006), Birmingham (Harris 2012), Belfast (Bell 2012) and Glasgow (Helinska-Hughes, Hughes, Lassalle, Skowron 2009). Other studies note that Polish migrants migrated to locations across both urban and rural areas in the UK (Scott, Brindley 2012), including areas with strong regional economies (such as London) and weaker regional economies (such as North East England) (Stenning, Dawley 2009). Due to this variation, academics are increasingly focusing on the motivations and the impact of this migration flow on non-urban locations such as Llanelli and the South Wales Valleys (Thompson 2010; Lever, Milbourne 2014).

These location-based patterns could have been studied amongst short-term migrants; however, the ability of Polish migrants to stay in the UK beyond their original short-term migration plans has given academics more time to interact with this group. As EU citizens, Polish migrants in the UK in the post-2004 period enjoy the same privileges as British citizens – they can work and live in the UK indefinitely if they wish (Ciupijus 2011). Some studies (Thompson, Chambers, Doleczek 2010) have focused on migrants in this group who stayed in the UK longer than they initially expected but have not necessarily settled in the UK. However, little research has been produced focusing on these longer-term migrants and comparing their labour market mobility across different spatial areas. This article seeks to contribute to this gap in knowledge by comparing the labour market progression of post-2004 Poles across three distinctly different spatial areas in South Wales over time. By combining three independently conducted studies, the aim of this article is to determine if there are any differences regarding the types of migrants that settle in specific locations and their experiences in the Welsh labour market, specifically: what factors contribute to the labour market mobility of migrants throughout the course of their migration period?

The article will explore this question in three ways. First, qualitative data on post-2004 Polish migrants from three samples will be compared to achieve a better understanding of the varied characteristics of post-accession Polish migrants. These ‘characteristics’ can include the basic demographic features of Poles, such as education level, age and English language skills. Second, qualitative data on post-2004 Polish migrants across three different spatial areas – urban, semi-urban and rural – will be compared. By comparing samples across these spatial areas, links can be made between location-based advantages and how these can influence migrant labour market mobility. For example, an urban setting may provide more diverse employment opportunities and more opportunities to transition out of low-skilled jobs than in a rural setting. Third, the acquisition of human capital and migrant social network use will be assessed and compared. This article adds to the existing literature by comparing the characteristics and motivations of Polish migrants to understand their labour market mobility over time.

The evolutionary aspect of this comparison will be presented through trajectories. Trajectories were created instead of typologies because they allow us to understand the transitions migrants make over time and, by doing so, demonstrate the dynamism of this population (Nowicka 2013). There is a noticeable increase in the use of trajectories in post-2004 Polish migration studies (Nowicka 2013; Helinska-Hughes *et al.* 2009; Bell 2012) due to interest in understanding the evolution of this group over time. Instead of comparing a specific event such as the initial motivation to migrate, a trajectory follows the migrants over time to understand how their motivations evolved.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the existing literature on the spatial preferences of migrants and their position and experience in the division of labour. Where possible, the literature will focus on post-2004 Polish migration flows. This will be followed by a review of the case study locations, the methodology used in each study and the samples gathered. Next, the findings and discussion section will compare the experiences of Poles in each case study location and highlight why their experiences vary. The concluding remarks will focus on the policy implications of the spatial spread of migrants as well as the cultural and economic integration of longer-term EU migrants.

## Literature review

Traditionally, migrants find work and accommodation in the destination country using their social networks. In this context, social networks do not motivate migrants but facilitate their migration to a specific area. Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino and Taylor (1993: 48) state that migrants are more likely to move to another country where there is a social network because it *lowers the costs and risks of movement while increasing the expected net return of migration*. Social networks encourage migration in two distinct ways. First, they lower the risk for new migrants due to the expanding network. Second, they offer on-the-ground support in the destination country through the provision of short-term accommodation and assistance in finding a job (Massey *et al.* 1993). As a result of this facilitation role, scholars of migration have shown how these social networks serve to direct new migrants to particular localities in destination countries. Patterns observed in other contexts, such as in North America, are evident in post-2004 Polish migration to the UK. Thus, in nearly all of the cases of Mexican migration to the United States studied by Garip and Asad (2013), individuals spoke of how network contacts reduced the risk of migration through the assistance provided in-country. Similarly, Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara (2008: 679) noted that among new Polish migrants in London many had, at least initially, relied extensively on social support from close contacts on arrival in London, and, to quote one participant whose experience was echoed across their sample: *Poles helped me to stand on my own two feet*.

A notable feature of post-2004 Polish migration has been its geographical spread across all parts of the UK, however. London and the surrounding areas have been the principal magnets for migrants coming to the UK, but research has shown how places with no previous history of international migration, such as South West England and Northern Ireland, have attracted significant numbers of post-2004 migrants from Poland and other CEE countries (Pollard, Latorre, Sriskandarajah 2008). Rural areas, too, saw sizeable immigration, such as in the Highlands of Scotland, the East of England and West Wales.

Trevena (2009) was one of the first scholars to note that rural localities can create unique challenges for migrants, particularly due to the nature of local labour markets, which can be seasonal and limited in scope. For example, the food production industry has been one important source of employment for post-2004 Polish migrants and a determinant for their movement to rural parts of the UK (Scott, Brindley 2012). More recently, Trevena, McGhee and Heath (2013) highlighted how the internal mobility of international migrants is not driven by location *per se* but rather by the availability of work and accommodation. Trevena *et al.* (2013) also explained how the migrants interviewed in their study, who were accompanied by dependent children, were more likely to make the move from urban to rural locations for work, particularly if rural locations were perceived to present opportunities for greater long-term stability.

So how are these migrants migrating to non-urban locations? Is their migration solely attributed to social networks, or are other actors involved? By defining the role of social networks for new migrants as a way of reducing the costs and risks associated with migration, recruitment agencies could be considered manufacturers of social networks for new migrants. In this capacity, employment agencies have been important actors in directing migrants to sites beyond major British cities. Chappell, Latorre, Rutter and Shah (2009) found that almost a quarter of the Polish migrants they interviewed in England identified work arranged by a staffing agency as the reason for moving to work in a rural area. Research on migrant workers in Bristol and Hull reported that in the latter city, the primary channel of recruitment was through employment agencies, even noting that some agencies were unofficially only taking Polish workers (Glossop, Shaheen 2009). In rural areas the leverage provided by staffing agencies may be greater still, particularly in localities with little local experience of migration. Jentsch, de Lima, MacDonald (2007), for example, show how recruitment agencies have made the far north of Scotland one of the premier locations for CEE migrants in recent years. Moreover, these agencies demonstrate how direct recruitment can replace local social networks, at least with respect to their role in securing employment in specific localities where previous knowledge of employment opportunities would have spread by word-of-mouth (Sporton 2012).

Social networks and recruitment agencies facilitate Polish migration to even seemingly unlikely locales for migrants within the UK. Once the migrant arrives in the UK, these 'migration facilitators,' along with the individual endeavours of migrants, can assist the migrant in gaining employment. However, what kind of employment will the migrant enter? According to Anderson *et al.* (2006), Anderson *et al.* (2007) and Mackenzie and Forde (2007), post-2004 Polish migrants entering the UK were originally perceived as well-educated individuals who would enter the UK for a short period, work in low-skilled employment and return to Poland. The characteristics of these migrants have changed over time to include low-skilled migrants and longer-term migrants (Burrell 2010); however, the low-skilled employment taken by these migrants when initially arriving in the UK has remained constant.

Through her work on CEE migrants in the UK post-2004, Currie (2007) – taking into account the complexity of EU migration – focuses on the low-skilled employment of migrants in the destination country. She focuses on the legal framework of CEE migration to the UK (Worker Registration Scheme (WRS)), the lack of education recognition, and the supply of labour to explain why highly educated migrants take low-skilled employment when migrating. These factors explain not only why migrants take low-skilled positions, but by focusing on education devaluation and the supply of labour over time, also why highly educated migrants

may take low-skilled opportunities beyond initial migration. As the WRS ended in 2011, this aspect of Currie's argument is no longer relevant for post-WRS migrants and there is scepticism as to how many CEE migrants enrolled in the WRS while it was active (Galgoczi, Leschke, Watt 2009). In addition, the focus on the contradiction between high education and low-skilled jobs in Currie's work does not consider the labour market mobility of migrants without high levels of education.

In her work on migrants' ascent in the division of labour, Parutis (2011) highlights that the acceptance of low-wage, low-skilled jobs can be attributed to a migrant's need to earn money when initially migrating. In her study of Polish and Lithuanian migrants in the UK post-accession, Parutis (2011) describes migrants using the term 'middling transnationalism,' which alludes to the paradoxical nature of migrants as high-skilled individuals taking low-skilled jobs. In terms of migrant motivations, this 'middling transnationalism' will seek any position when reaching the destination country to earn enough to live (Parutis 2011). Once savings are accrued through 'any job,' the migrant can then move on to a 'better job' that more closely relates to their skill level, and finally accrue more savings and move on to a 'dream job' (Parutis 2011). This argument links the migrants' earnings to the migrants' ability to move up the division of labour in the destination country; however, Parutis (2011) does not provide a timeline for this movement, making it possible for both short-term and long-term migrants.

Parutis' theory (2011) is based on Chiswick, Lee and Miller (2005) U-shaped pattern of migrant progression in the division of labour in the destination country. This pattern depicts the high level of occupational attainment achieved by migrants in their home country, the initial low level position they took when migrating, and their subsequent ascent up the division of labour in the destination country (Chiswick *et al.* 2005). To achieve this occupational attainment in the destination country, migrants will have a high-level occupation prior to migrating; they will have developed their human capital prior to migrating; and they will acquire additional 'location-specific' human capital in the destination country (Chiswick *et al.* 2005). The more non-transferable the skills of the migrant are between the country of origin and the destination country, the more likely the migrant is to immediately have low employment options and, over time, to have significant upward occupational mobility in the destination country because location-specific human capital is acquired (Barrett, Duffy 2008). By contrast, Parutis (2011) discusses the migrant's ascent up the division of labour from the time the migrant enters the destination country and only mentions their high-skill level prior to migrating through the migrant paradox. The migrant paradox for Poles in the UK focuses on high-skilled migrants taking low-skilled positions; it should be noted, however, that 'high-skilled' can refer to their education level while the U-shaped pattern research focuses on 'high-skilled' as employment experience.

Both studies by Parutis (2011) and Chiswick *et al.* (2005) indirectly highlight that migrants hold several jobs during their migration period. Other studies have observed that in order to maximise their earning potential, a common strategy among migrant workers is to change employment regularly, even for relatively minor improvements in pay (Datta, McIlwaine, Evans, Herbert, May, Wills 2006). If the migrant was in the destination country for a longer term, as demonstrated by Chiswick *et al.*'s (2005) longitudinal sample, they could eventually contribute to their 'boundaryless career' (Arthur, Rousseau 1996) by having multiple positions that enhance their skill level over time.

The contrasting views of the migrants' ascent in the division of labour and their holding numerous jobs in the destination country, demonstrates the motivations of migrants to take low-skilled positions when initially migrating and their human capital needs if interested in ascending the division of labour. However, the timing of this ascent, whether it occurs uniformly, as well as other conditions relating to the migrants' labour market mobility, are not assessed. As a result, the main question raised through this review of the literature, which will be addressed in this article is: using three different spatial areas, what factors influence a mi-

grants' progression in the local division of labour? This question will be discussed using the three samples of Polish migrants in Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Llanelli.

### Review of the case study locations

Wales has a significant history of both inward and outward migration (Hooper, Punter 2006). There are migrant populations of widely varying origin countries, ranging from the Somali migrant population in Cardiff to the Irish migrant population in Llanelli to the Russian migrant population in Merthyr Tydfil (Hooper, Punter 2006). In relation to post-2004 Polish migration, according to WRS data, almost 21 000 Poles entered Wales between 2004–2011, with 16 000 Poles entering the South Wales area (UKBA 2012).<sup>4</sup> At the local authority level, from 2004–2011 the WRS listed 4 300 Poles entering Carmarthenshire, 1 312 Poles entering Merthyr Tydfil (semi-urban) and 2 510 Poles entering Cardiff (urban) (UKBA 2012). The Merthyr Tydfil and Cardiff numbers reflect two of the fieldwork locations; however, it should be noted that while Carmarthenshire received the highest number of Poles in Wales during this period, Llanelli (rural) is a town in the wider Carmarthenshire local authority (see Map 1). While estimates vary, Llanelli is reported to have received approximately 1 000 Poles during this period (Thompson 2010). These migrant numbers are interesting given the varying spatial aspects of the three fieldwork locations, which is part of the grounds for comparison within this article.

**Map 1. Wales case study locations**



Source: Wikimedia, 2008.

Beyond the varying numbers of Poles that these locations received, they also have significantly different spatial characteristics. Cardiff, the urban case, is the capital of Wales, with a diverse geography, economy and society. Geographically, with a population of 346 090, Cardiff is located on the southern coast of Wales, spread across 14 038 hectares of land (ONS 2011). Economically, the main employee jobs in Cardiff (in 2008) are in the service sector (87.9 per cent) which accounts for distribution, hotels and restaurants (20.4 per cent); finance, IT, and other business activities (25.5 per cent); and public administration and health (30.9

per cent) (ONS 2013). The recession had a sizeable impact on the Cardiff economy, with unemployment rising from 4 per cent in 2006 to 9.7 per cent in 2012, which was also accompanied by a rise in the cost of living. Despite these economic indicators, Cardiff is the only one of our three localities that is not an EU convergence region (2014–2020). Socially, Cardiff is a diverse city with an established history of migration due to the once prominent docklands area in Tiger Bay bringing inflows of migrants from popular port countries such as Somalia, Ireland, Spain and Portugal (Hooper, Punter 2006). This inflow of migrants to port cities is common in other UK cities such as Liverpool, Bristol and London (Hooper, Punter 2006). Following urban renewal efforts, the Tiger Bay area is now known as Cardiff Bay, but the wider city still retains a diverse population as it is home to 111 different nationalities (Cardiff Council 2008). As a result, Cardiff continues to be the most ethnically diverse local authority in Wales (ONS 2013).

The semi-urban case is the local authority of Merthyr Tydfil, which has a history of migration dating back to the industrial revolution. When the South Wales Coalfield (SWC) expanded during the 19th century, migrants arrived from England, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Poland and France, among other places. At the height of the economic boom in 1913, the region (encompassing 11 138 hectares) employed over 230 000 people and produced almost one third of the world's coal exports (Nicol, Smith, Dunkley, Morgan 2013). Coalfield employment peaked in 1920 and between the wars around half a million people left the Valleys to look for work in the New World (Morgan 2005). As coal production declined dramatically in the second half of the 20th century, Merthyr Tydfil experienced a period of rapid social and economic decline. The economic issues are on-going with Merthyr Tydfil continually categorised as an EU convergence region (2014–2020).

Using the ONS (2011a) data on location quotients, the Merthyr Tydfil local authority is currently the home of the following industries: public administration, health and social work, manufacturing and ICT. Much like unemployment trends in Cardiff, which are reflective of the rest of Wales, the recession had a significant impact on Merthyr Tydfil, with unemployment more than doubling to a high of 12 per cent in 2012 (ONS 2011). Nonetheless, the population of Merthyr Tydfil is becoming increasingly diverse. According to the UK census (ONS 2011), Merthyr Tydfil has a population of 58 802 of which 1 000 residents are Poles. In addition, Merthyr has 293 Portuguese residents, the highest number in any Welsh local authority, and 194 Filipinos, the third highest number in any Welsh local authority (ONS 2011).

The rural case is the town of Llanelli, located in the local authority of Carmarthenshire. As of 2011, Carmarthenshire has a population of 183 777 spread across 237 035 hectares of land (ONS 2011). Similar to the semi-urban case, Llanelli was once a principal centre of industrial production in Wales, attracting migrant labour to its industrial foundries and factories. However, Llanelli is no longer a natural magnet for large-scale migration. A good deal of the industrial production once undertaken in the town, employing tens of thousands of workers, is now done elsewhere or requires a substantially smaller workforce. Using the ONS (2011a) data on location quotients, the Carmarthenshire local authority is currently the home of the following industries: healthcare, administration, construction and mechanical goods sale. The unemployment trends experienced in the other case study locations have also been experienced in Llanelli.

Similar to the Merthyr case, Llanelli once had a diverse population. Industrial expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries attracted migrants from other parts of the UK and Ireland, while a sizeable Italian population settled in the town after World War 2. Today, the population of Llanelli is predominantly Welsh-born (86 per cent). The percentage of the population that is Welsh-born is markedly higher than the proportion for the wider region of Mid and West Wales (67 per cent) and higher than the Welsh average of 75 per cent (NAfW 2010). Interestingly, however, the proportion of the population born in the EU and classed as 'migrants' roughly tracks national data, with 1.1 per cent of the population born in another EU member state compared to 1.3 per cent in Wales, and with 10 per cent of the population classed as 'migrant' compared with 11 per cent for the Welsh average.

This brief review of the economic and social dimensions of the three case study locations highlights the variations among these locations, particularly regarding levels of diversity and the lack of significant employers in the non-urban cases. The variations amongst these locations will be further discussed in relation to the case study samples, which are discussed next.

## Methodology

The three samples compared in this article were used in independent, qualitative studies of Polish migrants in each of the three aforementioned locations; one study also undertook some statistical analysis. In each case, the labour market mobility of Polish migrants was only one part of the overall study. For example, the Llanelli study also focused on the long-term effects of Polish migrants' reliance on recruitment agencies, while the Cardiff study focused on the changing motivations of Polish migrants during the recession. The Merthyr Tydfil study also focused on the Polish migrants' ability to economically develop the region. Despite these variations, the labour market mobility of Polish migrants was a major component of each study.

Across all three locations, participants were recruited through snowball sampling, aided by gatekeepers in the local economy of each area. The gatekeepers provided access to the wider Polish community in each area and, in some cases, set up the actual interviews. In Cardiff, data collection was arranged through gatekeepers in the local Polish community. In Llanelli, while gatekeepers were useful, the participants came largely through contacts the researchers had developed independently. In Merthyr Tydfil, participants were recruited through community gatekeepers with the help of a Polish researcher.

The methods used in each location and the characteristics of the samples are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. The methods and samples of three case studies**

Location	Method used	Sample characteristics
<i>Rural – Llanelli sample</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27 semi-structured interviews (2008)</li> <li>• 25 semi-structured interviews (2011)</li> <li>• all fieldwork conducted in Polish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60 per cent &lt; 40 years of age</li> <li>• even gender distribution</li> <li>• for majority, high school is highest level of formal education</li> <li>• most come with very low levels of English</li> <li>• initially migrated for economic and non-economic reasons</li> <li>• planned to stay in the UK for several months</li> <li>• all stay significantly longer than they initially expected when migrating; all have been resident in the UK for between 4–7 years</li> </ul>
<i>Semi-Urban – Merthyr Tydfil sample</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 questionnaires (2012–2013)</li> <li>• 10 semi-structured interviews (2012)</li> <li>• fieldwork conducted in English and Polish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt; 54 years of age</li> <li>• even gender distribution</li> <li>• mixed education levels</li> <li>• English language level is poor and often problematic</li> <li>• initially migrated for economic and non-economic reasons</li> <li>• planned to stay in the UK for several months</li> <li>• all stay significantly longer than they initially expected when migrating; the majority have been resident in the UK for between 3–8 years</li> </ul>
<i>Urban – Cardiff sample</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 semi-structured interviews (2008)</li> <li>• 19 semi-structured interviews (2011)</li> <li>• all fieldwork conducted in English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt; 35 years of age</li> <li>• even gender distribution</li> <li>• high levels of education</li> <li>• higher English language skills</li> <li>• initially migrated for economic reasons</li> <li>• planned to stay in the UK for several months</li> <li>• all stay significantly longer than they initially expected when migrating; all have been resident in the UK for between 4–7 years</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration.



Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in all the studies. Open-ended questionnaires were also used in the Merthyr Tydfil study. Semi-structured interviews were completed with post-2004 Polish migrants across all three locations to get a better understanding of the migrants' motivations, mobility in the Welsh labour market, human capital development and long-term plans in the UK. In Cardiff and Llanelli, the interviews were conducted in 2008 and 2011 to take account of the impact of the recession on the motivations and the long-term labour market activities of migrants. In Merthyr Tydfil, all semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires were conducted between late-2012 and early-2013. Due to a small interview sample size, open-ended questionnaires permitting anonymous responses were disseminated using the same questions that were asked in the interview, to reach a larger population of the Polish community in the area. The staggered timeline to the data collection was due to the overarching aims of each of these studies and did not have an impact on the findings reported in this section as the migrants were residing in these locations for comparable amounts of time.

For each study, the interview questions were developed in line with the overarching aims of each independent study. However, specific questions relating to the migrants' initial migration, education level, work experience, labour market mobility and future plans were asked. The questions that each participant, in all three studies, were asked included, but were not limited to the following:

- When did you migrate to the UK?
- What were your reasons for migrating to the UK?
- What is your highest level of education?
- Where were you educated?
- Are you currently employed?
- If so, what is your current job?
- Is this the first job that you have had since migrating?
- If no, what other jobs did you have?
- How did you get this job?
- What, if any, are barriers for you to get a job in the UK?
- What are your future plans?

In each location, even though the data was collected over a substantial amount of time, the same questions were asked of the participants. In Cardiff, during the 2011 data collection period, some additional questions were asked about the impact of the recession on the migrants' future plans.

Beyond the different methods used in these studies, the sample sizes vary; the rural sample has the most participants and the semi-urban sample had the least. The variation in the sample sizes could be attributed to the following four points: 1) the size of the Polish community in each location, 2) the migration patterns of the Poles in each location, 3) the language the interview was conducted in, or 4) other research conducted in the area. First, the size of the Polish community and therefore the pool of potential participants varied in each case study location. In addition, the geographical size of the location as well as the diversity of the population can make recruitment difficult. Second, the migration patterns of the Poles in urban and non-urban areas also vary (Trevena 2009). This is particularly the case when recruitment agencies facilitate migration to a specific location such as Llanelli, creating a densely populated migrant area in an otherwise homogenous population. By contrast, the migration patterns of urban migrants in places such as Cardiff could be greatly influenced by employment opportunities, transportation links, and accommodation. Third, the language an interview is conducted in can favourably influence the number of participants. In the case of Cardiff, where an interpreter was offered, the participants were concerned about the interpreter divulging interview information to the wider community. In comparison, in Llanelli, the researcher was fluent in Polish, thus removing the need for an interpreter and potentially increasing the sample size. In Merthyr, participants found

anonymity in the open-ended questionnaires used. Fourth, due to the widespread interest in the topic, the participants may have been invited for interviews multiple times, leading to fatigue and a lack of interest in participation. This could particularly be the case in Merthyr, with several migrants recently intra-UK migrating to Merthyr. More generally, this could be the case for ethnic entrepreneurs due to the visibility of the business presence in the community.

All of the migrants in the three samples migrated to the UK from Poland post-2004 and initially planned to stay in the UK for 3 to 12 months. The motivation to migrate varied across the samples. The Cardiff sample initially migrated for economic reasons and their migration was greatly facilitated by their social networks. In comparison, migrants in Llanelli and Merthyr Tydfil were motivated to migrate by economic factors and also by non-economic factors such as a sense of adventure or to try something new. The migration of the Llanelli and Merthyr samples were facilitated mainly by recruitment agencies, with the Merthyr Tydfil also being influenced by social networks. Regardless of the conditions that migrants experienced when entering the UK, across all three sample migrants had stayed in the destination country significantly longer than they initially expected.

In terms of demographics, each sample had a relatively even gender distribution. Focusing on the age of migrants, their English language skills and education level, each sample had its own unique attributes. As a brief comparison, the migrants in the Cardiff sample were the youngest and had the highest human capital levels (education and language skills). The Merthyr Tydfil sample contained the oldest migrants with the second highest levels of human capital. Migrants in the Llanelli sample were somewhere in the middle and had the lowest human capital. These varying characteristics will be a major theme throughout the rest of this article.

Using Grounded Theory as the basis for analysis, in all three studies the qualitative data was thematically coded based on categories derived from the text. The interview text was coded using NVIVO 2.0. The nodes used to code the interview transcripts were generated from the data. This analysis was completed in three stages, yielding precise data focused on the migrants' labour market mobility during their migration period. Through this extensive review of the data, the context of the original quotes was retained while focusing solely on the specific issues discussed by the migrants. Patterns were identified by reviewing the participants' responses. These patterns contradict the traditional varied results expected from a small sample. Similar to the findings of Bell (2012) and Nowicka (2013), the patterns in the participants' responses are the basis for the trajectories created in this article.

## **Comparison of the case study findings & discussion**

### *Rural case*

The majority of the Poles in the Llanelli sample had their migration facilitated by recruitment agencies or were migrating because network contacts had told them of agencies who would be able to secure work for them on arrival in the town. Among those interviewed in Llanelli in 2008, just over half stated they had arranged work through a recruitment agency before coming to Wales. Recruitment agencies offered migrants accommodation and employment when initially migrating to the UK. In this way, recruitment agencies could be considered a surrogate social network, as a social network often facilitates migration to a specific location using the same means, namely offers of accommodation and employment. Also, similar to a social network, since a significant proportion of the Poles in the Llanelli sample were directed to the region through the recruitment agency, the agency fulfilled some of the functions of a social network for them, e.g. by connecting

them to other migrants in the same situation, creating friendships and offering an opportunity to continue speaking Polish.

The Poles in the sample who used the recruitment agency worked at a meat packing plant on the edge of Llanelli. The limited exposure to the local economy through the location of the plant, the hours of work and the use of the Polish language in work and at home, reinforced the workers' position in the meat packing plant at the bottom of the division of labour. There are few instances where individuals successfully made the transition beyond this 3D employment. Where the migrants worked alongside locals, they often did so as agency workers recruited along with other migrant workers. New arrivals quickly learned that agency work is uncertain and that their entitlements, whether in pay or contracted hours, may be less than colleagues employed directly by firms.

Still, relatively few of the workers changed their jobs despite their longer stay in the area. The majority of migrants in this sample did *not* change jobs more than once, and nearly two thirds of these migrants had *not* left the job for which they were initially recruited. At best, these migrants would continue to be employed by the organisations that initially recruited them through recruitment agencies. Most migrants, nevertheless, spoke openly of wanting to improve their employment status and earnings, as well as, in some instances, of matching their job more appropriately to their skills and level of education.

Working almost exclusively with co-ethnics not only limits the possibility of interaction with individuals beyond the ethnic world, but also acts as a barrier to flows of information beyond the realms of this relatively enclosed population. Thus, it is possible that individuals may not come to acquire information about job openings or knowledge about how to access such opportunities. Due to limited personal networks, information about scarce resources does not tend to travel far. Social networks, then, appear to have a bearing on the low level of occupational mobility among the Polish migrant population in Llanelli.

### *Semi-urban case*

Unlike the migrants from the other cases who selected their migration destination based on employment opportunities, the migration of the semi-urban migrants was to some extent motivated by proximity to family and friends. Approximately 65 per cent of the Merthyr sample migrated to Wales to be near family and/or friends and a quarter of participants had extended family members living with them or nearby at the time of contact. Around a third migrated for pre-arranged jobs, with the rest migrating with the knowledge that jobs were available. Regardless of their education level, the majority of these migrants looked for and took low-skilled employment when they first arrived, primarily in the food and meat-processing sector. In the early 2000s, the majority of migrants working in Merthyr's meat-processing factories were Portuguese, but after 2004, factories and recruitment agencies servicing the area turned their attention to Poles to keep down costs and maintain control of the workforce (Tannock 2013). Employment opportunities for migrant workers in Merthyr are generally limited to this sector. A small number of factory workers moved up the occupational hierarchy into language-related support services in youth work, for example, but language remained an impediment to upward occupational mobility for most. Despite the difficulties of maintaining their position in the hierarchy of migrant labour, many Poles appeared happy with their situation and with employment that offers them a better quality of life and financial security than in Poland. Opportunities to move up the division of labour appeared to be a secondary concern and many Poles seemed to accept their position with a sense of resignation (Lever forthcoming).

For those Poles who were unhappy with their financial situation – or increasingly, for those who could not find employment – entrepreneurship and going into business became an alternative form of employment. In recent years, competition between Polish and Portuguese entrepreneurs has had a significant impact on the

town of Merthyr, both physically and culturally. Merthyr now has a range of ethnic shops, cafes and bars that were unimaginable a few years ago (Lever, Milbourne 2014). This dramatic increase in ethnic businesses is changing the image and wider perception of the town, which was traditionally considered an area that was suffering the consequences of economic decline. Asked to explain these developments in Merthyr, one interviewee answered: *It's more multicultural if you like, which for somewhere like Merthyr Tydfil is quite unusual because the Valleys' mind-set is the norm.* This situation has also contributed to the sense of well-being and satisfaction experienced by many Polish migrants, who appear happy in the area despite their lack of occupational mobility.

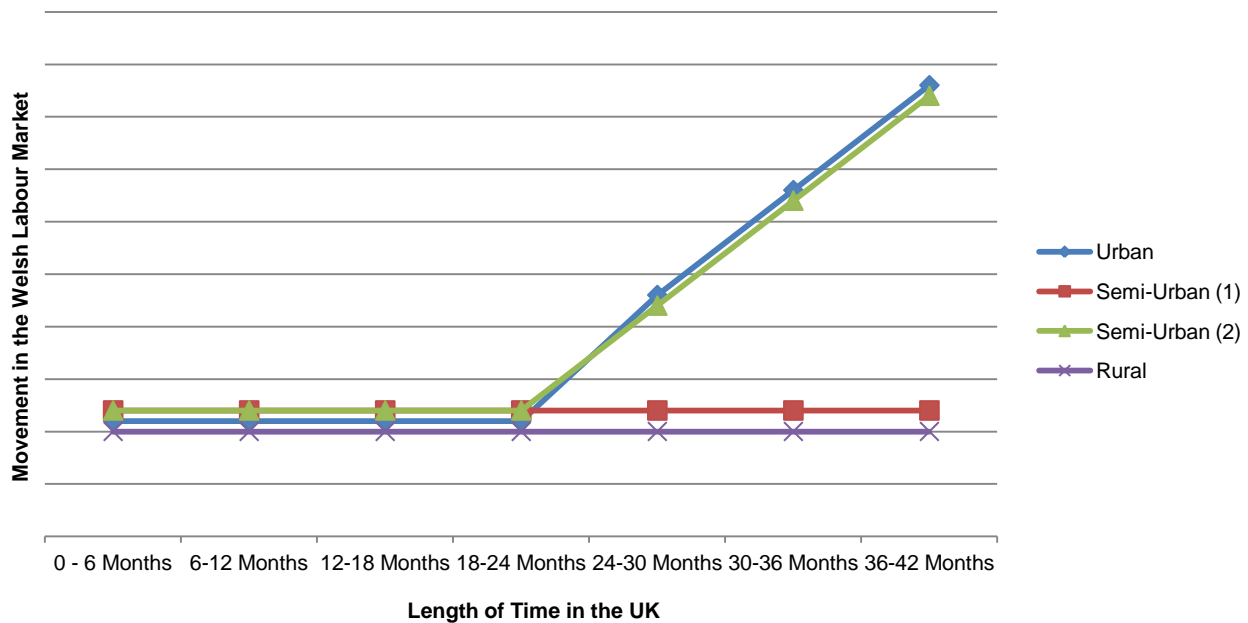
### *Urban case*

Looking at the entirety of the sample for the Cardiff study, Poles seek low-skilled employment when initially migrating regardless of their (language and education) skill level. At this stage, the Poles in this sample sought low-skilled employment because they just wanted 'any job' to earn money when initially migrating (Parutis 2011). Approximately half of the migrants in the sample acquired their first job in the lower end of the local labour market through their social network. After having several low-skilled positions they began to move up the division of labour, advancing their language skills and in some cases their education level as well. This ascent traditionally begins after living in the UK for 18 months and continues until the migrant reaches a position that is commensurate with their skill level. For example, several migrants originally had low-skilled jobs despite being well-educated and having high English language skills. Over time, and by gaining confidence in their language abilities, some started working in an industry that they were educated in, including university research, diversity officer and translator. Due to the migrants' well-educated nature (in Poland and in Britain) and the language ability of the migrants in this sample, at the last point of contact they had positions in the division of labour that would be difficult for recent graduates in Britain to acquire. While the pre-migration professions of the migrants in this sample is unknown, it could be argued that their ascent is largely based on their ability to acquire language skills in the UK and, in the case of several migrants in the sample, to acquire British educational qualifications.

The Cardiff findings support the labour market progression literature in a number of ways. The migrants are actively trying to get their 'dream job' by moving up from 'any job' when initially migrating, which supports the findings of Parutis (2011). It could be argued that the socioeconomic features of Cardiff, with its diverse range of industries, acts as a pull factor for the migrants when deciding where to live in the UK in the longer term. The city, in comparison to the other South Wales locations reviewed in this article, can provide ample employment opportunities for well-educated migrants.

### *Comparative review*

In a trajectory format, Figure 1 brings together the experiences of the migrants from each sample collected in South Wales to illustrate the mobility of these Polish migrants in the Welsh labour market over time. The rural migrants enter the Welsh labour market in low-skilled positions upon arrival in the UK and stay in those positions throughout their time in Wales, ranging from 4–7 years, with no plans to return. These positions are largely at the meat packing plant that the recruitment agency placed them in when they arrived or in another agency-placed, temporary position in the local labour market. Given the rural migrants' constrained social network, which reinforces the shared use of the Polish language and their relatively closed relationship with the local community, these Poles are the least likely to have labour market mobility.

**Figure 1. Polish migrant mobility in the Welsh labour market**

Source: own elaboration.

By comparison, the semi-urban Poles in the sample from Merthyr have a markedly different experience in the Welsh labour market. All of the migrants in this sample start in similar low-skilled positions when initially migrating to Wales; however, after working in low-skilled positions for almost two years, the migrants' paths vary. For those migrants in the 'semi-urban 2' group, their labour market mobility is based on their ability to acquire the knowledge and confidence to use their English language skills in daily conversation. Once these migrants have the confidence to use their English language skills, they move beyond their basic social network and, in several cases, seek entrepreneurship in the local economy that would not otherwise be possible. The education level of these migrants is higher than the education level of the migrants in the other semi-urban group. By contrast, the Poles in the sample that form the 'semi-urban 1' group have a similar trajectory as the rural migrants due to their lack of English language skills. They may have several different jobs during their time in the destination country in the service sector or the food-processing sector, but they do not move up in the labour market.

The Poles that form the Cardiff sample have several low-skilled jobs when initially migrating to the UK that are often provided through their social networks. Regardless of the migrants' education level, all of the migrants in this sample sought to increase their English language skills while working in these low-skilled jobs. On average, this advanced language acquisition took 18 months to complete, which coincides with the migrants' ascent up the division of labour mentioned above. At this stage, the migrants were able to continue to rise in the Welsh labour market through entrepreneurship, management and other, more high-skilled positions. Their mobility in the labour market is primarily based on their language development with secondary influences from social networks as well as the availability of opportunities in the urban setting. The social networks of the migrants in this sample remain but evolve to include a diverse range of fellow Polish migrants, non-Polish migrants and British nationals.

## Conclusion

In our research in South Wales, we wanted to better understand migrant mobility within the local labour markets we studied. Specifically, we were interested in learning how migrants' commitments to remaining abroad were influenced by their ability to move between jobs in order to maximise the return on the investment they made when moving from Poland. As part of this, we also wanted to know what factors – networks, education or skills – influenced their potential for labour market mobility.

Our studies across the sites we investigated lead us to a three-part conclusion. First, as each of our studies in the South Wales region found, migrants typically underestimate the amount of time they will spend abroad. They are not alone in this. When the early wave of labour migrants from Poland arrived in the UK in 2004/2005, it was widely expected that these young migrants, who were plugging immediate gaps in the labour market, would be staying in the UK for the short-term. It is only in recent years that social scientists have begun to show that significant numbers of migrants stay far beyond the point at which they had envisaged they would leave the UK (Burrell 2010). More pointedly, a decade after Poland joined the EU, studies are revealing that for a significant proportion of migrants – perhaps up to half of those who migrated (Duvell, Garapich 2011) – there are no clear plans to return to Poland in the foreseeable future or, alternatively, to settle down and make the UK their home. They are, instead, prepared to 'see what happens' while continuing to shape the labour market of the UK.

As EU citizens, the ability of migrants to stay in the UK indefinitely is a factor that contributes to their labour market mobility as, without visa restrictions on their time in-country, they can acquire new skills, try new career options and fully integrate into the British economy. Against the backdrop of continued EU enlargement and the free movement of migrants from Bulgaria and Romania into the UK from January 2014, the capacity for these EU citizens to stay in the destination country indefinitely should lead to broader questions of cultural integration. As demonstrated in this article, under certain conditions migrants are able to economically integrate into the local economies of the area they migrated to; however, cultural integration is of equal importance in the long-term.

Second, there are markedly different approaches to labour market mobility among migrants. These 'approaches' can range from overachievers, who actively invest in their human capital development in order to climb the division of labour, to those individuals who are content to get by with no specific aims. Those with higher levels of education and training actively pursue a career of upward mobility, as we found among those we interviewed in Cardiff. They were prepared to tolerate work not commensurate with their level of education and training, if it was temporary. The low-skilled nature of this work was initially attractive to the migrants as they wanted to ensure a flow of wages from the time of arrival in the UK. However, while in this low-skilled employment, these migrants were searching for other, better positions in the labour market. Once migrants obtain these positions, it reinforces motivations, that are no longer solely economic, to stay in the UK for longer periods. By contrast, the migrants who moved to Merthyr Tydfil and Llanelli are, broadly speaking, individuals who were struggling the most to make ends meet in Poland. In many cases, they will have been coping with more than one job to raise sufficient income to cover their bills. In Llanelli, our research showed that their chief aim is usually to remain with the employer they joined on arrival, usually through an employment agency. Like their fellow nationals living in Cardiff, they are keen to pursue better prospects, but they are aware that they lack the skills to progress in the labour market, which would give them better financial returns. These individuals are nevertheless generally content with what their employment in Wales delivers, both in terms of financial returns and lifestyle improvements. While there are many factors involved in the decision to return migrate, it should be highlighted that continued employment in the

destination country is a significant motivation to stay, despite the migrants' approach towards labour market mobility.

Third, where migrants live and work has a bearing on their employment opportunities and on their ability to remain abroad. Each of the localities offered different employment prospects. The comparatively higher skilled migrants living in Cardiff would not have enjoyed the same employment prospects in the smaller, less diverse local economies in Llanelli and Merthyr Tydfil. As noted above, several of the migrants in the Cardiff sample made the necessary improvements in their English skills and were then able to access employment opportunities that British graduates would also be competing for in the local economy. For those who had been recruited to work in food-processing plants in Merthyr Tydfil and Llanelli, their ability to continue to live away from Poland is contingent on the on-going demand for their labour, either in the plant or in other low-skilled employment. While this demand continues, they can choose to keep their options open. If this work dries up, or labour is sourced from elsewhere, then their inability to be mobile may well signal the end of their sojourn in Wales. Generally, these migrants do not possess the social and cultural capital to make themselves less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of local labour markets in the long term.

Similar to other studies (White, Ryan 2008; Burrell 2010), our findings show why expectations about short-term or circular migration must be revised. A key characteristic of CEE migration has been the movement of migrants to all parts of the UK, with employment agencies – local, national and multinational – playing a key role in securing work for migrants in localities which might otherwise not have expected to see significant immigration. In this respect, Merthyr Tydfil and Llanelli are typical of other similar small town, semi-urban and rural localities in other parts of the UK. The local labour markets do not necessarily offer opportunities for upward mobility. Those without the skills to trade-up occupationally may be susceptible to changes over which they have little or no leverage, but so long as their prospects are better in the UK than they are in Poland, there is every likelihood that substantial numbers will continue to stay longer than they originally envisaged.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The countries that joined the EU in 2004 were: Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Estonia. Of these accession countries, those that are considered 'CEE' include: Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Estonia.

<sup>2</sup> The low estimate was attributed to the historic East–West migration figures and the limited impact that changing institutional arrangements historically had on migration to the UK (Dustmann *et al.* 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007 and Croatia joined the EU in 2013, taking the total number of EU member states to 28; however, this article will focus mainly on the 2004 EU enlargement.

<sup>4</sup> The authors acknowledge that there are limitations to the use of the WRS data (Gillingham 2010) but it was one of the few migrant data sets available at the local authority level in Wales.

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