

The art of restoring bridges

The immigration and integration of the immigrants in post-communist country

1. Introduction

A saying: *burn one's bridges behind one* can find in many languages in the world. This particular sentence represent the importance of bridges regarding communication in human history. While burning the bridge, one is discarding the continuance of relations once established. With the passage of the time, the communication patterns are fading, until they are disappeared. The attempt to restore the communication ways one lost is a difficult task, involving commitment and sacrifices, however the results can be enriching and they can lead to improvement.

In this paper I would like to analyze how the history of Poland, paying particular attention to recent immigrant wave, and the different social consequences caused by the political changes have influenced the concept of reception of immigrants in Polish society. I would like to concentrate at two groups of immigrants: Ukrainians and Vietnamese. Furthermore, I would like to study the concept of reception of Polish immigrants in Dutch society in order to analyze if the difficult experiences of immigration have some transnational influence on integration of immigrants in Polish society. In addition, I would like add some ideas to improve the process of integration of immigrants in Polish society.

2. Immigrants in Polish history

The history of eastern Europe is marked by immense and painful process of burning bridges. The Second World War and the forced introduction of communism have completely demolished numerous societies and torment the demographic balance, causing drastic changes, in this case, of Polish demographic structure. After the establishment of The Second Polish Republic, in period of interwar, Polish society was diverse and multicultural. In 1931 2/3 of 32 million population declared themselves Poles. In some regions, Polish community was estimated only at 10% of the population. About 5 millions of Ukrainians, 3 millions of Jews, often considering themselves Poles, 2 millions of Byelorussians, 1 million of Germans, many Czechs, Russians, Armenians and Tatars found their home in between Polish borders. The diversity of nations brought the diversity of religions as well. Although the dominant religion was Roman Catholic with 62%, other religions had a significant

representation, such as, Eastern Catholicism 12% , Orthodox Christianity with 11%, Judaism 11%, Protestantism 2,6% and the other 1.4% of Islam.

This particular mosaic of nations and cultures has been existing in relevantly working coexistence for 21 years. Despite the political pressures and propagandas caused by uprising movement of nationalisms, especially in border regions adjoining Lithuania and Ukraine, in local societies during everyday life, people lived together in accord. Painful memories of Partition of Poland and common fight for independence were the uniting factors for this multicultural population. However, this coexistence was destroyed by historical events with inconceivable consequences.

The Second World War cost 6 million lives of Poles, including 3 million Jews. After Potsdam Conference in 1945 Poland was forced to change the borders and relinquish the territory of Kresy (Eastern Borderlands) which effectuated deportation of most of remaining minorities created, unnatural for Polish society in that time, ethnically solid country with 200.000 Germans, 150.000 Ukrainians, 100.000 Byelorussians, 10.000 Lithuanians, which denoted 2% of whole nation. Communism time meant 44 years of isolation, interrupted by single interactions (for example with foreign students), which caused certain difficulties with reception of not only immigrants, but also tourists.

The situation started to change in the 90's with opening borders, easing the process for granting visas and spontaneous creation of *bazaars*, markets at open air, where people from around the world could sell almost everything, including illegally smuggled cigarettes, alcohol, counterfeit documents, unlawful CD's and VHS etc. Poles had opportunity to interact with foreigners both from neighborhood countries and Asian and African countries.

The biggest step for Polish society into transnationalism and cultural development was accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004 and ratification of Schengen Agreement in 2007. This events allowed to start one of the most important migrant movements, both outgoing and incoming.

All this historical events, followed by sociological and cultural consequences, are important factors on the way to understand the reception of the immigrants in Polish society. As a member of European Union and a country not only of transition but also of final destination for increasing number of immigrants, Poland have an obligation to create new ways to incorporate them into population and restore one existing multicultural society.

3. Immigrants in Poland: Ukrainians and Vietnamese

3.a Ukrainians

Ukraine and Poland have a long and most of the time difficult common history marked by being part of the same nation, Polish disregard of uprising Ukrainian identity, numerous wars against common enemy and against each other. For this reason, the concept of reception of this particular group of immigrants will be different, than the other motioned in this paper. However, Ukrainians is the biggest immigrant group in Poland: 31% of all community.

Former relations between this two countries were difficult. Massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, an ethnic cleansing operation and the revenge of extremist group in Eastern Malopolska were one of the reasons of bilateral antagonism, especially in regions next to the Polish and Ukrainian border. During the time of communism, reconciliation of two countries was dogged by lack of sovereign nations. Until after the collapse of communism and creation of independent Ukraine, both countries could start a new economic and cultural relation. One of the effects was common organization of Euro 2012.

Despite the fact, that is very difficult to estimate the real number of immigrants, according to the Office for the Immigrants and Repatriates and Office for Foreigners, in 2012 Ukrainians received around 19.000 work permits. Ukrainian immigration is dominated by woman approximately 67%. 90% finds their jobs in services. Among whole community, *stayers*, those who decided to apply for permanent residence, following the typology of John Eade, are working in education, international and local trade along with health care. The professions bound in stereotypical image of immigrants from this country, such as domestic service, construction and catering, are domain of *storks* and *hamsters* and they have mostly seasonal character.

In terms of legality of employment, according to research from 2006, around 78% of *stayers* have an employment contact, 16% are working in a gray market and 6% are not fitting in this category (for example, farm owners). The number of workers without legal job in this group is quite low, considering the fact, that in polish society there is unspoken acquiescence for this type of activities.

For Ukrainians it was quite easy to receive touristic visa for 90 days of stay and many of them, especially woman were using the opportunity to hire themselves as a seasonal worker. The application process was free and relatively simple in terms of bureaucracy. Regrettably, since 2007 and the ratification of Schengen Agreement, the application process became more meticulous and time-consuming and it begun to expose the applicants to financial costs

of 35 euros. Due to long wait, Ukrainians preferred to apply for a visa with a work permit on a territory of the country destination instead of liberty of moving in Schengen Zone. This type of visa cost 75 euros, but can give an opportunity to work and stay in Poland till 6 months instead of 3 months. Visa with work permission requires official pronouncement of the employer, containing expressed will of hiring a foreigner. This regulation caused a phenomena, not yet analyzed: illegal trade of employer's pronouncements. Counterfeit pronouncements allow to obtain a visa and start working in gray market.

As every immigrant, Ukrainians have right to apply for residence permit, which opens an opportunity to become, institutionally speaking, a part of society. Immigrants who received this permit have the same rights as the Polish citizens, except the right to vote. It's also the end of paperwork and the end of emotional and social instability. Only in between 2003 and 2005, according to governmental bulletin, over 4.400 Ukrainians applied for residence permit, and over 3.600 of them received it. At the same time, almost 25.000 application have been submitted for a residence permit with fixed period of time.

In reference to culture, both nations, due to the geographical proximity, are similar in their way of living. For this reason, the integration of Ukrainian immigrants is proceeding easier than in case of other previously mentioned group. It can be clearly seen in terms of language, which belongs to the same Slavic language group, although some immigrants are complaining at Poles for mockery related to strong accent. For religious people it is easy to find an Orthodox Church in majority of Polish cities as a remains of old multicultural society, which allows to introduce themselves into Polish community and facilitate incorporation into the society. In border regions, numerous groups are trying to introduce cultural elements throughout festivals, expositions, youth camps etc., in order to bring together two nations. A wonderful example of such integration is a music group called *Enej*, which roots are lying in between Poland and Ukraine. The musicians are recording songs both in Polish and Ukrainian, which helps both nations discover similarities in neighbor cultures.

The reception of Ukrainian immigrants in Polish society relatively good, keeping in mind the fact, that it's a most numerous group. Even though Ukrainians and Poles share difficult history full of antagonisms, the proximity of languages and cultures aids to incorporate this particular community. Ukrainians are filling the void after Polish workers which either are not willing to do this kinds of jobs or they are doing it abroad. Nevertheless, Ukrainians suffer from certain discrimination and sense of superiority on the part of Poles.

3.b Vietnamese

It might seem that Poland as a reception country is a peculiar destination for Vietnamese community, but as a matter of facts, Vietnamese are the third biggest group of immigrants in Poland.

The history of common relations with Vietnam is short, but the origins can explain the interest that this particular nation in migration to Poland. Vietnam, as a communist country, Vietnam signed an bilateral agreement with People's Republic of Poland in 60's and 70's, about the exchange of science and technology, including students and academic workers. This was a great opportunity for Polish people to have a first contact with representatives of such a different culture. Historians estimate the number of Vietnamese students to 4.500. Part of them stayed in Poland to start a family.

The second wave of Vietnamese immigration started after political changes at the end of 80's. This time, the community was more heterogeneous in terms of education and economic status. Most of them was looking for an employment in trade and gastronomy, especially in *bazaars* developing in 90's.

Most important branch of activity is trade, especially wholesale trade in big international complexes like the one in Wólka Kossowska next to Warsaw, of products (mostly clothing) imported from Vietnam or China. The second biggest branch is gastronomy. Only in 2006, 82% of work permits. We can find Vietnamese restaurants in every place, where is a Vietnamese community. They serve as a cultural centers for immigrants and only few of them offer themselves as a place of cultural indoctrination for Poles, organizing exhibitions, literary meetings or even Vietnamese new year.

What is particularly interesting is that the most of the immigrants can be classified as *hamsters*, who are only concerned about gathering needed amount of money. According to survey made by Warsaw government, more than 83% of Vietnamese immigrants who are staying in Poland more than 10 years don't want to stay in country of reception for live. Unlike Ukrainians, there are less willing to join in matrimony with Poles.

According to the research from 2006, around 65% of immigrants are having a legal employment contract. In contrast to Ukrainians, Vietnamese workers from gray zone are more often hired in Vietnamese companies, together with immigrants with work permits. In this group, 43% were women, mostly working in their husband's companies.

Access to Poland is more difficult for Vietnamese. Most of illegal immigrants are coming through *green borders*, unprotected places on the borders with Russia, Ukraine or Czech Republic. Others are trying to get touristic visa and then they prolong their stay in illegal way. The frequency of choosing first manner is marked by popular believe, that Polish authorities are inhospitable to Vietnamese immigration, therefore they access the country of destination using intermediaries, which in some cases are using the immigrants to capitalize on their tough situation.

Legalization of residence permit status is more difficult for Vietnamese than Ukrainians, due to, in most cases, previous illegal immigrant status. In between 2003 and 2005, according to governmental bulletin, approximately 1.000 Vietnamese applied for residence permit and 742 of them received them. Simultaneously, almost 4.700 residence permit with fixed period of time.

Vietnamese culture is extremely different from Polish culture. That might cause problems with adaptation in Polish reality. Different patterns of children education, work, family, social behavior can be an obstacle in the process of adaptation. However, Polish language is the biggest challenge for this group of immigrants. The community is not big enough to survive without knowledge of the language. Poles are experiencing enormous pride regarding the difficulty of the language and it's pronunciation, occasionally mocking mispronunciations of sounds, that does not exist in Vietnamese language.

The reception of Vietnamese community in Poland is difficult due to the language problems that Vietnamese have with learning Polish and isolation of this group from society. For the other hand, Vietnamese are a calm community, which don't want to create problems. For this reason, they are not suffering any particular discrimination.

4. Polish immigrants abroad: integration problems

Poland is not only reception country, but also a country which, according to estimation of Polish government, only last year produced 100.000 immigrants. As a result of this migration movements, Poles should understand reasons and needs of immigrants from another countries to settle down in their country in order to find a better live. Many families are influenced by the absence of family members. Unfortunately, Polish society is not accepting the immigrants as well as it should be expected.

One of the countries of destination for Polish migration are Netherlands. Polish governmental institutions estimate, that there are approximately 170.000 Poles in the Netherlands. The wave

of immigration is caused by ratification of Schengen Agreement in 2007 and the abolition of obligatory work permits, also in 2007, which facilitate seasonal work. Most of the workers find employment in agriculture and services in professions such as gardener, farmer, butcher etc. jobs often executed by immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Although seasonal and low and under-skilled workers are required on Dutch work market, social reception of Polish immigrants is differential. Most of Dutch politicians feared a massive, unrestrained wave, which will take away workplaces from Dutch people. However, due to difficult language and a relatively high cost of life, the statistics of Polish immigration were significantly lower than Dutch government have been assuming. Nevertheless, Dutch Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV*) funded by Geert Wilders in 2012 opened an internet site, where Dutch can submit complaints and grievances on workers from Eastern and Center Europe, especially Poles. Dutch Party for Freedom is highly against immigration process in the Netherlands and demands full assimilation of immigrants especially from different cultures such as Islam. In accordance with report of European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Poles are discriminated in Dutch society. Some employers started to introduce residential segregation, which hinder the process of integration. The report make aware of another important problem such as obstacles that Polish people are having with creating a bank account or taking a loan. The image of Polish worker is presented in most of Dutch media in pejorative way, causing false stereotypes and antagonisms.

Similar situations are also present in Poland. During Euro 2012 finals, two radio journalists, which are broadcasting a comedy auditions, provoked one of the most unpleasant diplomatic affair in relations of Poland and Ukraine. The journalists, in highly sarcastic way, were mocking at the typical for close-minded Poles judgments about Ukrainian women working as a housekeepers, expressing sense of superiority to Ukrainian nation. Ukraine interpreted it as a direct insult and bashing at Ukrainian workers in the media. What it supposed to be a satire of actual ideas of part of Polish society, turned up to be a another reason for recalling antagonisms.

5. Possible ways if improvement

As stated, the Polish concept of reception is marked by difficult history. Years of military conflicts and communist propaganda have been a great influence for present reception of immigrants not only from deferent cultures but also from similar once. As a nation of great migration wave, Poland is exposed to contacts with another cultures. As many immigrants, Poles are forced to integration in

societies and they can use those experiences in order to create a better way to incorporate the immigrants into the Polish society.

What causes most problems for the immigrants in Poland is language. Without basic knowledge of Polish, it's impossible to achieve proper integration in the community. What is more, speaking native language is considered as an effort and change in attitude in Poles. Polish government, with help of European Union, should organize language courses for foreigners, who are applying for stay permits. The courses might be taught by university students of different philology courses as a realization of internships, which are obligatory for every student. That would reduce the cost of whole project and help the immigrants to cooperate with Poles.

Furthermore, in the regions that have entertained the most immigrants of each community, should organize festivals of every ethnical group, as an element of integration. It ought to present history, music, typical dance, food through concerts, fairs, city games, interactional activities, organized with help of representatives of immigrants. The aim of such project would be the presentation of a culture to acquaint Poles with unknown immigrants and further coexistence.

In addition, Polish government should reanalyze the laws concerning immigrants and facilitate illegal immigrants the change of their legal status. The illegal immigrants would apply for a special card, which would give them basic political laws. The legalization would be an impulse to get a legal job, what would contribute to state budget. Only with legal job an immigrant could apply for residential permit, which would give him a complete sets of rights.

Moreover, Polish government should prepare schools for the children of immigrants, with additional courses of language and additional help. The integration of children is very important in society with decreasing number of birth and significant emigration. Auxiliary financial effort now, can be profitable in the future not only as an addition to pension system, but also can raise a new generation of Poles, open-minded and tolerant.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, for a post-communist society it is difficult to coerce integration with the minorities. As I presented in this paper, the integration of the immigrants into society is marked by former history and the history of the host country. In case of Ukrainians, relations can be influenced by historical antagonisms and in case of Vietnamese, former relations created an impulse to choose Poland as a country of destination. Moreover, the culture is an important part of immigration. Is easier to adapt for Ukrainians in Polish society, in particular because of the language. What is more, due to the type of the work activity, Vietnamese are less exposed to the interaction with Poles, therefore the integration process is more difficult.

In addition, Poles are taking part of major migration movement that we can observe in all Europe. Even though they encounter some unpleasant situations, like some workers in the Netherlands, Poles still don't feel the need of changing their own behavior into immigrants in their own country. Although the discrimination and rejection from the part of destination country society is not an usual situation, Poles should express more tolerance to immigrants to build a transnational coexistence.

Unfortunately, acceptance of immigrants in Polish society is still an issue to resolve. The new wave of young Polish immigration can help future to incorporate workers from East Europe, Asia and North Africa. To achieve improvement and restore a bridge to multicultural society Polish government should facilitate access into society in terms of legality of staying, learning process of the language, education and developing cultural cooperation. This way Poland might restore in the future a conscious and open-minded society, ready for enrichment with elements of another cultures.

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