

Sociology of Migration before and during the Pandemic – “New Generation” of Theories of Migration and Adaptation in the Light of Contemporary Research Challenges

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Migration processes are an attractive research laboratory for sociologists, who analyse interpersonal relations and social phenomena. This special issue of *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny* is the result of work undertaken by the Sociology of Migration Committee, which operates within the Polish Sociological Association. A majority of texts collected in the volume are expanded versions of papers presented during the XVII Polish Sociological Congress in Wrocław within the thematic group “Durability and liquidity of international migration – circulation, settlement, integration of migrants”². The group was hugely popular among the Congress’ participants and this was one of the stimuli to establish the Committee itself in September 2019. Some of the articles presented here are the result of work of members of the Committee, written independently from the conference proceedings or only in reference to conference presentations. We must emphasize that sociology of migration has great research and organisational potential. Consolidation of this young subdisci-

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pline is also manifested through the establishment of numerous migration research centres in Poland, which usually employ sociologists, and in some cases (eg. Łódź, Cracow) are created and led by sociologists. It is a subdiscipline that is highly internationalized and deeply rooted in global research networks. Polish sociologists are active in international migration research organisations, develop projects in cooperation with international partners, present their findings at international conferences and publish in English (also in this volume). Moreover, sociology of migration is taught at universities and postgraduate courses. All the above indicate that the subdiscipline is already quite well institutionalized and its research identity consolidated.

Of course, there are many possible academic perspectives on mobility apart from sociology of migration. Migration studies gather experts from various discipline branches of the social sciences such as economy, demography, political sciences, law, psychology, geography or anthropology. This multidisciplinary has also been visible in the pages of *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*. In this issue however we focus specifically on the sociological approach. We present its methodological diversity, including surveys, in-depth interviews, Internet research, longitudinal studies and analysis of official data, as well as theoretical achievements. Sociological tools allow for the analysis of various aspects of migration: those related to work, housing, family, social relationships, emotions, attitudes and stereotypes. Theoretical inspirations presented in papers that contribute to this special issue show that migration research is often embedded in academic approaches developed by sociologists, such as institutionalism (paper by Małgorzata Budyta-Budzyńska), social networks (paper by Ksenia Homel) or sociology of work (paper by Ignacy Józwiak). Migrantological themes can already be found in classical works of Polish sociology – a flagship example here is the book “Polish peasant in Europe and America” by Florian Znaniecki and William Thomas. Moreover, migration was subject to interest in the interwar period by such authors as Józef Chałasiński, Maria Gliwicówna, Tadeusz Makarewicz, Krystyna Duda-Dziewierz (see: Cieślińska et al. 2018: 87). We should also underline the disciplinary affinity of migrantology to other fields of research, especially those developing dynamically in the previous years along with the increase of globalization. Polish sociology has for years been interested in research on ethnicity and ethnic minorities – the Polish Sociological Association includes a Section on Sociology of Ethnicity – as well as works in multiculturalism and sociology of multiculturalism which was for some time regarded as a subdiscipline occupied with research on migration and minorities (Sadowski 2011). At the threshold of the third decade of the 21st century the boundaries between sociology of migration and other disciplines engaged with migration studies are blurred. This however is no fault or flaw but results among others from the fact that many sociologists of migration in Poland hold interdisciplinary education in for example law, economy or anthropology. These researchers apply qualifications from various fields of study in their academic work. We would like to stress however –

18 acknowledging the importance of interdisciplinarity in migration studies – that the

variety of sociology's research methods alone and its theoretical richness gives migrantologists a wide spectrum of cognitive and interpretative options.

The multitude of articles prepared for this special issue show that international migration constitutes an important field of sociological study and the analysis of migration from a sociological perspective is of key importance for understanding contemporary social, demographic, political and cultural challenges. Authors look at international mobility in the context of the dynamics and durability of migration processes both in the micro and macro-social dimensions. Papers gathered in this issue have been written in one of two languages – Polish or English. Although English dominates in social research as a connection between academics from different countries, we also find it important to build the achievements of sociology of migration in Polish, which allows researchers to develop conceptual apparatus locally. Efforts to create an academic language of Polish sociology of migration are especially important for two reasons. First of all we are operating within a relatively new and dynamically developing subdiscipline, one that is of interest also among young researchers (doctoral students). Secondly, changes within sociology of migration come quickly: new notions and theoretical approaches develop, which substantially reformulate existing research paradigms.

For example, issues liable to dynamic changes of interpretation are concepts of adaptation and integration in the context of migration. Researchers' views on the course and functions of processes aimed at migrants' adaptation to their new places of stay have been changing quite fundamentally in the last decades. Initial concepts of assimilation (Gordon 1964) assumed that foreigners and representatives of minority groups gradually become alike the social majority, which constitutes the final aim and success of assimilation. Later concepts, such as integration, stressed that adaptation is a two-directional process: not only the minority group undergoes socio-cultural change but so does the majority society that this group joins. Gradually, researchers started to notice (especially when it comes to multicultural Western societies) that concepts of adaptation and integration developed earlier have become inadequate due inter alia to the vastly growing diversity of receiving societies which are no longer homogenous when it comes to values or ethnicity (see e.g. the concept of 'super-diversity' by Vertovec 2007). At present we can observe a 'new generation' or 'third generation' of approaches to migrant adaptation. According to these approaches, the concept of integration is a result of the logic of the nation state where it is expected that the point of reference for adaptation will be the nation state itself. Researchers indicate that the concept of integration in many cases ignores various types of mobility that occur before or after the transfer from the sending country to the host country (Dahinden 2016). A typical point that authors make nowadays is that mobility has become a common experience whereas the concept of integration implies a sedentaristic perspective, where changing home is still perceived as an exception while staying in place as the norm (Hui 2016, also citing Urry 2007). These new approaches

call for the de-nationalization of migration research and breaking down false barriers between international migration and other types of mobility (Anderson 2019). Researchers also point that we need to move away from methodological nationalism when it comes to assessing the impact of immigration on the receiving society and notice other aspects apart from the politically embedded significance for economy and culture of the host country (see the paper by Katarzyna Andrejuk in this issue). Adaptation processes differ greatly when we take into account the multiplicity of mobility experiences, social class, status, social environment and social “bubbles” as well as transnational affiliations. Current analysis stress that the process of migrant learning is not actually about adjusting to the host society, but migrants’ strategies concentrate rather on being flexible, developing soft competences and communication skills in different environments, a readiness for life-long learning and adaptation to dynamic changes (Grabowska 2019). These ‘new generation’ concepts – such as anchoring (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2016) and embedding (Ryan 2018) – underline the individual character of migrants’ transformations and their personal experiences that may (or may not) cause them to stop somewhere and become tied to that specific place. All this shows that we are encountering an individualistic turn in sociology of migration theory as well as migration research in general. Sociologists are moving from analysing migration as a process of adapting to life in a specific host society to perceiving migration as a process of learning how to live in conditions of constant mobility, both social and geographical. Articles collected in this special issue creatively use and develop both the concept of integration as well as other recent concepts that we define here as the ‘third generation’ of migration research. The work presented here refers to multiple paradigms and theoretical approaches, which is a characteristic and acceptable feature of sociology itself (Kraško 2010: 12).

Anne White in the text *New receiving countries and the European ‘mobility laboratory’: integration and family reunification aspirations among Ukrainians in Płock* argues that one should not overplay Poland’s status as a new receiving country in the analysis of the situation of immigrants, because this situation is different than in established receiving countries such as the UK. Some migrants perceived the choice of Poland as an inferior destination, a stepping stone to work in old immigration countries of North-West Europe. However, many migrants had aspirations to settle in Poland and bring their families. They also appreciated various mobility opportunities and expanded transnational social networks.

The article by Agnieszka Trąbka and Iga Wermińska-Wiśnicka entitled *Niejednoznaczny wpływ Brexitu na życie młodych Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii* (Eng: *Ambiguous impact of Brexit on young Poles living in the United Kingdom*) concentrates on the significance of Brexit for people aged up to 34 years. Based on empirical research (including a qualitative panel study) the Authors point that the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union had ambiguous impact on such spheres of migrants’ lives as: life decisions and return plans, application for British

citizenship, buying properties and well-being / life satisfaction. The Authors use such concepts as social anchoring (after A. Grzymała-Kazłowska) and de-stabilizing events (after M. Kilkey and L. Ryan) in their analysis in order to understand the strategies of young Poles and answer the question of why Brexit has not caused (at least up till now) mass return migrations to Poland.

The text by Katarzyna Winiecka entitled *Polscy migranci w Londynie w obliczu Brexitu – (re)adaptacja? Wyniki badań wstępnych* (Eng: *Polish migrants in London in the face of Brexit – (re)adaptation? Results of preliminary research*) also deals with the case of Brexit and refers to the notion of social anchoring as a theoretical foundation to conceptualize a typology of (re)adaptation strategies of Polish migrants in the face of socio-political change in Great Britain. The Author presents results of her preliminary research, using a qualitative approach, on a group of Poles living in London. The analysis focuses on factors that give a sense of safety and stability and on perceived fears connected to Brexit. The Author distinguishes four adaptation strategies: strategy of suspension (“Brexit numbness”), strategy of confidence, strategy of citizenship and strategy of return.

The article by Małgorzata Dziekońska entitled: *Religious Behaviors as a form of cultural identification. The case of Polish circular migrants in Iceland* deals with the under-researched phenomenon of Polish circular migration to Iceland, in a 2/2 work rotation system (2 weeks in Iceland and then next 2 weeks in Poland). Based on qualitative interviews the Author analyses the role of religious celebrations and accompanying practices in organizing the life of migrants as well as the social and cultural significance of these celebrations in maintaining identity and defining relations with the host society in conditions of mobility.

Justyna Kijonka and Monika Żak in the text *Polish return migrants. Analysis of selected decision-making processes* depict various types of return migrants. “A man of calculation” is an individual who assumes the financial aim of migration and after it is achieved, he/she comes back to their home country. “A man of the road” makes more spontaneous decisions and finds satisfaction in constant seeking for new opportunities. “A man of learning” perceives migration as a way to increase skills – not only formal qualifications such as diplomas, but also soft skills which can be useful in one’s life. The fourth category is “a man of new opening” for whom migration is connected with various turning points in life and the necessity of experiencing some kind of katharsis or running away from difficult life crises. This typology may also be useful beyond the Polish context, to analyze immigrants and return migrants from other countries.

Małgorzata Budyta-Budzyńska in the article *Immigrants from EU/EFTA in Poland. The institutionalization of freedom of movement for workers: implementation, issues, obstacles* describes the legal and institutional framework of the situation of intra-EU migrants in Poland. The Author defines some main barriers, which concern not necessarily legal or bureaucratic disadvantages, but rather insufficient availability of information

in English and low language skills of officials. At the same time intra-EU migrants do not know well the institutional arrangements created in order to assist them – they do not use the EURES network and they do not know about Solvit centres. Only a certain percentage of these immigrants observe the regulations concerning registering their stay; their employers do not have knowledge about the obligation to register, either.

Kseniya Homel in her article *Support Online: Case of Russian-speaking Women’s Online Network in Warsaw* describes mechanisms of development and activities of immigrants’ online support networks. She distinguishes four types of support informational, instrumental, emotional, and community-building. Virtual support groups turn out to be an important complementary mechanism of adaptation in a new country.

Tatiana Kanasz in her article *Perception of Poles and immigrants’ well-being in the opinions of women from the former Soviet countries: selected aspects* examines the image of Poles as a host society from the perspective of female migrants from Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. She emphasizes that the respondents associate the well-being of Poles with the culture of containing one’s emotions. The content analysis of social media posts shows that migration experience is satisfactory especially for women working in high-skilled jobs, self-employed, and those with happy family life. Positive opinions are often articulated by those immigrants who have Polish origins and those who adapted well to life in the new country.

Ignacy Józwiak in the article *Temporality and agency in the light of precarity concept. Lessons from the studies of Ukraine to Poland labour migration* takes a look at the issues of economic migration from Ukraine to Poland in the context of segmentation of the labour market and precarization of work. The text presents the labour migration of Ukrainians to Poland as a reflection of global mobility processes and indicates potential future directions of research. The author indicates that activities of Ukrainians in Poland are a reaction to the institutionalized precarity: their responses encompass both activities within the dominating pattern of short-term/circular migration, as well as aspirations and attempts to go beyond this type of mobility. Ukrainians demonstrate agency and determination in efforts to improve their situation in Poland.

Katarzyna Andrejuk in the article *Political right, political left, and attitudes towards immigrants. Poles’ opinions of immigration and their dynamics against the backdrop of European trends* demonstrates that in Western Europe anti-immigrant attitudes are correlated with the self-identity as political right, while in Poland such correlation either does not exist at all, or (in some contexts) it is weak. The author explains this phenomenon referring to the phase of migration cycle, which is earlier in Poland than in Western countries and to the feebler socio-political cleavages between the political right and left in Poland. The text indicates that right-wing identifications in various Western European countries are correlated with distrust towards immigrants mainly in the cultural dimension, and not as much in the economic dimension.

This may lead to supporting by the right-wing parties policies aimed at attracting “labour force” with the attempt to fill in the gaps on the labour market, while at the same time a lack of long-term adaptation strategies and rejecting the possibility of settlement of foreigners with the aim of maintaining cultural homogeneity.

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The articles gathered in this volume are based on empirical material which was collected before the outburst of the novel coronavirus pandemic in 2020. However, the authors also refer in their analyses to the new socio-economic situation that has occurred since and indicate its possible consequences. In doing this, they refer to the mechanisms observed so far in their research. The significance of the pandemic and concurrent crisis for the migrants themselves, as well as for migration studies is two-fold. We distinguish a substantive and a methodological dimension.

In the substantive dimension, the pandemic may shape migration processes through increasing the significance of nation states and their competences in regulating mobility. Numerous states are becoming more and more protectionist and they tend to limit international inflows – at least during the pandemic – to foreigners from neighbouring or geographically close countries. The number of new residence permits in the OECD countries has decreased by 46% in the first half of 2020 (OECD 2020a). The regionalization of migration may be among the most prevalent consequences of the pandemic, because it is strengthened by migration networks which are quite stable. Another manifestation of the strength of nation states is a new and more restrictive approach to state borders observed in both first and second phase of the pandemic. As Małgorzata Budyta-Budzyńska notices in her text, in March and April 2020 countries of the Schengen zone began to close their borders for EU citizens and third country nationals. This was implemented in a chaotic and arbitrary way. The opening of borders also happened in an uncoordinated manner, and was often directed only towards selected neighbouring countries. In addition, support programmes for residents of particular countries were established individually by each state. The European Union started its support programmes at a later date. It should be noted that the influence of the pandemic on migration is indirect: it depends less on the waves of coronavirus itself, and more on the responses of states and solutions implemented by national/supranational institutions. In theory, both these aspects should be interconnected, but it is not always so in practice. We observe for example a loosening of social restrictions despite the high number of infections and even despite the increase in contagion rate. Even though migrant populations are on average younger than the native population, migrants are more prone to coronavirus infections because of their working and housing conditions; moreover, the mortality rate in migrant communities may be higher due to worse access to high-quality health care (OECD 2020).

The micro- and macrosocial processes associated with the pandemic may be examined in relation to three areas: immigration to Poland; attitudes towards migrants; emigration from Poland.

- 1) In the context of **immigration to Poland**, several issues should be raised. A possible consequence of the pandemic is the return of foreigners to their countries of origin due to the worsening economic situation in Poland. Another outcome may be also the growth of the number of unemployed foreigners who are legally entitled to stay in Poland, and the deteriorating situation of those foreign workers who were able to retain their jobs. A phenomenon which is very symptomatic for the crisis is the forced transition of some foreign workers from registered employment to the grey zone – and at the same time an increased tolerance of state institutions for breaching the rights of workers. Anti-crisis legislation (so-called “anti-crisis shields”) partly disassembles the workers’ protection system, which is dangerous especially for groups susceptible to discrimination, including immigrants. On the other hand, new forms of support emerge in the circumstances of social isolation. Researchers indicate the growing significance of social networks of support online (we recommend the text by Ksenia Homel), which offer not only updated information, but also psychological support in times of crisis. The isolation and lockdown measures slow down the integration process of migrant children: while remaining at home, they use only their parents’ mother tongue and do not have many opportunities to learn the language of the host country (OECD 2020).
- 2) In the context of **attitudes towards immigrants**, the 2020 collapse may have a similar impact as previous crises and recessions: for the most part, they usually cause an increase in negative attitudes towards foreigners, less openness on the part of receiving societies and an intensification of xenophobic atmosphere. Moreover, current anti-immigrant attitudes, which focus on the so-called cultural threat (Katarzyna Andrejuk’s article shows this on the basis of ESS data) may be replaced by a discourse based on the so-called economic threat. The latter one concerns the perception of foreigners as outing local workers on the labour market or contributing to a decrease in salaries.
- 3) In the context of **emigration from Poland**, a possible response to the challenges of the pandemic are return migrations. It is not, however, the only option chosen by Poles in light of the crisis, and the final decision is usually influenced by various “anchors” connecting the emigrant with a given country (articles by Agnieszka Trąbka and Iga Wermińska-Wiślicka – co-authors, and by Katarzyna Winięcka in this volume show this phenomenon). On the other hand, as Justyna Kijonka and Monika Żak notice, some Polish migrants feel

that Poland is dealing with the coronavirus crisis better than their countries of residence, and so they choose to come back temporarily. Due to growing difficulties on the labour markets, their return may turn out to be longer than originally planned, or even permanent. Moreover, with regard to the strategies of Polish emigrants in the UK, they have to take into account the accumulation of two crises: Brexit and the pandemic which has hit the inhabitants of Great Britain particularly hard. The analyses in this volume indicate that the influence of Brexit on migrants' life decisions, or on their sense of safety and stability, is multidimensional and ambiguous. In addition to that, Polish migrants abroad face similar socio-economic problems as those experienced by foreigners in Poland. Difficulties with retaining jobs and decreasing salaries may translate into reduced financial remittances from abroad. Up to this date, these remittances have constituted a significant part of income for Polish households, especially in small towns and countryside (Chmielewska 2015: 63–64). The possibility to perform circular migrations during the pandemic is also in question – for numerous formal, organisational, and health reasons. Such migrations are described in the article by Małgorzata Dziekońska in this issue, which concerns Polish migrants in Iceland performing shift work.

Taking into account the perspective of migration researchers, in the methodological dimension the pandemic denotes taking more advantage of online research with the use of Internet tools. In-depth interviews are now more frequently conducted through audio/video applications such as Zoom, Skype, or Messenger. On the other hand, survey respondents obtain the possibility to fill in online questionnaires and submit them through the Internet. For researchers, this often implies the necessity to deal with methodological as well as technical challenges – such as unreliability of computers and diversified quality of Internet connections, or risk of losing the “digitally excluded” respondents in the sample. On the other hand, migrants are usually individuals who have high digital competences, because their daily activities are embedded in more than one country and they routinely use remote communication tools. Access to respondents who are migrants is easier through mobile tools, and their high mobility is no longer an obstacle in scheduling interviews.

Research challenges brought by the pandemic and the resulting crisis require a modification of applied research methods. They also show the necessity to take into account the dialectics of migration studies: on the one hand, researching mobility in transnational spaces, on the other – mobility limited and controlled by states, at least in crisis situations. Sociologists who flexibly use various theoretical approaches seem to be quite well equipped to describe and analyse such changes. Summing up, sociology of migration has also been affected by the coronavirus but is dealing with the pandemic quite well, as the articles in this volume demonstrate.

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