

— BOOK REVIEWS —

Torben Krings, Elaine Moriarty, James Wickham, Alicja Bobek, Justyna Salomońska (2013), *New Mobilities in Europe: Polish Migration to Ireland Post-2004*, Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 161 pp.

Whereas Polish migration to the UK has for many years now attracted scholarly and literary attention, the unprecedented post-2004 influx of Poles to Ireland has been addressed to a lesser degree. Given the recent shift of the Irish economy ‘from boom to bust’, *New mobilities in Europe* emerges at most perfect time. The volume will be a touchstone for those interested in European – particularly recent East-West – mobility, labour migration, migrant identities as well as the application of qualitative longitudinal studies. Written in an engaging way, it will be a compelling read not only for researchers, but also for students and wider non-academic public.

It is, perhaps, worth recalling here that Ireland was amongst three European Union (EU) states which opened up their respective labour markets for the so called A8 countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) that entered the EU in 2004. Having been granted free movement and labour rights, many (especially younger) Polish people were encouraged to migrate and find employment abroad as the situation in the Polish labour market was particularly severe. Since at that time Ireland was experiencing a remarkable economic boom, jobs appeared virtually assured to any new arrivals from Poland and elsewhere. This resulted in a large-scale inward migration that significantly impacted on the Irish labour market. The situation changed dramatically from 2008 onwards when the recession and rising unemployment triggered by the global financial

crisis rapidly decreased the prosperity of the country. Interestingly, however, this – in the words of Krings *et al.* – *has not reversed previous inward migration as Ireland continues to have a substantial migrant population* (p. 36).

New mobilities in Europe offers a holistic image of recent, primarily economy-driven Polish migration to Dublin, an increasingly globalised city. In doing so, the volume explores the changing career pathways of 22 Polish men and women across a period of two years. Against this backdrop, the authors stress that although *work and employment remain crucial to an understanding of recent East-West migration* (p. 15), the motivations to migrate in the post-2004 context are usually complex, highly situated and include diverse non-materialistic as well as non-work-related reasons. The recognition of this often underappreciated aspect of Polish international mobility makes the book a successful attempt towards a comprehensive view on migrant experience that stretches well beyond the classical patterns of labour migration.

Drawing upon mobility, which has been argued to better characterise the East-West migratory flows (Wallace 2002), Krings *et al.* acknowledge the ‘mobility turn’ we have been witnessing in social sciences within the last decade. The focus on liquidity, flows and movement – be it intra-, international as well as social mobility – allows the authors to look into the intricacies, interruptions and contradictions that often characterise migrant worklives. In this context, the authors poignantly show that Polish migrants tend to develop ‘boundaryless careers’ and move not only across countries (and, indeed, continents), but also within national labour markets.

The book offers an interesting methodological innovation. The employment of what the authors have termed *Qualitative Panel Study* (QPS) – com-

prising six waves of targeted interviews with 22 participants – allowed a longitudinal investigation of migrant career pathways and changing professional biographies. In this respect the volume, as the authors claim, *represents one of the first applications of qualitative longitudinal research to the study of migration and employment* (p. 3). The migrant sample included male and female informants in their 20s and 30s (being representative of average ages of Polish migrants in Ireland) employed in both skilled and less-skilled occupations. This was, importantly, supplemented by 40 single interviews with employers and managers, including recruitment and human resources specialists. By looking into both sides of the employment relationship, Krings *et al.* succeeded in placing migrant experience within a wider context that embraces here the micro-level of an organisation, its peculiarities, distinctive aims and corporate culture.

The volume begins with a short introduction, continued with the conceptual argument of the book (Chapter 1) in which the authors analyse the new mobility patterns in the light of recent literature. In particular, they outline and problematise the understanding of Polish migrants as ‘free movers’ in the context of the new European mobility space. This is followed by Chapter 2 which provides an extensive overview of the research design. The next chapter conceptualises the recent changes to the Irish economy as the context in which the study of Polish post-2004 migrants occurs. Readers are offered a detailed story of an extraordinary change from a goldrush labour market that attracted large-scale migration from Poland and other new EU member states to a dramatic economic downturn followed by rising unemployment among both migrants and Irish citizens.

Chapter 4 looks into motivations to move, plans and aspirations of migrants before departure and upon arrival as well as the recruitment process and strategies in an era of booming economy of the ‘Celtic Tiger’. One of the most interesting findings here is the extent to which Polish migrants seem to internalise the stereotype of a ‘hard-working Pole’. It appears that although Irish employers initially

recruited migrants due to labour shortages, they soon started to conceptualise the non-Irish work force as particularly ‘hard-working’. The following chapter explores the workplace experiences of Polish migrants in four employment sectors: hospitality, construction, financial services and IT. In doing so, it draws attention, for instance, to the fact that less-skilled positions routinely labelled as ‘bad jobs’ are not necessarily experienced as such by migrants who beyond materiality tend to value other aspects of employment (e.g. positive workplace culture) and compare them with the situation in Poland. Further on, readers are introduced to the career pathways of Poles in Dublin. Whereas some migrants, as Krings *et al.* argue, follow somewhat traditional worklife trajectories and strive to move upwards, others focus on earning as much money as possible in a given time, often in sectors hardly related to their education or skills. This results in diverse professional choices that are frequently fuelled by personal situations and constantly changing plans that may include every scenario from staying in Ireland, through further migration/mobility, to return to Poland. In probably most intriguing Chapter 7, the authors study how international mobility is linked with the so called ‘mobile technologies’ both physical (e.g. low-cost air travel) and virtual (e.g. instant messaging agents, social networking services). Finally, in Chapter 8, readers can have a closer look at how Polish migrants in Dublin evaluate the time spent in Ireland and within the Irish labour market in particular. This is further supported by the detailed exploration of their future plans. Notwithstanding professional positionality, the vast majority of migrants seem to perceive their migration as a positive and personally enriching experience. Importantly, the authors also note that in the light of the economic crisis worklife trajectories of many Polish migrants have changed significantly. This has resulted in frequently employing a drastic adaptation strategy, migrating elsewhere or moving back to Poland. Lastly, in condensed but solid conclusions, the authors reflect particularly on how consequential the choice of the methodology was for their study. Six repetitive interviews with mi-

grants conducted over the turbulent period of 2008–2010, when the global economic crisis dramatically altered the Irish labour market, appear to have exceeded research expectations and provided richness and detail to the story.

With so much to praise, I do have, however, a few comments. Namely, I would particularly welcome more nuanced analysis of social relations in a multinational workplace. Although the authors argue that *workplace is an important site for inter-ethnic relations* (p. 85), they hardly address tensions related to prejudice and ethnic, national, religious or other axes of difference. The small section on multinational workplace, which briefly summarises migrant experience of intergroup relations as ‘rather positive’, may give an impression that fractures related to social imaginary, stereotyping, prejudice and other negative attitudes are scarce. This is quite surprising given the extent of similar studies from, for example, the UK that suggest otherwise (e.g. Cook *et al.* 2011; Fox 2012; McDowell 2008; McDowell *et al.* 2007). While this might not have been the main focus of the research or did not come out of the collected data, engaging with broader literature and shading some light onto workplace encounters with embodied difference, distinctive cultural normativity and work ethic would have added to the rich texture of the book.

Secondly, as elaborate as it is, the overall story presented in the book seems to downplay the significance of gender for migrant (labour) experience. This, again, might not have been a core interest of the study and/or might not have emerged from the interviews, yet juxtaposition of some findings (or the absence of them) with evidence from wider literature could perhaps enrich research conclusions.

Another aspect that remains unaddressed is how the research findings possibly inform policy makers and wider academic and public debates. As much as the empiricism of the presented story makes the volume offer a valuable perspective onto workplace experience, the findings seem to remain on a rather descriptive level. Being aware of the challenge such discussions may pose, I would appreciate some

more attention into how certain findings might be socially, institutionally and academically applicable.

Friendly comments aside, *New mobilities in Europe* is definitely well worth the read. The book provides a dynamic picture of Polish migration/mobility to Ireland. It is well-thought-out, fleshy and strongly embedded in empirical data.

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Contemporary immigration in Europe has become increasingly European. Accelerated migration from