

IRREGULAR MIGRATION – BETWEEN LEGAL STATUS AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

Narratives of Polish labour migration

Abstract

How do Polish migrant workers experience the process of migration and how does irregular migration status influence their life plans? In this article I analyse how the shifts between different legal statuses may be related to the social practices connected to the specific area of activity and to the accumulated capital of the individual. The aim is to identify how opportunity structures affect the migration process and how migrants react to them depending on the available capital and biographical knowledge and experiences. The horizon of experience is captured through biographical narrative interviews with the purpose of contributing with new perspectives and understandings of constructing irregularity.

Keywords

Irregular migration • opportunitystructures • strategies • motivation • recognition

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1 Introduction

The enlargement of the E4U in 2004 and 2007 has brought on an accelerated movement of people from the new Eastern European Countries (EEC) to the “old” EU15 countries. This substantial change in migration patterns have resulted in a far more open Europe as a potential migration destination with increased possibilities for migrants to gain socio-economic mobility (Düvell 2006; Tamas & Münz 2006). The accelerated mobility of people between borders has in various ways been managed by states (and supranational organs) through more or less restrictive immigration policies – not at least in order to combat irregular migration. The increased interest in various aspects of illegal migration correlates with restrictions in migration policy, particularly concerning criminalisation of entry, stay and employment (Düvell 2006). The enlargement of the EU has further increased the concern regarding irregular migration and the consequences for the respective EU member countries. The size of the problem is hard to estimate, as it is quite impossible to be accurate about the number of irregular migrants in the EU and anything between 4 and 8 million migrants are assumed to be irregularised (Sassen 1996; Düvell 2006). In the various EU countries the scale of the informal economy and the employment of irregular migrants vary according to the respective welfare states and migration policies adopted (Toksöz 2007; Reyneri 1998; Jordan 2005). Most of the EU15 countries introduced transitional agreement in order to protect their labour markets and national workers from decline in salary and working conditions, showing a sceptical attitude towards labour mobility over the open borders of the enlarged EU. Denmark implemented one

of the most restrictive transitional agreements among the EU15 countries, which imposed a requirement of a working permit for EEC citizens (Tamas & Münz 2006; Thomsen 2010a). A breach of this regulation causes irregular migration in spite of the free mobility within the enlarged European Union.

The single largest group of EEC migrant workers comes from Poland and there has been more than 55,000 Polish workers registered in Denmark since the enlargement (Pedersen & Thomsen 2011). Most of these workers take occupation in sectors that require unskilled or semi-skilled labour despite their level of education and qualifications. Several studies have documented that the salary and working and living conditions of Polish migrant worker are much lower than that of national workers (Hansen & Hansen 2009; Hviid & Flyvholm 2010; Thomsen 2010b.)

Irregular activities and conditions such as lack of documents, clandestine labour (intended and unintended), underpayment, poor housing, etc. are common in relation to the migration process of many EEC workers. Irregular migration – in the optic applied in this study – embraces dimensions of both illegality and illicity. The empirical part of the article therefore goes beyond the legislative and regulative aspects of the irregular migration in Denmark by also including examples of illicit activities.

The article focuses on the migration process of the individual; from the motivation factors behind the choice to migrate to the strategies applied in relation to the actual migration process. The article explores how immigration policies and labour market structures

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affect the lives of migrants and furthermore whether and how these may lead to irregular migration and what strategies are applied in order to cope with this situation?

Patterns of coping with irregular migration are identified by looking at the relationship between motivation to migrate, labour market opportunities and strategies applied in order to scrutinize the relationship between different dimensions of the migration process based on the experience of the migrants themselves.

2 Redefining irregular migration

Irregular migration may be categorized as forms of social practices that intersect two or more regulatory spaces and violate at least one normative or legal rule. A specific social practice might be accepted in one context, or regulatory space, but not in another. Regulatory spaces are zones where particular sets of norms and rules are dominant that are produced by either the state or in social relations (van Schendel & Abraham 2005). It is noteworthy that the production of irregularity in this approach is not only done by official regulatory authorities, but is also produced through social constructions based on normative constituted action and it is therefore crucial to distinguish between political (*legal and illegal*) and social (*licit and illicit*) origins of regulatory authority. It may for example be the case that legal restrictions are confronted with socially sanctioned practises. These are linked to the migration status of the migrant and the social expectations tied to these. The ability to move from one space to another may partly depend on the social network and various forms of capital of the migrant (Bourdieu 1983).

The distinction between legal/illegal and licit/illicit is therefore to be found in the origin of the regulating authority or actors. Legality refers to what the state regards as legitimate in a juridical sense and licit is related to what people involved in transnational networks and activities regards as legitimate in a social sense. Illegality is defined as the type of meaning that is produced by the effect of the criminalised objects movement between political, social, cultural and economic spheres. Illicit, on the other hand, depends on the normative recognition that is given certain activities within a social network or group. These networks exercise authority in terms of placing judgement on the social practices based on norms and values and thus legitimise the practises (Thomsen 2010a). The importance of this distinction is to identify the origin of the regulatory authority which may have an either political or social origin. The judging authority includes the persons who engage in the activities and practices through direct or indirect participation in these. Social acceptance may dominate a specific practice even though it might be illegal, but it doesn't necessarily make more right (or wrong), but it is however legitimised (van Schendel & Abraham 2005). This approach is based on an acknowledgement of the expediency of including both legal and social perspectives on the process, and to distinguish between these, in order to encompass social perception and practises in relation to irregular activities and attitudes towards these. The advantage of including elements of both an illegal and illicit perspective to the understanding an analytical application of *irregularity* is that it facilitates an analysis that takes a more nuanced glance at migration processes by including a social level.

For analytical purposes it is useful to apply an approach that captures the large segment of grey zone migration and go beyond a mere black and white perspective of illegal versus legal migration. This can be achieved through the concept *semi-compliance*, which captures the fluidity between legal and illegal status in grey zone

areas, where a person might be in compliance on most accounts, but not all of them at all of the time (Anderson & Ruhs 2008; Guild 2004). Compliance may according to Bridgit Anderson & Martin Ruhs be divided into three levels. 1) *Compliance* refers to migrants who are legally residing and working exclusively under and in full compliance with the conditions attached to their migration status. 2) *Non-compliance* concerns migrants who are without the right to reside in the country of destination. 3) *Semi-compliance* indicates a situation where the migrant has the right to reside but is working or engaged in other activities in violation of some or all the conditions attached to the migrant's immigration status. The three levels of compliance are applicable to the three dimensions of concern for the country of destination: entry, residency and employment. The distinctions of the three levels of compliance are particularly useful in an analytical optic in which it seems expedient in order to capture the complexity of irregular migration.

3 Reflections on methods and data

This article is based on an explorative study from 2006 to 2009 of the migration experiences of Polish workers in Denmark and their motivations and strategies in relation to the migration process and how these may be influenced by policies and opportunity structures. The analysis in this article is based on how Polish labour migrants experience the migration process in the immigration country and how the opportunity structures as well as their personal and biographical resources influence their labour market activities and ability to regularise their migration status and labour market position. Migration does in most cases necessitate revision of the migrants' biographical project and a reconsideration of the life planning due to changes in circumstances and the attached life chances.

In the original study biographical interviews were conducted with 24 Polish migrant workers representing different trades, mainly the construction, the industrial and the service sector in Aalborg, the third largest town in Denmark. Through the analysis of biographical narrative interviews it is possible to obtain information about how certain relations and circumstances during the migration process have conditioned the strategies and activities of the migrants. The interviews can therefore help determining how the migration process is shaped through identifying significant factors in the respective narratives and patterns that may occur among them. The interviews were conducted in 2006 and in 2008 starting with the representatives at the meso level. Through some of these informants, initial contact to Polish migrant workers in Aalborg was established. The local Catholic priest contributed with useful insights, but the intended strategy of gaining access to Polish workers through the church failed. The chairman of the Polish Association in Aalborg became a key person and the gatekeeper of contact with Polish workers. Together with an element of "snow-balling", all informants were found through this one contact. A main concern of this one-sided recruitment of informants is that it is very possible they are not representative of irregularised Polish workers and do not cover the diversity of the group. It is quite likely that they represent the most successful half of that group because the recruitment happened through someone who himself belonged to the more resourceful group like many of the other members of the Polish Association in Aalborg. This may possibly lead to some degree of bias in the sample, and the case is therefore not representative of the whole group of Polish workers in the low-skilled areas of the Danish labour market.

The main strength of the biographical method, from a methodological perspective, is that it facilitates a way of exploring subjectively experienced reality and conceptually reconstructs a changing world as interpreted by the social agents themselves (Hoerning 1996; Kupferberg 1998) providing a perspective from below. In order to understand the biographical experience and social action it is necessary to bring the articulated actions into a biographical coherence. By making a distinction between two types of motivation (Schütz 1971), it is possible to explain an observed act in its context (Kontos 2008). Firstly, the teleological type of motivation deriving from the act *in order* to obtain something is an act made for future purposes. Secondly, the causal type of motivation based on *because of* is built on events of the past (Schütz 1971). The discussion on what motivates people to migrate is a relevant topic as it is one of the central elements of this research field, not at least because motivation is directed towards gaining social integration and recognition.

Labour migration or mobility may also be developed due to constraints and barriers that disallow the migrants to follow an original strategy based on the life planning of the individual in the home country. The migrant might be more or less forced towards labour mobility, and therefore has less control over the situation and may become more vulnerable to exploitation. This push mechanism is to be understood as “a pressure to innovate” and motivation is based on the actors will or need to go down a different life path and create new possibilities for capital accumulation or personal gains (Kupferberg 2003).

Another perspective on this relation is to distinguish between motivations and strategies, as these relate to respectively matters of intensions and opportunities. In this research project, motivations are comprehended as being related to people's life planning and are based on the intension that they have for how they would like their trajectory to be shaped in the future. Strategies, on the other hand, are related to the opportunities that the actor is presented with, as it is on the basis of these that the realisation of intension are made possible. The relation between respectively motivations/strategies and life planning/life chances can be illustrated as:

Motivations → reactions/intentions → life planning
Strategies → opportunities → life chances

These relations are explored in the analysis of the biographical narratives with the purpose of investigating why and how the migrant workers enter irregular spaces and how they may move back and forth into spaces of regularity and irregularity. In doing so it is necessary to draw upon the personal and biographical resources that the migrants have at their disposal, making their past history very relevant indeed. Moreover, personal and biographical resources are developed over time in interaction with other actors within specific structural frameworks creating particular social, cultural and political arenas or fields. As a result hereof, living conditions do internalise social structures and socialise the individual in different ways. Strategies become here a matter of the relationship between the intentions of the life plan, personal/biographical resources and the opportunities available. A major turning point in the trajectory of the Polish workers in this study is that of migration, which brings on a vital change to their life planning as the socio-structural relations and the value system attached to it is in most cases dramatically different to what they have been accustomed to in Poland. The situation then creates an unequal relation between the intentions of the life planning and the actual opportunities that the life chances are based upon. The

consequences of this discrepancy generate different reactions and different strategies of coping with the situation from making resistance to indifference depending on the situation and biographical resources of the individual and the opportunity structures of the given environment.

4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical frame applied in the analysis of the biographical is based on an elective approach and consists of selective concepts from Pierre Bourdieu's and Alex Honneth's theoretical frameworks. Bourdieu is relevant for the analysis mainly due to his notion of field and capital. Field conceptualises the spaces that the migrant worker move in and out of and capital correspond with the personal and biographical resources of the individual.

4.1 Field, capital and strategies

Labour market activities, like other types of activities, derive from the relationship between the dispositions of the individual and the structural opportunities or limitations of the field at the given time (Bourdieu 1994). This makes the concept of field central to the analysis and to the understanding of the coherence between or dialectic relationship of agent and structure – the migrant and the Danish labour market. The structure of the field is characterised by an unequal distribution of capital and it is composed of a particular combination of capitals (Bourdieu 1983). It is the struggles within the field that can be explained and to a certain degree understood by using concepts such as habitus, dispositions, capital, strategies, practices and social positions. The main reason behind the struggles to obtain capital accumulation and in particular symbolic capital is the route to accessing social recognition (Bourdieu 2000). Migrants often experience that accommodation to a new society entails structural limitations that restrain the possibilities for the continuation of a certain trajectory or life plan. It may therefore be necessary to apply alternative strategies to accumulate capital and to accomplish social recognition. This transformative process causes changes to both the individual(s) and society. What is also illustrated here is the important connection between practice, habitus and field, as the changes that accompany migration do in many cases involve a decline of social position, which is the case for many migrants in irregularised positions.

4.2 Defining the different forms of capital

In order to comprehend social interaction, Bourdieu reintroduced the notion of capital and the accumulation attached to it. Capital comes either in a materialised or embodied form and it enables the agent to approach a position in social space and it takes time to accumulate. It can be described as three different types of capital that at any given moment in time represent the immanent structure of the social world (Bourdieu 1983). Depending on the field and accumulated capital it presents itself in three fundamental guises: 1) economic capital which is a material type of capital that can immediately and directly be converted into money and may be institutionalised in forms of property rights; 2) social capital is immaterial and made up of social obligations (connections or networks) and it is convertible, under certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the forms of a title of nobility, 3) cultural

capital which is also immaterial and convertible, under certain circumstances, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in forms of educational qualifications. An additional form of capital is symbolic capital, which is achieved when different forms of capital are recognised and legitimised. Legitimation is the main mechanism in the conversion to power. Capital has to be regarded as legitimate before it can be capitalised and before it is realisable (Bourdieu 1983; see also Honneth 1995).

All of the different types of capitals are context specific (field depended) and so is their convertibility. Bourdieu's thoughts on this matter are that cultural capital can be acquired in different degrees depending on the period of time, the society and the social class. In relation to this he speaks of a domestic transmission of cultural capital, which makes transnational transmissions opaque and makes convertibility difficult due to the unequal distribution of capital that characterises the structure of the field. In relation hereto one could say that some capital travels better than others. This means that it might be difficult for some people to convert their cultural/educational capital into economic capital, and are therefore constrained in their attempts to acquire symbolic capital, which results in lack of improvement of their social position.

4.3 Social recognition

The notion of social recognition is relevant to apply in the analysis because it contributes to the understanding of possibilities of labour market inclusion or exclusion and integration in society.

According to Honneth social recognition, or experience of recognition from interaction partners, serves as a precondition for building up a personal identity. Thus, denial of social recognition will be experienced traumatically, because it will lead to damage on the personal identity. Recognition can be categorised into three levels: 1) level of primary relationships like family and friendship; 2) level of recognition as a person with the moral capacity to participate in the community, sharing legal rights; 3) the level of social solidarity, based on the recognition as a person with a social status (Honneth 1995). Together these three levels constitute the universal concept of recognition that people struggle for. Attached to each of these levels are different forms of awareness, which are expressions of the fundamental effect of the different levels of social recognition on the individual or groups of individuals. Firstly, the private sphere is concerned with the emotional recognition as in self-confidence (*Selbstvertrauen*). The concern at this level is the relationship between couples, parents, children and friends and where fundamental self-confidence is developed through the confidence of own resources and values that are recognised by others. Secondly, the legal sphere concerns the self-esteem (*Selbstachtung*) of the individual or groups of individuals. The central element here is to ascribe to the universal rights and through the attainment of common respect, which releases self-respect as the individual perceives him- or herself as an equal member of society. Thirdly, the solidarity sphere concerns self-appreciation (*Selbstschätzung*) and is based on inclusion in cultural, political and labour communities. Recognition in this sphere is gained through participation in communities where the participation and engagement of the individual is recognised equally to and by other participants (Honneth 2003). These are ontogenetically development steps in relation to obtaining 'the good life', making it a normative-based approach to theory building (Honneth 2003). The three spheres are each connected to a type of violation that releases a need of recognition: "Where the types of recognition constitute a normative

idea of the good life, are the corresponding types of violation the basis for comprehending the motive for or reason behind the struggle for recognition" (Honneth 2003:18). The struggles for social recognition thus become the purpose of social action and a behavioural regulator in social practices.

5 Narratives of migration

The analysis part seek to investigate the relations between irregularity, capital and strategies applied by the migrants in order to illuminate how the resources of the migrant and the opportunity structures influence both regular and irregular migration and the strategies applied in the migration process. Here the theoretical concepts of field, capital and social recognition are applied as tools for understanding the social action that takes place within the different regulatory spaces of migration. Through the biographical narratives' rich information about the conditions that surrounds the migration process supported by the theoretical concepts, it becomes possible to detect correlations between different aspects in the narrations and discover patterns among the narratives.

The analysis is structured around three interviews with Polish migrants who have taken work in Denmark during the period 2005 and 2008. Two of the cases are based on individual biographical interviews with Piotr and Marcin, and the third case is based on a biographical interview with a couple, Ewa and Darek. The three cases are chosen from the whole sample of interviews as examples of the different narrations of migration as well as the patterns that emerges from the whole sample.

5.1 The case of Piotr

Piotr is 47 and trained as accountant. He was unmarried and did not have children. During several years he was engaged in local politics in his hometown in a rural area in eastern part of Poland. In his narration Piotr explains how he decided to seek work abroad because he got into serious debts and lost his job as an accountant due to the economic situation at that time in Poland (2005). The EU enlargement created new opportunities for easy access to other EU countries and new chances for employment, which made Piotr revise his life planning and seek employment abroad. In Denmark Piotr has been employed as a manual worker in a manufacturing company together with seven other Polish men. The company only employed Polish workers and they were employed on very flexible conditions, enabling the employer to adjust the number of staff to the current amount of work available. The salary was lower than the standard for the particular type of work, but without being in direct conflict with the regulations. "I know that our (migrant workers, ed.) is not as high as what the Danish workers get, but it is a lot more than I would be paid in Poland" (Interview 5, p 13). The working condition can be characterised as irregular in the sense that there is an aspect of illicit connected with the terms of employment, such as salaries that are lower than the regular norm, which may lead to social dumping. In connection with the East Agreement, these working conditions are exactly one of the main concerns that the salary is as it was intended to protect against, in terms of avoiding the development of an A and a B team on the Danish labour market. The living conditions for most of these workers were also under the normal standard in Denmark. In Piotr's case it was a 12 sq. meter room which he shared with another Polish worker without possibility for privacy.

Piotr's motivation to take employment in Denmark is based on his life situation in Poland and the abruptness in his planned life course forcing him to revise his biographical project and seek new opportunities for employment – not at least to be able to pay his debts. "In Denmark it is not possible to use my qualification, not even my experiences. Here I am only cheap labour, but this is fine for me. I just need to earn the money, so I can pay my debts back and start over again" (Interview 5, p 12).

Piotr's motivation for labour migration is partly caused by his economic situation in Poland, which has pushed him toward migration and partly due to the possibility of employment in Denmark regardless of its sort and conditions. Several of the Polish informants in this study also expressed that they had chosen to seek work in Denmark because someone from their social network had recommended it. Making use of transnational ethnic networks is a strategy applied by most of the informants, and some have used their social capital in more than one country as for example in Germany and Denmark.

Piotr also recalls how he happened to come to Denmark to work: "I was contacted by a friend who has been working in both Germany and Denmark and he told me that it was possible to get work in Denmark. I needed the job so I said yes I'll like to go and give it a try. A week later I was working in Aalborg (Interview 5, p 9). The usage of ethnic network or social capital plays a significant role in the labour mobility of the migrant workers. The networks provide information and opportunities that facilitates the migration process, but may at the same time serve as restriction of the possibilities of gaining social mobility and recognition in the destination country because the field accessed might be characterized by limited gain of capital and capital conversion. In Piotr's case the particular field is unskilled work in the industry sector and he had limited possibilities of converting his cultural capital in this field and was at the same time restrained from accessing other fields that might have improved his social position. The irregular character of his employment affects his situation in the sense that the employment situation is not fully in compliance with the legal regulation on labour migration for citizens from the new EU member countries from Eastern Europe as stated in the Danish transitional agreement. At the time of the interview Piotr was commuting between Denmark and Poland depending on available work in the company in Aalborg.

5.2 The case of Marcin

Marcin is 51 years old at the time of the interview and he comes from a small town in the centre of Poland. He is a skilled builder and has for several years had his own building business in Poland. Due to the economic situation in Poland in the early 2000s he lost his business and had difficulties in finding a job in Poland. After the EU enlargement and the opening of borders Marcin decided to leave his wife and daughter behind and went to Denmark where the economy was booming at the time and the demand for labour was high. Marcin explains; "I did not want to leave Poland and my family but I had no choice because I had no job and no money. My family depended on me so we decided it was for the best that I went to Denmark" (Interview 16, 2). The decision to seek employment in Denmark was taken with his wife as they both regarded it as a necessary investment for the future. His situation as unemployed forced on a revision of his life plan and at the time there were chances in Denmark. He got a job in the building trade and could use his skills and knowledge from previous work, which is related to the convertibility of that kind of

skills and that it was in particular high demand on the Danish labour market at that time.

For the first couple of years Marcin was working illegally, because he did not have the required working permission for EEC citizens, which was necessary in order to comply with the regulations of the transnational agreement. At that time he did not speak much Danish even after a few years in Denmark and had very limited English skills. He was therefore dependent on the employer to take care of the official arrangements with the authorities. He was also among the early Polish migrant workers, who arrived in Denmark after the enlargement of the EU and did not have much network with co-ethnic workers and his social capital was therefore limited in a Danish context. After a couple of years he decided to become self-employed and through this occupational position create a change in his legal status as he then moved into a fully legal space. Marcin explains: "The work was good enough but the hours were long and the pay not that good and I never know when I didn't have work anymore. That's why I decided to start on my own business. Now I earn more and my wife and daughter have come to Aalborg to live with me" (Interview 16, p 9). Even though Marcin could use his skills in a Danish context they were not equally valued with the skills of Danish workers and he still didn't receive full recognition as he received a lower salary than Danish staff and was working on more unstable conditions, providing very flexible labour. The particular field of this sector does to some extent determine the conditions and the possibility of accessing as it is more characterized by both illegal and illicit activities than most other sectors of the labour market.

Marcin now runs a small construction company and has been united with his wife as well as his daughter who is planning to take a university degree in Denmark. Self-employment is a well-known strategy among immigrants who do not receive recognition for their skill and qualification in the country of settlement (Thomsen 2006). Marcin is the only person in the sample of this study who has chosen to become self-employed at the time of the interview. He is however also the person who has stayed in Denmark for the longest time, which is also a significant factor, not at least because self-employment presupposes a decision to settle in the destination country as well as having qualifications which are relatively easy to convert into self-employment.

5.3 The case of Ewa and Darek

In 2006 the young couple Ewa and Darek, age 29 and 31, chose to go abroad to work, despite of the fact that they both had university qualifications and relatively good jobs in the marketing sector in Poland. They had no children at the time of the interview and were living in a shared apartment with relatives in Warsaw. The motivation for going abroad was based on personal incentives of wanting to explore new possibilities, self-realisation and to see some of the world. The couple decided in 2007 to travel to Norway like many other Poles at that time (Jørgensen 2010). On their way they made a stop in Aalborg in Northern Denmark and decided to stay for a while. They soon found jobs as distributors on the local newspaper. Similar to other migrant workers in this sector, they were employed for 15–20 hours weekly which is not in compliance with the national regulations of the transitional agreement that required the EEC workers to be employed for a minimum of 30 hours per week. In other cases Polish newspaper distributors have been underpaid and some have been promised more than 100 DDK per hour and 37 hours per week by the distribution companies. One of the interesting

aspects of this is that a low skilled position on the labour market is not necessarily filled by a low skilled person. This over-qualified labour or so-called brain waste is not uncommon for migrant workers or workers with an immigrant background in the Danish labour market (Thomsen 2006). Many immigrants find it difficult to use their education in Denmark and do therefore end up in more low-skilled or manual job or as self-employed. Moreover, reasons why migrant workers in particular are in demand in these areas, is on the one hand the possibilities for employers for benefiting from irregular employment such as underpayment and 'flexible' conditions and on the other hand migrant workers' opportunity of gaining access to the labour market. These matters do not correspond well with the Danish welfare state model and great measures are taken to prevent and combat such activities.

In the interview Ewa expresses her view on their motivation to work abroad: "We wanted to try something new, something else than the usual. We have no children yet so it is easier for us now. We have good jobs in Poland but the money was not great, so there was not so much to loose" (Interview 2, p 3). Even though it might not be the main motive for migrating, the economic motive still plays an important part in the decision to seek employment abroad. Ewa and Darek's motivation can be characterised by a higher degree of pull than push as they were motivated by future gains and possibilities rather than the limitations of the past.

Due to that the irregularity of their first employment at the local newspaper that did not fully comply with the regulations of the East Agreement, Ewa and Darek started out as irregularised migrants who were caught in the grey zone area of the (migrant) labour market. They did however manage to move into a legal space and change their status by getting a fully regular job in the hospitality sector.

Apart from regularising their employment situation, the benefit of their social capital/network also manifested itself in conversion of cultural capital in the sense that they could use their education and work experiences from Poland. Darek explains: "We got jobs at "Jaegergaarden" through an acquaintance and started at the bottom. Soon I was promoted to administrative tasks and Ewa is now also doing administration and marketing work. I think this is right for us" (Interview 2, p 17).

When asked about their salary none of them could remember how much they earn, which might not have been the standard wage for their positions. However, they both believe that all conditions are in full compliance with the regulations and are very satisfied with their jobs. The combination between their cultural capital/education and social capital/network may possibly have had a positive effect on the life chances in the Danish labour market, not at least due to moving from an irregular position in the labour market to fully regular employment. The new opportunities have made the couple change their life plans completely and they have decided to settle in Denmark and are saving up for the down payment on a house and are planning to have children.

6 Discussion and conclusions

The three cases of Polish labour migration to Denmark illustrate various differences and similarities in the narratives of Polish labour migration. From a comparative point of view there are certain patterns that emerge when focusing on forms of motivation attached to the migration and types of strategies applied in the migration process.

The motivation for leaving Poland varies among the informants, but the main reason for most informants was the socio-economic situation – both for the Polish society and for the individual in terms of high unemployment rate as well as personal economic situation. In several cases the main motivation had a causal explanation in large debts to be paid back. These respondents are of different reasons caught in a debt situation and have due to either unemployment or the low wage level in Poland been pushed into seeking employment abroad. The decision to work abroad is often more of a household matter rather than an individual decision (Phizacklea & Wolkowitz 1995). A larger part of the informants express how the decision to take employment abroad was taken on a rational of investment of the future for the family. The expectation of economic gain from labour mobility has in most cases not been met, as the salary has been lower than expected and/or living expenses has been higher. This situation has for some of the Polish workers resulted in having to prolong their stay and have in some cases pushed them into further irregularisation due to lack of opportunities and rights. Such situation brings some migrant workers in vulnerable situations where they are easily exploited, such as having to work very long hours, on dangerous working sites or even without pay.

The economic situation in Poland and the extremely high unemployment rate of nearly 20 per cent at the time of the EU enlargement in 2004 created a high motivation to seek employment in some of the EU15 countries that were experiencing labour demand in many sectors at that time (Grabowska-Lusinska 2007). The majority of the Poles interviewed for this study have in one way or another used their ethnic network to access a job in Denmark. The use of social capital does however not necessarily lead to employment that corresponds with the qualifications and educational level of the migrants. Some of the Polish workers are over-qualified for the jobs they take in Denmark because their cultural capital may be difficult to transfer into a Danish context, where it cannot automatically be converted into economic capital or social mobility.

In all three cases used in the analysis, the migrant workers have experienced working for lower wages and under less attractive conditions than the Danish counterparts. Furthermore, even though wages may be in compliance with the agreements there is a tendency that the Polish and other EEC workers are paid a lower wage than what usually is the case for national workers. This is not necessarily in non-compliance with the legislation, but a breach with the wage level negotiated for the particular sector and does therefore not comply with the illicit level by the trade union and union members. A survey done by Hansen and Hansen (2009) reveals the wage difference between Polish workers and national workers in the same position that shows the inequalities, which leads to undesirable development in wage levels as well as creating a segregated labour market. The lack of recognition of migrant workers' skills by underpaying them is experienced negatively by the migrant worker as it makes themselves feel less worthy than the national workers, which affects both their self-esteem and self-appreciation, because their irregularised position renders them less rights and possibilities of resisting this situation. This wage pattern does of course not reflect illegal activities, but is rather an expression of an illicit (and legal) development, that does not meet the norms of the particular area and is therefore not granted acceptance and legitimisation of the engaged actors.

The study shows a pattern of moving from an illegal/irregular space to a legal/regular space when there is an incentive to settle

with the emergence of an actual integration process. Most of the Polish workers interviewed in the course of this study have at one time or another been irregularised due to not being in full compliance on the legal and the licit level. In relation to such a situation the rather restrictive policy seems to be a barrier for accessing the labour market. Other Polish migrants have started out as fully legal but have in one way or another become illegalised due to changes in their employment situation. The rights and conditions that are attached to the status of the individual migrant shape the possibilities of being in full compliance with the rules and regulations. The large variations depending of the type of stay have caused some confusion and frustration for both employers and employees. As a result many EEC workers have during the time of the transitional period been in situations of not entirely complying with the residence and/or working regulations and therefore not fully legal. The workers may however not necessarily be aware of the legal aspects of their position and status as an EU citizen. Even though the Eastern agreement is considered a success in certain political circles and a political statement of the ambition of maintaining that wages and employment conditions should be very controlled and regulated, there have been many cases of irregularised migration of EEC workers since 2004.

The exploitation of migrant workers by employers might be legitimised by paying a higher salary than what the migrant would receive at home and in this sense he or she is better off. This type of irregularity is characterised as being illegal on the one hand but in certain environments it may be licit among the actors involved in the activities. The migrant might not always be aware of the regular level of salary in the particular position and therefore is not in a position of arguing the fairness of the salary, not at least in relation to undercutting the going standard. The asymmetric relationship of power between the employer and employee makes it very difficult for the migrant worker to pose any demands and rights as he or she is at the mercy of the employer.

In the course of the transitional agreement some Polish migrants shifted from being in full compliance with the a legal regulations to various degrees of irregularised migratory situations or the other way around in the sense of not complying fully on either the state or social level and in some cases both. At the same time Polish workers could be holding a legal status; he or she could still be engaged in irregularised migration if for example the employer was not complying with the regulations by providing work permission. In several cases the trade unions have been involved in incidents where Polish and other EEC workers have been working under seriously dangerous conditions on construction sites where the norms for safety have not been complied with.

The different strategies applied display a connection between the possibility of accessing regular spaces and gaining recognition with the desire to settle in Denmark. The long-time strategy of settlement and integration are often related to the fact that there are better possibilities for family and work life in Denmark because of the opportunity structures in the Danish labour market and of the Danish welfare state model.

6.1 Coping strategies

All of the interviewed workers have experienced being in an irregular position at one point or another during their work life in Denmark. They cope with the situation in different ways depending on their personal and biographical resources as well as the opportunities offered to them during the migration process. The various ways of reacting to the life situation as a migrant worker and not at least as an irregularised migrant may be summed up in three types of strategies:

1. Professional strategy: This strategy is applied by migrants with higher education and qualification who succeed in transferring their cultural capital into a Danish context and gain access to regular spaces of employment. This strategy reflects a relatively high degree of recognition of the migrant and her/his qualifications in relation to inclusion in the labour market.
2. Network strategy: A strategy based on using social capital in order to access employment and housing. This strategy is vulnerable because it has little inherent mode for upward social mobility, which depends on individual's ability to make use of cultural capital. Movements from irregular to regular spaces might be difficult as recognition of the migrant worker tends to be rather low.
3. Self-employment strategy: Represents an alternative path to regular spaces of the labour market when ordinary routes may be obstructed or closed. This strategy entails possibility of social mobility, but it depends on the accumulated capital of the individual migrant. Applying this strategy often reflects lack of recognition in ordinary employment and self-employment becomes a strategy in the struggle for recognition.

The strategies applied reflects both the life chances and the life planning of the individual migrant, which depends on their accumulated personal capital and other biographical resources. These strategies represent some of the variations that are found in the narratives of Polish labour migrants. This does not mean, however, that these strategies are the only ones found in the narratives of the Polish migrant workers, but rather that these are the most general types of strategies that may be broken down to several sub-types that are more specific and representative of the individual's way and means for coping with irregularised labour migration.

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