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Vladimir KMEC

## **Transnational and Local: Multiple Functions of Religious Communities of EU Migrants in Dublin**

**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores how Christian migrants of European background live their faith within their religious communities in Dublin. Immigrant congregations provide a place for the accommodation of religious and cultural packages that migrants take with them from their homelands. At the same time, immigrant congregations create opportunities for migrants to enter into new discourses and interactions with the host society. European migrants in Ireland are confronted with a two-fold reality: 1) the notion of loyalty to ethnic and cultural traditions, which urges on migrants' conscience so that their ethnic and national identity is further strengthened, and 2) an opportunity to engage in intercultural interactions, which encourages migrants' sense of belonging to the society in which they live. With the use of an ethnographic approach, this paper explores how the religious congregations of Polish, Slovak and German migrants in Dublin move from an ethnic-enclave experience to one that is engaged with the host society.

**KEYWORDS:** immigrant religious congregations, transnational ties, bonding and bridging social capital, EU migrants in Ireland.

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## *Introduction*

The post-1990s migration to Ireland has been considered a significant landmark in a country that used to be associated with emigration. Between 1991 and 2008, the share of foreign-born persons living in Ireland rose from six to almost twenty percent (Ruhs and Quinn 2009). The most significant increase in immigration came with the 2004 enlargement of the European Union (Krings, Bobek, et al. 2013). Since that time, EU nationals have dominated immigration flows. According to the last census, seventy percent of migrants to Ireland were EU citizens. After British citizens, Polish migrants are the second largest migrant group, followed by Lithuanians, Latvians, Romanians, Germans, French and Slovaks. The majority of EU migrants are young people aged between twenty and forty (Central Statistics Office 2012a). The migration of EU citizens within the EU is characterized by new mobility patterns. EU migrants can freely move across the EU and benefit from frequent and affordable transport (Krings, Bobek, et al. 2013; Krings, Moriarty, et al. 2013).

Through immigration, Ireland's religious and cultural landscape has become increasingly diverse (Cosgrove et al. 2011; Maher 2009), especially in Dublin (Gilmartin 2008). Nevertheless, as Fahey claimed, although immigration has brought a new degree of multiculturalism to Ireland, the diversity of migrants is still limited given the fact that the majority of them are white, from the EU and of a Christian cultural background (Fahey 2007, 28). Immigration has not only changed the religious landscape of Ireland; it has also been a driving force of religious revival (Macourt 2008; Passarelli 2012; Ugba 2007a, 2007b). The identification with religious groups has increased (Central Statistics Office 2012b) despite a dramatic decline of Sunday mass attendance in Irish churches (Martin 2011, 2013; Ganiel 2009) and an increase of atheists (Central Statistics Office 2012b). Immigrants have brought larger numbers and a new vibrancy to churches in Ireland (Ugba 2009).

While the numbers of churchgoers in Irish churches have declined, Christian immigrant congregations have been growing. Migrants in Ireland tend to establish their own communities and are less attracted by Irish churches. Passarelli argued that, even if Irish-majority churches are welcoming towards foreigners, they are not inclusive enough (2012). According to Ugba, many Africans who belonged to 'established churches' in their homelands join immigrant congregations because of the cold reception, racially based attitudes, dissatisfaction with social solidarity and the exclusion of migrants from decision-making in Irish-majority churches (2007b, 2009). Ganiel observed that migrants do not join Irish-majority churches because they view these churches as strongly traditional,

institutional and dominated by Irish members. The clerical sexual abuse scandals and the influence of secularisation on Irish churches have also affected migrants' preference for immigrant congregations over Irish churches (2016).

EU migrants also prefer to establish their own congregations. The Catholic Church accommodates Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Italian and French chaplaincies under the umbrella of the Irish Episcopal Council for Immigrants (Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference). Other Catholic immigrant communities, such as the Slovak one, use the premises of Irish churches. As EU citizens, EU migrants can not only maintain intensive transnational ties but also relatively easily return to their homelands. As a result, congregations of EU migrants might be expected to focus on sustaining the ethnic and national particularities of migrants. This might be expected in a country such as Ireland which is predominantly religiously and culturally homogeneous. Nevertheless, congregations of EU migrants also create spaces for their members' adaptation in their host society. They organize various intercultural, ecumenical and civic-related activities. It is important to understand how such change and involvement happens, as it provides a counter-narrative to stories that depict immigrant congregations as disengaged from their host societies.

This paper analyses the role of Dublin-based religious communities of Polish, Slovak and German migrants in creating religious places of worship as well as of social, cultural and ethnic belonging. The paper explores why Christian migrants from Europe join their immigrant religious congregations and how they make sense of their religious places. The paper observes that immigrant congregations can both nourish transnational attachments to migrants' homelands and assist the development of socio-cultural bonds to the host society. The degree to which congregations behave as ethnic enclaves or become more open towards the host society depends on migrants' contextual understandings of the functions and meanings of their religious communities. Language capabilities and social networks also play an important role in enabling individuals to involve in intercultural interaction.

### *Methods and Data*

The paper draws on an ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the German-speaking Lutheran congregation, three places of worship of the Polish Catholic chaplaincy, and the Slovak Catholic community in Dublin. These congregations were chosen as examples that represent the ethnically and

denominationally diverse picture of EU migrants in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The congregations differ in terms of demographic characteristics and the length of stay in Ireland of their members. The German Lutheran church, which dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and has around 450 members (Lutheran Church in Ireland 2013), accommodates both temporary migrants and permanent residents. Many Germans settled in the country permanently, some even became Irish citizens. Those who have moved to Ireland since the late 1990s and expats who circulate between different countries usually return to Germany after a certain period.

In contrast, the Polish and Slovak Catholic communities were established after the 2004 EU enlargement. They are predominantly attended by young adults. Although many Poles and Slovaks have lived in Ireland for almost a decade, they understand their stay as a temporary issue.<sup>2</sup> Sunday Masses in Slovak take place in the St Saviour's Church and are attended by fifty to hundred people. Polish Catholics in Dublin are part of the Polish Chaplaincy in Ireland which operates across Ireland with several chaplaincies and Polish Masses served in around 100 towns and villages. The Saint Audoen's Church in Dublin has become an autonomous home of Polish Catholics in Dublin. The Sunday Masses, which run five times a day, are attended by up to 5,000 Poles. Masses in Polish are also offered by Polish Jesuits in Saint Francis Xavier Church and by the Dominican Polish Chaplaincy in the Saint Saviours Church. The analysis of these different cases aids the understanding of the intensity of migrants' self-perceptions of their attachments to their ethno-national identities and their host society.

The research used ethnographic approaches based on interviews, participant observations, written documents (e.g. brochures of the congregations) and online source (e.g. websites of the congregations). Forty in-depth and semi-structured interviews were carried out with first-generation migrants who are members or affiliated with the studied

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<sup>1</sup> The German Lutheran congregation was selected as an example of a Protestant community representing migrants from a Western European country. In contrast, the Polish and Slovak congregations represent the cases of relatively recent communities of Eastern European migrants who belong to the Catholic faith. The cases were also selected on the basis of the author's familiarity with these communities as well as their language and culture.

<sup>2</sup> While many immigrants from Eastern Europe return to their homelands, new arrive each year, contributing to a positive net inward migration (Krings 2010; Krings, Bobek, et al. 2013; Mühlau 2012). When taking into account the constantly changing immigration and emigration of migrants from the EU12, the decrease in PPSN signals that Eastern European migrants tend to stay in Ireland temporarily (Central Statistics Office 2013; Department of Social and Family Affairs 2010). All Polish and Slovak interviewees in this research emphasized that they plan to return to their homeland.

congregations. Interviewees from the Polish and Slovak congregations were aged 18 to 36. The interviewees from the Lutheran church were aged 18 to 64. I also conducted interviews with religious and lay leaders of the communities. Respondents' names have been changed to ensure confidentiality. Information on nationality and age has been included in interview passages. The paper does not attempt to make a general claim for all immigrants for the studied groups nor all members of the congregations. The selected sample of respondents attempts to capture a diverse picture of religiously active EU migrants in terms of their age, gender, residency and migration status, and length of stay.<sup>3</sup>

Participant observations focused on regular activities such as Sunday and weekly Masses, religious services, mid-week gatherings, Bible lessons and Taizé services.<sup>4</sup> I also attended non-regular activities, such as social activities and occasional ecumenical services. Interviews and field notes from observations were analysed with the use of an interpretive coding approach (Brewer 2000, 106–117; LeCompte 2012). I followed a coding scheme of different items sorted into units and patterns of religious behaviour, which provided a basis for the development of categories. I first looked for codes, i.e. items, that occurred often and that were influential or rare. The items included particular activities, events, practices, behaviours, beliefs, interactions, statements and actions. I presented the findings in the form of thick narratives and interpretive analysis, supported by excerpts from interviews.

### *Bonding and Bridging Functions of Immigrant Religious Communities*

While migrating to new countries, migrants usually take with them their own religious and cultural packages that include various practices, behaviours and beliefs (Beyer 1994; Casanova 2001; Held et al. 1999; Warner

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<sup>3</sup> In the Lutheran congregation, I interviewed first-generation German migrants who permanently settled in Ireland, some of whom married Irish citizens and/or gained Irish citizenship, and those who stay in Dublin temporarily or moved to Ireland again. The majority of the respondents had a higher education. Two participants were students, three retired, one unemployed and other worked in the IT, financial, health and social work sectors. Two thirds of Polish respondents held a higher education degree. Five Polish respondents worked in services and sales, two in the IT sector, two in finances and one in the health sector. Very similar characteristics apply to the sample of respondents from the Slovak community.

<sup>4</sup> Taizé services follow the liturgy of the Taizé community, an ecumenical monastic order in France. A typical Taizé worship includes hymns based on simple phrases and sung repeatedly or in canon in different languages, a recitation of Bible texts, prayers and meditations. For a detailed description of the Taizé community, see Brico (1978).

and Wittner 1998). Migrants prefer establishing their own religious communities rather than joining existing native ones in their new places of settlement (Vásquez 2010). This occurs even when migrants have the opportunity to join congregations of the religious groups to which they belong (Alba et al. 2009; Lopez 2009). Immigrant congregations provide a space for the accommodation of cultural packages that migrants bring with them (Esposito et al. 2008; Woodhead et al. 2009). As agents of transnational connections to their homelands, immigrant congregations can nourish and sustain migrants' ethno-national belongings. Through the control of ethnic, cultural and national boundaries, immigrant congregations can assist migrants in sustaining their attachments to their ethnicity, nationality and culture (Basch et al. 1994; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000, 2002; Levitt 2001, 2007a; Orsi 2010).

Nevertheless, immigrant congregations can also support the development of links with the host society. Transnational ties themselves created by migrants can blur social and cultural boundaries as migrants engage with other people in culturally diverse settings (Levitt and Nyberg-Sorensen 2004). Practising religion within migrants' places of worship can help migrants in their adaptation in their new society (Handlin 1971, 3; Nagel 2010; Pries 2010). Within their places of worship, migrants can synchronize their previous religious identity with the mainstream culture of the host society, change their religiosity, and practice their religion in hybridized forms while linking the tradition of their homeland with that of their host society (Avalos 2004; Ling 2008).

As a result, immigrant congregations provide migrants with a two-fold reality. As communities that nourish ties to migrants' homelands, they promote the preservation of ethnic and cultural particularities. At the same time, the life in a new societal environment encourages migrants to embrace new religious and cultural practices. Allen claimed that immigrant religious communities are capable of generating social capital that can bond migrants to their homelands and bridge them to their new places of settlement (Allen 2010). Social capital is one of the central concepts in the study of immigrant religion as it explains how immigrant religious communities function as social networks. Portes describes social capital as "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other structures" (Portes 1998, 6). Putnam defines social capital as "connections among individuals [...] social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000, 19). Religious communities are a particularly fertile soil for generating social capital (Coleman 1994; Putnam et al. 1993; Putnam 2000).

Scholars of migration distinguish between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to intra-group solidarity, support and empowerment. In contrast, bridging social capital focuses on

building links to other groups (Wuthnow 2002). Immigrant congregations can play bonding and bridging roles in migrants' lives simultaneously. They can strengthen the ties within immigrant groups while also connecting them to the host society (Allen 2010; Hirschman 2004; Cadge and Ecklund 2006). Allen observed that religious institutions of minority religions tend to play a bonding role, whereas those affiliated with a majority religious tradition can play both bonding and bridging roles (2010). Religious communities generate bonding social capital by reaffirming ethno-national identities through familiar rituals (Levitt 2003; 2007b). Ethnic solidarity, especially the use of native language and homeland rituals, and social support can also strengthen a sense of ethno-cultural belonging (Allen 2010; Ley 2008). Religious institutions play bridging roles for migrants when they build social networks beyond immigrant communities (Warner 1997; Hirschman 2004; Stepick et al. 2009). The formation of networks beyond one's own enclave depends on the willingness and resources of individuals, the immigrant group and the host society (Allen 2010).

Social networks of immigrant religious communities have been intensively studied in the North American context. In Europe, research focused mainly on Muslims and non-Christian and non-European migrants who tend to settle in their host societies permanently. Little is known about social networks of religious communities of EU migrants who migrate within the EU. When considering the transnational nature of EU migrants, their religious congregations might be expected to nourish bonding social capital. This paper observes that religious communities of EU migrants also support the development of bridging social capital. The study takes a closer look at the social networks embedded in the religious communities of German, Polish and Slovak migrants in Dublin. I analyse to what extent the communities function as agents of transnational connections, i.e. bonding social capital, that nourish the preservation of ethnic and cultural particularities and to what extent they support the building of links to the host society and other groups.

### *Preserving Transnational Ties*

The communities of Polish, Slovak and German migrants in Dublin are transnationally connected to migrants' homelands. They maintain close relationships to their mother-structures which provide them with moral, ideological and financial support as well as religious leaders, albeit under different arrangements. The Polish Chaplaincy operates within the Irish Catholic Church. However, culturally and organisationally, it is connected to the Church in Poland. Although the Slovak community is neither a



chaplaincy nor an independent parish, but a group administered by a Slovak priest under the Irish Catholic Church, it maintains a strong link to the Church in Slovakia. Both Polish and Slovak Catholics continue to be registered in parishes in their homelands. German Lutherans are organized as an independent Irish church with an association with the Lutheran Church in Germany, which provides its Ireland-based church with support and German-speaking ministers. While the congregation has around 450 members who pay regular contributions, some temporary migrants attend the church without joining it as full members.

Not only social and cultural life but also religious activities are often initiated by lay members of these congregations. For instance, the Slovak community started as an initiative of Slovak Catholics who were attending gospel Masses in the St Francis' Xavier Church in Dublin in 2005. After Masses, they engaged in conversations, exchanged information and continuously developed friendships. They started to think about their own religious meetings in Slovak and for Slovaks. One of the facilitators described the beginnings of the group in this way:

...we did not have a priest or someone who would bring Slovaks together. There was also no site or anything where we could meet. [...] We started to meet at the Gospel Mass. Then, we came to Taizé once [St. Saviour's Dominicans Taizé in St. Catherine's chapel]. We met there Dominican brothers who asked us why we do not start our own meetings. So we did. [...] we organized our meetings on Thursdays. In 2005, we began with the first meeting – this is how Slovaks started with lessons *Lectio Divina*" (Interview with a facilitator).

Many migrants join their congregation because they look for a place that reminds them of their homeland. In their religious communities, they can use their mother tongue, practise their own religious and cultural traditions, and meet with people from their country of origin. Migrants' places of worship can provide *a sense of home* in a *strange* country (Baumann et al. 2003; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000, 2002; Warner and Wittner 1998). As already mentioned above, most EU migrants stay in Ireland temporarily. They join their immigrant congregations because it is more convenient than joining Irish-based congregations, which requires investing more time into establishing new contacts. In their congregations, they find norms, liturgy, customs, practices and behaviours that are familiar to them. Interacting in a foreign language in everyday settings can be challenging. For non-native English speakers, attending services in their own language can provide a mental and physical relief. As Zuzana (Slovak, 35) who moved to Ireland a year ago said:

In terms of the option of sharing the experience fully, because this is in the spiritual and emotional level, I see it as essential to attend a mass that is in your own language. [...] language is certainly important at the beginning. For me, it is a place of asylum with the possibility of a break. I think that, for everyone, it is a challenge [to communicate in English ...]. It is very tiring to work in that language.

The firm focus on the aspects of familiarity and home may result in an idealised image of immigrants' own congregations. As Tibor's response below demonstrates, migrants may perceive their communities less critically compared to Irish churches.

Nevertheless, migrants who attend native-based Irish churches can also maintain relationship with their immigrant congregations. They seek to sustain their cultural and national ties. While they feel comfortable in Irish congregations, they desire to interact with people of their own cultural and national background. For example, Tobias (German, 38) attended the German congregation in Dublin despite the fact that he was a member of an Irish-based church in which he felt spiritually satisfied:

I go there (to Sunday services in the German Lutheran church) once a while – usually every third month. I go there because it is a German service – because it is a service in German and with a liturgy that is sung [Lutheran liturgy]. This is simply so – quarterly specials for me – because I maybe need this tradition, although only sporadically.

The German church was for Tobias a place where he could preserve his ethno-national and cultural package. Even if he did not prefer the traditional Lutheran liturgy at Sunday services all the time, he felt strongly about his German and Lutheran background. Similarly, Tibor (Slovak, 32) attends the Slovak community because he can practise his faith in his own language:

What pulls me to go there more [to the Slovak community] is the opportunity to attend the Mass that is in Slovak language. Many times, I also go to the Irish church – where the service is in English; but, it is not my language, even if one understands it. However, if you hear the Word and sermon from a person who has personally experienced the situation similar to mine – there is a difference as it is based on the philosophy and mentality from which you are coming. This explanation, or the interpretation of the Word, is presented in the context and is linear with the thought processes that you remember from your country of origin, where you lived and experienced it. He [the Slovak priest] knows about how things

are, as he experienced what you experienced when you were a child or when you were younger.

While migrants such as Tobias and Tibor may not prefer some elements in their immigrant congregations, they can still miss other ethnic and religious aspects that Irish congregations cannot provide them. The familiarity with the religious, social and ethno-cultural norms and behaviours characteristic for their homeland are some of these aspects. Immigrant congregations can provide such migrants with a sense of home, where their identity, or certain aspects of their ethnic, national, cultural or religious belongings, is maintained.

The need to meet with people from their homeland and to speak in their mother tongue is a strong motivation also for those who settled in Ireland permanently and were not religiously practising in their homeland. Although being baptised, Simone (German, 64) was not religiously active when she lived in Germany. Upon her arrival in Dublin many years ago, she heard about the German church. She was not very keen to go there as she was not religiously practising. But, one of her German friends convinced her to go to church with her.

It was a small community, in my view, which brought me a dilemma. I did not want to find myself committed to attend church regularly every Sunday. However, I went to the church again and again [...] I wanted to have a real contact to Germans and to proper German – it is a real need.

Simone attends the Lutheran church because of the German language and culture. By attending her immigrant congregation, she wants to connect to people who speak her mother tongue and who share the culture of her homeland. The German congregation is for her a community where she can nourish her attachments to her culture, language and homeland.

The stories presented of individuals from the three groups demonstrate that migrants can join their immigrant congregations with an aim of preserving their transnational attachments to their country and culture. Their congregations provide them with a place where they can sustain their ties to their culture through social activities, conversations with people from their country of origin and the exchange of information. This often includes families with children who would not usually go to church, but attend their immigrant congregations in order to keep their children connected to their cultural roots. In such cases, religion becomes a mode for one's satisfaction of social and cultural needs. Some migrants, especially seasonal workers, do not speak English fluently. As they live and work in an environment where they mostly speak in their mother tongue

and as they plan to return to their home countries, they may not be motivated to interact with the native population. Attending their congregations is thus straightforward.

The support of ethnic and cultural particularities can thus be a straightforward result of social functions of the community that organizes its life in the mother tongue of their members. Immigrant congregations play a considerable role in the accommodation of migrants' needs. They function in many ways by offering migrants social, economic and psychological support. Many interviewees received help in their congregations while looking for job opportunities or accommodation. Migrants also get support if they experience personal difficulties. Congregations and groups within the congregations organize various sport and social activities which foster interpersonal relations among members of the congregation. Social networks play an important role in the exchange of information and fostering interpersonal communication.

Although these communities create spaces for the reproduction of familiar behaviour and practices, they operate in a new context. The new country in which immigrants live impacts on the nature of experiences and practices nourished in immigrant congregations. As Tibor's response above demonstrates, liturgy, songs, sermons and social activities can provide an opportunity for the reflection of migrants' everyday experiences in their new country. This context is different from that in which their religious experience was formed in their home country. It is an unfamiliar context that adds a novel aspect to their familiar behaviour and practice. Migrants have to adapt not only to their new country but also to the new context of their immigrant congregation as well as to the new character of the congregation which provides space for the accommodation of familiar practices. As a result, new operational settings of immigrant religious communities can provide a platform for the formation of bridging social capital.

### *Connecting to the Local Environment of the Host Society*

Religious congregations of Poles, Slovaks and Germans in Dublin are not only ethno-national communities; they also engage in intercultural and ecumenical activities. These activities have provided new opportunities for interactions that influence migrants' sense of belonging to the society and the city in which they live. The activities are organized mainly in English, seldom in languages that participants speak. They include church services, Taizé services, Bible studies, and prayers during special seasons. These activities are ecumenical as they involve participants of various Christian backgrounds. They are also intercultural as participants in these activities

are migrants and/or Irish people. Some members of the Catholic Polish and Slovak congregations and the Lutheran church parish attend ecumenical and intercultural activities organized within the premises of their churches or by other communities. Many young people, such as Lenka (Slovak, 29), are interested in attending intercultural ecumenical activities that bring together people of different nationalities while also remaining active in their own congregations:

The fact that I have here the Slovak community where we have a Slovak Catholic priest [...] - there is my place of faith. Thus, I go to the Mass among Slovaks on Sundays. Yet, I am also very happy that I have the opportunity to go to Taizé and meet there people of various backgrounds. I often do not know whether they are Catholics or Protestants [...] I am just happy that I can go there and sing songs in different languages.

Religious communities often coordinate activities such as workshops, campaigns and religious services that address societal issues of civic and public concern. For example, ecumenical midday prayers during Advent and Lent in the Lutheran community have often been dedicated to different civic problems. In Advent 2010, an ecumenical midday prayer addressed the impact of the economic crisis in Ireland. The midday prayer was coincidentally hosted on the day when the Irish government announced its budget, which included budget cuts in the wake of the economic crisis. On another occasion, the community hosted a 'Creation Tide Service' together with the Eco-Congregation Ireland and a neighbouring local congregation.<sup>5</sup> The service was followed by a workshop that discussed climate change and identified ways of improving the local environment. Intercultural activities are usually initiated and attended by individuals who are interested in particular matters of their host society. These individuals are often actively involved and volunteer in the preparation and organization of activities in their congregations. Research suggested that volunteering in a congregation increases chances for migrants' civic participation and integration (Sinha et al. 2011).

Apart from events organized by immigrant congregations, some members take part in civic-related or religious activities, such as Pro-life campaigns and the ecumenical Walk-of-Life, organized by non-migrant groups or Irish-native churches. Many members of the Polish and Slovak communities support Prof-Life campaigns despite the fact that these actions

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<sup>5</sup> Eco-Congregation Ireland is an ecumenical environmental programme that provides churches with sources for learning on environmental issues.

could be regarded as an Irish issue. Maciej (Polish, 29) who has participated in Pro-Life activities understands his involvement not only as a religious issue but as a political and moral one based on his life in Ireland:

I live here and what happens in this country influences my life. [...] Yes, I am not from this country; but this cannot stop me from expressing my opinion on matters which are of urgent importance to me and this society.

Maciej also follows many other political developments, such as abortion, which suggests that his civic engagement is driven by his religious beliefs and perceptions. Nevertheless, his involvement in such activities, although based on his religious position, leads to a development of a sense of belonging to the society in which he lives.

Many people do not indeed attend such activities. Some people attend these activities while continuing to be active in the life of their own congregations. Some attend these activities while omitting the services organized in the national language of their origin. Some have a double membership, i.e. they continue to be affiliated with their immigrant congregation while, at the same time, they belong to an Irish-native congregation. There are persons who became members of Irish-based English-speaking congregations, but attend ecumenical intercultural activities of their immigrant congregations. The disinterest of people who do not attend ecumenical and/or intercultural activities does not necessarily mean the lack of their religious participation. Instead, social and personal factors play a role in influencing migrants' interest in intercultural involvement. Many do not intend to stay in the country for a long period. As a result, they continue to orient their engagement towards activities that promote their language, traditions and culture.

Furthermore, civic participation is closely linked to migrants' personal interest in the civic and political issues of the host society. Participants who attend civic-related activities are concerned about the economic and political situation of Ireland. Their children attend Irish schools; their jobs depend on the economic situation of the country. They often took part in civic activities in their homelands. The same applies to ecumenical activities. Many people are simply not interested in attending such activities as their religious needs are sufficiently satisfied in their own congregations. Moreover, linguistic capabilities play a considerable role in affecting the participation of migrants in ecumenical intercultural activities. Participants who engage in such activities that are usually in English are mostly individuals with a good command of English. The lack of linguistic capabilities makes the interaction in intercultural activities difficult. Most importantly, individuals may not engage in such activities due to the lack

of social contacts with people who attend these activities. Individuals who attend such activities often developed strong friendships with other participants in these activities. Individuals who attend ecumenical Taizé services, the Walk-of-Life event, and Prof-Life activities have already established friendships with people either from their own or other congregations who also attend these activities. Nevertheless, it is equally important to acknowledge the role of a congregation as an agent of the religious, cultural and social life of migrants. Members may engage in the civic-related activities organized by their congregations because they want to participate in the life of their church.

In addition, immigrants are exposed to new social interactions within their immigrant congregations. Although the congregations are ethnically and religiously homogeneous, the members come from different parts of their homeland. Immigrant congregations are places shared by people of diverse social backgrounds. Whereas in Germany people from the same village or town would attend a particular church, in Dublin, people from all over the Germany are going to one Lutheran Church. This influences the way how this religious place is perceived. In their congregations in their homelands, they met familiar faces – people they knew personally. People who live in large cities socialise with people of similar characteristics in their congregations, whereas people from the countryside meet mainly people from their village in their congregation. In the church in Dublin, they are encouraged to interact with people of different social backgrounds and with various experiences.

### *Conclusion*

This article presented various images of migrants' attachments to national and ethnic identity on the one hand and to the local environment and the host society on the other hand. The article looked at different religious settings – religious communities of Polish, Slovak and German migrants in Dublin. The research analysed the communities through the lenses of an interpretive approach while exploring how immigrant communities function as places that generate social capital. These communities act both as agents of transnational attachments to migrants' homelands and as places that attempt to develop links to the host society. The paper revealed different ways of how ethno-national boundaries accommodated within religious communities become apparent and essential or weaker in the studied religious communities. The maintenance of transnational ties can be simultaneously accompanied by the strengthening of migrants' relations towards the host society. Such a combination is especially alluring in the case of EU temporary migrants who might be expected to invest their

resources in the preservation of their ethnic and cultural identities. EU migrants, however, are also involved in intercultural activities that bridge them to the society in which they live.

The analysis revealed that the length of the stay/residency status in the host country does not influence the degree of transnational ties and/or links to the host society. People, such as some Germans, who settled in Ireland permanently and are well integrated in the society can feel a need to connect to their ethno-cultural background. The German church offers them an opportunity to nourish their ethnic and cultural particularities. Also those who attend and are members of Irish-native churches – and these include temporary migrants – seek to re-connect to their native churches in order to revive their ethnic and cultural as well as ethno-culturally religious connections. People who stay in Ireland temporarily can get easily involved in intercultural and ecumenical interactions as well as religious activities that address civic issues of the country that may still be *foreign* to them. Some feel *at home* and find their role in the host society within their religious communities even a few weeks after their arrival.

Instead, the degree and the intensity of ethno-national boundaries depend on the extent of social integration of migrants and social networks, and on individual preferences and linguistic skills. The process of boundary construction or deconstruction is not homogeneous. The way how and the circumstances under which ethnic and national boundaries accommodated within religion intensify or weaken vary from case to case. The degree of the attachments to particular ethnic and national groups depends on individual persons rather than on ethnic and religious congregations as such. In the case of migrants from EU countries in Ireland, an affirmative legal and societal environment created a situation where ethnic and national boundaries are indeed important although indifferent when it comes to group identification in intercultural settings. Ethnic and national attachments do not disappear; they continue to be expressed through different forms of cultural and ethnic particularities accommodated in the religious and social life of ethnic congregations. Yet, the preservation of these particularities continues alongside an affirmative interaction with the host society and other groups.

The findings also suggest that migrants take part in their ethno-religious communities and/or intercultural and civic activities when their personal interests and motivation are concerned. Thus, one's participation in such activities is also a matter of personal choice. This choice can be influenced by religious preferences as well as social contacts. Members of the communities may know people who attend intercultural events, and have friends in other religious congregations. In addition, language skills are crucial conditions that allow migrants to participate in intercultural events, including civic-related activities, as such activities are mainly



organized in English.

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