

Return labour migration: an exploratory study of Polish migrant workers from the UK hospitality industry

Viachaslau Filimonau^{1*}, Mirosław Mika²

¹ Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University, Talbot Campus, Fern Barrow, Poole, Dorset, BH12 5BB, UK

² Department of Tourism and Health Resort Management, Institute of Geography and Spatial Management, Jagiellonian University, 30-387, Kraków, ul. Gronostajowa, 7, Poland

* Corresponding author

Email: vfilimonau@bournemouth.ac.uk

Phone: +44(0)1202965980

Abstract

Incoming labour migration represents an important research field, especially in the context of East-Central Europe, a key source region of labour migrants to the tourism and hospitality sectors of many western economies, including the UK. Surprisingly, return labour migration from the UK to this region has not been systematically examined and yet there is increasing evidence of its significance, especially in light of Brexit. The labour migrant motivations to return and their re-integration experiences back home remain poorly understood. This study adopts a qualitative method of data collection and analysis to explore return migration of the Polish workforce from the UK hospitality sector. Homesickness and educational pursuits are identified as the key drivers. The UK employment experience enhances career prospects of former migrants and yet it largely benefits non-hospitality related sectors of the domestic economy. While the re-integration experiences of former migrants are generally positive and the majority are content with the decision to return, some consider an opportunity to re-migrate.

Keywords

Return migration, migrant labour, Polish hospitality workers, UK hospitality sector, Poland

Highlights

- We explore re-migration experiences of Polish hospitality sector workers from the UK
- Homesickness and educational pursuits are the key drivers for return
- Re-integration in Poland is generally seamless, especially for short-term migrants
- The UK work experience enhances career prospects of former migrants outside hospitality
- While the majority do not regret returning, some consider re-migrating

1. Introduction

International labour migration has penetrated all economic sectors and it is estimated that circa 60% of global migration in 2015 was with work purposes (International Labour Organization, 2016). Labour migration is particularly pronounced in post-industrial, developed economies where better earning opportunities, advanced social welfare systems, established social security standards and higher quality of life attract substantial numbers of migrants (Lucas, 2008). As a result, in the UK alone, the migrant workforce holds a large share in the national labour market where its contribution to total employment has grown from 7% in 1993 to 17% in 2014 (Rienzo, 2015). Importantly, this figure reflects the number of legally registered migrant workers and is likely to increase when illegal migrant employment is added to the picture (Lucas & Mansfield, 2008).

The hospitality sector of the global tourism industry has traditionally employed a large number of labour migrants (Baum *et al.*, 2007; Duncan *et al.*, 2013; Ladkin, 2011). This is partially because it is perceived as an economic sector which is 'easy-to-enter' due to little prerequisite knowledge and skills required (Williams & Hall, 2000; 2002). This is further due to the often informal and casual nature of hospitality employment which is attractive to many (Janta *et al.*, 2011a). Next, low remuneration and unfavourable working conditions within the sector (for example, a necessity to work long and 'unsociable' hours, unpredictable and ad-hoc nature of shifts and intense level of customer contact) may deter the domestic labour from entering and remaining in hospitality employment where they get replaced with the migrant workforce (Evans *et al.*, 2005; Joppe, 2012). Lastly, the continuous growth of the hospitality sector globally brings about labour shortages that migrants can fulfil foremost (Choi *et al.*, 2000; Kim *et al.*, 2016). As a result, it is estimated that in the UK alone migrants account for 22.5-34% of hospitality employment, with some evidence pointing at a much

higher share of up to 60-70% for some business categories (for instance, certain types of tourist accommodation and catering enterprises) and geographies (for example, major metropolitan cities and remote destinations) (Baum, 2012; Janta & Ladkin, 2013; Lucas & Mansfield, 2008; Rolfe & Hudson-Sharp, 2016).

Historically, the nationals of Poland have constituted one of the major ethnic groups within the UK migrant community and a top migrant category from European countries (Rienzo & Vargas-Silva, 2016; Wadsworth *et al.*, 2016). The Polish migration has intensified after the EU enlargement in 2004 which has provided countries from 'New Europe' with free access to the EU/UK labour market (Zopiatis *et al.*, 2014). It is estimated that circa 2 million Poles have migrated since 2004 with approximately 700,000 or 35% coming to the UK (GUS, 2013 cited Karolak, 2014). Since then, Polish labour migrants have significantly contributed to employment within a number of UK industries, such as hospitality (Okolski & Salt, 2014). Given a large scale of this phenomenon, the drivers for Polish migration to the UK hospitality sector alongside the employment, adaptation and acculturation experiences of the Polish workforce in the UK have attracted significant research attention (see, for example, Janta *et al.*, 2011a; 2011b; 2012; also see Burrell, 2016 for a compilation of region- and industry-specific case studies).

Recently, there has been evidence suggesting that an increasingly larger number of Polish labour migrants in the UK are either returning to Poland or considering feasible an option to return (Cieslik, 2011; Grabowska-Lusinska, 2012; Karolak, 2014; White, 2014). The following factors have been found to be the main driving forces: reduced employment opportunities in the UK; financial savings made while employed in the UK; improved domestic economy with a subsequent rise in living standards in Poland; lower living costs in

Poland; and nostalgia for family (Eurofound, 2012; Janta *et al.*, 2011b; Machnis-Walasek & Organisciak-Krzykowska, 2014). Dedicated incentive programmes and re-integration campaigns developed by the Polish authorities for returnees (see, for instance, <http://powroty.gov.pl/>) also play a role (Whitehead, 2015). The ‘return’ considerations are likely to have further intensified in light of the June 2016 UK referendum where the majority voted for the country to exit the European Union leading to the situation known as ‘Brexit’ (Wadsworth *et al.*, 2016). The subsequent economic (for example, devaluation of the British pound and the uncertainty regarding future business opportunities in the UK) and socio-cultural (for instance, the uncertain future of free labour movement across the EU/UK and the rise of nationalism in the UK) ramifications may all represent important factors in intensifying considerations of Polish labour migrants to return (Borger, 2016).

It is always difficult for migrants to decide on whether or not they should go back. Being one of the largest migrant workforces in the UK, Poles should carefully evaluate the implications of return as the UK has not only provided them with employment, but also become a ‘second home’ where many migrants have settled and/or grown extensive social networks (Janta *et al.*, 2012; Sherwood, 2014). In Poland, former migrants will have to re-integrate into the Polish society; face employment and accommodation searches; and compete in the domestic labour market (Karolak, 2014). The difficulties associated with societal and economic re-integration upon return may represent an important counter-argument in the migrants’ decision to voluntarily leave the UK (White, 2014). Despite the political, economic and socio-cultural significance of the topic, the issue of return Polish migration from the UK has not been thoroughly examined in peer-reviewed literature which represents an essential knowledge gap.

This paper contributes to knowledge by exploring the phenomenon of return migration of Polish hospitality labour from the UK. To this end, it adopts a qualitative method of data collection and analysis to gain a better understanding of the key motivations to return and the re-integration experiences back home. The focus on the hospitality workforce is deliberate. First, the UK hospitality sector is a major employer of Polish migrants. Unfavourable working conditions within the sector may drive the migrants' decision to return. Second, migrant hospitality jobs are particularly vulnerable to the ramifications of Brexit. The 'low skills' nature of hospitality jobs makes them an unlikely candidate for inclusion into an exclusive pool of 'highly skilled' jobs that can be offered to migrants, should the freedom of labour movement in the UK be abandoned. Lastly, the UK hospitality employment experience may not necessarily benefit Polish migrants upon return. This is because the earning and promotion opportunities available in the sector of Polish hospitality are restricted which may entail difficulties in job search. In turn, this may bring about enhanced competition in the domestic labour market, should the returnees strive for employment in the sectors outside hospitality. This underlines the value and the timeliness of analysis on return migration of the Polish migrant workforce from the UK hospitality sector.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on hospitality labour migration: key themes

Although hospitality employment has for long been an established research avenue within social science disciplines, the scope of its analysis has been sporadic, while the scale of investigation limited (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011). In particular, the issue of migrant labour in hospitality has not yet received sufficient attention which explains a rather fragmented nature of research outputs on this subject matter as a result (Datta *et al.*, 2007; Rydzik *et al.*, 2012). The issue of the migrant workforce in the hospitality sector has

primarily been studied from the ‘western perspective’ where the post-2004 EU labour migration has been of primary interest (Janta & Ladkin, 2009). Recently, the geographical focus of analysis has shifted towards migrant labour in some developing and petroleum-dependent economies of East Asia and the Middle East (Duncan *et al.*, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2016). The national hospitality sectors in North America and Australia have also been examined from the viewpoint of the migrant workforce (see, for instance, Hugo, 2006) and yet there are geographies that have been completely overlooked in academic hospitality research on labour migration. Above all, these include the rapidly developing economies of South Asia and Latin America (for instance, Brazil and Malaysia) where tourism is on the rise which accelerates inflows of the migrant workforce from less developed neighbour states (Joo-Ee, 2016).

Existing studies on migrant labour in hospitality have concentrated on a set of major issues. First, a substantial chunk of research has looked into the nature of the migrant workforce and categorised it on various grounds, such as: the migrant type (for example, unskilled and (highly-)skilled workers); duration of migration period (for instance, short-term/temporary, long-term and permanent); and the level of attachment to the source and destination countries (Choi *et al.*, 2000; Rolfe & Hudson-Sharp, 2016). The major groups of labour migrants have been identified within the last classification category: temporary/seasonal, ‘liquid’ (professional nomads), transnational (long-term) and ‘settlement’ (permanent) (Engbersen *et al.*, 2013).

Second, the workforce motivations to migrate have been explored. Here, migration has been divided into voluntary and (en)forced (Ewart-James & Wilkins, 2015). A number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors have been identified and critically evaluated within voluntary

labour migration. These include the quest for better monetary rewards and higher quality of life; the desire for the development of new skills and enhancement of personal/professional networks; and the willingness to challenge the physical and mental capabilities of a migrant worker (Janta & Ladkin, 2009; Lundberg *et al.*, 2009; Parutis, 2014).

The third major stream of research on hospitality migrant labour has been concerned with the choice of host countries. Here, the rationale of migrants for selecting a specific labour market has been examined (Rolfe & Hudson-Sharp, 2016). Such determinant factors as remuneration levels; job security; and employment conditions available in a destination country alongside the role of recruitment agencies and intermediaries have been looked into (see, for example, Devine *et al.*, 2007; Findlay *et al.*, 2013; McCollum & Findlay, 2015).

Fourth, the life/work experiences of hospitality migrant workers in a destination country represent arguably the largest and most rapidly growing stream of research on hospitality migrant labour (Lugosi *et al.*, 2016). The analysis has been shaped around the positive and negative experiences and comprised detailed overviews of such issues as access to employment; managerial, domestic and fellow nation employee relationships; migrant labour motivation, job satisfaction, turnover and retention; career prospects; societal integration; build-up of social networks with fellow migrants; and homesickness (see, for instance, Alberti, 2014; Datta *et al.*, 2007; Devine *et al.*, 2007; Janta & Ladkin, 2013; Janta *et al.*, 2011a; 2011b; Rydzik *et al.*, 2012).

Lastly, the role of migrants in the domestic hospitality labour market, human resource management and business performance of hospitality ventures has been investigated (Baum, 2006). The primary themes that have emerged from research to-date include: labour

internationalisation as a driver of corporate growth; knowledge transfer and innovation in hospitality firms; the impact of migrant labour on quality management; and the effect of migrants on managerial practices adopted in hospitality enterprises (Devine *et al.*, 2007; Parutis, 2014; Rolfe & Hudson-Sharp, 2016; Williams & Shaw, 2011).

Due to the steady growth of international tourism and its hospitality sector, hospitality migrant labour represents a strategic research avenue. Increased globalisation leads to enhanced workforce mobility and the hospitality sector provides an ‘easy’ opportunity for many migrants to enter employment in a host country. The determinant role played by migrant labour in business performance of specific hospitality enterprises and the economy of a host country as a whole calls for a more holistic and consistent analysis. This is in part due to the growing evidence attributed to enhanced productivity linked to labour migrants (Joppe & Li, 2016; Li & Prescott, 2010). The ramifications of the migrant workforce for hospitality management practices should be investigated. All this underlines the importance of further research on the topic in question.

2.2. Polish hospitality labour migrants in the UK

Access to the ‘free labour movement’ market gained by Poland after 2004 has enabled migration of Poles across Europe (White, 2014). High unemployment rates and unfavourable living conditions back home have pushed the Polish workforce towards going abroad (Janta *et al.*, 2011a). The UK has become a top choice for many Polish migrants due to the language situation (i.e. English is a primary foreign language taught in Poland) and the high demand for workers in a number of domestic industries, including the sector of hospitality (Janta *et al.*, 2011b; Okolski & Salt, 2014). The Polish migrant workforce has proven to be hard-

working, dynamic and resourceful; these qualities have made them a good match for many hospitality-related jobs in the UK (Neate, 2014).

While the precise magnitude of the Polish migrant employment in the UK hospitality sector is unknown, it is considered substantial. Okolski & Salt (2014) argue that UK hospitality jobs represent the key occupations for Polish labour migrants accounting for circa 30% of the total Polish migrant employment in the UK within the 2001-2011 period. This is in line with other studies reporting similar figures (Clark & Drinkwater, 2014; Drinkwater *et al.*, 2009). Importantly, a significant number of Polish migrants employed within the UK hospitality sector have been over-qualified for hospitality jobs but undertook this employment in pursuit of language skills refinement; because of peer assistance/recommendations; and due to ‘easy-to-enter’ requirements (Karolak, 2014; Okolski & Salt, 2014). Stress at work and low remuneration levels have been referred to as the primary off-putting factors and yet these have not deterred the Polish workforce from employment within the UK hospitality sector (Janta *et al.*, 2011a).

2.3. Return (hospitality) labour migration to Poland

The phenomenon of return migration (also referred to as re-migration by some sources) is not new to academic research (see, for example, Dustmann, 1997; 2003; Dustmann & Weiss, 2007) and yet it has never been reviewed systematically from the perspective of labour migrants (International Labour Office, 2010). In fact, it was not until the period of the recent financial downturn that this topic had attracted attention (Machnis-Walasek & Organisciak-Krzykowska, 2014). The global economic recession has driven research on return migration because of the detrimental effect it has made on job opportunities and employment security in Europe (Eurofound, 2012). As a result, increasing numbers of

migrants have started returning home which was seen as a safe haven and an opportunity to start a new life in a familiar environment, close to family and friends (Bijwaard *et al.*, 2012). This has facilitated research on the topic of return labour migration and yet this research stream remains scant (International Labour Office, 2010).

There are two major categories of labour re-migration that literature differentiates. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to precisely establish people's intentions, traditional *return migration* can be defined as the return home with no plans to become a labour migrant in a short-term perspective (Engbersen *et al.*, 2013; International Labour Office, 2010). This is in contrast to *circular migration* which does not exclude further, short-term plans for re-migration (Eurofound, 2012). The global financial recession alongside the free labour movement in EU has facilitated development of circular migration in Central and Eastern Europe where migrants would temporarily come back home and wait until the negative implications of the downturn have faded away, and then return to a destination country (Engbersen *et al.*, 2013; Eurofound, 2012). Circular labour migration has been of primary interest for policy-makers due to the substantial effect it imposes on labour markets of the destination and source countries (International Labour Office, 2010).

The reasons for why the topic of labour re-migration, let alone re-migration of the Polish workforce, has never been systematically examined are manifold. Primarily, this is due to the erroneous perception of this phenomenon as being of minor magnitude while, in reality, it is considerable (International Labour Office, 2010). Indeed, according to the Central Statistical Office of Poland, circa 300,000 long-term Polish migrants have returned home within the period 2002-2011 where the number of UK returnees is equal to 73,000, or 24% (GUS, 2013 cited Karolak, 2014). Re-migration therefore accounts for approximately

15% and 10% of the Polish total and the UK-specific Polish migration, respectively (Karolak, 2014; Okolski & Salt, 2014). Importantly, these figures are likely to be conservative estimates or underestimates as a number of alternative sources have reported on the substantially higher magnitude of return migration to Poland, with some figures being as high as 2.9 million (see, for instance, Eurofound, 2012; Grabowska-Lusinska, 2012 for an overview). The variation is attributed to the diversity of definitions of return migration alongside the different periods and methods of data collection. The lack of consistent, publicly available data on the scale of re-migration to countries of East-Central Europe represents a major challenge (Eurofound, 2012). It prevents development of a pan-European database on return migrants that could be employed with research purposes (International Labour Office, 2010). All this makes labour re-migration an under-developed, emerging research field (Eurofound, 2012).

There are a number of reasons for more in-depth research on return migration of the Polish workforce from the UK. Poland has been a key supplier of labour migrants in Europe while the UK labour market has been the largest recipient of Polish migrant workforce in EU (Okolski & Salt, 2014). The Brexit outcome contributes to the uncertain future of Polish migrant labour in the UK which may determine their (voluntary or enforced) decision to return (Hope, 2016). Furthermore, the UK hospitality sector hosts a substantial number of Polish labour migrants. Hospitality employment is demanding and underpaid (Rydzik *et al.*, 2012) which may stimulate departure of the migrant workforce as the work experience gained in the UK alongside financial savings made and improved language and social skills could be applied with a better value back home.

Despite the above factors, the number of studies into the issue of re-migration of the Polish workforce in the UK is small and largely unavailable in English (see Eurofound, 2012; White, 2014 for an overview). While the geographical and occupational destinations of return migrants in Poland have been looked into, there is limited understanding of the motivations to re-migrate alongside the economic and societal re-integration experiences of returnees at home. Furthermore, there is no evidence of research on return migration of the Polish labour from the UK hospitality sector. This is an important drawback given this is the largest employer of the Polish migrant workforce in the UK. This is where the contribution of this study rests. It aims to better understand the motivations of Polish migrants from the UK hospitality sector to go back home and strives to explore their return experiences.

3. Research design

The scant and inconclusive nature of research on re-migration of the Polish hospitality workforce from the UK dictated employment of a qualitative method for primary data collection and analysis. Anticipated difficulties in accessing and recruiting the number of willing participants which would be sufficient for a meaningful quantitative study represented another determinant in the selection of a qualitative technique. Qualitative method was deemed appropriate also because it facilitates an in-depth analysis of under-explored, complex social phenomena with their subsequent conceptualisation (Silverman, 2000).

To collect primary data, face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews were employed. These were preferred to focus groups as recruitment took place in various localities across Poland while the project was unable to cover transportation and accommodation costs for willing focus groups participants. The initial interview schedule was developed based on the key themes emerged from literature review. The schedule was

regularly updated and supplemented with further themes identified during the interviewing process. The key themes explored comprised: motivations to migrate to the UK and the reasons for entering the UK hospitality employment; hospitality employment experiences in the UK; motivations for return to Poland; experiences upon return; future outlook.

Interviews took place at various times and in different locations in Poland within the period of February-April 2016. Snowball sampling was applied to facilitate participant recruitment. Recruitment took place offline, through personal and professional contacts of the study's investigators, but also online, on popular social media platforms in Poland. Whenever possible, a balance was striven for in recruitment to ensure the migrants with various hospitality employment experiences in terms of its background (i.e. tourist accommodation and catering) and length (i.e. short- and long-term) were represented in the sample.

Two main criteria were applied when selecting willing participants. First, only those return migrants were considered for interviews who had originally intended to stay in the UK for at least one year. This requirement was applied to exclude seasonal migrants from analysis as their motivations to return would be different from those of long-term migrants. Second, only those migrants who were employed full-time in the UK hospitality sector and did not claim social security benefits while in the UK were chosen. This criterion was applied to exclude those who went to the UK with a primary purpose of taking advantage of its advanced social security policies, rather than for employment.

In total, 25 participants were recruited and interviewed (Table 1). Data analysis was ongoing and interviewing was stopped after the material collected generated no new concepts/themes. The length of interviews varied between 25 and 90 minutes; they were

digitally recorded and transcribed. Prior to each interview, participants were offered a choice of interview language (English or Polish) and all preferred to be interviewed in Polish. Subsequently, professional English translation of interview transcripts was made. No incentives were offered for participation.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The material collected was coded and organised into themes compiled from literature and initial interview findings (Braun & Clark, 2006). Tables 2-5 and Figures 1-3 present the coding structure developed. To support the concepts emerged through thematic analysis verbatim quotations were used when writing-up.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Motivation to become a labour migrant in the UK hospitality sector

The two equally important, extrinsic and intrinsic factors affected participants' decision to become labour migrants in the UK: the desire to earn money and to experience independent life in a new, away-from-home environment. The intention to improve English was also important, and yet not determinant (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Economic motivation has for long been a key driver of labour migration and the Polish workforce is no exception (Cieslik, 2011; Cook *et al.*, 2011; Janta *et al.*, 2011b). The quest for self-development and the desire to try living independently is typical for highly mobile,

young demographics that constitute a major category of labour migrants in the UK (Rienzo & Vargas-Silva, 2016):

'The reasons for the departure to England were curiosity, desire to meet other people, see new places, live independent life, learn language and gain earnings. These reasons are probably the same for everyone. But it seems to me that everyone who went there thought about money first' (Mariusz)

'Money was the main reason [to migrate], but also language and the different experience. I also wanted to travel – I knew it would be harder with a Polish salary. That's why I was tempted to go, and I had friends there, so it was easy - just to buy a ticket and go' (Barbara)

Above, Barbara pinpoints something which has already been highlighted in literature (Janta *et al.*, 2012), namely, the important role of pre-existing Polish social networks/connections in her decision to migrate and seek for employment in the UK. Indeed, more than three quarters of participants benefited from the assistance of friends and relatives already based in the country. This assistance was provided at different stages of the migration and societal integration process and varied from the encouragement to go to the UK and temporary accommodation provision upon arrival, to the substantial help in job searches:

'My friend, who was already in the UK, persuaded me to go there. I was staying with him when I came. He also helped me find a job. I wanted to stay there just for summer holidays, but easy money and high tips in the hospitality sector were the reasons why I stayed there for six years' (Antoni)

Above, Antoni reveals one of the main reasons for choosing the UK hospitality sector for labour migration (Table 2). Indeed, ‘easy money’, or, to be more exact, ‘easy-to-enter’ employment opportunities are a typical feature of the sector which is particularly attractive to labour migrants with limited work experience and insufficient English proficiency:

‘[employment in hospitality] It’s the fastest job to find for foreigners - without experience, any documents, without special education. I didn’t have any great work experience and I didn’t feel strong enough in the language to look for some other, more ambitious jobs. I was positively shocked to know that I could get the chance to work in the kitchen, without any experience. In Poland – it’d seem impossible or strange’ (Monika)

[Insert Table 2 here]

Some participants selected hospitality jobs because of previous subject-related study or work experience back in Poland while the UK market was seen as an excellent avenue to apply the knowledge and skills gained given better monetary rewards it offers. Lastly, for some participants the choice was purely opportunistic and hospitality jobs were taken due to help received from members of the pre-existing social networks in the UK (Janta & Ladkin, 2009). Again, this underlines the ‘easy-to-enter’ character of hospitality employment where enterprises are constantly on the lookout for hardworking and reliable staff and often accept new employees based on ‘word-of-mouth’ recommendations.

4.2. The UK (hospitality employment) experience

The UK living experience was reported as being generally positive and all participants appreciated the higher living standards in the UK compared to Poland. The primary disadvantage was seen in substantial accommodation costs and yet these were offset by greater earning potential, subject to hard work (Janta *et al.*, 2011b). A number of participants reported cases of ethnic discrimination in day-to-day life. Although most participants agreed that these cases were largely occasional, they appear to have played an important role in motivating some Poles to return (see section 4.3):

'...only our English neighbours were not very accommodating. They sent out a clear signal that they didn't want us and were always asking why we came there. They also asked when we'd want to go back, because we took their money and jobs. Of course, it depends. It's just a half of them. The other half were nice and friendly, but there're those who showed that they didn't like us. Some Poles are treated there as Ukrainians in Poland' (Dariusz)

In contrast, when discussing the hospitality employment experience, a diversity of views was recorded. While a quarter of participants, including Joanna and Agnieszka below, described their work experience in the UK as being rewarding in many aspects, the majority found it challenging (Figure 2):

'I've lived for two and a half years in the UK in total and worked in three different hotels at the reception. At the beginning it was not easy in many ways: different country, different language and the job which was new to me. With time, it became better, especially after I changed hotels. The atmosphere was very friendly. People were very open and sociable, that's what I miss in Poland. The

organization of work at the reception and quality of service outweigh those in Poland. Wages are higher. Generally, I enjoyed living and working in this multicultural environment' (Joanna)

'It's quite different to be a worker in England. Here, everyone's equal. There's no difference if someone is black or white, if he speaks English better or worse. Our start was difficult when it comes to knowledge of English, but they understood us. It seems to me that they're friendlier, no one treated anybody consequentially. That's what I liked. There's this openness, optimism. People don't complain there. In Poland, unfortunately, it hasn't disappeared and probably won't disappear' (Agnieczka)

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Language competency was a key challenge for many followed by the difficulties in coping with hard work/work stress and establishing productive relationships with managers, fellow employees and customers:

'Language was a problem as I didn't often understand what people were saying. For example, they'd ask three times for ketchup, and you'd bring them orange juice' (Iga)

'I was there [hotel] a maid at first, so it was quite exhausting for me. I remember the first day: after the work, I simply laid down on the rug in the lobby for half an hour, because I was unconscious' (Alexandra)

'Hospitality work is physically and mentally hard. The early hours of waking up and late hours of homecoming. Resentment and contempt for Poles, exploitation and treatment as inferior by managers and fellow workers. With the resentment to Poles I came across while working in hospitality. On the streets or in other work I didn't experience that. Sure, it all depends on people. It's true though that the Poles work hard and even better than the others. They're more productive, faster. This bad attitude to us may be due to jealousies that we work better' (Natalia)

The role of these factors in shaping the migrant labour experiences has been studied and documented. Janta *et al.* (2012) highlight the challenges and opportunities of hospitality employment in acquisition and enhancement of language skills for Polish migrants. Andriessen *et al.* (2012) discuss ethnic discrimination of the migrant workforce and managerial biases towards foreign employees. Work-related stress and physical exhaustion among Polish migrants employed in 'low skills' jobs represent an emerging research stream (Weishaar, 2008). Interestingly, many Polish labour migrants consider temporary home returns as a means to cope with employment-imposed stress and improve mental well-being (Osipovic, 2013).

4.3. Motivation to return

All participants but one stated their return decision was voluntary and well-thought through. The exception was a migrant worker who had to come back due to health reasons. Among voluntary returnees, a variety of factors motivated Polish migrant labour in the UK hospitality sector to return (Table 3). Here, homesickness represented a major driver to re-

migrate (Eurofound, 2012; Karolak, 2014). It appeared to be an age-independent variable which primarily affected single migrants who came to the UK with the intention to live independently, but soon realised the challenges of being disconnected from social ties back in Poland. The variable may be gender-dependent as the majority of participants who stated homesickness/loneliness as a driver to re-migrate were young, single females.

'I spent one Christmas there and it was enough for me. I decided I didn't want to spend another Christmas without family. Because it was terribly difficult. I remember sitting with a phone and crying, because I could not be at home. And I knew that I wouldn't have another holiday leave, so I decided that this was the moment when I had to go back permanently. I decided it was time to go home. I was there all alone. There're friends, but no family, no relatives, no Christmas, and it's so difficult. Because I was always brought up with such strong family ties' (Justyna, migrated at the age of 22, returned after 2 years)

'I didn't feel good in the UK. I generally felt very lonely there; I did not meet any single person who I could call my friend. So I didn't feel well there. It was the only reason that I came back to Poland. I remember the first five months, at the beginning it was euphoria - it was great, great, it was a new world in the UK. But then I began to feel alone. I remember once I was sick, quite hard and did not get any help, no one even was there to give me the medicine, I was just terribly lonely there' (Liwia, migrated at the age of 24, returned after 2 years)

[Insert Table 3 here]

In contrast to homesickness, educational pursuits expressed by a significant number of participants stand out as being an unconventional determinant for labour migrants to return which has not been identified in literature previously. Importantly, it is only applicable to the younger demographics of migrant workers who consider the UK hospitality employment as an opportunity to earn money with its subsequent investment in further education back home. The high cost of the British University education is a major off-putting factor for young Poles to spend the money earned in the UK. It is seen as better value to utilise the earnings for self-support while studying for a University degree in Poland where education is generally free. The University degree is considered as a vehicle to enhance career prospects and get employment in the sectors that offer better remuneration and more favourable work experience (Karolak, 2014):

'I went home because I decided that I couldn't afford studying in the UK. Plus I earned enough money to spend on my education in Poland. I just wanted to learn more, get a higher education degree with better job prospects and also be closer to my family. It felt that it's my time to go back' (Antoni)

The role of other motivations to return was less pronounced (Table 3). Among these, the feeling of being unwelcomed and unwanted in the UK came out as an important consideration which may intensify in light of Brexit given the increased number of xenophobic incidents directed at Polish migrants across the UK lately (O'Connor, 2016):

'Maybe I'm a too sensitive person, but I saw that they, the British I mean, they don't like us. As if we're stealing their jobs, we're taking their benefits. As if all the evil in the UK it was us - the Poles. I just had this impression. Although I

met some really fantastic English people and have contact with them until now. It was very unpleasant and very unfair. And it was also part of the reason that I left and went to Poland' (Pawel)

Looking after the children's future was put forward as another important driver of re-migration. While the higher living standards in the UK may suggest better opportunities to live and work in this country, some labour migrants were concerned about their children's future if they remained. This is primarily due to the substantial cost of childcare and dissatisfactory work-family life balance in the UK which imposes a detrimental effect on family ties and perceived quality of life among migrants (Dyer *et al.*, 2011). Importantly, this factor played a role in return considerations only after the quest for monetary rewards had been fulfilled and finances were no longer seen as an issue:

'We decided to come back because of children. In the UK we missed our family very much. In general, I think that the help of grandparents in raising children is very important. Nannies in the UK are too expensive. Plus they cannot replace family's love. Money does not bring happiness, but it's hard without it. Luckily, we've made savings in the UK and we bought an apartment in Poland, so it was nothing to worry about. Without people who're close to you one does not live normally. Time will show us whether it was a good decision' (Agnieczka)

4.4. Experiences upon return

The majority of participants felt positive about being back. Re-establishment of ties with family and friends, access to free/cheap childcare and education, and life in a familiar environment were seen as the key pluses of re-migration. Concurrently, about one third of

participants were undecided as, while acknowledging the above benefits of return, they regretted better remuneration opportunities and associated affordability of the British life/work style (Table 4). Mariusz was the only one who was unhappy about coming back. Migrant hospitality employment in the UK did not seem to have expanded his career opportunities as he faced substantial challenges in terms of job search upon his return to Poland and ended up working in the construction sector. Interestingly, only one quarter of participants remained within the hospitality sector when they returned to Poland (Table 1). The combination of low income and hard work which is inadequate to the remuneration levels offered was referred to as a key off-putting factor for pursuing a hospitality career:

'I did not stay in hospitality because in Poland it's not profitable. Well, unfortunately in Poland, especially in Rzeszów, if you work in the hotel industry, and even if you work as a hotel manager, it's a lot of hard work, there are too many very ungrateful customers, and very little money for it. That's why I said myself that in Poland it's not profitable and did not stay' (Alexandra)

[Insert Table 4 here]

Concurrently, the migrant hospitality employment in the UK was perceived beneficial to career prospects of many returnees when searching jobs in other economic sectors. Improved English proficiency (including the ability to communicate in business English); enhanced professional and personal qualities; and work experience overseas were all valued by prospective employers which had enabled the majority of former labour migrants to successfully re-integrate into the domestic labour market (Table 5). The new experience and knowledge gained during the time of living in the UK were acknowledged as valuable

attributes of labour migration that had enhanced career prospects and improved social skills of many returnees back home:

'Definitely my English has helped me in this job I got in Poland, because I am no longer stressed to talk in English. My company in Poland is led by the British. They trained us here in Kraków, so I felt very confident, because I even understood exactly their accent' (Wojciech)

'British hospitality employment gave me a lot. I learnt good team work. Because if people don't cooperate in the bar, nothing comes out. Stress – also working under stress. And contact with troublesome customers. Hospitality jobs is something that I think everybody should do at least once in their life. Because only then you notice how it's on the other side, and then as you go somewhere, you tend to be nicer, because everyone can have a bad day' (Piotr)

[Insert Table 5 here]

This implies significant value of migrant employment for the domestic labour market in Poland. The experience gained while working overseas, even in occupations that are perceived as low-skilled, can be effectively utilised at home. This rationalises the importance of dedicated campaigns developed by Polish authorities in an attempt to bring labour migrants back (Grabowska-Lusinska, 2012). While re-migration suggests tightened competition for under-skilled jobs, in reality, this issue does not persist because returnees are likely to make use of their migrant employment experience in other sectors of the domestic economy. Lastly, the UK employment experience may have a positive effect on the

entrepreneurship spirit of Polish migrants as there was a small share of participants who established their own business upon return, or were thinking about self-employment opportunities (Table 1).

In terms of societal re-integration, three quarters of participants did not experience any issues upon return. Re-migration was particularly non-problematic for those who was absent for a shorter period of time, such as less than one year. Certain issues of the socio-economic character were noted as these underline the substantial differences between the British and Polish ways of life. These came out as being especially pronounced for those migrants who opted to stay in the UK longer and/or those who lived in a large, metropolitan city in the UK but returned to a small, remote locality in Poland:

'Diversity, this is what I was missing upon return. There're a lot of people from different countries in the UK. I miss the multiculturalism because it causes that people are more open to each other. But maybe it's also related to the fact that the British are more open towards other people. It's easier to start a conversation with them. If you enter the store, they start the conversation, for example, someone asks for something. In Poland people are so closed. I remember that when I came back to Poland and I walked into the store with a smile, a saleswoman looked at me in a strange way. We're still a bit closed. I think it's connected to the past and communism. We have always been a little bit distrustful. Maybe people in larger cities as Kraków, where there are lots of tourists and visitors are more open, because they have to contact with the others. However, in smaller towns, everyone knows their environment, stays in their house, knows their neighbours and don't need anything else' (Janina)

'It was hard at times because in my village there're so many elderly people, the young have left the place. There isn't even any place to go in the evening. Also, there was "Starbucks", here coffee costs 20zł [circa £4] and, compared to our income, it's very expensive. The value of money is different. In England, even if someone earns less, he can go out for a coffee and cake and spend differently the afternoon. In Poland, people do not spend their time outside, I found it strikingly different' (Agnieczka)

4.5. Future outlook

Having discussed their experiences overseas and upon return, the participants were asked to elaborate on an opportunity to come back to the UK. The outcome demonstrated a substantial split in outlooks. About half of the participants admitted they would like to return and yet, within this category, it was a majority's opinion that they would only go back to the UK if a suitable job opportunity arose. A job which would be better paid and less stressful than the hospitality ones was generally considered 'suitable' in this context. About one third discounted an option to return entirely and circa one quarter would only come to the UK again with tourism and leisure purposes (Figure 3).

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Cultural differences between the two countries were highlighted as one of the key reasons to stay in Poland. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation played a role. Given there are large hospitality employment opportunities in remote and rural UK localities (Piso, 2016), the lack of cultural and entertainment options in these areas may contribute negatively to the

subjective well-being and quality of life of some Polish migrants. As Joanna suggests (Figure 3), this is because many of them are represented by educated people who left Poland in an attempt to secure better remuneration abroad. According to psychology research (Maslow, 1954), educated people are likely to have (and strive to satisfy) higher motivations and needs, such as the need for spiritual development and self-realisation. When translated into the context of labour migration, this suggests that educated Polish migrants residing in small and remote UK localities may therefore be more inclined to return as they see more opportunities to 'find themselves' at home. This implies that the return campaigns run by the Polish authorities should specifically target this category of labour migrants and facilitate return considerations by emphasising better employment and self-realisation prospects in Poland.

Among those who expressed a desire to return to the UK (Figure 3), extrinsic motivations prevailed. It was a dominant view that the discrepancy in living standards between the UK and Poland and the difference in remuneration levels represented the primary drivers for return. To keep these returnees, it is necessary for Polish policy-makers to develop domestic economy to the UK level and create favourable conditions in the national labour market in which the former migrants would perceive themselves as valuable members. This is a difficult, if not impossible, task to fulfil in a short-term perspective which suggests that for many Polish returnees re-migration will be circular.

5. Conclusions

Return labour migration is an important research field which has never been examined in the context of tourism and hospitality in Western Europe. This is alarming given that this sector has traditionally relied on the migrant workforce in an attempt to fulfil the large, and yet growing, demand. Within this research field, the Polish migrant workforce from the UK

hospitality sector represents a particularly interesting study object. This is because of the crucial role it plays in the UK economy and its labour market. This is further due to the implications of Brexit that can contribute substantially to the considerations of Polish labour migrants to return.

This study examined re-migration experiences of Polish workers from the UK hospitality sector. It found homesickness and more affordable educational pursuits in Poland to be the determinants of return. The re-integration process was generally smooth and yet better remuneration prospects of the UK employment alongside a yet significant discrepancy in living standards between the UK and Poland would encourage some returnees to go back. This suggests that, at present, a substantial share of Polish re-migration has a circular nature and it is an important, but challenging, task for policy-makers in Poland to retain these temporary returnees given the value they bring to the domestic economy. Brexit may affect the Polish migrant attitudes to re-migration because of the envisaged negative impact on the free labour movement market in Europe. As a result of Brexit, the flows of Polish labour migrants may face geographical re-distribution towards those free-to-access markets where English language is broadly spoken (for example, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland) while living standards are higher than in Poland.

This study highlights a set of policy-making and research recommendations. In policy-making terms, the Brexit ramifications and the on-going 'return' campaigns of the Polish government may indeed affect many of those employed in the UK hospitality sector and encourage them to re-migrate. However, given that hospitality employment facilitates development of transferable skills among its workforce, the 'return' campaigns should better emphasise the multiple opportunities for the application of the skills gained in the UK in the

sectors of the Polish economy that have better prestige and higher remuneration levels than hospitality. The 'return' campaigns should better capitalise upon the Brexit effect as the uncertainty attached to the future of Polish labour migrants in the UK may intensify their considerations to re-migrate, especially among those who have already thought about the return but was reluctant to make a finite decision. This provides scope for the 'return' campaigns to intervene. Re-migration of young Polish labour migrants from the UK can be incentivised by attractive educational offers back home. These can take the form of, for instance, interest-free study loans to cover living costs and placement opportunities abroad.

In research terms, this study has revealed a number of important and interesting concepts that call for more in-depth investigation. The feasibility of these concepts should be validated via a quantitative survey of former Polish migrants from the UK hospitality sector. This will enable better generalisability and representativeness of results. The motivations of Polish migrants from other sectors of the UK economy where their contribution is substantial (for example, construction and social care) to return should also be examined to enable development of more effective 'return' campaigns. Given the envisaged growth of re-migration from the UK, an analysis should be conducted on the prospective impact of the 'return' workforce on the labour markets in Poland and the UK. In the Polish context, this will enable development of strategies aimed at better utilisation of the former migrants' knowledge and skills gained while in the UK employment. Lastly, a study of the re-migration experiences among the Polish migrant workforce from other European countries where it plays a significant role (for instance, Germany and Sweden) would be useful. This is to enable cross-geographical and cross-sectoral comparison to establish market-specific re-migration patterns.

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