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Inclusion through trade unions' community organising and migrant workers' activism: the case of Polish migrants in the UK

Theme 2. Inclusion and Exclusion

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Abstract

The present working paper examines the response of UK trade unions to migration in the context of EU-enlargement. More specifically the paper scrutinises the challenges faced by a specific large UK trade union and its inclusion strategies of community organising to foster migrant workers' activism amongst Polish migrants. In order to investigate the overall response of the researched union to this migrant group, findings from semi-structured interviews are analysed in the light of existing knowledge of the challenges faced by UK trade unions in organising Polish migrant workers.

Acknowledgements

1.   Introduction

Following the implementation of the organising model by UK trade unions – organising and building up strength in the workplace (Waddington and Kerr 2009) – the model of community organising influenced trade unions in the UK to look for broader cooperation with social movements, community organisations, and similar groupings in the face of declining union membership and political and economic weakness. This way of organising goes beyond class relationships as a motivator for social action and collectivisation and looks for new coalitions showing the intersections of workers' lived experiences and identities (Holgate 2013). In relation to migrant communities this approach is of special interest to trade unions, because of the potential to reach migrant workers, who are often difficult to locate and access. While community organising can be a means of reaching and informing Polish migrants in the UK, another goal and challenge is to turn them from members into activists, such as stewards or equality representatives, who themselves could promote better working conditions and representation for their Polish colleagues.

This working paper[1] focuses on the challenges facing trade unions when they seek to organise Polish migrants in the UK. The guiding research questions address what approach a specific UK trade union mainly organising in public services takes in face of post-accession migration of Polish workers, how the strategies of community organising and migrant workers' activism are implemented and what successes and limitations these meet. The paper, first, provides a short

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[1] My Early Stage Researcher position within the Marie Curie Initial Training Network 'ChangingEmployment' entailed a secondment between September and November 2013 with the trade union in question and its strategic organising unit and provided me with an insight into its activities. This trade union is currently working with different migrant groups including Polish workers and has had a number of migrant workers projects. This placement and the union's focus on migrant workers have enabled me to investigate their experiences and strategies as a preliminary research for my upcoming PhD research project on Polish migrants' experiences and constitutes the basis for this paper. I was able to attend two meetings of migrant activists' groups before the placement period, one of Polish members in April 2013 and one of Filipino members in June 2013 and the former, along with a number of semi-structured interviews provides the data for this paper.

insight into the background of the research topic on EU-enlargement and Polish post-accession migration to the UK. This is followed by a section on existing knowledge from literature on trade unions and migration. Therefore, it firstly looks into responses to migration by trade unions in general, followed by an account of findings on the specific case of Polish post-accession migration to the UK and the attitudes of Polish workers to UK trade unions. The literature review is concluded with earlier findings on the specific trade union analysed in the present working paper and its migrant workers strategy. Following this elaboration I outline the methods of data collection and describe the case of the researched union. The analysis focuses on the strategies of community organising and migrant workers' activism, whose successes and limitations are scrutinised with the support of semi-structured interviews.

2.   Background: EU-enlargement and Polish post-accession migration to the UK

Trade unions face the challenges of changing employment throughout Europe against the background of a general downward trend in union membership and the challenges emerging from the economic crisis (McKay 2008, 3; Holgate 2013). While migrant workers have been on the radar of Western trade unions for a long time (Castles and Kosack 1973), the enlargement of the EU in 2004 posed new challenges. The European principle of free movement guarantees European citizens the right to move within the European Union and take up employment, while the enlargement processes instituted transitional arrangements, which some Member States adopted (Galgóczi *et al.* 2009). In face of the differences in income levels between the EU-15 and the new Central and Eastern European accession countries there were widespread concerns among trade unions in some 'old' EU-15 about the potential level of labour migration from these countries; however trade unions in the UK were calling for free movement and labour market access (Krings 2009; Galgóczi *et al.* 2009).

Following these debates the EU-15 implemented different transitional systems of opening up their labour markets to citizens of the new member states (Drinkwater *et al.* 2006). The different systems had various consequences for the concerned states, which did not always follow the country's intended strategy and the restrictions applied in some countries did not prevent immigration from the new member states (Kahanec and Zimmermann 2009). The transitional measures of the UK entailed that while citizens of Malta and Cyprus were granted full free movement rights as well as the right to work, citizens from the A8 countries were required to register with the Worker Registration Scheme and had restricted access to welfare benefits (Düvell and Garapich 2011). On the one hand, this has implemented a new form of regularisation of a previously mainly irregular movement, with many Polish migrants already working in the UK being amongst the first to register after enlargement. On the other hand, the implemented tool for monitoring this migration, the Worker Registration Scheme, had limited success in keeping track of migrants because of the required fees and the perception of the process as being too bureaucratic and not worthwhile for temporary migration (Düvell and Garapich 2011, 6). Although mobile Central and Eastern Europeans now have greater freedom of movement and the UK labour market de facto opened up for citizens of the new member states, their work is often characterised by poor working conditions (Ciupijus 2011, 547; Anderson *et al.* 2006).

Following EU enlargement in 2004 the numbers of migrant workers increased substantially in the UK (Anderson *et al.* 2007, 3). After the transition period from state socialism of 1989/1990 migration from Poland became even more mobile, commuting and flexible and since Poland joined the European Union in 2004, the number of Polish migrants in the UK has risen significantly, exceeding all prior predictions (Galgóczi *et al.* 2009). Although there has been a certain volume of return migrants detected since the economic crisis from 2007 onwards, the

Polish population is so substantial, that Polish advanced to be the second most spoken language in England (Booth 2013). Poland is in 2011 estimated to be the top country of citizenship of foreign citizens with 15.2 per cent and the second country of birth for foreign-born with 8.5 per cent (Rienzo and Vargas-Silva 2012).

3.   Existing knowledge: trade unions' responses to migration

The literature on trade unions and migration has identified three problems that trade unions face when dealing with migrant workers: trade unions have to decide whether to object to migration on the ground of protecting members; argue for quotas; or cooperate with the state and employers to try to influence policies (Penninx and Roosblad 2000). Another question is that of inclusion or exclusion within trade union structures and subsequently the form of integration by equal or special treatment (Penninx and Roosblad 2000).

Penninx and Roosblad (2000) describe four factors which can shape trade unions' responses towards migration. One is the macro-economic situation at the time, which in relation to post-accession Polish migrants was certainly influential with low unemployment rates and a labour shortage in the UK around 2004 (Penninx and Roosblad 2000). When comparing this to other EU member states' union responses it becomes apparent that the economic and labour market situation alone are not sufficient to explain union responses (Krings 2009, 60).

Another factor identified by the literature is the social and institutional position of trade unions and the trade union movement's power and structure (Penninx and Roosblad 2000). Following the weakening of the trade union movement under Margaret Thatcher, the necessity of inclusive strategies for the future of trade unionism in the face of a decline in membership and power was pointed out (Wrench 2004). Losses in union density and bargaining power led the TUC and individual unions to develop models of organising unionism

in order to reach a broader spectrum of people such as migrants (Heery *et al.* 2000). The labour relations indicators in Table 1 highlight this loss in trade union density over time from 51 per cent in 1980 to 26 per cent in 2013 as well as the loss in collective bargaining coverage from 70 per cent in 1980 to a mere 29 per cent in 2013 (Krings 2009, 61; ETUI 2013). The power of unions depends more on their strength in organising after losing in collective bargaining coverage (Frege and Kelly 2003).

Table 1: Labour relations indicators

	Trade union density (%)		Collective bargaining coverage (%)	
	1980	2013	1980	2013
United Kingdom	51	26	70	29

Source: Krings 2009, 61; ETUI 2013.

The other factors referred to in the literature, which may account for trade union responses to migration, are the broader social context, national ideologies and broader perception of immigration in society as well as characteristics of migrants (Penninx and Roosblad 2000). However, trade unions are not solely influenced by external variables and the unions' own structures and framing processes are crucial for understanding their acts upon changes (Frege and Kelly 2003).

UK trade unions from the early stages of the enlargement process were in favour of opening up the labour market on the one hand because of labour shortages and low unemployment, and on the other hand because of long established anti-discrimination policies (Fitzgerald 2012). Although nobody expected the scale of immigration that occurred, the trade unions' main concerns appear to be to enforce established labour standards and oppose the exploitation and discrimination of migrant workers (Galgóczi *et al.* 2009). While these measures were mainly set up for new immigrants, the enlargement provided a de facto

amnesty (Drinkwater *et al.* 2006, 5) as well as the freedom of change of employer and sector for workers from Central and Eastern European countries who were working in the UK prior to enlargement (Anderson *et al.* 2006).

A specific form of engaging with migrant workers in the UK is based on the community organising approach (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010). Acknowledging the need for new organisational forms to address issues of migrant workers often concentrated at the lower end of the labour market, these campaigns go beyond the workplace and class politics and include diverse actors such as trade unions and community organisations (Wills 2008). The idea that cooperation between unions and community-based organisations can succeed in fighting injustices faced by migrant workers is derived from the United States experience of the Industrial Area Foundation (IAF). This was developed by Saul Alinsky in the 1930s and has achieved successes as a community organising network (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010; Holgate 2013).

3.1   Challenges in organising Polish migrant workers in the UK

There has been some research undertaken on trade unions and Polish workers in the UK. Fitzgerald and Hardy (2010) identify innovative recruitment and organisation activities focusing on inclusion as well as new local, regional, national and international linkages as the response strategies of trade unions to Polish workers after 2004. Their findings on inclusion are especially interesting, when they point to the willingness of trade unions to react creatively to the challenges posed by the changes in the labour market and migration (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010). As a senior research officer of a trade union had told them:

'we strongly believe that you can't approach this in traditional trade union ways; we are going to have to be more imaginative and think 'out of the box'.' (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010, 132).

In relation to trade union decisions to include or exclude migrant workers, Fitzgerald and Hardy (2010) refer to crucial aspects of the unions' discourse. In this approach current challenges were seen as linked to previous migrations and it was highlighted that the trade union movement has developed a strong support for diversity and for the importance of anti-racism (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010). However, while the general national approach to migrant workers was characterized by the promotion of inclusion, there are certain differences in the level of equal versus special treatment (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010; Wrench 2004). The TUC for example started out with a special treatment approach by implementing a separate migrant workers strategy, which later on was turned into an equal treatment policy, where migrant workers were conceptualised in the broader vulnerable workers strategy (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010). Different challenges faced by unions were identified. Locating and recruiting migrant workers represented the first challenge often complicated by migrants being employed in non-unionised workplaces or by agencies. The next challenge is to formulate attractive strategies for migrant workers to join. Activating passive members and achieving sustainability in their membership and activism can be difficult. Finally, the last challenge is the need to develop policies that can meet the specific needs of migrant workers (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010).

In regards to community-based approaches, there were numerous new networks with Polish communities established through Parishes, churches, Polish clubs and other NGOs (Fitzgerald 2012). These multi-agency activities were the consequence of hostile employers and frightened Polish workers and of issues outside of the workplace that Polish workers were experiencing and needed support with such as accommodation, health care, and legal support (Fitzgerald 2012). Fitzgerald (2012, 3) characterises some of these initiatives as 'marriages of convenience' that unions had to engage with to be able to address the issues Polish workers were experiencing, which unions generally did not deal with. While these activities have the

potential of reaching a broader set of people, there have been problems resulting from these networks such as services being expected and which organisation acquires membership in the end (Fitzgerald 2012). Holgate (2013) describes the difficulties of labour and community organisations' cooperation with ideological and non-ideological differences in conceptualising power, politics, democracy and self-organisation. Despite these difficulties for example the living wage campaign of London Citizens included a wide range of actors with special support from a union and was able to achieve considerable success (Holgate 2013).

3.2 Polish migrants' attitudes towards trade unions in the UK

'That's a problem they face … they cannot express themselves very well and other workers just whinge and whine and complain about them and sometimes you look and you think what are they actually complaining about, there isn't anything?' (Moore 2011, 127)

The statement quoted above was given to Moore (2011) by a trade union activist who was concerned about the unfair treatment of her Eastern European colleagues because of language barriers. Besides the broader employment situation of low pay, poorly organised workplaces (Hardy and Clark 2007, 125) and short-term contracts, there are other difficulties in organising this group: the legacy of trade unions in the home country (Moore and Watson 2007, 7) and the long time it takes to build trust (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010, 139) as well as troubles sustaining their engagement (Fitzgerald 2012, 3). On the other hand, Anderson et al. (2007) found a basic willingness to join trade unions amongst Polish and Lithuanian workers, 'which could be seen as a collective manifestation of the social dimension of citizenship' (Ciupijus 2011, 543).

In a research project on employment experiences of Central and Eastern European migrants a majority of 54 per cent of Polish and Lithuanian migrant workers have been found not to be

hostile towards unions, but rather interested in joining them (Anderson et al. 2007). While 13 per cent of their respondents were trade union members in their home countries, only 3 per cent joined in the UK (Anderson et al. 2007). The research results suggest that a majority was interested in joining for individual services as well as for a process of change and thereby collectivism, while those not interested gave practical reasons such as cost, lack of information and short-time stay or feeling able to solve one's problems alone. Only 10 per cent had ideological objections or negative experiences (Anderson et al. 2007). There would be the need for some form of effective workers' representation, since 52 per cent had reported problems with their employer or agency (Anderson et al. 2007). This report also puts community organising approaches into perspective, since their findings conclude that only a few of their respondents contacted through the Workers Registration Scheme had contact to Polish or Lithuanian organisations (Anderson et al. 2007).

3.3   The case study union's inclusion strategy to migrant workers

The trade union which is the focus of the present paper has in the past years implemented a migrant workers participation project as part of their strategy to include migrant workers. Moore and Watson (2009) evaluated this strategy and found the following successes and difficulties. .A stronger community approach including cooperation with the Federation of Poles and the union learning agenda of implementing courses had the potential for promoting the inclusion of Polish migrant workers. In relation to migrant workers, most union branches do not have figures on the number of migrant workers, but in a survey on the migrant workers' participation project of the researched union 44 per cent of branches reported having migrant members. These were additionally more likely to recruit amongst private contractors, which implies a higher concentration of migrants in privatised services. A majority of 53 per cent of branches recognised migrants as potential new recruits for the union, but only 35 per cent had

targeted them specifically. A majority of 61 per cent of branches experienced specific barriers in recruiting migrant workers and 44 per cent of branches reported difficulties. Even though they have no fears over their immigration status Polish workers can still face fears over their job security and potential difficulties for promotion when being active in a union. Moore and Watson (2009) also refer to language and culture as possible barriers to union participation. In relation to these differences some branches seemed to be reluctant to recruit migrant workers based on concerns over language barriers, but also over the potential amount of resources needed to deal with issues specific to migrant workers.

The problem of transforming passive membership into activism was characterised as being an even bigger problem than recruiting with only 12 per cent of branches reported having migrant worker activists (Moore and Watson 2009). The focus groups conducted for that research showed that when working for private contractors a lack of knowledge as well as an uncertainty of the union's applicability as a public services union hindered membership. Effective methods used by active branches and regions to activate members include talent spotting and reaching out to them; another way of reaching out to members and potentially activating them were means of communication, such as newsletters and flyers in native languages, informing about the union's activities and campaigning (Moore and Watson 2009). Active individuals of migrant communities acting as lead persons for their organising were also found to be crucial for success (Moore and Watson 2009). Courses aimed at empowering and building migrant workers' self-confidence in engaging with the union were deemed successful in creating activists. It appears that the migrant workers participation project established more informal types of activism with migrants informing and advising others while staying reluctant to become formal activists (Moore and Watson 2009).

4.   Methods of data collection and the case study union

The union which is the focus of the present study is one of the largest trade unions in the UK mainly organising members in the public services employed in the public and private sector and has been promoting a community approach for different migrant groups such as for their Polish members. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff of the union working in different areas of the organisation. This involved two officers of the self-organised groups, three officers working on community organising and two officers with responsibility for training and education, one of whom has a Polish background. Furthermore one interview was conducted with a person, who had been formerly working as an organiser of Polish workers in the case study union and has a Polish background, but is now working for a Swiss trade union organising Polish workers, as well as one with a Polish union member, who is active as the steward of his trade union branch. The literature review of existing findings on trade unions and Polish migrants in the UK informed the questions for these interviews. For those respondents working with Polish workers the questions targeted the background of the union's activity in this field, the implemented strategy of organising Polish workers, the experiences made and the evaluation of challenges and successes. The interviewed Polish steward was asked about his migration experience, his involvement with the union and his work experience. The interviews were then analysed reflecting on the challenges for trade unions identified in the literature (Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010) and scrutinising successes and limitations.

The union organises primarily in the public services including those working in local government, health care, education, utility services and transport, police and justice and the community and voluntary sector. Following the privatisation of many public services and fragmentation of the workforce, the formerly mainly public sector union has to deal with a growing number of private employers (ETUI 2013). While only 26 per cent of employees are

trade union members in the UK, the public sector has a much higher density with 56 per cent compared to the private sector with 14 per cent (LMS 2013). Whereas UK nationals are still more concentrated in the public sector, the 2011 census showed that there is a significant percentage of 23 per cent of foreign nationals employed in public administration, education and health sector. There are over 1 million non-UK born persons working in this sector (2011 Census; LMS 2013). These figures illustrate the relevance as well as potential of migrant workers for the researched union.

5.   Findings

In regards to the research question on which approach the trade union in question took in face of post-accession Polish migration, the interviewees did not question a basic inclusionary approach. While this basic willingness and desire to include Polish workers remained uncontested, various strategies to achieve this as well as their strengths and weaknesses were debated. Before these core strategies reflected in the research questions are analysed the basic challenges of locating and recruiting Polish workers and the crucial role of the union learning strategy are examined, since they were put forward by the data as fundamental.

5.1 Difficulties in locating and recruiting Polish workers and the role of the union learning strategy

The researched union in its membership statistics does not specify the nationality of members. When joining, union members are asked to identify their ethnic origin on the basis of 'white UK, Irish, white other, black UK, black African, black Caribbean, black other, Asian UK, Chinese, Asian other, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian'. Polish migrants may choose 'White other' for their ethnic origin, but so would various other migrant groups. Locating Polish migrants hereby becomes a difficult task, because as a union official states,

'it's hard for us to work out exactly who they are and where they are, because we don't have any way of recording the country of origin of our members.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

While locating Polish migrants can pose a difficult challenge, recruitment can also be problematic due to various factors. Union officials reported of a lack of knowledge about trade unions amongst migrants and due to a potentially temporary stay the reluctance of colleagues and some organisers to inform them. A possible return migration or also further mobility can be an argument against union membership. As one interviewee states, the migrant workers are

'coming here, working long hours, saving money and thinking about coming back to Poland, so it is quite difficult to convince them to join the union, because it is kind of a longer attachment to the country.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

While training courses have proven to be successful means of locating and recruiting Polish workers, it can be extremely difficult to even organise these because of migrant workers' lack of time. One interviewee reported that many had to work two jobs, one full-time and one part-time often on a Zero Hours Contract, where the employer does not have the obligation to provide a certain amount of working hours. To find the time for union activities and even courses therefore can be very challenging, all the more when the employers are not willing to support training with paid time off.

Interviewees also referred to the legacy of trade unions in the home country as potentially influencing migrant workers' attitudes towards unions.

'Polish people have a different perception of trade unions as politicised organisations, weak, which don't have any influence in the labour market, so there were some of these stereotypes I needed to tackle.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

This interviewee also described however how many Polish migrants are young and would therefore not have prior experiences with trade unions, but also because of the different structures of industrial relations in Poland, where trade unions are not present in every workplace. In Poland trade union density is extremely low with 12 per cent and collective bargaining covers only 30 per cent (ETUI 2013). While it is certainly important for organisers to be aware of this background, resistance to recruitment does more often have to do with practical issues such as membership fees.

In order to overcome problems in recruiting and pursuing the integration of migrant workers, Fitzgerald and Hardy (2010) suggest that trade unions need to formulate attractive strategies. The researched union has implemented different strategies in attracting Polish workers. Sometimes these are aimed directly at activating Polish members or they can be part of broader project aims. For example, the union learning strategy has proven to have some successes in locating and organising migrant workers. This offers courses implemented with the support of a Polish organiser, which target all people in employment, regardless of country of origin or union membership.

'We are trying to have both, migrant workers and indigenous workers, so they are getting to know each other and it also helps with integration and social cohesion.' (Union officer in the field of training and education)

These courses help to provide relevant information for migrant workers while locating their training needs, treating everyone equally and not directly approaching only Polish workers speaking Polish and thereby potentially excluding others. The courses include specific training

for progression in employment such as in book keeping or business English, but because of a lack of time of migrants in low-paid employment it is very difficult to organise these courses and get them to come to them. The project organisers stay flexible in setting the time for the courses and try to accommodate to the workers needs. Through these courses the workers are also informed about the union in order to overcome the lack of knowledge and experience with unions. This project has proven to be successful with a list of a few hundred Polish members and newly recruited stewards. Due to lack of experience and knowledge, it nevertheless still takes some time to activate people and for them to be willing to become a workplace representative. The union officer working in the project would only identify a few Polish migrants as being actively engaged, while the majority is not pro-active. In contrast to other migrant groups, Polish migrants have the same rights as UK citizens. While they experience the same problems as all other employees, their specific problems are being described as mainly based on language barriers and a lack of knowledge of their rights.

5.2 Successes and limitations of community organising

In the case of Polish migrants the cooperation with the broader, active Polonia in the UK built the basis of the union's community approach. The active Polonia refers to the Polish diaspora and its organisations such as the Federation of Poles, amongst others, who were approached by the trade union for cooperation. Various activities such as supporting Polish Independence Day, events at the Polish embassy and advertisements in Polish newspapers were implemented. An interviewee describes this approach as a success:

'we supported a lot of events, we also organised a leadership school for Polish leaders of Polish community groups and the success was in terms of this, when they need the union or they want to contact the trade unions, they know only about (this union), so they only

contacted me, even though they can't join us because they don't work in the public services.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

The engagement with community organisations and in the public sphere was successful for the image and high profile of the union amongst Polish workers, so that Polish workers started identifying the union with issues at work and sometimes simply called up the union when they faced an issue without any prior knowledge of trade unions and without being a member. Nevertheless, it is difficult to measure the success of community organising in this case since it is not directly connected to recruitment or activating members.

While the organising model has dominated for a long time, where the aim is to organise in the workplace and thereby build up strength and power of workers in a specific workplace, the idea of community organising influenced the researched unions approach. The basic thought is to develop relationships around common interests between trade unions and other groups in the wider community such as church groups, schools, women's groups or migrant organisations. An interviewee argues for moving beyond the workplace with the idea that everyone in the UK is connected to the union in a few steps and that eight out of 10 trade union activists are also active in other communities. In this sense community organising is not only issue driven but also aiming at general organising, meeting community leaders and identifying issues and common interests.

'Our definition of communities is: it could be a geographical community (…), it could be a community of interests so it might be a sports club or a group of football fans or a women's institute or people who hang out around a pub, you know a particular pub (…) a community can also be a particular ethnic or religious community or a migrant community or it could be also (…) in a workplace or around an employer (…) and its also the intersection of all those things.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

Community organising is understood by another interviewee to be a more local and issue-driven form of activity, where migrant community organisations can be part of it or it can manifest itself in a migrant network without the locality aspect, but providing the commonality of the issue of being from a certain migrant group. These community initiatives are defined according to the scale of the activity. The position of migrant groups appears to be manifold; they can either be a member of a local, issue-driven community campaign or they can be seen as already existing within broader structures that the union wants to cooperate with.

'I think the migrant groups, particularly in London anyway, you would find a lot of the groups already have community groups, they already have networks (…) so they already have a format in there (…) its about finding those networks that are already there and tapping into it.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

The strategy of community organising in relation to Polish migrants has been pursued by the researched trade union and has seen some successes in its heightened profile amongst Polish migrants, when it comes to specific measures directed at the Polish community. The nine interviews conducted, however, showed a broad understanding of community organising, which sometimes is directly addressed to Polish migrants but more often at a broader issue and/or more localised level, which might or might not include Poles. The interviewees were either more involved with trade union organising or more specifically with organising Polish workers, however they agreed on a broad understanding, while those working with Polish members would additionally point out approaches directly addressing or including Poles. In any case of community organising it is difficult to measure success, and additional limitations lie in the fact that not all Polish migrant workers are either organised in migrant community organisations and not all of those that are reached by these measures can be represented by the union due to its focus on public services.

5.3 Successes and limitations of migrant workers' activism

The case study union has implemented a migrant workers participation project, in which the aim was to integrate Polish workers and develop activists by spotting talent, finding interested members and inviting them to training. A Polish activists' network was established, which according to one interviewee is a vehicle for getting people to become active in existing structures.

'This network is a vehicle to bring people into branches, to bring them into the self-organised groups, to bring them into structures that are already here, so it actually feeds in and it is another way for people to come into the union and become more active in different ways (…) it's a fluid vehicle.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

In contrast to the situation of more established self-organised groups such as the young members, LGBT or women's groups, this network does not have representation on branch, regional or national level and cannot implement motions to the national executive council. It is rather a loose, informal network of Polish activists. As an interviewee explains,

'the self-organised groups are at branch level and they also have their regional level and they have the national level (…) they also have a conference and the conference runs with motions, so actually people, activists have a chance to influence the way the union goes.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

The network of Polish activists on the contrary is a loose association of activists around all regions and has so far had three national meetings, has its own Facebook group and a commitment to annual meetings. When comparing this new migrant network to the union's network of Filipino activists the differences in activity, engagement and history become apparent. The Filipino network is very engaged, which can be explained on the one hand by a strong community approach and activism of the Filipino members themselves, but also by

continuous efforts over years by a Filipino union officer at national level. During one network meeting they discussed their aspiration to have a Filipino assistant general secretary in 20 years. The presence of the Filipino officer is crucial here, which it would also be for the Polish network. Interviewees refer to the 'like for like principle' meaning the approach to ideally have organising staff that members can identify with. Identifying with a union organiser has also proved to be relevant with the Polish community, especially since they are reported to have greater linguistic problems. While in the union learning project the organisers tried to address all people in the same way, very often the Polish organiser would receive calls later on to ask about more details in Polish.

'It helps that I can speak Polish (…) so people are quite happy to call me and speak to me, ask questions and learn more about the union and I think over the years they learned a lot about trade unions.' (Union officer in the field of training and education)

The informal form of activism of the Polish activists' network may be more successful than trying to force migrant workers into existing group structures, but it might also prevent the inclusion into self-organised groups. In order to further activate members it was seen as important to have face-to-face conversations so as to find out with what kind of activist role they might identify with. While some migrants are international officers interested in solidarity work, such as the interviewed Polish steward, others might be more interested in being a health and safety representative. The individual meetings with members, called one-on-one, are important in order to avoid falling prey to any prior judgements as for example sending a Polish member to the Polish activists' network when the person might be really identifying more with the LGBT self-organised group. The national level in this context provides best practices for regions and branches to engage with migrant workers and as one respondent describes:

'the role of the branches is actually crucial (…) we only provide tools (…) the branches at the end of the day they will elect delegates for the conference, for the committees, for various union structures and bodies, which make a decision on the future of the trade union.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

In relation to language issues as well as work conditions and training, Polish workers were described as suffering from low self-esteem and no sense of entitlement, which could be relieved by the participation in the Polish activists' network. One interviewee furthermore connects the problems in integrating into a general branch to the social background, and another additionally to the Polish context of transformation from socialism to capitalism.

'This is something which is related to living and growing up in Poland (…) and especially the dominant discourse of neoliberalism 'you are not entitled to anything'; in the communist time you were entitled to everything: job, no unemployment, social benefits, but after that 20 years of this dominant discourse which is happening now in Poland 'you are not entitled to anything, you should work, be happy that you have any job' (…) they bring it with them, this kind of ideology and then probably they will also have the ideology of working really hard.' (Union officer in the field of community organising)

The interviewee describes Polish workers as not wanting to be viewed as victims or as failures, not wanting to receive benefits and trying to avoid being associated with the picture of migrants dominant in the public discourse, as people taking advantage of benefits, and thus are less likely to address work issues and their needs with British organisers. This poses the question of special versus equal treatment. On the one hand, Polish workers are reported to not want special treatment, but on the other hand they do not integrate as well into existing union structures such as the branches or self-organised groups and they do have specific issues. Some union officers also consider special treatment as discriminatory to other migrant

groups. Projects dealing with Polish workers therefore are not easy to sustain and fund; furthermore without statistics to prove the need to organise Polish members there is no substantial argument and following the recession and cuts in public services, other issues are likely to be higher on the union's agenda.

The key issues raised in this paper can be found in the experiences of an interviewed Polish steward. This interviewee has been active in unions for some years and has multiple functions as an activist, a steward, a health and safety representative and an international officer. When the respondent took part in a national meeting of all international officers, there were no other Polish workers in a similar role present. In the interviewee's workplace there were a lot of stewards, who reportedly stepped down amongst whom were Polish stewards, mainly for two reasons. One was a lack of time for union activities and the other the hindering of their progression in employment while being a union activist. It also took the interviewee one year to finalise training as a steward, which in the respondent's perception was too long. The Polish steward joined the Polish activists' network when it was established, but would still see the need for a Polish regional officer or a Polish contact at national level. As an individual, the interviewee is very active in the union as well as in the broader Polonia writing for a Polish online regional newspaper. These activities offer possibilities in further community organising.

6. Conclusion

The present paper investigates the approaches taken in the face of post-accession Polish migration by a large trade union in the UK, which organises in the public services. The focus on the inclusion strategies of community organising and migrant workers' activism in the case of Polish migrants in the UK contributes to research into challenges faced by trade unions in organising Polish migrants. It furthermore adds to the discussion on which form of inclusion strategy, if equal or special treatment, is met with success.

The dilemmas described by Penninx and Roosblad (2000) of opposing versus welcoming immigration and of exclusion versus inclusion of migrants are currently leaning towards a supportive attitude of trade unions towards immigration and an inclusionary approach towards Polish post-accession migrant workers. The basic character of the researched trade union's approach is inclusionary, while the question of how this inclusion can successfully be achieved is contested. Which form the inclusion of Polish migrants into trade union structures takes lies within the union decision-making process (Krings 2009). A special treatment of Polish workers is limited on the one hand by public discourse and internal trade union debates, and on the other hand by established trade union structures. The Polish activists' network is unlikely to ever achieve the position of a self-organised group. The recruitment of Polish organisers is only implemented if the organiser's work entails a broader field such as a learning project. The challenges of locating and recruiting are already a difficult barrier to engaging with Polish migrant workers and, as such, the locating of uncategorised members implies the necessity of equal treatment. While special treatment would be more effective in locating potential members, the main recruitment issues are common to Polish and other workers alike. Strategies with the potential to attract Polish workers have been manifold, sometimes within the outline of equal treatment combined with the 'level playing field' approach (Wrench 2004) as in the case of courses for all workers with the benefit of a Polish officer working on the course project and the project providing English courses for migrants. The strategy of community organising and addressing the broader Polonia in the UK has been evaluated by the interviewees as successful in informing Polish migrants and building up a high profile as a trade union within the community, but has also shown some limitations especially in relation to the individuals reached. With regard to the challenges of turning members into activists and sustaining their engagement the dominant request of interviewees was for a member of staff with Polish background to work on it in order to make it successful, but the

decision between equal and special treatment is for the trade union to make. It appears that in the experiences of the researched union the implemented equal treatment and 'level playing field' approach have seen some positive results in regards to the challenges of locating and recruiting. In terms of strategies and activating, success is achieved by special treatment. Further comparative research into unions, which are explicitly implementing equal and special treatment, would help to go beyond the mere impression that special measures are more successful.

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