RESEARCH REPORT

POLISH IMMIGRANTS
IN NORWAY: CULTURAL
PARTICIPATION AND
INTEGRATION

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for
MojaNorwegia.pl

6. May 2013, Oslo
Between the 8th and 21st of April a social survey was conducted on a group of Poles living in Norway. Due to the nature of the research group we used the tool that provides access to the largest possible number of people - the online survey. Use of the aforementioned tool seemed advisable taking into account that its ‘nature’ means high dispersion and lack of one clear center. The website MojaNorwegia.pl (MyNorway.pl) is probably one of the places that most closely resembles this specific forum, it’s a meeting place (though mainly virtual) and a source of information for Polish people currently living in Norway, which was another argument for the use of an online survey – especially due to the type of medium and its ‘access’ to a high percentage of polish immigrants.

When reading this document it is highly recommended to remember about certain negative sides of the tool being used. The only features that were required by the respondents were that they were polish people currently residing in Norway. Due to the nature of MojaNorwegia.pl most likely all of the subjects met the minimum requirement. However, because of the random character of the used method – so-called snowball sampling - it does not mean that this particular sample of respondents can be considered as a group representative for the whole Polish community.

The study involved 1021 respondents (a further 1000 begun to fill out the questionnaire, but did not finish the task). Results for the question about the respondents’ sex differ from data collected in other studies, namely that the representation of women in this survey is probably higher than the actual distribution of this feature among Poles in Norway. This is an example that the data obtained should not be considered as a reflection of the situation of the Polish community. At the same time however, the number of respondents is appreciable due to the total number of polish immigrants (around 200 000) that gives some, albeit limited right to conclude about ‘general’ attitudes, habits etc. characteristic for an average Pole in Norway. For convenience sake, further in the report certain concepts are being used which can carry signs of too far-reaching generalization, however, as it has been said before, we should not overestimate the representativeness of the data collected.

The report consists of the three following parts:

1) The profile of the average Polish immigrant in Norway;
2) The image of integration with particular emphasis on cultural participation of Poles in Norway;
3) Conclusions.

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PART 1
THE PROFILE OF THE AVERAGE POLISH IMMIGRANT IN NORWAY

According to the data collected the average Pole living in Norway is a man between 25 and 35 years old. He works in the construction industry or performs physical work of some other kind. He has been living in Norway for 1 to 5 years and he plans to stay here permanently, not excluding the possibility of moving back to Poland in certain cases. He feels that he is well integrated with the Norwegian society, although he does not participate in its cultural life. This may be due to too little time, lack of knowledge of the language, an insufficient cultural offer addressed to foreigners or simply lack of interest in what is generally understood as culture. He knows the Norwegian language, but on a medium or low level. He definitely understands the written word and speech best, while writing is the most problematic matter for him. He feels that Norwegians see Polish people in a positive light, however they appreciate them more as workers than members of the society. Poles themselves also have a positive attitude towards Norwegians, although they value their worth more as members of the community than as co-workers.

The charts below present in a more graphic way the distribution of the answers to some questions about the basic characteristics of the respondents, relevant to the purpose of the study.

![Sex Chart]

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Level of education

- Primary: 2%
- Secondary: 29%
- Vocational: 13%
- Higher vocational: 12%
- Higher: 44%

Line of work

- Construction: 28%
- Physical work: 23%
- Administration/office: 7%
- Commerce: 3%
- Transport: 6%
- Education: 6%
- Catering business: 5%
- Automotive industry: 3%
- Other (incl. HR etc.): 19%
PART 2

THE IMAGE OF INTEGRATION WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON CULTURAL PARTICIPATION OF POLES IN NORWAY

The chart below shows the preliminary and rather general picture of Poles’ participation in the cultural life of Norway. The most popular activity associated with culture made in the last 12 months was reading a book, marked by 32% of respondents. The next most common activity was to participate in a concert (18%) and to visit the cinema (17%). The least popular was a visit to the theatre (4%), while 16% of respondents did not do any of these activities.
The next graph presents the image of habits associated with both participating in so-called high culture and activities of a more everyday character. Both the first and second group includes actions where knowledge of the Norwegian language is required as well as actions where participation is not dependent on this knowledge. This image tells us about the frequency with which respondents undertake these activities. The highest percentage of the response ‘very often’ came with questions about watching Norwegian television and listening to Norwegian music. Most of the ‘never’ responses occurred when respondents were asked about a visit to the theatre. Also visiting galleries or exhibitions, use of the library and reading Norwegian books (both written in Norwegian and by Norwegian authors) are at the forefront of activities which, according to a large part of the respondents, ‘never’ take place. Therefore it means that despite the fact that reading seems to be the most practiced ‘cultural’ activity, this concerns mainly books written in Polish.
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The following chart shows the distribution of responses concerning reasons for not practicing activities mentioned above. This question was meant for respondents who answered the question about their cultural habits with mostly ‘very rarely’ and ‘never’, which, according to the graph below, concerned 90% of all the respondents. Main reasons for not participating in cultural events are lack of time (24%), lack of knowledge of the language (20%) and lack of interest in this area of life (16%). Only 5% of respondents pointed at lack of knowledge about a decent source of information for those kinds of events as the main problem, every tenth respondent cannot afford buying tickets, and 12% do not have friends or acquaintances who could accompany them to participate in e.g. a concert or other cultural event.

As for the participation in different sorts of organizations 20% of respondents belong to at least one. In most cases it is a Norwegian organization for a sport, a hobby or of political character.

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The next diagram illustrates respondents’ answers to the question concerning estimating their own participation in the cultural life of their region. The lowest percentage of responses was noted next to the answer ‘definitely yes’ and ‘definitely no’, which in combination with the fact that the answer ‘it’s hard to say’ was the second most popular option, allows us to conclude that people had problems clarifying the degree of their cultural participation (or with defining the concepts ‘culture’ or ‘cultural life’). According to the response that was given most often 35% of Poles do not consider themselves as people participating in their regions culture, which agrees with the results collected in previous questions about the specific manifestations of that sort of participation, which showed a not very high level of activity in the field of cultural life.
The chart below shows to which extent Poles feel integrated into Norwegian society. As in the question about participation in culture, a significant percentage of the respondents had not been able to clearly define their position. At the same time the same amount of respondents (ie 32%) answered that they consider themselves integrated into society in Norway. 21% of them believe that they are not integrated, 9% say that they ‘definitely are’, while 6% of respondents admit that they definitely are not integrated into Norwegian society.

As for the dependence between their declared level of integration and sex, only the results for the response ‘rather yes’ somewhat differ. Men were more decided in their answers than women and the option ‘it’s hard to say’ was the second most common response, while in women’s case it was the number one answer. The most popular option among men was ‘rather yes’.

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The following charts show in a little more detailed way how the network of social contacts among the Poles in Norway looks like. 84% of respondents work together with Norwegians. 70% of them maintain social contact with Norwegian co-workers outside of work, in which 43% does it occasionally, 19% fairly often, while 9% declare that these Norwegians belong to their closest circle of friends.

When it comes to Norwegian acquaintances from outside of the work environment, 52% of the respondents do not have any such friends, 31% have a couple of them, 6% many and 11% just one. In the case of non-Polish and non-Norwegian friends from work with whom respondents have been in

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contact in a social setting, 11% claim to have one such friend, 31% some, 6% plenty and the rest – none. It looks somewhat different in the case of non-Polish and non-Norwegian friends outside of work where 43% of respondents declare maintaining social contact with several of these friends and almost as many claim not to have any such friends. Other answers are distributed almost equally between those who have one, and those who have many of these friends.

As shown in the chart below, the problem on the way to integration in the cultural field may be the lack of an explicit desire to participate in the culture of Norway among Poles. Slightly less than a third of respondents specify their level of such desire as definitely (9%) or quite high (20%), 32% of them is motivated to such participation on an ‘average’ level, one fourth is ‘rather’ reluctant, while 14% is definitely not interested in participating in the culture in Norway. Differentiation by gender show slightly more ‘positive’ responses among women than among men. Common thinking suggests that such a desire would increase with the length of their stay in Norway, however, the results show that people staying here for more than five years are more decided in their ‘low’ motivation than those living here less than five years. Interestingly, the lowest rate of the response ‘definitely not’ occurred in the group of respondents living in Norway for only a few months, and even though we cannot speak of a strong reduction of the urge to participate in culture over time, the results seem to indicate that this motivation is not increased.

Poles seem to show quite high motivation to learn the Norwegian language. Most of them participated or continues to participate in a language course (67%), while only 10% of respondents did not take part in such a course and does not intend to do so in the future. This latter group point above all at the lack of time (29%) and funds (26%) as reasons for the lack of such a desire. Only 2%
believe that they do not need the language, while 4% declare lack of interest in the topic, which may be another indicator of high motivation to learn the Norwegian language for Polish immigrants.

**Investigating the relationship between the answers of the respondents**

Below we can find graphs allowing us to see the relationship between different variables, such as the relationship between the level of knowledge of the Norwegian language and participation in culture, etc. The first of them shows the aforementioned relationship between language skills and activities related to culture performed by respondents in the past 12 months of their stay in Norway. Although the question did not specify whether the book was written in Norwegian or not, this response was most popular among respondents who can use Norwegian to at least a small degree. Among the group of respondents declaring an absolute lack of knowledge of the language, the answer ‘none of these options’ was marked most often, although it should be noted that only 10% of all respondents was in this group.

The next most frequent responses involved activities such as going to the cinema and going to a concert, with the exception of the group of respondents declaring their poor knowledge of Norwegian where the answer ‘none of these options’ was in second place. Definitely the lowest percentage of responses that might indicate not very high participation in culture occurred among those declaring a thorough knowledge of the Norwegian language. It is a quite obvious correlation, confirming the importance of knowledge of the language in participating in culture and pointing to the need for taking actions that may lead to a reduction of the problem of the language barrier.

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- ![Polish Connection](image1.png)
- ![my call](image2.png)
- ![Fjordline.com](image3.png)
- ![PKS Oslo](image4.png)
When it comes to the relationship between the length of their stay in Norway and the estimation of their own level of participation in cultural life, it can be noted that the distribution of responses for each of the groups is more or less similar, only proportions differ in some cases. For example, the answer 'probably not' (which means that the respondent do not think of him/herself as a participant in cultural life) was the most common response in all groups except for the group of respondents living in Norway for more than 10 years, where the most popular option was 'definitely not', slightly ahead of the answer 'it is hard to say' and 'rather yes'. Both positive responses ('definitely yes' and 'rather yes') are the least popular in all the groups except the aforementioned group of respondents residing in Norway for more than 10 years. In all the groups the 'rather yes' answers were marked almost as often as 'definitely not'.
In the case of the relationship between length of stay in Norway and peoples’ profession it can be observed that the construction industry is the most commonly chosen option in almost all groups of respondents. The next most common response is physical work, but with the difference that ‘construction industry’ was being chosen mostly by those living in Norway from 5 to 10 years, while ‘physical work’ was selected by respondents staying here from one to five years. And this is the group that is highest in most of mentioned sectors, with the exception of construction work, work in administration/office and HR. In works in administrations’ case groups 1-5 and 5-10 years are almost equal, while when it comes to the HR industry it mostly consists of people residing in Norway from 5-10 years, far surpassing the other groups. These industries can be considered as more ‘prestigious’ than for example physical work, which may explain the greater participation of people living in Norway for at least a few years. At the same time, however, even among those living here for more than 10 years or a lifetime, building industry remains the most common response, which may indicate that ‘promotion’ in terms of the prestige of the profession is not a very common occurrence.
As for the relationship between the assessment of respondents’ participation in culture and activities associated with that participation it is as follows:

As the graph shows, people considering themselves definitely or rather not participating in culture are the two largest groups of those who have not done any activities related to culture. Interestingly, however, almost as high a percentage of people ‘definitely not' participating in culture answered that they have read at least one book in the past 12 months. Among those who in the past 12 months have read a book the largest group of respondents doesn’t consider themselves as engaged in cultural life, which may mean that the respondents do not identify reading as a cultural activity. Another interesting observation is that the respondents who chose options ‘rather yes' or ‘rather not' when answering the question about participation constitute a comparatively high percentage of all of those who went to a concert, art gallery or a movie (in the case of the latter two 'rather not 'was even slightly more common). This may mean that the respondents do not consider the situation in which they are spectators or ‘passive' consumers of culture as participation in culture, or consider the frequency with which they perform certain actions as insufficient. The problem with defining the respondents’ place in the culture in Norway may also be indicated by the high response rate of ‘it's hard to say' answers, when asked to evaluate their own participation.

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It can also be observed that there is a clear link between education and the respondents’ taking part in cultural activities. Among respondents with higher education only going to the theater received fewer votes than the answer 'none of the above activities', which means that most of the respondents perform certain activities related to culture. The situation looks similar among respondents with higher vocational education. Lack of participation in activities or cultural events is the most common response among respondents with vocational education and the second most common response among respondents with secondary education.

The following diagram shows the relationship between the length of stay in Norway and the respondents’ own estimation of their integration into Norwegian society. It may be noted that people living in Norway for a longer time (group 5-10 years and more than 10 years) are a bit more decided in their assessment (even if minimally), which means that the answer 'it’s hard to say' does not appear in these groups often, as it was in the case of people staying in Norway for less than five years. A group of people living here for at least one year have chosen the answer 'rather yes' more often than 'rather not' (in contrast to the others), which may indicate that the level of integration...
The next graph shows quite clearly the relationship between the level of proficiency in Norwegian and a sense of integration into Norwegian society. People who communicate in Norwegian fluently often respond 'definitely' (39%) or 'rather yes' (38%) when asked about their assessment of the level of integration, and the first option appeared even more frequently. The worse the knowledge of Norwegian is, the more lack of decisiveness increases, as well as declaring rather weak integration with the rest of Norwegian society. Respondents speaking Norwegian 'quite well' feel quite integrated, but less 'definitely' than the ‘fluent’ group; also the difference between responses 'rather yes' and 'it’s hard to say' begins to decrease. The biggest problems with determining their level of integration can be observed among people speaking Norwegian 'a little', and those in this group who were slightly more decided marked 'rather yes' almost as often as 'rather not'. The least popular response in this group was ‘definitely yes’. The last group, i.e. those who cannot communicate in
Norwegian at all, declared rather low level of integration with Norwegian society (34%). It is also the only group in which "definitely not" was more popular than "rather yes". The percentage of people who feel strongly integrated in spite of the language barrier was 2.5%.

It turns out that the relationship between language and the level of motivation to participate in the culture of Norway is more significant only in groups of people who either speak Norwegian fluently or not at all. In the first group the most popular response was 'definitely' and 'rather high', as well as 'medium' when describing the level of desire to participate in culture. The least popular answer was 'definitely low', which was the most commonly chosen option among respondents who do not speak the Norwegian language at all. In this particular group, the lower the level of motivation is, the more people chose this answer. The distribution of 'popularity' in the two middle groups (people using Norwegian fairly well, or only a little) was more or less similar, i.e. most people identified their level of desire to participate in culture as 'medium', then 'rather low', and the answer that was marked least - 'definitely high'. This may mean that to participate fully in the cultural life of Norway better than basic language skills are needed, or it may simply indicate that the longer a person stays here, the better their language skills get, integration increases and thus does the motivation to participate in the socio-cultural life (though as the results already submitted show, only part of this thesis finds are confirmed). One of the questions coming up after analyzing the chart below is how a reluctance to participate in the culture of people who do not know the language stems from the fact that they feel they do not have the appropriate 'competence' and how much is actual lack of interest in this issue.

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The planned length of the stay also seems to be important when it comes to the issue of motivation to participate in culture, namely those who declared a desire to remain permanently in Norway were choosing the answer 'definitely yes' more often than any other group and they were the only group in which the answer 'definitely not' was the least popular. It may also be observed that the shorter the intended stay is the higher the rate of the responses 'rather not' and 'definitely not' gets.

PART 3

CONCLUSIONS

The general conclusion that emerge after a preliminary analysis of the results are first and foremost that Polish immigrants do not seem very interested in participating in the cultural life of Norway. More people consider themselves to be integrated with the Norwegian society than to be a participant in the culture of the country. The motivation for participation is higher among people with a good knowledge of the Norwegian language, while lack of this knowledge as well as the lack of time are the greatest obstacles on the road to higher participation. The vast majority of Poles has the motivation to learn the language, but taking into account the percentage of people who took (or are still taking) part in a language course and comparing this figure with the percentage of people speaking Norwegian only a little, it may be worth thinking about whether more attention should be paid to not only teaching basic language skills for newcomers, but to deepen the skills of those who know Norwegian even on a low level.

The question which may be worthy of deeper exploration is to what extent the lack of strong motivation to participate in culture is a result of the lack of an adequate offer which could be interesting for Polish people, both due to the language barrier and subject matter. One group of respondents pointed at a lack of a cultural offer addressed at the Polish, where the smallest
percentage of people 'definitely' willing to participate in culture occurred. It is also worth to take a
look at respondents’ habits, namely, that participation in so-called high culture is visibly less popular
than for example reading books, listening to music (even Norwegian), and going to concerts.

In addition, a significant percentage of respondents marks that the social contact occurs mostly in
their own apartment or a friends’, which may indicate that many respondents might not have a habit
of 'going out' to culture and other activities.

Although the majority of Polish immigrants working with Norwegians have some kind of social
contact with some of them, people often accompanying them (Poles) on the occasion of certain
events connected to culture are usually other Poles.

For many questions, the most common response was 'it’s hard to say', which does not have to but
may mean that many people are somewhat confused and still a little bit uncertain of their place in
Norwegian society. It is a fact that work is a good ‘source’ of friends - 70% of respondents maintain
some sort of social contact with Norwegians they have met at work, while only 49% of Poles meet
with Norwegians met outside of their place of employment.

To sum up: many Polish immigrants speak Norwegian to some extent, but those who know it well are
much more 'culturally' active and demonstrate more willingness to participate in social and cultural
life of Norway. Most of the Polish community, however, does not seem to be particularly interested
in that kind of activity, although there is a chance that an increase in language skills could foster this
interest. Language correlates with most forms of integration and participation in culture more than
for example the respondents length of stay in Norway. As suggested earlier, it seems important to
work on deepening the knowledge of the Norwegian language among those who already have some
basis. Absence of interest in cultural life may also be a result of lack of previous cultural habits, so it
should be considered whether it would be the best way of activating Polish-Norwegian relations.