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Integration of immigrants with the host society (the case of Poland)

Abstract: This article presents the problem of immigrant integration in Poland. The research objective was to analyze the degree of integration of the immigrants with the host (Polish) society. The authors adopted the concept of 5 dimensions of integration as the theoretical basis for their research.

The studies were carried out using a survey questionnaire. They lasted from November 2022 to March 2023 and were carried out via the Internet. 224 immigrants took part in the research. The condition for participation in the study was residence in Poland for at least 2 years.

The respondents were asked, among other things, about free practice of one's religion, access to places where one can practice religion (churches, temples, mosques, etc.), making and maintaining acquaintances, encountering discrimination/hostility on the part of Poles, importance of religion and tradition in adapting to life in Poland, the choice of Poland in the event of the possible re-deciding on the choice of residence place or a possible change of residence place.

The analysis of the indicators revealed that the vast majority of the respondents (61%) had integrated with the host society to a great extent. However, a large group of immigrants (39%) who had problems with integration was also identified.

Keywords: integration, immigrants, Poland, host society, integration indicators

Introduction

Poland is traditionally treated as a country of emigration. Recently, however, it has changed from a typical emigration country to an immigration country, mainly as a result of its membership in the European Union. In recent years immigrants began to play an important role in the Polish labour market,

which creates an additional challenge for Polish immigration policy. The obligation to undertake integration initiatives is indicated by the European Union regulations on immigration policy. These regulations are also in force in Poland. However, the spectrum of activities aimed at integration of immigrants in Poland is not as extensive as in Western Europe. In Poland the largest number of integration activities are undertaken by non-governmental organisations and by the families of immigrants. This article is focused on the process of social integration of immigrants with Polish host society.

Integration of immigrants in Poland

Lots of authors have been dealing with the problem of integration for many years, analyzing in their research and publications various issues related to integration, both from the perspective of the host society and immigrants (e.g. Becker, 2022; Cavjan, 2020; Dollmann, 2021; Grzymała-Kazłowska and Phillimore, 2022; Klarenbeek, 2021; Knap-Stefaniuk and Sowa-Behtane, 2020).

The term integration comes from the Latin word "integratio" – unification, merging, creating a whole from parts. In relation to nations, it means a process encompassing social, cultural, economic and political life, aiming at the creation of a larger, supranational community. It is supposed to be a community of states and nations, heterogeneous, multicultural, united around common values. It guarantees the cultural identity of individual ethnic groups and nations that constitute it (Stępniak, 2003). Integration is also defined as the social coexistence that brings about racial desegregation, equal opportunities regardless of race and cultural origin. The nature of the process is quite complex and may appear in many aspects (structural, cultural, social etc.) affecting both immigrants and the receiving society.

"Integration can be defined as a state or process in which different – from the point of view of ethno-cultural characteristics (identity, religion, culture) – individuals or groups are included in the host society and participate in various areas of its life. This refers not only to immigrants' contacts with the society of the new country, but also to their adoption of the basic norms, values and institutions of the host society" (Piekut, 2008, p. 248). "Integration – is the result of both the desire to maintain one's own cultural identity and the desire to maintain contact with a new culture" (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2000, p. 18).

In order to study the phenomenon of integration, its factors must be determined. The most frequently mentioned factors include:
– the attitude of the majority society towards the immigrant group;

– social relations with the sending society;
– social relations with the host society;
– participation in social organizations.

The conditions of the integration process have been included in the "integration map" (Castles, Korac, Vasta and Vertovec, 2002). The decisive factors here are those influencing the socio-economic and political situation of the migrant in the country of origin; the category of migrants; their legal status; demographic, cultural and social characteristics of immigrants and the same characteristics of the ethnic community; conditions in the host society; openness to immigrants; type and scope of state policy; housing availability; the extent of ethnic segregation; the situation on the local labor market; accessibility of education; the history of the same ethnic group in a given country; stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination and racist behavior towards migrants; cooperation between different ethnic groups.

The native division of factors was made by Aneta Piekut (2008), who distinguished: demographic, cultural, psychological, social, economic, political, spatial and macrostructural factors. Integration may be different for different dimensions, e.g. good integration in one area may be accompanied by lack of integration in another. The most important dimensions of integration include: economic, social, cultural, identification, legal, institutional and spatial ones.

The other theoretical concept is 5 dimensions of integration (Łotocki, 2009):

– the structural (institutional and legal) dimension, i.e. the acquisition of basic rights and gaining access to valued social positions for immigrants and their children. Integration indicators may include: the residence status of immigrants, their use of social services, as well as the participation of immigrants in the political system of the host country;
– the cultural and identity dimension, i.e. the level of language proficiency of the host society, knowledge of the cultural patterns of this society, as well as the immigrant's sense of belonging and identification with the host society;
– the social dimension, i.e. personal social relationships established by immigrants in the host society and membership in formal and informal social groups, marrying representatives of the host society;
– the economic dimension, measured by the difference in income between migrants and permanent residents of the host country, the percentage of migrants working for the minimum wage, as well as the level of unemployment among immigrants;

– the spatial dimension, i.e. the degree of segregation or ghettoization of immigrants.

Research methodology

The concept of 5 dimensions of integration was adopted as the theoretical basis for the research. In this article, a closer look will be taken at the social dimension of integration, which is understood here as establishing relationships at individual levels of the social structure, starting from the smallest groups, such as family and marriage, neighborhood groups and groups of friends, to larger ones, such as associations, social classes, and ending at the level of the entire society and its attitude towards the immigrant group (Massey 1986).

The aim of the study was to answer the question: How is the process of integration of immigrants in Poland proceeding?

In this publication (due to the limitations) the following detailed problems will be described:
– Is it possible for the surveyed immigrants to practice religion freely?
– Do immigrants have access to places where they can practice religion (churches, temples, mosques, etc.)?
– Do immigrants make and maintain friendships and with whom?
– Have immigrants experienced discrimination/hostility from Poles?
– What is the importance of religion and tradition for their adaptation to life in Poland?
– Would immigrants choose Poland if they had the opportunity to choose the country of immigration again?
– Do the surveyed immigrants intend to change their place of residence to another country?

224 immigrants living in Poland took part in the research conducted from November 2022 to March 2023 with the use of a diagnostic survey. The research was conducted using an online questionnaire among the group "Migrants and migrants – we support each other!" and among the group "Mixed relationships – foreign partners". The condition for participation in the study was living in Poland for at least 2 years. Participation in the research was voluntary and the questionnaire was prepared in English.

The study involved 144 women (64.3%) and 80 men (35.7%). Most respondents lived in big cities, over 100,000 inhabitants (124 people – 55.3%) and medium-sized cities (76 people – 33.9%), and only several in villages (24

people – 10.7%). The respondents were aged between 21 and 43, and at the moment of the study they had stayed in Poland from 2 to 13 years, so the level of their integration should hypothetically be highly differentiated.

The group of foreigners included: Ukrainians – 136 people (60.7%), Indians – 26 people (11.6%), Turks – 24 people (10.7%), Slovaks – 14 people (6.2%), Egyptians – 8 people (3.5%), Nigerians – 5 people (2.2%), Algerians – 4 people (1.7%), Italians – 4 people (1.7%) and French – 1 person (0.4%). Their education level ranged between higher and vocational: higher – 64 people (57.1%), incomplete higher – 8 people (7.1%), post-secondary – 20 people (17.8%), secondary – 8 people (7.1%), vocational – 10 people (8.9%).

Discussion of the results

The first studied factor of integration was free practice of religion. Immigrants staying in Poland are able to practice their religion and beliefs freely – this is what nearly 85% of the respondents stated. There was no significant ($p > 0.05$) correspondence between free practice of religion and gender, place of residence, age or nationality. However, access to places of worship where they could practice their religion (churches, mosques, temples, etc.) was not so widespread: nearly 70% of the respondents claimed that they did not have access to places where they could practice their religion. Four people declared themselves Catholics, and these people definitely had no problem with access to religious places. The remaining people declared the following religions: Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Orthodox Christianity. Since these religions are culturally distant from Poland, there is an obvious difficulty in access to houses of prayer, especially in small towns and villages. The detailed data are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Free practice of immigrants' religion

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Definitely yes	124	55.4
	Rather yes	68	30.4
	I do not know	8	3.6
	Rather not	20	8.9
	Definitely not	4	1.8
	Total	224	100.0

Source: own research.

Table 2. Access to places in which immigrants can practice their religion (churches, temples, mosques, etc.)

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Definitely yes	0	0
	Rather yes	68	30.4
	I do not know	0	0
	Rather not	28	12.5
	Definitely not	128	57.1
	Total	224	100.0

Source: own research.

Another factor important for integration is immigrants' participation in social networks, i.e. maintaining relations with Indigenous people. 55% of the respondents initiated and maintained contacts with a mixed society (Poles, their compatriots and foreigners). A highly significant ($p < 0.01$) correspondence was found between the answers to the question about the possibility of practicing religion and the question about making and maintaining acquaintances. This means that the answers to these two questions were consistent with each other, and the respondents who did not report any problems with practicing their religion had no problems with making new acquaintances. The detailed data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Making and maintaining acquaintances

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	With all nationalities	124	55.4
	Mainly with Poles	24	1.,7
	Mainly with my compatriots	40	1.,9
	Mainly with other nationalities	36	1.,1
	Total	224	100.0

Source: own research.

A very important factor which may hinder integration of immigrants is their being discriminated against by indigenous people. The respondents were asked whether they encounter discrimination/hostility on the part of Poles: 57% of them had never experienced it. Other people reported such experiences: some rarely, some once, and some frequently. A highly significant ($p < 0.01$) correspondence was found between experiencing discrimination

and the gender. In 90% of cases, the people discriminated against were men. There was no significant (p > 0.05) correspondence between experiencing discrimination and place of residence, age or nationality. The detailed data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Experiencing discrimination/hostility on the part of Poles

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	128	57.1
	Once	20	8.9
	Seldom	56	25.0
	Often	20	8.9
	Total	224	100.0

Source: own research.

For 71% of the respondents religion and traditions in which they grew up were important for their adaptation to life in Poland. As many as 25% of them did not know whether their upbringing in another country influenced the process of integration with the host society. There was no significant (p > 0.05) correspondence between the importance of religion and tradition for adaptation to life in Poland and gender, place of residence, age or nationality. For the remaining respondents these factors were not important – see: Table 5.

Table 5. The importance of immigrants' religion and tradition for their adaptation to life in Poland

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Definitely important	132	58.9
	Rather important	28	12.5
	I don't know	56	25.0
	Rather not important	8	3.6
	Definitely not important	0	0
	Total	224	100.0

Source: own research.

An important element of the integration process is the perception of a given country by immigrants and their opinion on this country. Pleasant or unpleasant situations which have been encountered by immigrants at the ini-

tial stage of their stay in a given country may affect their opinion and attitude towards it. The respondents were asked whether, if they could choose their place of residence again, they would still decide to settle in Poland. Nearly 84% of respondents would made the same decision. There was no significant (p > 0.05) correspondence between choosing Poland if able to choose a place of residence again and gender, place of residence, age or nationality. Their answers to this question are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Choosing Poland if able to choose a place of residence again

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Definitely yes	128	57.1
	Rather yes	60	26.8
	I don't know	4	1.8
	Rather not	16	7.1
	Definitely not	16	7.1
	Total	224	100.0

Source: own research.

The respondents were asked about their life plans connected with Poland. The study revealed that almost half of the respondents did not have any departure plans, while the other half planned to leave Poland. The respondents were also asked why they wanted to change their current place of residence. The most frequent answers included poor living conditions in Poland (low wages, lack of tolerance for cultural or religious differences, racism) and easier life in another country. A significant (p < 0.05) correspondence was found between potential change of a place of residence and gender. In the vast majority of cases, women did not want to leave Poland. Table 7 presents their answers to the question about a potential change of their current place of residence to another country.

Table 7. Potential change of a place of residence

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No departure plans	108	48.2
	Planned departure to the home country	32	14.3
	Planned departure abroad	84	37.5
	Total	224	100.0

Source: own research.

The aim of the study was to answer the question: How is the process of integration of immigrants in Poland proceeding?

The study revealed that almost half of the respondents did not plan to leave Poland. Immigrants staying in Poland were able to practice their religion and beliefs freely – this was the opinion of almost 85% of the respondents. However, the access to places of worship where they could practice their religion (churches, mosques, temples, etc.) was not so widespread: nearly 70% of the respondents claimed that they did not have access to such places. This could be explained by the fact that Poland is a country inhabited mostly by Christians, so, obviously, Catholic churches constitute the majority of places of worship in Poland.

55% of them initiated and maintained contacts with the mixed society (Poles, compatriots and foreigners). Nearly 84% of the respondents stated that if they had a possibility to choose their place of residence again, they would still decide to live in Poland.

The analysis of the indicators examined in the study revealed that the vast majority of the respondents (61%) integrated with the host society to a great extent. However, a large group of immigrants (39%) who had problems with integration was also identified.

Conclusions

The obtained research results are similar to those obtained by Anita Brzozowska and Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska (2014), who also examined the social integration of immigrants (only from Ukraine) into Polish society. The research conducted by these authors shows that immigrants from Ukraine focused not only on maintaining relationships with Poles, but also on deepening them. Most Ukrainians mentioned Poles as their closest and trusted friends (78%), which proves that they develop strong bonds with representatives of the host country. The conducted analyses showed that Ukrainian immigrants settled in the Masovian Voivodeship develop their bridging capital not only by using strong marital ties with Polish spouses, but also through strong ties with unrelated representatives of the host country, as evidenced by the volume and density of the social networks in which they participate. The strategy aimed at accumulating the bridging capital and developing strong ties with Poles is typical not only of Ukrainian immigrants who entered mixed marriages, but also of those who entered marriages with other Ukrainian citizens.

Poland is one of the countries experiencing an international flow of people, which is why Poles must strive for a dialogue with immigrants who have settled on the territory of Poland. Polish people must manage diversity, build integrating environments together, combat social distance between groups, and prevent prejudice and discrimination. In order to achieve this goal, social integration becomes a key tool which allows social groups of different nationalities, cultures and religions to be included in the host society.

Thus, adequate integration policy is needed. First of all, this translates into recognition of the need for proper planning and implementation of activities leading to gaining and spreading knowledge of the phenomena of migration and integration, their dynamics and related processes, including group processes. Secondly, both migrants' situation before they arrived to the host country and their current functioning in it should be taken into account. Finally, it should be remembered that by supporting immigrants Poles also help to build their own daily living conditions. If immigrants are left to their own devices, it will probably have an impact on the quality of Poles' everyday life, which, looking into the future, will certainly become more and more multicultural.

Therefore, aiming at creating successful immigration policy in Poland, one must learn multiculturalism and allow immigrants to actively participate in the social life as agents within the dominant culture. Intercultural education is more than education adapted for the phenomenon of multiculturalism. "Multiculturalism is treated as a fact, whereas interculturalism is a task and an educational challenge" (Nikitorowicz, 1999, p. 25). It is all about increasing one's awareness of existing differences as well as learning about and accepting the elements of different cultures (Lewowicki, 2000). It is a lifelong cognitive and practical experience of every human being an individual unit as well as a member of society (Szczurek-Boruta, 2009).

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