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Informal practices, unemployment and migration in small-town Poland

Introduction: Twenty-First Century Social Change in Post-Communist Europe

This article combines perspectives from the literatures on contemporary migration and social change in post-communist Europe to explore the livelihood strategies of unemployed potential migrants in rural Poland. It examines how their views on migration interconnect with perceptions about local informal practices and relations. Although this interconnection is addressed in literature about migrants employed informally in European receiving countries, informal practices as such, other than informal trading opportunities, are rarely under the spotlight in scholarship about migration motives in countries of origin.¹

By contrast, informality - admittedly a slippery concept, as discussed below - can hardly be ignored in accounts of post-communist change. From Gorbachev's campaign for the rule of law to the adoption of the EU *acquis* by new member-states in Central Europe, doing things by the book has been central to democratization. This is not just a matter of adopting new legislation. EU accession processes create 'pressure towards a more convergent pan-European legal culture',² which is supposed to permeate society. Communist regimes, despite and because of their proclivity for red tape, had harboured informal practices and relations at every level. Social equality and efficiency should be served by the formalisation of many spheres; as Bafoil argues, this would set post-communist countries back on path towards Weberian-style modernisation, leaving behind the distorted modernisation projects of the communist period.³

However, as Bafoil and other commentators have observed, the single path is an unhelpful metaphor. Ledeneva's remark regarding informality in Russia, that "change is happening to a varying degree in different sectors and contexts,"⁴ seems equally applicable elsewhere. Old habits continue to influence present practice. "Many informal economic practices, witnessed today, developed in the late socialist period and have in fact persisted and played significant roles in shaping the emerging logic(s) of the post-socialist order(s)."⁵ Moreover, the introduction of capitalism created its own reasons to do things outside formal rules and procedures. The post-1989 arrival of unemployment "decanted [surplus labour] into the informal economy"⁶ across the region, given that state benefits frequently do not constitute an alternative livelihood. The stresses of economic transition in the 1990s resulted in many people being thrown back on informal livelihood strategies, as discussed below. Even more importantly for the argument of this article, twenty-first century employers increasingly engage in informal practices, perpetuating the need for sections of the population to rely on their own informal strategies.

Casualisation of labour is a trend in many countries of the world, with employee rights ignored in the interests of flexibility and cost reduction.⁷ "Informality is increasingly becoming normal, not least in middle and even high-income countries." Even in OECD countries a growing tendency to an "informalisation" of working conditions creates informal employment, partly because of increasing international competition in the course of globalisation.⁸ With reference to Eastern Europe, Meardi argues that "not only do new member states generally provide employers with more "freedom" than the old ones (except the UK) but they have increased this "freedom" particularly generously."⁹ Writing about rural Romania, for example, Horváth reports on the wide-scale flexibilization of employment relations which limits access to formal and long-term jobs, especially for younger and less well-educated parts of the population.¹⁰

Another trend relevant to this article is social equality, although it is not straightforward to determine whether societies in the region are becoming more or less equal. The overall increase in income

inequality which marked the 1990s seems to have been reversed, and recently most new EU member-states have witnessed narrowing income inequality. Since EU accession, poverty has reduced everywhere except Slovenia, where it was already low.¹¹ However, national figures conceal core-periphery divides within member-states. The transition to a market economy has benefited some regions and locations more than others, with growth disproportionately high in a handful of dynamic urban centres¹² and many peripheral areas lagging behind. Since EU accession inequalities have persisted, despite structural fund investments and mass migration. In countries such as Poland and Romania it seems that regional inequalities have grown since EU accession, even as income inequality nationally has narrowed.¹³ Unemployment rates – as in Western Europe – are often considerably higher in peripheral regions, notably on the eastern peripheries of Slovakia, Hungary and Poland.¹⁴ Such discrepancies may help explain why popular perceptions of inequality remain strong, and even though – for example - in Poland – income differentiation is currently at the EU average, it seems that the public perceives it as being still too high.¹⁵ In countries across the region, many citizens are convinced of an –institutionalized system of excessive disparity.¹⁶

Finally, migration, particularly since EU accession, has changed the lives of many of the region's inhabitants. New links to diverse locations within Europe and beyond are particularly evident in the periphery. As Koleva writes about Bulgaria, –As a result of the global spread of visitors and relatives, the inhabitants are aware of their village being situated in a geographical and virtual space which they could hardly have imagined a decade ago – Their world has widened, reaching far beyond the nearby towns.¹⁷ According to migration network theory, as networks expand, so migration becomes less selective, and even weaker and poorer members of society begin to migrate: emigration becomes –a reliable and relatively risk-free resource.¹⁸ Moreover, as a migration culture becomes established in a particular location, local people become bolder in their choice of destinations so that, for example,

Romanian migrants who chose Hungary in the 1990s began to migrate to Western Europe, even before EU accession.¹⁹

With regard to the periodisation of social change, this article belongs to the body of literature which suggests that legacies of the communist period are now less important for social change and attitudes, and that it is important to understand the substantial differences between the 1990s and the 21st century.²⁰ Developments in international employment practices, combined with the rapid growth of international migration and transnational networks, are among the most significant factors shaping the lives of many citizens. This is not to deny that the roots of informality are endogenous, in the sense that local migration networks pull in ever new inhabitants, while cultures of informality more generally can certainly be seen as historical legacies.

Although the article adopts an anthropological/sociological approach, it should also be of interest to economists, addressing issues similar to those raised in some recent quantitative studies. There appears to be an unemployment/migration/informality nexus, where the three phenomena are interconnected, but the causes and effects are not self-evident. Do informal practices breed more informality/unemployment and/or migration, and, if so, how? Does migration breed more migration/informality/unemployment? Unemployment can cause migration, as migration theorists have observed since the nineteenth century, but not all unemployed people migrate, so exactly why and when so they do so? This article, being based on a small sample, cannot provide definitive answers to such questions, but the detailed interviews about individual livelihood strategies can establish some patterns of causation: for example, whether and why interviewees see migration as preferable to informal work in Poland. Some recent studies by economists do suggest this to be true in other countries (Mexico and Tajikistan)²¹ but only qualitative research, such as Horváth's research on Romania, can capture migrants' actual reasoning and motivations.²²

The structure of the article is as follows. I discuss the terms *livelihood*, *informal* and *transnational*, and justify the choice of Poland as a case study. The main part of the article focuses on interviewees' discussions of their own potential livelihood strategies, in the context of their perceptions about the local economy and of opportunities to work abroad. It examines how interviewees' impressions about the prevalence of informal practices in Poland incline them towards migration abroad and at how and why they use - or are unable to use - informal migration networks.

Livelihoods

As in my previous research, I used a livelihood strategy approach to understand how individuals understood their options, both in Poland and further afield. Although livelihood strategies are usually studied in the context of international development,²³ people everywhere have livelihood strategies, particularly in less well-off households. Hence the approach is equally applicable to the UK,²⁴ Poland and other European countries. A livelihood is more than just going to work and earning money. It frequently spans a range of official and informal activities, such as additional earnings in the shadow economy and exchanging favours with neighbours. In an article published in 2002, Wallace described households in post-communist Europe as surviving on the basis of a *portfolio of activities*.²⁵ Moreover, a key aspect of the approach is that it views individuals and households as constructing livelihoods in the context of their impressions of the local economy, as well as their personal and household resources, including networks of useful contacts. Locally prevailing norms and values influence their decision-making on matters such as how migration *should be done*.

Over 19 million jobs are estimated to have been lost across Central and Eastern Europe between 1990 and 1996.²⁶ The livelihoods literature which emerged in the 1990s, often using the term *survival strategies*, explored how individuals and their household members responded to the insecurities of this early transition period.²⁷ It tended to focus on how *transition losers* made ends

meet, rather than wealth accumulation.²⁸ Reliance on exchange of favour networks was often seen as retrogressive; Rose uses the term 'pre-modern'.²⁹ However, anthropologists, particularly in recent years, have tended to emphasise that informal social practices in the region are not always seen locally as acts of desperation or as bad, unwelcome and unfair.³⁰ In many cases they represent a source of stability and comfort, the known and local, in a world where the rules are always changing. Moreover, a double standard applies, since 'the ambiguous grey acts of 'ordinary people''³¹ can be condoned, especially if they are family members or neighbours, while corruption in the outside world is considered unacceptable.

In a study published in 2002, Olwig and Sørensen claim that although 'a basic assumption in migration studies is that the search for a better livelihood is a main cause of migratory movements' such studies rarely take in-depth research into specific livelihoods as their point of departure.³² As de Haas observes, this is odd, given that the livelihood strategy approach has much in common with the New Economics of Labour Migration, a theory which stresses the importance of household strategies.³³ In 2015, in-depth literature on specific livelihoods of European migrants remains small. An interesting exception is Nagy's work in French, discussing Romanian household strategies, where income earned by one family member abroad is invested in house extensions and agrotourism in Romania.³⁴ There is also an emerging English and Polish-language literature on return migrants shaping livelihoods in their origin countries. However, this does not employ the lens of 'informality'.³⁵

“Transnational” and “informal” lenses

The use of the concepts 'transnational' and 'informal' needs justification, since both are ambiguous and their usefulness has been disputed.

Irek, having reviewed the theoretical literature on informality from an anthropological perspective, suggests that informality can helpfully be understood by scholars in the broadest possible and non-normative manner as ways of behaviour outside the state: 'the total social space minus what is controlled by the state'. She points out that 'it is up to commonsense judgment to work out the qualitative difference between the proverbial housewife cooking a family dinner and organised mafia crime'.³⁶ Economists use a different touchstone: 'All definitions delineate informal employment in terms of what is absent from it or insufficient about it relative to formal employment'.³⁷ In practice, as Hart (the originator of the term 'informal economy') observes, it can be hard to draw rigid distinctions between formal and informal.³⁸ Attempting to measure informal employment and/or determine its influence on other phenomena, economists include a range of practices.³⁹ For the purposes of this article, it is enough to note that in contemporary usage the term covers not only work within the shadow economy but also all 'jobs that generally lack basic social or legal protections or employment benefits'.⁴⁰ Often these are temporary; although fixed-term contracts do not necessarily break labour law, they often go against the spirit of the law, since they are used by employers to evade responsibilities in respect of worker rights. Self-employment is often classed as informal, since self-employed people are typically not subject to the same range of protection as employees.

'Transnationalism' also requires explanation. Migration scholars since the 1990s have realised the value of studying all stages of migrants' experiences and behaviour in the context of webs created between particular countries as the result of migration.⁴¹ For example, the impact of migration on sending countries is not just loss of population, but also gaining ties abroad. Migrants' lives abroad cannot be understood without investigating how they engage in transnational practices, keeping a foot in both countries by, for example, communicating with friends and relatives at home and making return visits. Transnational networks are extraordinarily dynamic in the twenty-first century, thanks to

speedier transport and communication, and this helps explain how new waves of migration can suddenly occur.

‘Informal’ and ‘transnational’ suffer from being scholarly terms unlikely to be comprehensible to interviewees engaging in informal or transnational practices on the ground. However, this does not prevent their being useful analytical tools. Just as migration scholars often refer to a ‘transnational lens,’ a way of seeing the world as connections between countries, so the ‘informal lens’ can be conceptualised as a way of seeing social practices according to whether or not they are acted out following officially-established rules.

The important point is that, without referring to ‘informality,’ my interviewees used this approach when complaining about the limited nature of their local and international livelihood options. It might seem far-fetched to fuse discussion of globalisation-induced demand for flexible labour and old-fashioned post-communist use of contacts, but they are part of the same problem in the eyes of interviewees: practices are seen as unfair because they are socially unjust and not in accordance with proper rules. Using the term ‘informal’ captures this similarity. Before embarking on the research I had not intended to analyse my data through the lens of informality. However, the interview content suggested the helpfulness of such an approach.

The Polish case study

This article is mostly based on a project which examined links between migration and long-term unemployment. Although unemployment seems to have been a more significant cause of migration in the 1990s, and today unemployed people are almost certainly a minority among Polish migrants, survey evidence suggests that unemployment remains a significant ‘push factor.’⁴² The article discusses the

perceptions of forty long-term unemployed people interviewed in 2012-3 in two peripheral regions of Poland with a high volume of migration.

Interviewees expressed considerable pessimism about local labour markets and a conviction that migration was continuing unabated, while not alleviating unemployment. Although I never asked directly about the topic, most interviewees spontaneously attributed their problems finding work locally to not knowing people who could get them jobs. The minority who hoped to migrate, but felt they had small chance of success, also tended to blame lack of useful connections.

Poland is an interesting case study in informal practices. Although this article is particularly concerned with contemporary causes and manifestations, Polish informality has a long tradition, linked to Poland's distinctive profile relative to other Soviet bloc countries: the survival of a private sector and, from the 1970s, shuttle migration, organised political opposition, and an economy marked by extreme shortage. Democratisation since 1989 has created much more favourable conditions for the rule of law. However, to some extent attitudes and habits developed before 1989 continue to manifest themselves today, for example in distrust of officials and institutions; finding ways round bureaucratic obstacles; and resourcefulness in making ends meet.

Informality also has contemporary causes, arising from the nature of the economy and characteristics of international migration. Within the region, Poland is typical but also in some respects extreme. Although estimates vary, the size of the informal economy is probably high relative to other OECD countries and Poland has been identified as one of the OECD countries where informal employment poses the most serious challenges.⁴³ In Poland, according to the National Labour Inspectorate, fifty-three percent of employers were in breach of labour law in 2013, compared with fifty percent in 2011.⁴⁴ In addition, short-term contracts are increasingly prevalent. 'Junk contracts' - where employees are officially self-employed under civil law provisions⁴⁵ - have attracted particular attention and condemnation in recent years, but in general Poland stands out for having the second highest share of

temporary employment among OECD countries, after Chile: above twenty-five percent of total dependent employment today, compared with about ten percent back in 2001.⁴⁶ In 2013, only fifty-four percent of Poles were working on permanent contracts, compared, for example, with fifty-six percent in 2011.⁴⁷ According to Boulhol, “persistently high structural unemployment is likely to have contributed to this phenomenon by weakening workers’ bargaining power and prompting them to accept offers for relatively precarious jobs.”⁴⁸

Informality, as discussed above, can also be considered anthropologically. As Kubal illustrates, Poles’ respect for the law as an abstract concept coexists with perceptions that actual laws are often unfair, unnecessary and against common sense, leading to a tendency to ignore regulations.⁴⁹ Poles often mistrust formal institutions, although trust in some has apparently improved over the last ten years: for example, trust in public officials was forty-five percent in 2012, compared with thirty-one percent in 2002. As one would expect from studies of other countries, trust in public institutions increases with income, so it is not surprising to find low levels of trust among unemployed Poles.⁵⁰ However, although some interviewees expressed distrust of job centres and the labour inspectorate, and concerns about the fairness of hiring practices at state institutions, mistrust between Poles in general is probably more important in shaping their predicaments and strategies. Poles seem to be less trustful of strangers than citizens of other Central European post-communist countries.⁵¹ Low interpersonal trust helps explain why Polish employers prefer to hire people they know, but also why many Poles prefer not to ask strangers for help in seeking work abroad.

Finally, Poland is an interesting case study for links between unemployment and migration simply because there is so much migration from Poland, and this now affects all parts of Poland, including those without an international migration tradition. The high proportion of migrants per head of population in many locations suggests penetration of migration into everyday life and practices, but the sheer number of migrants is also important. Poland and Romania – which have the highest absolute

volume of out-migration in the EU ó generate particularly large and geographically diverse transnational migration networks. These span the continent, reaching out to destinations such as Ireland, Norway and Iceland, which before 2004 barely, if ever, attracted labour migrants from Central and Eastern Europe.

Livelihood strategies and formal and informal employment in Limanowa and Grajewo

The article is based on my three recent projects on Polish migration, particularly thirty-six interviews with long-term unemployed people conducted in 2013 in Limanowa (pop. 11,000) and four in Grajewo (pop. 22,000) in 2012.⁵² All three projects explored labour markets, livelihood strategies and migration patterns in small towns and surrounding rural areas. All revealed the significance of family and friendship ties in influencing migration choices, which ó contrary to the assumptions of some migration theorists⁵³ - definitely did not seem to be made by individuals acting in isolation, purely on the basis of economic rationality. The eighty-two interviews in Poland for the first project (about family migration) were mostly with employed people. Although they had stories of unemployment-linked migration, sometimes of migration taken as a snap reaction to unemployment, it was only when I began to talk to currently unemployed return migrants for my second project that I appreciated the significance of the different stages of long-term unemployment for migration planning, and the usefulness of a research project which would focus particularly on this. A final common theme was that (just as in the Bulgarian and Romanian villages mentioned earlier in the article) international migration had become much more noticeable than internal. To quote a Limanowa interviewee, "we stick in one place in Poland, but we look for jobs all over the world."⁵⁴ In any country, it can make sense to commute to work from small towns, but not if they are out-of-the-way. Limanowa is at least 1 hour 40 minutes by bus from Kraków - sometimes more in winter. As Boulhol comments in a 2014 OECD report, "the insufficient, though improving, quality of transport infrastructure [in Poland] prevents workers from

commuting easily and responding to more favourable labour market conditions elsewhere. Indeed, despite some recent noticeable progress in developing road infrastructure, mostly financed by EU funds, internal labour mobility is still widely seen as insufficient. Moreover, expensive housing in urban areas related to weak housing policies is a severe obstacle to relocating and thus to a better integrated national labour market.⁵⁵ My interviewees repeatedly referred to this obstacle, as well as the higher cost of living generally in Polish cities.

Although small towns vary in prosperity⁵⁶ they tend to be considerably poorer than cities, and overall in Poland average monthly income⁵⁷ is lower, the smaller the location of residence. Registered unemployment is also higher in small towns and rural areas. For example, in January 2014 average figures were Poland 14.0 percent; Warsaw 4.9 percent; Kraków 6.1 percent; Limanowa *powiat* 19.3 percent.⁵⁸ Small-town and rural residents are particularly pessimistic about the prospect of finding work: assessment of the situation on the local market is connected above all to size of location of residence.⁵⁹ Moreover, informal work is especially prevalent in rural areas, reflecting the dominance of the informal sector in work not requiring high-level qualifications.⁶⁰ Limanowa is exceptional only in having one of the highest birthrates in Poland, and this presumably exacerbates unemployment-related migration. As the authors of a study of the whole Małopolska region observe, international migration from Małopolska has the hallmarks of crowding-out, i.e. the emigration of people who cannot find jobs.⁶¹ This is not a new phenomenon – both Limanowa and Grajewo have long histories of emigration to the USA – but, as this article will demonstrate, some aspects of crowding-out have particular twenty-first century causes.

The causes of poverty and unemployment are hardly surprising. Larger factories, previously the bedrock of the local economy, have closed or considerably reduced workforces; new businesses are mostly small-scale and often ephemeral. Supermarkets are mushrooming in Poland but offer poor quality employment as well as forcing smaller shops to close. According to 25-year old Jan:

It would be good if there were some bigger factories ó that's what we lack in Limanowa. We don't have firms which could give work and make money. We used to have a wine factory, mills, a railway station, until recently we had Koral which produces ice-cream, people made metal sheeting, that's all disappeared because the town didn't help support it. The terrain isn't good because there's not much flat land and there's nowhere to build a big factory. And have you heard about the landslides? That puts investors off even more.

Investments in infrastructure ó such as better roads, public buildings and parks - were welcomed for their own sake, but not considered to solve the problem of structural unemployment.

Interviewees in both towns ó like people I had interviewed elsewhere in Poland ó often displayed a strong sense of how things ought to be. As in the past, a local factory or factories should provide steady *formal* employment for much of the population. However, interviewees varied in how they assessed the current operation of previously dominant enterprises such as the chipboard factory in Grajewo or juice plant in Tymbark, near Limanowa. All agreed that factories had scaled down their workforces, but interviewees who adopted a 'glass half full' approach considered they still offered 'good' jobs to the lucky few. The 'glass half empty' perspective emphasised the poor quality of jobs at the same enterprises. For example: 'I wouldn't want to work at the [Tymbark juice] factory. You have to be available to work day and night shifts, it varies. Or work on call (*na telefon*). They phone you and then you have to come in' (Eliza).

Interviewees took for granted that they could not just register as unemployed and expect a regular job to fall into their laps. Limanowa Job Centre does have vacancies, particularly for shop assistants and builders. However, many unemployed people - despite having experience as shop assistants or builders ó apparently do not find these vacancies suitable for them. A Job Centre analysis of the Limanowa labour market comments that 'one should note that the occupations most in demand are those with the highest number of registered unemployed people.'⁶² This paradox is not explained, but

my interviews with unemployed people suggested they were reluctant to work in supermarkets or construction because of their reputation for exploiting workers and violations of labour law (see below). Justyna, for example, lamented: 'That's what they demand, at weekends most of all, in those bigger shops, flexible people who can work six or seven days a week.' Particularly considering the shortage of childcare institutions in rural areas, it is understandable why many women cannot commit to supermarket jobs.⁶³

Reflecting on their failure to find work, many people expressed frustration about what they viewed as unreasonable demands of employers - particularly insistence on previous experience. Overwhelmingly, however, people complained that high unemployment and the great demand for decent local jobs meant that they were always reserved for friends. Almost every respondent spontaneously made comments along the lines of 'everything is done through acquaintances' or 'if you have friends you have a job' (Dominika). Interviewees felt this was true of both public and private sectors.

Workplaces are reserved for family members. Everything is kept in the family I think. People just hang onto their jobs and retire once their son or daughter graduates, so they will get the job. But how am I supposed to manage? Everything is in the family and I don't have any relatives working in offices. So I won't get a job. Everything's in the family. You can see that in the *gmina* offices. Just one family running the *gmina*. (Oktawia, from village near Limanowa)

As for businesses, these are mostly small, so it is hardly surprising that, as Halina observed, 'those private firms mostly just give jobs to the closest family members, if there are any employees at all. And only afterwards might they employ someone else.'

Interviewees often suggested that the best they expected through formal channels was that the Job Centre would find them occasional placements, not leading to permanent work. As Marzena complained: 'It often happens that the employer just takes you for an open-ended trial period without

any contract or insurance contributions – then they fire you and take on someone else. The Job Centre pays for the placement, the employer has a worker without the costs. So mostly there are placements, more than work contracts (Luiza). The Job Centre, by making placements attractive to employers, exacerbates the problem of temporary work: the system itself contributes to the rise in precarious employment.

Interviewees therefore had to be proactive, and the label ‘unemployed’ concealed a range of types of livelihood, including combining unemployed status with studying part-time; caring for their children or parents; or ‘resting’ in Poland between spells of work abroad. Some interviewees were job-hunting more energetically than others. Only three had no informal work, heavy caring responsibilities or recent migration experience; all were middle-aged women and all were desperate to find a paid job.

Informal part- or full-time work included helping out in a spouse or parent’s small business: for example, selling second-hand clothes, making furniture, working in a café, and doing accounts. Several women were working as nannies. Men did seasonal building work, which is readily available in Limanowa but lowly regarded, because it is often in the shadow economy and poorly paid. Overall, interviewees gave the impression that working in the local shadow economy was not a lucrative livelihood strategy, and that in any case, particularly for women in villages, there were few opportunities to do so.

In theory, dependence on benefits might be an alternative strategy, but it was not the case that interviewees could subsist on benefits, and most received none at all. They had health insurance by virtue of registering as unemployed, but unemployment benefit in Poland is generally awarded only for six months. Hence unemployed people who cannot depend on their families have little choice but to work.

International migration as a response to unemployment in Poland

Often the interviews revealed a range of strategies tried and abandoned. For example, Andrzej, a 35-year old father, had lost a job in Scandinavia in 2011, then started looking for building work in Poland, but:

you have to work from dawn to dusk without a break. I need to pay the bills and then have some left over to live on. The only option in Poland would be if you had your own firm, that's the only chance. My [builder] friends and I say that in Poland the only options are to be run your own business or go abroad. Or in the case of someone with contacts they can get an office job.

Since his friends had tried self-employment with little success and because he lacked friends in offices, Andrzej concluded 'it makes no sense to work in Poland'. Frequently, interviewees felt that by the time of the interview they had exhausted all available Polish possibilities. 'There simply are no options. Not at the moment. I've looked. I've enquired here, I've enquired there. But there's nothing' (Jolanta).

Considering the poverty of livelihood options for small-town residents without useful contacts, it is not surprising that migration is viewed as the 'only' remaining option. Some interviewees drew a direct contrast between the two strategies: informal work in Poland or migration. Paulina, for example, observed that 'it depends on the employer, but lots of them want to employ you on the black market. So it's hard, they don't want to pay your insurance contributions, and that's why it's better to go abroad'. Jerzy made the same point:

I'm not looking for work in Poland now. In Limanowa there's no work and won't be any for a long time. They just build supermarkets and there won't be anything. Hardly anyone creates new workplaces. If you can get seasonal [building] work from March to October it's without insurance, without anything, and it's dangerous. One employer pays the wages, another won't, that's the Polish mentality. It's not the same in the West where if an employee works he must be paid.

Of course, interviewees also knew cases of poor working conditions abroad, but in general the attitude seemed to be that if one stayed a certain length of time in a Western country it should be possible to pick up decent work. With regard to seasonal and temporary work, the classic double standard prevailed: interviewees felt that in Poland they were entitled to work in the formal economy, whereas abroad, they lowered their expectations.

Discussing the concept of a 'survival strategy', I have argued elsewhere⁶⁴ that livelihood strategies cover a continuum between the poles of survival and accumulation. With regard to migration the distinction is often particularly blurred and interviewees refer to both being 'forced' and 'tempted'. People migrate from towns like Limanowa because they are forced by the shortage of formal employment, but they are also tempted to migrate because migrant success stories are so clearly evident, particularly in housing. New migrants can also be literally 'tempted' to work abroad by friends and relatives.

Iwona: My uncle proposed it because he's been in Norway about ten years. He mentioned it to my husband several times but he never been brave enough.

Anne: Your husband had work in Limanowa?

Iwona: Yes. He said if you want to take the opportunity, it might not come up again, then pack your bags and we'll go.

The interviews suggested that in both Grajewo and Limanowa many people had close family and friends abroad and expected to use migrate using these networks if necessary. Luiza commented, for example:

My mother-in-law is abroad, and my sister-in-law, they're in Germany and they both clean. My sister-in-law has actually been there ten years and is pretty well set up, she has some permanent jobs and they earn good money. What I say is that if I graduate from the adult education college and can't find work I'll get my mother-in-law to fix something up [in Germany].

Interviewees frequently seemed to assume that networks determined local migration destinations: as Alicja put it, 'people go where they have contacts'. Joanna suggested that 'everywhere you need contacts, you need them abroad too, somebody has to recommend you [for a foreign job], it's the same as in Poland'.

In some cases, the interviewee's period of unemployment in Poland was protracted while they waited for a foreign contact to come up with the right job. Andrzej *ó* mentioned above as a returnee from Scandinavia who had ruled out different options for work in Poland - had been waiting for two years for the right invitation from his *znajomi* (less close friends).

Andrzej: I'm looking around for work abroad.

Anne: How do you do that?

Andrzej: I'm counting on my friends. I have good contacts with my friends. It's true there's the crisis, it's hard to get work, and I'd rather wait until there's some quality work to go abroad, nothing outstanding, but secure work. I have heaps of friends, not just in Sweden, but also Norway, Germany, England.

Other builders in the sample were in similar circumstances: the hoped-for invitations had not yet materialised. This could be rationalised *ó* particularly, perhaps, in the interview context - as a sensible strategy of not rushing abroad before a good opportunity presented itself. By contrast, several women interviewees presented a more pessimistic point of view, emphasising that long-term unemployment had made them passive, diffident and slow to follow up opportunities.

Why am I stuck in Limanowa? I still have personal matters to keep me here, that's the first thing, and also I think it's a kind of lethargy, you know, not wanting anything to change. I do have friends who encourage me, say come and see, but as I said, I'm not brave enough. (Aleksandra)

In fact, as I have discussed in another paper,⁶⁵ although almost everyone interviewed in these towns had friends and family abroad (often their parents, children and siblings), contacts abroad are not always able to help new migrants, or in some cases perhaps do not want to help. Explaining the poverty of their livelihood strategies to date ó strategies which had been centred on the Polish labour market - several interviewees made comments like 'I didn't have the chance. Because lots of people go through their contacts.' Here, Katarzyna assumed that because she did not have contacts, she could not go abroad. It sometimes transpired that the interviewees' adult child or even husband was working abroad but could not or would not 'activate' the network by inviting their family member to join them.

The prevailing view among interviewees - employed or otherwise - in all the small towns, was that you should not go abroad unless you knew someone there, and if possible you should have a job fixed up in advance. Provincial locations with a tradition of migration have a 'migration culture' whereby residents expect to migrate using networks and this culture is continually reinforced by cautionary tales which circulate about the dangers of trusting to strangers. The reliance on personal contacts was not always shared by experienced migrants, but naturally was especially marked among those with less or no migration experience.⁶⁶ Luiza, for example, commented that she would migrate 'if I had secure work, recommended by someone - I wouldn't go into the unknown, through some employment office, definitely not'. Because you hear bad things'. She equated using an agency with going into the unknown (*w ciemno*). I asked Kinga, who was about to go to a job fixed up by her cousin in London, whether she would have gone to the UK without a relative there and she replied 'Probably not. I wouldn't go because you hear bad stories, on the Internet and whatever'.

Although one might assume that this particular sample of long-term unemployed people were in their current plight precisely because they lacked confidence to strike out on their own, nonetheless, they were not expressing an unusual point of view, and other research in the UK seems to corroborate that informal migration networks are used by most migrants,⁶⁷ although Poles from locations or sections of

society without strong networks do use recruitment agencies.⁶⁸ Employers abroad also play a role in encouraging the use of informal ties. McCollum et al, writing about Latvian labour migration to the UK, and basing their research on interviews with employers, argue that it is a predictable development for recruitment agencies to be bypassed as migrant networks develop: one can observe ðan increased importance of social networks as a route into foreign labour markets (sometimes at the expense of recruitment agencies) as a labour migration flow begins to matureö. This is because taking on new employees on the recommendation of their co-ethnic friends and relatives can be a ðquick, inexpensive, reliable and hassle-free means of recruitmentö.⁶⁹

Conclusion

In recent decades migration researchers have become increasingly conscious of the significance of transnational migration networks. These are highly evident in contemporary Poland and have special significance in locations afflicted by high levels of local unemployment and lower than average wages. Typically these are smaller towns and villages. Just as in the Bulgarian and Romanian villages mentioned in the introduction to this article, it would be impossible to understand the Limanowa or Grajewo labour markets ó stretching across Europe and North America ó without reference to informal ties. In particular, rapidly expanding migration networks since 2004 create an increasingly complex and geographically diverse web of transnational household livelihood strategies, as existing migrants invite their friends and family to join them and would-be migrants solicit such invitations. Although migration scholars sometimes dispute that networks *cause* migration, my evidence shows that they clearly do.

No interviewees had entirely ruled out international migration. It seemed unlikely in some cases, especially where they had health problems, but others were on the brink of departure. However, the fact

that many were still waiting in Poland indicated that networks do not always work efficiently and helps explain why even in high migration locations there is still unemployment. It is not enough to be in touch with people abroad. At the fringes of every net there are still individuals trying unsuccessfully to clamber on, or like Andrzej, waiting for exactly the right opportunity. Moreover, interviewees who were stuck in Poland because they lacked invitations abroad often displayed a mistrust of strangers and this contributed to restricting their options. Although they sometimes expressed the idea that it was unfair that they lacked access to informal networks, they still remained convinced that it was necessary to use informal ties in order to migrate.

The evidence suggests that 'informality' in the sense of reliance on informal contacts is a relevant concept with reference to interviewees' experience of the whole labour market, in Poland and abroad. However, what differentiates those labour markets (as probably in an increasing number of Central European locations) is that many people have more useful contacts abroad than at home. The high level of unemployment exacerbates the tendency for jobs in small towns to be reserved for friends. This is not true of all jobs - as unfilled vacancies in building firms and supermarkets at the Job Centre attest - but certainly of much 'decent' work. Precariousness is not a purely Polish phenomenon; indeed, in Romania, Horváth concluded that the lack of 'formally anchored positions in the domestic labour market' was the major reason propelling the young and less well-educated villagers in his study abroad.⁷⁰ My research among Poles of different ages showed that they too have a sense of being pushed from places like Limanowa by the fact that (as they view it) the only alternative to migration are local jobs which are informal in the sense of being to a greater or lesser extent in breach of labour law. Hence informality is leading to migration.

With regard to the merits of a livelihood strategy approach: such an approach invites us to look behind official statistics about local economies, instead seeking out individual and household involvement in the informal economy. This approach is as valid today as it was in the 1990s. It would

be hard to understand the Limanowa labour market without taking into account either the prevalence of informal work in Limanowa or the use of informal migration networks. Going through interviewees' various livelihood options in the course of an interview also provided insight into the causes of that wider pessimism about local prospects and frustration about unfair access to jobs which can lead to their exit from Poland. As one interviewee in the UK told me, Polish GDP growth was 'just statistics' not really relevant to ordinary people. To them, the important fact about the economy often seems to be that they have tried and failed to find a variety of regular employment, but so often been disappointed.

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 2. W. L. Miller, 'Asymmetric Adaptive Legal Cultures among Minorities and Euro-Migrants', *East European Politics*, 28 (2012), 409.
 3. F. Bafoil, *Central and Eastern Europe: Europeanization and Social Change* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 3-6.
 4. A. Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernise? Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8.
 5. A. Polese and P. Rodgers, "Surviving Post-Socialism: the Role of Informal Economic Practices",

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7. Williams and Lansky, 364.

8. J. P. Jütting and J. R. de Laiglesia "Is Informal Normal? Towards More and Better Jobs in Developing Countries: an OECD Development Centre Perspective", (OECD Publishing, 2009), 11-12.

9. G. Meardi, *Social Failures of EU Enlargement. A Case of Workers Voting with their Feet* (London: Routledge, 2012), 6.

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11. *Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2012* (Luxembourg: European Commission, 2013), 314 (Gini coefficients). Eurostat, "People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex [ilc_peps01]"

http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_peps01&lang=en# Last update: 12-03-2015.

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13. *Employment and Social Developments*, 317, "compensation per employee".

14. See e.g. Eurostat Regional Yearbook, "Unemployment rates by sex, age and NUTS 2 regions (%)" http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfst_r_lfu3rt&lang=en.

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17. D. Koleva, 'Rural, Urban and Rurban: Everyday Perceptions and Practices', in G. Duijzings (ed.), *Global Villages: Rural and Urban Transformations in Contemporary Bulgaria* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 144.
18. D. S. Massey, R. Alarón, R., J. Durand, and H. González, *Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987), cited by A. Palloni, A., D. S. Massey, M. Ceballos, K. Espinosa, and M. Spittel, 'Social Capital and International Migration: A Test Using Information on Family Networks', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 106 (2001), 1266-7.
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22. See Note 10.

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32. K. F. Olwig, and N. N. Sørensen, 'Mobile Livelihoods: Making a Living in the World' in N. N. Sørensen and K. F. Olwig (eds.) *Work and Migration: Life and Livelihoods in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.
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35. E.g. R. Black and S. Gent, 'Sustainable Return in Post-Conflict Contexts', *International Migration* 44, 3 (2006):15-38; I. Grabowska-Lusińska, *Migrantów ścieżki zawodowe bez granic* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2012); D. Biełkowska, C. Ułasiński and J. Szymańska (eds.), *Kierunek Małopolska: Charakterystyka powracających i rekomendacje jak nie zmarnować ich kapitału* (Kraków, CDS: 2010); D. Biełkowska, C. Ułasiński and J. Szymańska (eds.) *Warto wracać? Strategie zachowań reemigrantów i rozwiązania służące wykorzystaniu ich potencjału. Opracowanie w ramach projektu „Kierunek Dolny Śląsk”* (Kraków, CDS: 2010); J. Szymańska, C. Ułasiński and D. Biełkowska (eds.) *Zaraz wracam... albo i nie. Skala powrotów, motywacje i strategie życiowe reemigrantów z województwa śląskiego* (Kraków, CDS: 2012).
36. M. Irek, 'Black No More: Towards a New Theoretical Framework for Studies of Space Connected with the Informal Economy', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 1, 2 (2009), 221.
37. Williams and Lansky (2013).

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38. K. Hart, "Bureaucratic Form and the Informal Economy", in B. Guha-Khasnobis, R. Kanbur and E. Ostrom, *Linking the Formal and Informal Economy: Concepts and Policies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
39. See e.g. Jütting and de Laiglesia, 28-9.
40. ILO, "Statistical Update on Employment in the Informal Economy" (Geneva: ILO, 2011), 12, cited in Williams and Lansky, 357.
41. N. Glick Schiller, L. Basch and C. Blanc-Szanton, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1992).
42. Grabowska-Lusińska 2012: 84; J. Napierała, "Regionalne aspekty zróżnicowania mobilności Polaków w świetle wyników sondażu", in P. Kaczmarczyk (ed.) *Współczesne migracje zagraniczne Polaków: Aspekty lokalne i regionalne* (Warsaw: CMR, 2008): 148-9. It is impossible to state that x percent of Polish migrants were unemployed in Poland, given the difficulties in defining both "unemployment" and "migration", extensive regional and local variation in migration patterns; and changing patterns over time. Based on survey evidence, Grabowska-Lusińska 2012 (p. 84) states that the number declaring unemployment as their "key" motivation for migration was 22% in 2007, compared with 40% in 2001.
43. H. Boulhol, "Making the Labour Market Work Better in Poland", OECD Economics Department Working Papers no. 1124, OECD publishing, 2014: 12, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jz2pwf4wd41-en>, accessed 3 July 2014.
44. B. Sendrowicz, "Przybywa pracy na czarno, resort pracy chce zmian w przepisach", http://wyborcza.biz/biznes/1,100896,15739635,Przybywa_pracy_na_czarno_resort_pracy_chce_zmiany.html#TRNajCzytSST (4.4. 2014) accessed 4 April 2014. 20.2 percent of employers seriously violated the law, by employing people without a contract, failing to pay national insurance, or concealing

employment from the Job Centre. Other violations included paying workers part of their wages under the table, without taxes; employing people "half-time" but really for considerably longer hours; taking on workers for trial periods without a contract and prolonging the trial period.

45. Boulhol, 16; A. Kubal, *Socio-Legal Integration: Polish Post-2004 EU Enlargement Migrants in the United Kingdom* (Farnham: Ashgate: 2012), 174-6.

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47. P. Strzelecki, K. Saczuk, I. Grabowska and I. Kotowska "Warunki życia gospodarstw domowych. Rynek pracy", *Diagnoza Społeczna 2013 Warunki i Jakość Życia Polaków - Raport, Contemporary Economics*, 7 (2013): 135

48. Boulhol, 14.

49. Kubal.

50. A. Cybulska, "Zaufanie społeczne", *CBOS BS/33/2012* (March 2012): 15, 17.

51. See for example European Social Survey data discussed in H. Domański, "Zaufanie między ludźmi", in P. B. Sztabiński and F. Sztabiński (eds.), *Polska-Europa. Wyniki Europejskiego Sondażu Społecznego* (Warsaw: IFiS PAN, 2014).

52. I am grateful for a research fellowship from PON, the Polish Research Centre of the Jagiellonian University in London, which enabled me to conduct the 2013 fieldwork. Interviewees were from Limanowa and smaller towns and villages in Limanowa district (*powiat*). I conducted interviews with 35 long-term unemployed people and one person who had recently been unemployed long-term, as well as talking to directors and staff at the Limanowa job centre, social services department and adult education college. The interviewees, eight men and 28 women, were aged 21-57 and formed a diverse group in many respects, although some fell into sub-categories, such as middle-aged women who had hardly or never worked in Poland since the birth of their children; part-time students doing adult education courses who had wanted to work and study but been unable to find a job; and "resting"

builders. I also draw on interviews with return migrants, particularly four unemployed and two semi-employed people (four men and two women) whom I interviewed in Grajewo, north-east Poland, in 2012. Publications from my earlier projects include a monograph, *Polish Families and Migration since EU Accession* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011) and "Polish Return and Double Return Migration", *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, 1 (2014): 25-49.

53. Adherents of neoclassical theory: see S. Castles, H. de Haas and M. Miller (5th ed.), *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 29-30.

54. "Jan". All interviewees have been given pseudonyms.

55. Boulhol, 10-11. See also K. Kowalczyk, "Mobilność i preferencje migracyjne Polaków" (Warsaw: CBOS Research Report 26/2010).

56. See e.g. E. Zuzak, "Male miasta w okresie transformacji: Studium w regionie śląskim" (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006).

57. T. Panek and J. Czapiński, "Warunki życia gospodarstw domowych. Dochody i sposób gospodarowania dochodami", *Diagnoza Społeczna 2013*: 41.

58. http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_1487_PLK_HTML.htm, accessed March 2014.

59. B. Badura, "Nastroje społeczne w kwietniu" (Warsaw: CBOS Research Report 50/2014): 14.

60. W. Zgliczyński, "Rynek pracy na wsi" *Studia Biura Analiz Sejmowych* no. 4 (2010): 116.

61. C. Ulaszewska, W. Chodacz and M. Dzióbko, "Wyniki badań", in Bielewska et al 2010: 33.

62. S. Jasica, "Ranking zawodów deficytowych i nadwyżkowych za 2012 roku" (Limanowa: PUP, 2013): 6.

⁶³ This is despite marked improvements in Polish childcare provision in recent years. In 2013 21.9% of rural children aged 0-6 were in kindergarten or nursery. I. Grabowska, D. Wziak-Białowska, I. E. Kotowska and T. Panek, "Edukacja i kapitał ludzki", *Diagnoza Społeczna 2013*: 92. The number of

institutions is definitely higher in newly built-up rural areas such as the outskirts of Warsaw than in places like Limanowa.

64. See Note 26.

65. A. White, 'Polish Circular Migration and Marginality: a Livelihood Strategy Approach' (paper presented at the Euroemigranci conference, Kraków, September 2013), available on-line at <http://www.euroemigranci.pl/dokumentacja.html>.

66. For Grajewo and Sanok, see White 2011, 79-80.

67. P. Trevena, D. McGhee and S. Heath, 'Location, Location? A Critical Examination of Patterns and Determinants of Internal Mobility Among Post-accession Polish Migrants in the UK', *Population, Space and Place*, 19, 6 (2013): 671-687; A. White and L. Ryan, 'Polish Temporary Migration: the Formation and Significance of Social Networks', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60, 9 (2008): 1479.

68. White 2011, 80-81.

69. D. McCollum, D., S. Shubin, E. Apsite and Z. Krisjane, 'Rethinking Labour Migration Channels: the Experience of Latvia from EU Accession to Economic Recession', *Population, Space and Place*, 19 (2013): 699, 697.

70. Horváth, 783.