

MOBILITY TOWARDS STABILITY: NETWORK-MEDIATED ETHNOGRAPHY OF SUCCESSFUL POLISH MIGRANTS IN DUBLIN

ŁUKASZ KACZMAREK

DEPARTMENT OF ETHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY, POZNAŃ

Inspired by some findings in the areas of the anthropology of wellbeing and mobility, in this paper I wish to consider the non-dichotomous relationship between socio-spatial mobility and the life stability of Poles who have migrated to Ireland and are satisfied with their current status. I assume that the status that my research partners have obtained is satisfying for them because it enables them – and those they feel responsible for – to achieve further social mobility in a direction they want. In other words, they see mobility as a means of achieving successful stability, and such stability is a means to continue mobility, both social and spatial, if it is deemed necessary or preferred.

Since most of my research partners have settled in Dublin taking advantage of social networks created before migration and actively developed after, I have decided to follow in their footsteps in the form of ‘network-mediated ethnography’, to by using my existing network of family and friends to become acquainted with successful Polish migrants in Ireland, and to understand them and their experiences better. I complemented these attempts using means accessible to everyone – searching the Internet, doing fieldwork in selected localities and hanging out with my research partners.

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Inspirując się ustaleniami z zakresu antropologii dobrobytu i mobilności, w niniejszym artykule rozpatruję niedychotomiczny związek między społeczno-przestrzenną mobilnością a stabilnością życiową Polaków, którzy po migracji do Irlandii osiągnęli satysfakcjonujący ich obecnie status. Zakładam, iż ów status zadowala ich, gdyż umożliwia im i ich najbliższym, dalszą społeczną mobilność w pożądanym kierunku. Innymi słowy, praktykują oni mobilność ku swoistej pomyślnej stabilności, która z kolei prowadzi do dalszej mobilności, zarówno społecznej, jak przestrzennej, jeśli z różnych powodów uznają to za konieczne lub korzystne.

Ze względu na fakt, że większość moich partnerów badawczych, osiadając w Dublinie korzystało z sieci społecznych utworzonych przed migracją i rozwijanych później, zdecydowałem się pójść w ich ślady, praktykując *network-mediated ethnography*. Jest to metoda badań etnograficznych polegająca na wejściu etnografa w teren, używając własnych sieci krewnych i znajomych do wyszukiwania respondentów i lepszego rozumienia ich doświadczeń. W ten sposób odnajdywałem polskich migrantów, którym powodzi się w Irlandii. Uzupełniłem te zabiegi używając ogólnodostępnych środków – eksplorując Internet, wydeptując ścieżki w wybranych miejscach oraz spędzając czas w towarzystwie moich partnerów badawczych.

K e y w o r d s: social mobility, social and economic status, stability, achievement, success, wellbeing, network-mediated migration, network-mediated ethnography, migration, Polish migrants in Dublin.

Many forms of conscious social and spatial mobility are characterised by the desire to achieve, either individually or collectively, a certain socio-economic status which may be called stability. The representations of the status are not static – they are subject to modifications in the course of collecting personal experiences by individuals and their communities, as a result of the observation of practical endeavours and accompanying circumstances. Researchers are trying to capture certain similarities in specific social contexts between people, however each person evaluates their situation individually in reference to their own interpretations of social category-representations of success (and failure) in life which shape their aspirations and assessment of achievements (Fisher 2014, 5).

During my ethnological fieldwork in Dublin¹, I investigated the sentiments of people who left Poland after joining the European Union. They have stayed in Ireland having achieved, in their perspective, success. This allowed me to formulate a statement that what enables them to feel basic levels of satisfaction is achieving life stability (“standing on their own two feet”). This stability manifests itself in an emotional tranquillity accomplished as a result of their ability to provide legal and material security for themselves and/or their close relatives and associates. This is a consequence of the certainty of employment and accommodation and an ability to plan their future based on predictable access to material and financial resources. This situation is also partly brought because of the health and social care pension schemes which are seen as very secure and stabile, as is the case of my research partners in Ireland.

An important element of this sense of stability is also the ability to “enjoy life” realised in many different ways depending on personality or availability of local activities matching each person’s individual preferences. A sense of satisfaction is significantly affected by having one’s nearest and dearest in close proximity the close people – be they a partners and/or friends – with whom one can share one’s life (see also Graham 2001, 13). This combination of elements determine the quality of self-evaluation of migrants, which directly translates into their ability to accept variable life situations in the host society.

In other words, stability on a level acceptable for a person (or family) allows them to think of realizing further professional and life aspirations. Determining whether the level of stability is sufficient and defining further life aspirations stem from individual feelings. And these are negotiable – especially when family is taken into account. Some people feel forced to abandon their personal aspirations for the sake of their family’s happiness or the well-being of their children. However, it also commonly occurs that

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some family members feel inspired to personal development because of these values. However, the majority of people among whom I carried out my research in Ireland, indicated that they remain in this country precisely because of their achieved stability and “tranquillity”. It is also one of the reasons why they postpone their return to Poland or abandon it completely, at least for the foreseeable future.

In this context, a certain describable level of life stability allows people to fulfil their basic aspirations, translating into feelings of satisfaction from life and allows them to plan for the future. Therefore, from a bottom-up perspective, this kind of individual stability has become their point of evaluation reference and their own definition of socio-economic status. Notions of stability are the motivating factor behind the deliberate taking of all forms of social and spatial mobility, such as for example learning and professional development, the desire to integrate within one’s own or another society, as well as migrating for work (be it within one’s own country or abroad), or indeed in search of a better place to live, to raise one’s children and to spend one’s free time – in short, to enhance one’s social life. From a bottom-up perspective, if the phenomena and social processes taking place are looked at in the modern world where aspirations are shaped on the basis of an increasingly common and global public culture, the reasons behind the majority of migration cases – both domestic and international – are more understandable. Bearing all of this in mind, it is to be supposed that for the majority of people mobility is a means of achieving life stability. It is also the expression of an individual and collective pursuit of happiness, or at least the improvement of one’s material situation, which, in turn, is often related to concern for loved ones.

This article results from the first stage of my field work, conducted in the summer of 2015, in Dublin. The majority of people I interacted with in the course of my research left Poland after 2004, soon after Polish citizens were exempted from the obligation of possessing a work permit to be able to work in Ireland. The purpose of this research is to understand beliefs regarding people’s sense of success achieved when living abroad. Therefore, in this article I wish to focus on a number of chosen individuals, whose transnational lives will allow their success to be seen relativistically taking into account the subjective perception of satisfaction as experienced by the research partners² and the variety of factors influencing their reasons for experiencing it.

Many Poles who went to Ireland in order to find employment, in the beginning arrived just “to see how it would go”, and in the majority of cases they had the safety net of knowing that they could return home. Their first migration experiences might thus be referred to as “labour tourism” which lasted from a few weeks to a few months – in the sense of as long as it was affordable. Many of these “labour tourists” who found

² Names of all research partners have been changed. In each of the stories, certain details were omitted or added from other biographies so that the described story still has currency but I felt it was important to maintain anonymity.

satisfying working and living conditions (livelihood), often returned to Poland, despite their positive experiences. However, later on when confronted with the realities of Polish working conditions and when they were compared to the conditions pertaining in Ireland, this resulted in definite decisions being taken to emigrate (see also Nowicka 2014). Many people, after an initial trial period in Ireland, returned to Poland to sort their situations out and prepare for emigration, very often with their families in tow. A relatively small number of Poles whom I met left their country with the aim of permanently settling in Ireland. The trip was meant to be a quick fix for their financial situation or sometimes only a means of enhancing their English language skills. The majority of people, after their period of “labour tourism”, were planning to work in Ireland for a number of years in order to achieve a certain level which in their context could be understood as “a measurement of success”, and then planned to return to Poland. However, the majority of my research partners have prolonged their stay in Ireland and they are unable to state definitively whether they might one day return to their home country.

This is related to the fact that the majority of this group have spent most of their professional lives in Ireland. Their return to Poland, in a professional context, in a sense would mean emigrating anew to a no longer known environment, of which they do not think very highly of judging from prior experiences. The stories they hear from friends and relatives who have remained in Poland do not encourage return. Among the people I met in Dublin, who after an initial period of “labour tourism” returned to Poland and then came back to Ireland, most described the Polish job market as “horrific” and their stay in Poland as a failure.

When taking their first steps in Ireland, Polish migrants followed a scheme referred to by Tamar Wilson as network-mediated migration. She wrote that many migrants “seek work first one place, then another, where they have kin and friends” (Wilson 1994, 272) which in many cases makes it easier for them to overcome their initial difficulties and often enables them to apply certain modifications to their target place of migration choice, without limiting this choice to only just one location. As a result, I decided to conduct my own field research and do some reconnaissance work by using my own network of relatives and friends who had left for Ireland.

Undergoing a migration network-mediated ethnography study among Poles who have succeeded in Ireland is particularly easy for researchers of my generation. This is due to the fact that the majority of these people were born in the 1970s or 1980s and left Poland after being educated after having reached the cusp of their independent adult lives. If a representative of this generation does not have any migration experience, it is highly probable that this person or one of their relatives or friends will know someone who has left, especially to countries where English is widely used. Since such a network was available to me I decided to avail myself of it in order to conduct a network-mediated ethnography project in Dublin.

IZA AND WOJTEK

Despite having mutual close friends in Poznań, I met Iza only a few months prior to my departure for Ireland. She came over to visit a mutual friend as they have been friends since their early school years when they both grew up in a small Wielkopolska Province town. Wojtek, who comes from a locality near Poznań, was met in Dublin. When they found out about my ethnographic research in their city, they invited me to stay with them for a number of weeks and I duly took up their offer with my family. This afforded me a fantastic opportunity and our relationship took on a new footing, far from that of researcher and subject. We lived together, spent our free time together and our children played together. We visited their friends, who also gladly shared their experiences and reflections as they tried to be helpful in assisting me to realize my research objectives. They also provided invaluable comments on what they believed to be some interesting aspects and situations in regards to the presence of migrants in Ireland and what had influenced them.

Iza was the first to arrive in Ireland, in 2003. At the beginning she just wanted to improve her English and maybe earn some money. She had a number of menial jobs (cleaner and waitress). She and Wojtek were unmarried and childless at this point (their daughter was born later in Ireland). The financial situation of her family was good so she did not have to remit any money to Poland. During her first stay in the Emerald Isle she managed to save enough money to pay her own contribution to her 30-year – mortgage for a flat in Poland, which she had obtained from a bank with her parents acting as guarantors. Over a year later she returned to Poland but found it difficult to re-adapt to the local job market. Before completing her studies she worked in a courier company, where she met Wojtek, also a student. She worked in the office and he delivered packages. Upon her return to Poland in 2005, she tried to find some stable employment with the hope of completing her university studies and paying off her mortgage without needing the assistance of her parents, as they were realizing their own dreams by building a house. She managed to obtain a relatively well-paid position in local terms, but the income she earned from the acquisition of this office job for a person with a good command of English did not allow her to achieve as comfortable a financial level as she had had in Ireland (essentially earning the local minimal wage). Moreover, her boss in Poland was very clear in implying that “he who pays the piper calls the tune”, expecting unpaid overtime work and creating an atmosphere of psychological stress. He stoked the rivalry between employees and increased uncertainty over further employment. All attempts to discuss, negotiate or refuse were met with a phrase so well-known in Poland: “if you don’t like it here, leave as there are a list of others who will gladly take this job”.

Iza could not afford to lose her job, as she had her mortgage to pay while at the same time she could not look for other work as actively as she would have wanted to

since her current position consumed too much time and energy. All the offers that she did receive failed to come up to her financial needs. After a number of months she realised she had stopped frequenting the cinema with her friends, partying and that she was too scared to start a family, as becoming pregnant could potentially lose her employer's good graces and that this could eventually cost her the job. Wojtek, in the meantime, continued studying and working as a courier. He did not have any significant family or financial commitments and had time to entertain himself to "enjoy his youth" and have a healthy social life. All however was not bright on the horizon. One day Iza left, packing her suitcases and went back to Ireland, where a friend from her first stay helped her to obtain a job as a cleaner at the university hospital in Dublin. For this lowly-paid menial night shift job, five times a week, she earned a monthly salary almost twice as much as in Poland – employed in an office in a big city. She was easily able to meet her mortgage repayments in Poland for a flat she rented out which resulted in her being able to abstract herself from a stressful employer and finally have some time for herself.

Wojtek joined her after six months and he came, successfully as it turned out, to keep their relationship afloat. He started working at the same place and position as Iza and they moved in together. He instantly started earning about four times as much as he was in Poland. In the meantime, on the hospital notice board Iza found a month-long offer of work looking after a bedridden person during his stay abroad. No special qualifications were required and all that was needed of the carer was patience and kindness. Iza was tired of working night shifts so she decided to take up the new challenge. In doing so, she took time off from the hospital. The person she looked after became very fond of her and after a while recommended her as an unqualified help to his friend, who was a dentist. At the beginning, the dentist did not pay her as much as she was earning in the hospital, but he taught her the basics of dental care. Iza liked her new job and enrolled on a series of vocational courses. It allowed her to garner her first professional qualifications and enabled her to obtain a much better paid job for another Irish dentist. She has continued attending vocational courses and now she has become the chief medical assistant in the private dental clinic of her employer.

Wojtek still works as a cleaner at a hospital, but now that Iza, after nine years of working and studying, has achieved a satisfying position, he is also looking to advance his career prospects. Wojtek feels satisfaction from the fact that by working hard (he has become the supervisor of the hospital cleaning team) he has helped to provide a psychological and financial comfort which has allowed Iza to risk changing jobs and investing some of their earnings in her vocational courses. When four years ago their daughter was born they decided to get married. A growing sense of material security allowed them to make the decision to move from a cheap rented working class terraced house in The Liberties into a nice apartment in a 'more refined area' which they found thanks to the assistance of their Irish associates. They still own the mortgaged flat in

Poland but no other property. Due to their constant expenditure on their payments, rent, utility bills, and kindergarten as well as investing in their own development, they have delayed the decision to purchase a car, even though most of their friends have one, and many are buying apartments or houses in Ireland. They prefer to put money aside to invest in their children's education and they believe their situation will keep improving, and if problems crop up then they have the security blanket of being always able to sell their flat in Poland.

GOSIA

I met Gosia through the old fashioned method of simply asking around. I was told by an Irish friend that at one of the universities he had noticed quite a number of Polish employees, working at various levels of administration and hospitality services, but also among the academic staff. So I went there and I came across Agata, who helped me to make contact with her Polish colleagues. Needless to say, I had conducted a little prior homework on the university. However, it was my "strolling ethnography" which allowed me to determine that administrative work and services are characterised by a constant re-organisation of the university structure, meant to reduce costs, increase revenue, open up new markets and score higher international ratings. This causes frequent changes involving transfers of employees from one department to another, a growing number of services being outsourced, reductions in the number of permanent staff, increased responsibilities for individual positions and departments and also the creation of new structures to realize new projects internationally.

The vast majority of Poles I met at the university have benefitted, at least temporarily, from these continuous changes. They are ready for new challenges, have degrees (most), are accustomed to facing the everyday life situations and communicating in a foreign language, which has forced them to hone their English language skills. In addition, they had to learn professions they were not prepared for nor taught at Polish universities; had to climb the "migrant career ladder" (starting from the menial and graduating to white collar office work) with all roads leading eventually to them being afforded the opportunity to work at university. They had to acquire new skills and combine these with ones they had gained before. They have also learned to appreciate work which gives them a relatively moderate but stable source of income allowing them to live in peace and have enough free time. With this in place, the university employees from Poland working in administration or services whom I met, agreed to frequent changes in their responsibilities, and even, in some cases, to being transferred to external companies which were contracted as outsource service providers. Even if in some cases they might have lost out financially from the change, they kept the continuity of employment and good recommendations, which sometimes came in handy

when further re-organisation of university structures occurred and new positions with more responsibilities became available.

As programme administrator and area manager, Gosia has achieved the highest rank of all non-academic Polish staff in the university. Gosia comes from a large city in the south of Poland. She and her boyfriend came over to Dublin for the first time in 2002, to earn some money while still students. She got a well-paid job as a barmaid in one of the hotels. She even invited a number of her friends to come to Ireland. Despite this, she decided to go back to Poland to finish a degree in tourism, which was her great passion as she was also a mountain guide. In 2003, she gave birth to a son, and enrolled for a postgraduate diploma in Public Relations. When her son was 2 years old, she decided to return to Ireland. This was not for economic reasons, but she wanted to distance herself from the pressure her family was imposing on her regarding the fact that she decided to raise her son herself, and their attempts to impose their way of life, on both a professional and private basis on her.

After coming back to Dublin she stayed with one of the friends she had formerly invited to Ireland. She quickly found a job allowing her to pay rent and play school. Within a relatively short period of time, in 2006, she had acquired her first university job, a position in administration, of low rank. She says that she has never been overly ambitious, but she clearly has an idea of what a “good job” means to her. This is why she has always tried to perform her duties scrupulously, and, as she says:

“There has never been too much work not to be able to manage it, on the contrary, there is not much work at all and quite a large group of people spend their days on Facebook; but I don’t like being idle, so always when I had an opportunity, I was helping others or proposed some improvements or new ideas, for example, video presentations of our staff is my success, we didn’t have it before. It is clear here that once you have an idea, you will be heard «you have a great idea, so you do it» but for me it’s never been a problem, I just really like it when there is something going on, and I can spend my time being useful”.

She also adds:

“What I would call my success, but to be perfectly honest I don’t think my job falls into the category of success stories, so I believe my success is the fact that until now most of my promotions at work I received not by going out for a pint with bosses or being a toady (there are a few people like that), but because someone noticed and appreciated my work. Surely, I was vying for promotions and applied for different positions at university on multiple occasions, for example there was one position I applied for 4 years in a row – without success. However, at this moment I am working at an even better position, although not at the school I wanted to get transferred to”.

Gosia is serious in her explanations, however when she talks about her “luck” and how she obtained her current job, she smiles a little. She repeatedly emphasizes that she does not consider the arc of her career or her life as “typical” at any level (“I’m probably no use for your research as I don’t fit into any standards”). She is relatively

satisfied with her salary, however she emphasises that, in her opinion, she differs from the norm because she does not save any money, the majority of which is used to cover the cost of living, rent and the private education of her son. She has never had to remit any money back to Poland and she seems to have a relaxed approach to her administration position at the university. She is very critical towards what she calls the “official” optimism and “the propaganda of success” inherent in the business school where she works. She also mentions, something common among the academic staff of the school, a snobbery which manifests itself in the need to highlight the scale of each person’s achievements (these reflections were in response to comments I made in terms of problems arising in defining success).

Gosia lives nearby the university, rents a flat and does not own a car. The prices of properties in the area are horrendously high and she forks out around 1200 euro a month on rent. From her point of view, despite the fact she would be paying less for her own place in terms of mortgage and bills, it is the close proximity to her workplace and her son’s school that make it ideal. Gosia does not go out much in her free time, because her old circle of friends has fallen apart, nor does she go out to indulge in her tourist hobby (“there isn’t really anyone to do it with”).

ASIA AND JERRY

Asia and Jerry hosted me during the very last weeks of my stay in Dublin. They live in a rented apartment in a new estate located about 15 km to the south of the city centre. From their house you can conveniently reach the centre thanks to a newly built tram line called the DART and Dublin bypasses. It is also close to an area called Tallagh, which due to the preferential apartment prices on offer is very often chosen by newcomers.

Asia is my friend’s cousin and as kids they spent summers together in Asia’s hometown, a small village located in the south-east of the Wielkopolska region. After finishing her secondary education she worked in different jobs in her locality, where the majority of companies not in the agriculture sector belonged to one owner. Having passed her “matura” (secondary education certificate) exam, Asia commuted to Poznań to study with thoughts of a course that would provide her with vocational training, with which she could find employment in her home area or one of the nearby towns. She graduated from a 3-year- cosmetology course and returned to her catering job in her hometown. She was resistant to the idea of going to Ireland – she learned not to expect much from life and the job she had was enough to meet her needs. Her older siblings became independent and moved out, so she lived with her parents contributing to household expenses. Similar to a great number of people I met in Dublin, she came to Ireland “to see how it goes”, to visit her friends who had made the decision

to go earlier and now were able to help her out with finding her first job and accommodation. Many of these “labour tourists” returned to Poland after a period of time or moved to other countries to find work. Asia took some time to find her feet in Ireland as she felt she had difficulties communicating in English and for a long time she could not find a job. She felt useless and a burden on her friends, where she was staying and who were trying to help her out. She was just about to return to Poland, but a day before she received the offer of a trial period at McDonald’s. She gave herself one last chance, mainly in order not to view her stay to have been a total failure and also to earn some money, to pay off the loan she had taken to be able to come to Ireland and to recoup some of the outlay she had spent after a work free month. She returned her flight ticket and went on trial, eventually working at McDonald’s for 5 years. During that time she met new people, made friends and learned to communicate effectively in English (largely thanks to sharing a flat with an Irish national). After some time and with the backing of good references she changed jobs for a more demanding one at a company providing catering services for a number of universities in Ireland. In this new job she was promoted several times and has now become a manager of a canteen in Dublin.

She met her current partner, Jerry, who works in the same industry as an economist. They have lived together for a number of years now supporting each other. Asia helped Jerry recover from a difficult divorce and he describes her as a very practical person, who is not overly ambitious and focused on the future, but she makes the most of the opportunities which present themselves without having to resort to taking out loans or credits that would take years to pay off with the intention of “showing off”, to prove that one is successful. I perceived this to be some sort of critique of the modern world and the phase of life Jerry went through previously. Jerry thinks about the future but he cares more about ensuring that his children from his previous marriage have “a cool childhood and a good degree”, without falling into the trap of workaholism, which he relates to his previous struggles to prove his success at every level. In relation to this he mentioned living in an expensive house in a good area, having a new high-class car, following the newest trends and frequenting expensive restaurants.

These days together with Asia they have a very active life after work and his children are frequent participants. They both have reasonably well-paid positions so money is not their biggest concern as long as they maintain employment. They chose to rent a comfortable apartment in an area where prices are not very high and where they have easy access to parks and forests and a convenient commute to their children’s schools and their workplaces. Jerry did not want to repeat some of his earlier mistakes in regards to an expensively-mortgaged house, located in an area that could only be reached by car and where despite living in close proximity to the city, it was impossible to spontaneously and conveniently go out with friends, go to a cinema or to a pub. Jerry has now more opportunities to meet his old friends, spend some quality time

with his children (often outdoors), and visit his and Asia's friends. Together with Asia he indulges in sports, such as going for long-distance runs, and triathlons.

LITTLE STABILITY

The situations described are standard stories that can be witnessed every day in big multicultural cities. They show that these situations cannot be solely reduced to economic, social and cultural factors. These migrants, the protagonists of my research, could have made completely different life choices by staying in their hometowns, moving elsewhere or indeed never leaving their native country. In their cases, the factor that influenced their decision to emigrate was mobility understood as "the possibility and ability to move", together with a lack of social or administrative obstacles for such mobility. Because of the removal of visa and work permit requirements they were in a position to visit Ireland and work there for a trial period. Only later, having garnered that initial experience, could they then make informed decisions about going back to their country or trying to make a living in Ireland and planting permanent roots. Their decisions were based on their empirical and practical knowledge of what could be expected from life in Ireland.

Another characteristic held in common with a majority of my other research partners and the protagonists of these stories is that it is more important for them to have the opportunity to integrate with their host society rather than just with other Poles living in Ireland. Migration network of friends or relatives from Poland serving as intermediaries was especially important upon arrival, at the beginning of the familiarization process and in dealing with the otherness of the new environment. Later, however, each of the described persons made independent, individual decisions, translating into their professional situation depending on how they functioned in their local working environments and societies. This does not necessitate their breaking off from their Polishness or those the Poles, with whom the people described here have contact with at work and in their social life. This contact can provide them with a break from routine an opportunity to speak Polish and sometimes to ensure that their children maintain contact with the Polish culture at different institutions or during organised events.

The described examples present Poles who feel comfortable in a big Irish city and enjoy its diversity. The people described do not socialize excessively with any specific social group. Their close relationships are limited to the people they have met at different junctures of their life, most commonly related to their professional life or their place of abode in Ireland. Most of my research partners also have families and friends in Poland, whom they try to visit as often as possible and make efforts to keep in touch but, as many of them commented, as time passes it becomes more and more difficult to maintain contact, as lives change and evolve differently.

The sense of stability is most of my research partners have in common, both those who settled in Ireland and declare to be content with their situation, and those who now live in Ireland but still would like to return to Poland. They believe that Ireland provides them with stability in the form of relative predictability of livelihood expenses, income, savings and accommodation. They can afford more than they could in Poland, and are convinced that “in Ireland [people] know how to appreciate a normal job”. Subjective appreciation of stability also shows in which circumstances we agree or not agree to the level of professional status assigned to us. The majority of Poles believe that if they were born in Ireland, with similar education levels and acquired skills, they would be more likely to hold higher positions and earn better salaries. They also relate it to their assumption that in Poland with the same qualifications they might hold higher positions but to earn as much as they do in Ireland they would be forced to work much harder and in much more difficult working conditions. These comparisons and relativity allow them to focus their aspirations outside of their professional life, by searching for success in family and financial security, in reference to the people who have stayed in Poland and based on building a sense of having achieved in life.

CONCLUSION

It is equally difficult to discuss spatial mobility without any reference to locality – not only to travel conditions but also visited places, especially those where roots are set, and spaces where peoples identities are formed such as their places of origin and destination (see: Marcus 2004, 126; Dahinden 2010, 51) – as it is to discuss social mobility without reflecting on what it provides for the people who can be characterised by it. My research partners often describe their life in categories of completed stages, “little stabilisations” and certain personal achievements. Not many of them who, in their opinion, are successful, relate this notion to just one sphere of life. They prefer talking about the satisfaction brought by certain moments or periods, and that “you have to enjoy the good things” and “look at yourself from a different perspective”. In this context, discussing mobility as a means of achieving stability or a certain level of life, does not exclude the pursuit of social advancement. Therefore mobility through stability is being dealt with, in a context in which both of these notions, mobility and stability do not carry contradictory meanings but actually complement each other.

The Poles migrating to Ireland have taken up many different jobs therefore it is impossible to uniformly categorize them, be it professional or social. What is more, their migration direction and their activities, jobs and accommodation, especially in their migrations early stages were mainly influenced by their networks formed in Poland. This can be referred to, after Tamar Wilson, as a *network-mediated chain migration* (1994, 272). My research was conducted predominantly among relatively well

educated people who come from different local and social environments in Poland. It is therefore difficult to point out one specific social place they would fit into or one they have created after their arrival, especially since the professions many are in are not an immediate result of the education they received in their home country. However, based on my fieldwork results, it can be stated, with caution, that successful Poles can be considered to be those people who left not in order to pursue amazing careers but in search for “normality”, understood as achieving a position in which it is possible to live a tranquil, decent life based on diligent but not back-breaking work. These people have never tried to “blend in” or assimilate at all costs into Irish society; however, they want to be able to figure out what opportunities are available and to take advantage of them in order to have a good job in an environment of freedom and equality, as at least is entailed by European Union legislation (Pawlak 2015, 27).

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Author’s address:

Łukasz Kaczmarek, Ph.D.
 Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology
 Adam Mickiewicz University
 Collegium Historicum
 ul. Umultowska 89 D
 61-614 Poznań, POLAND
 e-mail: lukasz@amu.edu.pl

