

Oppland Archives, Maihaugen and the project aims

Oppland Archives, Maihaugen is an institution that stores and provides access to the archives of private individuals and firms, as well as materials transferred by social organisations from the boroughs of Lillehammer, Gausdal, Øyer, Ringebu, Sør-Fron and Nord-Fron.

Oppland Archives, Maihaugen also carries out research into migration, especially in the Oppland county. It is currently participating in three such projects – “Arkivdokumentasjon av nyere innvandring til Oppland” (“Archival documentation of new emigration to Norway”), “Emigracja Polaków do Norwegii w XIX–XXI wieku. Materiały źródłowe do badań” and “Polish Political Exile to Norway caused by the Martial Law 1981”.

The main aim of the research conducted by Oppland Archives, Maihaugen is to gain archival materials, in a digital form, which come directly from immigrants to Norway from various countries. It is important for the Archives to record and store for future generations the stories of these people who, as a result of many different causes, decided to leave their homeland and live in a foreign land.

The results of the research will also be accessible for the scientific world, which deals with the deep mysteries of human migration. In the multi-cultured Norway, learning about the way of thinking, and the conception of the new homeland, of those people arriving from various cultural spheres is of particular importance. Scientific works, which were created based on, among others, research conducted by Oppland Archives, Maihaugen, can help in the creation of methods easing the acclimatisation of immigrants in their new reality.

Statistical data

From the moment of Poland's accession to the European Union on 1st May 2004, Poles began to leave their homeland in great numbers in search of work. A few European countries immediately opened their employment market to the new, numerous and well-qualified labour force. Among them was the Kingdom of Norway, which was not a member of the European Union.

Poles are currently the largest group of immigrants in Norway. According to research conducted by the Norwegian Central Statistical Office and published on 1st January 2010¹, over 50,000 Poles were living in Norway. When compared with information published on 1st January 2008, which stated that there were 30,000 Poles living in Norway², we can observe a significant increase in the registered immigrants of Polish origin.

Additionally, in the county of Oppland, Poles make up the largest national group among immigrants. In 2008, Poles were only sixth in terms of group size, behind Danes, Swedes and Somalians, among others³. Owing to their poor command of the English language and almost complete lack of Norwegian, they constitute a rather closed and tightly-knit minority group.

The causes of emigration

Undoubtedly, the main cause of the recent mass influx of Poles into Norway, is the difficulty of finding suitable employment in Poland. The problems associated with finding work, as well as the low salaries offered in Poland, force many people to look for employment possibilities abroad. This concerns both workers with a low level of education and training, as well as graduates and specialists in their fields. In Norway, within Polish emigrant circles it is possible to meet unqualified building labourers, bull farm workers, carpenters, hairdressers and

¹ Statistisk sentralbyrå, *Innvandring og innvandrere*, www.ssb.no/innvandring [avail.: 12th March 2010].

² Statistisk sentralbyrå, *Innvandring og innvandrere*, www.ssb.no/innvandring [avail.: 28th March 2009].

³ Statistisk sentralbyrå, *Folkemengde 1. januar 2007 og 2008 og endringene i 2007, etter innvandringskategori og landbakgrunn*, www.ssb.no [avail.: 28th March 2009].

doctors. All of them migrated to Norway in search of a better life.

Poles choose Norway with regard to the potentially high earnings and good social welfare system (which is particularly important for those with children)⁴. Some of them arrive with the intention of staying permanently, but many plan only a short-term stay. Returning to Poland, however, often turns out to be very difficult – the salaries offered are insufficient for their basic needs⁵ and differ vastly from those earned in Norway.

Work

The vast majority of emigrants are men⁶, who mainly find employment in construction companies⁷. Norwegian employers willingly employ Polish workers who are well qualified and, at the same time, cheaper and harder working than the Norwegian labour force⁸.



Photograph 1. Adrian Kotulak at work on a construction site.

⁴ Interview with Wojciech Kulażyński, project *Dokumentasjon av nye innvanding til Oppland*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2008.

⁵ Ł.J. Kędzierski, *Wielu wybiera Norwegię*, www.mojanorwegia.pl [avail.: 22nd March 2010].

⁶ Statistisk sentralbyrå, *Tre varianter av innvandringskategori fødeland og statsborgerskap, etter landbakgrunn og kjønn. 1. januar 2010*, www.ssb.no/innvandring [avail.: 12th March 2010].

⁷ J. Horgen Friberg, G. Tydlum – ed., *Polonia i Oslo. En studie av arbeids- og levekaar blant polakker i hovedstadsområdet*, Fafo-rapport 2007: 27, Oslo 2007.

⁸ K. Flåm, *Angriper nordmenns arbeidsmoral*, [in:] VG, 27th July 2009.

It often occurs, however, that due to their limited knowledge of languages and Norwegian labour law, they are exploited by employers, e.g. they are denied payments, which Norwegian workers in the same company receive. In order to prevent this, more and more Polish construction workers are joining Norwegian trade unions. In addition, an increasing number of foreigners are seeking help with their problems from Juss–Buss, where free legal advice is provided by law students. Most cases conducted by the employees of Juss–Buss in 2009 concerned the payment of salary arrears by employers⁹. Many workers are afraid, however, to demand money owed to them or join industrial action for fear of losing their job¹⁰.

Another problem, to which the director of the Norwegian state institution, UDI, Ida Børresen, drew attention, is the fact that Polish workers work too long and hard, which may lead to industrial illness. As a result, the Norwegian government is obliged to make special welfare payments. A similar situation took place in the 1970s, when immigrants from Pakistan, just as Poles now, worked too hard and too long, thereby destroying their health¹¹.

In fact, Poles in Norway are able to work 10 to 12 hours almost without a break. Tomasz Klosowski, a construction worker, recalls his day at work as follows: “... I was at work, in the building firm, eleven hours every day. After those eleven hours, I went home and wanted to do nothing but wash. I even didn't eat, just so I could sleep as much as possible”¹². Norwegians often don't realise that Poles want to earn as much as possible because their wages must be sufficient to maintain themselves as well as their families living in Poland.

Marek Pawlak, an anthropologist researching the environment for Polish emigrants in the region of Oslo, made some interesting remarks: “... being there, they treat Norway pragmatically, the only thing that matters is work. It is not important for them to participate in any social

⁹ www.jussbuss.no [avail.: 12th April 2010].

¹⁰ Ł. Brzeziński, *Polacy boją się strajkować*, www.mojanorwegia.pl [avail.: 12th March 2010].

¹¹ K. Gillesvik, *Advarer mot polsk uføreboom*, [in:] *Vårt Land*, 8th February 2010.

¹² *Interview with Tomasz Klosowski*, project *Polscy emigranci w Norwegii w XIX–XXI wieku. Materiały źródłowe do badań*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2010.

interaction whatsoever with Norwegian society. It is enough to say that they are interesting because they are there for three weeks, then return to Poland for ten days. They change their personality, which in Norway they must sacrifice, not allowing themselves many different things, yet in Poland they permit themselves, for example, to go on excursions and eat in more expensive restaurants”¹³. These occurrences confirm the words of Tomasz Kłosowski: “When I was still part of the construction company, I often met Norwegians in pubs and nightclubs. However, in the long term, this made no sense as it is known that people go there for financial reasons, for better pay. If someone wants to have a good time there, he won't save a lot. I realised this after a few months and I stopped partying”¹⁴.

There is also a second group of migrant workers, who soon after arriving in Norway decided to take their families and settle there for good¹⁵. The vast majority of these have emigrated from Norway in the last three years. Almost all of them are happy with their decision and their new lives in Norway. They emphasise the lack of stress, which dominated their everyday lives in Poland, the calm life in Norway and the exceptionally beautiful nature.



Photograph 2. Robert Samburski shows his satisfaction with life in Norway.

¹³ Interview with Marek Pawlak, project *Polscy emigranci w Norwegii w XIX–XXI wieku. Materiały źródłowe do badań*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2010.

¹⁴ Interview with Tomasz Kłosowski, op. cit.

¹⁵ I. Sandved Nordli, *Polakkene bosetter seg i Norge*, [in:] *Aftenposten*, 07th April 2010.

An example of a man who has found his “place in the world”, is Robert Samburski. In Poland he was the owner of a carpentry company, as well as the co-owner of a restaurant, which he ran together with his wife. Unfortunately, due to the difficulty of borrowing money, the restaurant went bankrupt after only eight months. Robert's carpentry company also struggled financially, caused mainly by the difficulty of gaining payment from his clients. He frequently invested his own money in projects, and then was unable to recoup it from unreliable clients. The final factor that influenced Robert's decision to move to Norway were Polish labour law regulations, which place a great financial burden on employers. For him, this burden was too high so he closed his firm and set out to find success in Norway. Like many others, he found a job advertisement in the local newspaper from a Norwegian company in need of carpenters and decided to apply. After a basic and, as he himself states, insufficient, course in Norwegian, he was sent in December 2007 to Lillehammer, where the recruitment agency Job Zone provided him with accommodation and work. He was happy because he could work in his profession and receive a decent salary for it. He sold his home in Poland and, after around two years in Norway, his wife also moved there. He hasn't regretted his decision, not even for a moment¹⁶.

Polish women also travel to Norway. To a large extent, these are the wives or partners of the emigrants working there, who, using the Norwegian program for reuniting families, had no difficulties in obtaining permission to stay in Norway, even when they didn't work themselves¹⁷. Their lives in Norway are often limited to housekeeping and taking care of kids. Because of their lack of language skills, besides Polish, and driving licence, they are often separated from daily social life. They meet Norwegians only when they do the shopping or during occasional attempts to speak with their landlords and landladies. Generally, most dealings with Norwegians, especially

¹⁶ Interview with Robert Tomasz Samburski, project *Dokumentasjon av nye innvandring til Oppland*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2009.

¹⁷ Ø. Woie, *Polakker velger Norge*, [in:] *Vårt Land*, 12th July 2007.

in official matters, are conducted by their husbands or partners.

Their decision to emigrate mainly comes from the need to create a complete family, which was impossible when their husbands and fathers worked abroad. This was the case for Małgorzata Litwin: “We made the decision [to emigrate – author] very quickly because we wanted to be together”¹⁸.

Many women arrived in Norway with the intention of finding employment. The most popular job for these female emigrants is cleaning homes, schools or offices¹⁹. This is occasionally “black market” work, mainly in private homes, however, in institutions or companies everything must be official and in accordance with the law. There is a great demand for Polish cleaners as Norwegians prefer to pay someone than to do jobs they don't like themselves. Few women actually perform their professional career jobs. The main barrier against this is the lack of language skills.

One of the few women working in her profession is Barbara Woźniak – a hairdresser with many years of experience, who thanks to her sufficient command of Norwegian was hired in a hairdresser's in Lillehammer²⁰. Another example is Agnieszka Kalinowska, a psychiatric doctor, who found work in Norway as a result of a recruitment campaign conducted in Poland by a hospital in Lillehammer. The cause of this emigration was the financial situation in Poland, which she describes in one word as: “tragic”²¹.

¹⁸ Interview with Małgorzata Litwin, project *Polscy emigranci w Norwegii w XIX–XXI wieku. Materiały źródłowe do badań*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2010.

¹⁹ J. Napierała, P. Trevena, *Motiver for aa reise ut* [in:] J. Horgen Friberg, G. Tydlum – ed., *Polonia i Oslo. En studie av arbeids- og levekaar blant polakker i hovedstadsområdet*, Fafo-rapport 2007: 27, Oslo 2007.

²⁰ Interview with Barbara Woźniak, project *Dokumentasjon av nye innvandring til Oppland*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2008.

²¹ Interview with Agnieszka Kalinowska, project *Polscy emigranci w Norwegii w XIX–XXI wieku. Materiały źródłowe do badań*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2010.



Photograph 3. Agnieszka Kalinowska in her surgery in Innlandet Hospital in Lillehammer.

Due to the very good social welfare payments which mothers receive, Polish women are more and more frequently deciding to give birth in Norway. In the last two years in the Lillehammer region, many children have been born in families where both parents are Polish²².

Language

The basic barrier to Polish assimilation into Norwegian society is the low level of Norwegian language skills. Many emigrants don't know English either, but when they are in groups of Polish people, they do not feel the need to learn other languages. For daily communication, it is enough to know a few basic expressions in English. Tomasz Klosowski described a situation characteristic of a Norwegian construction site: "On the whole it is funny because most of the Poles are excellent at their jobs [...], but they don't know foreign languages at all. They have created a kind of mixed language and speak with their bosses using it. [...]" However, when I spoke with their bosses later, they said they had no idea what the others

²² Statistisk sentralbyrå, *Innvandring og innvandrere*, www.ssb.no/innvandring [avail.: 12th March 2010].

wanted to tell them. [...] They see that the work is going well, so they nod assent and go away. And all this despite the fact they have worked there for so long [Poles – author]²³”.

Marek Pawlak notices a certain specific dependency which occurs in groups of Polish construction workers: “Because there is a hierarchy among those working on the same job. There is a boss who communicates with the Norwegians, who knows that it is necessary to buy this kind of paint and not other ones, and there are others who are below him and carry out his commands²⁴”. This situation refers not only to this particular group of workers, but also concerns the whole Polish emigrant environment, and the Polish saying “among the blind, one eye is king” comes to mind.

Stay or return?

The interviewees were asked: “Where will you be in two or three years' time?” and many responded: “I don't know.” They don't plan far ahead, a maximum of one year, because many things can change in the meantime – they may still work in Norway, or just as likely they could be back in Poland. For most of them, the deciding factor is the economic situation in the two countries. In 2008, many Norwegian companies were forced to make some employees redundant, due to the global downturn, including a large number of Poles. Some of these returned to Poland to wait out the hard times there, but those whose families had also moved to Norway, tried to find new employment or lived on unemployment benefits²⁵. In 2009, the situation slowly started to improve, and the crisis was not as dangerous for the Norwegian economy as feared.

Some Polish emigrants still hope that the economic situation in Poland will improve and they will be able to return to their homeland. Others, however, say that they have overcome their illusions because it is as difficult to find employment in Poland now as it was a few years ago, and

²³ *Interview with Tomasz Kłosowski, op. cit.*

²⁴ *Interview with Marek Pawlak, op. cit.*

²⁵ Polishconnection, *Eksplozja bezrobocia wśród emigrantów zarobkowych*, www.mojanorwegia.pl [avail.: 29th January 2010].

it doesn't look like improving. Many young well-educated people left Poland and now work well beneath their abilities. Despite this, these people are not returning to their homeland, because they see no future for themselves there. However, there are very few who decide to apply for Norwegian citizenship. Perhaps they still have hope?

Summary

Poles now constitute a considerable national group in Norway. Considerable, but little known. The main reason for this is their lack of knowledge of Norwegian and even English. This situation is slowly changing as many emigrants intend to stay in Norway for longer, and that means that learning Norwegian is becoming a priority. Poles work in Norway, they buy houses, send their children to Norwegian schools – gradually they are becoming an important part of the multi-cultured Norwegian society.

Photographs:

1. Adrian Kotulak at work on a construction site. Property of A. Kotulak.
2. Robert Samburski shows his satisfaction with life in Norway. Photo. M. Sokól-Rudowska/Opplandsarkivet avd. Maihaugen/
3. Agnieszka Kalinowska in her surgery in Innlandet Hospital in Lillehammer. Photo. M. Sokól-Rudowska/Opplandsarkivet avd. Maihaugen/

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17. *Interview with Wojciech Kulażyński*, project *Dokumentasjon av nye innvanding til Oppland*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2008.
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20. *Interview with Robert Tomasz Samburski*, project *Dokumentasjon av nye innvanding til Oppland*, Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2009.

21. *Interview with Barbara Woźniak*, project *Dokumentasjon av nye innvanding til Oppland*, Digital collection in Opplandsarkivet avdeling Maihaugen, 2008.