

Inspired by Thomas and Znaniecki. Do We Observe the Formation of a New Polish-Norwegian Society

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Abstract

The paper aims to present that concepts introduced in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* have not lost their validity. They are still inspiring for analysis of contemporary migratory movements. Especially, the premise that “assimilation” of Polish migrants is not an individual but a group phenomenon can shape a scope of analysis of massive post-EU-accession emigration from Poland. The author tests adequacy of classical tools for investigation on Polish migrants in Norway. What is interesting about them is the fast increase in their number after 2004. As a consequence, they are the biggest immigrant group in this country. They have been spreading all over Norway; however, more than half of them reside in four counties (Oslo, Akershus, Rogeland, and Hordaland). Referring to the approach introduced by Thomas and Znaniecki, formation of a new Polish-Norwegian society is a process constituted by certain stages, which will be discussed in the paper below.

Keywords

Thomas and Znaniecki, Norway, Polish migrants

The paper aims to present that concepts introduced by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1920) in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America Vol. V Organization and Disorganization in America* have not lost their validity. They are still inspiring for analysis of contemporary migratory movements. Especially, the premise that “assimilation” of Polish migrants should be analyzed as not an individual but a group phenomenon can shape a scope of analysis of massive post-EU-accession emigration from Poland.

An approach brought by Thomas and Znaniecki in *The Polish Peasant* meant a turn in the object of investigation from assimilation or integration of immigrants to the formation of a group that “constitutes the social milieu into which the immigrant who comes from Poland becomes incorporated and to whose standards and institutions

he must adapt himself” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920: 11-12). These distinguished scholars “constructed a general sociological scheme of the development of a Polish-American community applicable with some variations to all such communities” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920: 29). The author would like to employ this pattern for investigation on Polish migrants in Norway.

A seed of Polish community in Norway was formed by pioneering migration of a few thousand of Polish political refugees yet in the 1980s and seasonal workers arriving in the 1990s on the basis of bilateral

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agreements on temporary work in agriculture. However, the fast increase in the number of Polish migrants in Norway has started after 2004. As a consequence, nowadays, Poles are the biggest immigrant group in this country, standing at the beginning of 2018 at about 98,200 with additional 12,300 Norwegian-born to Polish parents (see Table 1)¹. They have been spreading all over Norway; however, more than half of them reside in four counties (Oslo, Akershus, Rogeland, and Hordaland) (Gmaj 2018).

Poles are the largest group of immigrants in many Norwegian municipalities. Figure 1 presents their geographical distribution; however, it does not include persons staying in Norway for a period of less than six months, who are registered as non-resident wage earners.

What is interesting about Polish community in Norway is its socio-demographic structure. Segmentation of labor market and demand for labor in particular sectors of Norwegian economy are reflected by migrants' occupational and educational composition. Economic factors, at least partially, explain also over-representation of males among Polish migrants (see Figure 2) and types of jobs undertaken by them (Iglicka, Gmaj, and Wierzejski 2018)². With regards to sectors of the economy where Poles are employed prevail: (1) construction, electricity, water supply, sewerage, waste management; (2) manufacture; and (3) labor recruitment and provision of personnel.

Concerning educational structure, in 2016 about 50% of Polish migrants had secondary education and 32% tertiary education (more precisely, BA 16% and MA 16%)³. The gap between genders is evident. Females are better educated (Steinkellner 2015: 36). Data reached for 2012 showed that BA or MA possessed 52% of females and only 23% of males.

Although Poles initially arrived as labor migrants, their stay in Norway turns into a long-term one. Substantial proportion of couples brings children from

Poland or establishes families in Norway. Settling in Norway, they radically change their ordinary course of life (Bell and Erdal 2015; Gmaj 2018; 2016; Iglicka et al. 2018).

FORMATION OF A NEW POLISH-NORWEGIAN SOCIETY

Referring to the approach introduced by Thomas and Znaniecki, formation of a new Polish-Norwegian society is a process constituted by certain stages, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

“When a Polish immigrant finds work which pays well and promises to be permanent in a locality where there is no Polish settlement yet, he usually tries at once to attract his friends and relatives from other Polish-American communities” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920: 30).

As migration scholars noted, with the passage of time, migration flows develop and the number of potential migrants increases. Migrant networks offer support in finding employment and accommodation. They reduce the economic and psychological costs and risks of international migration (Faist 2000; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Vertovec and Cohen 1999). Migrant networks played an important role in directing flows from Poland after 2004; however, in the case of Norway, recruitment agencies played an important role as well (Napierała and Trevena 2010; Friberg, Tronstad, and Dølvik 2012). The importance of “location-specific capital” (DaVanzo 1981) and social networks has been confirmed by TRANSFAM research, too (Gmaj 2018; 2016; Iglicka et al. 2018). Researchers revealed that Polish migrants, before their arrival, had known someone already working in Norway (both in registered and unregistered way), or themselves invited other Poles to join them in order to work together. They actively searched for jobs for their relatives and friends. Gradually, labor migrants brought their relatives (family reunion), siblings,

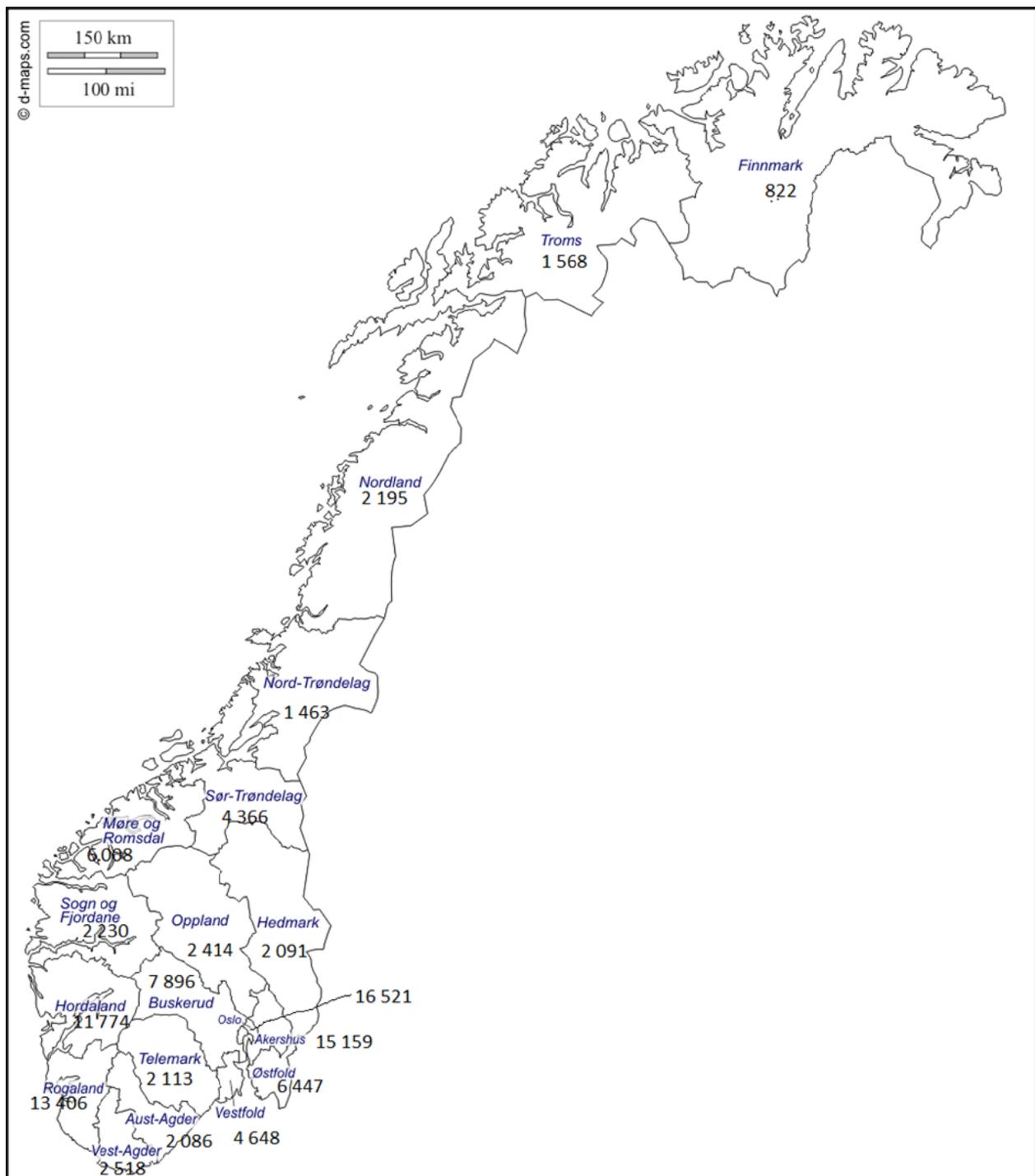


Figure 1. Polish Immigrants and Norwegian-Born to Polish Parents (2016).

Note: Source: d-maps.com and Statistics Norway data (Table 09817: Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, by immigration category, country background, and percentages of the population; retrieved March 15, 2018 <https://www.ssb.no/en/>).

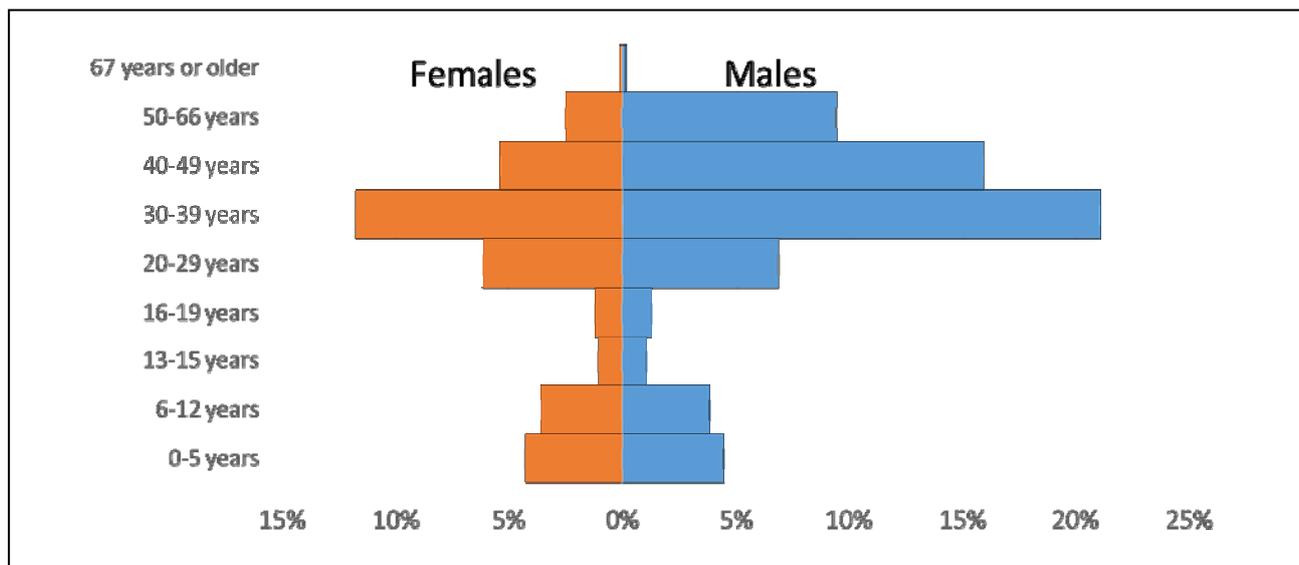


Figure 2. Population Pyramid—Polish Immigrants and Norwegian-Born to Immigrant Parents at the Beginning of 2018.

Note: Source: Author's elaboration based on Statistics Norway data (05196: Population, by sex, age, and citizenship 1977-2018; retrieved March 15, 2018 <https://www.ssb.no/en/>).

Table 1. Polish Immigrants and Norwegian-Born to Polish Parents, at the Beginning of 2018

County	Number of Poles
Østfold	7,030
Akershus	16,622
Oslo	16,405
Hedmark	2,286
Oppland	2,534
Buskerud	8,577
Vestfold	5,099
Telemark	2,175
Aust-Agder	2,082
Vest-Agder	2,578
Rogaland	13,312
Hordaland	11,996
Sogn og Fjordane	2,322
Møre og Romsdal	6,124
Trøndelag	6,347
Nordland	2,378
Troms/Romsa	1,765
Finnmark/Finnmárku	877
Total	110,509

Note: Source: Statistics Norway (09817: Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, by immigration category, country background, and percentages of the population 2010-2018; retrieved March 15, 2018 <https://www.ssb.no/en/>).

cousins, aunts, uncles, etc. They established their families there or gathered their family members, who used to reside in Poland.

“A ‘society’ is established invariably (...) The first purpose for such a ‘society’ which is usually established is mutual help in emergencies (sickness, death, and, more seldom, lack of work)” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920: 36).

In the case of post-EU-accession emigration from Poland to Norway, welfare state instruments replaced migrants mutual help associations in emergencies. Membership of structured entities, NGOs and involvement in politics seem to be limited to work of activists. Religious services, Polish language classes, traditional celebration, and practical assistance to newly arrived Poles constitute the main pillars of organized social activity. As researchers pointed, Poles do not converge yet to the Norwegian standards of civic participation. Even though they are the largest group of immigrants in Norway, there are still only a few Polish organizations registered in the public volunteering register (Guribye et al. 2018).

“(…) what the Polish colony really wishes in establishing a parish is not merely religious services but a community center of its own” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920: 43).

Polish ministry is a part of Norwegian Catholic Church. In practice, in every parish, more or less, frequently masses in Polish are organized (Burkiewicz 2015). The Catholic Church not only offers masses and catechesis in Polish but also plays an important role in reminding children about their common Polish heritage by observing Polish traditions, even if they do not attend mass every Sunday (Guribye et al. 2018).

The Church role goes even beyond. Particular churches organize Polish events, and they are sites of socializing, getting important information with regards to work, housing, social entitlements in Norway, etc.

The central role of Catholic Church is a result of Norwegian policy that does not provide any individual

integration instruments for Poles, who are EU-citizens and benefit though from the freedom of movement for workers in European Economic Area, on the one side. And on the other, an engagement of Catholic Church is suitable for the Polish community that can be characterized by particularized trust (Guribye et al. 2018)⁴. The Directorate of Integration and Diversity provides financial support for work among labor migrants done by the Church. Among others, this work has included information meetings and counselling.

“Immediately after the completion of the church or even before, the parish school is organized” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920: 49).

Nowadays, education is not only a privilege but a right and an obligation (compulsory education to particular age). Stories shared by Polish immigrants’ children show how important Norwegian school is for the transmission of norms and values of the Norwegian society (Ślusarczyk, Wardhal, and Strzemecka 2018). These new norms and values, and children behaviors that are their consequences, however sometimes, meet parents’ reluctance that can be summarized by the statement: “do not be so Norwegian”.

Of course, it would be an exaggeration to compare parish schools offering full-time teaching observed by Thomas and Znaniecki in America with contemporary supplementary Polish schooling in Norway. Nevertheless, Polish schools shall not be ignored in the analysis.

Polish schooling has existed yet before post-accession wave of migration. Their primary goal is education and transmission of Polish culture to children. This work is done by schools run by associations, of which some are based at Catholic parishes. In Oslo, there is also the Embassy school attached to governing bodies in Warsaw. Additionally, catechesis and religion-centered language classes are organized by many Catholic parishes. Attending at

these activities demands efforts from both children and their parents, which often includes long-distance commuting (Guribye et al. 2018). Polish schooling plays an important role in reminding children about their common Polish heritage and balances unavoidable Norwegian impact on children. The same might be said about the Polish Scouts in Norway, who are a part of YWCA-YMCA Guides and Scouts of Norway⁵.

As Thomas and Znaniecki stressed, Polish-American society as a whole group was slowly evolving from Polonism to Americanism and especially the second generation was acquiring more American attitudes. Although post-accession immigration to Norway is a relatively new phenomenon, the similar patterns are observed. The role of Norwegian school in this process is evident. In order to balance somehow its influence on children, parents do not limit their activity exclusively to actions taken within the family but rely on support from institutions and organizations developed by/or together with other Poles. Organizations focused on children are sites of socializing for grown-up family members. Though, their role often goes beyond education and upbringing children. They organize Polish events, and they are sites of socializing, getting important information with regards to work, housing, social entitlements in Norway, etc.

“Simultaneously with this process of social organization of the Polish-American group its territorial concentration goes on” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920: 63).

As it has been mentioned, Poles are to be found in all counties all over Norway; however, more than half of them reside in four counties. They are rather spread, nevertheless, some signs of concentration in particular streets or buildings are found especially when labour migrants are not accompanied by their families. From practical reasons, accommodation, at least temporary, should be arranged before arrival to Norway. Sometimes, employers organize worker’s hostels. The

location-specific social capital plays an important role at least at the initial stage of migration. Some migrants joined their relatives and friends, who had been settled in Norway and some brought other Poles to Norway. Nevertheless, presence of co-ethnics living in neighbourhood is not itself something attractive for new Polish settlers. Poles arriving to Norway are not monolithic. Differences among Polish people arriving to Norway were recognized by several interviewees during TRANSFAM research⁶. Some who had bad experience with co-ethnics, decided to limit their relationships. Some, who suffered from a growing competition of new arrivals working in a shadow economy, detached themselves from “rivals”. Nonetheless, it should be said that migrants use their social capital—their relatives and friends living in Norway and their broader Polish network—especially in order to find a flat or a house for rent.

“The real super-territorial organization of the American Poles is based not on the parish but on the local association, for although the association is included within the territorial community and serves its interests, it may be able to cooperate for certain purposes with analogous associations existing in other communities” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920: 95).

As it has been mentioned, organized social activity, besides Polish school or religious services, seems to be limited to work of activists. *Polonia Norweska*, formed in 2012, is one organization that can be labelled such a super-territorial one. It has branches across the country. Organization assists Poles and helps further their integration in Norwegian society. It seems that portal “MojaNorwegia.pl” and social media at least partially replace some functions of super-territorial organization.

CONCLUSIONS

The choice of Norway is not accidental. It is justified by the fact that Polish migrants constitute the biggest group of immigrants there. Furthermore, it is

reasonable to claim that former expectations related to the temporariness of Polish post-EU-accession (2004) migration can, at least to some extent, be questioned. Migrants decide on more permanent settlement instead of circulation between Norway and Poland. Along with the networks and growing number of children, part of temporary migration has transformed from circular into permanent migration. The number of Polish children residing in Norway and the number of children born in Norway to Polish females are growing each year⁷. It seems that the process of pioneering male migration followed by a family reunification is similar to that was observed in Polish migration to the United Kingdom studied by Anne White (2011).

To examine formation of this Polish-Norwegian group, an approach introduced in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* has been employed. This analysis is based on the premise that it is more fruitful to study assimilation of migrants not as an individual but as a group phenomenon. Regardless of the terminology used: integration, adaptation, or assimilation, one witnesses process constituted by certain stages. They have been discussed in this paper showing that classical theoretical approach is still inspiring for research and analysis of contemporary migration.

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Notes

1. There are two classifications the Norwegians refer to, both in terms of statistics and more general in terms of studies on migration. The first one is related with the term “immigrants”. Immigrants are persons born abroad with two foreign-born parents and four foreign-born grandparents. The second term used in Norway is “Norwegian-born to immigrant parents”. They are persons born in Norway of two parents born abroad, and in addition having four grandparents born abroad (Statistics Norway).
2. Segmentation of labor market and demand for labor in particular sectors of economy can be analyzed in terms of social and structural changes observed within the Norwegian labour market. The restructuring of labour-intensive sectors, such as construction, and the increasing of the informalization and casualization of labour relations and their connection to international migration, have been elaborated in literature (e.g. Sassen 2005; Haakestad and Friberg 2017).
3. See Table 5. Level of education for immigrants 16 years and older. Country background. Numbers. Retrieved (<https://www.ssb.no/en/utdanning/statistikk/utniv>).
4. Particularized versus generalized trust is an important distinction. It is based on distinguishing between people who look outward, beyond their own groups, and those who look inward. The generalized trusters have a positive view of human nature and believe that most people share common values. They are willing to trust strangers and believe that contact with different groups can be both personally and socially fruitful. The particularized trusters have faith in other people but only from their own group so they stick to their own group (Uslaner and Conley 2003).
5. YWCA—the World Young Women’s Christian Association, YMCA—the World Young Men’s Christian Association.
6. The differences refer to, e.g. length of residence in Norway, length of periods spent in Poland and Norway, type and status of undertaken jobs (registered, unregistered, temporal or permanent, full-time, part-time, etc.), and staying abroad alone or accompanied by family (spouse and children, parents and siblings) and more distant relatives or friends. Migrants are also diverse with regard to their educational level (achieved in Poland and Norway), previous migration experience (besides Norway), their professional career in both countries, and level of religiosity. Although all of them are Poles, even those residing in the same city, town, or

region in Norway, originate from different regions in Poland and circumstances of their migration are diverse. Therefore, it might be said that this description suits the idea of “super-diversity” of contemporary migration (Vertovec 2008).

7. At the beginning of 2018, approximately 19 thousand Polish children—15 years old and younger—resided in Norway. It means that their number has more than doubled when compared to 2010. Regarding births given yearly to Polish mothers, their number has changed from less than 12 hundred in 2010 to more than 16 hundred in 2017 (Statistics Norway).

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