A SENDING COMMUNITY IN THE FACE OF A MIGRANT CRISIS. MOŃKI CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The article presents results of the study carried out in Mońki, which is a town characterized by high intensity of economic emigration. The study was conducted in 2016, during the so-called the migration crisis, i.e. the increased influx of immigrants and refugees to the countries of the European Union. Although the wave of this influx did not reach Poland, but the migration crisis has become an important social issue, especially in the mass media. Our survey shows how being a member of an emigrant sending community affects the attitude towards receiving immigrants and refugees.

Keywords: migration crisis, attitudes towards of migration, Mońki

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Introduction

The rapid increase in the inflow of immigrants and refugees to the territory of the European Union member states in 2015 (Frontex 2019) dominated mass media releases for several months and resulted in an increased interest in the issue of migration in the Polish society. Furthermore, the focus on migration was fostered by the Parliamentary election campaign conducted at that time. Different concepts of migration policy have become an important element distinguishing the individual political parties, as some proposed liberal approaches towards immigrants and refugees coming to Europe, while others opposed those. The election results revealed that the attitudes of politicians contesting Poland's openness to the influx of foreigners were more acceptable to society and ultimately led to success of these parties.

The result is unsurprising, given the predominant nature of the media coverage on the arrival of immigrants and refugees. The most controversial incidents were covered the most intensively, such as the frequent drownings of people trying to cross the sea to get to Europe or the behavior of the new arrivals (mainly men), which violated the existing social order and sense of security in the host countries. The covered events affected public opinion and stimulated concerns about the potential intensification of these phenomena in Poland as well, especially considering that in Polish society, the experience of welcoming immigrants and refugees is not as extensive as the experience of themselves being immigrants. There are still regions and cities in Poland where at least one family member has travelled or is currently living abroad to work (White 2011; Jończy 2016; Solga 2017; *Raport o stanie badań nad migracjami w Polsce po 1989 roku* 2018).

The small town of Mońki situated in Podlaskie Voivodeship, inhabited by approximately 10000 people, is one such place. The specific situation of the town was described numerous times in the subject literature (Cieślińska 1987; *Idem* 2012; *Ludzie na huśtawce. Migracje między peryferiami Polski i Zachodu* 2001, Dobroński 2014). The current article will present the results of own research on the reaction of residents of Mońki towards the migrant crisis. Based on the results of the surveys, an attempt to answer the question of the impact the fact of being a migrant sending community may have on the attitude towards the reception of immigrants and refugees.

Research methodology

The survey¹, which included questions concerning the attitude towards the inflow of foreigners, was conducted in Mońki in the summer of 2016 (July, August). At that time, the migrant crisis was one of the focal points of the public debate (Leszkowicz-Baczyński 2018; Jaskułowski 2019). The survey in Mońki was conducted by randomly selecting 120 adult residents from the electoral lists². Surveys were carried out by two trained researchers, graduates of the University of Białystok. The interviewers reached all the addresses of the randomly selected respondents, but only 63 of them were interviewed in this sample. As many as 37 respondents were not present at the place of residence, 23 of them were abroad at the time of the survey: in the USA (8 persons), Canada (2 persons), Belgium (6 persons), Germany (3 persons) and other European countries (4 persons), and the remaining 14 persons left Mońki for other places in Poland. Relatives or tenants became residents of their homes instead. A relatively large number of 20 people - every sixth person - refused to participate in the survey and answer questions.

¹ The research was conducted as part of statutory research of the Department of Sociology of Organizations and Institutions of the Institute of Sociology of the University of Białystok. The intention was to repeat a 1991 study, when Mońki was the subject of a survey on a sample of adult residents selected from electoral lists for the first time. In 1991, 120 respondents were drawn, out of which 103 completed the survey.

² In practice, these were 120 numbers, with names and addresses attached, which were made available after meeting the statutory requirements.

Mońki as a migrant sending community and an "emigration" town

The experiences related to emigration of the residents of Mońki are an important element of its image and identity (Cieślińska 1997; *Idem* 2012; Dobroński 2014). In order to understand the emigration phenomenon of this small town, it is necessary to refer to its origins and developmental conditions. The town of Mońki was established in connection with the creation of the Mońki Poviat (district) in 1954 and the consequent attraction of internal migrants. Being a part of a train network, the poviat authorities' main office was situated in the town, which resulted in increased possibilities of employment in the state administration and a general qualitative and quantitative development (Skutnik 2015). The administrative reform of 1975 led to the abolition of poviats (districts).

Mońki was, at the time, already a dynamic and attractive small town, one of the largest in the former poviat (district). The loss of opportunities for further development of the town based on administrative functions caused the constantly increasing number of new residents to look for other employment opportunities. Some of them decided to commute to work in the Voivodship's capital city (Białystok) or in smaller towns with other job prospects. However, many people benefited from the lax passport policy of the People's Republic of Poland and emigrated to work abroad (Cieślińska 1997). It is worth remembering that in order to implement the plan of economic emigration, one had to overcome two obstacles. The first one was related to domestic policy (limited access to passports), the second one to international policy (the need to obtain a visa for Polish citizens).

The inhabitants of Mońki usually wanted to emigrate to the USA, where they had friends and relatives who had emigrated there many years before (interwar and post-war emigration). Chain migration followed on this basis: those who managed to travel to the USA attracted more people, relatives and friends (Osipowicz 2002).

In Mońki, families whose members had left for the USA created environments of mutual support and simultaneously became the economic elite of the town. The 1980s, the period of economic and political crisis, was paradoxically economically prosperous for such families. because their financial situation was much better than that of those who did not have the support of relatives working in the West. Differentiating between "emigrant" and "nonemigrant" families divided the local families. This began to change with the political transformation, namely, after 1989. Working abroad no longer generated such a disproportionate income in relation to domestic wages. Paradoxically, however, economic emigration has been steadily increasing (GUS 2013). It was primarily the result of rapidly growing unemployment in Poland (which stemmed from bankruptcies and closing of many workplaces) and the necessity to find any available sources of income. Simultaneously, the existing administrative barriers blocking the possibility of leaving the country were largely eliminated. It is possible to assume that every Polish person was granted the right to emigrate (lack of passport restrictions). The right to immigrate was not facilitated to a lesser, but not insubstantial extent: most European countries waived the visa requirement for Poles in the early 1990s. As a result, new emigration opportunities emerged in Europe. In Mońki, however, the United States remained the most popular direction, despite the visa requirement still in place.

Early 1990s were an interesting period of transition also with regard to immigration to Poland (Łukowski 1997; Domaradzka 2000; Łodziński, Nowicka-Rusek 2001; Kaczmarczyk, Stefańska, Tyrowicz 2008; Adamczyk 2012). Seasonal economic immigrants started appearing even in small, provincial towns. Own observations suggest that the immigrants who came to Mońki consisted predominantly of seasonal construction workers and street vendors. They were received positively by the locals, since many saw them as reflections of their own experiences with economic migration. It seemed that the inflow of economic migrants would increase dynamically, but for various reasons (unemployment and pauperization of Polish society) it was not the case. The register of permanent stay migrations n Mońki in the years 1990-2017 shows that only 72 foreigners registered their permanent stay, and 304 locals "registered out of the town". Thus, the permanent stay balance was negative at -232 persons. During these 28 years, annual permanent immigration has not exceeded 10 persons per year and permanent emigration has not exceeded 40 persons per year³. Although these figures do not reflect the real scale of the phenomenon, as they are concerned only with permanent stay migration, they indicate that Mońki is a town of emigration, rather than immigration.

Comparison of the respondents' attitude towards migrants: 2016 versus 1991

The moral panic of the so-called "migrant crisis", caused by the high and rapid influx of immigrants and refugees to Europe, was an important socio-political context for the survey conducted in Mońki in 2016 (Sik, Simonovits 2019). Therefore, the questionnaire, which involved current social issues, also included a question concerning the attitude towards migrants "from other countries where things are not going well". A similar question was asked 25 years earlier, in 1991 (Cieślińska 1994). At that time, the socio-political context of the influx was different (no moral panic) and it concerned mainly the attitude towards economic immigrants. The questions in 1991 and 2016 had a similar form. They were multiple choice questions with an identical choice of answers, namely: a. I do not see anything wrong with it, only

³ Own calculations based on data from the Voivodeship Statistical Office in Białystok.

positives, b. I see good and bad sides (I have mixed feelings), c. I mostly see the harm it may cause, d. I do not yet have an opinion on this subject".

By combining the answers to these two questions, asked quarter of a century apart in different moments and socio-political contexts, a preview of opinions on immigrants and refugees in Poland of this small migratory city's respondents emerges (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of responses of the residents of Mońki on foreign immigration: 1991 vs 2016

Que	stion and answers:	Survey date	
Sovie	: Long and short term economic immigration to Poland from the et Union, Romania and other countries is becoming more mon. What is your personal opinion on this phenomenon?	1991	2016
othe	: Long and short term economic immigration to Poland from r countries, where things are not going well, is becoming more mon. What is your personal opinion on this phenomenon?	%	%
a.	I do not see anything wrong with it, only positives	11.7	4.8
b.	I see good and bad sides (I have mixed feelings)	53.4	39.7
c.	I mostly see the harm it may cause	10.7	33.3
d.	I do not yet have an opinion on this subject	19.4	19.0
e.	No answer or "I have a different opinion" answer	4.9	3.2
	Total, in %	100.0	100.0

Source: own calculations based on the results of surveys conducted in 1991 and 2016 in Mońki.

Bearing in mind the differences in the content of these questions and the different social and political contexts in which the research was conducted, some characteristic features of the answers chosen can be observed. First, the percentage of those surveyed in 1991 and 2016 who chose the evasive answer "I do not yet have an opinion on this subject" was almost identical. Almost every fifth respondent (19.4% in 1991 and 19.0% in 2016) did not want to or was not able to judge the

phenomenon happening "before their very eyes" which concerned foreign immigration. Therefore, in both time periods, it was a new phenomenon to the respondents. Second, in 2016, compared to 1991, respondents from Mońki were much less likely to choose the answer "I do not see anything wrong with it, only positives" (11.7% in 1991 and 4.8% in 2016). Third, the respondents in 2016 chose the answer "I see good and bad sides (I have mixed feelings)" less frequently than those in 1991 (53.4% in 1991 and 39.7% in 2016). This answer is virtually neutral, although, colloquially, such statements ("I have mixed feelings") may indicate that a given phenomenon is controversial. Fourth, in 2016, the percentage of those opposing the influx of immigrants and refugees increased significantly (more than three times). These were people who chose the answer "I mostly see the harm it may cause". In 1991, 10.7% of respondents chose this answer, and in 2016 - 33.3%.

Despite the relatively small sample size (103 persons in 1991 and 63 persons in 2016), this relation is statistically very significant. The chi-squared test (for the hypothesis that answers to this question depend on the year of the survey) gives a result of 99.97%.

Analysis of the 2016 responses concerning the influx of immigrants and refugees to Poland

The Public Opinion Research Center's (CBOS) research revealed that attitudes towards the reception of immigrants and refugees were related, among others, to the gender of the respondents (women rated the phenomenon more positively than men) and their assessment of their personal situation (positive self-esteem increased the likelihood of a positive assessment of the immigration, CBOS 2017b). These relationships were also confirmed in the case of respondents from Mońki (Table 2, Table 3).

Long and short term economic immigration	Gender		Total	
to Poland from other countries, where things are not going very well, is becoming more	Women	Men	_	
common. What is your personal opinion on this phenomenon?	%	%	%	
I do not see anything wrong with it, only positives	7.1	0.0	4.8	
I see good and bad sides (I have mixed feelings)	42.9	33.3	39.7	
I mostly see the harm it may cause	26.2	47.6	33.3	
I do not yet have an opinion on this subject	21.4	14.3	19.0	
I have a different opinion. Elaborate.	2.4	4.8	3.2	
Total, in %	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Number of respondents	42	21	63	

 Table 2. Opinion on immigration depending on the gender of the respondent

Women chose the answer "I see good and bad sides (I have mixed feelings)" the most often (42.9%). Men chose the answer "I mostly see the harm it may cause" the most often (47.6%). Therefore, women were less likely to express negative opinions on foreign immigration. An extremely negative assessment of this phenomenon was chosen by 26.2% of women (and 47.6% of men). The positive aspects of accepting immigrants and refugees were only chosen by women, albeit rarely (7.1%). None of the men surveyed chose the answer indicating the "good sides" of the immigration. The women surveyed in Mońki, similarly to the national sample, approached the issue of the influx of immigrants and refugees more positively.

Despite the small sample size (63 persons), this relation is statistically significant. The chi-squared test (for the hypothesis that the answer of "I mostly see the harm it may cause" is dependent on respondent gender) gives a result of 91.1%.

Considering the subjective assessment of one's own situation in the town with the assessment of the immigration, the following relationships can be observed (Table 3). Respondents indicating an improvement in their own situation were much more likely than other respondents to avoid judgement concerning the immigration, choosing the answer "I do not yet have an opinion on this subject" (29.1%, with an average for the whole sample of 19.0%).

Although this percentage contains only 7 people, this relation is statistically significant. The chi-squared test gives a result of 89.1%.

immigration to Poland from	How would you define your own current position in the city compared to the past?			
other countries, where things are not going very well, is becoming more common. What is your personal opinion on this phenomenon?	My position has improved and is now better than it used to be	My position has remained not changed	My position has deteriorated compared to the past	
I do not see anything wrong with it, only positives	4.2	2.9	25.0	
I see good and bad sides (I have mixed feelings)	37.5	45.7	0.0	
I mostly the harm it may cause	25.0	37.1	50.0	
I do not yet have an opinion on this subject	29.1	11.4	25.0	
l have a different opinion. Elaborate	4.2	2.9	0.0	
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	
N	24	35	4	

Table 3. Opinion on the immigration and respondents' assessment of own situation

Respondents who rated their own current position in the city as the same as in the past or worse than in the past were more likely to negatively assess the influx of immigrants and refugees (Table 3).

Also, this relation is quite statistically significant (the chi-squared test assesses the probability of the of such a relation at 72.9%).

Bearing in mind that Mońki is an emigration community with deeply rooted emigration experiences, it is worthwhile to examine whether the surveyed residents viewed the emigration of their compatriots in the same terms as the foreign immigration. To do so, the answers to the questions concerning the assessment of emigration and immigration were compiled (Table 4).

Table 4. Assessment of the inflow and outflo	ow of population abroad on the basis of 2016 study

Long and short term economic immigration to Poland from other countries, where	Mońki is known for the economic emigration of its inhabitants. () What are the advantages and disadvantages of this emigration? What, in your opinion, does the city gain and what does it lose because of the economic emigration of its inhabitants?					
things are not going very well, is becoming more common. What is your personal opinion on this	I do not see anything wrong with it, only positives	bad sides (I have the harm it it, mixed feelings) may cause		lt is difficult to say. No response	Total	
phenomenon?	%	%	%	%		
I do not see anything wrong with it, only positives	0.0	3.2	9.5	0.0	4.8% (3)	
I see good and bad sides (I have mixed feelings)	66.7	38.7	38.2	20.0	39.7% (25)	
I mostly see the harm it may cause	33.3	32.3	33-3	40.0	33.3% (21)	
I do not yet have an opinion on this subject	0.0	19.3	19.0	40.0	19.0% (12)	
I have a different opinion. Elaborate.	0.0	6.5	0.0	0.0	3.2% (2)	
Total in %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0% (63)	
Number of respondents	6 (9.5%)	31 (49.2%)	21 (33.3%)	5 (8.0%)	63 (100%)	

Source: Own calculations based on the results of the 2016 survey.

It is interesting that there is no relation between the perception of the harm caused by the influx of immigrants and the harmfulness of emigration from the town. The chi-squared test used to answer these questions assesses the probability of the existence of such a relationship exactly at zero.

Faces of the "migrant crisis" in Poland

It has been approximately four years since the first signs of the so-called "migrant crisis" (refugee crisis) emerged (Frontex 2019). Initially, there were concerns that the scale of this phenomenon would widen (Cianciara 2015, p. 430). However, this did not happen, as in the following years the inflow decreased to the 2015 level (Cieślińska, Dziekońska 2019). It is important to note that those who arrived in high numbers during the peak have remained in Europe and it is difficult to predict how long it will take for them to integrate into the host societies (Balicki 2016).

The migrant crisis has shown that effective border control and streamlining of procedures for granting refugee status is needed. In practice, these procedures are too lengthy. Separating refugees from economic migrants is not easy (Castles, Miller 2011, p. 242). According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it"⁴. The key phrase in this definition is "fear of persecution" and its reasons. Therefore, a refugee status is not granted automatically after submitting a request. Special procedures are being put in place to verify the personal data of asylum-

⁴ UN, Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951 (Polish version), available at: https://amnesty.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Konwencja_Dotyczaca_Uchodzcow.pdf

seekers. The mass influx of immigrants extended the waiting period for such decisions and the problem of immigrants with undefined legal and social status is growing.

In Poland, the so-called "migration crisis" did not appear in the same form as in other European countries. No significant increase in the number of refugees was recorded at that time⁵. According to the data of the Office for Foreigners, in 2015, 12325 persons submitted applications for refugee status (348 persons were granted the status, i.e., 2.8%), in 2016 - 4502 applications for 12 321 persons were submitted, out of which only 108 persons obtained the status (i.e., 0.87%); In 2017, 2226 applications for 5078 persons were submitted (150 persons were granted the status, i.e., 2.95%) (Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców 2015).

Countries of origin related to the migrant crisis were not represented in greater numbers among those applicants: refugees from Syria accounted only for 2.4% (295 persons) of the total number of registered asylum-seekers, while at the same time in other EU countries, refugees from Syria accounted for 30% of the whole group (Martin 2016, p. 309). However, the probability of obtaining refugee status in Poland for Syrians was higher than for foreigners from other countries. In 2016, out of 108 positive decisions, 40 (or 37%) concerned people from Syria.

In 2017, this percentage dropped to 11%. The characteristic feature of immigration to Poland was still the influx of people from neighboring countries, such as Russia and Ukraine. In 2015, 7989 (64.8%) asylum-seekers came from the Russian Federation and 2305 (18.7%) from Ukraine. Refugees from the Russian Federations were mostly Chechens. For Chechens, Poland is one of the first safe countries on their route. They often come here not only to seek refuge, but also to make it easier for them to travel further west, to countries where their countrymen have established numerous and well-organized Muslim communities.

⁵ Main migration trends'15, Commentary of the Office for Foreigners (Główne trendy migracyjne'15, Komentarz Urzędu ds. Cudzoziemców).

The typical "migrant crisis" situation involved mostly male refugees. However, it was not the case in 2015 Poland. In the largest group of asylum-seekers (from the Russian Federation) there even were slightly more women (51.6%). However, if the gender structure is categorized by country of origin, it is revealed that in 2015 in most countries of origin (41 out of 53) more men than women applied. Applications for the refugee status are submitted through the Border Guard.

In Poland, the so-called "migrant crisis" became chiefly a popular media event. However, it also provoked significant societal concern and became a prolific subject of public debate and sociological research (Łodziński 2019, Jaskułowski 2019). Since 2015, the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) has been conducting regular surveys concerning the attitudes towards this issue.

According to their results, a steady decline in positive attitudes towards the reception of refugees and an increase in negative attitudes can be observed. Initially (May 2015), the opponents of accepting refugees accounted for 53%, and supporters for about 33%. Two years later (April 2017), the opponents constituted 74% of the respondents, and the supporters – 22% (CBOS 2017a, p. 2).

The rapid increase in the negative attitude towards refugees in Poland resulted not so much from tangible experience as from fears of the issues faced by those countries where the influx of first wave migrants was the greatest:

"Poland is in a specific situation in that despite the increase in the number of foreigners, there are still few of them here in comparison to other European countries. Foreign reports, however, especially those concerning crimes and terrorist attacks by foreigners, also affect the situation in Poland and shape the attitudes towards foreigners living in Poland" (Deutschmann 2017, p. 83).

Conclusion

The analysis of the chosen survey questions conducted in a relatively small town of a migrant sending community, was intended to help answer the question of how the (direct or indirect) experiences of emigration affect the perception of the phenomena of emigration and immigration. Will respondents from a "migration" city (Kubera, Lisiecki 2014) be willing to assess the outflow of their own citizens (emigration) in a different way than the inflow of citizens from other countries (immigration)? As the survey conducted in 2016 suggests, every third respondent from Mońki saw only the harm caused by the emigration of Mońki residents, as well as that which may be caused by the influx of foreigners to Poland. There were very few supporters of both types of migration. In the case of emigration, fewer than one out of ten respondents (9.5%) saw only the good aspects of the phenomenon. In the case of immigration, such positive assessments were significantly less frequent – 4.8%.

Surveys conducted in this particular period of increased social interest in migration and refugees reveal that both the real experiences of emigration and the reported "media" experiences of the migrant crisis are treated in a similar way, while being a migrant sending community does not affect the attitude towards the inflow of immigrants and refugees. The demographic and social characteristics of respondents are more important than their place of residence and its characteristic features.

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