

KAMIL ŁUCZAJ

Faculty of Administration and Social Sciences,
University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów

JANUSZ MUCHA¹

AGH University of Science and Technology in Kraków

Why to employ foreign academics in Poland? Perspective of heads of university research teams²

Academic international mobility is a long-lasting phenomenon and important aim of public policies in numerous countries. Scholarly debate usually concentrates on Western countries and some Eastern Asian scientific hubs like Singapore. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is understudied. In Poland, the largest CEE country, unlike in many Western countries, public policies concerning internationalization of the academic field are still under construction. Nevertheless, there is a strong pressure for internationalization. The Polish case to be discussed in this article can serve as an example of academic migration to less economically privileged regions that are usually countries of emigration of scholars rather than immigration. In this paper, by means of qualitative in-depth interviews, we concentrate on the need to invite academics from abroad and the perceptions of the actual presence of foreign scholars, employed full-time, as seen by their Polish supervisors. Geographical focus of this paper (CEE) and adopted perspective (interviews with heads of departments supported by interviews with academics) bridge the gap in the literature on academic mobility.

Keywords: academic mobility, highly skilled migrants, Central and Eastern Europe, immigration to Poland

¹ Corresponding author: Janusz Mucha, [jmucha@post.pl](mailto:jmuch@post.pl)

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Introduction

Academic international mobility is an important point of focus of public policies in numerous countries (see e.g. Boucher and Cerna 2014). Scholarly debate concentrates on Western countries and some Eastern Asian scientific hubs like Singapore. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is understudied. This paper supplements our prior analyses (Mucha and Łuczaj 2016; Mucha and Łuczaj 2017a; Mucha and Łuczaj 2017b; Mucha and Łuczaj 2018) with the point of view of heads of institutions employing foreigners in Poland. We build upon the interviews with both Polish heads of departments and international faculty in order to provide a more detailed picture of the phenomenon being discussed.

In Poland, the largest CEE country, unlike in many Western countries, public policies concerning the internationalization of the academic field are still under construction. Nevertheless, there is a strong pressure for internationalization. A hallmark of change is the creation of the National Agency of International Exchange (NAWA) in 2018 based on the example of German Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD). The Polish case to be discussed in this article can serve as an example of academic migration to less economically privileged countries that are usually countries of scholars' emigration rather than of their immigration.

There are multiple reasons why Poland (as well as Central and Eastern European countries with a similar contemporary history) is not a popular destination country, with its relatively poor infrastructure and low salaries being the most prominent ones (an interesting example of this kind of situation in China is analysed in: Kim 2015). Others are its troublesome administrative procedures and duties, which have been discussed in detail elsewhere (see Mucha and Łuczaj 2017b). Unlike most of the contributions concerning academic mobility, this paper does not concentrate on the migrating scholars' perspective (although it takes it into account); the focus is rather on the perspective of the institutions, represented by heads of departments. Its goal is to bridge a gap in the literature by revealing motivations on the part of university officials.

The structure of the paper is as follows: after a brief overview of the methodology, we start with the discussion of the importance of foreigners' work for the department and, conversely, what Polish universities have to offer for incoming scholars. The final sections are devoted to two major groups of problems that foreign academics face in Poland: problems in the workplace and problems with social bonds that usually occur outside work.

Academic migration as a subject of social research

The accelerated globalization of recent decades and its consequences for the spatial mobility of millions of people has led to the widely held opinion that for the past 20 years international migration has been more intensive than ever before. Some scholars question this opinion (see, e.g. Czaika and de Haas 2014); however, according to Thomas Faist (2013), the links between spatial mobility and the reproduction of social inequalities have given rise to the ‘mobility turn’ in social sciences (see also, earlier, Urry 2007).

International migration flows have an internal social structure and stratification: they occur in various ethnic (or racial) groups, they have a strong gender dimension, and there are visible class inequalities within them. Internationally mobile scholars belong to a much larger and ambiguous category of highly skilled migrants (HSMs). Managers, experts, physicians, engineers and university professors belong to this privileged upper end of the ladder. At the lower end, there are unskilled or semi-skilled, underprivileged migrant labourers. Some migrants who are highly educated and skilled in their countries of origin have to take menial jobs in the destination countries. Moreover, the skilled and educated among the globally mobile also include students, nurses and medium-level employees that would be difficult to describe as elites. Their experience can be better captured by the term ‘middling migrants’. Many young scholars, including the mobile ones, have no steady jobs and live ‘from grant to grant’, occupying precarious positions (see, e.g., Ackers and Gill 2008; Loacker and Śliwa 2016; Santos 2016).

What seems to be particularly important in scholars’ processes of spatial mobility? Migrating has been a permanent and significant aspect of the academic habitus. They follow the relatively independent and individual ways of migration, stimulated mainly by the ambition to achieve higher prestige and recognition. Economic motivations are important, but the intention is to get access to well-equipped laboratories and libraries, to the *tacit* aspect of knowledge production (Śliwa and Johansson 2015: 78; Luxon and Peelo 2009; Kreber and Hounsel 2014: 26), rather than to increase individual income. In many cases, mobility is not so much a matter of choice as a necessity. For professors moving to low-prestige universities in another country, the reasons to go may be the ‘limited available positions in their home countries or places of choice commensurate with their degrees’, ‘to seek career advancement through further research and international teaching experience, (...) [or] to explore something new and different’ (Kim 2015: 607, 611; see also, e.g., Richmond 1994; Ivancheva and Gourova 2011; Mucha and Łuczaj 2014a; Morano-Foadi 2015). Sometimes both choice and necessity are equally important.

Because of the small scale of academic migration to Poland both in absolute numbers and compared with other European countries (see Mucha and Łuczaj 2017a), there is hardly any empirical literature on academic mobility to Poland and

theoretical investigations as well as studies on similar HSM populations are scarce (cf. Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2005; Mucha 2013; Piekut 2013; Mucha and Łuczaj 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2016). However, academic emigration from Poland has been the subject of both scholarly studies and research reports (see, e.g.; Wagner 2011; Łazarowicz-Kowalik 2011; Ackers and Gill 2008). Some of these studies show paradoxes of European internationalization. Recently, Erik Stokstad (2017) showed in *Science* that the fast emigration from the East to the West of scholars (mostly young and talented) who had already published internationally co-authored papers paradoxically weakens the position of local academic systems of the sending countries. Those people, many of whom come from the CEE, still publish, but are now counted as Western scholars. As a result of internationalization, “In Poland, [...] the ratio of internationally co-authored papers fell from 33% in 2004 to 28% in 2011, whereas it rose from 28% to 43% in the United Kingdom” (Stokstad 2017: 2). The reason is that people who emigrated brought along their connections with scientists in other countries.

Most studies on academic migration focus on the flow to developed Western countries (see Kim 2009; Kim 2010; Kreber and Hounsel 2014; Loacker and Śliwa 2016) or other countries with large-scale migration (Richardson and McKenna 2003; Richardson and Zikic 2007). We concentrate on Poland, traditionally a country of emigration rather than immigration. In 2012 the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education issued an unpublished report, according to which 1,887 foreigners were employed full time in academic positions, constituting 1.9 percent of all academics working in Poland. Data from the Ministry indicate that the majority (57 percent) of foreigners in Poland came from Central or Eastern Europe, one third from Western Europe or the USA (33 percent) and the remaining from other, usually Asian, countries (10 percent). In our study based on the onomastic method and focused on Krakow, we obtained a similar ‘structural’ result (Mucha and Łuczaj 2016: 192): very few (11 percent) scholars who decide to work in Poland are not of European origin. The rest came either from Central and Eastern Europe (62 percent) or other Western European or Anglo-Saxon countries (27 percent). Our paper is focused on this relatively small number of migrants who decide to work in a semi-periphery country (see: Warczok 2016; Zarycki 2016). Our findings can help build sociological interpretations of academic mobility to culturally and economically similar destinations by HSM.

‘Polish academia’³ in rankings and opinion of foreign scholars

It is very difficult to scientifically assess the relative status of scholarship and the academic system of a particular country. Using well-known rankings, however, it is

³ In this paper, we refer to ‘Polish academia’ as opposed to other national science systems with respect to staff policies, funding, university programmes, academic degrees, openness to international cooperation, national traditions etc.

clear that Polish universities do not belong to the top research and higher education institutions globally (the best two are ranked between four and five hundred). However, neither do Polish banks, manufacturing and other enterprises.⁴ A report commissioned by the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP) (Łazarowicz-Kowalik 2011)⁵ reflects the subjective opinions of interviewed scholars. The research targeted both Polish academics working abroad and foreign academics asked about their potential work in Poland. Two thirds of foreign scholars said that they would consider working in Poland in the future (Łazarowicz-Kowalik 2011: 36). Nevertheless, foreign scholars preferred short- rather than long-term stays. Foreign scholars were also asked to evaluate certain elements of the Polish academic system, comparing Polish institutions with foreign ones. Two-thirds identified the Polish institutions' visibility, funding (58 percent) and prestige (52 percent) as worse (or much worse) than in other countries (Łazarowicz-Kowalik 2011: 27).

Research problems and methodology

Our first research question is why Polish universities are willing to employ international staff and what, in the opinion of their supervisors, the contribution of foreigners is to academic scholarship in Poland. The motivations for the international mobility on the part of the researcher are far better known than factors taken into account by the university officials employing them. Numerous studies observed that cross-border mobility could be beneficial for the individual researchers (Teichler 2015), but a few studies also point out the 'darker side' of academic migration (see, e.g., Richardson and Zikic 2007; Kreber and Hounsel 2014; Loacker and Śliwa 2016).

Our second question concerns the main advantage of working in Poland, an issue we have addressed in detail elsewhere (Mucha and Łuczaj 2017a, 2017b). In this paper, we would like to highlight the cultural similarity between Poland and many countries of origin. Excerpts from interviews with both migrating scholars and their supervisors reveal how cultural affinities make their professional work easier.

⁴ See, e.g., <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2013-14/world-ranking> (accessed: 7 October 2013). *Forbes* magazine publishes a list of the largest companies in the world. In 2015, the periodical listed only six Polish companies: PKO BP bank (743rd position), PGE energy company (778th), PZU insurance group (855th), PGNiG energy company (887), PKN Orlen oil company (1217th) and KGHM copper company (1302nd); see <http://www.forbes.pl/najwieksze-firmy-swiata-2015,artykuly,194099,1,1.html> (accessed: 18 April 2017). On university rankings see, e.g., Hazelkorn 2009).

⁵ The FNP invited 836 scientists to participate in the survey: Poles working abroad and foreign reviewers of the Foundation's programmes (650 people); scholars designated by laureates of the FNP TEAM Programme (27); and Polish researchers from the National Institute of Health (159). The report is based on 160 questionnaires returned to the FNP. This report itself is not scientific in nature, but we do not know any other reliable source.

Our third research question concerns the attitude of university staff and colleagues towards international scholars in Poland. We point out how academic culture can support or hinder the adaptation to a new institution. It has been noted that in other countries (Kreber and Hounsel 2014) mobile academics are often subject to different treatment than native researchers and professors. One of the recurring problems cited is a lack of collegiality. How is it in Poland?

We address these issues based on data from our Polish study (2015–2017), composed of twenty-three qualitative in-depth interviews (IDI) with foreign academics employed full-time by four universities in Krakow, Poland (all our interviewees were at least PhD holders) and five additional expert interviews with their formal supervisors (heads of research units, mostly departments). The sample of foreigners was diversified in terms of basic socio-demographic criteria (gender, age, professional experience, field of study). One sub-group was ‘Easterners’, who constitute two-thirds of our sample. This category includes Ukrainians, Russians, one Armenian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, and Vietnamese. The ‘Westerners’ were Italians, Germans, and [one] French. We employed this broad division for two separate reasons – to protect narrators’ privacy and to highlight differences between scholars from more affluent and poorer country. In the first case, providing the reader with details regarding nationality would have created an unnecessary risk of revealing their identity. In the second, it allows us to show that economic triggers of migration are less important in case of scholars from Western countries.

All interviews except one were conducted in Polish despite the fact that the interviewees had the opportunity to choose the English language as well. The IDIs allowed us to deepen our understanding of key concepts that occurred in the course of interviews (Kvale 2008; Rubin and Rubin 2012). Although our project should be considered a case study and its results cannot be easily generalized, it enabled us to discover recurring career paths and strong tendencies. The rationale for using qualitative methodology lies in the fact that we were able to encourage interviewees to justify their opinions and elaborate on them, which would be impossible in a quantitative survey of opinions. The interview guide comprised approximately 80 questions divided into six broad fields of our interest (e.g. educational background, life in Krakow) some of which go beyond the scope of this particular paper. We analysed individual responses and were looking, first of all, for general patterns and other emerging themes.

What can foreigners offer to a Polish university?

The preliminary question is why Polish higher education (HE) institutions decide to hire an international scholar over a Polish one. Data show that in Poland, as in most countries, unemployment for PhD holders is rather moderate, being

a problem for less than 3 percent of members of this group. Nevertheless, it exists and domestic scholars are available (Cyranoski et al. 2011; Mervis 2016). The phantom of unemployment demotivates many PhD candidates, which can slow down their work at best, or discourage them from defending a PhD thesis at worst. The inflow of foreign faculty can be perceived as a remedy for low qualifications or poor publication record of some local PhD but our analysis (Mucha and Łuczaj 2017a) shows that this is not always the case, as the majority of foreign academics in Poland can be referred to as middling: incoming scholars have rather modest publication track and are rarely well-known figures within their academic fields.

This is why we encouraged the supervisors to describe the input of foreign scholars in the work of their institutions. The first common point was related to internationalization *per se* and the necessity to follow the global trend. Polish academia has undergone a deep transformation in the last twenty years. One possible indicator of this systemic change is the number of international students increasing since the early 1990s, which accelerated especially after Polish accession to the EU (2004). From the academic year of 1995/1996, the number of international students in Poland increased sevenfold from 5,000 to approximately 35,000 in 2013/2014 (Golubieva and Tutko 2016). In 2016, as many as 65,793 international students representing more than 160 countries studied in Poland (GUS 2017). In this context, some heads of the departments that we interviewed argued that employing foreigners is not only a good strategy but also a kind of necessity because they can better understand their problems of their compatriots. This reason is clearly visible in the following account:

A relatively large number of Ukrainian students – not only of Ukrainian descent, but the citizens of Ukraine and Belarus – attend our lectures, participate in classes, some in seminars. I have many students and I also have Ukrainian or Belarussian doctoral students. In this sense, someone who comes from Ukraine knows the everyday life, – not just language, because language can be learned, – but he or she knows the everyday: this is very important. These people – students – do have their own problems, you know; from time to time they need to go back to their country, and the international scholar may understand that better [than native professors], because he or she also goes to the country of his or her origin at the same time. This [commonality between international scholar and international students] streamlines these relations, makes them easier, and makes them warmer. (Man/Head/HS)

The second common point was prestige, which stems from the cultural and political stress on international collaboration. International publications, conference papers and study visits abroad are still valued as much in Poland as in other countries. Following other authors, Basak Bilecen and Christof Van Mol present the opinion that internationally mobile academics and students expect to acquire important symbolic capital in terms of prestige, credibility and specific skills that

would be valued by their future employers (2017: 1245). On the other hand, according to Bernadette Loacker and Martyna Śliwa, international collaboration (and mobility) is not always a choice, but often a necessity if scholars wish to establish, maintain or advance their professional position (2016: 658). Our interviewees looked at it from the point of view of the institutions they were in charge of: incoming scholars and their contribution are also important for the departments' image abroad:

It is undoubtedly associated with the recognition of the institution abroad. At the conferences where we were presenting our papers, as well as when we published the papers, we were certainly made aware of the fact that we are a unique research center, because it is so well funded [by the government of the Asian country]. This was repeatedly brought to our attention. (Men/Head/HS)

Cases described by the heads of departments suggest that this struggle for prestige could be dangerous. In part because the quality of research is measured by 1) the number of publications in Western books and periodicals, 2) conference appearances in Western countries, or 3) partnership with leading global universities, the overwhelming majority of which happen to be located in the West (or Global North), a bias towards employees from these countries can occur. Internationalization happens to be confused with Westernization, which one interviewee dubbed *a snobbism for Western scholars* (Man/Head/HS). He explains that a scholar from the West is treated by their compatriots as being superior to Poles, unlike scholars from the East who are treated as *just normal*. But the Westerner is always a valuable asset for Polish academia, and this attitude can be regarded as post-colonial (see, e.g., Warczok 2017).

The third argument was related to research abilities and the experience of the incoming scholars. The most commonly highlighted feature of foreigners' contribution was the 'fresh take' or rare skills related to issues investigated by the existing team.

Yes [to show a new perspective], but also to take advantage of the experience of another [tradition]. Well, I can find different points of view among Polish colleagues, too, but the international scholar may have better contacts because he was born and raised and educated in Ukraine, Belarus or Russia together with his colleagues from there, which can be very useful (Man/Head/HS)

These are people whose native tongues are foreign languages for us, right. So not Polish, not English. We [can therefore] build some teaching modules on their competencies (Man/Head/HS)

The fourth most common reason to employ foreign scholars in Poland is related to the expansion of social capital within the institution. For heads of Polish departments, international cooperation means new research contacts and the

possibility to start joint international projects. The importance of social capital has been emphasized both in the case of permanent employees and visiting professors.

And his foreign contacts are also an advantage for us, because they open up different possibilities of cooperation, cooperation with external institutions. (Woman/Head/Humanities)

[Collaboration was] very good. Excellent. Their input was significant. We maintain contact all the time, we publish together. We are visiting each other, we are giving lectures. Some of them [visiting professors] plan to stay here again. (Men/Head/ST)

Differences between representatives of 'soft' and 'hard' sciences are well known also in the context of internationalization and have been reported in various cultural contexts (Smeby and Trondal 2005), also in Poland (Kwiek 2014). In this study, the representatives of 'natural science and technology' (ST) on the one hand and 'humanities' (HS) on the other differed by their assessment of foreigners as potential assets. University officials from both these generalized fields perceived internationally mobile academics as assets, but they justified those opinions very differently. In the field of ST, which is more oriented towards research grants and projects, scholars need support for particular research tasks and announce job openings more often than HS departments. For them, it is more about having new hands on board. Heads of ST units thought of their co-workers as teams composed of people possessing particular skills and experience in solving well-defined problems. Thus, the international exchange in this field is far more extensive. In the humanities, in turn, the organizational culture is, at least in Poland, quite different. The work there is individualized, and close cooperation between different members of the same organizational unit is not required. What counts very much are specific research interests or knowledge of cultural contexts. One of the heads explained that his institution deals with problems of Central and Eastern Europe, which embraces not only Poland but also neighbouring countries. Thus, this person was interested in recruiting foreigners coming from specific areas. They were not expected to have particular skills and academic achievements but instead attention was paid to their scientific interest, in order to broaden the scope of the team's expertise. Similarly, in cultural and language studies, native speakers seem indispensable and cannot be replaced by Poles, no matter how high their language level. When language studies are taken into account, scientific achievements play minor role compared to teaching abilities. In this case, foreign philologies resemble the science and technology (ST) field.

We should note here that all superiors spoke highly of their international employees but, in their assessment, there was not a major difference in scientific potential among local and incoming scholars. What seems interesting is the organizational commitment of foreign scholars employed in Poland. Many of them

were engaged in the organizational work. Some even occupied formal positions (e.g. vice head of the department) at the university, or were active in another way:

Besides, he launched a series of annual scientific conferences (...) which is an enormously big enterprise. I think there are not many employees in his age group in the entire university as good as him, so I am lucky to have him. (Man/Head/HS)

What seems to be the most important issue related to this observation is that foreigners in Poland cannot count on special treatment. Their role was not restricted to teaching or research activities. On the contrary, international scholars had organizational duties that could cause some problem when we take into account language difficulties discussed later on in this paper.

Cultural proximity – the major advantage of Poland to immigrant scholars

Poland does not have a well-developed grant system for incoming scholars. There are some scattered programs targeted at certain groups of scholars, but examples of broad-scope programs are rather rare. In addition to the newly founded National Agency of International Exchange (NAWA) and its proposed programmes, one should mention the ‘homing’ program of the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP), targeted at the Polish academics who might return from abroad to the homeland. If foreigners are employed on a regular, full-time basis, unlike the temporary contract financed by a research grant or a funding programme (like Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions), they cannot expect special treatment or travel allowance. None of our interviewees benefited from a special bonus for foreigners, but in some rare cases such perks are available for incoming scholars in Poland. General financial conditions are rather harsh and wages cannot be perceived as a strong motivational factor. According to the large international research project MORE2, the salary of a Polish researcher is 25–30% (depending on their experience) of a salary in the best-paying country (IDEA Consult 2013: 110). It makes Poland unattractive even for scholars from countries from the Global South. As one of the superiors noted:

In our case, i.e. contact with the Asian world, Indian, these conditions in Europe, whatever they are, are often financially and logistically weaker than in their family units. Nevertheless, these people would be willing to be here because of the very fact of a longer contact with Europe. (Man/Head/HS)

Our research indicates, however, that the most important asset from the point of view of incoming scholars is the lack of significant cultural differences between

Poland and the country of origin of most of them. Many mobile scholars have investigated the issue of cultural differences between the immigrants and host societies. The differences may vary from simple misunderstandings related to language (Kreber and Hounsel 2014)⁶, or organizational culture (Antonowicz 2012), to a different understanding of the cultural patterns, to different visions of academia and science, as there are various concepts related to what 'true' scientific knowledge is, which methods are reliable and valid, and what to do with doubtful and borderline cases, etc. (Otten 2009; Hwang 2008, 2012; Monteiro and Keeting 2009). Scholars fluent in English and/or the language of a host country are privileged in a number of ways. Others rarely become project leaders, have more difficult access to tacit knowledge, and their ideas are seldom distributed. The majority of foreigners in Poland came from Central or Eastern Europe and other more or less similar cultural contexts; migrants from culturally distant countries are rare. The same cannot be said of usually better-developed countries whose ethnic structure resembles a melting pot. In this case, different cultural patterns can make one feel uneasy, as documented in the following quote from a study by Kreber and Hounsel (2014: 29):

Or when they say 'Oh you must come over for dinner!' they don't actually mean that. It's just a greeting. It's just a way of saying "Hello." It doesn't mean that you're going to pull out your schedule and see when you can get together for dinner... it's well meant, but it doesn't mean what you might think it means.

In contrast, many of our interviewees perceived cultural proximity as the main asset of Poland. One of the young PhDs compared his life in Germany to his life in Poland, and was, surprisingly, in favor of Poland:

I have experience living in Germany and it was more difficult. (...) We talked in the kitchen with a German friend, whom I met in a dorm. I asked him: do you have any plans for tonight? He says: No, not really. I say: let's go for a beer somewhere, to a pub. And he replies: but how, right away? I say yes, why not? He: I do not know, maybe next week – can we get some beer next week? Because I have to plan it, write in my agenda. I say: I do not know if I will want to have beer next week ... I think the Slavs are more spontaneous compared with e.g. Germans. And this spontaneity – in my opinion Poles and Ukrainians are much closer to each other in this respect than Poles and Germans. (Men/Employee/HS)

Yet, the lack of significant differences does not automatically mean that there are no significant problems. Even in Poland we observed cultural differences resulting in cultural misunderstandings. A very illustrative is this excerpt from the

⁶ The authors note that Americans employed in Scotland felt that cultural differences made communication difficult due to minor regional differences and communication style (Kreber and Hounsel 2014: 30).

interview with a head of an (ST) institution who was currently employing both a Western European scholar and a scholar of Asian descent:

And what did this cooperation look like? As good as in the case of the [Westerner]?

I would say the cultural difference is a little bit bigger, and it's a bit harder to understand him, but I did not have any bigger problems.

Could you please explain "it's harder to understand"?

Him, I would say; his philosophy, yes. Because it is, it also has to be ... You need to understand someone in order to be able to communicate with him, right? And I understood the [Westerner] much better than him (...) He is [of Asian nationality]. So also, this is a completely different culture (Man/Head/ST)

Our interviewee, an internationally recognized Polish professor with experience in working abroad, had a very international vision of academia. He praised the Western European for his engagement and was satisfied that he and his foreign employee could easily understand each another in terms of cultural customs and expectations. The Asian was less committed, according to this professor, and was good at carrying out mandates.

The same interviewee described another problematic issue related to the incompatibility of social norms:

It is very difficult to recruit foreigners. I had such an issue with the Russian whom I wanted to hire here in the European project. I interviewed him in English on the phone. Well, perhaps because I was too lazy to travel to Russia, I did not talk to him in person. When he arrived, it turned out that the person who talked with me was not him, and he did not know any English at all. It was not a problem for me, by the way, because I know Russian. However, for other employees, who did not know Russian at all, there was an information barrier, no information flow. Subsequently, the European Union asked me to come to Brussels with him for the project meeting, so the officials could meet each of these PhD students, project participants, everyone from each of these teams from around world, to talk together. Although I paid for an intensive English course to get him to learn English, he never learned English at all, and I had to send him back, unfortunately... (Man/Head/ST)

As we noted, the 'understanding' issues are not always related to linguistics. The problem was either a different way of formulating one's thoughts and different style of day-to-day communication, or different expectations of certain standards. Thus, cultural diversity can cause some problems that become visible when particular hard skills are more important than benefits that stem from the mere cultural contact. But in the humanities we observed a very different trend. In the following excerpt, the department head describes the uniqueness of an Asian scholar whom he personally considered to be an asset:

These are the ways and methods of teaching that are typical of the tradition of that region, and I cannot say much about them, except short observations, which put more emphasis on memory structures, repetition of certain paradigms. And it certainly enriched our way of looking at language teaching, assimilation of linguistic reality, foreign cultural reality (...). This was certainly a very instructive visit. (Man/Head/HS)

Public problems: attitudes, administration, formal issues

From our interviewees we can learn that there are two major problems related to moving to Poland. The first one is an old-fashioned nationalistic orientation of some members of the professoriate. The second is the inability of the university administration to handle foreigners' issues (e.g. organizing the paperwork in English, as discussed below). 'Internal,' intra-university or intra-department, relations between the newly employed foreign scholars and their supervisors and native colleagues are very important for the incorporation processes, identity formation, and integration in the host society. Unfortunately, there are few studies that focus on interactions between skilled migrants (including scholars) and native-born employees in the workplace (see, e.g., van Riemsdijk, Basford and Burnham 2015: 3).

Interviewed scholars noted that the attitude of university authorities (deans, heads of research units) is not always favourable. Some noted that one problem is a lack of openness and friendliness towards foreigners among the professoriate. This tendency can be illustrated by the account of a head of the department at a technical university describing the troubles of his former PhD candidate. It all started when the dean expressed his opinion that in Poland a PhD dissertation needs to be defended in Polish.⁷ The problem was that the candidate was unable to pass this examinations in Polish. He was fluent in English, which was sufficient to work in Poland:

Eventually, with the intervention of the Rector, it was possible to arrange everything in English. But this is a matter of the faculty council. The Dean does not support foreigners and their, so to speak, contribution to the development of our faculty. (Man/Head/ST)

In another account, a similar attitude was expressed more directly. A professor in humanities describes how his idea to employ more foreigners has been rejected:

Well, since I thought it was not working well there, I pointed out the other countries from which I wanted to hire specialists. Unfortunately, the authorities did not allow me to. No interest in this. They believed it was a relic of the communist period, that we need to explore countries from the region and maintain contact by employing people from there. I completely disagree with this, but, well, that's the opinion I encountered. (Man/Head/HS)

⁷ That opinion was not in agreement with the Polish legislation.

Another obstacle was related to the limited communication skills of office workers employed by Polish higher education institutions, which led to several problems on the administrative level. Administrative staff at Polish universities never had a good reputation to begin with (see, e.g. Maj and Prochal 2012), but when it comes to contact with foreigners, the difficulties begin to multiply. In Poland, despite the debate on internationalization of academia that we mentioned before, the ability to communicate in English or other foreign languages is not a common skill, especially among older employees.

And is this person experiencing or causing any communication difficulties?

I would say at the level of the team, not, but there are difficulties on the level of the department's administrative office. They require some reports in Polish from him. He can't do that at all. The [Westerner] is learning Polish quickly (laughs) and he [the second employee] is not able to speak Polish at all. (Man/Head/ST)

The language barrier is less tiresome when there is a cultural proximity and the mother tongue resembles the language of the host society. Given the high number of scholars from Slavic countries in Poland, acquiring basic language communication skills usually goes smoothly. Some interviewees noted that Polish was not a problem for them, or their families, at all:

I will tell you about my first ... The first hour of my lecture in [relatively small town in Eastern Poland]. I had already translated it and I was reading, and during it I made comments in the hybrid of Polish-Slovak.... And after the lecture I asked if they had understood me and one student raised his hand and said: your Slovak language is so close to Polish that we understood everything. ... I was speaking in Polish and they thought it was Slovak, and that is all. (Woman/Employee/HS).

How do your daughters deal with the Polish language?

[with a smile] They do well, they do well. I mean, the younger daughter did not have any problems. For example, when she was 12 and went to school here, it was the last year of primary school. She handled it excellently [Polish]. She had special lessons with a university student, for a month, and after two months she had no problems. And at the end of school, we were astonished because she was second or third in Polish language in her class. So she has not experienced any major problems. I suspect that she would now have more problems with [mother tongue] than with Polish [laugh]. (Man/Employee/ST)

In this context, it is worth emphasizing that almost all scholars that we interviewed spoke fluent (though not necessarily perfect) Polish. Exceptions were rare, and only one out of twenty three persons asked us to conduct the interview in English (and even this person communicated in Polish smoothly in everyday life). Superiors praised their international co-workers' skills and noted that they

improve them in the course of working in Poland. Needless to say, this progress can be both a necessity as well as an effect of exceptional skills and motivation of mobile scholars.

Nevertheless, our interviewees were of the opinion that the administration was friendly towards foreigners. They either claimed that there is no difference in treatment between Poles and foreigners, or that they are treated even better than Poles.

That is to say that with the university administration ... I had no more serious problems than ... Poles working here [laugh]. So whether one is a foreigner or non-foreigner is not really an issue. I think, on the contrary, in these different issues that were related to the beginning of my work, etc., the university administration tried to help me as much as they could. (Man/Employee/HS)

University administration? I did not experience any serious issues. (Woman/Employee/HS)

I think that, [they treat me] rather positively, because they explain patiently what I should do, etc. They do repeat, because it needs to be repeated, but I think they have no idea what may be complicated for us.

(Woman/Employee/HS)

In the following excerpt a professor from a Western country differentiated between the (neutral) attitude of university administration and the very preferential treatment from public administration:

I do not see any difference between Poles and foreigners at all ... That is, you know, I am here for so many years that I am going to the administration and I am an employee, that's it. ... Who is interested in my passport? When it was important, I don't know, for example, when I applied for a residence permit and they gave me PESEL number, that kind of thing, I had to manage, the administration treated me better because I was a foreigner. I may say that, as a rule, I'm better treated in Poland if my passport plays a role and worse as a "functional Pole", so to speak, yes? I mean, Poles sometimes treat other Poles a little bit harshly, right? (Man/Employee/HS)

Many interviewees emphasized that the attitude towards themselves in case of university or public administration depends heavily on their nationality:

It depends on origin: I think that if one is from the European Union, he or she has no special problems. On the other hand, the attitude to others may be different – I do not know if the clerk will deal as nicely with a Vietnamese as he deals with the citizen of another the European Union country. (Woman/Employee/HS)

Maybe there are problems with refugees. One alien is very different from another alien. People look differently at a foreigner from Syria, and a foreigner from Ukraine. (Man/Employee/ST)

Private problems: Lack of in-depth personal bonds with superiors

In many cases, foreign scholars who came to Poland have found a life partner here. They are well integrated into the receiving society, and some superiors treated them as Poles.

Well, I cannot imagine him ever leaving the country. He is just [laughs] a naturalized Pole. He has citizenship of [another European country – authors], but he is employed here, he pays social insurance, taxes, and he is a head of an important scientific institution. (Man/Head/HS)

This translated into a fair private relationship with their co-workers. They for instance spend time together with Poles and organize joint trips to the mountains. Asked about their friends, international scholars in Krakow often indicated colleagues, yet similarly to other countries, the relationships between foreign scholars and their superiors in Poland turned out to be purely professional in the vast majority of cases. There were a few cases when the superior had not even met their families, and even when the superiors *had* met their co-workers' partners, these relationships were not very deep.

Are you familiar with the personal situation of that person?

I've already said all that I know. I do not know more.

Does it mean you do not have any contact outside the university?

No, no. We meet from time to time, go for a beer, but it is so... We barely discuss our family situation. (Man/Head/ST)

Do you have social contacts with your colleagues?

Unfortunately, not frequently. And it's because, it may sound that I'm bragging now, but I'm so busy, I have almost no time for social life. I barely have time for family life. So, unfortunately, I do not have a lively social life. (Man/Head/HS)

The risk of feeling socially isolated or 'being alone' described by Kreber and Hounsel (2014: 28) also exists here, but only in the case of the superiors, not the peers. This can be related to the specificity of an academic profession: a situation where work contracts are often short-term (Stephan 2015), there are no traditional office hours, and a considerable portion of the work is done from home is not conducive to an active social life. Nevertheless, the lack of social bonds is somehow surprising, considering that in Poland, unlike in many Western countries (see, e.g., Mucha 2016; Kreber and Hounsel 2014), visiting each other at home is a rather common practice; around 90 percent of Poles with higher education had hosted someone at least once a year (Domanski et al. 2015: 146). However, there is a substantive reason for the lack of those ties, namely the hierarchical organization

of the Polish universities, which was also described by Izabela Wagner (2011). In Poland, in contrast to many Anglo-Saxon universities, the contact between an experienced professor and emerging young scholar is restricted to formal situations, and everyone knows their place. Even if a younger colleague wishes to consult an older one, they arrange a formal meeting rather than having a working lunch or a common walk on campus (or nearby park, as many Polish universities do not have a campus in American sense of this word).

Discussion

Polish academia needs internationalization and tries to attract foreign scholars. Heads of departments emphasized that foreigners improve the prestige of the institution both nationally and internationally, provide rare skills and scientific perspectives, as well as secure valuable contacts and collaboration opportunities. For many heads of departments, the added value is also diversity, but this was the opinion of humanities scholars, not 'hard' scientists, who tend to be more 'objectively' oriented. One voice also expressed that hiring international staff is a natural response to the inflow of international students that increased significantly after Polish accession to the EU. Social capital (understood as a possibility of international cooperation) as well as skills and expertise are two other important factors for the heads of departments. These benefits are difficult to overestimate, but setting up a new policy for incoming scholars seems necessary to attract more international academics in the future.

The full-time employment of foreign staff can be understood as the third pillar of internationalization. Along with 'internationalization at home' measured by internationally visible publications (without spatial mobility) and international research cooperation as a form of 'internationalization abroad' in the form of research visits and participation in joint research projects (Knight 2012: 34–37; Kwiek 2014: 681), incoming international scholars can help build the position of Polish academia in the global world of science. Poland desires international mobility, but average working conditions and a limited number of funding sources available for foreigners make Poland rather a peripheral destination. Polish institutions feel the need to cooperate internationally and employ foreign postdocs, researchers, and professors. If the internationalization is one of the main aims on the ministerial roadmap, it is worth considering what can be done to make Poland more attractive. At the moment, international scholars are not very common in Poland. As we have argued, Poland has neither a good academic reputation, nor attractive salaries. For some scholars, the most important advantage of Poland is its EU member status. From the perspective of scholars raised in the former USSR countries, Poland as a destination is simultaneously 'close' (in a cultural sense) and 'distant' (regarding

geopolitics). Moreover, for many scholars from Central and Eastern Europe, who constitute the majority of incoming scholars, cultural differences are small and are barely indicated as obstacles. Being ‘in the middle’ opens up opportunities for building a regional academic hub, but thus far, those opportunities have not been taken advantage of as much as they could be.

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