In Search of Links and Communication: Engaging with New Migrant Communities

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Extent and Method

- Polish migration constitutes largest ever in-migration to UK (Salt and Millar, 2006) - concern at national and local level on actual figures;
- More A8s (Poles) registered on WRS in north than London & SE;
- Ubiquitous – Poles in particular low paid sectors but widely dispersed in many sectors and workplaces;
- Research based on three years continuing work in the North of England;
  - Interviews with key respondents working with Polish migrants;
  - Action research, attendance at community events;
- Agency/employer control - fear; often provide accommodation leaving Poles sometimes isolated in villages and other areas.
Why organise in community?

• Lack of engagement in past (Fitzgerald & Stirling, 2004 Perrett & Martinez Lucio, 2006)

• Two main drivers now:
  - Rate-for-job (transport, food processing & construction)
    When unions tried to engage ‘..fear becomes a major factor, they are scared to be seen talking to us in workplaces. Many Poles will often want to meet away from the workplace’ (full-time officer – Ucatt);
  - Approaches from Poles, intermediaries (some new actor collaboration)
    - Who? (1) member of work group brave enough (2) newly arrived Polish community activists (those who are helping their fellow Poles) examples Polish businessman, Polish web administrator.

• In past approaches fallen on deaf ears or lost in union bureaucracy.
How – locations & events

Support for engagement by (a) TUC regional projects – Solidarnosc organiser (b) new Polish organisers/reps:

1. Through locations and events (informal & formal) - ;
   
   - Poles homes, local community centres, Polish pubs/cafes, town centres!
   
   - One-off trade union or multi-agency events – often turn into informational events;
   
   - Collaboration with new actors community NGOs, solicitors etc.
How – locations & events (cont.)

Tensions and sustainability?

• Events union organised lack of interest, community approaches a success but can be hit & miss (resources);

• NGO collaboration problematic?
  ➢ Polish expectation that unions can deliver services outside of their remit or unions are involved in doing this and not cost-effective;

  …people feel all that will happen now is people listen but noting is done, they are not sure about going now. (Polish community activist)

• Need to develop more sustainable approaches –
  ➢ Selby together (church, emergency services, Unite etc.) wider scope
  ➢ Solicitors & TUs – drop-in on regular basis.
2. Established Polish networks (WWII & beyond)

- The Federation of Poles in Great Britain (ZPWB):
  - Umbrella Polish federation (long established);
  - Network of existing reps in north (4 in Yorkshire & the Humber);
  - Electronic & hardback booklet in Polish (100,000 distributed) with pro-union articles & adverts;
  - Direct assistance in organising events & contacts with unions;
  - President invited & spoke at Y&H TUC annual conference;

- The Catholic church – at least 68 churches in UK;
  - Solidarnosc used churches for clandestine meetings in the 80s;
    - … I think young Poles are searching for community, they are looking for something important (Solidarnosc international officer)
  - Church used for one off contact or more regular engagement
    - It is the way in every time, I would not normally align myself with it but they have been very helpful (Unite official)
Tensions and sustainability?

• Early days – ZPWB influence may dwindle as young community activists establish community organisations;

• Ageism in both networks – many ZPWB & church committee members retired, exhausted!

• Unions questioning membership gain – need for champion?

• Positive ZPWB national; regional (Y&H conference etc.); & local engagement – early union commitment (TUC phone);

• ZPWB project worker established in Yorkshire and the Humber – one aim of work engage with movement;

• Church local welcome (‘wished we had come before’ – Unite ‘union day’); regional (Hull initiative); national (Scotland – ‘we are keen to work with union’)

How – established networks (cont.)
How – Polish UK media

3. Polish UK media (newsprint & internet)
   • Why?:
     ➢ Time & resources;
     ➢ Ad hoc & one-off events – how many Poles reached?;
     ➢ Regular drop-in sessions need consistent funding stream or well structured new actor collaboration;
     ➢ Raise union profile (Martinez & Perrett, 2007);
     ➢ ‘...good way to advertise union, yes have been positive comments in Polish papers for unions’. (Polish community activist)

   • Newspapers & magazines:
     ➢ National distribution through WHSmith News etc.;
     ➢ Nationally Usdaw advertised in Polish daily newspaper, develop this with newsworthy stories of success of unions for Poles;
     ➢ Regionally Unite co-ordinating separate sections & Thompsons to pay for Polish newspaper distributed through Polish centre;
     ➢ Local engagement through adverts.
How – Polish UK media

• Polish Internet -
  - Poland significant increase in the use of ‘new technology’;
  - Polish workers using internet to communicate with home/book tickets – workplace learning centres, community locations;
  - UK businesses using sites (EasyJet etc.);
  - 35/40 Polish language/administered web pages in UK (vast majority based on north of England)
    - Often contain important information on these (e.g. forums for discussions of work and other issues).

  Trade union engagement so far (in Polish):
  • International/national - Solidarnosc/TUC/CAB webpage;
  • Regional – tentative moves by Y&H TUC with Polish websites (5)
  • Local – North East TUC migrant worker project Ucatt-local site
Conclusion

• Pattern of engagement across north & beyond? But
  ➢ Limited time span unless formalised into core.

• How can this be done:
  1. Recognition that strands like community activist & new actor engagements are adequately consolidated into union strategies;
  2. Unions be fully aware of competitive pressures, develop trust in their ranks! Agendas like vulnerable workers important? Leadership driven.
  3. Membership gain dependent on servicing and unions proving their worth:
     • Polish branch;
     • Well policed regulations (gangmasters) – advertised to communities;
     • Unions more flexible – 3-month rule.

  No shortcuts to organising in the community