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

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Presentation at Seminar 3 of the

ESRC research seminar series 'Ethnicity, networks and  
voice mechanisms in established and hard to reach BME  
communities: capacity building and beyond'

Manchester 17<sup>th</sup> April 2008

# 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;
- Mainly project based around four TUC projects on migrant & Polish workers (Fitzgerald 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008):
  - 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 nothing 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.

# How – established networks

## 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)*

## How – established networks (cont.)

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 – 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