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Erfahrungen polnischer Studierender in Deutschland*

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Entering a foreign labour market via the “academic gate”¹. The experiences of Poles who came as international students to Germany

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Introduction

- 1 In the second half of the year 2010, Germany – the background country of this research – experienced a public debate on migration and integration which was also linked to the topic of talent shortage in the skilled labour sector. Germany as a highly-industrialised country faces demographic challenges in the years to come since the working-age population will decrease by 3.4 % between 2010 and 2020 (OECD, 2010a, p. 50). A possible solution to this problem is seen by some in changes of migration policy towards the highly-skilled. Proponents of this position were especially found among representatives of professional associations, the liberal democrats and employers. It was claimed that already today 400,000 engineers and professionals are missing on the German labour market (Reich *et al.*, 2010). The mostly debated aspect was how to convince talents to come. As part of this question the introduction of a points-based immigration system was discussed in order to attract a “bunch of bright minds” (“eine Menge heller Köpfe”) (Heinsohn, 2010).
- 2 However, when asking how to attract these bright minds the option of convincing foreign talents trained at local higher education institutions to stay was seldom mentioned as a policy option (except Sorge, 2010). Most voices neglect those who are already in the country. While elsewhere governments such as the Australian one

actively make use of the “Academic Gate” (Abella, 2006, p. 22), i.e. recruiting skilled migrants via the higher education sector, this option is rarely discussed in this country. Studying abroad and subsequent mobility patterns remain unmentioned not only in the public but also in migration studies. This is even more astonishing since the enhancement of international student mobility was one of the key aims of the Bologna process, the most important reform which changed the European educational landscape in the last decade tremendously. The benchmark was set to 20 % of all graduating students with a study or training abroad experience by 2020 (OECD, 2010b, p. 310). Not only Europeanisation but also globalisation of higher education and with it the recruitment of international students have become major issues. However, there is still little knowledge on the spatiality of international student flows (Findlay, 2010, p. 2). Furthermore, we know only little of the mobility patterns of foreign trained graduates and the retention and return rates upon studies abroad. Whereas traditional immigration countries (Australia, Canada) monitor retention rates and survey the labour market positioning of highly skilled immigrants and former international students, Europeans lag behind.

- 3 It is to these research lacunae that the article wants to contribute. It sheds light on the group of Polish students trained at German universities, their mobility patterns after graduation and their later career profiles. It aims to answer the following questions :
 - Why do Polish students decide to take up studies in Germany ?
 - What are the mobility patterns of Poles trained between Rhine and Oder ? How many of them remain upon graduation in their study destination country and how many of them return to their country of origin ?
 - What is the labour market positioning of these highly-skilled Poles in Germany after 2004 ?
- 4 The article consists of five parts. In the second section I will give a glance on educational and migration statistics in order to arrange the German-Polish example in the European and international setting. Since this text is inspired by qualitative and quantitative data as well, the third section explains the research methodology of combining qualitative (graduate interviews) and quantitative (online survey) data. The fourth section deals with the research results. It first elaborates on the mobility patterns by discussing the sample of those who took part in the online survey and presenting retention and return rates. It also presents a typology of those who remained after studying in Germany and discusses their integration into the labour market. Section five summarizes and concludes.

State of the Art in Research on International Student Mobility in Europe and German-Polish Educational Migration

- 5 Germany is the third most important target country of all international students worldwide and therefore a potentially important player in the competition for international students as highly-skilled migrants. In 2008, the OECD counted more than 3.3 Mio. students who studied in another country than that of their citizenship. The ultimate magnet country were the United States, which attracted 18.7 % of all foreign students, followed by the United Kingdom (10 %), Germany (7.3 %), and France (7.3 %) (OECD, 2010b, p. 309, p. 314). In Germany, in winter semester 2009/10 181,249

international students (educational foreigners) were enrolled, the largest groups being from China (12.6 %), the Russian Federation (5.4 %), and Poland (4.7 %) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010, p. 57). But it is not only that Polish students form the third largest group of international students in Germany which makes them a worthwhile case to study. If we take a look at the sending country it is also visible that Germany is a very attractive target country for Poles who decide to study abroad : according to UNESCO statistical data 31,599 Poles studied abroad in 2008, the largest group in Germany (10,797) (UNESCO, 2010, p. 176). As analysed elsewhere (Wolfeil, 2009), intra-European student mobility throughout the 1990s and in the first years of the new millennium can be described as an East-West movement – mobile students from the EEC mainly chose Western European study destinations. Germany was not only the most important target country for Polish students but also for students from other EU new member states (compare Table 1).

Table 1. Foreign students from EU8+2 countries in selected target countries (EU15) in 2007.

source country		BG	CZ	EE	HU	LT	LV	PL	RO	SK	SL	total
target country	DE	12170	2132	724	2434	1667	886	14493	4156	1569	524	40755
	UK	710	1150	535	1040	1485	880	6770	740	890	285	14485
	FR*	2615	**772					3188	4675			11250
	AT	1309	528	40	1199	77	48	1467	707	1301	567	7243
	SE	317	349	393	709	112	142	2781	907	20	46	5776
	NL	500	350	100	400	150	100	1250	300	150		3300
	FI***	32	325	135	265	208	70	500	47	97	52	1731
	IE	117	152	97	41	80	44	539	66	39	11	1186

* DATA CONTAINS ONLY FOREIGN STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITIES

** YEAR 2006

*** DATA ON INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE STUDENTS

SOURCE : WOLFEIL, 2009, TABLE 3, P. 12.

- 6 With regard to the attraction of foreign talents to domestic labour markets it seems worthwhile to discuss the retention and return patterns of international students in general, and Polish students in Germany in particular. Since the statistical coverage of data on migration patterns is always better in destination than in sending countries our insights into retention patterns are more valid than those into return. In the United States there is data available for the 1970s. 12.5 % of the international students who came to study at US universities between 1970 and 1975 were still in the country in 1986 (Bratsberg, 1995, p. 374 *et seq.*). In recent times data indicate that up to one third of international graduate students stay in the United States (Lowell *et al.*, 2007, p. 45). Data from Australia indicate that 18.7 % of international graduates in 2002/03 were retained (Tremblay, 2005, table 4). However, for graduates from certain countries

retention is much higher. Hawthorne reports that 66 % of all Indian students became permanent residents of Australia and 38 % of all Chinese students (Hawthorne, 2010, p. 40). Data from Europe report growing retention rates which may be illustrated by the British example : in the UK all graduates are surveyed six months after graduation. While in 2000/01 19.3 % of all international graduates with EU-domicile took up work in the UK, four years later a value of 26.6 % was reported (Suter & Jandl, 2006, p. 65). In 2010, the OECD published for the first time data on stay rates². According to this data retention is the highest in Germany (29.5 %) and the lowest in the Netherlands (15 %), with an average of 21 % in all countries (OECD, 2010a, pp. 44-45). As a conclusion one can say that up to one third of all international students is on average retained but there are higher retention rates for certain sending countries of international students. Regarding the retention of Poles in Germany there is no precise data available. In 2007 1,405 Polish international graduates were counted (database Wissenschaft Weltoffen – WW) and 123 work permits issued to Poles under the Foreign Graduate Labour Market Entrance Regulation³. This very low retention rate is consistent with surveys among Polish graduates. According to a survey of Polish graduates from the European University Viadrina only 20 % entered the German labour market (Meier, 2002, cit. in Matejskova *et al.*, 2004, p. 74). Thus, we expect that the large majority of Poles trained at German universities returns upon graduation to Poland.

- 7 After taking a closer look at the flows of international students within Europe and Polish students to Germany in general, we will now follow a short overview on research dealing with the professional value of the study abroad. Higher education research has been surveying internationally mobile students in Europe since the 1980s and provides valuable insights into the usability of skills trained during studies abroad in later professional activities (Bracht *et al.*, 2006 ; Teichler & Janson, 2007 ; Teichler, 2007). The overall finding of this field of research is that the professional value has been decreasing over the cohorts analysed (1988/89, 1994/95, 2000/01). While 71 % of the respondents in the first survey still expressed their opinion that studying abroad helped securing their first position, only 54 % of the respondents in the second survey agreed with this in 2000/01. The same refers to a statement that Erasmus studies had had a positive impact on the job content. While 49 % of the first cohort mentioned this, only 39 % of the last cohort supported this statement (Teichler, 2007, p. 174 *et seqq.*).
- 8 While these general studies on the study abroad experience shed light on the impact studies abroad have in general on later career patterns, it seems even more adequate to compare these findings with studies on the specific labour market positioning of highly-skilled migrants or retained international students on the labour markets of their receiving countries. A glance at macro data in traditional immigration countries overseas (Canada, USA, Australia) that monitor the labour market performance of their newcomers reveals that participation in the labour market is lower for highly skilled immigrants than for highly skilled locals. They have to report lower incomes than the local population (Batalova *et al.*, 2008, p. 9 ; Batalova & Lowell, 2006, p. 99 ; Li, 2008, p. 223, p. 231 *et seqq.*). However, when looking at highly skilled migrants that had received their university education in the destination country, these findings can be relativized : highly skilled migrants with a local degree report lower unemployment rates than migrants who graduated from a foreign university (Hawthorne, 2009, p. 371 ; Batalova *et al.*, 2008, p. 13, p. 18).

- 9 Qualitative findings add to this discussion by highlighting the strategies highly skilled migrants and former international students choose when looking for a job in the study abroad destination. Cultural capital according to Bourdieu⁴ is a key concept that is also applied in this research but as well forms the basis for a larger research project on the labour market integration of highly skilled immigrants in Germany, Canada, Great Britain, and Turkey (Nohl *et al.*, 2006 ; Nohl *et al.*, 2010a,b,c.). Three dimensions (“opportunities for applying skills and knowledge”, “orientations towards migration” and “levels in the status passage”) govern labour market integration (Nohl *et al.*, 2010c, pp. 69-73). It should be noted that as a subfield of this research project ethnic niches have relevance with regard to labour market positioning (Schmidtke, 2010, pp. 251-257).
- 10 Csödö adds to these findings by a study on Hungarian and Romanian young professionals in London showing that the knowledge of English is the key to a good position and that graduates without perfect English skills have to accept jobs in low income sectors without making use of their degrees. Another last option for them is to find a “niche” with regard to their mother tongue (Csödö, 2008, p. 815). Qualitative studies have also emphasized the influence of circumstances on the specific national labour market in a certain period of time. Liversage (2009) researched the labour market positioning of highly-skilled migrants in Denmark. According to her findings labour market positioning depends upon the period in the migrant’s life time as well as historical circumstances and the nature of skills to be transferred. The pattern of “re-entry” refers to migrants with easily transferable knowledge (e.g. IT) whose good position on the Danish labour market was also influenced by the IT-boom. The pattern of “ascent” describes someone who enters work in the low skills sector and moves over a certain period of time to high-level work. This pattern was observed among victims of the Balkan wars. The remaining patterns (“re-education”, “re-migration”, “marginalisation”) refer to less successful work biographies on the foreign labour market.
- 11 In order to assess the labour market positioning of young Poles in Germany having left their home country for studies abroad from this state of the research one can make up the following assumptions : the labour market positioning depends upon the skills and knowledge involved (study subject), the migration orientation and the level in the migration process. The specific circumstances of the historical period – i.e. transitionary arrangements with regards to Poles on the German labour market after EU-enlargement in 2004 – will also create specific patterns of labour market positioning. Finally, the ethnic sector is supposed to have some relevance for highly-skilled Poles as well.

Research Methodology

- 12 The analysis of the study abroad experience in this article was a retrospective one, combining quantitative and qualitative data and trying to apply methods that create samples resembling the statistical picture of Polish German educational migration according to regional distribution of Poles at main target universities as well as subjects studied in Germany and the gender question.
- 13 The online survey targeted former international students at the most important target universities of Polish educational foreigners in Germany in order to get a sample

profile close to reality. When contacting International Offices and alumni associations of these universities, the following four of the top ten target universities⁵ supported the research and sent the link either to e-mail accounts or postal addresses of their members or former students: Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Viadrin@-lumni, Free University Berlin, Alumni Network TU Dresden⁶. Between November 2008 and March 2009 the survey went live. The general response rate of 22.94 % (n=440) is satisfactory.

- 14 With regard to the qualitative interviews, quota sampling was applied in order to select possible interviewees for biographical interviews with Polish students who stayed on in Germany. The author supposed that the disciplinary background (i.e. study subject) and gender would influence upon career patterns. Therefore, it was first observed which study subjects are widely chosen by Poles at German universities and how the distribution according to sex is. According to the database Wissenschaft Weltoffen (WW) the most popular subjects among Polish students between 2001 and 2006 were economics and business administration (24.6 %), German language and literature studies (19.9 %), and law (9.4 %), followed by information technology (5.4 %). As a consequence, in the sample of 27 interviews ten interviewees had their background in business administration, six in German language studies and two were lawyers, while the remaining represented various subjects. The share of women among Polish students amounted in the same period of time to 75 % ; in the interview sample 74.1 % of the interviewees were female. The interviews lasted on average about an hour. They were semi-structured with guiding questions and taped. Later on the text material was integrated into the coding software MaxQDA.
- 15 The core of the analysis was a typology with regard to the career patterns and the labour market positioning of the remainees. When deciding how to set up the typology two different modes were compared: the first approach stands in the tradition of the documentary method (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2007, p. 280). It was not chosen since it is a complex method that can be adapted with a handful of interviews and seems more appropriate for community case studies. In opposite, the second approach – a stepwise model as introduced by Kelle and Kluge (1999) – was chosen, that comprises four steps. The two dimensions identified were “the impact of the Polish cultural capital” and “the impact of the disciplinary background” (compare: Kelle & Kluge, 1999, pp. 83-97).

Qualitative and quantitative findings regarding Poles trained in Germany

Mobility patterns upon studying abroad in Germany and evaluation of the study abroad experience

- 16 This section will first reflect upon the results from the online survey with regard to general characteristics of the sample, reasons for studying in Germany, stay-on and return rates, and the self-evaluation of the study abroad experience with regard to labour market outcomes.
- 17 It is first worth to be noted that the characteristics of participants in the survey resemble to a large extent those in the general population of Polish educational foreigners in Germany with regard to study subject and sex. 25.5 % of the survey

respondents studied German language and literature studies, 23 % business administration and economics, and 8 % law. The share of women in the survey respondents was 75.9 %, and the respondents' average age 29.1 years. 70 % held a master's degree or equivalent. 14.5 % had not yet a degree or no degree at all (drop-outs), and 8 % held a PhD-degree or higher. 3.2 % passed state examination for lawyers and teachers and 3.6 % earned a bachelor degree. The huge majority of survey respondents came to Germany as exchange students (73.5 %). 18.4 % took up studies at German universities with the intention to earn a degree. The remaining group of the respondents came to Germany as exchange students but decided later on to earn a degree from a German university (overstayers). According to these sample characteristics findings refer to a very young generation of educational migrants with their educational background in subjects that imply that they will be working as generalists rather than specialists in a certain field.

- 18 Why did the respondents choose to take up studies in Germany? Broadening one's horizon was the predominant motivation. 94.9 % declared this motivation either appropriate or very appropriate. Ranking second is the improvement of German language skills (84.8 %). Furthermore, improving one's career chances upon return in Poland was an important reason for studying in Germany (73.2 %), which also corresponds with a high return rate. But even 53.3 % chose to study abroad in order to facilitate career opportunities abroad, which shows that retention and entering a foreign labour market is at least an attractive option that is considered in advance.
- 19 68.8 % of the respondents indicated that their current country of residence was Poland (returnees). 23.4 % of the survey participants currently lived in Germany and 7.5 % had moved to third countries, but only 2 % indicated that they were currently living in the UK or Ireland. Thus within the sample the mobility to the countries that, unlike Germany, opened their labour markets to Polish citizens in 2004 is considerably low while more than two thirds of those having studied in Germany had returned to Poland. When differentiating between the different student statuses in Germany it seems obvious that the length of the studies impacts upon the return rate. 55 % of those who were classified as degree-seeking students and who were currently employed fulltime were retained in Germany. Only 30 % of this group had returned to Poland. In the group of overstayers who were employed on a fulltime basis 44.4 % remained in Germany and 44.4 % returned to Poland. However, this group is very small (n=18). The overall majority of the former exchange students (85.5 %) is not retained but returns to Poland. The survey shows that the overall majority returns to Poland.
- 20 In what follows we will shed light on the professional value of studying abroad. The self-evaluation of the survey respondents with regard to labour market positioning is more positive than in comparable studies. When asked how worthwhile the period of study abroad was with regard to the following aspects the following comparison becomes obvious (compare figure 1).

Figure 1. Evaluation of the study abroad period – comparison own survey and similar studies, 1= extremely worthwhile, 5= not at all worthwhile.

SOURCE : OWN ILLUSTRATION BASED ON MAIWORM/TEICHLER 1996 (TABLE 7.9) AND KING/RUIZ-GELICES 2003 (TABLE 2).

- 21 As the survey respondents indicated that they went abroad for broadening their horizons and improving German language skills, they now evaluate the foreign language proficiency and personal development highest. It should also be noted that participants in this survey evaluate the relevance to general career aspects much better than respondents in other studies. However, when asked to evaluate the knowledge and understanding of the study abroad country, in this survey the evaluation is not as positive as in the survey published in 1996. Another comparison should be included when referring to the professional value, as mentioned in section two with regard to Erasmus surveys: while 54 % of the former Erasmus students who were abroad in 2000/01 thought that studying abroad had a positive influence on their first employment, 67.1 % of the retainees think that it was an advantage. 39 % of the former Erasmus students think that studying abroad positively influences upon the job content but 59.5 % of the Polish survey respondents. The most impressive difference is observable when it comes to the influence on earnings: only 16 % of the former Erasmus students think that studying abroad positively influenced their income but 57.5 % of those who remained after studying in Germany (Teichler, 2007, p. 174).
- 22 When asked about their international professional contacts this positive picture is confirmed and it is visible that some of the professionals in Germany take up jobs in the sphere of German-Polish business relations. 42.1 % of the Poles working in Germany never speak Polish at work but 18.4 % use their mother tongue on a daily basis. However, English is used on a daily basis by 26 % of the retainees.

Labour market positioning of those retained in Germany – a typology

- 23 In order to deepen these insights on the value of studying abroad which was delivered by reporting on the results of the online survey, a closer look at results from biographical interviews will be fruitful. The four types are separated according to the degree of mobility and the importance of Polish cultural capital for the career development (compare figure 2).

Figure 2. Typology with regard to labour market positioning in Germany.

	high impact Polish cultural capital	low impact Polish cultural capital
mobile	<p>Type 1 Brain Circulators</p>	<p>Type 2 International Career</p>
immobile	<p>Type 3 Polonia Members</p>	<p>Type 4 “Transformation Refugees”</p>

SOURCE : OWN INTERVIEW DATA (N= 27).

- 24 If a graduate’s biography shows a high degree of spatial mobility in the course of time and he or she uses the Polish background for career advancement, he or she belongs to type 1 (Brain Circulator). If someone shows a low degree of spatial mobility (i.e. remains in Germany) but the Polish cultural capital is of importance in the professional life, we have to deal with type 2 (Polonia Members). Type 3 is someone for whom the Polish cultural background has no influence on the professional level but who is or has been very mobile (International Career). Type 4 resembles type 2 in its low degree of spatial mobility but as Type 3 the Polish background is not important for career advancement (Transformation Refugees). The profile of these four types will be described in detail in the following four type portraits.

Type 1 : Brain Circulators

- 25 Respondents who belong to this first group of life trajectories usually have an occupation that is connected with German-Polish relations in business or in the political sphere. Due to business or private reasons they are often in Poland and their

life pattern shows a high degree of spatial mobility. Representatives of this group regard their Polish cultural capital as a special asset on which they mainly rely when starting a career. Not only do they have business networks in both countries but their private networks are embedded in Poland and Germany to the same extent. When speaking about their feelings of belonging there is no notion of conflict. They are managers of a well-balanced life in both contexts. In their future plans they intend to remain in their occupations, which are centred on Polish-German exchange.

- 26 Kasia⁷ is a very good representative of this group. After her graduation from high school in 1996 she studied German literature and languages in Poland. In her fourth year during university studies she was awarded a scholarship for one year at a German partner university. Since she met her husband to be during the study abroad period, she went back to Germany directly after graduation. Soon after her re-arrival in Germany, Kasia started practical training in business administration. An integral part of this training was an internship which she did at a consulting company specialised on consultancy of German SMEs that wanted to start business in Poland. After the internship she was hired on a regular basis. Within her responsibility was the whole range of activities starting with search of location, formalities with Polish administration and selection of personnel. Another field of activity was consultancy of German firms that are already running business in Poland but face intercultural problems with their personnel.
- 27 Another representative of this group, Marcin, is a consultant at the German subsidiary of a Polish software company. Trained as an economist with a degree from the University in Gdańsk, he also spent a term as an Erasmus student in Germany in 2001 which he overstayed in order to earn a German master's degree in International Business. He started his first job at the municipality of a huge Polish town where he was responsible for German investors. After a second job in a Polish enterprise for another year (again responsible for German customers) he received an offer from Berlin and returned to Germany in order to take up his current position as a consultant in the German subsidiary of a Polish software producer. His trajectory may be regarded as brain circulation in the pure sense. During his studies and professional life he moved forth and back between Poland (Gdańsk) and Germany (Berlin). In future he plans to go on with this lifestyle and puts lots of hopes in the further development of German-Polish business relations as he mentioned during the interview :

"Of course, financially it might be slightly better than in Poland. But this will change. [...] But if you are working in Germany you gain experience how to be somehow [...] internationally mobile. [...] And [N.W. : I decided to go to] Germany due to the fact that I speak and understand some German. That's why I have the opportunity to be mobile in German-speaking [...] countries. And I think [...] that it might help a lot with regard to professional life since borders are removed and there is a development towards mutual cooperation between countries that share borders with each other. Just think of the soccer EU cup in 2012. German architects are going to build our arenas and organize them somehow. Then, why not ?" (A 11, pp. 254-274)

Type 2 : Members of the Polonia in Germany

- 28 The common denominator of this type is its affiliation with the Polonia⁸ in Germany or the exclusive embeddedness in Polish social networks. Representatives of type 2 often run an ethnic business for Poles in Germany. It is not unusual that they spend years at a

German university without having many contacts with Germans. Such trajectories are possible if one studies either in a huge city with a Polonia of considerable size (one case in this sample) or at one of the two universities located at the German-Polish border (European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder, International University Institute Zittau-Görlitz) where there are large groups of Polish students. After their studies these graduates remain in Germany but take up an occupation in which their Polish mother tongue is of use.

- 29 Jakub is one these graduates. He comes from a small town in Lower Silesia. In 1996 he started to study management and tourism in Poland. After graduation he decided to take another course in business administration at the German partner university of his home university. After graduation a Polish colleague in his Polish soccer team suggested Jakub to start his own business as a financial consultant for Poles and to share an office with him. Due to preliminary arrangements on the German labour market, Poles were not allowed to be employed without a work permit until May 2011, but they were allowed to run their own business. Consequently, Jakub's customers are Poles with low language and computing skills who work as self-employed builders or cleaning ladies and who need someone who helps them to organize the financial and administrative aspects of this activity. He describes it as follows :

“Most of the Poles here are builders and/ or they are working (laughing : in the cleaning business). It is a kind of niche. They are all self-employed, they are not allowed to become employed for the time being. And that's why they all need insurances, they need [...] business liability insurance, health insurance, pension insurance, accident insurance. All sorts of things. It is obviously a niche, you know. [...] They prefer to consult with compatriots rather than with Germans or others because they don't have such a good command of the language. That's at least what I think. Because of that our customers are mostly our compatriots.” (A 5, pp. 466-472)

- 30 Their business is very successful. Currently, they think about stronger affiliations with Polish partners in the area of house financing since many of their customers want to invest their money into building houses in Poland.

Type 3 : International Career – Germany as a jump board to an international career

- 31 Representatives of this type share the characteristic that they have a very clear consciousness of upward social mobility. Often, Germany represents a kind of “Promised Land” for them. As many Poles have an “American Dream”, they have their German dream. For them, Germany is a country that offers many possibilities and may be regarded as a jump board to an international career. Sometimes, they even come to Germany to start studies with this intention. Their time during studies resembles that of their German study colleagues. In most cases they smoothly adapt to their German surrounding. As their German counterparts they do internships in huge MNCs, often abroad. In many cases a stay as an Erasmus student in some third country is an integral part of their German university studies. After graduation they follow an international career path and do a job for which their Polish cultural capital does not play a role but their international experience does. In their future plans return to Poland is seldomly mentioned but an international career outside of Germany seems to be an option.
- 32 In order to explain the characteristics of type 3 let us get familiar with the life story of Michał. He came to Germany in 1997 from the centre of Poland. During his time at secondary school he already knew that he wanted to study abroad. For him there were

two options : either the United States or Germany. He started his studies in business administration at the University of Leipzig. In the second half of his studies he applied for a six month internship with a German MNC in the US and wrote later on his diploma thesis in cooperation with this enterprise. After graduation he received a job offer of this MNC in Germany and decided to remain in Germany. He describes the process of evaluation for and against a return to Poland as follows :

“In Poland [...] it’s my country, but in order to do an internship for instance, [...] I’m afraid it is not as possible as here or in the US or elsewhere. If you want to achieve something in Germany or in the US [...] then you can achieve something. In Poland it is unusual that you write your diploma thesis in cooperation with a company. [...] I could do so, but only by means of contacts. This is not what I want. I want to stay independent. I want to be simply free of these contacts. [...] Here, this country offers such opportunities. [...] And if we get the opportunity to move to the US in future, then we’ll do so. But we’ll not yet return to Poland.” (A 15, pp. 258-264)

- 33 Today he is employed as a controller at this MNC in a very international environment. He compares key performance indicators of locations in China, Singapore, Malaysia, the US and Germany. The knowledge he uses is embrained knowledge he learned since he chose controlling as a major subject. His Polish background is not important for his job and there are no knowledge transfers between Poland and Germany involved in his activities.

Type 4 : “Transformation Refugees”

- 34 Respondents of this group were also influenced by the socio-economic circumstances in Poland due to transformation processes when deciding for studying abroad. Often after graduation from Polish universities they had problems to find a job since they mainly come from the peripheral regions with low job opportunities and high unemployment rates. Doing a second degree in Germany was a loophole out of their situation in Poland. Their decision to go abroad is fuelled by a mobility culture in their environment. The regions they come from are characterised by out-migration to foreign countries. Many of their peers left the country to earn money in Ireland, the United Kingdom or some other countries. What they are looking for in Germany is a secure position. The job content is of less importance and they often agree to take up jobs that are below their qualifications. Knowledge transfers are absent in their activities and there are no possibilities to use their Polish cultural capital.

- 35 King was born in a small Polish town in Lower Silesia. She studied business administration at a local university. After graduation searching for a job in the region was not crowned with success, which she explains by the fact that there was a boom in business administration but an oversupply of young graduates on the labour market :

In 2003, I think, I finished studies [...] Diploma certificate in my hands with lots of ambitions. I wanted to conquer the world. With regard to such plans the situation in Poland was not that good. [...] At that time everyone wanted to study economics, because [...] everyone thought of being an economist trained in business administration or public economics and regarded this to be a good plan. Employers would be eager to hire you. [...] The bottom line is that there were so many economists in 2003 entering the labour market that you did not get a job.“ (A 4, pp. 102-110)

- 36 Additionally, many of her former classmates are already abroad and almost everybody has gained migration experience.

“[...] The people I went to school with, they are to a majority in Great Britain or Ireland, partly in Germany and (...) a large share is in the USA. [...] There is such an internet portal, a Polish website : www.naszaklasa.pl⁹ [...] You can see where these guys are now. [...] And then I read : Edinburgh, Chicago, New York, Belfast, Dublin, Munich, Düsseldorf and so on and so forth.” (A 4, pp. 528-534)

- 37 Since she had the opportunity to receive a scholarship for studies she decided to go to Germany in order to study social sciences. After finishing her last exams she headed to one of the economic centres in the south of Germany. Through private networks she found an employment as a working student at a patent agent. After graduation in early 2007 she was offered a full-time job as an administrative officer with the same agent. Although she is not allowed to speak about her activities in office she declares that the knowledge she needs to fulfil the job has been gained during the time as a working student. Additionally, she confirms that her Polish cultural background has no importance for the job.
- 38 When looking at the biography of Joanna the similarities between Polish graduates’ migration behaviours and the out-migration of Irish graduates in the late 1980s/early 1990s are obvious. A comparison with the study of King & Shuttleworth (1995) on graduate migration from Ireland shows similarities on the structural level (peripheral economic situation, long history of migration, educational expansion and overspill of graduates) as well as on the cultural level (mobility culture). As the Irish graduates, many “transformation refugees” entered jobs below their opportunities and migration is seen as a societal norm due to a “culture of migration” (King & Shuttleworth, 1995, p. 33, p. 35 ; Miller, 1976, cit. in King & Shuttleworth, 1995, p. 35).

Conclusions

- 39 This paper contributed to debates on international student mobility in Europe and its impacts on mobility and career patterns upon studying abroad. It chose the example of Polish students who studied abroad at German universities and stayed on in order to enter the German labour market. As shown in the second section of this article, Poles at German universities are a worthwhile case to study : first, Germany is the third most important target country of international student migration and Poles represented the second most important group of international students in Germany. Secondly, this example shows the patterns of labour market entrance that are created by transitory arrangements on the labour market upon Eastern enlargement of the European Union in the highly-skilled sector.
- 40 Poles studying on this side of the Oder River decided to take up studies in Germany in order to broaden their horizon, to improve language skills, or to facilitate labour market entrance upon return to Poland. However, 53.3 % indicated that they wanted to study abroad in order to improve career chances on foreign labour markets. This motivation indicates that studying abroad is connected with subsequent migration intentions and that this motivation should be supported by the receiving study abroad destination in case they want to recruit highly-skilled from abroad via the “academic gate”.
- 41 The state of art in research regarding the retention of foreign graduates suggested that up to one third remains in the study abroad destination. Their success on the labour market is dominated by the study subject, the migration orientation, and the level in

the migration process as well as circumstances in the historical period. Results from the online survey and biographical interviews support these assumptions. In the surveyed field – Polish students trained at the main target universities of Poles in Germany with their background in business administration, German language studies or law – the overall majority (69 %) returned to Poland while 23.4 % were retained in Germany. However, retention and return rates show a link with the student status. Exchange students remain less often than degree-seeking students. According to self-evaluations the professional value of studying abroad is much higher for Poles who stayed in Germany than for surveyed Erasmus students throughout Europe, especially with regard to income. Results from the online survey show that the ethnic business or field of German-Polish relations has some influence with regard to the labour market positioning. 18.4 % of those who remained in Germany speak their mother tongue on a daily basis in their professional life.

- 42 The typology derived from the analysis of 27 biographical interviews with former students at German universities revealed four types of labour market positioning. The first type (Brain Circulator) refers to graduates from mainly business administration. They rely on their expert knowledge and Polish cultural capital when working for consultancy firms that accompany market entrance of German firms in Poland. The second type (Polonia members) shows a career pattern that is strongly linked with the historical period (transitory arrangements after EU-enlargement) and the Polish community in Germany. Representatives of this type provide services for their fellow countrymen in Germany. The third type also has its background mainly in law and business studies. Upon studying in Germany they have a job with international job content and make no use of their Polish cultural capital. Representatives of the fourth type (Transformation Refugees) often have their background in less specific study subjects and enter the German labour market through internships. Of relevance are neither the Polish cultural capital nor the expert knowledge from university but the skills gained during the job training.
- 43 As a conclusion, this research highlighted that foreign graduates from local higher education institutions are an underestimated resource for national labour market needs which should make better use of them. As shown by the quantitative data, more than 20 % remain in Germany despite still valid labour market restrictions after 2004. Results from this article call for more in depth studies on labour market entrance upon graduation in a foreign country and the transition to this national labour market. The typology derived from qualitative interviews also showed that it is not only important how many stay but how they can make use of their skills. The paper provided new results on the individual returns of studying abroad. These findings can be used by higher education institutions as means of marketing to convince more students to spend part of their studies abroad in order to reach the Bologna goals. Governments and mediators in the field of international student mobility (e.g. German Academic Exchange Service DAAD) are asked to create support programmes that help international students to enter a foreign labour market and to make use of their special set of cultural capital which may be used to function as bridges in the field of Polish-German relations.

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NOTES

1. The “academic gate” is an expression borrowed from Abella 2006, p. 22.
2. The stay rate is defined as the number of status changes as a percentage of the number of international students who do not renew their student permit (OECD, 2010a, p. 45).
3. Information provided to the author via e-mail by the Statistics department of the Federal Employment Office, 2009-05-13.
4. Pierre Bourdieu distinguishes four forms of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital). Cultural capital consists of three sub forms. Objectified cultural capital is embodied in cultural goods (books, pictures). Institutionalised cultural capital is represented by formal educational qualifications and embodied cultural capital is cultivation, education in a less formal sense (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 243-248).
5. The top ten target universities of Polish educational foreigners in Germany in 2006/07 were the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder (10.6%), Free University Berlin (5.1%), Hamburg University (4.6%), LMU Munich (4.5%), Goethe University Frankfurt/Main (4.4%), Humboldt-University Berlin (4.0%), University Mainz (3.8%), Technical University Berlin (3.6%), Technical University Dresden (3.1%) and University Cologne (3.0%) (WW 2008, table 1.9.2).
6. The link was also sent via the the Quandt Foundation, the Alumni Club of the Heidelberg University, the International Office at the University Passau and the association of Polish students and graduates in Munich. Additionally, potential respondents were contacted via two of the main sending universities in Poland. The International Relations Office of the University of Warsaw and the Centre for International Programmes Development of the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) informed their former Erasmus participants who had been abroad in Germany.
7. All names of persons are changed in order to guarantee their anonymity.
8. Polonia is understood as the community of Poles living in Germany.

9. “Nasza Klasa” : our class.

ABSTRACTS

Against the background of debates on needs for highly-skilled labour in Germany, the article is interested in international students as a special group of Highly-Skilled Migration. It analyses the impact of studying abroad on future mobility and career patterns. The article presents results from an online survey and 27 qualitative interviews with Poles who came as international students and who later on entered the German labour market. Results from the online survey indicate that approximately 70 % return to Poland but lower return rates are observed among degree-seeking students than among exchange students. The professional value of the study abroad experience is very high. A qualitative typology comprising four types (“Brain Circulators”, “Polonia Members”, “International Career”, “Transformation Refugees”) shows how former international students combine Polish and German cultural capital in their professional life and identifies success and failed stories. As a result, special programmes should be created to smooth the transition from university to the labour market in the study abroad destination.

Vor dem Hintergrund der Debatte um einen Fachkräftemangel in Deutschland beschäftigt sich der Beitrag mit internationalen Studierenden als Subgruppe der Hochqualifiziertenmigration. Er analysiert den Einfluss des Auslandsstudiums auf spätere Mobilitäts- und Karrieremuster und präsentiert empirische Ergebnisse aus einer Online-Befragung und 27 qualitativen Interviews mit polnischen Absolventen, die als internationale Studierende nach Deutschland kamen und im Anschluss an ihr Studium eine Beschäftigung in Deutschland aufnahmen. Nach den Ergebnissen der Online-Befragung kehren ca. 70 % nach Polen zurück, wobei allerdings Studierende, die einen Abschluss erwarben, eine weitaus geringere Rückkehrquote aufweisen als Austauschstudierende. Der berufliche Ertrag des Auslandsstudiums ist hoch. Eine vier Typen umfassende qualitative Typologie (“Brain Circulators”, “Polonia Members”, “International Career”, “Transformation Refugees”) zeigt, wie die ehemaligen internationalen Studierenden im beruflichen Leben deutsches und polnisches kulturelles Kapital nutzen. Sie identifiziert Erfolgs- und Misserfolgsgeschichten. Als Schlussfolgerung daraus sollten spezielle Programme entwickelt werden, die den Arbeitsmarktübergang internationaler Studierender im Studienland begleiten.

INDEX

Keywords: German-Polish migration, international students, return rates, professional value of studying abroad

Schlüsselwörter: deutsch-polnische Migrationsbeziehungen, internationale Studierende, Rückkehrquoten, beruflicher Ertrag des Auslandsstudiums

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