

Introducing and inviting readers to dive into and discuss:

POLISH “LIQUID” MIGRATION & PARENTAL APPROACHES TO EDUCATION

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A personal justification of what led up to my research and an invitation for discussion on the 10th July!

Usually, when one is having a conversation about their chosen tracks, like your job, or your degree, one of the first questions to come up are “Why this?”, or “What made you choose it?”. This happens even more if your choices are anywhere more unusual than becoming a teacher or doctor, or IT specials, in the current days. And I have been asked that a lot. I was asked that when I studied cultural anthropology (“anthro- what?”), when I got a biology degree specialising in mycology (I studied the evolution of fungi, molds specifically, a focus surprising for many). Finally, I took on the challenge of studying Governance of Migration and Diversity in Rotterdam. Not the easiest focus to explain, but more digestible than mycology. Maybe just the political controversies it can raise add some spice to it.

There is another ingredient to my final focus, which resulted in the research that I am trying to guide the readers through. From the beginning I knew I wanted to relate to diversity in the context of education, inter-cultural education, or the junction of children rights and migration experiences. These are the things that have concerned me for years outside my academic life, and that I was involved in personally through some social work. The time of formulating a research focus for my master’s thesis approached and I discovered the Hague Thesis Hub. And it hit the spot, because I have an inner drive to take action, and the Hub allowed me to ensure my research will not get shut in the desk drawer, that a local practitioner will take a look at it, mostly, that it would get translated to something applicable, if I do a job good enough. This is why I am writing this short text, to spark an interest in the practitioners and stakeholders from the den Haag Zuidwest.

It all comes together now. The Hub indicated a local problem - how parents engage at schools or in general, in their children’s education, in the diverse schools of the Zuidwest neighbourhoods. I visited a primary school in Moerwijk, I saw the diverse classrooms and language lessons for newcomers, I talked to a Brugfunctionariss who was trying to reach the parents and build bridges between families and the school. But why Polish parents? Because I recently moved here from Poland myself. And, apparently, the Polish parents are especially private about their lives, don’t let the school intervene, so sometimes it is not really known, what is going on or what their problems are. Like this, my research focus got established.

I joined Facebook groups of Poles living here, I added myself to local parenting groups. Finally, I managed to get in touch with enough Polish mothers to call it a research sample. The interviews I had with each of them were something incredible. It was as if they finally felt somebody is interested in their stories. They shared more than I expected, they contacted me with their friends. I visited their houses, or I did videosalls when their busy schedules didn’t allow for that. I really felt like a privilege to enter the life of these other people, people who have such different life histories than my own.

We are getting closer now to the goal of this quick train of thought that I describe to justify what I did and add some background. Mothers opened up, shared, complained or prouded themselves. Some stories were so moving, some of them were stories of escape, some of them of success, some of adventure, most - of hard work. And, importantly, the children stayed at the center of them. What did I find out?

In the face of a lack of European borders and work permits, the migration is Poles has been described as “liquid” - unstable, uncertain, unplanned, spontaneous and constantly open to changes. My thoughts were: “These are not the right conditions for children to grow up, or adapt to a new, foreign school!” Indeed, when I listened to people’s stories, their migration experiences reflected just that. I asked then the parents about their approaches to schooling, how do they manage to guide their children if they don’s speak the language? Would they consider moving in the middle of a school year? What do they think of the Dutch schooling as compared to Polish?

To avoid *academese* jargon, I will just put these in a few bullet points. The reader’s attention dedicated to them will be much appreciated, and I hope what I leave here will result in a fruitful discussion, or at least will enhance the reader’s curiosity and bring to mind questions that I will be happy to discuss when we get a chance to meet.

- Polish parents prioritise education - they depend their migration moves on the schooling stage of children. They try to be supportive and they have **high home-based engagement**. Unfortunately, they encounter some difficulties, naturally mostly related to language. So they resort to **private lessons!** On of the most surprising results of the research. Who would have thought that these families who work so hard will invest so frequently in these? Such a result says a lot. Note that, until recently, private “catch up” lessons were seen as somewhat of a shame in Poland ...
- Moreover - parents try to be engaged, but, to their positive surprise, the school takes over a big part of responsibility for the whole education and upbringing process. And while this contrasts with what some local Dutch parents think of the Dutch system, Poles compare it to an old-fashioned, strict and demanding hard work system they were brought up in. Polish **children enjoy Dutch school**, the school is seen as a pleasant experience! What a nice result.
- There is a down side of the local schooling. Many parents expressed feeling **discriminated or less supported**, than other minorities. For example, they found that some resources at school were translated to many languages, but not to Polish. They found that when they reported some incidents of discrimination to the school, they were not taken as seriously as they would have liked. They did not feel heard, at times.
- This connects to a phenomenon described in social sciences called “super-diversity” in cities. That means, that these cities are composed of so many minorities, that some of the become majorities, and these can be called “minority-majorities”. Poles in the Hague are a large immigration group. However, they feel that their local Polish communities are not strong. To put it in a different way, **Polish people abroad do not support each other, stay somewhat isolated**, they don’t create structures of mutual support, they live secluded in their own apartment or house and feel surrounded by “others”. **Poles are at the minority among “majority-minorities”**, and they have

lower in-group community support, and this is what results in feelings of discrimination, **isolation or alienation**

■ And here another key finding gets put into an explanatory context. I mentioned that Polish parents are engaged. And they are, but education scholars differentiate between home-based and school-based involvement and see both as very relevant for the children's achievements and wellbeing. Unfortunately, **Polish parents do not participate at school**. This is probably because of the described feelings of isolation or discrimination, or feelings of linguistic barriers. Because they clearly care a lot about their children's future. They just do not have all the tools to engage in a broader way. They also work very hard, so they are restricted by this as well.

These key findings were the answers linking many aspects of the of parental engagement in the studied group, and plaiting the answer to the research question: **How do migration intentions influence approaches to their children's education in Polish families from den Haag Zuidwest?**

I tried to put it in a nutshell hoping it seems interesting for some outside the social sciences faculty. I hope I lead the readers through my train of thought and caught their attention. At the end of my research I feel honoured, inspired by people's strengths in the face of adversity and eager to see my research contribute to their situation. The key moment of the research process comes now:

Can my research get translated it into practice? That is a question I ask the readers and hope to discuss when we meet, shortly!

I already had some reflexions for implementation purposes. It would be important to increase school integration, so - integration of the future citizens of den Haag Zuidwest. In a bigger picture, the education outcomes of students in the diverse local society will be relevant for social cohesion and social mobility in the Hague.

- An **outreach policy** seems necessary. Reaching those hard to reach requires an effort from both the school and institution side, as well as a will from the parents themselves.
- Facilitating support directed **specifically to the Polish minority** - solutions like more language resources, integration or inter-cultural events at school have been found effective in there similar contexts
- **Community building** is clearly needed for the local Polish community. Both the in-group Polish community should be connected and, at the same time, giving them a place to become part of the Zuidwest neighbourhood community. This would help tackle their feeling of isolation and discrimination.

School could become the place for neighbourhood community building!

To get insight into what those with practical experience and local expertise think of such solutions is what I am extremely eager to hear.

