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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 17th April 2008

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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;

- 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.

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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.

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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)

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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.

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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