Article

Processes of socio-spatial exposures and isolations among Polish labour migrants in rural Norway: Exploring social integration as a lived experience

Jakub Stachowski

Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway University Centre Dragvoll, Norway

Abstract

The recent significant inflow of international migrants into rural areas in Europe has raised questions about the integration of migrants into the rural host localities. Amidst the growing literature, there are, however, few comprehensive analyses of processes of migrants' social integration. Drawing on the lived experience of Polish migrants in a rural area in Norway and applying the theoretical framework of social exposures, the article illustrates the important role of the migrants' position on the local labour market, the socio-demographics of the receiving locality and the material and geographical properties of the area for the dynamics of their social integration. Findings show how migrants' desires to engage in migrant/non-migrant relationships are challenged by the increasingly ethnically divided local labour market, amidst growing migration to the location and by the geographical structure of the locality. The changing and intersecting character of those domains fosters conditions that promote primarily social exposure of the migrants to their own co-ethnics, isolating them from the local community. At the same time, the study illustrates that mutual engagement of the migrants and the local inhabitants, as well as having children, play a significant role in diversifying migrants' local social contacts.

Keywords

Exposures–isolations, social integration, rural areas, Polish migrants, Norway

1. Introduction

One of the relatively recent components of intra-European patterns of migration is the spatial differentiation of migrant destinations that highlights the role of non-urban areas as receiving contexts (Jentsch, 2007; McAreavey, 2017; Robinson, 2010; Winders, 2014; Woods, 2016). In contrast to urban areas that share a long tradition of hosting international migrants, a defining characteristic of many rural areas across Europe is that they have so far limited if any experience with international migration (McAreavey and Argent, 2018; Simard and

Corresponding author:
Jakub Stachowski, PhD candidate, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, University Centre Dragvoll, building 10, 7491 NTNU, Norway.
Email: jakub.stachowski@ntnu.no

Jentsch, 2009). Given their typically geographically peripheral location, sparser and more dispersed populations, less developed infrastructure and more homogeneous labour markets, rural areas are believed to create a different context for migration from their urban counterparts, and consequently impact the processes of migration differently (Bell and Osti, 2010; Bock et al., 2016; De Lima et al., 2011, Woods, 2011).

With an overall increase of the share of European population living in urban areas (Eurostat, 2016), many rural regions have become vulnerable to population decline (Pinilla et al., 2008; Stockdale, 2004). At the same time, there are many rural regions where thriving local industries have caused the demand for the labour force to increase exponentially. In many cases, the inflow of international migrants has satisfied those demands (Górny and Kaczmarczyk, 2018; Harbo et al., 2017; Scott, 2013). Some scholars have viewed international migration to non-urban areas as a pivotal counterforce to the demographic declines and as a potential stimulus to repopulate and revitalise rural communities (Hedberg and Haandrikman, 2014; Kasimis et al., 2010). On the other hand, concerns about the sustainability of such solutions have also been raised (Aure et al., 2018). Considering the pace of socio-demographic change in rural locations, a better comprehension of the multifarious character of integration of international migrants in those areas is high on the research agenda (Jentsch and Simard, 2009; Rye and Scott, 2018).

Based on ethnographic data collected among Polish migrants in a rural coastal municipality in Norway, here fictively called Fish Island, this article seeks to advance knowledge about the processes of social integration of international migrants in rural areas. The article takes the lived experience of the migrants as a starting point to discuss local conditions for forging and maintaining social relationships. The case analysed illustrates many aspects of recent international migration to rural areas outlined above. Since the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004, the migration of Eastern and Central Europeans into the location has rapidly increased, with migrants attracted by opportunities for work in the local farmed salmon industry. The steady inflow of the migrants has changed the locality socio-demographically and altered the proportion between the local and migrant population.

Acknowledging the problematic character of integration processes as described in the migration literature, this article addresses three questions concerning migrants' social integration in rural areas.

1. How is the dynamics of migrants' social relationships affected by their positions in the local labour market?
2. What characterises the dynamics of co-ethnic and migrant–local relationships in the host locality?
3. What role do the material and geographical attributes of the rural locale play in the shaping of the dynamics of migrants' social relationships?

In this article, these three aspects of migrants' lives in a rural location will be discussed as processes of social exposures. This refers to the conditions that either promote or obstruct migrants' possibilities to develop and maintain social relationships (Bissell, 2013; Erdal and Lewicki, 2016; Van Tubergen, 2006). Discussing the framework, I draw upon the literature on migrant integration and embeddedness as well as on the role of spatiality and place for integration, which allows one to tease out the complex dynamics of place-specific opportunities and constraints (Blau, 1994; O'Reilly, 2012; Ryan, 2018) in establishing social relationships.

The article proceeds as follows: the following section surveys selected aspects of integration literature and brings them into the social exposure framework. Subsequently, I review relevant research on international migration to rural areas. Next, I introduce briefly Norway as a context of migration and discuss recent patterns of the geographic distribution of international migrants. In the methodological section, I discuss the fieldwork, the data and the local context of research. The analytical part has four sections analysing, respectively, social relationships in the segmented labour market, co-ethnic social relations in the community, migrant–non-migrant social relations in the community and how the materiality and geography of rural place shape migrants' social relations. The last part connects the discussed aspects

and addresses the contribution of the study to the existing literature.

2. Dynamics of social integration: A theoretical framework

The concept of integration has developed a notorious reputation in migration studies. Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) point out its paradoxical carrier: on the one hand, it has served to explain how immigrants relate to and participate in receiving societies (Frideres and Biles, 2012; Grzymała-Kazłowska and Phillimore, 2017); on the other hand, it has been extensively criticised. One of the main criticisms has concerned the pressure to adapt to the receiving society's dominant culture and social and moral norms as prescribed by national integration policies (Erdal, 2013; McPherson, 2010). As such, some have considered it a mere euphemism for assimilation, which presupposes the gradual dissolution of migrants' original identity as they blend into mainstream society (Sayad, 2004). However, nowadays, most scholars view integration as a two-way process of negotiation and alignment between those who integrate and the context into which they integrate (Castles et al., 2003; Modood, 2007). Importantly, integration depends on a complex range of determinants and involves the acquisition of multiple competencies ranging from rights and citizenship, language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability, employment, education and health and housing to social bridges, bonds and links (Ager and Strang, 2008).

This study seeks to understand the processes of social integration as a lived experience of the migrants in a local rural social context. This bottom-up approach allows one to contrast and complements the process of integration as a state-orchestrated, normative process with migrants' needs, perception and understanding of integration (Erdal, 2013; Jentsch and Simard, 2009; McPherson, 2010). I frame migrants' local experiences of integration as processes of social exposures. The framework takes as its starting point Bissel's (2013) discussion of the relationship between proximity and connection. It proposes an understanding of proximity as exposure, a way of thinking about peoples'

everyday interactions and relationships in various spheres of social life, such as neighbourhoods, workplaces, etc. Elaborating on Bissel's (2013) approach, Erdal and Lewicki (2016) have suggested the notions of exposure and proximity as ways that promote or obscure migrants' integration. Proximity and exposure may assume many forms and entail exposure to the general context of settlement of migrants, exposure of the migrants to their ethnic community or as a two-way process through which both migrants and non-migrants become exposed to each other (Erdal and Lewicki, 2016: 2–3). Such an approach echoes others' contributions to the integration literature that underscores the importance of exposure, understood as the likelihood of contact or a degree of contact between minority and majority population as a reflection of the social integration of the migrants (e.g. Blau, 1994; Van Tubergen, 2006).

The exposure framework is related to a range of contextual, structural and institutional factors that shape migrants' integration pathways both nationally and locally (Bock et al., 2016; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016), such as, policies regulating migrants' legal status in receiving countries, migrants' position on the labour market or the role of ethnic communities (Portes and Rumbaut, 2014). It resembles what Lindo (2005: 16) refers to as *placement*, that is 'a process of occupying different positions in society, and of gaining, maintaining, defending or losing access to resources, that are relevant for the position of an individual or a group'.

Polish migrants in this study have all arrived in the given locality as labour migrants or in connection with family reunifications. Labour migrants frequently occupy an underprivileged position within the structures of the host country's labour markets (Piore, 1979; Standing, 2011). The position of Polish migrants in Norway reflects this general picture, as they are concentrated mostly within the secondary segment of the labour market where they perform low-skilled, manual labour (Friberg, 2013; Ødegård, 2014). Thus, understanding their position in the labour market is also crucial to understanding the processes of social integration, especially as workplaces are often understood as pivotal arenas for integration (Ager and Strang, 2008).

One way of looking at migrants' social integration is through the concept of embeddedness, which refers to 'social relationships that foster a sense of rootedness and integration in the local environment' (Korinek et al., 2005: 780). The concept is multi-layered and, as suggested by some scholars, should be understood as a process taking place in different domains of social life and within the structural context of opportunities and constraints (Ryan, 2018; Ryan and Mulholland, 2015). As pointed out by Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019: 134), types of social relations may be indicative of the level of integration and embeddedness. They may vary regarding how deep (Ryan, 2018) and 'meaningful' the contact is (Valentine, 2008). In this regard, the role of ethnic communities in affecting the dynamics of integration has been extensively addressed. For instance, transnational studies have shed light on a multitude of complex relations migrants maintain with their home countries and their diasporic milieus in countries of destination (Faist et al., 2013; Mügge, 2016; Vertovec, 2007). As suggested by many authors, migrants' networks play a key role at different stages of migration, from decision-making and facilitating migration to providing various forms of support through the so called integration 'migration infrastructure' (Boyd, 1989; Goss and Lindquist, 1995). Consequently, they may have a 'cumulative causation effect' (Massey, 1990), a situation when migration becomes self-reinforcing and when, in consequence, it alters the initial conditions for migration. The composition of migrants' social relationships is, thus, not static but evolves with time, and in specific contexts (Lubbers et al., 2018; Ryan and D'Angelo, 2018). It is essential to bear in mind how the composition of migrant networks, as well as the internal relations within ethnic communities, for example interactions between their members, friendships or competition, affect migrants' social contacts and may, hence, expose them to different conditions of integration (Deaux, 2006; Hagan, 1998; Kindler et al., 2015; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). Studies have shown that migrant communities may become cohesive, trust-based and harmonious (Levitt, 2001; O'Reilly, 2000) while, in other cases, they may contain traces of envy, rivalry and competition (Garapich, 2016; Ryan et al., 2008).

Another aspect relevant to the discussion about processes of social exposures of migrants is how spatial emplacement affects the shaping of social relations. Particularly illuminating here is the literature discussing urban life. Aspects such as geographic concentration, dispersion or the segregation of immigrant groups in specific physical areas, such as neighbourhoods, play a role in shaping the economic, social and cultural outcomes of integration (Fong and Berry, 2017). Residential concentration invokes the notion of ethnic enclaves, that is, areas of physical congregation of immigrant groups (Zhou, 2013), and is related to the notion of proximity, distance and the variegated degree of mobility and coordination necessary to forge and maintain social relations (Bissell, 2013; Buhr, 2014). As argued by Bolt et al. (2010: 171), the type of residential setting and its location in relation to other locations, that is, neighbourhoods, may influence the degree of people's exposure to each other, and increase or reduce their chances to interact. At the same time, while the geographic segregation of ethnic groups often invokes negative connotations (see, for example, Wacquant, 2008), the processes underlying it are highly complex. They may be a result of structural conditions, for instance, the availability of housing within the existing real estate structures, but also migrants' own choice to congregate in the physical vicinity of their co-ethnics (Bolt et al., 2010; Ruiz-Tagle, 2013).

3. International labour migration in rural contexts

Rural host regions in Europe display considerable national and local differences, which have implications for migrants' integration trajectories (Bock et al., 2016; Woods, 2016). A significant part of the literature concerning international rural migration has examined how the processes of inclusion and exclusion of migrants are reflected in their position in local labour markets (Danson and Jentsch, 2009; Kasimis et al., 2010; Rye, 2014; Scott, 2013), with the agricultural sector being the most explored (Rye and Scott, 2018). Studies that have analysed the employment of migrants in local industries found a lack of locally available labour force or the

perception of migrants' work ethic as superior to that of the locals as factors enhancing the presence of migrants in those industries (Friberg and Midtbøen 2018; Scott, 2013; Tannock, 2015). Other studies have examined how work arrangements affect migrants' position in local communities. In agriculture, the seasonality of production imposes a specific character on migrants' social relationships. Andrzejewska and Rye (2012) showed how the isolation of farms limits migrants' accumulation of bridging social capital and creates obstacles for their social integration. Similarly, Wagner et al. (2016) showed how long hours spent in the fields and accommodation in container encampments result in the invisibility of the migrants in the local community and may give rise to dense and often conflictual internal social relations. Lever and Milbourne (2017) contended that migrants in the meat-production industry become spatially and structurally invisible outsiders. They are isolated physically in the specific workplace, hidden from the sight of the public and subjected to ethnic segmentation and competition through their work conditions. Ethnic segregation of the local labour force has also been observed in other industries, such as fish processing (i.e. Aure et al., 2018; Skaptadottir and Wojtyńska, 2016).

The literature points also to mixed and sometimes contradictory experiences of international migrants with rural social contexts. Flynn and Kay (2017: 63) found that such settings may not only promote social relationships that are 'burdensome and claustrophobic', especially with migrants' co-nationals, but also foster the emotional security of the migrants when positive relationships are developed. Morén-Algeret (2008) reported contrasting experiences of social relationships and the role of places of origin in shaping encounters with receiving rural places. Comparisons with the urban areas led some to evaluate integration in rural areas positively, while others evaluated it negatively. Rye (2017) illustrated how differently the successful integration in rural areas is perceived by various rural actors, which suggests that understanding the outcomes of integration may be in the eye of the beholder. As Rye's study suggests, employers and local authorities tend to evaluate the outcomes of integration more positively, while migrants themselves are more critical.

The phenomenon displays a substantial diversity. Among the contributions, there are, however, few systematic accounts that explore migrants' social relationships across more than one domain of their lives in rural host localities. The analysis in this article demonstrates how migrants' lived experiences of integration in rural areas may be understood in terms of the intersecting labour market and sociodemographic and spatial dimensions of rural locations, which result in processes of social exposure and isolation.

4. Norway and the 'new' European Union migration

The enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007 and subsequent flows of intra-European migration provide the macro context for the study. Norway, with a modest population of 5.5 million, has received more post-accession migrants relative to its national population than any other EU member state (Friberg, 2013). Although Norway is not a full member of the EU, through its membership in the European Economic Area (EEA) it participates in a common policy allowing for the circulation of capital, labour, people and services within the EEA's territory. Immediately after the extension, Norway opened its labour market to the new EU citizens, but retained a five-year long transition period. During this time, access to the labour market was more restrictive, but the rules for finding employment were liberalised in 2009.

Within a few years, Poles and Lithuanians who arrived in Norway in search of work have grown from insignificant to constituting the two most populous groups of immigrants in the country (Statistics Norway, 2019a). Similar to other EU migrants, the legal status of Eastern and Central Europeans does not entitle them to free language training or any other means of integration (Directorate of Integration and Diversity, 2018). By contrast, refugees enrolled in two-year compulsory introduction programmes receive both language and work-life training free of charge. In the case of EU migrants, the Norwegian government delegates the decision to provide or not provide language training to municipal authorities and employers (Directorate of Integration and Diversity, 2018).

Unlike refugees, Eastern and Central European labour migrants in Norway enjoy a simplified process for gaining legal status and are free to settle anywhere in the country. The inflow of a large number of migrants has produced new patterns of settlement and geographical distribution. Although most migrants concentrate in the capital city of Oslo and its neighbouring municipalities, Eastern and Central European migrants live in all 427[1] of Norway's municipalities (Høydahl, 2013). However, their distribution is highly uneven; whereas some regions have received very few migrants, others have experienced substantial, high-paced growth in their share of Norway's foreign-born population.

5. Methods, data and setting

This article builds on ethnographic data collected in the period May 2016–May 2018 among Polish migrants in the rural coastal municipality, here fictively called Fish Island. The fieldwork comprised several intensive stays in the location, during which I conducted in-depth interviews, participant observations and numerous informal conversations, and socialised with the migrants, visiting their homes and relevant places in the community. To study migration as a process that develops over time, I employed a biographical approach to interviews (Roberts, 2002). Major themes discussed during the interviews were circumstances before arriving in Norway and Fish Island in particular, work conditions in the municipality, engagement in the life of the community and plans for the future. A substantial part of each interview was devoted to discussing the composition of the informant's social relationships, as I was curious to understand their dynamics in different spheres of the local community, such as workplaces or neighbourhoods. Moreover, this theme surfaced also spontaneously in the interviewees' narratives. The participant observations were carried out mostly during events organised by the local Polish association but also in various informal, everyday situations. This approach offered me a good perspective on the complexity of migrants' lives.

In the course of the fieldwork, I conducted 30 in-depth interviews with 36 participants, 17 women and 19 men. The age of the participants ranged from late 20s to early 60s. Interviewees had lived in Norway for approximately 2–13 years (6.5 years on average), and very few had experience with migration other than to the location studied. At the time of the interviews, 30 participants lived with their spouses or nuclear families, whereas six lived without their life partners in the locality or were single. Thirty participants had at one time worked at the local salmon-processing plant. My Polish background allowed me to conduct all the interviews in the interviewees' mother tongue. Of all the interviews, eight were dyadic, while the rest were individual. Moreover, the interviews included two follow-up interviews with married couples who purchased houses in the course of my fieldwork. Whether the interview was individual or dyadic depended on several factors. Often the reasons were pragmatic and concerned time constraints associated with moving between interviewees' living places or synchronising the appointments with their work schedules. The different types of interviews generated different interaction dynamics. Generally, interviewing couples was more challenging as sometimes interviewees provided contradictory answers, or one person dominated the conversation. Such situations required me to take a more active role, but also provided valuable hints into the dynamics of negotiations and decision-making within the family.

Located off the Norwegian coast in the Atlantic Ocean, Fish Island is nearly 2.5 hours away by car or ferry service from the nearest city on the mainland. The municipality has category 5 out of 6 on the Norwegian 'classification of centrality' scale, which means that it belongs to the least central region[2] (Statistics Norway, 2019b). The island's remoteness, along with its barren, rocky landscape, encouraged some of the migrants to call it 'the Moon'. The island comprises a single municipality centre encompassing most of the public and private services, several villages and approximately two dozen smaller villages and settlements. A total of 90% of the residential structure consists of detached houses. The island's simple road system includes the main road that connects the larger settlements and narrower side-roads that give access to more desolate places.

For years, the locality has been experiencing a slow but continuous decrease in the number of Norwegian inhabitants. After 2004, when the booming farmed salmon industry started to recruit labour migrants from the new EU member states, the municipality started to witness a rapid inflow of foreign migrants. In this period, the share of the foreign-born population grew from 4% to 25%. Accordingly, the overall size of the population increased by 1000, reaching 5000 inhabitants. Although today Fish Island hosts people with backgrounds from over 50 countries, its largest immigrant groups are Poles, Lithuanians, Bulgarians and Estonians. Unlike agricultural industries that depend predominantly upon seasonal migrant workers, the relatively stable, year-round demand for labour in the salmon farming and processing business has facilitated a more long-term engagement of the migrants.

6. Analysis

In this section, I present an analysis of the empirical data. The section is divided into four sections that discuss respectively the processes of migrants' social integration in light of their position in the rural labour market, their co-ethnic and cross-ethnic relationships and the materiality and geography of rural place.

6.1 Social relations in the segmented labour market

The majority of the interviewees moved to Fish Island to work for the municipality's main employer, a local salmon producer. During the last three decades, the company has grown from a local to a global enterprise. Immediately after the 2004 EU expansion, it started to recruit its first labour migrants from countries in Eastern and Central Europe, who gradually outnumbered and pushed out Swedish workers. The company's increasing success and continuous increase in the volume of production eventually led to the launch of a new, cutting-edge processing plant a couple of years ago. In its recruitment process, the company relied primarily on peer recruitment, requesting that already established

workers suggest new potential employees from their social networks. This strategy worked effectively in assuring the desired supply of labour force and guaranteed a rapid labour market entry for the arriving migrants. However, with time it resulted in a high concentration of foreign-born employees at the workplace. At the time of my fieldwork, the company employed migrants from more than 20 countries, of whom the great majority worked on the processing line. Discussing their working conditions, one of the recurring topics was how the organisation of work affected migrants' social contacts. Among them was Zuzanna who, like many others, lamented the lack of contact with Norwegians at work:

> There's [only] one Norwegian girl on our floor; she cleans. I try to connect with her. She's nice but also quite uptight about interacting. So, I can't talk with any Norwegians at work. (Zuzanna, 20s, 6 years in the municipality)

The unfulfilled wish to have social interactions with Norwegians during the workday has its roots in the disproportionate concentration of workers of foreign origin almost exclusively working in processing tasks. 'There are very few Norwegians in the company. [Norwegians] are mostly leaders, working in the offices. To tell you the truth, maybe four Norwegians are working on the processing line', according to Jarek. The company has developed a multi-ethnic niche (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003) through clustering migrant workers predominantly in specific, low-skilled tasks such as slaughtering, cutting or filleting. The dull, repetitive work, next to fellow migrants, has created a situation of social exposure of migrants on one another, while the upshot has been social isolation from ethnic Norwegians. At the workplace, migrants congregate on the ground floor of the plant, while offices for non-manual employees, most of whom are Norwegians, are located at the level above, around the processing line, allowing a constant, panoptic view of the workflow. Such an arrangement complicates the function of the workplace as an arena for forging social relationships with members of the non-migrant population (Ager and Strang, 2008). As

pointed out by Bock et al. (2016: 77), rural areas with their typically more specialised and homogeneous labour markets run the risk of concentrating migrants in particular industries and promoting physical and social isolation from the local communities.

Related to this is the important issue of how such work organisation affects conditions for the acquisition and practice of the Norwegian language. Many informants admitted having rather poor Norwegian-language skills while underscoring the relative usefulness of other languages, such as English or Russian, often acquired during education in the home country. Joanna, who has worked in the salmon industry for nearly a decade, reported experiencing what many other participants also reported:

> I understand . . . basic phrases [in Norwegian]. I've learned languages before, but if you don't use them and you work on a production line at a company where you speak Polish, Russian and maybe English . . . it [Norwegian] becomes a 'dead language'. (Joanna, late 40s, 11 years in the municipality)

By labelling Norwegian a 'dead language', the informant revealed what amounted to a paradoxical situation. Although the employer has institutionalised language training at the workplace that afforded non-Norwegian-speaking employees a chance to acquire rudimentary Norwegian-language skills, the organisation of work deprived migrants of the possibility to engage in conversation in Norwegian. At the same time, the plant, with its ethnic division of labour, provided fertile grounds for the development of a hybrid language—namely, a blend of English, various Slavic languages and Norwegian, which enabled and ensured communication in the multiethnic milieu.

The exclusionary character of the ethnic industrial niche was even more pronounced in the stories told by migrants who do not work in the salmon industry. While constituting only a small portion of the data, not all participants were employed in the salmon industry at the time of my fieldwork. Some had assumed other jobs in the municipality, and some had never worked at the plant. Such cases reveal interesting aspects of the role of the workplace for the migrants' social relationships. One of these informants, Bartek, who took another job after working at the plant for more than a decade, experienced shifting into a new work environment as liberating:

> I can see it now after I left [the company] . . . , plenty of people . . . not only Poles but also Lithuanians . . . they are closed off [from the community] . . . They meet with their folks on weekends . . . and then go off to work again. Even though I knew it before, now I look at it [working at the plant] from the side-lines, and it's hermetic. . . . In my current work, I have contact with the whole island. (Bartek, 40s, 11 years in Norway)

For Bartek, switching jobs afforded new opportunities for social relationships that have since become extensive and diverse. In retrospect, he recognised how the ethnically based division of Fish Island's labour market has promoted the aggregation of a great number of migrant workers in a so-called 'hermetic' milieu and stifled both his own and others' options for diversifying social relationships at the workplace and outside it. Such a form of stratification of the local community has a double consequence, as it isolates migrants from the mainstream community and at the same time exposes them through occupational concentration. The history of Martyna, a public officer in the municipality, captures this aspect:

> I was at a work-related meeting in another municipality, and one person there asked me when I had come to the island. I replied that it wasn't that long ago. Then he asked, 'So you haven't worked in the fish industry before?' I said, 'No. Why?' It got to me, so I asked him whether he had worked in the fish industry before he became a public officer. And he said 'no'. So, why did he think that I had worked there before? Because all of the Poles work there? It was the first time I had encountered such behaviour. He was disappointed; I ruined his idea about migrants. (Martyna, 40s, 2 years in the municipality).

Martyna's experience reflects a common, stereotypical view that assumes a link between given nationalities and particular professions (Friberg and Midtbøen, 2018). It also illustrates an interesting

dimension of the local labour market. Martyna's interlocutor linked her nationality to work in the salmon industry, which he also associated with the specific location. From his standpoint, the natural progression of Martyna's career should begin in the salmon industry, followed by promotion into more advanced positions. In rural areas with less diverse labour markets and fewer opportunities for migrants to work outside the dominant industry, such stereotypes can become amplified and reinforce the view of migrants as predestined to work in those industries. While the occupational concentration of migrants in rural areas may render them out-of-sight from the local communities (see e.g. Lever and Milbourne, 2017), it may simultaneously expose them as a group and, in turn, consolidate the stereotypes.

6.2. Ambivalent embeddedness in co-ethnic social relationships

The arrival of migrants in the locality in the years following 2004 has resulted in a rapid change to its socio-demographic landscape. At first, the municipality was 'discovered' by 'pioneer migrants' (De Haas, 2010) from Eastern and Central Europe, who reconnoitred the new context and paved the way for subsequent arrivals. Within a couple of years, the migration gained momentum and the local community witnessed a relatively stable and consistent inflow of foreign citizens each year. With time, the chain character of migration (De Haas, 2010), stimulated by the recruitment strategy described earlier, has led to reunifications of nuclear families and immigration of extended family members and friends, and has given rise to a previously non-existent 'migrant infrastructure' (Napierała, 2008). Many informants reported having at least one family member or friend living in the municipality. In one extreme case, one of the informants, Jarek, who lives in the municipality with his family, counted approximately 15 peers from his hometown neighbourhood who had moved to the island at some point in time. The increase in migration to the locality is an important factor that led to an increasing degree of social exposure of migrants to other migrants, primarily their compatriots, and created

a social milieu characterised by a substantial degree of mutual acquaintance among its members. As discussed by Lukasz:

> You know, it [Fish Island] is a small island. Everybody knows everybody; each Pole is somehow an acquaintance. I know him [random neighbour] simply by name . . . I know where he lives: those kinds of things. It's not only Poles but people of practically all nationalities. Most people know one another [here]. (Lukasz, 30s, 10 years in the municipality)

The overview of the local migrant community is related to the size of the population and the industrial context discussed earlier. In this case, the substantial volume of migration has had a cumulative effect, generating social conditions that promote an increased chance of developing social relationships predominantly with one's co-ethnics or other migrant groups (Blau, 1994; Massey, 1990). At the same time, it is important to underline that the Polish community, despite the level of internal social exposure and reciprocal familiarity of its members, reveals a deeply ambivalent social dynamic. On the one hand, co-national social relationships and the internal social integration of the community members fulfilled a range of important socio-cultural functions. As the inflow of migrants to the locality intensified, it has resulted in the establishment of a Polish association. The activities provided by the association have involved celebrating national days, organising a religious community and hosting informal meetings. It has become an important arena where the home-country cultural rituals are performed, cultivated and also transferred to the second generation as a way of sustaining their identity. It has provided Polish migrants with various forms of assistance and in general decreased the costs of migration (Goss and Lindquist, 1995: 329). On the other hand, they attracted neither the entire Polish community nor local Norwegians. The internal social climate among locally based Poles was often described as dense and tense, while competition and rivalry that transcended the sphere of the workplace were among its frequently reported characteristics. Patrycja shared her reflections in this regard:

Interviewer: Can you have friends on the island?
Patrycja: Yes, when you bring them from Poland with you. We have experienced some very disappointing situations with Poles here. (. . .) I have many examples, not being willing to help in some simple situations, acting as if they are superior (. . .) Instead of living as one group, one herd, everybody just waits to feed him or herself on others' failures. (Patrycja, 30s, 7 years in the municipality)

Another informant, Marek, underscored the following: 'Many people don't have their own lives [here] and they are interested in the lives of others. This is probably the biggest malady of this place'.

Statements like the above reveal that the local Polish community exhibits traits of typical rural communities with their high degree of social visibility and informal surveillance (Haugen and Villa, 2006; Woods, 2011). At the same time, they accentuate the lack of social cohesion among the local Polish migrants. While studies in urban contexts (Garapich, 2016; Pawlak, 2018) have also identified similar features among the Poles, the antagonistic relations they describe are, however, not always a result of direct exposure but rather based on how migrants perceive their compatriots. Rural contexts, however, seem to intensify such intergroup experiences by making contacts more immediate and sometimes difficult to avoid.

Contrasting the descriptions of internal relationships among Poles, another recurring theme in the interviews has been the desire to establish contacts with local Norwegians. As told by Jarek:

I would like to have a Norwegian neighbour: talk to him, go out and play football or something. Even when we used to play football in the fieldhouse, Norwegians played with us maybe two times. Usually, it was Poles, Lithuanians and Bulgarians: three teams. So, it was integration from the inside, not the outside, with Norwegians . . . But I don't think that Norwegians are very open . . . I don't know. Maybe it's because there are so many nationalities here. (Jarek, 30s, 7 years in the municipality)

Jarek's experiences embody important components of the dynamics of migrants' social relationships in the locality. Firstly, they convey a wish to establish meaningful social contacts (Valentine, 2008). Studies have shown that from the perspective of migrants, having just one single acquaintance in the local community can enhance the sense of belonging and the feeling of being welcomed (Søholt et al., 2012). Secondly, the quotation cited above indicates the relational aspect of social integration, suggesting conditions for promoting social integration with ones' co-ethnics or other migrants (Valenta, 2008). Indeed, the majority of the interviewees reported an absence of Norwegians among the social relationships they forge. Some mentioned occasional micro-meetings with the locals (McAreavey and Argent, 2018), describing them as friendly but superficial and not developing into stronger relationships.

Lastly, as Polish migrants in the locality are far from a homogeneous group, studying the processes of their social integration should take into account migrants' life-projects and imaginaries regarding the future. In the data, there are examples of migrants who perceive themselves mostly as labourers motivated by economic objectives, which is reflected in their attitudes towards their integration in the host community. One of them was Magda, who migrated to Fish Island to join her boyfriend. She described herself as a 'city girl' and talked at length about her life and the amateur artistic career she had tried to pursue in Poland. When asked about her plans for the future in Norway, and especially on Fish Island and her general attitude to integration, she stated the following:

I don't know what I want to do or whether I want to stay longer . . . I have this apartment [in Poland] that I want to buy and fix up. So I'm here with a concrete purpose: I've come to make money. When I reach that goal, then I'll see . . . I don't have an inner need to integrate. (Magda, 30s, 2 years in the municipality).

For Magda, integrating into Fish Island's rural community would constitute an investment that, in light of her plans, would not be worthwhile. Scholars

researching post-accession, intra-European migration have identified several typologies of migrants and conceive it largely in terms of temporality. Labels such as 'short-term' and 'circular', as well as the names 'storks', 'hamsters' and 'seekers' (Engbersen et al., 2013), illustrate the fluid, open-ended and impermanent character of migration as well as a palette of strategies, attitudes and forms of attachment. While only a minority among interviewees would fit into any of these labels, the example cited above illustrates a provocative way of thinking about migrants' needs, motivations and intentions for integration.

6.3. Embeddedness in non-migrant social relationships

The data contain a few cases of migrants who developed profound relationships with members of the established community. Those migrants had mostly arrived in the locality within the first years after Poland's accession to the EU before the migration to the locality became extensive. This suggests that strong intimate bonds develop over time. However, the migrants underlined also the proactive attitude of locals, describing them as 'involving', initiating the contact and encouraging the migrants to engage in the community. For instance, Kinga and Bartek, who have lived in the municipality for more than 10 years, stressed the importance of relationships with neighbours, from whom they initially rented an apartment, for their functioning and well-being in the local community:

> At the beginning . . . it was our neighbours. . . . They turned out to be people we could rely on. . . . When you come here from Poland, it's a different story. . . . We didn't have too many acquaintances. . . . When you have your family around, it's different. You get help; you have somebody to lean on. It's necessary. But here? . . . . You have no one. . . . And only because we had neighbours we could move on, open up further. Because we would go to places with them, and other people would be there. So, on the next occasion, you had somebody to say 'Hi' to. (Kinga and Bartek, 40s, 11 years in the municipality)

The described experience reveals several important facets of the migrants' social relationships with the local Norwegians. Becoming 'significant others' (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Valenta, 2008) in migrants' integration process, local Norwegians provide migrants with practical guidance in the unfamiliar socio-cultural environment and act as gatekeepers for potential new relationships. At the same time, migrant/non-migrant relationships such as those described by Kinga and Bartek exhibit a great deal of reciprocity. Informants who had developed bonds with locals often described their relationships as personal and intimate and involving everyday interactions, neighbourly help, shared leisure activities or gift exchanges on occasions such as Christmas, national holidays and important life events.

The migrants' engagement in and attachment to the local community seemed a crucial factor contributing to a deepening of the reciprocity of social relationships between migrants and non-migrants. During a neighbourhood meeting I attended with one of the informants, Piotr, the issue of the migrants' involvement in and attachment to the locality surfaced, as revealed in the following excerpt from field notes:

> The meeting is over, and I sit at the table with Piotr and several others, all of them native Norwegians and locals. The atmosphere is friendly and relaxed and heralds the party that is about to begin shortly. The discussion turns to the topic of my research, which triggers different opinions from the people at the table. One of them concerns the status of Piotr and his family in the neighbourhood. The family is considered to be local due to their engagement in the local community. They own a house, participate actively in neighbourhood events that often involve voluntary work, and their children speak Norwegian with a local dialect. When I ask them about second-home owners on the island, most of whom are Norwegians, and whether they consider them to be locals, the answer that I receive is a decisive 'No'.

The situation illustrates the local acknowledgement and appreciation of various forms of engagement in the community pursued by migrants. If commitment, presence and permanency are markers of being a local, then migrants can demonstrate their

long-term intentions by the purchase of a house, acquisition of the local dialect and by remaining actively involved in local neighbourhood associations. Unlike what the segregation of employees at the salmon-processing plant suggests, nationality and ethnicity seemed to be of secondary importance to migrants' capacity to integrate into the community, at least from the perspective of locals. They seemed preoccupied with the settlement and engagement of migrants, as they may perceive them as rescuers of the local community (Hedberg and Haandrikman, 2014).

Furthermore, family life makes a difference in the conditions for developing social relationships. The data show how, for families with children, family life played an important role in creating different conditions for participation in various social areas, other than one's own ethnic group. Alicja, whose son was born after she arrived in Norway, emphasised the change brought about by her child's enrolment in the local kindergarten:

> Earlier, when my son was smaller, I didn't pay too much attention to it [participation in the community]. But now, his friends from the kindergarten are going [elsewhere], so we're going, too. . . . If you have a child, it makes a lot of difference. (Alicja, 30s, 10 years in the municipality)

The introduction of children into local educational and extracurricular institutions allowed the children to function as gate-openers for the adult migrants, granting them access into previously inaccessible social environments of the local community (see Jones and Lever, 2014). Occasions such as birthdays or other social gatherings involved frequently voluntary work and created vital points of interaction and opportunity that shortened the social distance between migrants and non-migrants.

6.4. Isolations of rural place

Another central element shaping the dynamics of migrants' social relationships that has emerged from their narratives was the geography and material structure of the locality. The remoteness of many migrants' dwelling places has affected their social lives, as not living in the immediate physical proximity of other households often required greater efforts to establish or maintain relations with others. Most of the participants' dwellings were located in considerable spatial isolation. On the one hand, such conditions afforded them privacy, but on the other hand, these conditions also engendered a sense of withdrawal from social life. For instance, Radek and Magda, a young couple, who at the time of the interview lived in a rented house located a 30-minute drive from the municipality centre, described their immediate area in the following way:

> Nobody lives around here. . . . From time to time, the landlord comes over. We're alone here. The house by the street [approximately 300 meters away] is abandoned. Oh, well, there's one house not far from here; one guy lives there . . . I think. (Radek, 20s, 3 years in the municipality)

While pragmatically located close to their workplace, their place of living was experienced as burdensome in overcoming a sense of isolation, which involved conquering substantial distances through engaging in extensive everyday mobility (Bissel, 2013). As such, isolated places of residence, like that of Radek and Magda, may decrease the chance of accidental meetings between people inhabiting the area (McAreavey and Argent, 2018). In comparison to urban areas, rural areas typically have a less developed transport infrastructure, for example road system and availability of public transportation, which is related to the relatively smaller size of rural populations as well as their territorial dispersion (Bell and Osti, 2010; Woods, 2011). Fish Island reflected those characteristics and imposed the need for greater efforts to coordinate the maintenance of social relations, as discussed by one female informant, Kornelia:

> But let's say, just to pop in for a quick cup of coffee or something, it doesn't happen too often. And besides, people don't want to drive . . . we have some acquaintances who live on the other side of the island and we are not going to drive 45 minutes one way just to have a cup of coffee. It is a bit too much. (Kornelia, 30s, 3 years in the municipality)

Kornelia, like many other informants, used to live a part of her life in an urban area and experienced

moving to the location as a substantial transition (Morén-Algeret, 2008). As the quotation illustrates, confronting the materiality of the place may demotivate migrants and induce them to retreat from engaging in casual social interactions in their free time. For migrants with children, such as for Krystyna and her two adolescent children, a lengthy drive to the municipal centre, where most of the local services and attractions are located, was a burdensome part of family life:

Krystyna:	It's difficult to get to various places. If buses came more often, then it would be easier. There's a bus that comes to our place, but it doesn't come very often. It's irritating during the holidays. The kids have nothing to do for two weeks; they simply stay at home. But I know that in Poland there would be a football field and a swimming pool in your backyard. Here, it's difficult to drive 30 km one way.
Interviewer:	How do you spend your time, then?
Krystyna:	We usually hang around the house and do something different on weekends.
Interviewer:	What do your children think about living here?
Krystyna:	They think it's boring!

The experience of Krystyna and her family suggests that the more limited the accessibility to such services in rural areas, the greater the possibility of social exclusion (Cass et al., 2005). At the same time, Krystyna, like all other informants, reported engaging in repetitive transnational practices, such as regular travels to the home country. As illustrated, home-country travels inevitably had compensatory effects and to some extent mitigated the effects of the lack of rural infrastructure. Interestingly, during the fieldwork, I have not localised any specific area within the local housing structure with a particularly high concentration of migrants. Despite the reported feelings of isolation and challenges in navigating through the geography of the place in their everyday lives, migrants are part of the existing housing structure.

The significance of the material and geographical attributes of the location have also played a role in informing the informants' settlement plans. Many interviewees decided to engage long-term in the locality and purchased houses. Acquiring real estate was for many an important life event, conveying the intention to stay for a longer period. Settlement-related decisions involved considerations of the geographic location in the municipality. One of the migrants' main concerns was the improvement of access to workplaces and services. However, Fish Island's thin property market and scattered settlement structure constrained their options considerably. As a case in point, Ela and her daughter reunited with their husband and father, Staszek, after living apart for several years. Although moving from Poland to Norway required substantial adjustments, the family prioritised being together, and quickly acclimatised to the new life situation, including the rural setting. However, when deciding upon purchasing a home on Fish Island, the family faced a problem associated with the location on the island:

I don't want to move anywhere else [outside this particular location on Fish Island]. I want to stay here. We're looking for a house here, but we can't find one. We're waiting. It has to be here. We're close to the doctor's office and school, . . . and the shop is nearby. If my car breaks down or if there are 3 meters of snow, then I can still walk my daughter to school and get to the shop and anywhere else. (Ela, 40s, 4 years in the municipality).

Moving within the rural area affected the already established rhythm of family life. Meeting Ela and Staszek several months later in their newly purchased house far from their initially desired location revealed the effect of moving on their everyday life. The distance between their new residence and their daughter's school increased significantly. Similarly, the distance between Ela's job and home increased twofold. Even more important than requiring longer commutes, the increase in the distance has also meant isolation from neighbours and the daughter's peers.

7. Discussion and conclusion

This article has analysed processes of social integration of international migrants in rural areas. It has taken the lived experience of Polish labour migrants in one of Norway's rural municipalities as a point of departure and has focused on how the dynamics of migrants' social relationships develop at a cross-section of their position in the rural labour market, the changing socio-demographics of the local community and the material and geographical attributes of the place. Drawing on the analytical framework of social exposures (Bissel, 2013; Blau, 1994; Erdal and Lewicki, 2016; Van Tubergen, 2006), the article has shed light on the conditions for forging and maintaining social relationships, and their implications for the social integration of the migrants.

The context of work in the local labour market has emerged as the most palpable underlying structural factor shaping those processes. Ongoing and extensive migration to the locality triggered by labour shortages in the industry has gradually led to substantial occupational clustering of the migrants. It has sharpened and cemented the ethnic division of labour within the industry, promoting gradual isolation of the foreign-born population from the local Norwegian community and exposure to their co-ethnics and other migrant groups. In effect, such conditions have deprived migrants of access to vital prerequisites for integration, such as forging social relationships with members of local population or acquisition and practice of the Norwegian language. Moreover, as indicated, those processes may also have a symbolic upshot and consolidate essentialist stereotypes about migrants in the local community.

The position of Polish migrants in the local labour market has laid the foundation for other aspects of processes of social exposures and isolations of the migrants in the locality. As the aggregation of the migrants in a small-sized and depopulating rural community has become high, it has generated disparate conditions for social embeddedness for migrants arriving at different times. Early arrivals have managed to forge close relations with local Norwegian inhabitants. However, those cases illustrate the interaction of the migrants with the local inhabitants, for example, neighbours and landlords, and an active

attitude of the latter. Similarly, having children has been an element exposing migrants to dimensions of social life beyond the labour market. Ongoing migration to the locality has also fostered the development of a local 'migration infrastructure', most notably, co-ethnic associations, which fulfil a vital integrative function enabling migrants to continue their home-country cultural practices. Nevertheless, the in-group social climate has been by and large described and experienced as fragmented and competitive, and linked to the heightened social exposure of the migrants to one another, mostly due to labour market concentration.

The third dimension, the geographic attributes of the rural locale, also play a pivotal role in shaping the processes of social exposures and isolations. The general scarcity of the material structure of the locality, such as the thinness of the rural property market, scattered housing, a narrower offering of local services and limitations in accessing them, and an overall less developed local infrastructure, impose locale-related conditions experienced as burdensome for maintaining social relations. While geographical proximity does not necessarily translate into the development of social relationships (Ruiz-Tagle, 2013), the findings indicate that geographic distance decreases the probability of engaging in social interactions and augments an overall sense of social isolation.

The findings from this study lead to five conclusions concerning the processes of social exposures and social integration of international migrants in rural areas in general. Firstly, it is essential to consider the intersecting impact of the different spheres of social life of migrants and their potential cumulative effect in promoting conditions of not only social exposures but also isolations. Secondly, as international migration to rural areas fuels processes of rural social transformation (McAreavey, 2017; Rye, 2017), it is important to address how it may itself become significant in affecting the exposure–isolation dynamics. Thirdly, inquiring into processes of social exposures–isolations by asking who becomes exposed or isolated, how and why, and what are the corollaries of these processes, may provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of the migrants' situation. Fourthly, the insights presented

above illustrate a spectrum of individual attitudes towards integration ranging from a desire on the part of many migrants for meaningful social relations (Valentine, 2008) with the local non-migrant inhabitants to lack of intention to integrate. Finally, studying the lived experience of the migrants may challenge the state-orchestrated, normative connotations of integration, which do not always appear to align with migrants' needs and expectations. In the case of international rural migration to rural areas, it allows one to view processes of integration as embedded in local environments, with their locally specific challenges and opportunities.

This study does not claim to be extensively generalisable. However, the framework of social exposures and isolations may prove to be a useful perspective for further empirical investigations into the diversity of rural contexts and the experiences they engender (Woods, 2016). Moreover, as international migration triggers a rather rapid socio-demographic change, generating risks of emerging local social stratifications (i.e. Rye, 2014), it is important to assess the longitudinal effects of the international rural migration and integration of migrants. This may be achieved not only through ethnographic returns but also through quantitative studies measuring changes over time. This is perhaps particularly important in cases where migration is not seasonal, and where local conditions lay the ground for the long-term engagement of migrants. Ultimately, such studies could contribute to the development of more tailored integration policies grounded in the lived experience of the migrants.

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ORCID iD

Jakub Stachowski https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8243-8863

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1. In June 2014, a municipality reform aimed at merging of the municipalities and reducing their overall number was launched in Norway. The number of municipalities was first reduced to 422 and subsequently to 356 on 1 January 2020.
2. The current classification of centrality (Nor. Sentralitetsindeks) was introduced in 2018. At that time, the 422 Norwegian municipalities were divided into 13,500 so-called basic statistical units. The index was calculated based on the number of workplaces and service functions (goods and services) that can be accessed from the units by car within 90 minutes.

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