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SOCIAL TIES IN POLISH FAMILIES IN IRELAND:  
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS  
BASED ON OWN RESEARCH IN THE LAST DECADE

INTRODUCTION

Migration, as an intriguing issue, is eagerly researched. This interest is motivated by social mobility (both vertical and horizontal), cultural diffusion, and political-economic alliances. Nowadays, people have greater opportunities (options) to change their place of residence; therefore, migration concerns individuals along with the components of their functioning, such as: economy, resources, social and family ties, recognition of personal preferences or aspirations. Following 1 May 2004, the opportunities for Poles to move have increased as labour markets opened in countries like the United Kingdom and Ireland. Poles eagerly relocated to the British Isles, which offered them much more than their homeland. Additionally, migrants moved to Ireland, which is an attractive country with numerous possibilities of social assistance as well as support for its citizens and immigrant population.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from migration understood as the movement of people who want to realize their aspirations (material, emotional, academic, etc.), it is remarkable from the research point of view to explore the social ties of migrants as well as Polish family members living in Ireland. In this article I will attempt to answer the following questions: How are the bonds between Polish families living in Ireland and Poles in Poland shaped? Do they form close homogenous groups with strong social ties or are they rather open to the Irish community and form weak social ties within their national group? I will also

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<sup>1</sup> “Céad Míle Fáilte,” *Ireland in Brief. A general overview of Ireland’s political, economic and cultural life*, Dublin: Iveagh House, headquarters of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013, p. 29.

attempt to define the term “migration ties” from my own perspective. My reflections are complemented by my research from 2015, 2016, and 2019, as well as the 2021 pilot study, where I employed a variety of approaches – both qualitative and quantitative.

The theme of social ties proves to be significant if we analyze migration. Capturing the social context of social ties, particularly in families in terms of migration, can reveal whether and how migrants are rooted in a foreign society, whether they form separate homogeneous groups, or whether as a result of assimilation processes they enter the multicultural society of the recipient country like Ireland. Therefore, the study of migrants’ social ties is functional, but in the case of migration studies it has the capacity to prove problematic. These difficulties and the low research representativeness in this area might be due to numerous factors. Firstly, this is a complicated topic and requires a considerable amount of work on the part of the researcher. Secondly, migrants are reluctant to participate in research on social ties due to the intimate context of the issue. Thirdly, migrants (particularly in Ireland) are oversaturated with research – it is a relatively minor group of people of Polish descent (in 2020, it accounted for approximately 115 thousand) who are subjected to numerous surveys, which in some measure discourages them from participating. Fourthly, contemporary researchers are focused on immediate research and fast analysis, which is a destructive approach in the case of migration research – not all issues ought to be dealt with using the CAWI method. Migration research (this concerns each study in social sciences) is demanding for both, the researcher and the respondent, as the sample has to be properly selected, a pilot study has to be conducted, data have to be properly verified. Furthermore, social phenomena ought to preferably be studied in two ways – involving combined methods in the field of qualitative sociology along with quantitative sociology, which is quite likely nowadays as resources and time available are limited.

## 1. THE METHODOLOGY OF OUR OWN RESEARCH

Addressing the issue of migrants’ ties, particularly their family and friendship context, allows us to grasp similarly the mechanisms as well as factors of Poles’ departure to foreign country, in addition to it enables us to present the sequence of migrants’ behaviour. In my research, the respondents were Poles in Ireland who constituted a non-representative group, first 461

respondents responding to questionnaires in relation to the implementation of a major project in 2015,<sup>2</sup> which I supplemented with free interviews with community leaders (28 interviews). Later, in 2016, I pursued two themes, one regarding migration pastoral care,<sup>3</sup> and the other a research project on institutional completeness of Polish migrants in Ireland, where the issue of social ties and trust emerged (30 free interviews). An article based on this research has not been published yet for unrelated reasons. In 2019, I researched the families of contemporary migrants in Ireland,<sup>4</sup> particularly the issues of family roles, family structure, via casual interviews. Currently, in 2021, due to difficulties of movement as well as numerous pandemic constraints, I am conducting casual interviews by telephone. By now, I have collected a small amount of 10 interviews with representatives of Polish migrants living in Ireland for the longest period of time that I have been able to reach: all respondents were male, aged between 30 and 63, married, with families. Interestingly, the oldest respondents (aged 55, 60, 61, 63) have families, but their wives live in Poland. I decided not to use CAWI (*Computer-Assisted Web Interviews*).<sup>5</sup> All my research projects were conducted among Poles in Ireland living in Navan, Cavan, Kells, Virginia and Ballyjamesduff. The research was unrepresentative due to its structure and method, therefore the results are specified for the entire Polish community in this country. For the purpose of this article, I will apply the following aspects of all my projects:

1. The situation of families in Ireland: Where are better conditions for family formation and the realisation and function of parenting?

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<sup>2</sup> Research conducted in July as well as August 2015 applying combined methods (quantitative and qualitative), whereas 461 correctly completed questionnaires were collected, and 28 casual interviews with community leaders. M. SZAST, *W Irlandii wygodniej, ale w Polsce lepiej: kapitał społeczno-kulturowy i ocena sytuacji życiowej polskich migrantów w Irlandii*, Lublin: Ośrodek Badań nad Polonią i Duszpasterstwem Polonijnym 2017.

<sup>3</sup> M. SZAST, *Duszpasterstwo migrantów – mechanizm zachowania czy przekraczania granic kulturowych (na przykładzie Polaków w Irlandii)*, "Rocznik Kolbuszowski" 17(2017), p. 209-231.

<sup>4</sup> Casual interviews conducted from 30 July to 15 August 2019 among 15 people – five representatives each: from complete Polish families living in Ireland (nuclear families consisting of parents with one to three children), temporarily separated families (married people) living in Ireland without their families, and unmarried individuals; M. SZAST, *The Contemporary Migrant Family in the Eyes of a Pole in Ireland*, "Studia Polonijne" 41(2020), p. 287-298.

<sup>5</sup> D. MIDER, *Jak badać opinię publiczną w Internecie? Ewaluacja wybranych technik badawczych*, "Przegląd Socjologiczny" 62(2013), no 1, p. 2.

2. Observations and experiences of the respondents regarding relationships between Poles in Ireland: Do we like each other as a nation or not, and how can this be observed?

3. Strategies for Polish families in Ireland: Do Polish families function in the same way or differently to Irish (native) families?

4. Strength of ties: Do we prefer to apply collegial relationships among Poles or do we tend to have multi-cultural social groups given the Polish community in Ireland?

5. Benefits and losses in the area of family functioning: What do Polish families in Ireland lack?

6. Role issues in families: What are the roles of individual members of Polish families in Ireland now? Has anything changed since their arrival?

7. The bonding factors of Polish families in Ireland: What is bonding and what erodes family bonds?

## 2. CONCEPTUALISATION

Migrations imply various effects, both positive and negative. In the area of family, which is the subject of this study, migrations can have negative consequences in terms of family life.<sup>6</sup> Analysing scientific theories on migration, which are more than 100 years old, as indicated by the publication of Ernest George Ravenstein's article "The Laws of Migration" in 1885,<sup>7</sup> which became the first scientific approach to the phenomena of migration, scientific theories have evolved along with the development of the phenomenon of migration, defining in their assumptions various research and scientific perspectives depending on the scientific position adopted by a given scholar.<sup>8</sup> However, these perspectives were dominated by the theme of family, family ties, as indicated by Everett Lee's approach from the mid-1960s. This author focused on explaining the determinants of the migration decision, called *push and pull* factors. According to Lee, decision-making is not individual but also influenced by the family and friends.<sup>9</sup> The new economy

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<sup>6</sup> A. WHITE, *Polish Circular Migration and Marginality: A Livelihood Strategy Approach*, "Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny" 1(2016), p. 155.

<sup>7</sup> E.G. RAVENSTEIN, *The Laws of Migration*, "Journal of the Statistical Society of London" 48(1885), no 2, p. 167-235.

<sup>8</sup> M. ŁUKASIUK, *Obcy w mieście. Migracja do współczesnej Warszawy*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak 2007, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> E. LEE, *A Theory of migration*, „Demography” 3(1966), no 1, p. 56.

of migration (NELM) is significant as well, as it emphasises the collective nature of the decision to depart, taking into account the effects of departure on the primary group, first of all the family.<sup>10</sup> The concept of Thomas Faist<sup>11</sup> treats the family as an economic unit pursuing its own economic policy by means of diversification and risk-avoidance strategies, nominating selected members for various roles within the division of labour, one of which may take on a migratory character. The importance of social networks in the migration process is worth mentioning, as the importance of family networks and social ties forming migration chains among migrants in the country of destination and the country of origin was already recognised in the 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to quote the concept of Mark S. Granovetter (*The Strength of Weak Ties*, 1973). In the author's opinion, strong bonds are intense, intimate social relationships among individuals, emotionally characterised by the observance of norms of reciprocity and socializing. However, in the case of pursuing a job or having a social life (outside the family), weak relations were of greater importance, as they constituted a bridge linking isolated networks based on strong bonds (e.g. family) with a wider social group, constituted a source of new opportunities as well as mobility.<sup>13</sup> The strength of social bonds is considered in the context of the concept of social capital by authors such as Robert Putnam: *bonding capital* and *bridging capital*, i.e. low versus high involvement. This involvement might be considered by means of a number of indicators, e.g. the number of social contacts, the frequency of membership in formal organisations, time spent meeting other people.<sup>14</sup> James Coleman, while considering the concept of social capital, emphasised the importance of social bonds, in addition to norms and values that improve their actions, therefore facilitating the creation of a social community.<sup>15</sup> Much earlier, Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) dealt with the issue of

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<sup>10</sup> D. NIEDŹWIEDZKI, *Migracje i tożsamość. Od teorii do analizy przypadków*, Kraków: Nomos 2010, s. 54.

<sup>11</sup> T. FAIST, *International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces: Their Evolution, Significance and Future Prospects*, Bremen: Bremen Universität 1998, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> See D.S. MASSEY, *The Ethnosurvey in Theory and Practice*, "International Migration Review" 21(1987), no 4, p. 1489-1522.

<sup>13</sup> M.S. GRANOVETTER, *The Strength of Weak Ties*, "American Journal of Sociology" 79(1973), Issue 6, p. 1360-1380.

<sup>14</sup> R.D. PUTNAM, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon&Schuster 2000, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> J.S. COLEMAN, *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*, "The American Journal of Sociology" 1988, no 94, p. 97.

“unity in multiplicity or multiplicity in unity”<sup>16</sup> as community along with association, where social bonds played a significant role: community is the unity of human reason and human will manifested in the natural treatment of relations and bonds between close people, e.g. in the family. Association is a broader, discretionary, formal bond.<sup>17</sup> The type of social bonds generates two different types of social capital – inclusive and exclusive. A social bond constantly unites individuals into one social unit that can have various forms.<sup>18</sup> The existence of a social bond is a constitutive element of a social group along with its cohesion, coordinated values, functioning.<sup>19</sup> Stanisław Ossowski wrote on the subject of distributive or collective bonds.<sup>20</sup> Paweł Rybicki, on the other hand, treated bonds on two levels. The first one is constituted by commonalities and bonds between people defined by blood ties, origin, territory, language as well as culture in its various fields. The second plane is constituted by states and acts of consciousness defined by the feeling of connection with other people as well as dependence manifesting itself in attitudes, behaviours, individual and collective actions.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, three types of bonds were distinguished: natural bonds (e.g. in families, tribal communities, ethnic groups), associative bonds (in social organisations, cooperatives, trade unions, associations) and state bonds (e.g. the state, public schools, prisons).<sup>22</sup> While considering bonding, it is worth emphasising situationism, meaning a state, a position and a place where the moral obligation of the person is an individual challenge posed by unique situations they find themselves in, and what the person must do is an individual, independent decision, grounded in general and universal norms, where the human being is able to reject general norms in order to realise new conditions, unique existential situations on the basis of the supposed “new morality”.<sup>23</sup> The correct depiction of the human situation allows the humanistic factor to be used

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<sup>16</sup> F. TÖNNIES, *Wspólnota i Stowarzyszenie. Rozprawa o komunizmie i socjalizmie jako empirycznych formach kultury*, przekł. M. Łukasiewicz, Warszawa: PWN 1968, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> J. TUROWSKI, *Socjologia. Małe struktury społeczne*, Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL 2001, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> S. OSSOWSKI, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, Warszawa: PWN 1962, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> P. RYBICKI, *Struktura społecznego świata*, Warszawa: PWN 1979, p. 676.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> T. BIESAGA, *Sytuacjonizm etyczny*, [in:] *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, vol. 9, Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu 1995, p. 294.

to describe objects together with situations as perceived by the individual.<sup>24</sup> Wioletta Danielewicz, analysing the life situation of children of migrant families defined the term “life situation” as “a system of mutual relations between a person (subject) and objective properties of his/her own environment at a certain moment of time”.<sup>25</sup>

Taking into account my research, as far back as in 2017 I described an operational definition of relational capital embedded on the basis of components of socio-cultural capital, of which, in addition to trust, values and norms, social (migration) bonds play a crucial role.

Relational capital is the resources and human qualities that an individual or group has access to and accumulates through social interactions as well as trust constructed on the basis of shared norms, values, attitudes along with life goals for the realization of norms of reciprocity and interpersonal cooperation; they determine an individual’s possession of binding or bridging social capital that conditions functioning in a new social space (Ireland) and as a result shapes the attitude of the individual towards the previously made decision to go abroad.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. SOCIAL TIES IN POLISH FAMILIES IN IRELAND: AN ANALYSIS

To set up a framework for further analysis, in this section I will present the results of the research using indicators and constitutive elements of social bonds, e.g. frequency of contact with relatives in Ireland and Poland, trips to Poland, trust. The quantitative data comes from the project conducted in 2015, as it is complemented by statements or qualitative data from the other studies, i.e., 2016, 2019 and 2021.

The analysis of the data ought to begin with inquiries regarding the migration strategy adopted by the respondents, particularly the role of the family in this strategy. It appears (Table 1) that most people among the respondents left homeland on their own. Individuals who came with their families accounted for less than 14%, while less than 9% of the respondents declared they left with friends. This might be due to numerous reasons: Ireland is an insular country and in 2004 travels were mainly by land and sea transport.

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<sup>24</sup> P. SZTOMPKA, *Życie codzienne – temat najnowszej socjologii*, [in:] *Socjologia codzienności*, red. P. Sztompka, M. Bogunia-Borowska, Kraków: Znak 2008, p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> W. DANIELEWICZ, *Sytuacja życiowa w rodzinach migracyjnych*, Białystok: Wydawnictwo Trans Humana 2006, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> M. SZAST, *W Irlandii wygodniej, ale w Polsce lepiej*, p. 54.

Air transport was expensive because of few flights operating. Following 2006, airlines such as Ryanair, AerLingus flew regularly to Poland, where flights, especially by Ryanair, are offered from regional airports. Secondly, Ireland is far from Poland, where family representatives would go to fetch the remaining family members (es evident from my research in 2016 and 2019). A family reunion came later. So according to the study, first immigrants arrived on their own, and the next followed (which is the case of chain migration).

Table 1. Strategy for travelling to Ireland in 2015

	Total		Women		Men	
I left on my own	253	54.9%	107	55.2%	145	54.9%
I left on my own, then took whole family	76	16.5%	22	11.3%	54	20.5%
Departure with the whole family	63	13.7%	39	20.1%	24	9.1%
Departure with some friends/acquaintances	40	8.7%	14	7.2%	26	9.8%
I came alone or with my family to Ireland after a stay in another country	14	3.0%	6	3.1%	6	2.3%
No data	13	2.8%	5	2.6%	8	3.0%
Other (added by respondents)	2	0.4%	1	0.5%	1	0.4%
Total	461	100%	194	100	267	100%

Source: own materials

In addition, the respondents were inquired how frequently and through which channel they maintain contact through with their families in Poland (Table 2). In 2015, they mainly kept in touch via telephone and online. Short text messages were insignificant for them in terms of communication among families. The analysis shows that migrants contacted their relatives in Poland by phone several times a week (37.1%), 15.8% of them phoned daily, while 21.7% contacted numerous times a month. Responses suggesting little or no telephone contact with relatives (once a month, once in a while or not at all) represent only 16.1% of the respondents. The situation is similar if we analyse the results concerning contact with Poland online. According to the data obtained, most people communicated in this way (39.5%, 182 people) many times a week and 19.3% (89 people) every day. About the same number of



people used the Internet for communication several times a month. The remaining responses (once a month, once in a while, not at all, or no data) were simply 21.5%, several times a month – 19.7%. The surveyed Polish migrants in Ireland were characterised by strong relations with their relatives in Poland.

Table 2. The way in which the respondents maintain contact with their family in Poland

	Every day	A few times a week	A few times a month	Once a month	Every once in a while	Not at all	No data
Telephone	73	171	100	30	27	17	43
	15.8%	37.1%	21.7%	6.5%	5.9%	3.7%	9.3%
Internet	89	182	91	20	29	15	35
	19.3%	39.5%	19.7%	4.3%	6.3%	3.3%	7.6%
Text message	63	111	62	24	55	50	96
	13.7	24.1%	13.4%	5.2%	11.9%	10.8%	20.9%

Source: own materials

It is vital to obtain information regarding frequency, intensity of relations as well as family trips (visits) in Poland and frequency of visiting Poles in Ireland by their families from homeland. According to the research, the vast majority of respondents visited their relatives 2–3 times a year or more frequently (62.5%). Slightly fewer respondents visited their family only once a year or not at all (35.10%); no data for 2.4%. In addition, it was decided to inquire whether the respondents were visited by their relatives living in Poland. According to the data obtained from the analysis of the responses, the situation is reversed, as 66.2% of the respondents were visited once or not at all by guests from Poland, while 29.1% of the respondents (134 persons) received their relatives 2–3 or more times a year. 4.7% were missing answers or incorrectly ticked boxes in the survey questionnaire.

Poles acquire peace and quiet as well as miss home, the warmth of the house, name days, birthdays, traditions etc. Apparently there are companies and shops here however it's not the same (male, 60, 10 years in Ireland).

Do Poles frequently go home? Sure, very often, you can see it from the packed planes, you can hear Polish everywhere at the airports. I myself am in Poland

twice a year, my family is also with me two or three times, so we often visit (17/33/M/11/17).<sup>27</sup>

What do they miss? Usually family relations, because it often happens that as families with children who have grandparents can, once a year (or when they can afford it) bring a grandma and grandpa, who are retired, for two or three months. This is probably what they miss the most – these family bonds, which are the strongest in Poland. There are even situations, like today's Holy Mass, where a man comes to request a Mass because his grandmother has died, and they cannot afford to fly the whole family, so only the wife has flown, because it was her mother, and the father stayed with the children. They will pray here so I think that's what they miss the most (male, 32, two years in Ireland).<sup>28</sup>

Table 3. Trust indicators in migrant families

	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Difficult to say	Rather no	Definitely no	No data
If someone in your family in Poland lets down on an important matter, should you give it a second chance?	133	245	56	8	5	14
	28.9%	53.1%	12.1%	1.7%	1.1%	3.0%
I feel conflicted with my family in Poland	29	18	63	109	209	33
	6.3%	3.9%	13.7%	23.6%	45.3%	7.2%
I miss my family and friends from Poland in Ireland	209	130	55	13	14	40
	45.3%	28.2%	11.9%	2.8%	3.0%	8.7%
I miss my favourite places in Ireland that bring memories of Poland	172	122	62	52	18	35
	37.1%	26.5%	13.4%	11.3%	3.9%	7.6%
I am not afraid of betrayal by my wife, husband, fiancée, partner living in Poland	94	62	55	58	124	68
	20.4%	13.4%	11.9%	12.6%	26.9%	14.7%
I don't know much about the people who surround me in Ireland	59	114	129	85	33	41
	12.8%	24.7%	28.0%	18.4%	7.1%	8.9%

Source: own calculations

The frequency of contacts is associated with relations between members of migrant families, therefore a further inquiry was necessary to obtain responses concerning each other's reliability among migrant family members. The question was if the respondents should give another chance to a family

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 125.

member after being let down. The vast majority responded in the affirmative (a combination of *definitely yes*, 28.9%, and *rather yes*, 53.1%). The opposite view was expressed by 2.8% of respondents, who said that the family member should not count on a second chance. In addition, the opinion of respondents on whether they are in conflict with their family in Poland seems to be significant. According to the collected data, the respondents were not in conflict with their families living in Poland, 45.3% chose *definitely no*, and 23.6% *rather not*, which overall shows 72.5% of such responses. No more than 47 people had a conflict with their relatives (a combination of *rather yes* and *definitely yes* responses).

Did the respondents in Ireland miss their family? The response to this question was *yes*: 45.3% of respondents definitely missed their family, 28.2% *rather did*. Approximately 12% of respondents (55 people) did not care what they thought, at the same time barely 27 people said they did not miss their family or relatives. People from families or temporarily separated families miss each other, send parcels by courier, write, call online or bring relatives for holidays, then go to Poland with them. "You have to organise your life in a way to make it work," said Wojciech who has lived in Ireland for 15 years.<sup>29</sup>

Other than the family, Polish respondents living in the Emerald Island longed for their favourite places there that brought memories of their homeland (63.8%), at the same time 39.5% of respondents were of the opposite opinion. No opinion was expressed by 13.4%, while no data was provided by 7.6% of the surveyed.

Trust is measured with various indicators. In the present research, the author resolved to apply a rather controversial trust indicator, which is asking about the fidelity of the life partner, wife or husband. The lack of data might be due to the intimate nature of the question, which the respondents would not necessarily like to respond to. In this case the responses were divided, as the largest percentage of respondents did not fear for the infidelity of their partners (wives or husbands) – 39.6%, 33.7% feared for their partners' infidelity, no data was provided by 14.7%, and 12.0% chose the option *Difficult to say*.

According to the data obtained, 12.8% of respondents knew little on the subject of people around them, rather nothing about their neighbours (24.7%), which shows a total of 37.5% of negative replies. On the other hand, 7.2% of respondents definitely had some knowledge about their neighbours and

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<sup>29</sup> M. SZAST, *The Contemporary Migrant Family*, p. 291.

people from their neighbourhood, while 18.4% knew their neighbors. As many as 170 people would not share their thoughts on this issue (36.9%). The vast majority of respondents could count on support from their friends and family living in Ireland; at the same time it turns out that 112 people (24.3%) could not rely on any assistance from friends in their country of origin. When asked: "Does anyone look after your flat or house in Poland while you are away from home?," 29.5% of the respondents were not taking care of their flat or house because they had sold it. 65.7% of them had placed their flat or house in the hands of the family or friends, or it was rented out (19; 4.1%), and 3 stated: "I do not have my own flat in Poland; I lived with my parents; I do not have a flat."

TV channels watched by Poles in Ireland are: TVN, TVP (1 and 2), Polsat, TVP Polonia, Polsat News, Silesia, Republika, TVP Info, TV Trwam. Portals and websites they use form a long list of names around the following: Wirtualna Polska, Onet, Facebook, Interia, niezalezna.pl, deon.pl, gazeta.pl, radiomaryja.pl, TVP Info news, TVN24. pl, SE.pl, telewizjarepublika.pl, gazetapolska.pl, Wprost.pl, Newsweek.pl, polskieradio.pl, wpolityce.pl. The extended research procedure made it possible to capture the sources where cultural information was derived from: TV (TVP Info) – 23.8%, Internet – 27.3%, friends – 7.0%, family – 8.4%, the press – 2.8%; no answer was provided by as many as 51.0% of the respondents

We are interested in what is going on in Poland, we watch Polish TV, even if someone speaks English they watch Polish TV, we have decoders and we are up to date; I think that things in Polish politics are not well managed and if nothing changes, no one will praise the country and politicians. They have sold their property, there are no workplaces, they throw people abroad and they live off our money – it is us who generate profits and lower unemployment, not the politicians who care about our fate. Everyone takes care of their own business. We have a grudge, which you can hear when you talk to people, against politicians in Poland, that they do not care about us, they do not respect our work. We, Poles who had to leave, we have a grudge (male, 33, 11 years in Ireland).<sup>30</sup>

Three quarters of respondents expressed their interest in Polish traditions as well as rituals significant to them. The vast majority of respondents (76.6%) use Polish institutions in Ireland. Poles living in the Emerald Island mainly use Polish shops. There are many Polish shopkeepers in Ireland – if

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<sup>30</sup> M. SZAST, *W Irlandii wygodniej, ale w Polsce lepiej*, p. 130.

you drive along the streets of any Irish town, you notice signs or advertisements written in Polish. Apart from that, Poles use the services of courier companies; what is more, they declare to be using the services of Polish doctors. They discovered the existence and functioning of Polish institutions in Ireland mainly from friends and acquaintances (266 people, 57.7%), from the Internet (60 people, 13%), from Polish media operating in Ireland (56, 12.1%) and 92 respondents (19.5%) noticed advertisements of Polish institutions in the streets.

The vast majority of respondents who participated in the research have friends of Polish descent in Ireland. 73.6% of respondents have more than one Polish friend in Ireland, 23.4% own no Polish friends in Ireland, and 2.8% provided no information. The issue of trust is complicated to validate, especially when it comes to trusting a Polish neighbour. It is noted that the respondents possessed their own property in Ireland (a car or a flat); however, the majority of the respondents expressed no opinion on whether they would entrust such property to a Polish neighbour – 48.4% without a concern, 40.5% trust Poles implicitly, whereas only about a tenth of the respondents (9.5%) would categorically not do it.

Following this line of thinking, the idea was to obtain information on who the surveyed Poles spent their free time and weekends with. According to the obtained data, 299 respondents (64.9%) would spend time with Poles living in Ireland, who were their families as well as people close to their families. No more than 117 people (25.4%) spent leisure time and weekends in the company of Irish people or people of further ethnic groups living in the country. 1.2% of respondents said that they spent their leisure time with their family along with “depending on the situation”. 8.5% of the respondents expressed no opinion. Barely one third of the Poles participating in the survey showed an interest in Irish culture, with the majority of respondents having difficulty stating own opinion on the subject. A single community leader in 2015 stated that:

They are not a community here. Poles who have come here make a decision individually or as a family, these are not groups of Poles who leave Poland, who are employed here by some company that gives them a job or by an organisation that is set up for them to settle an area or perform some task or be part of some project. These are individual decisions and these people function as individuals or form ad hoc groups as groups of residents renting a flat together or giving a lift to each other – usually groups of up to 8 people plus friends. These groups are formed for practical reasons, to solve basic problems, i.e. to find out where to

get a job, rent a flat, spend a weekend, and often the cooperation of such a group ends in an unsophisticated way. Now there are more ambitious individuals, who are able to organise themselves around ideas, around programmes of a political or cultural nature, or, as we have seen, around a pastoral centre. In my opinion, they go to the Catholic Church and the team of chaplains who run the chaplaincy in this area, out of the 120 thousand Poles we have in Ireland, it can be said that about 6 thousand Poles attend mass every Sunday, so it is a small group, but most people are united around a religious idea, and other groups are much, much smaller, which are active in the area, they would be groups connected with running a Saturday school or other general Polish cultural centres. In different places they are very fragmented, it often happens that they are groups of people or ambitious individuals who try to run it with their own efforts, but it often consists of bringing politicians, activists from Poland, music bands from Poland who sometimes come, but these are rare occasions, not on such a wide scale as in Poland (male, 60, 10 years in Ireland).<sup>31</sup>

At this point it will be useful to devote some time to analysing the balance of profits and losses of migration of the respondents in Ireland as regards their family life, the most intimate and private sphere of life of each person (Table 4). It was assumed that there would be a high non-response rate at the initial stage of the study. To my astonishment, however, the non-response rates are at an acceptable level. One fifth of the respondents positively assessed intimate marital relations after leaving the country, whereas negative assessments of leaving were marked by numerous respondents. Approximately, one fifth of the respondents did not notice any changes (unmarried, single, maiden, widowers and clergymen).

Another aspect in this area of research was to identify the opinion of respondents on the durability of family bonds. The collected data is balanced, in the sense that a quarter of the surveyed migrants evaluated the changes positively, whereas more than a third of them provided a negative evaluation in this respect. A further issue concerned the relationship of the children of respondents with their grandparents. In this case, the majority of respondents gave a negative assessment of their situation. No more than 12.8% of them provided a positive opinion. The final stage is to express an opinion on the possibility of reconciling household duties with professional work. At this point the responses were balanced in terms of affirmative and negative evaluations. The detailed distribution of responses is presented in the table below (no data on gender differences).

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

Table 4. Respondents' assessment of family life

TOTAL	INTIMATE MARITAL RELATIONS					
	Favourable changes in favour	Unfavourable changes	No changes	Hard to say	Situation does not concern me	No data
N = 461	102	165	89	24	63	18
100%	22.1%	35.8%	19.3%	5.2%	13.7%	3.9%
TOTAL	TOTAL PERMANENCE OF FAMILY TIES					
	Favourable changes in favour	Unfavourable changes	No changes	Hard to say	Situation does not concern me	No data
N = 461	113	157	103	35	17	36
100%	24.5%	34.1%	22.3%	7.6%	3.7%	7.8%
TOTAL	YOUR CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR GRANDPARENTS					
	Favourable changes in favour	Unfavourable changes	No changes	Hard to say	Situation does not concern me	No data
N = 461	59	192	88	32	68	22
100%	12.8%	41.6%	19.1%	6.9%	14.8%	4.8%
TOTAL	TOTAL ABILITY TO RECONCILE HOUSEHOLD DUTIES AND PROFESSIONAL WORK					
	Favourable changes in favour	Unfavourable changes	No changes	Hard to say	Situation does not concern me	No data
N = 461	132	130	108	44	27	20
100%	28.6%	28.2%	23.4%	9.5%	5.9%	4.3%

Source: own calculations

As inquired on the subject of the benefits and losses of departing to Ireland, individual respondent (male, 35, eight years in Ireland) said:

Where do you think are better conditions to exist and develop and why?

Definitely here, as we earn money here, make money here and spend money in Poland, there is a good start here even though the work is hard and separation from loved ones makes itself present<sup>32</sup>.

If things were different in Ireland, there wouldn't be so many Poles here, with families and children. I think there are a few of them that don't leave at all, although it is said and heard in conversations. I feel good here, and so do my

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 135.

friends, although I miss the ones we were close to in Poland, but we have the Internet, mobile phones, Skype, and we are able to contact each other. Nowadays everyone is capable of moving at any time and live wherever they want. In Poland, I lived with my parents and grandparents in one small flat in Szczecin, and here, we have a house, a real big house with a floor, everyone has their own corner, which we didn't have in Poland, I didn't even dream about it. We also have a car, we go on holidays, I have nice clothes and we eat well. I think that explains a lot (female, aged 22, five years in Ireland).

...tax allowances, also between these two countries in terms of social life is better... you live like in the west, peacefully without such fear. The fear of tax relations (female, aged 18, nine years in Ireland).<sup>33</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

To sum up our analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from our research, we can say that the respondents in vast majority visit their relatives in Poland frequently, while their relatives visit them once a year, which does not imply that they may not count on assistance from the family or friends in difficult moments of their lives. The respondents owned decent and intimate relations with their relatives, which is confirmed by the frequency of mutual contacts by means of various media. The strength of the relationship of the respondents with their relatives and Poland was evidenced by indicators such as the lack of liquidation of bank accounts in Poland, unregistered departure to the parish office as well as living and maintaining contact mainly with Poles in Ireland. Most of the respondents were not interested in participation in the Irish society; nor did they care about politics and participation in elections in Ireland. Respondents generally spent their leisure time among friends or family of Polish descent, had moderate trust in Poles in Ireland, attended Catholic churches mainly led by Polish pastors. The majority of respondents were indifferent in obtaining Irish citizenship, nor did they acquire a loan or credit in Ireland.

So the main reason for your arrival and others is mainly money?

Mostly yes, but they don't come here for the love of climate or lack of forests – mostly. I think that people who come to Ireland do so purely for economic reasons, to earn a certain amount of money as quickly as possible and to fulfil their

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<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 223.



plans and tasks in Poland. I don't think Ireland is a nice country, it is friendly in terms of people and salaries, but a Pole feels bad here because of the weather, the climate, void in his heart, the separation and the lack of his roots. Besides, I think that a lot of people stay in Ireland for a simple reason: they are people who have no other prospects in Poland, that is, they don't have their own capital which would determine their future (family, farm, house, etc.) and they decide to stay in Ireland permanently. He stays in Ireland permanently for the lack of prospects and living conditions in the country, together with his family. In that case Poles buy homes, start families and try to live normal lives, sending their children to school. I personally know of only a few families who wish to do this, the others return, consider returning or have already returned to their homeland. However, the majority of people return to Ireland because the earnings in Poland did not guarantee them a living and fulfilling their needs. People get used to higher salaries and, taught by the steady pay, they are not able to adapt to the domestic labour market where low earnings and exploitation is prevalent, things that are not felt in Ireland (male, 35, seven years in Ireland).<sup>34</sup>

The research confirms that respondents mainly contacted each other online and by phone and the frequency of this contact is intensive.

In conclusion, our respondents maintain relatively intensive contact with their relatives. A vast majority of them travel to Poland two or three times a year or even more frequently.

They concentrate on the aspect of social bonds connecting Poles, especially strong bonds of ethnic and national character. These bonds are predicted by close relations, frequent meetings among family, close friends or acquaintances of Polish descent. It is evidenced by the presence of migration networks and migration chains. Entire situation seems bizarre, as nowadays it would seem that computer networks will substitute face-to-face contacts and strong emotional bonds, however in the case of the respondents in Ireland, the atrophy of relations did not occur. Importantly, even in the midst of the pandemic crisis, the respondents pointed to the support as well as unifying power of families in surviving a difficult situation in this country. Thus, social networks based on culture, kinship, the biological construct of human functioning, have proven themselves. A further element of the mosaic of relations are institutions, e.g. shops, services (legal, educational, hairdressing, compensation offices, etc.), which are willingly used by compatriots (surprisingly, if migrants speak decent English, they prefer to go to a Pole – this presents trust in people of Polish descent. These services are less expensive

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<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 137.

than Irish services. The occurrence of strong bonds and relations can be observed, thus social capital of a binding type directed at relations with Poland as well as relations with a group of Poles living in Ireland. In addition, a large percentage (about 25%) of the respondents represent the characteristics of bridging capital: they are well educated, fluent in foreign languages, working or studying in a cross-cultural environment. They are expected to stay in Ireland permanently. In turn, my assumptions from 2015 and 2016 regarding the selection of the number of people who will settle permanently in Ireland are gradually clarifying, as individuals characterised by strong bonds of an ethnic nature during the pandemic sought to return to Poland. At this instant, according to my research and my observations, a large number of people of Polish origin abandoned Ireland in 2020 and 2021, that is, departed with whole families. The pandemic accelerated their decision to leave. Previously, as they argued, their children were attending school, they were finalising investments in Poland (building a house, buying a flat) or earning money to start own business. Currently, the situation is gaining momentum, with considering the current statistics in the cities I have been observing regularly since 2007 (the central part of the country), about 25% of people of Polish origin have departed. The Polish group has been replaced by Bulgarians, Lithuanians or Ukrainians. This trend might be related to a certain degree of material saturation, which will make it possible to realise various intentions in the country of origin or to emigrate to a further country. One of my respondents, Jerzy, put it this way:

I came from Szczecin in 2006; at the time, I had nothing but a flat in Poland. My wife and I work here, we've brought up our daughter, who's finishing her studies in Ireland, and I want to buy a house in Spain when I retire. I will leave the flat in Poland for myself (Jerzy, 53, in Ireland with his family since 2006).

The roles of individual family members have altered to some extent as well. A fascinating trend has been observed: since the observation period (2007), the role of a woman, a wife, next to her husband has altered. It used to be that women were the keepers of the home, bringing up children, taking care of the house or the husband, so they rarely worked. There was paradoxically a joke among Irish postmen that a person could recognise a Polish home by its three attributes: well-kept shoes in the hall, the smell of home-made dinner or a cake, and a "Cyfrowy Polsat" satellite dish on the build-

ing.<sup>35</sup> Now women are working more frequently: the children have grown up and become independent, and they have gone to school and university; women have dare to work for their own development, as well for financial reasons, since life in Ireland is expensive.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, household budgets have not tightened since 2016 as they were in 2008 (the economic crisis of 2008/09), price rises, additional charges, and tributes appeared. Inflation and increase in wealth is identified in this country as well, which in a way forces Polish women to modify roles as well as concept of latest social roles. A further modification is the fact that children of Polish origin who were educated in Irish schools are succeeding in their professional lives in this country. “In Poland, there is still a belief that parents have to take care of their children’s education – Polish children in Ireland are more independent and resourceful in this respect” (Wiesław, 61, in Ireland since 2005). There are numerous similar examples, such as one recorded by a Pole, Jerzy, who educated his only daughter in Ireland and as a result she is independent as well.

First I came alone, then I brought my wife with my daughters (two of them). We waited for the girls to finish middle school. They went to secondary school in Ireland, they knew the language and their level of knowledge was good enough to cope. They were already earning extra money in high school and immediately went to study in Dublin. They both work professionally and help us. In Poland, we have our house and our daughters don’t know where they will start their lives. They are independent and take care of us. It is nice (male, 61, in Ireland since 2006 and with the whole family since 2009).

Unfortunately, the migration and change of living conditions of Poles are unfortunate for the durability of marriages: numerous marriages get divorced, this is clearly audible while talking to Polish migrants in Ireland.<sup>37</sup> It is not known whether this is a general trend in the atrophy and shallowness of marital relations; nowadays an increasing percentage of marriages are dissolved by divorce, however a vast trend of betrayals among Poles can be noticed. The respondents describe unpleasant situations and provide numerous instances when youthful people arrived to acquire money for a flat, wedding or a house and their relationship withstand the test of time in a foreign country. This might result from being more courageous in expressing oneself, likes and dislikes, lack of tolerance for certain behaviours (unfortunately

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 267.

<sup>36</sup> M. SZAST, *The Contemporary Migrant Family*, p. 293.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

Poles drink a lot of alcohol), which caused many ambiguities as well as relationship breakdowns.<sup>38</sup> Besides, there is a problem with more and more frequent burials of Poles as a result of their deaths. One migrant describes the situation in 2020 as follows (August, 63, in Ireland since 2004):

After the outbreak of the pandemic people were living in madness. Some were working normally and regularly (like me), others were closed at home. One Polish man, younger than me, couldn't stand it and hanged himself. Recently (2 July 2021), we had an unpleasant situation at work because the husband of a Polish woman working for us in our plant died of a heart attack at the age of 50. One of the Polish women, the head of the department in the plant, brought her parents to Ireland so that when they retired they could see the world, take care of their grandchildren and have better contact with their daughter and her family. It turned out that the mother couldn't bear being separated from Poland and died ... so they say, in unexplained circumstances. There was a contribution at work for masses, and the corpse was transported to Poland. It all took place in a town where there used to be over 500 Poles, now there are maybe 200 of us. I know what I'm talking about, because I was one of the first in this town, I lived in the company flats with Blacks, and now there is no one left from this team.... They all went to Africa and to Poland.

Polish families miss: bread (although you can purchase Polish bread, it is not identical), the warmth of family holidays (you can travel, but nowadays it is complicated), traditions (in each region there are special customs as well as habits related to religious, cultural, regional or occasional rituals).<sup>39</sup> The standard of living of Polish people in Ireland is believe it or not excellent in comparison to that in their country of origin.<sup>40</sup> It is motivating that Poles are able to afford more, not only everyday life but also hobbies, passions, gadgets, footwear.

When I lived in Poland and worked in the budget sector, I used to get "self-arranged countryside holidays" to patch up a hole in my budget. Now, I don't have a holiday allowance, because I don't need it, our salaries are high enough to afford holidays in Poland, holidays in warm countries and many other allowances. In Poland, I used to go to work in a shirt, here I go in a T-shirt. Salaries are rising and in Ireland too (male, 55, in Ireland since 2005).

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<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 292.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 294.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 293.

Families of Poles who stayed in their country of origin should not be forgotten as the transfer of money is observed on this level as well. One of the respondents said:

thanks to his work in Ireland, he renovated his house, his children (three of them) finished their studies, each of them has their own house or flat... had it not been for his work in Ireland, maybe my children would not have had any help from me and they would have had to manage on their own. They were better off, but I'm happy that they are already on their own (male, 63, in Ireland since 2004).

Interestingly, when inquired about intimate matters of infidelity, men in pre-retirement age stated they were faithful as a result their marriages stood the test of time. Wives resided in Poland, looked after the home and brought up children, they visited each other, spent holidays together and these marriages continue. Perhaps it is the age, maturity and awareness that determines the duration of love and bonds, or perhaps it is the habit of women to live comfortably and men to own a "haven" in Poland. Perhaps it is a mutual arrangement? Nobody has researched this so far, which is a pity, as it is worth it.

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SOCIAL TIES IN POLISH FAMILIES IN IRELAND: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS  
BASED ON OWN RESEARCH IN THE LAST DECADE

Summary

This article focuses on the concept of social ties in Polish families living in Ireland. It is not sufficiently represented in research work on economic emigration, especially post-accession emigration to Ireland, considering the context of the functioning of a modern migrant in their interpersonal space. It is important that the life of modern man is shaped by lots of interpersonal interactions in the social space, too. Yet, more important are interactions in the families from which the migrants come, in which they function or with whom they want to function. After opening the labor market to citizens of the new EU member states in 2004, Ireland hired the largest number of workers from the EU-8 countries. This approach was defined and analyzed on the basis of the group of respondents who were post-accession migrants in Ireland (N 461) in the research survey conducted in July and August of 2015 in Ireland and based on the 2016 and 2019 qualitative surveys on families in Ireland. Three research projects were analyzed. Therefore, the main subject of the article is to draw the reader's attention to the issues of interpersonal relations and the im-

portance of the family in the minds of the respondents, who were migrants. The research contains interesting, from the point of view of a sociologist, information on the preferences of Polish migrants in the field of shaping family relationships, the strength of family ties and the social roles performed based on these. The collected data show that there is a change in the functioning of the modern family, especially in the context of its functions, the roles of family members as well as openness to its alternative forms, but these changes are not significant enough to speak of a transformation of the nuclear family.

**Keywords:** family; migrations; social ties.

WIĘZI SPOŁECZNE W POLSKICH RODZINACH W IRLANDII:  
ANALIZA PORÓWNAWCZA NA PODSTAWIE BADAŃ WŁASNYCH  
Z OSTATNIEJ DEKADY

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł skupia uwagę czytelnika na ujęciu więzi społecznych w rodzinach polskich mieszkających w Irlandii. Problematyka ta nie jest dostatecznie reprezentowana w pracach badawczych odnośnie do emigracji zarobkowej, zwłaszcza emigracji poakcesyjnej do Irlandii, jako kontekstu funkcjonowania współczesnego migranta w przestrzeni międzyludzkiej. Istotne jest to, że życie współczesnego człowieka kształtują miliony interakcji międzyludzkich: w przestrzeni społecznej, a nade wszystko w rodzinach, z których migranci pochodzą, w których funkcjonują lub z którymi funkcjonować chcą. Po otwarciu rynku pracy dla obywateli nowych państw Unii Europejskiej w 2004 r. Irlandia przyjęła największą liczbę pracowników krajów UE-8. Podejście niniejsze zostało określone i poddane analizie na podstawie grupy respondentów, którymi byli migranci poakcesyjni w Irlandii (N 461) w badaniu ankietowym przeprowadzonym w lipcu oraz sierpniu 2015 r. w Irlandii, oraz na podstawie badań jakościowych z lat 2016 i 2019 nt. rodzin w Irlandii. Dokonano analizy trzech projektów badawczych. Głównym tematem artykułu jest zatem zwrócenie uwagi czytelnika na problematykę relacji interpersonalnych i znaczenie rodziny w świadomości badanych–migrantów. Badania zawierają interesujące, z punktu widzenia socjologa, informacje odnośnie do preferencji migrantów polskich w zakresie kształtowania relacji rodzinnych, sile więzi rodzinnych i na ich podstawie realizowanych ról społecznych. Zgromadzone dane ukazują, że następuje zmiana w zakresie funkcjonowania współczesnej rodziny, zwłaszcza w kontekście jej funkcji, ról członków, jak również otwartości na jej alternatywne formy, ale zmiany te nie są aż tak znaczące, aby mówić o transformacji rodziny nuklearnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzina; migracje; więzi społeczne.