

Integration of Immigrants into the Host Society: Participation in Traditions, Holidays, Celebrations and Cultural Life

ABSTRACT

This article presents the problem of immigrant integration in Poland, which was investigated in a 2022 diagnostic survey of 56 immigrants living in Krakow. The respondents were asked about their opinions on participating in Polish holidays and traditions, introducing their Polish friends to the customs and traditions of their culture and participating in Polish cultural life (Polish cinema, theatre, exhibitions and concerts). The analysis revealed that the vast majority of the respondents (approx. 70%–80%) integrate with the host society to a high degree. The vast majority of the respondents (nearly 90%) claimed that they familiarize their Polish friends with their national culture. Sixty-five percent of the respondents claimed that they participate in Polish cultural life very often or often. However, it is still necessary to support this group of immigrants, who have problems with integration, so there is a need to modify integration policies and introduce intercultural education in schools and universities to a greater degree.

KEYWORDS

integration, immigrants, host society, Polish society, cultural life, traditions, holidays, celebrations

Introduction

Contemporary migration is most often analyzed in the context of globalization. One of the basic rights of participants in the emerging global community is the right to move from one society

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to another and to remain there, at least temporarily, with the rights of the local population and with the possibility of returning without significant loss of one's rights. A derivative of this entitlement is the preservation of one's own culture and participation in various forms of mixed culture that include at least some elements of one's own culture (Urry 2009: 239). Globalization results in a cultural exchange that proceeds much faster than ever before. Immigrants not only learn and adopt elements of the dominant culture in the host society, but they also share their culture. We call this phenomenon interculturalism.

Social integration of immigrants in the scholarly literature

From the point of view of sociology, integration refers to the processes of unifying components and parts into a single whole. In a society, integration processes include all those interactions between constituent parts or groups that lead to their association, cooperation, adjustment or conflict resolution (Turowski 1993: 129). When referring to integration in the case of host society–immigrant relationships, one usually means integrating a new element into the existing social system, and this integration should take place in such a way that the extended system continues to function harmoniously and effectively (Koryś 2022).

The integration of immigrants requires the host country to create conditions for them to be genuinely included in various areas of social life: normative and legal (the legal status of immigrants), economic (employment), as well as institutional, educational and cultural. In turn, it requires that immigrants recognize the basic values and norms of the new society of residence and to actively engage in social contact, build social ties—including ones outside their ethnic group—and make use of the goods and services made available by the state and its institutions (Plewko 2010: 179).

The most frequently used indicators of social integration are grouped as follows (Ekspertyza 2007: 98–99):

1. those related to the attitude of the majority society towards the immigrant group:

- attitudes of the host society towards the immigrants' participation in various areas of social, economic, cultural and political life
 - the Bogardus social distance scale, which measures the degree to which immigrants are accepted in diverse social roles
 - public attitudes towards immigrants—tolerant and open or closed-minded—and orientation towards assimilation or multiculturalism
 - alienation test, a modified Dean's three-dimensional alienation scale (consisting of three scales exploring powerlessness, normality and isolation)
2. those related to social relationships with the original society:
 - maintaining bonds with the family and friends who remain in the country of origin
 3. those related to social relationships with the host society
 - bonds within the host society: the closest family (husband/wife and children), relations and friends (immigrants or members of the host society)
 - the immigrant's spending of free time with members of the host society and with people of a nationality different to their own
 - the extent of the immigrant's contact at work with residents of the host country and with people of a nationality different to their own
 - marrying members of the host society
 4. those related to participation in social organizations:
 - joining organizations (associations, clubs, faith groups, etc.) of the host society
 - forming and participating in ethnic associations and their orientation towards the society of origin or the host society.

Methodology of the research

A total of 56 foreigners living in Poland took part in the 2022 study carried out by means of a diagnostic survey with an electronic questionnaire. Half of the respondents (n=28) were women and the other half were men (n=28). The respondents mainly resided in large cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (n=31, 55.3%) and

medium-sized cities ($n=19$, 33.9%); only a few lived in villages ($n=6$, 10.8%). The respondents were aged between 21 and 43 years, and had been in Poland for between 5 months and 13 years. Seventeen people (30.4%) had lived here from 5 to 11 months, 16 (28.6%) from 1 to 2 years, 14 (25.0%) from 3 to 5 years and 9 (16.0%) from 6 to 13 years.

The group of immigrants consisted of Indian people ($n=13$, 23.2%), Turks ($n=12$, 21.4%), Ukrainians ($n=9$, 16.0%), Slovaks ($n=7$, 12.5%), Egyptians ($n=4$, 7.1%), Nigerians ($n=2$, 3.5%), Algerians ($n=2$, 3.5%), Italians ($n=2$, 3.5%) and Frenchmen ($n=2$, 3.5%). The Catholic religion was declared by 9 respondents (16.0%), while the remaining group declared adhering to Protestantism, Islam, Sikhism or Hinduism. The respondents' education was as follows: university degree (35%), incomplete university education (18%), post-secondary education (17%), secondary education (16%) and vocational school (14%).

The research problem was the degree to which the surveyed immigrants integrated into the host society, i.e. the society in Poland. In order to achieve the intended research goal and answer the research question, the following indicators were defined: Participation in Christmas, Participation in Easter, Participation in Polish name days, Participation in Polish birthdays, Participation in Polish weddings, Participation in Polish baptisms, Participation in Polish funerals, Participation in a Mass in a Roman Catholic church, Cultivation of one's national customs and traditions, Making one's Polish friends familiar with customs and traditions characteristic of one's culture and Participation in Polish cultural life (Polish cinema, theatre, exhibitions and concerts by Polish artists).

Results of the research

An extremely important factor in the integration of immigrants is participating in the traditions of the host country, including festivals and holidays. In Poland, many traditions are connected with Christianity, and especially Catholicism. Those traditions are related to celebrating Christmas, Easter, baptisms, weddings and funerals, which are usually religious ceremonies. However, secular traditions are also celebrated, e.g. birthdays, name days, wedding parties,

St Andrew's Eve, New Year's Eve, "garlands," etc. The respondents were asked whether they participate in Christmas according to Catholic tradition. The answers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participation in Christmas

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	once	32	57,1	57,1	57,1
	no	6	10,7	10,7	67,9
	yes, many times	18	32,1	32,1	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

The study shows that as many as 89.3% of the respondents had attended Christmas celebrated in the Catholic tradition at least once; 32.1% of the immigrants had done so more than once and 57.1% exactly once. This results from the fact that a large part of the respondents (almost 60%) had been living in Poland for up to two years.

Another important Polish festival is Easter, so the respondents were asked about their participation in it. The answers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participation in Easter

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	once	32	57,1	57,1	57,1
	no	6	10,7	10,7	67,9
	yes, many times	18	32,1	32,1	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

The answer to this question yielded exactly the same data as that for Christmas, i.e. 89.3% of the respondents had participated at least once in Easter celebrations according to Catholic tradition; another 32.1% of the immigrants had attended Easter more than once and 57.1% exactly once.

Table 3. Participation in Polish name days

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	once	32	57,1	57,1	57,1
	no	8	14,3	14,3	71,4
	yes, many times	16	28,6	28,6	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

Table 3 shows that the vast majority of the respondents had participated in Polish name days more than once: 57.1% had participated in such an event once and 28.6% did so many times. Very similar answers were obtained for the question about Polish birthday parties (57.1% participated once and 37.5% many times). The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Participation in Polish birthday parties

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	once	32	57,1	57,1	57,1
	no	3	5,4	5,4	62,5
	yes, many times	21	37,5	37,5	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

Also, many respondents had participated in a Polish wedding party. This data is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Participation in a Polish wedding party

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	once	32	57,1	57,1	57,1
	no	17	30,4	30,4	87,5
	yes, many times	7	12,5	12,5	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

The majority of the respondents (57.1%) had attended a wedding once, while 12.5% had done so more than once. Very similar answers appeared for the next question, concerning Polish baptisms. In this case, 57.1% of the respondents also declared attending such a ceremony once and 10.7% multiple times. The exact figures are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Participation in Polish baptisms

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	once	32	57,1	57,1	57,1
	no	18	32,1	32,1	89,3
	yes, many times	6	10,7	10,7	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

The respondents were also asked about attending Polish funerals. Their participation was less frequent than in the case of the previous ceremonies. Only 21.4% of the respondents reported that they had attended a Polish funeral once, and 3.6% stated that they had attended more than one. The detailed data is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Participation in a Polish funeral

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	once	12	21,4	21,4	21,4
	no	42	75,0	75,0	96,4
	yes, many times	2	3,6	3,6	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

The majority of the respondents had also participated in a Roman Catholic Mass: 60.7% once and 28.6% many times. The detailed data is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Participation in a Roman Catholic Mass

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	once	34	60,7	60,7	60,7
	no	6	10,7	10,7	71,4
	yes, many times	16	28,6	28,6	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

The data in Tables 1 to 8 shows that the immigrants had participated in Polish traditional holidays and celebrations. Weddings, baptisms and funerals are occasional celebrations, and therefore less frequent than the holidays and celebrations that we celebrate annually.

The respondents were also asked whether, as immigrants living in Poland, they celebrate their national customs and traditions. Almost 80% of the respondents answered “yes,” but about a half of them declared that they also celebrate Polish holidays. The exact data is presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Cultivation of one's national customs and traditions

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	rather yes	33	58,9	58,9	58,9
	partially	3	5,4	5,4	64,3
	no	7	12,5	12,5	76,8
	rather no	2	3,6	3,6	80,4
	yes	11	19,6	19,6	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

The integration of foreigners is not only about learning the culture of the host society, but it also involves making one's Polish acquaintances aware of the customs and traditions from the immigrant's culture. The vast majority of the respondents (nearly 90%) claimed that they do so. The details are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Making one's Polish friends familiar with the customs and traditions from one's culture

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	rather yes	32	57,1	57,1	57,1
	partially	4	7,1	7,1	64,3
	no	2	3,6	3,6	67,9
	rather no	2	3,6	3,6	71,4
	yes	16	28,6	28,6	100,0
	Total	56	100,0	100,0	

Source: own research.

Another indicator that was studied, which also has an impact on the integration of immigrants, is active participation in Polish cultural life (Polish cinema, theatre, exhibitions and concerts by Polish artists). 65% of the respondents stated that they very often or often participate in Polish cultural life. The exact data is presented in the table below.

Table 11. Participation in Polish cultural life (Polish cinema, Polish theatre, Polish exhibitions, concerts by Polish artists)

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of important ones	Accumulated percentage
Important	very often	32	57,1	57,1	57,1
	no	14	25,0	25,0	82,1
	hardly ever	5	8,9	8,9	91,1
	often	5	8,9	8,9	100,0

Source: own research.

Conclusions: Research results and pedagogical postulates

The research shows that immigrants participate in Polish traditional holidays and celebrations, while at the same time cultivating their national customs and traditions (80%). The vast majority of the respondents (nearly 90%) claimed that they make their Polish acquaintances familiar with their national culture. Likewise, 65% of the respondents said that they very often or often participate in Polish cultural life. It can therefore be concluded that this data confirms the well-functioning process of integration.

Also, in open-ended questions, the respondents described the ways in which they participated in Polish holidays, traditions, celebrations or cultural life. The most common answer was being in a relationship with a Polish partner, who naturally introduced them to Polish family traditions and invited them to participate in various celebrations together.

The results of this research and those first findings can be compared to the study I conducted 10 years ago (Sowa-Behtane 2013), which investigated the opinions of female partners of foreign men living in Poland regarding the integration of their partners. The participants in that study were married (n=32) or unmarried, i.e. cohabiting (n=8). The foreigners about whom their female partners expressed their opinions were Egyptians (n=13), Algerians (n=12), Tunisians (n=4), Indians (n=4), Nigerians (n=2), Turks (n=2) and Moroccan, Iraqi and Australian (n=1 each). The statements indicated that the women's partners had participated in Polish traditional

festivals and celebrations, and that they were also free to practice their religion and beliefs while in Poland (this was confirmed by 75% of the respondents). This research confirms that a partner from the host country is a significant person in introducing an immigrant to the traditions and cultural life of Poland.

In other cases, the respondents pointed to colleagues who took the initiative and invited them to their family homes to celebrate Christmas and Easter together, or invited them to their weddings, wedding parties or the baptisms of their children. Very often it was also employers (especially in large, international corporations) who organised celebrations such as Christmas parties for their employees in order to show foreigners the traditions of the host country. The immigrants commented that they were very keen to participate in such events. Also, various NGOs or local government organizations organize events for immigrants, which involve inviting them to participate in various celebrations with Poles.

Government organizations should also be involved in such activities. As Poland is one of the countries situated in the center of Europe, the subject of integration and dialogue with immigrants is extremely important here; as a host country, we must build integrative environments, bridge the social gaps between groups and counteract prejudice and discrimination. Social integration becomes a key tool in achieving this: it includes social groups from different nationalities, cultures and religions in the host society.

It is important to remember that by supporting immigrants we also help our society create our everyday living conditions. If we leave immigrants to their own devices, the quality of our everyday life will probably be affected in future by likely becoming increasingly multicultural. One of the sources of success in developing Poland's immigration policy is to learn interculturalism and encourage immigrants to actively and subjectively participate in the social life of the dominant culture. At the same time, as a host society, we ourselves should actively participate in their cultural life.

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