Place Belonging in a Mobile World:
A Case Study of Migrant Professionals*

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to discuss the impact of spatial mobility on international professionals' experience of place belonging. Drawing on qualitative research carried out in the Wroclaw subzone of the Walbrzych Special Economic Zone in Poland, the article explores the question of the identity of migrant professionals in the context of their connection with places. It analyses how migrant professionals perceive both their place of origin and the place they currently inhabit and considers the specific practices migrants engage in to strengthen old bonds and establish new ones. Despite their high mobility, migrant professionals cannot always be described in terms of placelessness belonging. On the contrary, migrant professionals show a relatively strong connection to their place of origin and some of them attempts to form ties with their current place of stay.

Introduction

This article discusses the impact of spatial mobility on the experience of place belonging among migrant professionals. Traditionally migration studies have focused on low-skilled migrants. Recently, however, there has been a growing interest in mobile migrant professionals, whose significance in the global economy is increasing [Meier 2015a, 2015b, 2016]. Yet, migrant professionals have often been regarded as a disembedded global elite belonging to a transnational space of flows [Castells 2011; Nowicka 2007, 2012; Sassen 2001; Sklair 2001]. Building on the literature that questions this image of a disconnected global class, we explore the place

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identity of migrant professionals in a local context [e.g. Leonard 2007, 2010, 2013; Meier 2015b; Walsh 2010, 2012]. The article draws on data obtained from qualitative research carried out in the Wroclaw subzone of the Walbrzych Special Economic Zone (WSEZ). The WSEZ is one of four special economic zones in the Lower Silesia district in Poland. It was established in 1997 to generate economic growth in areas particularly afflicted by high unemployment after local industry collapsed during the transformation from a state-led to a market-oriented economy in the early 1990s [Shields 2012]. In return for creating a certain number of workplaces, investors in the WSEZ could benefit from tax deductions and sometimes other forms of assistance too, such as access to ready-to-use factory premises. The WSEZ has attracted many multinational corporations (MNC), including IBM, Toyota, and Colgate-Palmolive, which employ many international professionals [Morita and Chen 2010: 227–228; Bielewska 2015, 2016]. This article explores the experience of place in migrants' lives and its significance for their identity. In other words, it analyses how migrant professionals construct their attachment to place. To address this issue, we begin by considering the current debate about the relationship between international professionals and place belonging. First we define 'place', especially as it relates to globalisation processes, then we discuss our methodology, and then we analyse our findings. We show how transnational professionals, who have grown to acquire economic and social significance since the onset of the neoliberal era in the late 1970s and early 1980s [Sklair 2001], relate both to their places of origin and to the places they currently inhabit, purposely undertaking particular practices to strengthen old bonds and establish new ones.

Theorising migrant professionals and place

There are a multitude of terms for classifying migrant professional workers and this can be a source of confusion. This international elite is thus known under different guises: international professional class, elite professional class, new transnational professional workforce, managerial elite [e.g. Sassen 1996: 218; 2000: 92; 2010: 7031, 7036; Castells 2011; Friedman 1986]. Some authors also use such terms as 'expatriates', 'highly skilled migrants', 'skilled international migrants', 'skilled migrants', or 'transnational elite'. Although all these terms pertain to highly qualified migrants with tertiary education, there are also some differences between them. Thus, the term 'expatriate' is usually used to denote 'white' professionals migrating from the developed to the developing world [Kunz 2016]. On the other hand, terms like 'skilled migrant' do not take into account the fact that some migrants for various reasons do not secure professional employment in their destination country, while concepts like 'transnational class' suggest deterritorialisation. Since our article deals with highly skilled migrants who come from both developed and developing countries, find employment in positions suited to their qualifications, and explore their connections with place, the abovementioned concepts are not suited to our aims. Thus, following Lars Maier we decided to

use the term 'migrant professionals', by which we mean 'those employed and working as skilled professionals after their migration. It is well-educated group with privileges accepted in the country of destination' [Meier 2015a: 6]. In other words, we define migrant professionals as those who have tertiary education, whose qualifications are recognised in the destination country, and who work abroad in positions suited to their qualification.

This article relies on a dynamic and processual concept of identity that moves away from seeing identity as a stable, coherent, and fixed category. Following Stuart Hall, we assume that an identity is a social construction, a process that is never complete, a process that is always in progress [Hall 1992; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Edensor 2002]. In other words, we presume that identity can be properly conceptualised only in terms of 'being' or 'becoming' and cannot be treated as some kind of thing that simply 'is' and is just 'out there'. We agree with Richard Jenkins [2004: 4] that 'all human identities are by definition social identities', because identifying ourselves or others involves interaction. Moreover, we expect identities to be performed in everyday life and constructed by discursive practices [Meier 2016]. Like Lars Meier [2016: 2], we regard identity 'as performed through narrations in an interview situation that includes narrations of everyday activities'. These narrations must be seen as expressions of learned cultural models and the internalisation of discourses [Strauss and Quinn 1997; cf. Meier 2016].

In this article we are interested in one particular dimension of identity, namely, the relation between identity and place. Consequently, it is necessary to unpack the complex concept of place. Place is generally defined as a space that holds some meaning for people. A place is not merely a locale with fixed objective coordinates, but a space to which people are in some way attached [Cresswell 2004: 7]. However, this general definition leaves open considerable room for interpretation, particularly in the context of contemporary global culture. Traditional human geography stressed a tight and relatively immobile connection between a group of people and a site. Place was understood in an essentialist way, based on notions of rooted authenticity and fixed character [Escobar 2001]. This way, places imply the construction of 'us' (the people who belong in a place) and 'them' (the people who do not) [Cresswell 2004]. As a result, it has been claimed that belonging to a place provides the basis for a single identity [Gielis 2009: 275]. The subject of our research is migrant professionals who are perceived as highly mobile and can be described as agents of globalisation. It has been argued that a connection between people and place, where place provides a basis for identity, is possible only in the case of low mobility and rare confrontations with others, while globalisation processes lead to increasing placelessness [Relph 1976; Tuan 1977; Marcus 1992; Auge 1995]. As Gielis observes, 'mainstream thinking was that globalization and place do not match, they are asymmetric. Whereas globalization was equated with openness, infinity and instability, place was usually seen as closed, local and stable. Consequently, globalization and place were often assumed to be opposites' [Gielis 2009: 277].

For example, Edward Relph [1976], drawing on Martin Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling', argued that places were losing authenticity in the modern world due to the development of mass communication and mass culture, particularly tourism, both of which have a homogenising effect. This homogenisation means that people find it increasingly difficult to feel connected to the world through places. Accordingly, homogenised places do not provide a basis for identity because they do not differentiate people as 'us' and 'them'. An escalating placelessness is also a result of increased mobility connected with railways, motorways, and airports. According to Yi-Fu Tuan [1977], fast transport deprives people of a sense of place, which needs to be acquired from undramatic experiences repeated day after day over years. In a similar vein, George Marcus [1992] argued that global culture has broken the connection between traditional notions of community and locality on the one hand and identity on the other. They have produced a growing homogenisation of the world through which places become tied into global flows of people, meanings and things, which make them more similar to each other. Marc Auge [1995] continues this argument and sees the receding importance of place as the result of the development of spaces of circulation (airports), consumption (supermarkets), and communication (telephones, television, cable networks), in which people coexist without living together.

While some scholars prophesied the end of place, others decided that the real problem is rather a definition of place that does not fit current reality. They believe that the essentialist and exclusionary notion of place is increasingly unsustainable in a globalising world. Some scholars have attempted to redefine place from a frozen scene into a process. From a phenomenological perspective, David Seamon [1980] suggests that place is too often thought of in terms of fixed visible and measurable attributes, whereas the key element of understanding place is bodily mobility and everyday movement in space. He points to the embodied character of place through movement and habits to produce 'time-space routines' and rhythms [Cresswell 2004: 33]. Other scholars go further in arguing for the flexibility of place. Allan Pred [1984] and Nigel Thrift [1996] state that places are never finished but always becoming. They cannot be thought of only in terms of measurable attributes such as the number of houses or population but exist always in specific contexts. They provide a physical setting for social practices and are constructed by people's practices; they are never finished but are constantly being performed. To retain a stable meaning they need to be reproduced daily [Soja 1999]. However, the authors that have had the biggest impact on reconceptualising place as fluid and relational are Arjun Appadurai [1995; 1996] and Doreen Massey [1992]. Appadurai [1995; 1996] argues that social relations are embedded in places but not necessarily in a single and bounded place. Thus, people may construct and experience social relations that are located in the places in which they are not physically present. Massey expands this argument further, arguing that place is not static but produced out of processes of social interaction. Places do need to have boundaries but are sites connected to others

in constantly evolving social, cultural, and natural/environmental networks, and consequently need to be understood through the paths that lead in and out of a place [Massey 1994; Cresswell 2004: 43]. As Gielis succinctly sums up, 'every place is related to a multitude of places and social processes beyond', and hence 'you can sense the simultaneous presence of everywhere in the place where you are standing' [Gielis 2009: 276]. Places have no single, unique identity but are full of internal conflicts, and their unique specificity is continuously reproduced, providing a basis for identity. This uniqueness emerges within globalisation, which results in distinct mixtures of wider and more local social relations and accumulated histories. Consequently, places must be understood as constructed, open, relational, and processual meeting points without single overriding identities [Gielis 2009: 280]. This article analyses the role of connection to place in the life of international professionals. We want to know how they construct their connection to places and how they perceive these places. For example, we are interested in such questions as: Do they see their belonging to place as unchangeable or do they rebuild it through everyday practices? Do they feel connected to the places they do not inhabit physically? Are connections established through social networks or in other ways? Do international professionals feel a belonging to one or more places?

Analysing the spatial belonging of migrant professionals we also pay attention to home, as the changing relationship between persons and their homes is a 'quintessential characteristic of transnational migration' [Al-Ali and Koser 2001:1; cf. Blunt and Dowling 2006: 11]. Home is, as are other places, currently defined as a process [Massey 1992]. As Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling [2006: 228] stress, 'home is not a fixed and static location, but is rather produced and recast through a range of home-making practices that bind the material and imaginative geographies of home closely together and exist over a range of scales'. It has been demonstrated that migrants reproduce their homes in new locations through home-making practices [Bielewska 2012; Petridou 2001; Tolia-Kelly 2004]. It is also accepted they can live transnational lives and have more than one home [Blunt and Dowling 2006]. However, it still needs to be proved that migrant professionals reproduce their home in a new location in the same way as other groups of migrants.

As Lars Maier [2015, 2016] rightly notes, there are two strands in the research on migrant professionals. The first and dominant approach analyses migrant professionals in the context of world cities, global connectivity, flows, and networks [Sassen 1996; Castells 2000]. In general, these analyses focus on the macro-level restructuring of the economy and the social sphere on a global scale and portray migrant professionals as belonging to a global space of flows, networks, and interactions, weakly embedded in territorial place [Ley 2004; Pawlak 2015]. It is argued that 'the global capitalist class members and their transnational life style' belong to a 'global realm in which commodities, peoples and ideas travel almost freely' [Nowicka 2012: 3–4]. Thus, for example, global city theorist Saskia Sas-

sen states [2001: 21] that migrant professionals are members of a global network, which is 'a set of particular international financial centres, with much circulation of people, information and capital among them'. She describes this network in terms of a 'proximity' that is 'not embedded in territorial space'. It is rather, she claims, 'a deterritorialized form of proximity containing multiple territorial moments'. In a similar vein, Manual Castells [2011: xxxix] writes about 'an increasing contradiction between the space of flows and the space of places'. The former space is the domain of a few privileged professionals who 'feel identified with the global, cosmopolitan culture' and cultivate global networks in contrast to most other people who 'feel a strong regional or local identity' [Castells 2011: 443]. As David Ley [2004: 157] argues, the literature suggests that 'the transnational capitalist class rarely touches down on earth'. It is claimed, continues Ley [2004: 157], 'that the erosion of transaction costs and the increasing flexibility of citizenship arrangements have created an "ungrounded" or 'deterritorialized' transnational class moving at will and occupying virtually undifferentiated space'. At the same time this undifferentiated global space is presented as an 'isotropic surface of sameness' [Ley 2004: 159]. Researchers focus mostly on migrants' networks, which are territorially unbounded, or concentrate on hyper-mobile individuals, such as employees of extra-territorialised international organisations, while they underrate, in a rather circular way, the role of geographical distance, proximity, and territorial boundedness in the lives of transnational professionals. Thus, for example, it is claimed that for such professionals home 'can be geographically located anywhere and everywhere and, what is more important, it can move with you' [Nowicka 2007: 83]. As Meier [2016: 4] notes, 'the impact of the unique locality on the everyday life of the transnational elite and their social identities is largely lost in these abstract concepts'.

By focusing on the identities of professional migrants in the context of their belonging to a place, we build on a second strand of research that criticises the notion of a disembedded global class. This strand of research opposes de-emphasising the geographical dimension of the life of a migrant professional [Gielis 2009; Pries 2005]. Based on criticism of the idea of the hyper- and placeless mobility of the global elite, some scholars started to explore the relevance of identity and locality in the life of migrant professionals. Some studies attempted to fill this gap by analysing the construction of close and private place, particularly home, in the narratives of transnational professionals [e.g. Allon and Anderson 2010; Butcher 2010; Condradson and McKay 2007; Nowicka 2007]. While these studies are enlightening, we examine the life of transnational professionals from a different angle. We are interested not only in their connection to an intimate and close place, such as home, but also to other forms of experiencing attachment to place. We build on studies that explore the significance of locality for migrant identities. There has been some research on the links between migrant identities and particular cities. For example, Leonard [2007, 2010, 2013] shows the significance of workplace for the racial identity of 'white' professionals in Hong

Kong and Johannesburg. Katie Walsh describes the postcolonial encounters of British professionals [Walsh 2010, 2012]. It is also worth mentioning the work of Jonathan Beaverstock [2005], who explores the place attachment of the financial elite in the cosmopolitan milieu of New York; Adrian Favell [2008], who analyses the experiences of migrant professionals in three European cosmopolitan cities; and Meier, who explores and compares the identity performances of German financial professionals in the City of London and the Central Business District of Singapore [Meier 2016]. Another example is a volume edited by Meier [2015b] entitled *Migrant Professionals in the City. Local Encounters, Identities and Inequalities*. This contains chapters analysing the significance of an urban locality for migrant professionals in various local contexts, which also go beyond well-research global cities. The authors clearly demonstrate that despite mobility, the daily life of migrant professionals is at the same time spatially embedded and grounded in new urban settings [Harris 2015; Mulholland and Ryan 2015; Rincon 2015; Walsh 2015]. With the notable exception of the collected volume by Meier, most studies on the place belonging of migrant professionals seem to focus on global or world cities like London, New York, Singapore, or Hong Kong, which occupy central positions in global hierarchies of power. Much less is known about more peripheral and disempowered locations. In contrast to the dominant perspective, our article does not focus on the postcolonial context or global cities but presents a new case study of the relatively peripheral Wrocław subzone of WSEZ. Although there have recently been some studies of the place-related identity practices of professional migrants, the specific and detailed ways in which these practices 'work' in various local settings often remain unclear. Such specific, detailed, and local knowledge is of crucial significance for the broader theoretical understanding of the links between mobility and place. Following Bent Flyvbjerg [2006: 221], we assume that 'in the study of human affairs, there appears to exist only context-dependent knowledge, which thus presently rules out the possibility of epistemic theoretical construction'. Consequently, we regard knowledge-building as a long, inductive process that must take into account the context-specific nature of social phenomena and requires the production of thorough case studies [Bendassolli 2013; Diefenbach 2009; Flyvbjerg 2001, 2006]. Thus, by focusing on a concrete and context-specific 'exemplar' of transnational professionals in the Wroclaw subzone of WSEZ, we aim to broaden and deepen our knowledge of the links between mobility and place attachment.

To sum up, by introducing this study we aim to broaden and deepen our understanding of transnational professionals' lives under the condition of mobility. We want to present how place belonging is present in the life of the group, which is often associated with weak territorial bonds. This group of migrants is usually analysed in relation to the global financial centres, cosmopolitan culture, and the placeless space of global flows. We are not interested here in the macrostructural transformations of the economy in the context of global cities; we focus rather on the identities of transnational professionals living in medium- and

small-scale cities in semi-peripheral capitalist regions. In contrast to the prevailing approaches we do not concentrate on global networks but instead look at migrant life through a geographical lens and explore the links between migrant life and attachment to place.

Research methodology

To answer our research questions we draw on 22 semi-structured interviews with transnational professionals from WSEZ. We chose to use semi-structured interviews since they combine predetermined questions with open questions, which gave the informants the opportunity to raise themes that are important to them [Berg 2009]. Our choice of method was also determined by the fact that it can be difficult to reach international professionals because of their busy schedules [Drew 2014] and also because corporations are reluctant to reveal information about foreign workers. The informants were therefore recruited through personal networks, social media sites, and the snowballing technique. Some participants were initially rather unwilling to talk openly, as they did not want to unintentionally present the companies they work for in a bad light. Consequently, the informants needed to be assured that their identities would not be disclosed [Bygnes 2008; Drew 2014]. For this reason, and taking into account the small number of Indian migrants in Wroclaw, we do not provide detailed personal information, such as the real name of the corporation in which they work, personal names, or their exact age, all which could be used to trace their identity.

All the interviews were conducted between February and October 2015. Our sampling criteria were: foreign nationality, living in Poland at the time of the interview, and being employed by one of the companies of WSSE in a managerial position or a position requiring professional knowledge, or being a foreign-born partner of such a professional. Our sample includes 20 professionals (18 men, 2 women) and 2 wives of professionals, aged from 24 to 47. We aimed at gender parity; however this proved to be difficult and our sample may reflect the overrepresentation of men among high skilled migrants in WSEE. At the time of the interview they had spent between 7 weeks and 11 years in Poland. These international professionals were employed by several different companies (e.g. IBM, 3M, Sonel) in three different locations in Lower Silesia, Poland. They were born in Algeria, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Turkey, Japan, Taiwan, Tunisia, Ukraine, and the USA. They worked as CEOs, directors, managers, engineers, or IT specialists. Interviews were conducted in English or Polish, depending on the interviewees' preferences. Each interview lasted from 45 to 120 minutes and was carried out in a 'natural setting', such as a workplace, the home, or a cafe of the interviewee's choice to make the interviewee feel comfortable. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. In conformity with the general principles of qualitative research, we immersed ourselves in the process of analysing the data [Kvale 1996]. We used an open coding procedure, so in the first stage of interpretation, our point of de-

parture was a close reading and re-reading of transcripts to allow categories and themes to emerge from the data [Saldaña 2012]. Then we carried out more focused coding aiming at reducing the number of categories and themes. To facilitate the process of identifying and combining related themes we used nVivo software. Both authors took part in analysing and interpreting the data. However, to increase the confirmability and credibility of our analysis, each of them coded the data independently. Then the procedures and findings were discussed to reach an agreement on our final interpretation. Moreover, to enhance the quality of our interpretation, one of the authors functioned as a critical outsider because he had not participated in conducting the interviews [Strauss and Corbin 1998].

Migrant professionals' understanding of place

The first of our research questions relates to the way international professionals understand their connection to places. We are interested in whether they perceive their belonging to place as unchangeable and static, as it is traditionally define in human geography [Cresswell 2004; Escobar 2001], or whether they feel it needs to be constantly reproduced through everyday practices [Soja 1999]. The next question concerns international professionals' ties to particular places such as their place of origin and current place of stay. We want to know to what extent they feel connected to places they do not inhabit physically and how such connections are cultivated. We also analyse their connections to their current place of residence. We explore not only whether they build or reject belonging to their current place of residence but also what scale of place they belong to because their connection to their new place of life could begin or be rejected on many different levels.[1] In other words, we analyse how they understand the place they belong to—for example, whether they feel they are attached to a small-scale place like Wrocław, a big-scale place like Poland, or an even bigger-scale place like Europe [Qian, Zhu and Liu 2011].

Interestingly the perception of place that emerged from the interview analysis does not fully reflect either of the two narratives known from the literature definitions of place. There are two types of narrative concerning places among our interviewees. The first described spatial belonging as a process that is affected by physical distance and can be weakened or strengthened by particular practices. This narrative is similar to the fluid and contextual understanding of place described above; however, as shown below, it lacks the flexibility stressed by Appadurai [1995, 1996] and Massey [1992]. The second narrative constructs spatial belonging as an essential part of a person's identity that once gained cannot be lost, and therefore is unaffected by any personal actions. By stressing the

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[1] Place is a multiscalar phenomenon, which means that sense of place exists on various geographical scales [see Qian, Zhu and Liu 2011].

immutability of place, this narrative is close to the traditional understanding of place as stable and unchanging. However, traditionally constructed places are inhabited by an immobile population and the feel of place needs to be acquired from undramatic experiences repeated day after day over years [Tuan 1977]; in contrast migrants claim an unchanging sense of belonging to their place of origin in spite of their mobility.

An example of the first type of place narrative is an Italian family who moved to Wrocław because the husband received a job offer. Both partners admit that their ties to their place of origin (defined in national terms as Italy) are changing as a result of their stay in Poland. They feel discomfort at being physically separated from their family and friends and admit taking some steps to prevent losing their territorial belonging. During every holiday they spend at least a week in Italy so that their children can meet their extended family and form a bond with their homeland. They and their children watch Italian news together. They frequently talk to their close ones on the phone or over the internet. However, in spite of all these efforts they perceive their ties to their place of origin as receding. Zita,[2] talking about communicating over Skype with her family in Italy, said: 'You can see them every day, but it's not the same thing as being at home'.

Transnational professionals who adopt this narrative at the same time actively form a bond with the place they currently inhabit. Despite the fact that their stay is temporary, this group of international professionals see establishing a relationship to the place they currently inhabit as a necessity. Our research confirms Meier's [2015] observation that migration may be considered a necessary qualification for a further career. This group of migrant professionals perceive their stay abroad as a 'chance' and an 'opportunity'. Building bridging social capital is a condition of taking this chance. They want to learn about their current place of life, understand its culture, and make it their temporary home. They make it their home through a series of practices, such as everyday routines, but also through time and financial investments. Ali from Turkey says: 'I'm almost resident here. I work here, I earn money, I spend money here, and it seems like I belong here, as long as I have here something connected [to] here. But if I don't have anything, if I don't work here, if I just live here, I don't feel like [it is] my home.'

As the quote illustrates, the interviewees believe that gaining the feeling of belonging to a new place of residence is related to the person's own activities. They explain that you need to make an effort to turn a new location into your home, but that it is possible. At the same time, the lack of an everyday presence in their place of origin makes them lose their connection with that place. Apparently place for them is not an authentic unchanging phenomenon but rather an event performed by actors as defined by the aforementioned Pred [1984], Thrift [1996], and Soja [1999]. However, it seems that the respondents do not go as far as Massey [1992] and Appadurai [1995, 1996], who see place as stretching into space

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[2] All names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees.

through social interactions. They have left their place of origin and are still trying to be a part of it, but they feel the ties are diminishing.

There are also informants who perceive place in a more ecological way. They have left their place of origin, and perhaps did so many years ago, but they claim it does not impact their attachment to their place of origin. They live in Wrocław, Poland, but they deny having a sense of connection to the place they currently live in. An example of such a narrative comes from another Italian professional, Antonio. He has lived in Poland for ten years, but in his opinion the place he currently lives in has not had any impact on who he is. Antonio says: 'I came to Poland I was 32 years old. Now I am 42. … I think I am the same I was ten years ago, I am only older. And I think that living here or somewhere else in Italy or somewhere in Europe or wherever … I wouldn't change so much.' He believes that his identity was shaped by his place of origin and he will never develop any ties to the place where he currently lives. He perceives his identity as given and not constructed in the process of social discourse (as described by Meier [2016]). He visits Italy, which he considers his homeland, almost every month. In Poland he has only Italian friends, although this is not in order to preserve his national identity. For him it is a simple consequence of being Italian. He describes living in Poland as a comfortable but sad necessity. He says: 'If I could live without working for sure I would live in Italy. Not in Poland.' He sees Wrocław as a kind of hotel. He wants it to be comfortable and convenient but he does nothing to make this place his home.

To sum up, these are two extremes of place perception. Thus, some may believe that their territorial identity will never change. They link their territorial identity with national identity, claiming that they will always be members of their national community, and they do not do anything to build a new territorial attachment. Others, on the other hand, may attempt to build ties to the place they currently live in and think that the experience of migration has changed them in some ways (ways not related to national identity, which is regarded as unchangeable). These differences in place perception showed no connection to ethnic or gender differences, as migrants of various backgrounds and both genders constructed both types of place perception in their narratives. Our study also contains a few international professionals who combine elements of both perceptions described above. For instance, some migrants may attempt to form ties to the place they currently live in and recognise that their experience of migration has changed them in some ways, while at the same time regarding their national identity as unchangeable.

Migrant professionals' patterns of belonging

As we have already argued, migrant professionals are often seen in the literature as a privileged, highly mobile group who belong to the global realm of flows and networks [Zaletel 2006; Green 2014] and do not retain feelings for their homeland or other specific local places [Nowicka 2012; Sassen 2001]. In fact, because they

are defined primarily as members of transnational networks, such dimensions of their identity as national identity are neglected [Meier 2016]. The above-mentioned second strand of literature on this group analyses race and ethnicity rather than national identity and rarely takes into account the local context of peripheral cities (but see Meier [2015] and 2016]). In contrast, our interviewees show a strong attachment to their place of origin, defined usually in national terms, and some of them also to the place they currently live in, defined on various scales (local, national, or European). We have already described how their attachment to their place of origin manifests itself through practices they perform to preserve their belonging. Now we will show how this attachment manifests itself through the fact that their 'homeland' is the main reference point for organising experiences gained in their current location and that their place of origin is referred to as home. Place of origin is treated here as a multi-scalar concept which embraces home, Heimat, and homeland [cf. Blunt and Dowling 2006].

For international professionals the importance of their place of origin defined in national terms is evident in how they frequently recall it as a reference point for organising new experiences. This is the same phenomenon observed by J. D. Porteous [1976: 386] in relation to the place called home. He noted that home is a 'fixed reference point for structuring reality'. The new experiences in the current place of residence are described by our interviewees as similar or different to what they know from their own country. In other words, they organise all new experiences into two categories: as something familiar (similarities) or as something new (differences). People who feel good in their new location usually mention the similarities. For instance, Arturo, an Italian, says: '... in the mindset of the people, I'm finding the same mindset that there was in my country up to ten years ago, let's say. So to that extent is a … really I'm feeling at home.' Arturo treats living in Poland as an opportunity for his career and personal development. He is enjoying his stay in Wrocław and describes the Polish mentality as similar to the Italian.

Interestingly, some interviewees seem to find pleasure in being able to observe in Poland the same faults that they know from their homeland. For example, Lajos, from Hungary, points to drinking and complaining as common faults shared by both his homeland and his new place of residence, defined also in national terms as Poland:

> We have similar habits, cultural habits, it's almost like home ... We have very similar bad habits as well. You know both Hungarian and Polish [people] like to complain about the government. And the situation might be because somehow deep inside we need some better treatment from the world community than we got.

This practice of listing bad habits in common can be understood using Michael Herzfeld's [1997] cultural intimacy concept. Herzfeld [1997: 3] explains that cultural intimacy is 'the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are

considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality'. Transnational professionals live in a foreign country and it seems that some of them have a strong need to feel a cultural intimacy with the Polish host population. They can achieve this using more encompassing upper level labels like 'being European', but they prefer looking for commonality in the national habitus instead.

As noted above, positive and negative similarities are usually underscored by those who feel comfortable in their new place. On the other hand, differences that favour their place of origin are mentioned by those who have a less positive attitude towards their new place of stay. For example, Antonio from Italy, who sees his stay in Poland more as something he has to do, speaks mostly about the differences:

> Sometimes it's not so easy because you [Polish people] are very closed, very cold for us. It's difficult to have a Polish friend for me. It's why I don't have [any]. But I have only Italian friends in Poland. Because we are so different from this point of view. We have different contact with people, we have different contact with food, with alcohol, with [a] party. So it's not so easy.

However, in some cases differences may also be mentioned even when migrant professionals are delighted with their stay. Then Poland may be seen as superior in some aspects. This is evident in the interview with Akio: 'Right now so many people can speak English, it's really amazing compared to Japan. If you go there it's very difficult to find [an] English speaker, I don't know why.'

Apart from those who look for similarities to their homeland to stress their liking for the place they currently live in and those who concentrate on differences to explain their negative feelings, there is also a type of international professional who does not mention their own country unless directly prompted to do so. This is the example of Li, who explains: 'I haven't gone back to China for a very long time, so it will be hard to compare.' For her the more direct point of reference is the United States, where she studied and worked. However, she still recalls the nation-state as her point of reference. Her attitude is typical for people who left their own country as children and later grew up while travelling [Trąbka 2014]. The importance of the place of origin may also be evident in the vocabulary choices international professionals make. They may talk about 'going home' when they plan to visit their place of origin or the family they have left behind. Andrew, who came to Poland from Ireland for only a few weeks and who spent each weekend in Dublin with his wife and children, says: 'I was at home at the weekends.' Lajos from Hungary also returns 'home' when he goes to visit his family in Hungary: 'Since I am here I bought a car and I go home regularly, almost every month.' Sai, from India, explains his idea of home very clearly: 'I feel more comfortable here but home is home—where my family is.' However, there is also another group, made up of those who do not use the word 'home' to de-

scribe the family they have left behind or their place of origin. Instead they may use the name of their home country, the name of their home town, or just talk about 'going to visit parents' or 'family'.

It is interesting that despite living in Wrocław even for many years and having their immediate family with them (husband/wife, children), some interviewees, especially from Mexico, India, and Italy, feel their home is where their extended family is. Not being there means they are not at home. People who talk about building belonging through the everyday performance of rituals feel that not being part of the everyday routines of their extended family excludes them from belonging to the place of origin. This shows that Massey's [1992] notion of place as built from social interactions without requiring a physical presence does not fit their everyday experiences. Geographical separation makes them feel excluded and the remedies they try to use, such as internet chats, phone calls, and visits, are not sufficient to fully maintain their sense of belonging to their place of origin. As Ryan et al. [2015] suggest, 'apparent ease of mobility and long-distance communication may lead to an underestimation of the ongoing salience of place and emplacement, even for relatively affluent, highly skilled migrants'. This supports the view that time-space compression [Urry 2004] is a weaker phenomenon than some scholars describe [Giddens 1990; Harvey 1990]. Although felt in various degrees, the tyranny of geographical distance is experienced by all of our respondents. This is especially true in the case of migrants from outside Europe.

Thus, although our informants belong to a highly mobile group that has access to modern means of communication and transportation, they still experience the barriers of space and time. First of all, our interviewees stress the difference between direct contact and contact supported by technology, with the latter being considered much inferior. As Sai explains: 'I'm not a good talker. I don't spend too much time on talking. I prefer face-to-face communication.' The fact that communication technologies cannot compensate for the absence of face-to-face contact is nothing new in social science [see Licoppe 2004]; however, the myth of information and communication technologies being able to free relationships from time and space is strong [i.e. Andersson 2013; Benítez 2012; Bacigalupe and Camara 2012; Larsen et al. 2008]. Our research confirms the observation of Ryan et al. that to a certain degree information and communication technologies allow time and space to be negotiated but nonetheless 'spatiality and temporality remain significant factors' [2015: 202]. The conclusions Ryan et al. [2015] reached in a study of highly skilled American and French migrants in London were similar to those we obtained in our study. In the experience of our informants, geographical distance is a significant factor that may lead to the weakening of ties and even to the loss of friends. Lajos says: '[I]n Hungary I had like ten close friends and here I have two so it's a big change. I have contact with my Hungarian friends but not at the same level like before, so that's a big change.' It confirms Urry's [2002] observation that physical contact is still necessary for sustaining social life. Additionally the new information and communication technologies are not free from

their own embeddedness in place and those using them need to endure spatial and temporal constraints [Ryan et al. 2015]. Where there is a big geographical distance between users, the time difference can be a constraint. This is a problem for John, who came to Poland from the United States:

Skype is the best for the video, but I find it challenging, when the time is different ... We are about 6 to 7 [hours' time difference] depending on who you are calling, it is 6 to 7 hours' time difference. So it is difficult to plan ... it always seems when you want to call somebody, either they are not awake or they are already in bed or they are eating dinner, so there are obviously very limited windows for communication.

Secondly, as observed also by Masselot [2011; cf. Ryan et al. 2015], in the case of long distances, travelling home is complicated even for the privileged group of international professionals. The interviewees who are Europeans can visit their home countries as many as 10 times a year or more. Those who came to Poland from more distant places like Taiwan, India, Japan, or the United States may go back once a year or once in several years. The fact that they, like Akio, are CEOs of big international companies does not alter this fact:

I have some meetings at the headquarters in Japan, so I have to go back twice a year. At that time I can visit [my mother]. Also my family, they are going back to Japan once a year to stay with my mother-in-law, and I think it's ok. Of course they miss grandpa and grandma, but I think it's ok.

Li, when asked about her plans for visiting Taiwan, answers: 'That would depend on if I could have the compensation from the company or a travel allowance. If so then I would plan to go back to Taiwan, if not I'll just explore Europe.' Anika from India also does not meet her family regularly: 'The last time I met my family was five years back when they came to visit me in Poland. And they are coming again this year in May. So next month I will see my parents. And last year my sister came to visit me with her husband.' As the quotes above illustrate, intercontinental travelling is rare even for international professionals and contact supported by technology is not equivalent to face-to-face contact. As a result, non-European countries are perceived as places very far away from the current place of stay. Akio says about his homeland: 'It's just so far away, [I] don't much think about the Japan-side unfortunately.' Similarly, John admits that while living in Poland he is not interested in what is happening in the United States:

I don't really care. But I will when I go back. You know, when I am here now, you seem more invested in where you are, you seem more interested in what goes on in the world than [you do when] you are in [the United States]. And then the world that you have left is kind of, just like, whatever. It is almost not even reality for you, because you are not living it.

Nevertheless, even in the case of European countries, there are significant differences in accessibility. Cheap airlines allow John to fly from Wrocław to Dublin and back every weekend, but there is no such connection to Hungary. If Lajos wants to visit his family, he needs to drive to Hungary and back, which means he has to take time off work, so he does not travel more often than once in six weeks. Similarly, Boris, from Ukraine, was not able to visit Lvov for several months because of the political situation. As presented above our research does not support claims that geographical distance or borders do not matter in relation to the flows of people and everyday routines [Nowicka 2012]. We need also to remember that international professionals are part of social networks of family and friends and even though their mobility is unrestricted the mobility of their networks' members may be [see O'Flaherty et al. 2007]. This may lead to asymmetrical relations where the international professional takes on the entire burden of travelling because his family members cannot obtain visas.

Scales of belonging

All the migrant professionals who participated in our research have a broadly similar sense of belonging to their place of origin and this belonging is a multi-scalar phenomenon. It embraces all levels from home to homeland. Belonging to the current place of stay is much more complex. There are migrant professionals who see themselves as not forming any bonds to their current place of stay. There are also those who see themselves as belonging to their new location. However, it may be problematic to define what exactly they perceive themselves as belonging to.

The group of migrant professionals who treat their stay in Wrocław as a temporary necessity and who do not attempt to build any kind of relationship to the place they currently live in might seem like an illustration of Meier's [2015] first strand of literature on migrant professionals, which focuses on global connectivity. Living in Wrocław, they concentrate on work and wait to go back to their 'normal' life somewhere else. Their daily routine is not affected by local specifics. They could live the same kind of life anywhere. For example, Li, when asked about her thoughts on local residents, answers: 'I don't have contact with them and I don't really see them, so I can't really answer this.' If they perceive their stay as a long-term necessity, they may try to make their life comfortable, but they could still refuse to form any connection to the place they currently live in. However, their attitude might not be derived from belonging to the space of flow [Sassen 1996; Castells 2011] but could be the result of a strong connection to their place of origin. Their identity is rooted in their place of origin and they do not want to change it or supplement it with a new element. A good example of this type of migrant professional is the Italian Antonio, who admits he likes where he is currently living but is not interested in Wrocław or Poland, Polish history and culture, or friendships with Polish people. When asked if he is interested in Polish culture, Antonio says: 'Not so much. … I have Italian TV at home of course and I

watch Italian news, I read an Italian newspaper on my tablet. Yes. I am interested what is going on in Italy, of course.' As the quote illustrates, Antonio's everyday practices do not support belonging to the local community in Wrocław and he is strongly oriented towards his homeland. His actions can be perceived as home-making practices [Blunt and Dowling 2006; Nowicka 2007], but he does not see it this way. He stresses that Wrocław is only a hotel and he reads the Italian press not to re-create Italy in Wrocław, but because he is an Italian.

Migrant professionals who treat work abroad as a 'chance', 'opportunity', or 'new experience' have a different attitude towards their current place of stay. They want to gain new experiences and develop a deep understanding of their place of stay. They are similar to researchers in their search for deep immersion [Geert 2005]; therefore, we call them 'anthropologists'. To gain an understanding of Polish culture, they want to build friendships with locals. Anika, for example, explains why she left India:

> I left India for a reason. I wanted to learn something new. So I appreciate what I see today. Of course I have some Indian friends who meet from time to time but it's not that I'm hanging around with Indians. I don't feel like doing this at all. For me it's boring. I need to learn something new to keep me interested.

John from the United States expresses a similar view:

> And that was the commitment we tried to make with ourselves ... we're not going to be these termites who hide in our house, like, no, we want to live. Like, we're gonna be here for three years—let's get them all started, lets meet the people and, you know, even only being here for a year and a half we've got people that we consider friends for life.

Migrant professionals may form a bond with their current place of stay by performing many everyday activities there, such as working or shopping, and also by buying a flat, paying taxes, meeting friends, and learning about the culture and language of their place of stay. However, not all migrant professionals combine all these elements and they also differ in the way they perceive them and define their new location. Anika, quoted above, states she is interested in Polish culture, Polish language and making Polish friends. She represents a group of interviewees who see themselves as living in Poland. However, Poland is for her just an example of a European country and the experiences she gains here are in her view experiences of European life:

> I think Polish people have very good sense of work-life balance. ... It's different in India because there is so much competition. It's normal to work overtime and not to ask for extra money or anything like that. ... So I like it about Europe in general that there is a work-life balance because life is not only about work.

Living in Wrocław allows her, as she puts it, to learn Polish ways of life, which are European ways. However, asked how migration has changed her, she does not define herself in a Polish or European context but in a local one. She describes herself with the Polish-sounding word 'Wroclawian' (a resident of the city of Wrocław).

> For me saying that I'm Indian is not a complete truth. I know I am not just Indian … I'm also a Wroclawian ... I don't know. It's a complicated identity. It is not a straightforward identity. I'm not like a regular Indian. I think I think differently, I have different expectations from life. So I just say it is very complicated to define.

Another group of interviewees stresses their strong attachment to the city of Wrocław but at the same time reject belonging to Poland as a country. This way they seem to protect their national identity and develop bonds to their current place of life. Arturo admits that after seeing Wrocław he wanted to live in this city but he has no interest in Poland. At the same time he is very interested in Wrocław and its history. He explains that he does not connect Wrocław to Poland: 'For me, Wroclaw, I can say, is not Poland. It's a city, a city, it's like … a port [laughter], like a hub. It's a hub where I have my life, I function. But for me it's not important that Wrocław is a part of Poland. It is important is that it's a city in Europe, a different perspective.' This different, not national perspective, allows him to build place belonging (to the city of Wrocław) without any need to redefine his national identity.

Summarising, migrant professionals who perceive their stay abroad as a chance or opportunity engage in practices that establish a connection between them and their current place of stay. The practices may vary from studying language and culture to making friends and buying an apartment. It is interesting that migrant professionals define the place they currently live in on different scales. Some of them build ties just to the city they live in, some want to gain a deep knowledge of Poland, while there are also those who treat their new location as Europe and are interested in learning European ways of life. These scales can be combined but international professionals can also choose one or two and reject the others. The migrants' scalar choices and their meaning for their feeling of belonging would be an interesting topic for future research. A further interesting question would be how to evaluate the bonds between professional migrants and place if they establish these bonds only in order to progress their future career in some other location.

Conclusion

Our study has concentrated on the spatial dimension of migrant professionals' lives and broadens our knowledge of the relationship between mobility and place attachment. Basically, it shows that, despite their high mobility, migrant professionals cannot be described in terms of placelessness belonging. On the

contrary, in accordance with recent studies [e.g. Meier 2015b, 2016], our paper demonstrates that migrant professionals, irrespective of their ethnicity or gender, usually make attempts to build ties to the place they currently live in. At the same time, however, our study shows that migrant professionals have relatively strong connections to their places of origins. Moreover, they seem to define their place of origin in national terms, which may suggest the significance of their national identifications [Mulholland and Ryan 2015]. However, overall we cannot discern any significant differences between migrants from different backgrounds. Instead, we can observe a difference that is directly related to the geographical distance between the migrant's place of origin and their place of stay. Owing to the small size of our sample it is difficult to draw broader generalisations from this observation. However, it may demonstrate that the salience of ethnic differences cannot be taken for granted [cf. Amelina et al. 2012].

Our study also demonstrates the complexities of the construction of place attachment. Our informants, irrespective of their ethnicity or gender, perceive place attachment in an essentialist way as authentic, given, and unchangeable, or in a constructivist way as a process strictly connected with everyday practices [Seamon 1980; Soja 1999]. Some of them also mix elements of those two opposite types. The essentialists believe that leaving a place will not affect their territorial belonging and that acquiring some other territorial identity by living in their current place of stay is impossible. The constructivists assume their territorial identity may be lost with time when there is no physical closeness. They claim that they experience a weakening of their ties with their place of origin because they are not able to take part in routine practices in that place. Visits and virtual contacts may slow down this process but will not prevent the bond from weakening. For constructivists it is also possible to build new ties with their current place of stay by performing everyday routines, making friends, learning culture, buying an apartment, and paying taxes.

Both groups, essentialists and constructivists, are strongly connected to their place of origin, but they manifest the importance of this belonging in different ways. Constructivists make efforts to preserve their belonging, while essentialists just stress it as a key and unchangeable element of their identity. The difference between both groups is even bigger in their attitudes toward their current place of stay. However, neither essentialists nor constructionists talked about living in the WSEZ, which seems to be perceived as an artificial, administrative unit with no resonance in daily life. Instead, they usually, but not solely, define their current place of living in local-city or national terms, that is, as Wrocław or Poland. Essentialists claim that the fact of living in a new place does not affect them in any way. They arrived in Poland with a particular and stable territorial identity; they might become older and more experienced, but this does not make them connected to the new place. Constructivists, on the other hand, perceive their territorial belonging as an ongoing process. They belong to their place of origin because they lived there once; however, unlike essentialists, constructivists do not believe that having one territorial belonging precludes acquiring another

one. Moreover, they perceive gaining new belongings as a chance for personal and professional development. A deep understanding of the culture they live in is expected to bring them future benefits. Their attitude to some extent resembles the cosmopolitism of European elites who, for personal development, in early modern and modern times, undertook a Grand Tour of Europe in search of art and culture [Trease 1991]. Yet, today the mobility experience may be also seen as the building of cultural capital, which may be used to mark higher social status [Mulholland and Ryan 2015]. Moreover, in the case of migrant professionals, openness to new places and cultures is combined with a strong national identity and concern about its preservation. In their view the new ties they develop to the place they currently live in should enrich their identity, but not replace it.

The way the constructivists perceive their current place of stay is also interesting. They can talk about living in Wrocław or even a particular district within the city but they can also see themselves as living in the broader and more abstract context of Poland or Europe. They can combine all these scales or choose just some and reject others. The scale that is favoured by our respondents is a city scale, which is further evidence of the relevance of the city context for a sense of belonging among professionals [e.g. Harris 2015]. However, in the case of Wrocław, it may be that acquiring the identity of a Wrocław resident is relatively easy for new arrivals and does not conflict with the other identities they already possess, especially with national ones. It will be an interesting question for future research to discuss why developing a belonging to the city is important for immigrants, whether they would develop this belonging in every city they happen to inhabit, and whether the degree to which migrants become attached to their new city of residence varies between cities and what causes this variation. Local authorities promote Wrocław as a 'meeting place', in other words, as a place where different cultures can meet and celebrate differences [Jaskulowski 2017; Jaskułowski and Surmiak 2016]. Wrocław is also promoted as a modern, innovative city with an interesting history. We can expect that immigrants may be able to identify with such identity content easily. On the other hand, due to the strong ethnic component of Polish national identity [Jaskułowski 2012], the interviewees may find it difficult to combine it with the national identity they already have. This hypothesis, however, warrants further analysis.

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