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RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT

SKILLS AND ASSETS OF POLISH PEOPLE AGED 50+ IN GREATER MANCHESTER

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Ambition for Ageing is a Greater Manchester wide cross-sector partnership, led by GMCVO and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, aimed at creating more age friendly places by connecting communities and people through the creation of relationships, development of existing assets and putting older people at the heart of designing the places they live.

Ambition for Ageing is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

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Thanks to Sarah Wilkinson – Equalities Research Coordinator, Ambition for Ageing for providing research related answers and Hannah Berry – Equalities Research Coordinator, Ambition for Ageing for providing two research training sessions and giving questionnaire related advice.

Credits

This report was compiled and some interviews conducted by Ineta Simelionyte. Since the aim of this research was to interview Polish people who usually felt more confident and at ease whilst being asked questions in their native Polish language, the help of Polish speaking researchers Barbara Radomska, Karol Kochanowski and interpreter Artur Sinkevic was paramount. Miss Radomska and Mr Kochanowski also provided English to Polish translations of such important documents as the Research consent form, Photo consent form, Research project and questionnaire summary and the questionnaire itself.

Special thanks to Polish over 50 interviewees who have invited the researchers to their workplaces and homes and were kind, friendly, welcoming and offered numerous cups of tea.



SUMMARY

Every individual has skills and assets which they have acquired through education, employment, life experiences, hobbies and interests. This report aims to identify and showcase the gifts that Polish people aged over 50 have.

In addition, the report also looks into what connections and relationships older Polish people have and how connected this group is to their neighborhoods across Greater Manchester. Whilst doing so we will also examine some of the difficulties which older Polish residents encounter whilst attempting to do so.

Altogether we interviewed 13 Polish residents of Greater Manchester over the age of 50. This report attempts to give a voice to this community which is quite sizable but perhaps often rather silent and forgotten. As the reader will see from our small population sample, the research focuses on qualitative rather than quantitative data and therefore provides suggestions rather than conclusions.

It is hoped that due to a better understanding and awareness of some of the skills and assets over 50's Polish people possess, the relevant organisations can explore ways in which to better address the needs of this group of residents and encourage them to contribute more to their local community groups and organisations. This in turn has the possibility to create much better integration for these groups.

INTRODUCTION

Several areas in Greater Manchester are home to a large population of Polish people. Whilst we are certainly aware of this sizable community, perhaps you have a Polish colleague, or could even show someone where the nearest Polish shop is; it feels that we do not seem to hear a lot from them, most certainly not from the older Polish generation.

This research is giving a voice and a human face to Polish people over the age of 50 who reside in Greater Manchester. The findings shared in this report reveal their numerous skills, talents, knowledge and personalities. It is also allowing them to talk about their fascinating hobbies, professions and activities. Perhaps, next time when coming across an older Polish person, one will not see him/her as a stranger, but as an interesting person to listen to and to connect with.

In addition to researching the skill set and assets of Polish people over the age of 50, we also wanted to find out how older Polish people define their local neighborhoods; how connected and involved they are in their local communities, or Polish communities across the wider Greater Manchester borough. Are they willing to get involved at all?

Would they be able to contribute if

for example, an asset-based community building approach is being implemented within their community?

An **asset-based** approach focuses on what individuals and communities have and how they can work together.

If yes, what barriers could they encounter whilst trying to connect with the community around them? After all, feeling connected and having connections within the local neighborhood can reduce social isolation and make it a better place in which to grow older.

We hope these research findings will create greater awareness and drive conversions that would help to create more age-friendly places, empower older Polish people to live fulfilling lives as they age in their neighborhoods across Greater Manchester and to perhaps, utilise their skills and assets within their local community.

Who has done this research?

The research project is part of a programme of Ageing Equally? research commissioned by Ambition for Ageing to explore what makes a good place in which to grow older for people who belong to specific minority communities. Europaia which is the only Registered Charity (Reg No 1161453) to work for the benefit of European Expats in Greater Manchester, has been commissioned by the Equalities Board, a part of Ambition for Ageing (AfA), to undertake this short research project.

In 2018 Europaia was commissioned to undertake a research project called *Experiences and challenges of aged 50+ Polish Expats in Greater Manchester* and an outstanding research report has been produced by Social Anthropologist and Researcher Hannah C. Wadle (PhD)*. This report concerns the situation of Polish nationals in Manchester over the age of 50 who moved to the UK as EU migrants after 2004.

JUNE 2018



Method

In order to collect data and to obtain answers to our research questions, the questionnaire has been designed in English and translated into Polish. The questionnaire consists of thirty-two questions, initially intended to take approximately 40-45 minutes to complete. In practice, it took longer for researchers to get answers to their questions, often because interviewees would tell them their life stories, or it would take additional time for the interpreter (Mr Artur Sinkevic) to convey the message from Polish into English and vice versa.

*Research summary:

<https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/sites/default/files/Europaia%20Final%20Report.pdf>

We created a questionnaire compiled of open and closed questions, consisting of five parts.

- 1.** Gathering data about interviewees personality, profession and assessing their language skills.
- 2.** The second part looks into hobbies, interests and ways in which they spend their free time. It also provides deeper insights into work-life balance of Polish people over the age of 50.
- 3.** The third part of the questionnaire asks interviewees to define what they consider to be their local neighbourhood, assessing how connected and aware of their local community asset (parks, community centres etc) they are.
- 4.** The fourth part assesses interviewees' involvement or willingness to get involved (to be signposted) in their local communities, or with one of the various Polish organisations across Greater Manchester.
- 5.** The latter part consists of demographic questions which add quite a lot of valuable information which enabled us to make comparisons and conclusions.

Altogether, the voices of thirteen older Polish individuals were heard. We did eleven face-to-face and two telephone interviews. The majority of face-to-face interviews were held in the interviewees' homes which allowed for observation of factors relevant to this research. Interviewees were based in various areas within Greater Manchester, such as Bolton, Harpurhey, Manchester, Salford, Stockport, Wigan and in St Helens (Merseyside).

The contacts of older Polish people were obtained through personal contacts of the report author, researchers, interpreters and Europaia. All interviews, with one exception (in English) were held in Polish. This was a very effective method as it seemed to put the participants at ease and would result in their willingness to contribute more.

Before every interview, candidates were presented with a short verbal explanation in Polish and a document explaining the research's purpose and a brief introduction to the questions. Research participants were asked to sign research (see attachment), photo and Europa's consent forms. All the above were translated from English into Polish.

The interviews were conducted by the author of this research Ineta Simelionyte working in pairs with Barbara Radomska, Karol Kochanowski and Artur Sinkevic. Some of the interviews were conducted by research assistants independently without the author of this research being present.

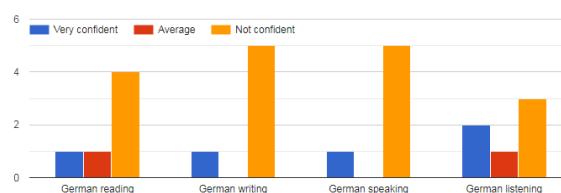
All the answers were then translated from Polish into English. In most cases, after the interview the respondent would be asked if they would require any help provided by Europa, such as Welfare Advice and help with their EU Settlement Scheme application or to see if they would like to join our monthly Polish over 50s meeting group at Europa which is called "Ławeczka Pod Jabłonią" ("The bench under the apple tree").

In addition, they were given the option to receive updates about cultural events organized by Europa, or perhaps, join Europa Art Collective or become a volunteer. Two participants received support with filling in the EU Settlement Scheme applications

and both received settled status.

Some expressed their willingness to join "The bench under the apple tree" and two participants Pawel (49yrs) and Michal (49yrs) attended the meeting on the 21st of September (Saturday) 2019.

Language skills: How confident would you say you were in the following?



Language skills: How confident would you say you were in the following?

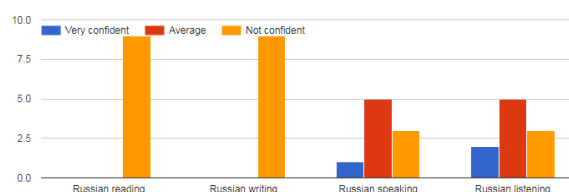


Figure 1: Bar charts generated by Google Forms

In order to better manage and analyse collected information, the data was entered in Google Forms. This has helped to produce clear diagrams, charts and allowed us to make comparisons. To minimise the amount of work required to enter a vast amount of data, perhaps in the future an online form could be used instead of a hard copy of the questionnaire.

FINDINGS

The following part of the report will give details of the findings and will be grouped into different themes and topics.

Interviewees

Interviewees were based in various areas across Greater Manchester with two exceptions were older Polish couple Halina (60yrs) and Witold (61yrs) were living in St Helens (Merseyside). We believe this did not make any significant impact to research results overall.

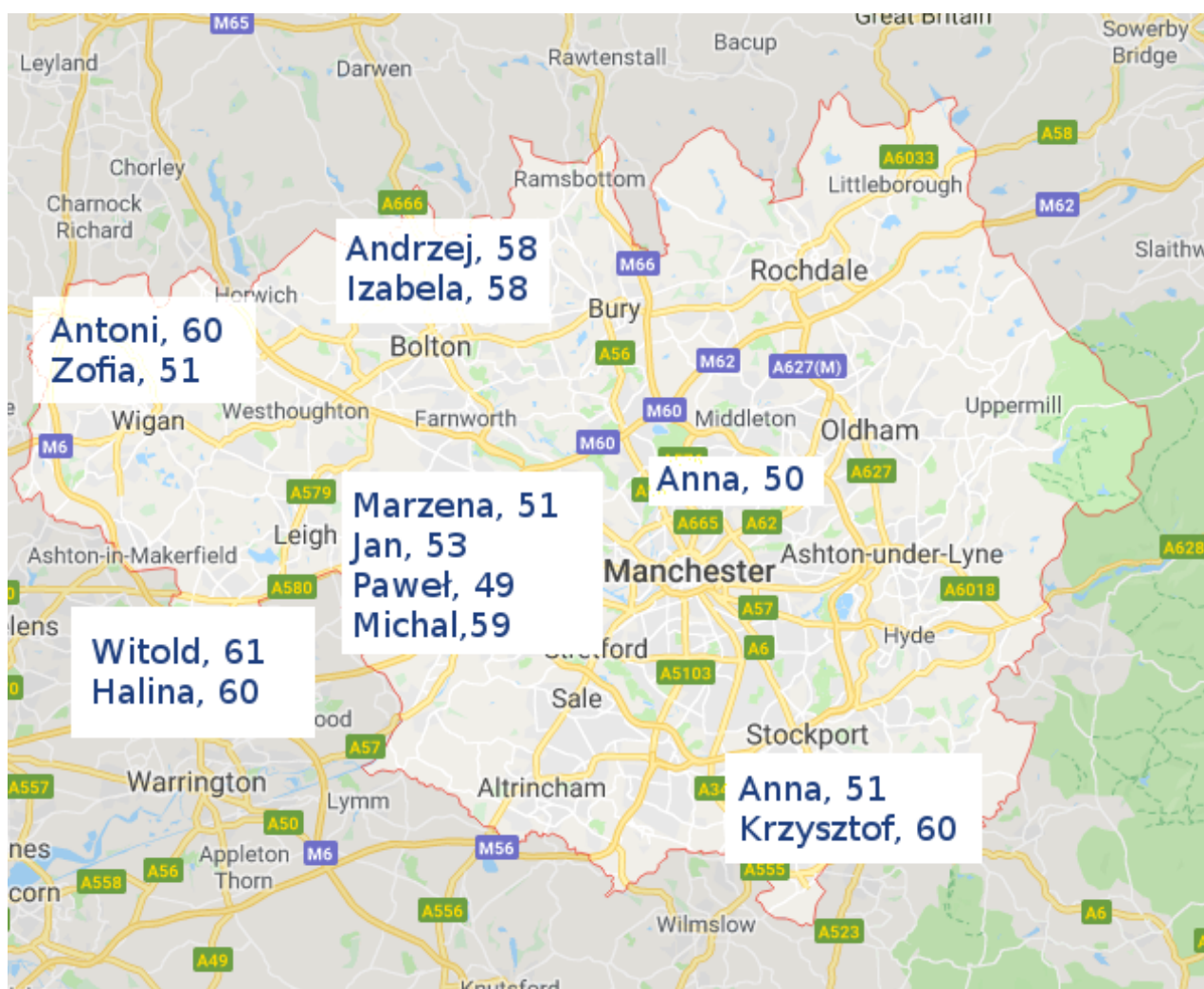


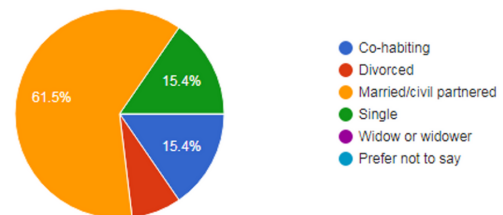
Figure 2: Map

The average age of interviewees was 55. One of the interviewees was less than fifty years old – Pawel (49yrs). He did provide quite a lot of interesting data that was slightly different to other interviewees. Thus, it is difficult to say if it was due to his age or his personality traits.

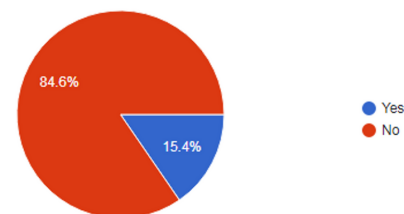
The most senior interviewee was Witold (61yrs) from St Helens who, along with his wife Halina (60yrs), were the only participants to be interviewed via phone. The couple were working night shifts and were not able to meet us for a face to face interview.

There were six females and seven males interviewed during this research. The average age for women was 53,8 and 57 for men. In order to better analyse the answers and to see if any significant differences or patterns emerge between female and male interviewees, the author of this research has divided the answers to every question into two groups, e.g. female and male. There were indeed some differences between the answers given by the Polish females and males, but it would be rather premature to draw any decisive conclusions, perhaps a larger study and greater numbers of older Polish people of different sexes should be interviewed in order to get a better picture.

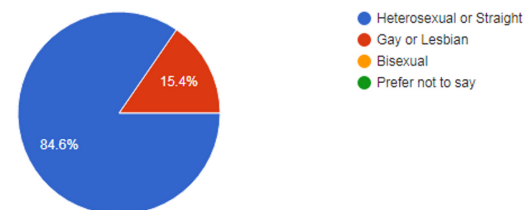
What is your marital status?



Do you live alone?



Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?



What is your religion?

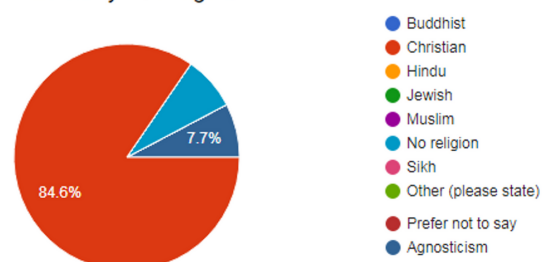


Figure 3: Various demographic data

INDIVIDUAL ASSETS

There are two types of assets - tangible and intangible. Tangible assets are physical and easy to identify. It could include cash, vehicles and buildings. In this report we are looking into intangible assets that people can have.

Intangible asset can be seen as anything of value and could be referred to personal 'strength' or 'talents' (and will be used in this report interchangeably).

Skills fall under the assets, as well as knowledge, experiences, personalities, networks, traditions, cultures, norms, collective experiences etc. (see the table on the right).

Individual Assets	Relational Assets	Collective Assets
Skills, knowledge, leadership capacities, experiences, personalities, what we have, what we can bring to the group.	Networks, relationships, partnerships, friendships, kinships, group ties, associations.	Stories: traditions, cultures, institutions, norms, collective experiences.

Figure 4: *Intangible assets*

Skills

There are three type of skills, such as transferable/functional, personal traits/attitudes and knowledge-based skills.

Even though this is not entirely reflected in the answers to the questions, most of Polish people over the age of 50 had mentioned that, since their arrival to the UK, their professions had changed significantly. Their qualifications, skills and knowledge would not be recognised in the UK. Some older Polish people had to either study or find another profession or job.

That is why a nurse (Marzena, 51yrs) anesthetist with 15 years' experience working in a private surgery in Poland became a letting manager in the UK, a carpenter became a baker (Andrzej, 58yrs), Masters in Economics diploma holder and an administrator became a factory worker (Anna, 51yrs), a bank worker became a cleaner (Anna, 50yrs) and a polygrapher is working in a care home and is studying Graphic design.

However, because of significant profession and employment changes interviewees had obtained additional skills, knowledge and strengthened their character and abilities to adopt to different situations.

PL: Polygrapher UK: Care assistant, artist and graphic designer	PL: Master's in economics, administrator, art, painting and literature UK: Factory worker
PL: Banker UK: Cleaner	Psychology, dance, decorating, music, fashion, hair dressing
PL: Nurse anesthetist UK: Letting manager	Electronics technician, technical innovations, astronomy and quantum physics
PL: Carpenter UK: Baker	PL: Cook UK: Factory worker
UK: Art and astrology	PL: Accountancy UK: Factory worker
UK: Motor vehicle repair	PL: Driver, mechanic and locksmith
UK: Ground worker	

Figure 5: Answers to the question: "What do you consider to be your profession, main areas of knowledge?"

Only a few expressed their regret for not being able to have similar employment to one in Poland. Most of them were happy with their current arrangements and some were thrilled to discover new and exciting career paths. Some had aspirations to change their employment in the future, for example, Andrzej (58yrs) who is currently working as a baker, is planing to become a bus driver when his English language has improved.

Language Skills

Even though the interviewees had obtain various skills through their education and previous employments in Poland they were not utilising these skills in the UK. Overall, the most popular reason was lack of English language knowledge.

However, some of Polish people over the age of 50+ have indicated their ability to speak other foreign languages, such as German and Russian.

Language skills: How confident would you say you were in the following?

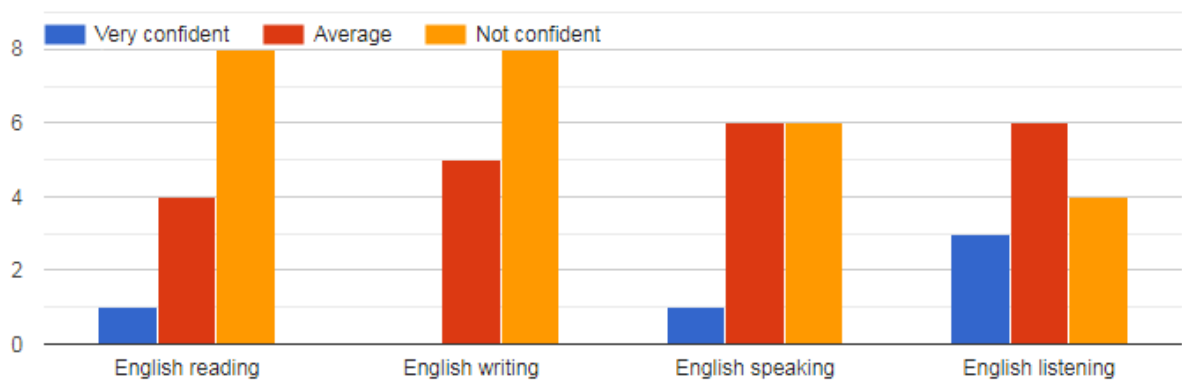


Figure 6: English language skills

As you can see from the chart above, reading and writing were the main areas where older Polish people were struggling. However, the situation was slightly better when it came to speaking in English. Half of interviewees responded that they level of speaking in English is “average”. Five out of twelve individuals said they were not “confident”.

However, it is worth mentioning that though my own observations and assessment, some of individuals had downgraded their English language knowledge and were lacking confidence. For example, one of the interviewees (Marzena, 51yrs) had a very good command of English and the interview was held in English, however, her answer to the question "How confident would you say you are in speaking in English?" she has circled her answer as “average” which was far from the truth.

Many Polish people over the age of 50 had understood the need to learn English, were learning it in the past or were willing to learn in the future.

Anna (51yrs) “I have attended ESOL class in the past, but was not able to carry on due to my full-time employment”

Jan (53yrs) “I would love to go back to studying English”.

Language skills: How confident would you say you were in the following?

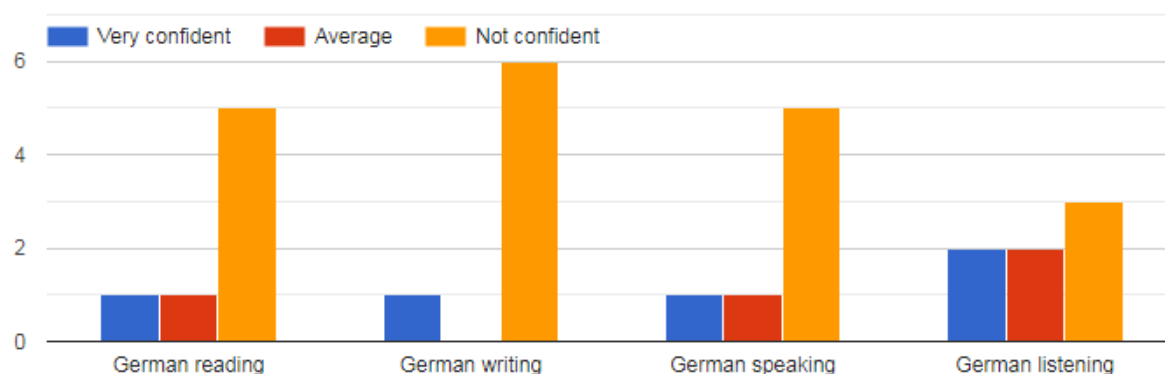


Figure 7: German *language skills*

Language skills: How confident would you say you were in the following?

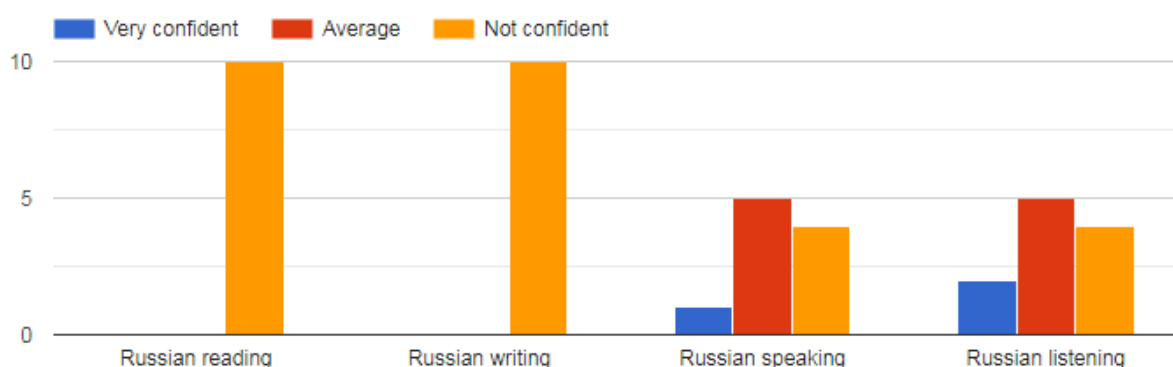


Figure 8: Russian *language skills*

Knowledge as an asset

Knowledge is often described as familiarity, awareness, or understanding of someone or something e.g. facts, information, description and could be acquired through experience or education.

We have already mentioned the knowledge acquired through work, however it can also be acquired through education, hobbies, interests and life experience.

What is your highest level of education?

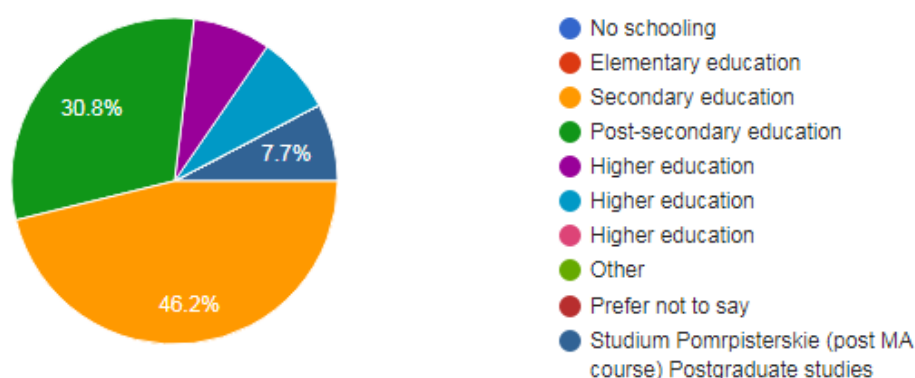


Figure 9: Levels of education

Most interviewees had pursued secondary education (wykształcenie średnie) e.g. profession school, technical school, secondary school/high school and post-secondary education, which combined with full-time compulsory education roughly adds up to more than 11yrs of studies in total, depending on the subject. Three interviewees had obtained university education and one interviewee Pawel, is currently studying Graphic design at the University of Salford.

As mentioned before, knowledge can be also acquired through the development of hobbies. Most of us have experienced that if we enjoy doing something or are interested in something, we can spend hours reading, practicing and gaining additional knowledge.

Sports e.g. tennis, gym, swimming, spinning, art and culture, cooking, urban culture	Travelling, tourism, reading books, baking
Roller blading, walking, swimming, fitness at home, hiking	Now I have lost interest, my hobby related to art (painting) was put on hold due to my illness
Listening to music, art, plants	Fishing
Psychology, parapsychology, Reiki, football	Listening to music, sometimes going for a walk
Reading, surfing the web, before the illness - art (mandala)	Baking, surfing the internet and reading the news
Motorbiking, gardening	Animal welfare and gardening
How to survive, I know this is not a hobby, but I focus on it now.	

Figure 10: What interests, hobbies do you have here in the UK?

As you can see from the answers in Figure 10, most of Polish people over the age of 50 mentioned various hobbies. Most were sports or arts related. Perhaps, the most troubling answer was that of Michal's, (59 yrs): When asked about his hobbies, he replied that he is focusing on how to survive.

Case study, Michal 59 yrs

Michal (59 yrs) is homeless and currently lives in a tent. We met him at Europa for the first time when he was referred by the housing and homelessness organisation Shelter. The report author helped him to fill in his settlement scheme application which would allow him to claim Universal Credit and perhaps finally get back on his feet.

Michal came across as a very friendly and educated individual, even though he said he doesn't trust and actively tries to avoid meeting people. The reason he gave was being attacked and beaten up once.

When Michal came to Europa for the second time, we decided to interview him (in Polish) and find out what his skills and assets are. In addition to speaking English he also speaks German. He is a locksmith by education and was working as a mechanic, handyman and driver in the past. He described himself as friendly, stubborn and focused on his goals.

His main goal is to find a place to live and to be able to support himself.

He was aware of many organisations across Manchester such as The Booth Centre, Cheetham Hill Welcome Centre, Homeless Shelter and Barnabus. In fact, he is volunteering at Barnabus which is a Christian Homeless Charity. Michal also came to Europa for the third time, on the 21st of September (Saturday) 2019 he attended the aforementioned Polish 50+ meeting "Ławeczka Pod Jabłonią"



Figure 11: The bench under the apple tree logo

Answers received to the question "What do you care about deeply?" produced a broad understanding of what kind of knowledge older Polish people have.

Felling like "second class citizen", low self-esteem caused by discrimination.	Politics in Poland and international politics.
Personal development (meditation, relaxation), change of nutrition (system)	Psychology, meditation, breathing techniques, travelling (went to Scotland), climbing
Art (mandala). When drawing mandala's in the past she used to pray that nobody would come into the room and disturb her, so she can carry on drawing. Even her carer (Polish) tried drawing it a few times.	Calmness and ambiance at home
Improving language skills	Active lifestyle
Stabilization in life - hard to find yourself in the UK. He has changed his whole life over the last few years and it's difficult for him to find himself in a new situation in a new country of which he is not a citizen	About my family. I want my children and grandchildren to do well
To get a job and have some income, have a normal home not a tent.	
Healthy life style and my grand kids	Family members

Figure 12: Answers to the question: What do you care about deeply?

Case study, Pawel (49yrs)

Pawel (49yrs) has mentioned feeling as a "second class citizen" the reason being that in Poland he was working as a polygrapher - considered a good, well respected profession. Unfortunately, in the UK his qualifications were not recognised and in order to make a living he had to find a different job.

He started to work in a factory on arrival to the UK, switching to working as a carer in a care home. However, during his years living in the UK he has discovered a passion for the arts and is now regularly participating in design competitions, attending art exhibitions at his local gallery and is a member of an art collective.

This indicates that Pawel has several different skills and his greatest asset, perhaps, is his ability to adapt to different situations, being ambitious, determined, fearless and optimistic.



Figure 13: Andzej (58yrs) loves his motorbike. His wife Izabela (58yrs) says that it absorbs most of her husband's time.



Figure 13: Anna (51yrs) loves art and she used to paint but she is no longer able to do so due to her health.



Figure 14: Krzysztof (60yrs) has worked in the music business as a sales representative in Poland for 20 years. He says *"I have changed my whole life over the last few years and it's difficult for me to find myself in a new situation"*.

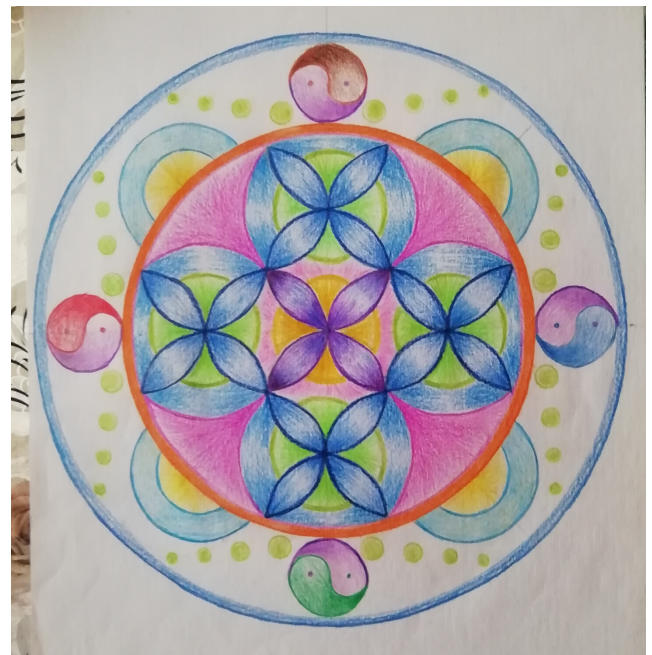


Figure 15: Izabela (58yrs) loves drawing mandalas but is no longer able to do so due to her health. She says *"I used to draw in my room and would pray that nobody would come in e.g. my husband, children, so I can carry on drawing without being disturbed"*.

COLLECTIVE ASSETS. POLAND, POLISH PEOPLE AND POLISHNESS

The history of Poland has been rather turbulent the most of the time. Poland has experienced quite a few wars which devastated entire sections of its population. The country has also encountered occupation by foreign powers and had to constantly defend its freedom, sovereignty and identity. Despite the misfortunes and the hardships, the Polish nation and people managed to recover, to regain their strength and to repeatedly hold strong to their own culture.

Collective experience as an asset

It should not be forgotten that Polish expats of a certain age have lived through a very traumatic time in Poland's history. Our interviewees did not experience the war and post-war atrocities; however, life was very turbulent at the time at which they were growing up as children and teenagers in Poland. Older Polish people have been witnessing outbreaks of strikes, demonstrations and civil unrest which led to dire food shortages between 1970-1981.



Figure 16: Entrance to Gdansk Shipyard with Solidarność poster, Poland. Photo by Ineta Simelionyte, 2018.

Many Polish people were imprisoned as political prisoners and many families were split up and relocated to countries that gave asylum. They also witnessed the election of John Paul II who urged Polish people not to conform to the communist state, the rise and suppression of Solidarność (Solidarity) the first independent labour union in a country belonging to the Soviet bloc and finally Poland's transition from communist party rule to a Western-style liberal democratic political system.

We did not specifically ask our interviewees about these traumatic experiences, however, one of them mentioned losing their loved one during these troubled times. We believe that these historical events had a significant impact on older Polish people. Perhaps, the hardship and uncertainty made them stronger, braver and more resilient. This could, perhaps also explain why all our interviewees decided to leave Poland at an older age (after Poland joined the EU in 2004). The average age when they left Poland was 45.5.

Year of birth	Current age	Year when arrived in the UK	Age when arrived in the UK
1958	61	2008	50
1959	60	2012; 2008	53; 49
1960	59	2006; 2013	46; 53
1961	58; 58	2010; 2010	49; 49
1966	53	2005; 2011	39; 45
1967	52	2011	44
1969	50; 50	2005; 2012	36; 43
1970	49	2006	36

Figure 17: Year of birth, currents age, year and age when arrived to the UK

NATIONAL CHARACTER AS AN ASSET

In this paragraph we will be looking at the most commonly recognised Polish character traits and see if these characteristics are relevant to Polish 50+ interviewed for this research. However, it is important to keep in mind that this research is not quantitative and is only based on a few individual encounters.

Work ethics. "Bez pracy nie ma kołaczy"

"No gain, no pain" an old Polish proverb says and perfectly sums up a popular opinion that Polish people hard-working individuals with a strong work ethic.

Bez pracy nie ma kołaczy
literally: without work there are no kołaczy. Kołacz is a traditional Polish pastry.

According to latest data obtained in 2018 by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Poles are the second hardest working nation in Europe. They work 39.2 hours per week (average), it is 35.3 hours per week in the UK.

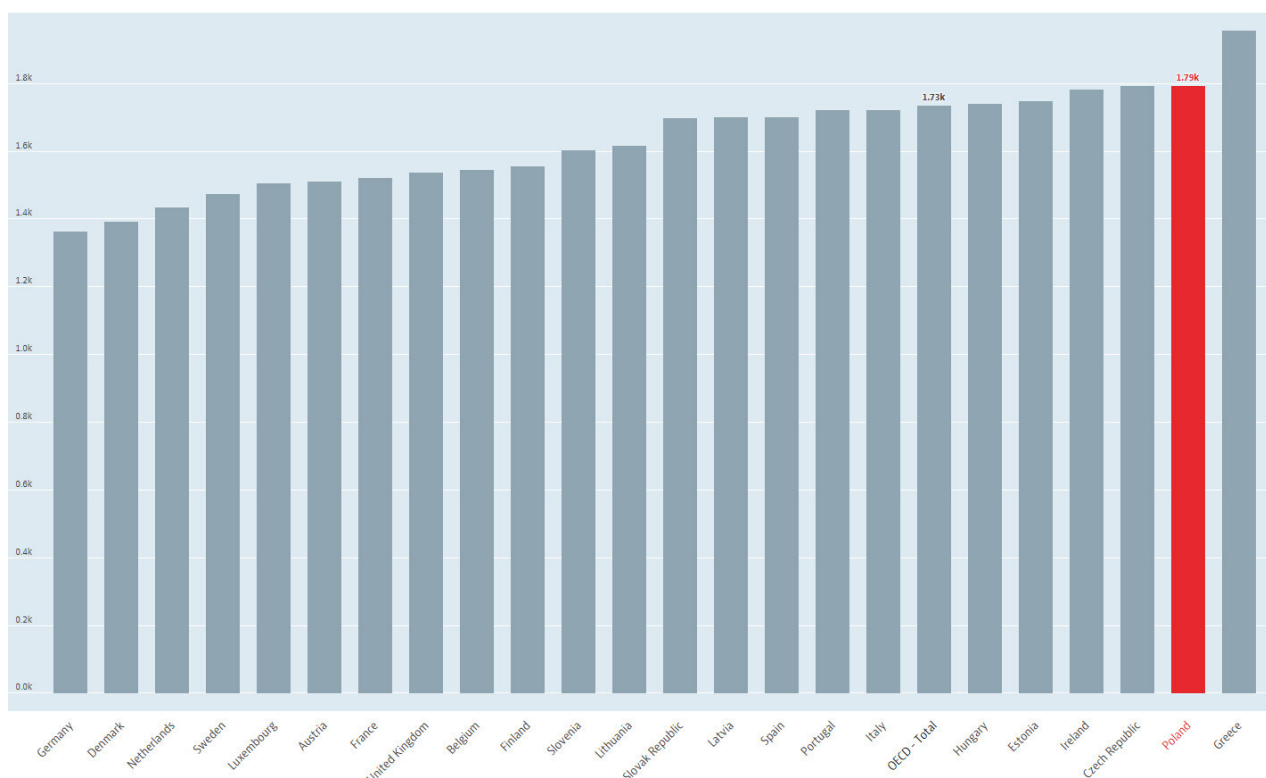


Figure 17: Hours worked. Total, Hours/worker, 2018; <https://data.oecd.org/emp/hours-worked.htm>

We also came across some data from 1988-2013 (unfortunately we could not find any data from recent years). This was published by the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN) and presents responses to the question about the importance of a “good education” in order to “achieve success in life”.

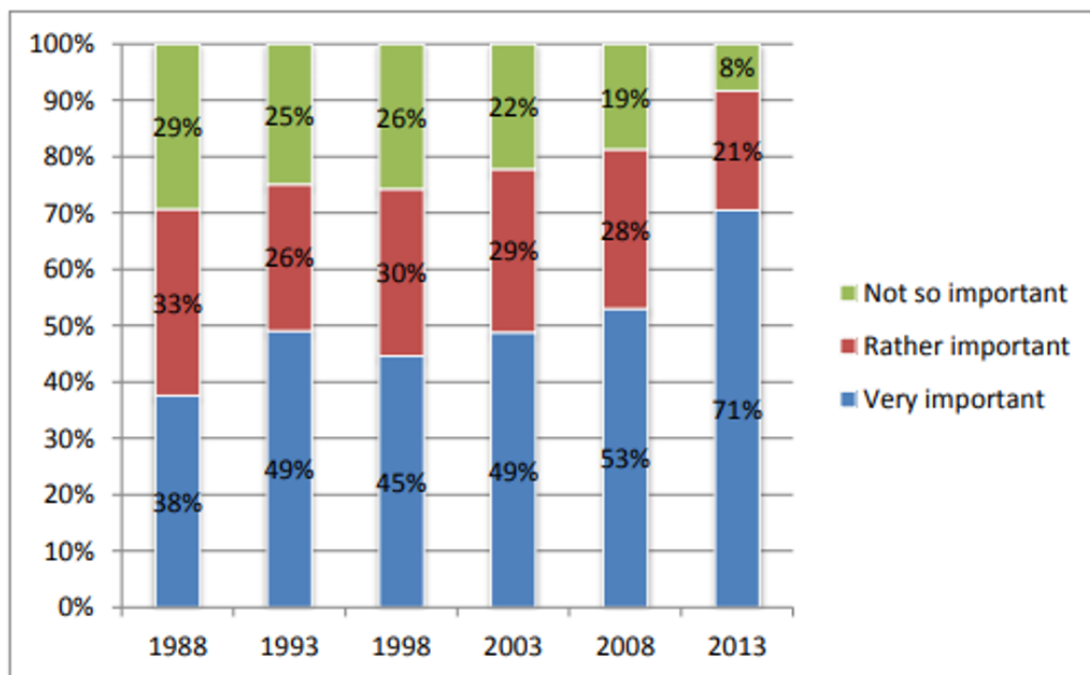
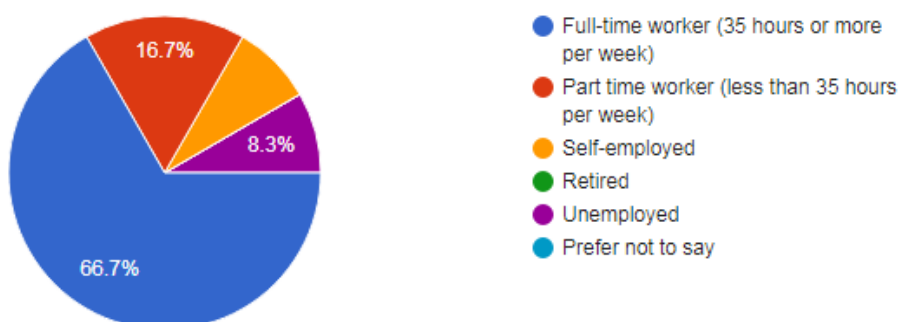


Figure 18: The importance of the “hard work” determinant. Source: POLPAN data, 1988–2013.

Indeed, the data collected during our research indicated that most of our interviewees (9 out of 13) had full time employment (35 hrs per week) and only two were unemployed due to serious reasons, such as, disability and homelessness. Both Michal (59yrs) who has no fixed adobe and is currently living in the tent and Izabella (58yrs) who is disabled and needs a carer to look after her during the day, had repeatedly expressed their regret regarding inability to gain employment.

What is your current employment status?



Perhaps, the most surprising case was that of a Polish couple from St Helens (Merseyside). Witold (61yrs) and Halina (60yrs) who have been working night shifts at such senior age in the factory for quite a few years. They have mentioned that they have learned how to manage their time and work around their employment and were looking forward to their retirement. After entering their dates of birth on the government's website, Halina (60) will reach her retirement age in 6 years and Witold (61) will be able to qualify for Pension Credit in 2024.

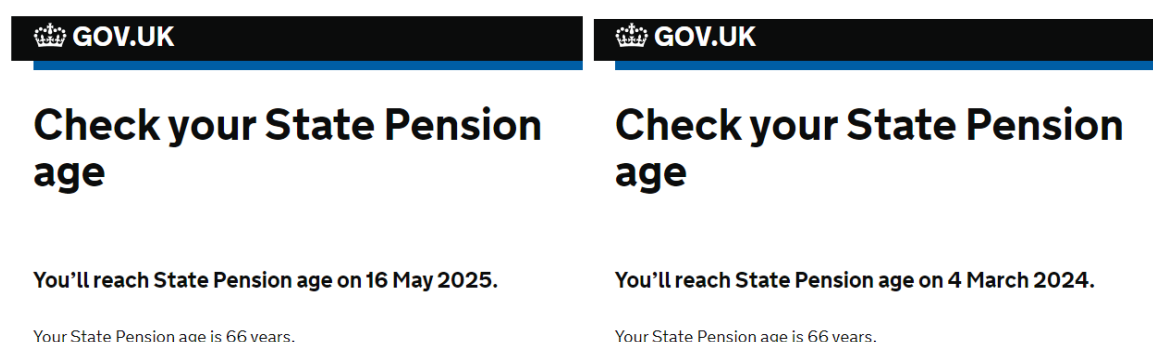


Figure 19: State pension age

There were also some other interviewees who mentioned their employment regularly, such as Anna (51yrs) who we met on Saturday after she had finished working overtime. Anna said that she normally works on weekdays but is also happy to work overtime on Saturdays and Sundays if required; in fact, she was doing it quite regularly, despite issues with her health.

"Bez pracy nie ma kołaczy" says another interviewee Andrzej (58yrs), ironically there is in fact some coffee and pastries similar to kołacz on the table which his wife Izabela (58yrs) instructed him to place on the table. Due to an accident Izabela encountered when they first arrived in the UK, she is no longer able to work and needs a carer to look after her. She has constantly expressed her regret at not being able to financially contribute towards their bills, rent etc and is grateful to her husband for being able to support her. For the past 7 years, Andrzej has been working night shifts as a baker and is sometimes sleeping during the day.

Overall, all of our interviewees gave the impression that they are hardworking, dedicated and honest employees which is a great asset to have not only to an organisation but also for the country.

Attitudes towards education

There are thoughts passed from generation to generation that along with the need to work hard to make a living, it is also important to become educated.

We again came across some data published by the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN) which shows a connection between “good education” and “achieving success in life”.

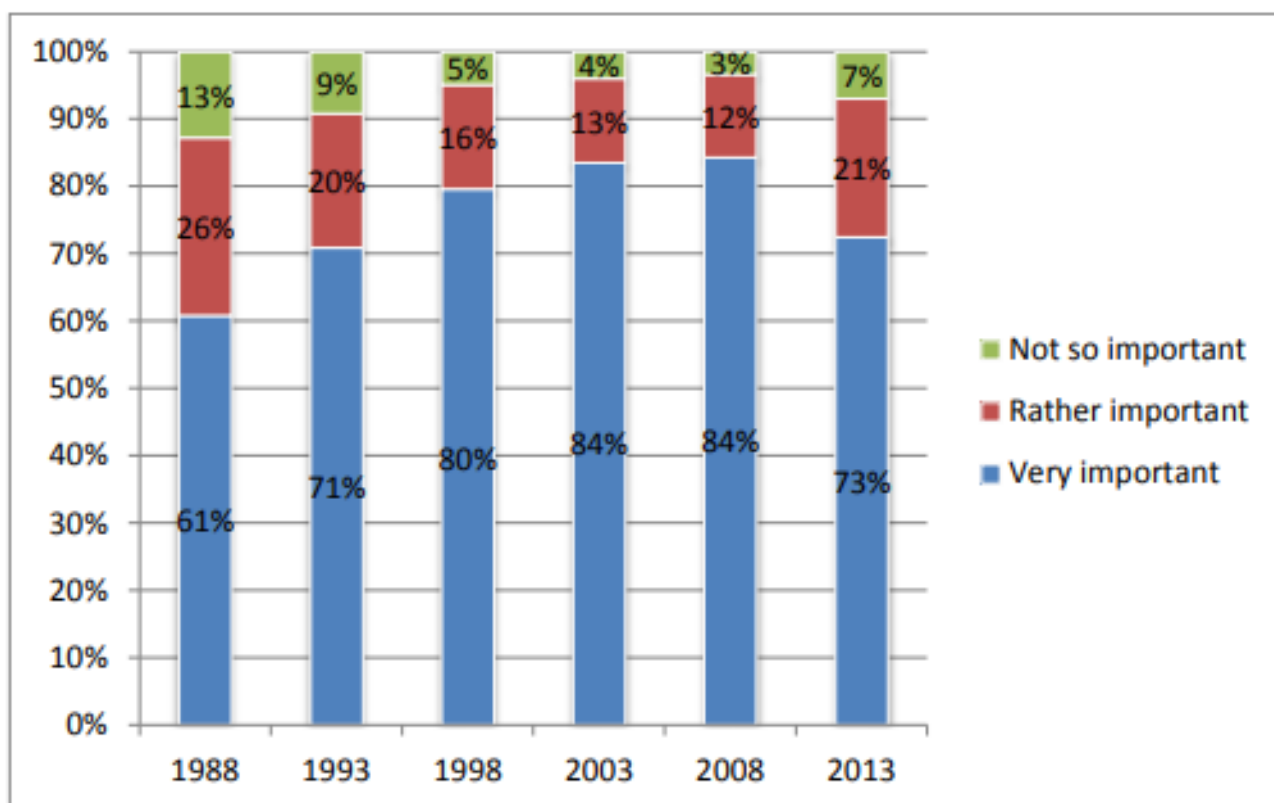
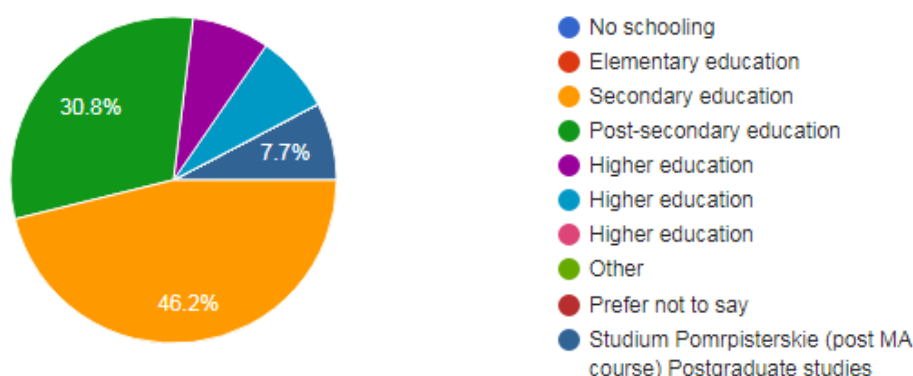


Figure 20: The importance of the “good education” determinant. Source: POLPAN data, 1988–2013

As you can see, the percentage of respondents stating that education is “essential” or “very important” is high. It would be great to obtain some more recent data or survey Polish people living in the UK.

Most older Polish interviewees had pursued secondary education (wykształcenie średnie) e.g. profession school, technical school, secondary school/high school and post-secondary education, which combined with full-time compulsory education roughly adds up to more than 11yrs of studies in total, depending on the subject.

What is your highest level of education?



Three interviewees had obtained university education in Poland and one interviewee Pawel (49yrs) is currently studying Graphic design at the University of Salford. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they have been studying in the UK e.g. Marzena (51yrs) attended management course which enabled her to work as a letting agent and Anna (50yrs), Anna (51yrs), Izabela (58yrs), Andrzej (58yrs) had attended ESOL classes in the past.

Education for Polish people is essential and some of our interviewees had expressed their wish to continue their studies e.g. learn English, attend a course for adults. However some barriers had emerged preventing them from doing so, such as, issues with their health, odd working hours, lack of English knowledge or lack of free time.

Izabela (58 yrs) "I have attended ESOL class in the past and I really enjoyed it. I can't travel to college independently due to my health"

Zofia (51 yrs) "I have checked times for English lessons but it is usually held when I am at work"

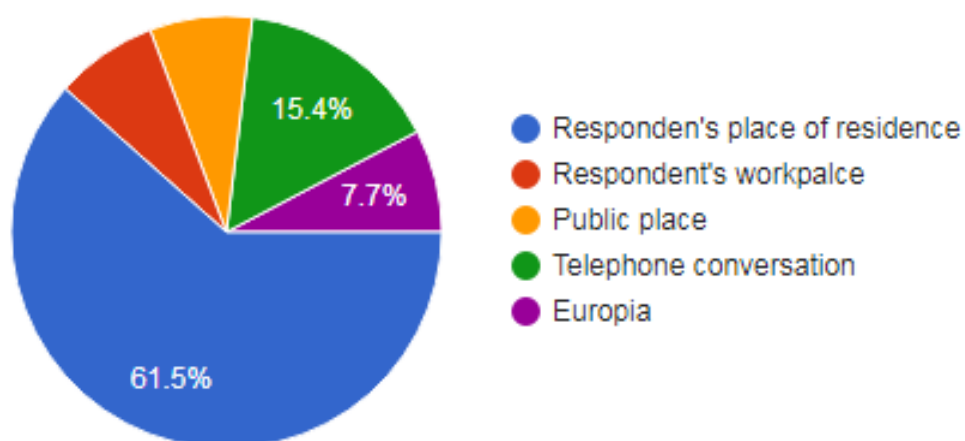
Andrzej (58 yrs) "I would love to attend a course and become a bus driver but I need to improve my English first"

Perhaps, if their needs were better addressed, some of them could pursue their dream to study English, attend a course or perhaps even gain a new profession or new skills.

Hospitality

Polish people are often described as hospitable, in fact, there is a Polish proverb which sums up the essence of Polish hospitality: “A guest in the house is a God in the house”. Indeed, whilst travelling in Poland and occasionally staying with Polish families, the author of this research was overwhelmed by the outpouring of generosity.

Place where the interview was held if Face-to-Face



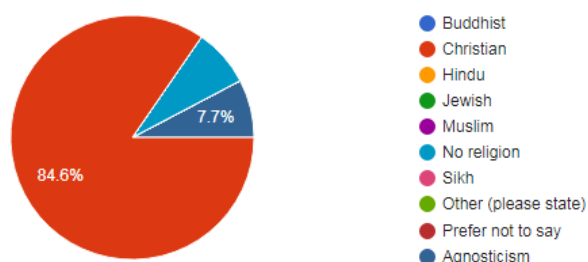
The majority of interviews took place in interviewees' homes. Polish people over the age of 50 were more than happy to invite us into their flats and houses across Greater Manchester. Often upon arrival a pair of slippers would be offered for comfort as well as food, snacks and numerous cups of tea. All the interviewees made sure we felt comfortable and welcomed.

Traditions and culture

Poland is considered to be rather religious. Approximately 90 percent of Poles identify as Roman Catholic. This has influenced holidays and traditions that are such an important part of Polish culture. There are many Poles who, whilst not being practising Catholics, the majority have a level of respect for traditions.

The majority of our interviewees (11 out of 13) identified themselves as Christian (Roman Catholics). Even though we did not ask them directly, most of them said they only attend church services during such holidays as Christmas, Easter or St. Andrew's Day perhaps travelling to Poland in order to celebrate it with their family and friends.

What is your religion?



One semi-religious (originally religious but now more of a tradition) celebration appeared to be still vivid as we have noticed a card at Anna's (51yrs) flat. The card was given to her because it was her name day (Imieniny). Traditionally, name day



celebrations were greater than that of birthday celebrations in Poland. Calendars often contain the names of saints, celebrated on a given day. Indeed, the popularity of this festivity was once again confirmed when visiting a large Polish shop in Eccles where a wide range of Imeniny cards were displayed.

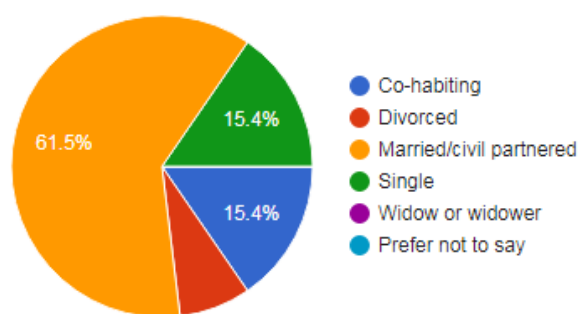
RELATIONAL ASSETS

This section looks into which relational assets Polish people over the age of 50 possess. We were looking into the networks and relationships interviewees have. We investigated how connected the interviewees feel to their local neighbourhoods and attempted to look into exactly how connected they are in practice. Do they have any ties with Polish or non-Polish groups or associations within Greater Manchester? Are they willing to connect at all and what issues do they face when making such connections?

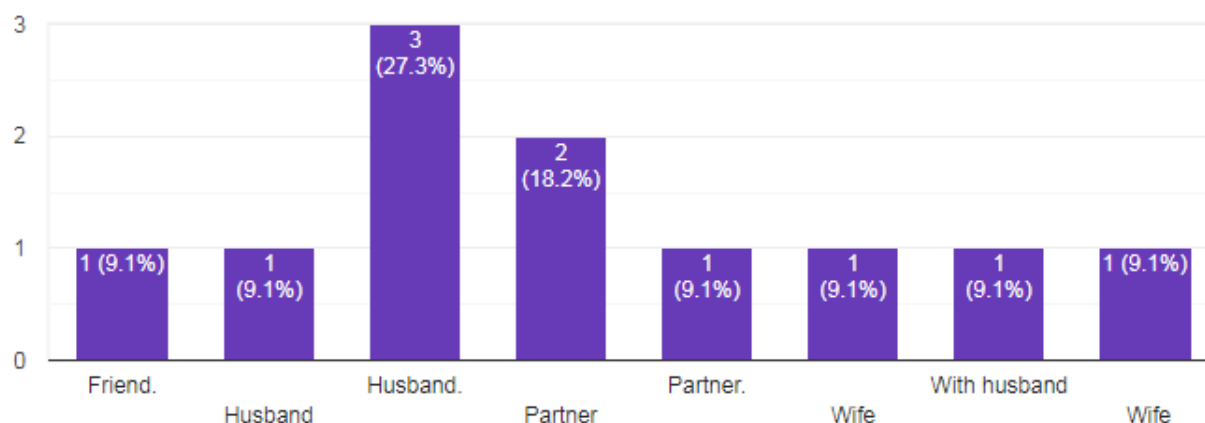
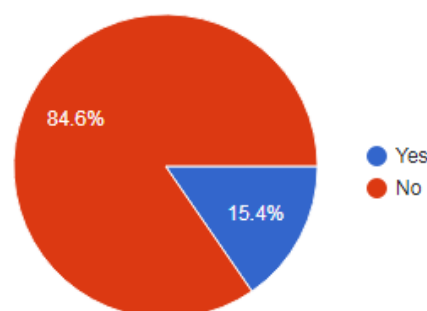
Family

In general, Poles have a high regard for family. Polish families usually tend to be large and interconnected, even if spread across the world. When asked if they live on their own 11 out of 13 people answered they do not live alone. When asked "Who do you live with?" 7 people lived with their spouse, 3 of them lived with a partner, one lived with a friend, leaving only two who lived on their own.

What is your marital status?



Do you live alone?



Even though we did not enquire directly some interviewees did mention having children and friends. Anna (51yrs) said that she had a son who sometimes visits her, Zofia (51yrs) said that her son visits her at least once a week and lives close by and Marzena's (51yrs) son was also a regular guest in her house. It would be premature to make definite conclusions but it seemed that most of Polish females over the age of 50 were closer to their children compared

to male interviewees.

In order to better assess the relationships that older Polish people had, some direct questions could have been included in the questionnaire, such as "Do you have any children who reside in Greater Manchester or in the UK?", "Do you have any extensive family members who live in the UK?", "Do you have any friends?", "If yes, how often do you meet them?", "Do you have any friends who are not Polish?" etc.

Neighbourhood

In order to find out if older Polish people felt and were connected to their local neighborhoods, we first had to find out what they consider to be their local neighborhood. The answers to the question are below.

St Helens	Few houses next to my house
My street	Adswood (part of Stockport)
The place where I used to live and now work as a letting agent	Local district
My district and my neighbours	My street
Block of flats and neighbours in Tonge Moore	Greater Manchester
Block of flats	Hindley
Stockport, but mainly Adswood to city centre	

As you can see the answers given were very different, starting with "few houses next to my house" and finishing with "Greater Manchester". Some of the respondents mentioned areas such as Hindley, Stockport or Adswood which are sizeable areas and perhaps would not necessarily fall under the definition of "local". Maybe the question needed more clarification or maybe it is simply a "local neighbourhood" to the interviewee. Michal (59yrs) of no fixed abode gave the answer "Greater Manchester".

When asked "What do you think about your local neighborhood?". 53% of older Polish people indicated that they like "friendly neighbors" and this was the most popular answer. It also indicates that there is some form of interaction and engagement between the two.

It has also emerged that older Polish people value safety, cleanness, green spaces e.g. parks and prefer when it is peaceful and quiet. When asked to identify meeting places for local people in their neighborhood 53% mentioned pubs, 31% - park, 23% - shops and shopping centres. Cafe, yard and art gallery was the least popular answer. One respondent could not indicate where local people meet.

9 out of 13 interviewees said that they do not go out and do not socialise with people in the above-mentioned meeting places; for example, whilst over half mentioned pubs, none of them actually visit one regularly. From the responses we received we could see that a lack of English language skills and a lack of personal time were the two major factors inhibiting interviewees from socialising with people in their local community. One interesting point was that just under half of interviewees stated they had a long-standing medical condition however only one mentioned ill health as a reason not for getting involved in a group or activity. We looked to see if there may be any correlation between marital status and willingness to join local groups; Whilst one person replied that they would rather stay home with their partner, overall we found no real difference between single or married/cohabiting people and their desire to join groups.

When asked "Are you aware of any local community members who take care of other people in your neighborhood or look after your neighborhood? 9 out of 13 respondents answered that they did not know. The remaining 3 people were aware of cleaners, gardeners, shopkeepers, priests and police officers. Marzena (51yrs) said that they have a WhatsApp group where, e.g. if one neighbor is ill and can't go shopping, he/she can ask other neighbors to help.

When asked about local groups, clubs, associations and volunteer organisations, 9 out of 13 interviewees did not know any. The remaining respondents gave answers, such as NAZZA community club in Salford, various university associations, women's fitness club, Conservative club, the Booth Centre, Cheetham Hill Welcome Centre, the Homeless Shelter and Barnabus.

10 out of 13 said they would like to become a member of a local organisation. They were interested in mixed age groups where you can learn about other cultures, engage in new art experiences e.g. photography, baking, drawing or sports/keep fit, take care of animals e.g. dog shelter or to develop English language skills.

The reasons given for not joining local groups were similar to the previous answers – a lack of time and difficulties with English language. However, Krzysztof (60yrs) simply said that he does not have such a need. This lack of desire to socialise and / or get involved could be put down to bad health or social insecurity.

Case study, Marzena 51 yrs

Marzena (51yrs) is working as a

letting agent and we have interviewed her in her cosy office in Manchester. She used to live here and considers it to be her local neighbourhood. She knows everybody here and everybody knows her since she regularly conducts housing inspections as it is her job.

Sometimes Marzena organises community events and is also involved in some local groups. One multicultural group is going for a meal at a different restaurant every month and Marzena loves it.

She is also very passionate about recycling that is why her community received "Clean Neighborhood" award at Be Proud Manchester awards.



"Clean Neighborhood" award at Be Proud Manchester awards.

When asked if there is anything that would encourage interviewees to join such groups, some answers were "better English", "better health", charismatic and intellectual group leaders and members and sightseeing opportunities.

When asked if they have been involved in local Polish groups - 4 out of 13 already were members of a Polish group in Greater Manchester and 5 were willing to join such a group yet didn't have enough information available to find something interesting.

5 older Polish people did not want to engage with any Polish groups, clubs, associations

or activities in Greater Manchester. One person had been previously involved in a Polish group in Bury yet found the experience unrewarding due to bad organisation.

Another person expressed quite a dislike of the idea of spending time with Polish people, another wanted to join non-Polish groups and thus improve their English.

Others were simply too busy or too content with their current situation to want to explore joining such groups. We did find that those who stated a lack of time when considering joining Polish speaking groups, in general had the same attitude to groups on a whole.

Negative experience with setting up a similar group in the past - lack of motivation from members.
I live together with my partner and we're happy to have a time only for us both
I am completely not interested in the Polish environment, just English. Poles who mainly come here are not the people with whom you can talk freely. It is difficult to find someone good.
I am happy with the people I have around me
I have tried one in Bury and didn't like the standards
I don't have time - I have to be able to support myself, I need to have a financial resource, flat, apartment. I think about these things first
The biggest reason I think is my age. I'm not a such a young boy like used to be
3x Lack of time

The reasons for not belonging and not wanting to join a Polish group in Greater Manchester were:

Case study "Ławeczka Pod Jabłonią"

"Ławeczka pod jabłonią" ("The bench under the apple tree") is a group of Polish people over the age of 50 who meet every month at Europaia.

It has started in 2018 when Social Anthropologist and Researcher Hannah C. Wadle (PhD) was looking for the ways to engage with older Polish people for her research project called "Experiences and challenges of aged 50+ Polish Expats in Greater Manchester". Although H.C. Wadle is no longer involved the group is still meeting.

During these meetings individuals can engage with one another and discuss age-related and migration topics.

Upcoming meetings will also introduce older Polish people to different aspects of British culture, provide training e.g. mental health, writing CVs etc.

Two research interviewees had attended recent "Ławeczka pod jabłonią" meeting which was held on the 21st of September.

CONCLUSIONS

United Kingdom is a vast country with people arriving from various corners of the world. Polish community is said to be the largest foreign-born community in the UK and is slowly ageing.

When meeting and talking with older Polish people face-to-face for the purpose of this research many hidden gifts were uncovered. It is concerning to think that the remarkable skills and the assets of Polish people over the age of 50 are still being unrealised, uncovered and full potential of older Polish people is not being unveiled.

There is a vast amount of work to be done to ensure that older Polish people have access to the full range of opportunities, get involved, feel valued and age with dignity. One of the main reasons for lack of social inclusion we found to be limited English language.

8 out of 13 interviewees stated they are not confident reading or writing English. This no doubt limits access to information regarding local groups and activities; for example, they could have problems reading a leaflet in English. In addition, just under half of the sample group were not confident speaking in English; something which could cause problems in joining certain activities. The majority of those interviewed however, expressed a desire to improve their English. In fact, two interviewees replied negatively to the idea of joining a Polish language group as they would prefer to spend their time in groups with the potential to learn or practice English.

The second main reason for a lack of engagement seemed to stem from a lack of personal time, with 4 out of 13 interviewees stating they have much less time to pursue activities compared to when they lived in Poland. However, a larger subject group would be advised before making too many assumptions.

It is unacceptable that Polish people over the age of 50 whom we have interviewed have lived in the UK for on the average 10 years or more and

are still leading somewhat secluded, parallel and disconnected lives.

We need to ensure that there are more opportunities for older Polish people to get involved in both Polish and English-speaking communities within Greater Manchester.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list provides some suggestions for possible steps that could be taken and projects that could be developed by Polish community organisations or organisations such as Europa and/or policy makers.

The government should make clear statements condemning hate crime and send a message to European migrants reassuring them that they are welcome to live and work in the UK without any fear or uncertainty.

The government or any other organisations should consider providing free of charge or subsidized, age friendly ESOL classes.

Organisations, such as Europa or Polish community organisations should:

- promote life-long learning;
- continue creating safe and age friendly places where older Polish people can socialise and share their ideas;
- combined language and vocational classes could be considered; ESOL bakery classes for example;
- promote Polish culture in creative ways that would enable people from all backgrounds to connect;

- raise awareness of older Polish people's skills and assets;
- signpost older Polish people to their local neighbourhood groups in their own language. This could be perhaps come in the form of a newsletter with local events in Polish language.

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ATTACHMENTS



Deklaracja Zgody/Consent Form

Dla uczestnika w projekcie
"Researching the assets and skills of Polish people aged 50+ in Greater Manchester"

Jeżeli Pani/Pan zgodzi się uczestniczyć w wyżej opisanym projekcie, poprosimy o
przeczytaniu deklaracji zgody i o parafowaniu dokumentu:

*If you would like to participate in the above project, we would like you to read through the following consent
form and sign it, if you agree to the outlined terms.*

1. Potwierdzam, że poczytałam/em informacje o podanym projekcie, że
miałam/em możliwość zadawać pytania dotyczące projektu i że te pytania
zostały wyjaśnione.

*I hereby confirm that I have read the attached information sheet about the research project
given in the title. I confirm that I had time to reflect on it and ask questions, and that my
questions have been sufficiently answered.*

Proszę
zaznaczyć
X/ please
tick

☐

2. Potwierdzam, że uczestniczę w tym projekcie dobrowolnie i mogę się
wyciąć w każdej chwili bez podanego powodu i nie ma żadnych
odpowiedzialności związane z wycofaniem się.

*I hereby confirm that I participate in the research project voluntarily. I can withdraw from my
decision to participate at any moment without further explanation or obligations.*

☐

3. Wyrażam zgodę na nagrywanie dźwięku/ wideo rozmowę osobistą,
telefoniczną (proszę przekreślić nieodpowiedniego) z badaczem.

*I agree to a sound/video (please cross out the inappropriate options) recording of the guided
conversation with the research over the phone, or in person.*

☐

4. Zgadzam się z skorzystaniem z cytatów wywiadu w raporcie w danej
formie: a) anonimowy b) z moim imię i nazwiskiem c) z moją imioną
(proszę przekreślić nieodpowiedniego).

*I agree for quotations from the guided conversations to be used in the report in the following
form: anonymized, with name and surname, with name (please cross out the inappropriate
options).*

☐

5. Wyrażam zgodę uczestniczyć w powyżej opisanym projekcie.

I agree to participate in the above described project.

*Imię i nazwisko uczestnika/
Name and surname of the
research collaborator*

Data/Date

Podpis/Signature

*Imię i nazwisko rozmowca/
Name of interviewer*

Data/Date

Podpis/Signature

