

Political remitting of mobile EU citizens – a comparative study of Polish and Spanish migrants (PolRemit)

The context

A fundamental question linked to migration is how it impacts migrants' countries of origin. Part of this impact happens through non-financial transfers, conceptualised by Peggy Levitt as social remittances – the ideas, norms and practices passed by migrants and returnees to the country of origin. Social remittances have been investigated worldwide, especially from the US to Latin America, and recently from Western to Central and Eastern Europe after the 2004 and 2007 European Union enlargements (when Poland and nine other countries from the region joined). However, a particular subcategory of social remittances – political remittances – has received less attention in the European Union. Political remittances are understood as aimed at transforming the state and the public sphere, as opposed to other kinds of social remittances, which may be directed at the private realm. They may concern such issues as the functioning of civil society and relations with authorities, politicised topics, e.g. immigration, abortion laws, the role of the church in the state, or gender relations, as well as political strategies, for example, of campaigning. Only a few papers have investigated political remitting from 'old' to 'new' EU countries, e.g., from the UK or Ireland to Poland or Romania. Even less is known about political remitting between Western European countries, although significant migration and intense exchanges in the transnational space (e.g. people simultaneously taking part in political and social activities in their country of origin and residence, including online) have recently occurred between some of them.

The aims

This research aims to fill the gap in knowledge about political remitting by investigating the phenomenon for two groups – Poles and Spaniards. Both countries have experienced large emigrations in the last two decades (Poland after EU accession in 2004, Spain due to the economic crisis of 2008 and the following years). Many of these migrants were graduates – which increases the chances of political and social involvement – and were dissatisfied with their country's economic or political situation, making them perhaps more prone to attempt to change something by remitting.

We want to learn about the contents of political remittances (what norms, values or practices are 'sent' or 'brought' to the home country by migrants, returnees, visitors, people acting online or through others) and how this is done. We also want to know how the conditions in the destination of migration and the home country impact remitting. For example, it has been noticed that the openness of the political system and political parties in migrant-receiving countries to newcomers can change their involvement and thus – potentially – their remitting. The size and organisation of the migrant community in the country may also play a role. To understand the influence of these factors, the project will compare political remitting to Poland from four countries: the UK, Germany, Ireland and Iceland. By choosing a spectrum of countries with significant Polish minorities, we hope to demonstrate exactly which conditions are important. The UK, Germany and Ireland were the most frequently chosen destinations in the last two decades, while in Iceland the Polish minority is especially large compared to population size.

At the same time, it is also known that conditions in the home country of migrants influence if and how their remittances are accepted and impact the social and political life of the country. To understand these, the project will compare two receiving countries of remittances: Poland and Spain. The comparison will focus on remitting by Polish and Spanish migrants from the UK and Germany, which were the most frequent destinations not only for Poles but also for Spaniards who left their country as a result of the crisis.

The methods

Information will be gathered mainly by repeatedly interviewing political remitters (who will be found through migrant organisations, NGOs, local authorities, parties, the media and social media). Several localities in Poland and Spain will also be chosen for detailed observation. There, people from the remitters' networks, such as co-activists or work colleagues, will also be interviewed to gauge the remitters' impact. Researchers will also observe various public political and social events in which the remitters will be involved.