

Catherine Harris

Doctoral Researcher

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About

Title of PhD: Entrepreneurship amongst Polish migrants in the West Midlands

Supervisors: [Dr Dominique Moran \(/staff/profiles/gees/moran-dominique.aspx\)](/staff/profiles/gees/moran-dominique.aspx), [Professor John Bryson \(/staff/profiles/business/bryson-john.aspx\)](/staff/profiles/business/bryson-john.aspx)

Catherine Harris is undertaking doctoral research into entrepreneurship amongst Polish migrants in the West Midlands. She is using qualitative methodologies to interview Polish entrepreneurs about their experiences of migration, establishing a business, and life in the UK. She presented a paper at the Association of American Geographers' Annual Meeting in New York City, in February 2012.

Qualifications

- MA International Studies (2007)
- BA (Hons) Geography (2005)

Biography

Catherine gained a BA (Hons) in Geography at the University of Oxford in 2005. She completed a MA in International Studies in the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham in 2007, which was awarded with distinction. She joined the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences in October 2007 as a doctoral researcher.

Research

There are numerous studies which focus on entrepreneurship in Poland, but very little is known about Polish immigrant enterprises and businesses that they set up in Western Europe in the post enlargement era. This research addresses this gap and contributes to the debate about Polish entrepreneurs by examining the trajectories of Polish immigrant entrepreneurs starting their own business in the West Midlands region of the UK. The research is based on the results of 48 interviews with Polish entrepreneurs throughout the West Midlands, who migrated around the time of EU enlargement in 2004.

The research argues that there are a number of factors operating which "push" or "pull" Polish immigrants into self employment in the West Midlands, and that their experiences of entrepreneurship are supported by translocal relationships. The study suggests that the timing choice of migration for Polish entrepreneurship is carefully constructed. The majority of Polish entrepreneurs in the region migrated prior to accession in order to capitalise on the flows of migrants expected with EU enlargement. Many of these are retail sector businesses who were originally reliant on a Polish customer base. Those entrepreneurs who migrated following accession tend to own professional businesses, with less dependence on Polish clientele.

The study also suggests that an important feature which characterises Polish entrepreneurs is the utilising of translocal (local-local) exchanges in order to support their businesses. The key translocal relationship involved is that of family, often with the entrepreneur's parents (who are based in Poland) providing resources in the form of capital to fund the business and advice to support it. Evidence of translocality is also seen through the products offered and services used by Polish enterprises, and through their labour force choices.

Polish entrepreneurs, particularly those who migrated post-accession, demonstrate the ability to identify specific gaps in the local immigrant based market, and the capacity to exploit social capital within the community, therefore "breaking-out" from the constraint of serving a distinctly ethnic cohort, to serve the wider population. In focusing on the process of adopting breakout strategies, the business aspirations, limitations for growth, and ultimately survival of the Polish businesses in the West Midlands are also explained.

The findings conclude that Polish entrepreneurs in the West Midlands made carefully constructed decisions regarding the timing of their migration in order to establish successful businesses through the use of translocal relationships, with some notable differences between pre-accession and post-accession entrepreneurs. Since the research highlights the local element of Polish entrepreneurs in the UK, it provides the foundation for research into the local lives of these entrepreneurs in Poland, before they migrated to the UK.

Catherine's research is funded by the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences School Studentship.

Research group

[Society, Economy and Environment \(/research/activity/hg/index.aspx\)](/research/activity/hg/index.aspx)

Other activities

Catherine has been invited to present at conferences and workshops throughout her time as a doctoral researcher. She presented a paper at the Association of American Geographers' Annual Meeting in New York City, in February 2012.

Catherine has enjoyed assisting with the teaching of a number of undergraduate modules and has attended several undergraduate field courses in order to support the field course leaders. She holds a certificate in the Introduction to Learning and Teaching in Higher Education for Postgraduates. She has undertaken a variety of training programmes in order to enhance her effectiveness as a researcher.

Publications

Harris C, D Moran & J R Bryson 'Polish Labour Migration to the UK: Data Discrepancies, Migrant Distributions and Entrepreneurial Activity' Under review at *Growth and Change*

Harris C, D Moran & J R Bryson (2012) 'EU Accession Migration: National Insurance Number Allocations and the Geographies of Polish Labour Immigration to the UK' *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, Volume 103, Issue 2, pages 209–221, April 2012. **[Available for download](#)** (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2011.00682.x/abstract>)

Harris C (2010) 'Poles Apart'. Doctoral research film of the year 2010, University of Birmingham. **[Watch online](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnRM53jmLO4)** (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnRM53jmLO4>.)

Harris C (2007) 'Globalization and the Internet: a World Online or a Digital Divide?'. Unpublished MA Dissertation. The Department of Political Science and International Studies, The University Birmingham, Birmingham.

Harris C (2005) 'Cultural Homogeneity? The Impact of the Globalization of Television on Punjabi Children's Cultural Identities in the West Midlands'. Unpublished BA Dissertation. School of Geography, The University of Oxford, Oxford.

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