

POLES IN SEATTLE 1880-2020. AN UN-IMAGINED COMMUNITY

The study focuses on the Polish-American community in Seattle, Washington in the past and present. The transformation process of the community is analyzed in the context of mobility within the Trans-Atlantic labor market, and the transformation process of the European immigrant communities in the USA. The study is informed by the theoretical concepts that dominate in the recent world studies on migration flows.

Poles settled in Seattle and its surroundings starting from the 1880's. It was the pioneer time when white settlers were arriving to the Pacific Northwest, and when the rail connections with the main American centers were under construction (1883, 1893). In the course of time the next immigration flows appeared: Polish refugees after the World War II, *Solidarity* refugees and other migrants from the communist Poland, and recently high skilled Poles recruited by the IT and high tech companies that have their headquarters in Seattle (Microsoft, Boeing).

This highly diversified immigrant group made of the descendants of the pioneer settlers, the descendants of the refugees, and the recent immigrants produced a community woven by the tight relations and attractive events, for example the Polish Festival, annually in June, and Polish Film Festival in the Autumn. Despite the involvement in the ethnic community life, the recent immigrants do not want to be identified with the traditional Polonia. Therefore, at the initial stage of the project, we may call them an un-imagined community. The term reveals the paradox of their situation.

The project aims : 1. to discover the migration mechanisms that in the past brought Poles into this remote region of the USA; 2. to analyze the internal diversity of the community with special emphasis on immigrant generations, social status, and gender roles (bread winners and bread bakers); 3. to reconstruct the organizational structure of the group with focus on the crucial role of the old institutions (Polish Home Association established in 1918, lodges of the Polish National Alliance that date back to 1890, Polish American parishes in Seattle and its vicinity), and the new forms of activity (Polish language schools for children, web platforms); 4. to reconstruct relations between Poles and other ethnic groups in Seattle: Croatians, Jews, Ukrainians; 5. to analyze identity change strategies in the new place; 6. to deconstruct stereotypical perception of a local Polonia community.

An important result of the study will be a new paradigm of the studies on transformation process of the immigrant communities nowadays. The model will find implementation in studies on other immigrant communities (non-Polish and in other locations).