

## University aspirations of Polish students in Athens

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### Abstract

*Contemporary migrations are becoming a common process for people who want to improve their material living conditions and to provide better economic security for themselves and their families. Immigration is currently high up the political agenda in most European countries, including Greece, as they struggle to deal with the increased flow of illegal migrants that many countries have experienced in recent months. This is why it is necessary to examine various aspects of migration, including those which refer to the youngest groups of migrants. In the following paper we focus on the university aspirations of young Poles from Athens. Immigrant youth and children of immigrants make up a large and increasing share of the Greek population, and it seems that over the next few decades they will constitute a significant portion of the society. Since the Greek community becomes increasingly diverse it is relevant to understand the educational trajectories of children from various ethnic groups especially with regards to the importance of postsecondary education to occupational success, financial security, and the pursuit of upward social mobility. Yet, research on the topic is far from being complete. Our project looks at the university aspirations of a group of Polish youngsters in Athens. Data come from PhD research, a qualitative study on the educational and migratory strategies of Polish families residing in the capital of Greece.*

### Key-words

*University Aspirations, Polish Migrants, Post-Secondary Education.*

## **Introduction**

The present paper looks at the university aspirations of the group of Polish youngsters in qualitative research on the educational and migratory strategies of Polish families residing in Athens. Analyzing the data for the PhD research we noticed that during the focus groups and interviews Polish individuals often spoke about their educational plans: children for themselves and parents for their children. It prompted us to investigate the nature of those aspirations for the researched group. We believe that since Greek society is becoming increasingly diverse it is relevant to understand the educational trajectories of children from various ethnic groups residing in this country. Of special importance are postsecondary educational aspirations as relevant for the occupational success, financial security, and the pursuit of upward social mobility of the individuals. Additionally, immigration is currently high up the political agenda in most European countries, including Greece, as the states struggle to deal with the increased flow of illegal migrants that many countries have experienced in recent months.

In the present paper we attempt to answer the following question: *What are the university aspirations of Polish adolescents from Athens?* Investigating university aspirations of young Poles we follow Salikutluk's (2013) conceptualization of educational aspirations as overall goals determining educational decisions at transition point which in our case is finishing high-school.

## **The Polish community in Athens**

Greece has never been one of the main destinations for Polish emigrants. Still, in terms of population size, the Polish community is amongst the ten largest immigrant groups residing in that country. Polish people have been coming to Greece mainly in search of

work and higher standards of living. But not exclusively: they came to Greece basically for three reasons: economic – employment, family related - following a partner, and for holidays. Curiosity and attraction to the country, with its climate, culture and traditions, worked as pull factors for many Poles. With time they started families in Greece or brought their families to the country.

At the beginning of the new millennium Polish workers constituted the third largest group of undocumented immigrants in Athens (Siadima, 2001:11) with 80% concentrated in Attica. In 2003 the Greek ambassador in Poland estimated that the number of Polish residents in Greece was 40 to 50,000 people (Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2006:15). The accession of Poland into the EU's structures did not change the number of Polish citizens residing in Greece dramatically, as was the case with some other EU countries (for instance the UK and Ireland). Table 1 presents the numbers of Polish citizens in Greece between 2002 and 2014 according to The Central Statistical Office of Poland (<http://www.stat.gov.pl/>).

Table 1 Emigration from Poland to Greece

| End of year | 2002 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Thousands   | 10   | 13   | 17   | 20   | 20   | 20   | 16   | 16   | 15   | 14   | 12   | 9    |

A decrease in the Polish population can be noticed after 2008; due to the crisis that struck Greece Polish families started to re-emigrate to other EU countries (e.g. the UK, Germany, Denmark), chose more distant locations (Canada) or returned to Poland. Currently it is very difficult to estimate the exact number of Polish citizens residing in Greece partly due to their mobility and partly on account of the lack of reliable statistical calculations. Polish residents remain an "invisible community": their presence

in Greece is not easily discernible in the material space of the country, as there are only a few Polish shops and restaurants in specific districts of the major cities in Greece, and rare Polish cultural events organized by the Polish School, Embassy, or some Polish societies and the church.

The Polish population in Athens remains concentrated in the heart of this city with the cultural center in Michail Voda Street, where the Catholic Church of Christ the Savior is located. Around that district a large informal network of Polish private services is organized (including everything from child care, shops, and restaurants to legal offices, doctors' surgeries, etc.). This area is a meeting place for Polish citizens where they socialize and exchange information concerning all the aspects of immigrant life in Greece.

In terms of education Polish families in Athens get to select from the variety of educational choices on offer: Greek public and private schools, various international schools as well as the Group of Schools at the Polish Embassy in Athens (GoSaPEiA). Nevertheless, taking into account the migratory pattern that the majority of Polish migrants present, namely economic emigration characterized by low paid jobs, the actual school choice concerns non fee-paying institutions: either the public Greek schools or the GoSaPEiA.

### **The Polish School in Athens**

The Group of Schools at the Polish Embassy in Athens (GoSaPEiA) was created for Polish children temporarily residing in Greece and include a primary school, a junior high-school and a high-school. All lessons are in Polish; Greek is taught as a foreign language. The Polish School is coordinated by The Group of Schools for Polish Citizens

Temporarily Living Abroad, with headquarters in Warsaw. The GoSaPEiA is funded from the Polish state budget. Since 1997 it has operated according to regulations which are the same for all public schools in Poland. Regular schooling implements the same curriculum as schools in Poland with additional lessons in Greek. The complementary curriculum is limited to the Polish language, the history and geography of Poland, religion and social studies. Graduates of the Polish high-school used to take their final exams (*Matura*) in Poland, Warsaw. Passing them allowed graduates to study both in Poland and Greece according to each state's regulations and requirements. The Greek State recognizes the GoSaPEiA as a foreign school. For this reason, if its graduates want to study at Greek universities, they must meet admission requirements common for all foreigners: they must present a translated Secondary School leaving Certificate, possess residence permits, and have a medical check-up as well as a certificate which proves their knowledge of the Greek language.

Since the school year 2013/2014 changes have been introduced into the functioning of the GoSaPEiA. Due to the regulation of The Ministry of National Education in Poland (Polish: Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, MEN) the regular teaching mode was withdrawn from the high-school and replaced with distance learning coordinated by The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad (Ośrodek Rozwoju Polskiej Edukacji za Granicą, ORPEG). ORPEG supports and promotes the education of Polish children abroad through the development of online learning, distance learning, school consultation points and *Polonia* centers. High-school pupils in Athens take part in ORPEG's "Open School" project: they attend the GoSaPEiA every day where they have lessons of Polish and knowledge about Poland. Additionally, they participate in online courses where they have all the other subjects according to school year group, with an

extended curriculum in certain subjects which pupils choose. In the school year 2014/2015 24 pupils took part in the “Open School” project. Distance learning required them to do most of the work independently, and obliged them to submit a set number of test assignments in different subjects throughout the school year. Assignments were marked and evaluated by teachers in Warsaw. Once all the assignments of a given pupil were submitted that pupil could proceed to take the classification examinations run at the ORPEG headquarters during the school holidays. A positive result at this stage provides for a pupil’s advance to the next class. Graduates of high-school take their final exams (*Matura*) in Poland, in Warsaw and alongside the GoSaPEiA’s diploma they obtain a diploma from the Polish “National Education Commission” High-school (one of the schools run by ORPEG).

### **Presentation of the study**

The PhD research (Rerak-Zampou, 2015) which the present paper derives from investigated the negotiation of migratory and educational strategies of the Polish families residing in Athens. In particular we asked what those strategies were and tried to identify factors influencing the process of their formation. The research sample consisted of 32 participants: 7 families, the Polish priest and a representative of the Polish Embassy and the Group of Schools at The Polish Embassy in Athens. The main research problem was investigated on the basis of a qualitative perspective, and inductive approach with focus groups and semi-structured, in-depth interviews as research tools. Polish was used when speaking to the interviewees since it was their native language (as well as the researcher’s) and because some of the respondents did not know Greek.

12 children (six boys and six girls) between ten and 18 years old representing second generation immigrants and one-and-a-half generation immigrants took part in the study. All the children came from two-parent families with both parents being Polish and attended either the Polish or Greek schools in Athens. The parents' socioeconomic status was middle or low: they had completed secondary education, did low-skill, low-paid, mainly menial and insecure jobs<sup>1</sup>. Table 2 shows the main characteristics of the researched students (see appendix).

### **Literature review on the educational aspirations of immigrant youth**

Given the specific nature of Polish migration to Greece there are few studies on educational aspirations and ambitions of immigrant youth to draw from. However, the international literature, and especially that for the United States and Canada, provides interesting insight into this topic. The majority of available research focuses on differences between various ethnic groups (e.g. Glick and White, 2004; Glick et al., 2006; Keller and Tillman, 2008; Sweet, Anisef, Brown, et al., 2010; Minello and Barban, 2012; Suslu, 2014) and differences in educational aspirations between immigrant versus non-immigrant groups (e.g. Duran and Weffer, 1992; Keller and Tillman, 2008; Le, 2009; Sweet, Anisef, Brown, et al., 2010; Hofferth and Moon, 2014).

In his study on immigrants' aspirations Salikutluk refers to the concept of aspiration as the attempts to achieve an aim by behaving in certain ways and clarifies relevance of educational aspirations as ones which "can help to explain individual differences in

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of the fathers worked in construction: painting, plastering, etc., one worked as a building administrator, one in transportation/moving services and one as a butcher. Mothers worked as cleaning ladies, baby sitters, one as a dentist and one as a nurse.

educational decisions evoking long-term consequences for the academic future and chances in the labour market.” (2013:5). Salikutluk (2013:8) also explains the complexity of educational aspirations, which in the subject literature are “used as an umbrella term to cover different meanings in different studies, e.g. academic wishes, educational plans, or chances to successfully attain higher educational degrees. There is no clear agreement between social scientists about what aspirations exactly are and how they should be measured (cf. Morgan 1998)”. In the present study we follow Salikutluk’s conceptualization of educational aspirations as overall goals determining educational decisions at transition point which in our case is finishing high-school.

Educational aspirations might be either idealistic or realistic. Both types are not static and can converge over time and realistic aspiration are sometimes referred to as expectations (Salikutluk, 2013). Minello and Barban (2012:22) connect this to the time available to make plans: according to scholars, students provide more realistic accounts of their expectations as the date approaches for them to make the decision about the next educational level. On the other hand, in the case of options further in the future, students tend to express less realistic aspirations. Idealistic aspirations reflect aims that are mainly based on wishes regardless of any constraints (Salikutluk, 2013). Salikutluk claims that realistic educational aspirations are lower than idealistic ones and there are various reasons for this: limited financial resources, insufficient academic abilities or low probabilities of success, to mention a few. Sweet, Anisef, and Walters (2010:14) point out that a lack of knowledge on the requirements that have to be met can lead to unrealized goals. For families with a low socio economic status, household income is a relevant factor in the discussion on the costs of higher education (Salikutluk, 2013) and it can hinder educational aspirations. Financial considerations are relevant when taking

into consideration the costs of higher education, but financial resources are also important since they may help to increase the probability of success by enabling families to afford extra tutorial hours.

Considerable research recognizes postsecondary education as being essential to ensuring economic security. Salikutluk (2013) believes that educational degrees are crucial predictors for the socio-economic positioning of individuals. This researcher explains that nowadays income becomes a crucial aspect of life since it directly impacts on the labour market chances, health and the quality of life in general. The qualifications acquired in the educational process are of great relevance if one hopes for “good” jobs and higher earnings. In this context educational aspirations play an important role as they mediate the choices that are relevant for the educational career and future well-being. Baum and Flores (2011:185) indicate that the sharp rise in demand for skilled labour has increased the urgency of providing access to education for all, therefore also for immigrant children who will play a more and more relevant role in European Union Member States in the coming years. Sweet (2010), in addition, explains that currently, due to the expanding “knowledge economy”, the continuous emergence of new technologies and the fact that job growth is concentrated in fields that require higher levels of education and skill, the completion of some level of postsecondary education becomes a must. This scholar informs us that “University, community college, and trade-vocational programs each provide opportunities for skill development and labour market preparation, though it is university that is privileged over the others in terms of prestige, employment requirements, and labour market demands” (2010:6).

Postsecondary education of immigrant youth is regarded as a relevant tool for their future economic and social integration. Moreover, educational and occupational expectations and aspirations of immigrant children are important predictors for their life pathways and future social positions (Coates, 2006). Research proves that participation in higher education is an aim for upward mobility (Rampino and Taylor, 2013) and that university education is highly valued among immigrant groups (Coates, 2006). Coates (2006) found that despite their disadvantaged backgrounds those immigrant children with high aspirations whose parents also had high ambitions for them, were able to experience upward social mobility in achieving their aspirations.

Economic differences between immigrant and native families make immigrant children disadvantaged in terms of schooling (Hofferth and Moon, 2014). Rampino and Taylor (2013) indicate that promoting positive educational aspirations among children in those economically disadvantaged groups will raise attainment and have long-term implications for productivity, poverty, inequality and social mobility. As Hofferth and Moon (2014:7) explain “Once differences in socioeconomic background are controlled, the achievement of children of many immigrant groups has been shown to exceed that of comparable children whose parents were not immigrants (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Fuligni, 1997; Sastry and Pebley, 2010) and the performance of children of immigrant appears to be stronger in recent compared to earlier cohorts of children (White and Glick, 2009)”. Childs et al. (2012) indicate that in the case of immigrant youth, they manage to attend university in spite of their particular disadvantages.

Interestingly, a review of literature on the educational aspirations of immigrant youth found, for example in research by Minello and Barban (2012:22), that children of immigrants have lower educational ambitions than natives. Yet, there is a broad

literature which proves otherwise. In a study by Kiche (2010) on Sudanese refugee youth, young immigrants expressed high educational and occupational aspirations, with all of them aspiring to obtain a college degree and some intending to achieve careers in medicine, dentistry, law, and engineering. In their previous research Picot and Hou (2012) found that students with immigrant backgrounds in North America achieve higher levels of education than native peers. Keller and Tillman (2008) state that minority children generally perform quite well in school, often out-performing native-born peers of similar socio-demographic characteristics. Similarly, Childs et al. (2012) referring to Finnie and Mueller (2009, 2010) imply that the children of immigrants attend post-secondary education and especially university, at much higher rates than their non-immigrant peers. Also, Coates (2006:14 after: Dobson, Birrell and Rapson 1996; Khoo et al 2002:46) refers to quantitative research showing that some ethnic groups attend university more so than the general non-immigrant population in the same age category. In his research on post-secondary pathways of young immigrants Sweet (2010) claims that many of them aspire to a college or university education. Similarly, Hofferth and Moon (2014) state that children of immigrants are highly successful in graduating from high-school, enrolling in college, and being gainfully occupied in work or in school. Salikutluk (2013) implied that some immigrant groups tend to express higher educational aspirations than natives regardless of the fact that they may perform worse at school and have lower social status. With reference to the high educational aspirations of immigrant youth Salikutluk (2013) fears that those youngsters might have high educational aims without adjusting their school-related behaviour to their stated aspirations.

The subject literature broadly describes factors impacting on the probability of aspiring to obtain a university degree. They can be divided into individual-level characteristics and macro-level characteristics: the impact of educational systems and political, economic, and religious features of both countries of origin and destination. Kiche (2010:24) named household income, school engagement, and peers (moderate effects), family structure, language first learned, and parental supervision (low effect) as factors impacting on educational aspirations. Family background and parental expectations and education and family size as well as lifestyle patterns in the high-school years are important to immigrants' children's achievements (Hofferth and Moon, 2014). Minello and Barban (2012) draw attention to the importance of attending a school where most of the pupils have high educational expectations. Research indicates that parents' educational values, language and the length of residence in the destination country may also be relevant. Minello and Barban (2012) include, among the factors which play a role in setting the educational ambitions of immigrants' children, the parents' education, the parents' involvement in schools, family structure, student academic performance in the early grades, student self-perceptions, attitudes toward school and students' classmates' and peers' influence. In the study on ethnic groups of students in America Suslu (2014) also names factors influencing students' aspirations, and these are parental expectation, education level, and academic achievement; as well as school engagement and language spoken at home. Socio-economic status combines family income and parents' education and it affects both the personality and the social capital of immigrant students (Salikutluk, 2013). Salikutluk (2013:9) concludes that "the socio-economic background, personality traits and significant others determine the educational aspiration of students through influencing the perceived benefit of education, subjective

assessment of success probabilities, attitudes towards education and the costs that have to be borne.” Social capital inside and outside of the family affects immigrant educational aspirations. Inside the family parents and siblings are influential, but we would argue that other relatives are too, yet there is not enough research to confirm this point. Older siblings can act as substitutes for certain functions usually fulfilled by parents, so if they attend higher education it may motivate younger siblings to finish high-school at a higher level and similarly aspire to further education (Sweet, Anisef, and Walters, 2010). Sweet and colleagues (2010:13 after: Nauck et al. 1998, Schauenberg 2007) refer to a different sort of influence of siblings, namely they point to the fact that the more siblings there are in a household the fewer resources per person there are available.

Peers, parents, siblings and teachers are often referred to as mentioned earlier as “significant others” and research underlines their relevance for expectations and support (Sweet, Anisef, and Walters, 2010; Minello and Barban, 2012; Salikutluk, 2013). Teachers’ feedback on students’ performances in different school subjects is an important factor. Also teachers’ positive or negative expectations can help to improve or hamper students’ academic development and achievement (Sweet, Anisef, and Walters, 2010:14). Peer attitudes about school and school related behavior are of relevance and so are characteristics of schoolmates (Minello and Barban, 2012). Interactions among peers influence educational performances and aspirations: information exchange, modeling and reinforcement of peer norms and values impact on academic motivation, engagement and achievement (Minello and Barban, 2012). Sweet and colleagues (2010) refer to two functions of peers: firstly as a reference to assess their own academic abilities in relation to other students and secondly – as a social group in sharing

common norms and values towards school-related behavior. In the latter aspect peer groups enable exchange of information, provide support and may act as role models for immigrant youth. Thus, if peers have academic aspirations, these may also influence the immigrant youth's educational plans. Minello and Barban (2012:24) highlight an association between relevance of friendship and educational ambitions and especially the issue of being part of a challenging context. Scholars find this correlations their most relevant result, as it is another validation of the relevance of social capital and the influence of peers in shaping the educational ambitions of immigrant children. Research indicates that migrant children are encouraged and supported in their academic pursuits by their ethnic friends (Le, 2009). Peers with the same ethnic background support each other more and have greater solidarity (Sweet, Anisef, and Walters, 2010:13). Of course, an immigrant student's own motivation is an important determinant of their success, and this opinion is present in the subject literature (e.g. Le, 2009). Yet, as suggested by Sweet et al. (2010), in order to ensure access to desirable university or college additional investments of emotional, cultural and social capital that encourage and support children's academic performance are necessary.

The subject literature is rich in research presenting immigrant parents and their children as individuals with high educational aspirations and expectations (Sweet, 2010; Salikutluk, 2013; Aparicio and Portes, 2014). Research on parental involvement in educational aspirations is extensive. It indicates that parental educational aspirations for their children have a strong positive effect on the youngsters' college and university aspirations (Kiche, 2010; Hofferth and Moon, 2014). Hofferth and Moon (2014:8) describe three mechanisms through which parents influence their children: "modeling, direct provision of experiences, and by the messages they give regarding their children's

competence (Simpkins, Fredericks, Davis-Kean and Eccles, 2006)". On the other hand, it is also suggested in the subject literature (e.g. by Sweet, Anisef, and Walters, 2010) that parents may not be perceived by their children as role models in terms of education. Salikutluk (2013:8) implies that the fact that parents have graduated from university can influence the perception of the reachability of higher education for immigrant children and previous studies indicate that highly educated parents are more involved and have higher expectations for their children's academic career. With reference to earlier – mentioned factors impacting on the probability of aspiring to obtain a university degree Åslund et al. (2011:5) emphasize that parental education has a substantial impact on outcomes: in their study children with university educated mothers had greater educational aspirations. Similarly, in research by Glick et al. (2006) and Glick and White (2004) the vast majority of immigrant parents expect their children to go further with their education, beyond the secondary level. Glick and White (2004) infer that structural background and familial resources, such as parental involvement and parental expectations correspond with participation in the post-secondary education of immigrant youth from different racial and ethnic groups. According to Keller and Tillman (2008) parental behaviors during adolescence, and more specifically parental involvement in school, parental control and academic expectations, explain the higher likelihood of college attendance among immigrants. Picot and Hou (2012) found that differences in parents' education play a small direct role in explaining a variety of postsecondary participations, however, as scholars explain, this variable may act indirectly through secondary-school performance or parents' aspirations regarding the educational attainment of their children. Migrant parents believe their children can improve their status through education, and so they encourage them to overcome the

difficulties kids may face in schools in order to take advantage of educational opportunities (Le, 2009). Sweet, Anisef, and Walters (2010) emphasize the relevant roles of parents for educational aspirations of immigrant youth since they activate resources that comprise various amounts and kinds of capital—not only financial but also cultural and social. Keller and Tillman (2008) point at relevance of parental behaviors and expectations for postsecondary attendance. Due to the greater risks associated with the low socio-economic status of immigrant families, immigrant parents tend to have higher expectations for their children and maintain a greater parental control than native-born parents and in consequence place greater demands on their children in terms of educational success (Glick and White, 2004; Keller and Tillman, 2008). Those greater parental expectations in turn lead to higher achievement during childhood and to higher educational aspirations. Glick and White (2004) showed that students whose parents have high expectations are more likely to complete high-school and pursue postsecondary studies compared with those whose parents hold lower expectations.

### **University aspirations of young Poles in Athens**

During the focus groups and interviews for the research on family migratory and educational strategies Polish interviewees often spoke about their educational plans: kids for themselves and parents for their children. Youngsters referred to the university opportunities that were available to them: studies in Greece, Poland, or another country, and expressed the belief that it was better for them to study in Poland. Curiously, all the young respondents plan to go to university in the future, the majority to a Polish one. Those aspirations were often not translated into high performance at school. For

example, in the case of one young respondent, who claimed that he would like to study psychology at one of the Polish universities, his aspirations seemed idealistic, especially since his mother informed us that the kid barely managed at school and due to the difficulties in the Greek school was moved into the Polish institution, were his grades were still rather poor.

The Polish youth in our study showed high post-secondary aspirations: they mentioned medicine, psychology, dentistry, or studying to become a pilot as desired future fields of studies. Parents shared those idealistic aspirations.

A common saying among respondents was that they live their lives in a Polish way. They watched Polish TV, some read books and magazines in Polish, they listened to the Polish online radio, cooked Polish food, bought some of their products in Polish grocery stores, celebrated all of the religious feasts in the way they did it in Poland. We found out that Polish parents hold onto their language, food, music and TV with the aim or hope, of passing them onto their children. This attachment to the Polish heritage might be translated into plans regarding university and may explain why the majority of the Polish individuals we spoke to want to study, or want their children to study, at Polish universities.

Based on the subject literature described in the above subsection we have grouped the results in to the following categories:

#### Greek language

As we have already mentioned, the majority of our young respondents, especially those from the Polish school, planned to go back to Poland to continue education there, so that

they can attend a Polish university in the future. Kids admitted that because they started Polish school it would be difficult for them to go to a Greek university:

*“M: Have you ever thought about studying in Greece?”*

*B (M): No.*

*M: Why not?*

*B (M): I guess, maybe if I had continued in the Greek school I would probably have chosen a Greek university. But now I have forgotten the language a bit, so I would not understand some things. I would misunderstand stuff during the lessons and I would have to study myself.”*

It is evident that this Polish boy did not feel that his level of Greek was good enough to allow him to attend a Greek university. We have noticed that Poles generally do not speak Greek that well. In our study only kids that attended the Greek schools and two adults: a dentist and a nurse, who worked and studied in Greek were fluent in the language. The majority of kids from the Polish regular school spoke Greek rather poorly: they only knew how to communicate. A low level of Greek language influences university aspirations and makes Polish kids choose Polish universities. Not only B, but a few other youngsters were also concerned that their limitations in Greek diminished their choices for post-secondary education and employment. Even though they have ambitions for their futures they felt, because of their lack of fluency in Greek, they may never be able to attend university in Greece. Lack of fluency in Greek and education in the Polish School throughout their lives makes it difficult for Polish kids to consider Greek universities.

## Polish and Greek Schools

Attending Polish high-school was accounted for in terms of the plans to study at a Polish university – in this case it seemed reasonable to choose a Polish high-school so that the future university student would be familiar with specific vocabulary: “*F (M): So then I started to think that it was a good thing that I went to the Polish school. Because [otherwise] I would have not known simple words, that’s why.*” Another thing is that there is a certain belief present among the Polish community in Athens that there is a higher level of education at the Polish School compared to the local Greek schools. Moreover, many of our interviewees, both youth and adult ones, also believed that the Polish universities are of a higher educational level than the Greek ones. During one of the focus groups we learned that in 2013 out of 22 graduates of the Polish high-school in Athens six got into the Jagiellonian University, which is considered one of the best, if not the best, higher educational institutions in Poland. According to parents, it proves the high level of education at the Polish School. On the other hand, it also confirms the high educational aspirations of its graduates.

An advantage of the Polish School in Athens, but also schools in Poland, which explains why Poles prefer those institution to the Greek ones is that high-schools in Greece lack classes with an extended curriculum in certain subjects, like mathematics or biology, which prepare students specifically for future studies in this field: “*D (F): I know people who waited for their child to finish junior high-school here, because the high-school here did not have classes with an extended curriculum in subjects that the child wanted to study*”. Mariola, a mother of two daughters studying in Poland and two boys going to Greek schools, explained family decisions regarding sending her daughters to Poland claiming that the reason was lack of the previously mentioned

classes with an extended curriculum in specific subjects in both Polish and Greek high-schools in Greece. Since one of her daughters wanted to study medicine she needed to attend a high-school that would have classes with an extended curriculum in biology: *“Ma (F): My daughter D. wanted to study medicine, so she needed to go to a class with an extended curriculum and we decided to send her to Poland, so that she would go to high-school in Oswiecim and live with her grandmother.”*

Polish parents from Athens send their children to Poland to their relatives or move back with them so their kids can continue their education in a good high-school, one that would ensure that they get into a prestigious university in Poland.

On the other hand, some of our respondents spoke about advantages of finishing a Greek high-school for the future higher education. A few parents and children in our research believed that finishing school in a foreign country, so also in Greece, is an advantage during the process of admission to university in Poland for the chosen faculty: *“G (F): the graduates of schools outside [Poland] have much easier access to the university than other regular children.*

*H (F): They have priority.”*

*“A (M): If a child from Poland graduates from a high-school here, he/she has priority for the university. It’s like beyond the “order”. It’s easier for Polish children and they have priority when being accepted to the school.”* Another thing making Polish parents choose the Greek school is the possibility of getting a scholarship from the Polish government for those kids who graduated from a foreign high-school: *“GL (F): I have heard it from my niece who studies in Poland, who said that “foreign children”, who come from abroad, have a larger scholarship, I mean “greater chances of getting a scholarship compared to us”, she said.”*

### Social interactions - Peers

The Poles we spoke to tend to socialize with other Poles in Greece or within the transnational European space. Almost all respondents: adult and young ones had mostly Polish friends and spent their free time in Polish company. This also includes children, who informed us that the majority of their friends were Polish.

School characteristics can promote or hinder opportunities to develop friendships among specific social groups in the sense that Greek schools create possibilities for them to meet more Greek youngsters and eventually befriend them, and Polish school does the same but with Polish youth. The role of peers in influencing educational aspirations is widely presented in the subject literature. Their attitudes and characteristics, as well as interactions among schoolmates, influence educational performances and aspirations and impact on academic motivation, engagement and achievement. The relevance of social capital and the influence of peers in shaping the educational ambitions of immigrant children is underlined in the subject literature. From this perspective, Polish students from the Greek schools might be encouraged to apply to a Greek university, since their schoolmates do so. In the case of the Polish School, since peers exchange information regarding future education and may act as role models for each other, if the classmates of our interviewees have academic aspirations connected to the Polish universities this may also influence the researched youth's educational plans.

### Perceptions regarding university

As we have mentioned in the previous subsection, there is this belief present among the Polish community in Athens that there is a higher level of education at the Polish

School and Polish universities compared to the local Greek schools and Greek higher educational institutions, including admission procedures: *“I (F): To be honest, I wanted to go to Poland to study there. But I know that there are huge requirements and it would be rather difficult to be accepted. So I will also try to pass here.”* Polish individuals generally have a low opinion of the Greek universities; during our research we have heard various disadvantages of those educational institutions: *“Ma (F) There had been some cases in Greece in the last two years of protests at Greek universities. Last year some Polish students came for Erasmus and for 2-3 months they were not studying at all. That is why the educational system in Greece is rather useless and whoever has a chance prefers to send his children to Poland to study at more trustworthy universities.”*

Parents referred to the costs of higher education - those economic considerations seemed to be relevant: *“Ma (F): Another thing is that I could not afford for my girls to study if I were in Poland. And living here I can afford for them to study there.”*

Economic considerations were relevant in the choice of whether to go to a university in Poland or in Greece. Polish parents were concerned about whether they would be able to afford to educate their kids in Poland. One of the fathers underlined the material aspects of future study, namely that it would be less expensive for the family if a child chose local, so a Greek university: *“J (M): Anyone who wants to study and chooses a faculty can study in Greece. And it will be easier financially. I believe that, relatively speaking, it is easier to graduate from university in Greece than in Poland. I am not speaking about the capabilities of a child, but the material part.”*

## Parents

The subject literature reveals that parents have a strong impact on the university aspirations of immigrant children. Polish parents believe that higher education will improve their kids' status, upgrade the chances for employment and future well-being in general, and so they encourage their children to attend university. Some of the parents we spoke to admitted that they planned to go back to Poland so that their kids could go to university there. The parents in our study wanted their kids to study in a Polish university: "*K (M): It would be good if they finished university. Especially in Poland. Here it's not that good [...] I have heard that they protest here a lot. The students or so... we have a friend who is Greek-Polish and his son studies here so he says it was not a good decision and that his son should have studied in Poland.*" Gloria is preparing her children for the fact that they will be educated at a Polish university, since she does not like the Greek educational system as, according to her, in Greece it is not easy to get into the university faculty you want: "*Why should children destroy their dreams? Especially when they can go to Poland: if they speak Polish, write in Polish, understand it, then they can be educated in the faculty that they want.*" Yet, a few parents did not oppose their children attending a Greek higher education institution. Mariola and Karol want their sons to choose university for themselves: "*Ma (F): He will have a choice: he wants to go to Poland to the university – of course. He wants to study here – this is his choice.*" Danuta, the dentist with a Greek diploma, wants her daughter to finish Greek schools and with regards to university she does not have any preferences: she gives herself as an example that once you have finished high-school you can study anywhere. Parents in our study want their children to follow the educational path that they dream about. They admit that they discuss educational options with their kids, rather than

impose their opinions and dreams on their offspring: “K (M): I mean... I do talk to my kids about that. The older son had to choose between going to the vocational high-school, or the other type of high-school where you can study after finishing it. So, he chose the latter option, more difficult high-school, so that he could go to the university.” Children confirm that discussion among the family members about their university options takes place: “I (F): above all this is my decision, because this is my university, I get to choose. But we talk, of course.” Dominika, when asked if she would like her daughter to go to university, said that: “Do (F): Of course, and I am pushing her towards it. I am trying to inspire her for professions such as a doctor, or something like that. I don’t know, maybe I am doing the wrong thing, maybe I should not decide for her. Because some parents want their children to achieve something that they missed. So, maybe I am like this. So, I don’t want to push her too much.”

Parents shared with us their views regarding education in general, as well as more specifically – going to university: “Ma (F): I believe that education on its own does not ensure an easier start in life. But I think we become [thanks to education] a bit different as people. We look differently at the world. We look differently at people. This is what I believe. Because when you study you meet more open-minded people, with different views and ideas. So I believe that it is not only getting a degree, but the diploma is not what counts the most. Education is very important...”

“M (F): for some parents [education] is about, above all the other things, getting into a good university. Good according to them, so they need to push their children a bit. Other parents, as you say, want the school to broaden the child’s horizons.”

## **Conclusions**

In recent years, the policy debate in the European countries has focused on the educational aspirations, attitudes and expectations of the youngest generations, including immigrant youth. Due to the increasing role that immigrants and their children will play in European Union Member States in the coming years, it becomes essential to investigate various aspects of migration, including post-secondary educational aspirations.

Similarly to immigrants to Canada (Krahn and Taylor, 2005) and America (Kiche, 2010), Polish migrants in Athens value higher education and most assume their children will attend university. A part of parents we spoke to were determined to educate their children in the Polish school - so that youngsters could apply to a Polish university in the future. The Polish community in Athens believes that there is a higher level of education at the Polish School compared to the local Greek schools which is of relevance with regards to the preparation for university. Moreover, many of our interviewees, both youth and adults, also believed that the Polish universities are of a higher educational level and are more prestigious than the Greek ones.

One of the educational strategies implemented by the Polish families was sending kids to high-schools in Poland. Such family decisions were sometimes explained by the lack of specific classes with extended curricula in high-schools in Greece, finishing which is desirable if a child wants to study in this specific faculty at a Polish university. For example, if a Polish youngster wishes to study medicine he chooses a high-school class with an extended curriculum in biology, chemistry and physics. Often Polish parents from Athens send their children to Poland to their relatives or move back with them so their kids can continue their education in a good school, one that would ensure getting

into a prestigious university in Poland. On the other hand, some advantages of finishing a Greek high-school for the future higher education were also mentioned. Both parents and children believed that finishing school in a foreign country, so also in Greece, supports and eases the process of admission to university in Poland. Another thing making Polish individuals choose the Greek school is the possibility of getting a scholarship from the Polish government for those kids who graduated from a foreign high-school.

The educational aspirations of the young Poles we spoke to seemed to be high. Youngsters consider such fields of future studies as medicine, psychology, dentistry, or studying to become a pilot. Parents support those aspirations. All of the young respondents we spoke to, believed that they would study at a university, most commonly at a Polish one. The majority of adult respondents shared this view. Our observations are in line with the findings of Kiche's (2010) study on Sudanese refugee youth, who similarly expressed high educational and occupational aspirations, with all of them aspiring to obtain a college degree and some intending to follow careers in medicine, dentistry, law, and engineering. However, it could be a case of idealistic aspirations of the part of the Polish individuals, so these are aims that are mainly based on wishes. The literature indicates that limited financial resources, insufficient academic abilities or lack of adequate preparation for the requirements that have to be met in order to be admitted to university might work against those idealistic aspirations.

Research (e.g. Kiche, 2010; Suslu, 2014) confirms that language is one of the core factors impacting on educational aspirations and choices. The majority of the kids from the Polish regular school spoke Greek poorly and Polish fluently and it may influence their university aspirations and direct them towards the Polish universities. The young

people in our study confirmed that they were concerned that their limitations in Greek diminish their choices for post-secondary education and employment in the settlement country. Lack of fluency in Greek and education at the Polish School throughout their lives makes it difficult for Polish kids to consider Greek universities.

The relevance of social capital and the influence of peers in shaping the educational ambitions of immigrant children is underlined in the subject literature. From this perspective, Polish students from the Greek schools might be encouraged to apply to a Greek university, since their schoolmates do so. In the case of the Polish School, if our interviewees' schoolmates have academic aspirations connected to the Polish universities this may also influence the researched youth's educational plans. We have observed that migrant children are encouraged and supported in their academic pursuits by their ethnic friends (similarly to Le, 2009) and that peers with the same ethnic background support each other more and have greater solidarity (according to Sweet, Anisef, and Walters, 2010:13). This is of relevance when we take into consideration the fact that the Polish individuals socialize mostly with other Poles and all the children in our research had a majority of ethnic friends.

The subject literature reveals that parents have a strong impact on the university aspirations of immigrant children (Glick and White, 2004; Keller and Tillman, 2008; Glick Schiller, 2010; Kiche, 2010; Minello and Barban, 2012; Salikutluk, 2013; Suslu, 2014). Polish parents believe that higher education will improve their kids' status and ensure future well-being, and so they encourage them to attend university. Some of the parents were ready to return to Poland so that their kids could go to university there. Parents wanted their kids to study at Polish universities, which were regarded as more prestigious and with a higher level of education. Yet, a few parents did not oppose, or

even encouraged their children who aspired to go to a Greek higher education institution. The parents in our study wanted their children to follow the educational path that they dream about. They discuss educational options with their kids, rather than imposing their opinions and wishes on their offspring. For the Polish parents university is more than an institution providing higher education, but a place that broadens horizons, changing the views and lives of its students.

The literature suggests that for families with a low socio economic status, the costs of higher education is weighted with regards to the household income (Salikutluk, 2013) and it can hinder educational aspirations. Financial considerations are relevant when taking into consideration the costs of higher education and increasing the probability of success, allowing families to afford extra tutorial hours. In the case of Polish families in Athens, economic considerations seem to matter, but our interviewees were ready to mobilize family resources in order to ensure their kids' university education.

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## Appendix

Table 2 Kids – General information

| Name          | Age | Gender | Siblings | Year of arrival in Greece | School type                                      | Grade at Greek school           | Grade at the Polish school      | Polish weekend school | Grade at the Polish weekend school |
|---------------|-----|--------|----------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Inga (I)      | 16  | female | 2        | Born in Greece            | Greek  | 1st grade of High School        | n/a                             | yes                   | 3rd grade of Junior High School    |
| Antek (A)     | 11  | male   | 2        | Born in Greece            | Greek  | 1st grade of Junior High School | n/a                             | yes                   | last grade of primary school       |
| Sylwek (S)    | 14  | male   | 2        | Born in Greece            | Greek  | 2nd grade of Junior High School | n/a                             | yes                   | 1st grade of Junior High School    |
| Benek (B)     | 16  | male   | 0        | Born in Greece            | Polish<br>(4 grades at the Greek Primary School) | n/a                             | 3rd grade of Junior High School | no                    | n/a                                |
| Franek (F)    | 16  | male   | 3        | 2000                      | Polish   | n/a                             | 3rd grade of Junior High School | no                    | n/a                                |
| Cezary (C)    | 11  | male   | 3        | Born in Greece            | Greek  | 1st grade of Junior High School | n/a                             | yes                   | last grade of primary school       |
| Odetta (O)    | 11  | female | 0        | Born in Greece            | Polish   | n/a                             | last grade of primary school    | no                    | n/a                                |
| Anna (An)     | 11  | female | 1        | Born in Greece            | Polish   | n/a                             | last grade of primary school    | no                    | n/a                                |
| Ala (Ala)     | 16  | female | 1        | 2.5 years in Greece       | Polish   | n/a                             | 3rd grade of Junior High School | no                    | n/a                                |
| Majka (Maj)   | 16  | female | 1        | 10 years in Greece        | Polish<br>(3 grades at the Greek Primary School) | n/a                             | 3rd grade of Junior High School | no                    | n/a                                |
| Szymon (Szym) | 12  | male   | 1        | Born in Greece            | Greek  | 1st grade of Junior High School | n/a                             | yes                   | last grade of primary school       |
| Olga (Ol)     | 18  | female | 1        | Spent 5 years in Greece   | Polish   | n/a                             | 5 years at Polish school        | no                    | n/a                                |

n/a = Not Applicable