

## SOCIAL COHESION AND MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

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## THE POVERTY OF COMMUNITY COHESION POLICY

- Community cohesion policy informed by poor research that ignores key differences between and within regions
- In general, failure to study small town/rural areas, tendency to use models derived from urban areas to inform strategies for all
- Processes needed for community transformation for cohesion set out as if 'obvious' and spontaneous.
- Who is to do this work? How will it be structured/organised? How do you engage diversity not only between communities but within subsections of them?
- Question of 'lived experience' of migrants is essential to addressing the issues above.

## WHAT KIND OF WORK ARE WE DOING AT MMU CHESHIRE?

- Tranche of participatory action research based projects with Central and Eastern European 'economic' migrant communities
- Quantitative, qualitative and ethnographic based approaches that have examined the 'lived experiences' of migrants to Crewe and, in particular, the 'parallel lives' that they lead people living in host communities but not of the community.
- Involving community co-researchers, altering the focus of the research in line with participants concerns
- Makes some agencies uneasy; working in ways that do not always suit their needs but may suit those who we work with.
- Working in ways that mirror the 'parallel lives' of migrants – evening and night work, weekend study, working in reciprocal ways.

## PARALLEL WORLDS 1: WORK, EAT, SLEEP, WORK

- Migrant communities, esp 'economic' migrants have to be understood in the context of work - normal life is constrained
- Poverty and deprivation
- the organisation of work (particularly unpopular shift patterns and type of work), personal safety
- Abuse within the workplace – employers and agencies have a key role in community cohesion

## NEGATIVE WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES

- 'Each day I arrive at work and he [the English boss of his section of the warehouse] says, 'morning wanker' or 'morning twat' and I have to just take this and say nothing ...'
- One man he call me a bell end all day, every day; for long time I not know what this means. Other English men just laugh... we are nothing to them just ants, ants to do the hard work."
- Selected other examples: a woman's overcoat being slashed to ribbons with a razor blade and left in the staff room causing her to feel terrified; a man whose foot was badly damaged after he was run over on purpose by English co-workers in a fork lift truck; two Polish men who worked for a building subcontractor being made to dig 2-3 metre deep trenches, sometimes up to their knees in sewerage and in rainy weather, with no props prevent collapse of the pits.

## PARALLEL LIVES 2: NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

- The way work feeds into neighbourhood experience ('home centred lifestyle', lack of visibility at 'normal hours', lack of participation)
- Lack of 'deep' relationships to other communities living around - Contingent attitude to neighbourhood
- Felt and real violence, fear of certain groups
- These are generally young people – under 30 – do we expect many young British people to be highly engaged in community?

### PARALLEL LIVES 3: SERVICE USE AND ENGAGEMENT

- Services uptake is patterned by work life
- Lived experience from sending country is one of looking after oneself – people serve the state, not the state serving people. Notions of advice, support, mentoring are alien to many Eastern European culture s; emerging help/support/advice in the last five years (e.g. domestic violence and abuse centres in Poland)
- Services may be seen as threatening, authoritarian or ineffective because migrants do not understand the way they are structured. Majority of people go back to Poland and use services there (dentists, scans, blood tests, etc.)
- Assumptions about cultural difference (or lack of it) feed into practice of service provision. Practitioners cannot recognize the needs of migrants (Don't come, so don't have problems).

### CONCLUSIONS

- In trying to understand migrant communities and cohesion issues there is a lack of 'migrant' perspective on their lived experience. The parallel lives they lead need to be fully explored
- Migrants often cannot contribute to community cohesion as they would like because of the constraints on them from employment, finances and sense of fear about certain members of host communities
- Community cohesion strategies have to therefore be innovative in getting players, like employers involved in using their settings for cohesion activities – these strategies must be generated from within the community itself.