

Special Polish Guardian

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Abstract in English

Upon the news that now one million Poles live and work in the UK, the daily broadsheet newspaper ran a 'Polish Special' of its G2 features section. As well as focussing on Poles in the UK for its British readers, the newspaper also ran a double page spread in Polish answering questions about the British way of life in a light hearted fashion.

Area: *media*

Kind-category of project: *newspaper features special*

Kind-category of actor: *National Newspaper*

Country: *UK*

Year *2006*

5 key-words newspaper, labour migration, Polish, bilingual, media

Description of the project

Every weekday alongside its regular newspaper the Guardian also runs a smaller G2 which includes longer stories and features, which are not usually current affairs though are still topical. On Friday 4th of August there was a 'Specjalny Polski G2' which focussed solely on Poland, and mainly on Polish workers in the UK.

The front page featured a map of the UK filled with supposedly Polish workers throughout the country with the headline, 'Suddenly everything's gone Polish! A special issue on the one million Poles in Britain'.

The format is almost identical as a regular issue only everything is Polish. Even the puzzle section has Polish puzzles and the food section has Polish food. There are short one column articles, longer three-page in depth reports and short case studies on certain Poles.

When and how long: structure and steps of the project

The project existed for one day as the newspaper is a daily paper. The newspaper is also available online and though the features are not now presented as a 'special polish edition', they still exist and will do [for](#) the foreseeable future.

Place and context

The impetus for the issue was the news that the amount of Poles in the UK has now topped one million. With the accession of eight counties from Central and Eastern Europe into the European Union in 2004, there has been a big increase in migration from these counties to the UK. As of 2006 it is predicted that around 600,000 migrants came in the two years since accession.

The public debate on migration in the UK, especially amongst some of the tabloid press, is not always the most well-informed and can lead to misunderstandings within

society. For instance, the idea that migrants arrive in Britain to claim benefits and not 'contribute' to the country is widespread. Furthermore, possibly because of the island mentality, little is known of the countries from which migrants come and there is a tendency to group together Eastern Europe.

The British Government has recently indicated that it is considering imposing restrictions on migration from new accession countries (Bulgaria and Romania) and may even reconsider its current 'open' policy towards the current A8 (2004 Accession countries minus Cyprus and Malta) EU states. Poles are easily the biggest nationality within the current influx into the UK making up 61 per cent of the total migrants from the new countries.

The typical Polish stereotype is that of a male plumber, and often little is known of the diverse nature of Polish migrants on the island, their reasons for coming and their hopes for the future. Though evidence is that Poles (and indeed other Central and Eastern European migrants) do not face the same levels of racism as those who are 'obviously foreign' because of the colour of their skin. However there have been reports of attacks on Poles, especially when they are concentrated in one house or flat and so easily identifiable (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/5114382.stm).

Britain does have a long heritage of Polish immigration with large numbers seeking refuge on the island during the Nazi and Soviet occupations. Polish names are common within British society although there was little visible sign of Polishness before the current influx. Now there are Polish shops and clubs, aspects touched on within the special edition.

Target

The primary audience is the 'normal' Guardian reader. By splashing a large advertisement for the feature on the front page in Polish, then it might be deduced that there is an aim to appeal to Polish readers living in the UK who might not be familiar with the paper. This is further confirmed by the centre page spread in Polish which answers the important questions Poles might have about British life, such as why to girls wear sandals in the winter and what the Queen actually does.

The Guardian is a liberal leaning paper, so it is not an unreasonable assumption to suggest that its readers are also relatively liberal. In this context it is of course easier to present varied positions on the issue of Poles in the UK and manage to discuss 'problems' more rationally. At the same time this 'target' audience, it might be assumed, would not be hostile towards immigrants in the country to the same extent (if at all) when compared with other parts of society. With this in mind, the audience might well be entertained and interested by the Polish Special, though there might be little 'intercultural value' as the readers are already fairly open and tolerant of the Poles.

Methodology

The most interesting aspect regarding methodology is the use of guest Polish writers interspersed with the usual Guardian journalists. This allows the British reader inside the mind of the Polish migrant, in a way which a British journalist might not necessarily manage. Interviews provide insight into the life of migrants, and the edition does also include interviews, but giving over an article to an individual allows more space for the journalists to explore the concepts which they want to highlight. These include well known individuals such as Dorota Maslowska as well as the Chef Robert Maklowicz.

For instance one article by Julita Kaczmarek explores how ‘some Poles are more Polish than others’, examining how the longer established Polish immigrants look down on the new arrivals for their un-British behaviour. If it was written by a non-Polish journalist then it would be based on assumption or heavily reliant on quotations if it were to attempt the same perspective.

Authors, Funding and Networks

The funding is same for the Guardian as it is for most major newspapers: the sale of advertising space and paper sales.

Strengths

The newspaper takes an alternative approach to the ‘Eastern European immigrant in the UK’ by including articles such as “Who Would Leave a Place Like This?” and “Why I Will Never Leave Poland.” This may help to dispel myths or preconceptions which exist amongst many Britons when thinking about what life is like in countries with high levels of emigration. It might also start people thinking about more complex questions regarding migration rather than only seeing economics as a driving force.

| By keeping the standard features of the paper (quiz, food section, etc.) regular readers do not feel in anyway that they are having a ‘pro-Polish migrant’ attitude forced upon them. Indeed the primary aim of the publication is to entertain, rather than to force a particular opinion about Poles in Britain. The views expressed are varied, touching on both the positive and negative aspects of the issue.

The easy style, with serious topics reported in a light-hearted fashion allows the reader to explore the many different facets of life in an easy and illuminating way.

| There are stories of love, opinion pieces, reportages, interviews, and cultural insights.

They use both Polish and British writers so the publication gives both perspectives: what Britons see when they look at Poles, and what Poles see when they look at Britain. In this sense the piece is as interesting for native Brits. It is often hard to self-evaluate when one is immersed in the culture from birth; immigrants can provide the insight into the way British people live and their attitude towards foreigners. The Polish writers are particularly frank, both in their evaluation of Poland “I have never seen such keen satire and universal national derision for the ruling elite as exists in Poland today,” (Dorota Maslowska) and of Britain, “I inspected the wrapping of the sausages, which proudly informed the consumer that they included a ‘minimum of 50% meat’. I was probably the only man in the whole county of Surrey who asked

himself the difficult question: in God's name, if that was the case, what was in the other half?" (Robert Makłowicz)

Within the confines of a liberal leaning features section, Poles have the space to express their frank opinion of British society. This publication might even be seen as an outlet where the Poles can be honest with the British public. Although discussion of a similar kind does take place on the letters pages of Polish language publications in the UK, the paper proved a platform for Poles to air their feelings to members of the British public.

Critical points

"The mistakes the paper made in Polish, the language I mean, are awful," complained one labour migrant. In a publication supposedly displaying the rich culture of Poland it seems a rather large oversight to misspell some of the Polish contributor's names. Furthermore, if they wanted to attract Polish readers it is not a good way to convince them of the quality of the writing within the paper. It was not the central pages (that were completely in Polish) which had mistakes, but rather the English articles which had Polish names, places or phrases.

Readers letters in the following editions of the paper also addressed some problems, namely the lack of coverage of some aspects of Polish immigration,

"Your very interesting G2 special Polish edition (July 21) misses out a big group of Poles. We are the invisible ones, born in this country of Polish immigrants in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, during the communist regime in Poland, when even telephoning, let alone travelling there, was difficult. We grew up hearing about the mother country, but without grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. The English treat us as Poles, but when we visit Poland, we are treated as English.

Our names point us out as being different - to the point of suffering violence in a minority of cases -yet our accents speak solidly of English. We can speak Polish to make ourselves understood, but neither the immigrants nor Poles back home treat us the same. Yet often we feel more Polish than they are, absorbing every single detail of the nation's history and culture in a vain attempt to make ourselves belong.

Personally speaking, the influx of new Poles puts us in another difficult position. How do we relate to them when they feel we are lucky to have been born in a country with good economic prospects and we feel they are the lucky ones born there? Our cultural heritage is complex. I am proud to be of Polish origin, Lancastrian and British (but curiously not English)."

However this can be taken as a compliment because the reader, as stated in the beginning, did enjoy the special. If coverage of other aspects of Polish life in Britain had not been such an enjoyable read then there is less chance they would feel moved to complain that some area concerning Poles in Britain has been missed out.

Conclusion: what is "exportable" in the project

The publication was bi-lingual and so it has different audiences for different sections of the paper. It was not bi-lingual in the sense that the same information was presented into two different languages but the features were different with a translation offered on the website with a 'what can't speak Polish yet? Check out website for the translation' as explanation. Often, possibly because of the British mentality different languages are rarely seen together. It is often considered that it will 'scare-off' readers, as many people on the island do not speak other languages. It

might be argued that this publication shows that having a foreign language will not scare of readers. However this was within the context of a one of special and with words that a very similar to English, so it is probably unwise to read too much into the event.

Conclusions about the British public's attitude to migration might also be made. Much of the press, especially the tabloid press, often take an anti-immigrant line, this publication's sensible and mature approach to the question may suggest that the British public might be able to discuss the complex issue without the scaremongering done by groups such as Migration Watch (www.migrationwatchuk.org). However, as stated above Guardian readers are typically left-leaning liberals and so it would be wrong to extrapolate opinions to society as a whole.

OTHER COMMENTS

The following is one of the shorter articles which appeared in the G2 Special.

In Britain some are more Polish than others

Julita Kaczmarek
Friday July 21, 2006

Guardian

I used to be special. My unusual Slavic looks would turn heads in the street; my "cute" accent was a novelty at parties; when people in London found out I had come to the UK five years ago all the way from Poland they were pretty impressed.

Not any more. But while British jobseekers now grumble about my compatriots coming over here and taking their jobs, and native inhabitants of major towns wonder what on earth is being sold in the increasingly ubiquitous Polish delis, there is a quieter battle going on in the UK between groups of Poles themselves. For, rather than welcoming the arrivals with open arms and a plate of pierogi, Poles who had arrived on these shores before 2004 are actually less than pleased. They feel that their style and status are in fact being cramped by the "nowoprzybyli" (newcomers).

Polish people living in Britain could be divided into three groups: the "old" migration (the ones who arrived after the second world war), the "middle" migration (Poles who arrived before the accession to the EU), and the latest one (the Poles who arrived afterwards).

The old generation consider themselves as pillars of Polishness and treat the "new gang" as a different breed entirely. But it's not only the oldies who turn their noses up at the newbies but middle migrants too. Nobody wants anything to do with the "uncouth lot" who hawk their CVs from door-to-door in search of jobs - despite the fact that this is exactly what they themselves did not too long ago. They pretend not to hear you when you ask them whether they are Polish; they address other Poles in what they consider to be their flawless English. It got to a stage that before I would start speaking to a Polish person I would ask whether they prefer speaking Polish or English.

The aloof attitude, arising from ignorance and a lack of a sense of belonging, is further apparent on public transport. How many times have I seen a suit-wearing Pole from the City hide a Polish magazine in a suitcase as soon as a covered-in-paint Polish builder enters the carriage? Far too many, that's for sure.

LINKS

The Guardian Online
www.guardian.co.uk