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# Superdiversity and Its Relevance for Central and Eastern European Migration Studies. The Case of Polish Migrants in the UK

Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska\*, Jenny Phillimore\*\*

*This article presents our key arguments about the usefulness of the concept of superdiversity for reimagining migration in European societies, based on the example of migration from Poland to the UK. We argue that, despite some criticism of ‘superdiversity’, this concept is beneficial to avoid over-simplifications related to ethno-nationalised homogeneity as the prevailing ascribed feature of Polish migrants, offering a helpful lens through which the complexities and fluidity of contemporary migrant populations and receiving societies may be investigated. Our main point is that such the reimagination might be commenced through applying the concept of superdiversity in research on migrants from Poland in Great Britain. The concept of superdiversity is also beneficial to understand complexities associated with the urban contexts in which migrants settle, their adaptation pathways as well as the intersectional factors shaping migrants’ lives and experiences.*

*Keywords: superdiversity; complexities; intersectionality; conviviality; Polish migrants in the UK*

## Introduction

This article outlines key arguments pertaining to the relevance of the concept of superdiversity for reimagining migration in European societies, focusing on the example of migration from Poland to the UK. We argue that, despite some criticism of ‘superdiversity’, the concept helps to avoid oversimplifications related to ethno-nationalised homogeneity as the prevailing ascribed feature of migrants, offering a useful lens through which we may think about the complexities and fluidity of contemporary migrant populations and receiving societies. Our key point is that such reimagination might be advanced through applying the concept of superdiversity to the analysis of migrants from Poland in Great Britain. The concept of superdiversity is also helpful to understand

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\* University of Warsaw, Poland, and University of Birmingham, UK. Address for correspondence: aleksandrakazlowska@gmail.com.

\*\* University of Birmingham, UK. Address for correspondence: j.a.phillimore@bham.ac.uk.

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complexities of the urban contexts where migrants are settling and the intersectional factors which shape migrants experiences and adaptation pathways.

Although superdiversity provides us with an overarching framework, it is useful in our analysis to combine it with other concepts and approaches such as intersectionality, culture shock and conviviality and. The relevance of superdiversity will be discussed using selected examples from fieldwork which are used to illuminate what Vertovec (2007:1025) has described as the ‘diversification of diversity’. These diversifications include the intersectional factors shaping migrants’ lives, such as their capitals, migration motivations and life trajectories as well as complexities associated with the superdiverse urban contexts in which they settle. We also apply the concept of superdiversity to examine how Polish migrants react to and interact with diverse populations in the urban settings in which they live.

After this introduction, we discuss the concept of superdiversity – its applications, limitations and premises. We then explore how superdiversity can be applied when researching the movements of CEE migrants and the potential added value of using the notion. Following the methodological approach presented below, we use examples compiled from interviews and ethnographic observation to highlight the diversity which is evident within populations of UK-based Polish migrants, examining the multiple complexities which shape their choices, experiences and trajectories. The closing section discusses the problems and opportunities associated with using the concept of superdiversity in the context of the data presented both herein and beyond.

### **The notion of superdiversity: challenges and opportunities**

The concept of superdiversity was first introduced by Vertovec (2007: 1025) to describe the ‘transformative diversification of diversity’ and related demographic and socio-cultural complexities. Although, on the surface, superdiversity might be seen as a descriptive category aimed at capturing a changing demographic reality and new diversities brought about by new types of migration flows apparent in some diverse urban contexts, it can also be perceived as a new conceptual and policy approach with specific methodological implications. The emergence of superdiversity may be understood in the context of an increased sensitivity to issues of equality and any associated equality legislation (Vertovec 2011). Vertovec also argues that superdiversity can provide a new ‘narrative’ with the potential to replace the contested notion of multiculturalism (Vertovec 2007) and fill the current post-multicultural theoretical void (Fomina 2010). Superdiversity can be conceived as a conceptual framework that offers an opportunity to rethink contemporary society or even as an ontological, methodological and epistemological approach grounded in the constructivist paradigm, highlighting contemporary complexities and sensitising to issues of difference and equality (Goodson and Grzymala-Kazłowska 2017). Others consider superdiversity as an orientation to difference: a preparedness or even desire to live in places where difference is the norm (Blackledge *et al.* 2018; Pemberton and Phillimore 2018).

Based on a study of 325 texts from various disciplines, Vertovec (2019) presented a typology of how superdiversity can be understood, including using superdiversity as a contemporary synonym of diversity, a backdrop for the material analysed, a call for methodological reassessment, a way of talking about ethnicity in a more in-depth manner, a multidimensional reconfiguration of social forms, a call to move beyond ethnicity and a tool for drawing attention to new social complexities. Vertovec argues that the final type – focusing on new social patterns, forms and identities arising from migration-driven diversification – is perhaps the most driving reason for the scale of interest in the concept.

Superdiversity is not only used to acknowledge ethno-cultural difference but also moves beyond ethno-nationalism to capture wide-ranging complexities. Sigona (2014) stresses that superdiversity allows society to be seen as becoming increasingly ‘complex, composite, layered and unequal’. The difficulty of capturing this complexity in order to identify ‘what’ superdiversity looks like is one of the key problems underlying the

concept. Several scholars have tried to identify the different dimensions of diversity that underpin superdiversity but there is no agreement as to exactly what these might be. For example, Grillo (2015) differentiates aspects of superdiversity along four axes: (x) ethnicity; (y) socio-legal and political status; (z) socio-cultural diversity (e.g. related to language and religion) and (w) socio-economic statutes and opportunities. Alternatively, Pride (2015) proposes a multi-dimensional framework in which to examine five domains of superdiversity. The *individual dimension* involves personal characteristics such as date of birth, gender, country of origin, ethnicity and religious tradition, as well as sexuality, (dis)ability or human capital. The *migration domain* includes variables such as migration channel, migration status, time of arrival and intended length of stay. The *socio-economic domain* is comprised of variables such as education, occupation and income. The *space/place domain* refers to the features of a community, including its ethnic characteristics and institutions (e.g. related to faith), diversity within a group, the mobility of the migrant population and the levels of inequalities and deprivation. The *household domain* refers to the features and relationships within a household, such as the number of residents, the age structure and the languages used.

Although these frameworks constitute a useful starting point from which to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of superdiversity, they require further elaboration. In particular, more work is needed to connect the frameworks with the various forms of inequality given Hall's work, which clearly indicates that superdiversity is a product of what she terms 'a brutal migration milieu' (2017: 1566). Further, there is a need to link the concept of superdiversity to the notion of intersectionality coined by Crenshaw (1989) and to integrate the analysis of power and agency that has been so useful in the discussions around intersectionality.

The emergence of new levels and types of complexity are not only difficult to conceptualise but also require multi-faceted research approaches that acknowledge the diversity, mobility, transnationality and fluidity of populations as well as the multidimensionality of superdiversity (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018). As Vertovec (2011) and Phillimore (2015b) argue, superdiversity also has profound implications for policy – which has often been developed based on notions of population homogeneity and sedentarism – instead implying the need to recognise movement and a multiplicity of positionalities and needs.

However, despite growing recognition of the opportunities and challenges associated with superdiversity at local, national and global levels, theory and method have not as yet been sufficiently advanced to address emergent complexities. Arguably, because of its theoretical and empirical complexity, superdiversity to date has mainly been researched from ethnographic and somewhat descriptive perspectives, with studies concentrating on interactions at the micro level in specific localities, with the focus on conviviality (which in fact has been researched since Illich 1973) and cosmopolitanism (e.g. Wise 2005), the lived realities of 'commonplace diversity' (Neal, Bennett, Jones, Cochrane and Mohan 2015) and the 'ethos of mixing' (Wessendorf 2013). In terms of scale, the emphasis has very much been on micro-spaces such as coffee shops, parks and organisations (see, for example, Blackledge *et al.* 2018), although more recent work has scaled up to the neighbourhood level (i.e. Phillimore, Brand, Bradby and Padilla 2019) or taken a national perspective, at least in consideration of migration rules (Meissner 2018).

In spite of its stimulating value and perhaps theoretical potential, superdiversity has evoked a number of criticisms. The concept is criticised for its vagueness, which leads to difficulties with its operationalisation. Critiques have questioned the novelty of superdiversity (Blommaert 2013), highlighting points in the past when superdiversity was in evidence (i.e. van de Laar and van der Schoor 2019) or its Global-North-centric approach (Ndhlovu 2016). Others have pointed to its descriptiveness resulting from ontology-driven research stressing the complexity and challenges of diversity classifications (Arnaut and Spotti 2014). Further criticisms have focused on its alleged overemphasis on cultural and localised difference at the expense of structural inequalities and politicised retreat from multiculturalism (Sepulveda, Syrett and Lyon 2011). According to Back (2015),

superdiversity fails to address racial issues, social conflicts and divisions, whereas the emphasis on ‘unprecedented levels of difference’ contributes to public anxiety, particularly over immigration.

As noted above, Hall (2017) urges that the notion of superdiversity be more explicitly linked (‘moored’) to the structures and relations of power and inequality. Berkeley (cited in Humphris 2015) claims that the way in which superdiversity has been translated into academic or policy debates may be counterproductive for challenging racial inequality because of its focus on fragmentation and promoting diversity rather than social justice. Demir (cited in Humphris 2015) points out that the superdiversity perspective lacks the crucial elements of theories of race, such as ‘recognition’ and ‘solidarity’, which help to acknowledge the identities and positionalities of deprived groups and to empower them. Although Vertovec’s iteration of superdiversity was intended to capture the intersection of various overlapping dimensions of difference, in practice many scholars using the concept continue to focus on ethno-cultural difference and the idea of more people coming from more places and going to more places. Work in social policy, however, does explicitly use superdiversity to identify the intersectional differences that impact on individuals’ experiences of, and access to, welfare. Phillimore (2015a, 2016) uses superdiversity to uncover the factors which shape migrants’ access to maternity services, focusing heavily on structural inequality and migration regimes and shifting the emphasis in this field from using culture to using structure in order to explain migrants’ low levels of access to maternity services. Elsewhere emphasis has been placed upon health (Lindenmeyer, Redwood, Griffith *et al.* 2016; Phillimore, Bradby, Doos, Padilla and Samerski 2018; Phillimore *et al.* 2019), housing and social work (Boccagni 2015).

Despite the above contestations, superdiversity is increasingly acknowledged as offering the potential to shift thinking beyond multiculturalism in order to present an ontological perspective and analytical lens with which to at least describe multiple differentiations. It enables the overcoming of binary categorisations and the ethno-nationalist groupism (Chernilo 2017) held responsible for reinforcing a perception of society and migrant populations as internally homogenous and externally bounded groups (Brubaker 2006). Regardless of an increasing awareness and acceptance of complexity and diversity as a reality and the recognition that factors beyond ethnicity and country of origin play an essential role in migrant settlement and adaptation, migration studies have continued to be dominated by an ethno-national focus. The essentialising of groups continues not only in policy terms but also in academic work, despite critiques of ethno-national approaches and methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002). The evidence of this impasse might be noticeable in the language of minority/majority, them/us and dominant/non-dominant binaries, as seen in the recent Casey Review in the UK (2016), which emphasised the expectation that migrants assimilate into what is constructed to be a coherent majority culture. Such expectations overlook the demographic reality in many European urban areas where there is no coherent majority culture and/or where populations are mobile and dynamic as well internally heterogeneous in terms of factors beyond ethnicity or country of origin.

The lens of superdiversity enables us, at the very least, to acknowledge the diversity of migrants and, as such, has the potential to enhance our knowledge of migrants from CEE countries who tend to be homogenised as ‘the Polish’ or even ‘the Eastern Europeans’, despite substantive multi-generation populations. Thus, we argue that superdiversity has much utility when thinking about CEE migration, helping to overcome the groupism and stereotyping and to capture contemporary complexities around how migrants respond, address and even utilise superdiverse realities. In our analysis we draw on McCall’s (2005) typology of three approaches to understanding multiple, intersecting and complex social relations and identities: 1) the *inter-categorical approach*, provisionally adopting existing categories to document relationships of inequality amongst groups and changing configurations of power; 2) the *intra-categorical approach*, one which examines the boundary-making and boundary-defining process, focusing on complexity within groups; and 3) the *anti-categorical perspective*, which deconstructs existing analytical categories as inadequate for a complex and fluid society. In

this paper we employ the latter two, not only to give insight into internal complexities but also to deconstruct the category of Polish migrants in the UK.

### **A methodological approach to superdiversity**

Goodson and Grzymala-Kazłowska (2017) argue that employing a superdiversity lens requires new methodological approaches which acknowledge diversity and the complexity of populations while sampling data and employing research techniques. As noted above, most studies to date have been qualitative and predominantly ethnographic in nature, aimed at uncovering the minutiae of everyday interactions. However, approaches are being developed that are capable of capturing the diversification of diversity and identifying some of the elements that make a difference both within and across ethno-national groups (see Phillimore *et al.* 2019). These include interviews and surveys and engage with sampling techniques such as Respondent Driven Sampling and Maximum Diversity Sampling. This paper uses data collected using such methods to demonstrate how a superdiversity lens can aid our understanding of CEE migrants and their experiences.

The *Social Anchoring in Superdiverse Transnational Social Spaces* or SAST project involved the undertaking of in-depth minimally structured individual interviews with 44 Polish post-accession migrants in the UK. Maximum variation sampling was used to ensure heterogeneity in the composition of the participants in terms of age, gender, faith, education levels, income and family situation. This form of comparison-focused sampling selects cases to compare and contrast in order to identify similarities and differences as well as the factors explaining them (Patton 1990). The shared aspects that emerged, despite the intersecting axes of difference, hold high levels of authenticity and validity since they are based on commonalities across highly diverse cases. The technique enables us to identify so-called intra-group variation – highlighting the factors that make a difference to the lived experiences of respondents who have resettled in the UK. Such factors frequently go beyond ethno-national identity or stereotypes.

The paper uses a combination of vignettes and short excerpts from the SAST project which support and enrich our analysis. These are taken from interviews in which the participants were asked about their life prior to migration, their movement to the UK, the beginning of their life in the UK, major changes over the years, their current situation and their plans for the future. Vignettes – defined by The Oxford and Cambridge Dictionaries as ‘a short piece of writing or acting that clearly shows what a particular person, situation, etc. is like’ and ‘a short piece of writing, music, acting, etc. that clearly expresses the typical characteristics of something or someone’ – are understood by us to be short descriptions of typical or exemplary cases (Ragin and Amoroso 2010). All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and translated from Polish to English where necessary. Data were coded in NVivo employing substantive (Kelle 2014) and theoretical coding (Thornberg and Charmaz 2014). The project received an approval from a relevant academic ethical review committee. The interviewees were identified via various channels in order to encourage maximum diversity – personal networks, various Polish and non-Polish organisations (such as schools, churches, socio-cultural and business associations, play groups and organisations working with the homeless) and advertisements in Polish shops and on the Internet. The participants were interviewed at the place of their choice after signing the informed consent form – which included information on anonymity and confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. They were offered a modest incentive to compensate for their time and travel costs.

The cases used herein were selected on the basis of their succinctness and relevance in order to demonstrate the diversity of Polish migrants, their adaption paths and their experiences of encountering superdiversity. Since the vignettes represent distinctive combinations of migrants’ features, they needed to be presented in a way that protects interviewees’ anonymity, which led us not only to changing their names and other details but also to not revealing certain of their characteristics. We do not claim that these vignettes comprehensively

encapsulate manifestations of superdiversity but offer them in order to shed light on some aspects of the diversity of Polish migrants and their responses to diversity. Our intention is to use the lens of superdiversity to highlight the potential of the concept for researching CEE migrants and migrations.

### **The context of the analysis**

The accession of Poland to the EU in 2004 and the subsequent unrestricted access of Polish migrants to the UK labour market led to an unprecedented movement of Polish nationals to Great Britain. As a result, according to the data from the British national census of 2011, migrants born in Poland represented 579 121 of all 7 505 010 usual residents born outside England and Wales (Office for National Statistics 2014). Notwithstanding the difficulty of measuring migration, the estimations of Poland's Central Statistical Office suggest that the number of Polish citizens staying in the UK for longer than three months reached 690 000 on 1 January 2008 (Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008). The growing population of Polish citizens in the UK was clearly evident in national datasets: 2010: 580 000; 2011: 625 000; 2013: 637 000; 2014: 642 000; 2015: 685 000; 2016: 720 000; and 2017: 788 000 (Central Statistical Office 2018).

The research used in this paper was conducted in one of the UK's largest cities where, according to the national census in England and Wales in 2011, Poles made up the most numerous migrant group (49 974) among residents who only held a non-UK passport. There has been the long history of Polish presence in the UK and the region, originating from at least the time of WWII, when Polish soldiers and exiles found their new home in the UK. The post-war Polish community was depicted as concentrated around the Polish church and characterised by its patriotism and self-perception as guardians of pre-war Polish traditions and the heritage of an independent Poland (Stachura 2004). Post-war Polish migrants have been portrayed as integrated in British society while maintaining a strong ethnic and Catholic identity. Since 2004, they have been joined by multitudinous post-accession Polish migrants who are depicted as keeping their distance from British society and developing and sustaining separate ethnic institutions – such as Polish schools, churches and cultural institutions – alongside Polish shops and services – i.e. beauty salons, medical centres, advice agencies, garages, restaurants and nightclubs.

For a long time there was a prevailing picture of Polish migrants as traditionalist, immersed in their own ethnicity and homogenous ethnic networks. In recent years, however, studies showing the different aspects of internal diversity have been published. For example, Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2006) investigated the relationship between class, migration and ethnicity, highlighting the differences between the various groups of post-accession Polish migrants in terms of the socio-economic characteristics and migration strategies exemplified by 'storks' – circular migrants found mostly in low paid jobs; 'hamsters' – migrants who treated migration as an one-off event during which, through undertaking low-paid jobs in the UK, to accumulate capital to use in Poland; 'searchers' – who were involved in different occupations but who shared a strategy of keeping all their options open and being flexible in considering further migration; and 'stayers' – migrants who intended to settle and who had strong social mobility aspirations. Ryan (2011) also demonstrated the variety of positionalities and experiences of Polish migrants, exploring different class and occupational positions (Ryan 2016) in her recent paper (Ryan 2018) and offering insights into the varied gender, age, family and occupational statuses of Polish migrants. Lopez- Rodriguez (2010) has also contributed to the scholarship on Polish migration by examining the relationship between class issues and the experiences of Polish migrants in the UK. Stella, Flynn and Gawlewicz (2018) and Szulc (2019) have moved beyond an approach which assumes heterosexual identities in a bid to highlight the experiences of Polish LGBT migrants. Despite this increasingly complex and nuanced insight into the diversity of Polish migrants, further exploration is needed. We argue that using a superdiverse lens enables us to not only depict internal differences but also highlight exceptions

and minorities while trying to de-construct group boundaries. As Rzepnikowska (2016) noted, the issue of the actual interaction of Polish migrants with a multicultural population has been largely overlooked, in spite of a few interesting examples of how Polish migrants encounter diversity (Valentine 2008) and redefine and revisit their identities through the process of migration and encounters with ‘others’ (Ryan 2010). Our paper thus applies the superdiversity approach to highlight diversity, to investigate cases which might be used for deconstructing group imaginaries and boundaries and to explore reactions to, and interactions in, areas where Polish migrants encounter high levels of diversity.

### Uncovering intra-group diversity

This part of the paper presents a series of vignettes and other examples highlighting the characteristics, adaptation strategies and lifestyles that do not fit into prevailing representations of Polish migrants in the UK. The first case study presents Marek, a male professional migrant in his 30s with a middle-class family background, who reoriented his life from being focused on a professional career in Poland to one of self-employment and voluntary activity in his local community in the UK, accompanied by his immersion in a diverse neighbourhood and eventual conversion to Islam. Marek went to the UK to accompany his partner. Shortly after their arrival, when the challenges of adaptation increased, the pair split up, causing considerable emotional distress before Marek mobilised to adopt a more proactive attitude and reshape his life. Despite his fast progression in white-collar jobs in the UK thanks to his higher education qualifications and pre-migration work experience, Marek drew on his high cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and turned to self-employment to organise his professional life in a more flexible and creative way. This also led to changes in his lifestyle and improved his health.

At the same time, Marek began to engage in his neighbourhood and became involved in diverse local social networks, which he found truly rewarding. While planting flowers in front of his block of flats, he got to know his neighbours, eventually developing friendships across perceived ethno-national cleavages:

*I called our agency and asked if I could arrange it [a garden]. They said that it was fine. So I bought soil, flowers and began to do this. At the same time, a neighbour came, then a second and third and they started to help me. All of a sudden this changed into a party, because someone brought cake, rum. (...) A [Polish] friend asked when I felt like at home here? I said that when I was opening my office I had already known my all local community (...). There was nothing like this in Poland. When I come back home, my neighbour living downstairs, a Pakistani, frequently opens her door and talks to me. My Jamaican neighbour, when he sees me with my dog, brings some rum and we talk (UK09/m/3y).<sup>1</sup>*

Following his immersion in the diverse social environment of his neighbourhood, Marek developed a local sense of belonging, embracing local diversity. In the interview he revealed: ‘I feel here like at home thanks to people who are very open. I feel like at home, connected to this local community’ (UK09/m/3y).

Through learning from and engaging with Islam with one of his neighbours, Marek converted to this religion. He explained his choice of Islam as providing him clearer, stricter and more overarching guidelines in comparison to Catholicism and this gave him a feeling of security and stability.

*I have changed my denomination from Christianity to Islam – intentionally and recently. (...) I liked some of the life principles, most of all, some regulations which you can find in the Koran. They help to take control over life when it begins to be chaotic. (...) Over the years religion was in my life and it was not. It*

*is Islam that has come and knocked on my door – as I called it. When I converted to Islam, I realised that Islam is simply the update of Christianity (UK09/m/3y).*

Marek's trajectory began to look very different to that of a 'typical' Polish migrant.

Being strongly involved in the local community did not reduce Marek's strong attachment to the Polish language and culture, as he explained: 'Literature and history – this is in me all the time. I cultivate Polish values, those which I took from my home – Polish culture, history, language' (UK09/m/3y). This attachment to his Polish identity coexisted with Marek's efforts to obtain British citizenship, which he presented as a form of acknowledgement of his attachment to British society and its feature of diversity.

*This is very important to me in spite of the fact that I will be a Briton in terms of passport. (...) Especially in such a multicultural society as Great Britain, you can be a good Briton and a very good Pole (UK09/m/3y).*

Unlike the prevailing portrait of Polish migrants in the UK, Marek was not involved in extensive ethnic and family networks. Instead, in a short space of time, the intensive processes of his embedding in a diverse neighbourhood and growing sense of belonging to the local community could be observed. As such, Marek and the intersecting characteristics that matter to him – Polish and British, Muslim, professional and immersed in wide-ranging social networks – are almost superdiversity personified. The fluidity of his identity and characteristics also highlights the importance of taking a superdiversity perspective rather than an ethno-national approach to understanding the resettlement experiences of individuals usually categorised as part of a large group of migrants from and to one country.

Ilona, a professional in her 50s from a working-class family, also provides an example of an individual who might be viewed as atypical. Approaching a landmark birthday, she engaged with the challenge of migrating after finding a job in the UK commensurate with her occupation online. To her, migration was a way to escape her financial problems and a difficult marriage in Poland. In addition, her mobility was also a marker of her personality, expressed in the words: 'I like challenges and I am not afraid of anything' (UK41/w/4y). At first, Ilona was thinking that her stay would be temporary. It soon became clear that Ilona would resettle more permanently so she divorced her husband and was joined by her adult daughter. On holiday in Egypt, she met a Ghanaian man and began a long-distance relationship. While waiting to be reunited with her new partner, Ilona travelled to Ghana where she bought a house and a farm. Unlike Marek, despite her successful professional life, her strong economic position and her high cultural capital (in terms of both her education and her English language competence), Ilona felt lonely and alienated in the UK, having only a narrow circle of Polish acquaintances from her workplace. She sustained her strong Polish identity, missed Poland and felt out of the place: 'I have withdrawn so much from Poland. I miss it and I have an impression that my life here is not a normal life, that it is not my place' (UK41/w/4y).

Nevertheless Ilona did not contemplate return because her job gave her financial security and she worried that her mixed-race relationship would not be accepted in Poland. Ilona's wellbeing improved slightly when she was joined by her partner, which made her feel a bit more settled in the UK. In some ways, Ilona's longing for Poland might be viewed as typical but the combination of features – such as Ilona's age at migration, her motivations for migration, professional status and inter-racial relationship – mark Ilona as different to the typified Polish migrant.

Thirty-year-old Robert might be classified as being involved in a lifestyle migration which, according to Benson and Reilly (2016: 21):

*is not intended to identify, demarcate and define a particular group of migrants, but rather to provide an analytical framework for understanding some forms of migration and how these feature within identity-making, and moral considerations over how to live.*

Robert said that he always dreamed about escaping from the provincial life of his town: ‘I completed my Masters studies...but I always wanted to migrate... life abroad always fascinated me (...). I hated work in the office because it was sitting at a desk, parochialism, provincialism, gossiping (...)’ (UK28/m/5y).

Although not explicitly mentioned, his identification as homosexual might have been a contributing factor in his desire to move to the UK, despite him having an established life in Poland with a white-collar job and a supportive middle-class family.

Having high cultural capital in terms of education, English-language competence and a teaching qualification in the UK, Robert managed to become a teaching assistant. This career brought him high levels of job satisfaction and a remuneration with which he was happy; it also allowed time for travelling. After a period when he was involved in voluntary work, he changed his priorities, focusing on his interest in a healthy lifestyle and playing sport. Cooking and experimenting in the kitchen became his favourite pastimes in addition to spending time with friends (both Polish and other nationalities) and taking lessons in art and music. He also talked about enjoying fashion and redecorating his own house – the latter making him start thinking about the city he lived in as his ‘home’. Although attached to his Polish heritage, Robert felt he was a citizen of the world and was open to intergroup friendship and being in a mixed relationship. His search for self-actualisation was a driving force which shaped his life and eventually his feelings of belonging.

Other priorities characterised Maria, a project officer in her 40s and a single woman with no children. Although she had been in the UK for 10 years, she did not feel attached to the neighbourhood where she rented a tiny apartment. Maria, like Robert, had a relatively wide and diverse network of Polish and non-Polish friends but was more engaged in voluntary work with wide-ranging communities across the city. Artistic activity played a vital role for her, enabling her to sustain her identity, enter into enriching social relations and express herself. She described herself in these words:

*I am a visual artist. When I try to describe this, usually it is easiest to say that I build spaces. (...) Such big installations often come out of this, so if I am attached to something material, these are elements of my installations which are now in a safe in the other end of the city. (...) I want people to be engaged, not only to watch and the majority of my projects have such sociological subtexts, but also cultural. Here in [name of the city] I have done a few of these projects, which look at different aspects of culture mixing and multiculturalism (UK13/w/10y).*

Despite her attachment to the Polish language and culture, at the same time – through art, mixing and voluntary work – Maria actively sought to resist Polish national identity. She felt that this was imposed on her when she was seen as a stranger and categorised as an Eastern European migrant while also distancing herself from Catholicism: ‘I also started to realise that I am a Pole in England’ (UK13/w/10y). Maria could not imagine herself returning to Poland because she did not accept the low levels of tolerance and diversity coupled with the rise of conservatism and nationalism in the country. Instead, she revealed her dream of moving to a different country where she could combine artistic and voluntary work, with one scenario being a move to Africa. Maria’s involvement in the arts and engagement in diverse social networks and voluntary actions while living a single and independent life differentiated her from the stereotype of Polish migrants as being focused on families, ethnic networks, the Polish language and Polish identity.

### Encounters with superdiversity

Above, we see how the superdiversity lens enables us to move away from the homogenisation of Polish migrants and examine intra-group diversity. We might also look at superdiversity in the context of encounters with diversity, as in the work of Wise (2010) and Wessendorf (2013) and how these encounters are impacted on by migrants' capitals and positionalities as well as the localities where they take place.

The intensity and scale of diversity were to varying degrees experienced by the interviewees, which brings to mind Oberg's (1960) notion of cultural shock, defined as anxiety resulting from losing familiar signs and symbols, accompanied by feelings of misunderstanding and confusion. Similarly, Adler (1975) describes culture shock as a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's culture, to new cultural stimuli which have different meanings or no meaning and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences.

A recurring motif among participants related to the unexpected scale of diversity in urban Britain. Aneta emphasised the intensive nature of British superdiversity in comparison to other European countries:

*There was such a nice feeling, because, before, I saw other places – Germany, Norway – so England surprised me a bit by its cultural diversity. For sure I had to get to know other cultures. It was a bit of a shock to me. In some places where I was it was perhaps not as clean in terms of the city. I could not understand why people did not look after their gardens in some places (UK12/w/8y).*

The encounter with superdiversity was frequently described as a shock – a situation to which interviewees needed to adapt, as illustrated by the following:

*And slowly I began to acclimatise, getting to know people, because, when I arrived, straight after three days I went to work. The job was arranged. So slowly I was getting used to all this – different races, all this (UK27/m/7y).*

Even if intriguing and a gateway to a new life, encounters with superdiversity generated feelings of anxiety. Particularly in the early stages after arrival, diversity was experienced as threatening and overwhelming, as Dorota's account demonstrates:

*A big city, better cars, despite coming from a city, I did not see all this [before]. I cannot get used to the fact that it is so dirty. I knew that there are different cultures, my husband prepared me for this. He told me not to stare too much because I would get hit. The first impression shocked me, because it is such a rich country and it is so dirty. Each neighbourhood is different – different cultures and differences on the streets (UK06/w/4y).*

Aneta and Dorota both of working-class background and from non-metropolitan areas pointed to the problematic urban environments associated by them with diverse impoverished and deprived neighbourhoods across the city. Irek, *expressis verbis*, contrasted the diversity he encountered in mixed areas with the ideal of wealthy white suburbs, disclosing his negative attitude towards otherness despite claiming that diversity is a value he wanted to teach his children:

*We try to show the kids a lot of England – so some trips here. It is also interesting to us. The experiences of different cultures. (...) We have nice memories from Southampton. We were there with the kids in a fun*

*park for our first two-day trip. We talk between us and laugh that in the future we will move and live there because there is so cool, white and clean. Maybe you do not know, I talk about [name of the city] – that this is a dirty city but it is not about unclean streets but the mix of cultures and nationalities (UK34/m/2y).*

Perceptions of diversity differ not only because of migrants' educational and social backgrounds but also according to whether the migrants originate from inner-city or rural areas. As Pemberton and Phillimore (2018) found Polish interviewees had varying perceptions about the same superdiverse neighbourhoods, with those from rural areas tending to describe places as dirty and others from Polish industrial cities perceiving them in a more positive way. This reinforces the point that ethno-national origins may be of less relevance than factors such as locality – the type of place from where individuals originate – which may constitute another aspect of superdiversity.

In addition to connecting diversity with a lack of order, diversity overwhelmed and scared some migrants, as explained by Joanna – a woman in her late 40s who felt harassed when men approached her:

*A daughter bought me a ticket. I flew by plane. What was my first impression? Simply a dirty country. I was terrified by the number of foreigners, Black, the most important. I realised that I became a racist here. I am totally horrified because they accost me. I am humble and I pretend that I cannot see and cannot hear it or smile sometimes so as not to be impolite. It irritated me so much but over time I became so indifferent that I do not mind it now (UK16/w/5y).*

Joanna admitted becoming racist in reaction to her feelings of anxiety, adding another dimension to the complexity of racism being framed as socially and culturally produced. Fox and Mogilnicka (2017) also argue that Polish migrants, like other Eastern Europeans in the UK, not only draw on pre-migration prejudices learned from culture and the media but also, to some extent, copy racist and racialising attitudes while directly experiencing diversity as something new to them – as a part of their adjustment practices and integration tactics.

Pawel noted that diversity has different faces and those encountered in deprived and transit areas can be particularly marked by conflicts, tensions and violence:

*I have experiences showing us emigrants in a negative way. I lived in one area where many Poles and other emigrants lived. It was an area where people worked in warehouses and were from the lowest [social] levels. Accommodation was cheap and one cannot pay much for renting it so people could afford it. It was very noisy, there were frequently visibly drunk people without any culture, throwing bottles, swearing, looking for problems and accosting people. So I decided that I had to move out of this place and I never want to live in such a place again (UK05/m/7y).*

On the other hand, diversity was also linked to a variety of opportunities, as the extracts below reveal:

*There are no opportunities [in Poland], whereas here [in the UK] there are opportunities (UK21/m/8y).*

*There are such opportunities but you only lack time a bit (UK12/w/8y).*

*In England, there is something like satiation of all this knowledge and these opportunities (UK13/w/10y).*

However, over time, after hitting 'a glass wall', migrants like Renata realised that opportunities are not equally distributed and accessible to everyone:

*I thought that this was a bigger city with greater threats but also greater opportunities. It turns out that there are barriers, as though someone had put a glass wall in front of me (UK17/w/2y).*

Darek, like Renata, pointed to the opportunities created by diversity – particularly regarding personal development – but he also connected diversity with the issue of safety:

*[his place of origin] is a quite colourful neighbourhood in terms of opportunities for development or something similar. It is not unsafe at all which is good – one can walk around at ease at any time of the day or night and be sure that nothing bad will happen. As it is well known, there are neighbourhoods where it is difficult to get out during the day (UK22/m/2y).*

The narratives set out above reveal that the levels of diversity encountered by the Polish migrants surprised them and constituted a challenge which they sought to address. Initial reactions to superdiversity constituted a combination of interest and excitement and anxiety and fear as well as the recognition of opportunities.

### **Adapting to superdiversity**

We can see from the above that superdiversity can be used not only to resist homogenising Polish migrants but also to understand processes of adaptation to a new environment. While focusing on how diversity is experienced, we can draw on Oberg's (1960) stages of cultural shock, which include, first, an interest and euphoria, then a crisis which may entail rejection of the different culture and regression in terms of focusing on one's own culture, followed by a period of negotiation and adjustment where migrants learn to cope with the new situation and finally by adaptation and recovery. Ways of experiencing diversity can be also analysed through changes over time – from an initial culture shock during the first encounters, as described in the previous section, through growing familiarity with everyday superdiversity and to developing certain attitudes towards it – such as rejecting superdiversity, accepting superdiversity but demarcating a line between the superdiverse environment and the migrants themselves, or immersing themselves in superdiversity and becoming part of superdiverse networks. After the initial encounter, the ways in which the participants adapted to superdiversity took various forms and had different implications which could be grouped under three themes: defence reactions, cognitive opening and conviviality.

Defensive reactions might be exemplified by the words of Hubert, who retreated into his version of Polish culture in order to reduce anxiety and secure himself and his children clear points of reference:

*Of course, all Polish culture is significant, important to me because England does not have any culture. Maintaining the Polish culture and Polish customs, all of which are linked to Polishness, by myself and my kids is important. The fact that I am in England does not mean that I cut off myself, that I do not want to be a Pole but any European. I still want to be a Pole because the Polish culture is very important to me (UK07/m/6y).*

Polish culture was constructed by Hubert in an essentialist way as homogenised, coherent, strong and opposed to a British culture so diverse that it lacks a strong and clear 'core'. The reconstruction of identity and ethnicity includes not only reproducing an idea of Polishness but also producing an idea of Britishness and otherness, with Polish migrants particularly contrasting themselves from those constructed as 'others' in racial and religious terms (e.g. 'Muslim migrants'). Hubert additionally contrasts his Polishness with a European identity to stress the strength and 'purity' of his Polish identity. Iga's words, below, also demonstrate how some migrants

not only embed themselves in Polish culture and identity but also actively distance themselves from an imagined British culture – even actively avoiding the building of close relations with non-Polish people even after several years in the UK: ‘I am constrained by the language but, even if I knew the language, it would probably be difficult for me to become friends with somebody from a different culture, with a different mindset’ (UK04/w/7y).

Adaptation to diversity was also linked to an evolution in identity and a sense of belonging and towards an understanding and acceptance of different lifestyles and beliefs. Bogdan (UK11/m/7y) highlighted: ‘I liked in England that there is a somewhat higher level of tolerance towards different matters’. Over time, exposure to diversity brought, for some respondents, a cognitive opening up and widened horizons. The interviewees became familiar with diversity and more open and tolerant. For example, Dorota recounts:

*For sure, I am not a racist because I know the English, Blacks. I have become more tolerant and open. I wish I could speak more English because I go to different playgroups. I try to talk to the extent of my English. I especially go [there] to learn English. (...) There are different [groups], Muslims and others depending on where you go. Once a week I went to a Polish group where I managed to enrol my daughter. (...) It is about contact with children, so that they could meet others (UK06/w/4y).*

Although Dorota presented herself as having become ‘more’ tolerant and open, her words still implied a degree of othering that might eventually be overcome by increased knowledge of and contact with ‘others’.

Playgroups and language classes gave migrants such as Monika an opportunity to meet people from different cultures, to transcend their own ethnicity and social networks and to learn new ways of thinking and scripts of behaviour, including how to interact with diversity:

*I have just started [English classes]. (...) We try to speak and this is a very diverse cultural and religious, language environment. (...) The atmosphere in the class is really cool. These cultural differences are not so visible, we treat each other equally and that’s all (UK10/w/1y).*

Intercultural exchanges at English classes are facilitated by the similarity of attendees’ situations in terms of adaptation challenges, the position of being strangers and language limitations, which give them a common ground, reduce power inequalities and, paradoxically, help in communication, as shown by Wessendorf (2015).

More insight into cognitive opening is provided by Agata, who reflected on various dimensions of the cultural learning she experienced:

*Many changes have occurred in my life – from basic ones, from learning English to acclimatisation, getting to know people and culture here. Until today this culture is being learnt because everybody is different, everybody believes in something different, everybody has different convictions (...) but it does not mean that we differ so much that this difference in language and culture can embroil people because each of us deals actually with the same problems in a foreign country. The same way that Hindus and other religions, we all deal with the same (UK39/w/8y).*

While Agata acknowledged the diversity of people and the processual character of cultural learning, she also expressed her conviction about the commonality of people’s challenges and concerns regardless of their cultural background and features. Agata explained her unpreparedness for dealing with diversity after coming from a post-war Polish society largely defined during the communist rule as homogenous and in contrast to external enemies. Agata indicated that family members who came to the UK earlier tried to ‘keep her in

a bubble' by using the imprinted patterns of rejecting 'otherness' and avoiding intergroup contacts but she resisted such attempts. However, she outlined the limits of the changes in herself which she was prepared to accept in order to retain her core values and identity:

*Simply I have a blockage – I do not want to change my life, my culture. I am good. I am open. I can get to know [other] cultures, sit at one table, pray, eat a meal together (...). But I bring them [children] up in the way I was brought up... I could have a relationship with an Englishman or any foreigner, but with somebody who will not exert pressure on me to change my culture and faith (UK39/w/8y).*

The importance of sticking to their own cultural norms and values was often discussed in the context of respondents' children. While Agata seemed to accept the possibility of the religious conversion of her children in the future, Aneta was concerned about the progressive values that her children are taught at school in the UK, particularly those presenting alternative values to the ideal of the heterosexual family. The prevalence of the traditional heteronormative family ideal among some Polish migrants in the UK and tensions with the alternative narratives and the growing diversity of family practices have been identified elsewhere (Botterill 2014). Thus, over time, shared characteristics such as newness and encounters with difference might override ethno-national identity, although these were often experienced with Polish identity in complex configurations of connection and belonging. While sticking to traditional cultural and religious values can be a strategy by which migrants can rebuild their sense of security in the context of diversity and fluidity (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018a), for some of them, such as Roman, their encounters with diversity resulted in distancing themselves from their cultural heritage, scripts and practices:

*I used to be religious – very religious, practising but now I am aware... knowing so much, reading about so many religions, hearing about religions, I simply stopped practising. I do not go to church despite the fact that I believe (UK28/m/4y).*

After Gilroy (2004) conviviality can be defined as a social pattern in which different groups dwell in close proximity when their racial, linguistic and religious differences do not lead to discontinuities of contact or unsolvable problems of communication and where there is a convivial culture of intermixture based on the ability to live together without being anxious or fearful about difference. Examples of conviviality and living with superdiversity surfaced when the migrants were talking about diversity at their workplaces, multinational rented houses and varied networks. For example, Anna, a young professional, revealed that, after the breakdown of her marriage, she shifted from Polish networks to diverse ones in a search for friends more oriented towards development and similar in terms of lifestyle:

*I have almost no Polish acquaintances and friends, maybe one or two people only. The majority are English or Pakistani or people from Latvia, Lithuania but Polish, only a handful of Poles and only acquaintances [not friends] (UK19/w/8y).*

Despite sporadic tension and intolerance in mixed areas of the city, any neighbourhood-level superdiversity experienced by our participants was largely perceived positively. Such positive feelings in places attracted individuals from diverse ethnic, religious and country-of-origin backgrounds, particularly in locations where place-making occurred around spaces where a common neighbourhood identity was emerging based around diversity, difference and/or newness (Pemberton and Phillimore 2018; Phillimore 2013). Some narratives demonstrated that, after a period of reorientation to difference, many positive experiences were recounted at

the local level, including examples of help received by the participants (e.g. offers of food sampling or inviting children to play together). Moving from encounters to the everyday acceptance of superdiversity could exemplify conviviality and ‘commonplace diversity’, when diversity becomes a daily practice, an ordinary part of social life and people mix in public and associational spaces (Wessendorf 2013), as well as a form of everyday conviviality providing the possibilities of openness (Gilroy 2004) and boundary crossing and interethnic solidarity (Karner and Parker 2011). Although most participants did not go so far as to become part of the superdiverse networks, instead experiencing rather shallow conviviality, exploring encounters with and adaptation to superdiversity highlights the variety and complexity of their reactions and defies the homogeneity often associated with the notion of ‘Polish migrant’. As Gawlewicz (2016) established, the encounters of Polish migrants with diverse urban populations result in a variety of changes in their attitudes towards difference which may involve more favourable and more prejudiced attitudes as well as – most probably – ‘complicated’ and ‘in-between’ responses.

### Superdiversity as a resource

Marek’s story illustrates his intensive lived experience of diversity in the neighbourhood but his testimony also shows his active engagement with and appreciation of diversity as a resource sometimes described as urban buzz or a diversity dividend, where population diversity has been shown to offer distinct advantages in urban areas (Syrett and Sepulveda 2011). Marek reflected:

*People – at each step I meet fantastic people. Every person brings something to life. Thanks to the fact that they are open, share a lot between themselves which one can derive from. British multi-culture is incredible. Starting from music because of such different styles of rhythm, where there are fantastic compilations of traditional Hindu music with a rap beat – it is something incredible. Culture as such which is around synchronises fantastically. Mentality based on social trust and truthfulness (UK09/m/3y).*

Maria, too, was actively attracted by superdiversity. She claimed that it gave her the freedom to be herself without being labelled:

*I think that it actually works for me in England. The fact that I am not particularly religious or do not define myself as religious in a certain way does not put any label on me. This does not exclude me from any religion and does not put any label on me and because there is such diversity around, people really understand it. Simply diversity causes people to have greater understanding of other cultures. They might be not interested in it but they have enough just from looking at least and they know that there are different things happening to others and not necessarily that their neighbour is very bad (UK13/w/10y).*

This quote illustrates the need for anti-groupist perspectives inherent to superdiversity to capture the complexities of migrants’ identities and positionalities, in line with McCall’s (2005) argument. Maria also disclosed that she is fascinated by cultural mixing, which has become the inspiration for her artistic activity – wherein she contemplates how cultures change and interact:

*Here in [name of the city] I have done a few such projects which are perspectives on different aspects of culture mixing and multiculturalism. (...) I am crazy about culture and culture mixing. It is very interesting because the longer you think, the more you become aware of what we are attached to, to what not. It is not*

*clear what is what. I really believe that cultural elements are attached to us like small ticks and they do not run away (UK13/w/10y).*

Kuba, too, expressed his admiration for superdiversity, while noting: ‘My curiosity about the world, especially in [name of the city] has increased, because there is such a large number of cultures. Here people speak 120 languages and this fascinates me’ (UK18/m/8y). Kuba’s engagement with superdiversity also formed the basis of his artistic activity:

*I took part in such an organisation bringing Polish artists here in [name of the city]. We organised a three-day arts festival, but this organisation was not closed to non-Poles. It was rather an organisation which cooperated with people from other cultures. At this festival (...) there were 10–15 different nationalities. We cooperated with the community of gays and lesbians. It all was open and mixed with local communities but disappeared. I take part in different stuff. In general I do not participate in any Polish projects but, rather, in international ones, apart from doing something with my closest friends but at that time this is done by Poles but not for Poles. (...) When somebody from Poland comes, it is fine, but rather all we did, we do and we will do, which is in my plans, it is not in Polish. This is aimed at residents here, at different cultures and religions but not at Poles (UK18/m/8y).*

In a similar vein, Pawel was involved in organising musical and artistic events in an attempt to bring various cultures and groups together. He saw this work as being his way of developing, expressing himself and socialising:

*We form a [music] collective and organise events. (...) My ideas are not only limited to music. I want to present our culture during the event I am the author of. Not only Polish, but from the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe. Why I do this? First of all, I like it but such actions bring closer nations, communities – Polish, English and all others, because there are many of them in England. I do not want that it is talked about us only on such negative occasions but also in the context of cultural events (UK05/m/y5).*

Superdiverse culture was a space where Pawel placed his anchors in the UK (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018b). These anchors focused on the English language he was learning, getting to know other cultures and people, personal development and acquiring new skills. He added to this: ‘What keeps me generally [in the UK] is the feeling of self-fulfilment. This is an anchor (...) these are such anchors: the feeling of self-fulfilment and setting new goals’ (UK05/m/y5), pointing to superdiversity as a resource for self-actualisation. Drawing on superdiversity as a resource was particularly visible in the case of migrants with higher levels of cultural capital and/or an interest in the arts.

## Conclusions

This paper uses the concept of superdiversity in four ways: to highlight the intra-categorical diversity of Polish migrants and eschew the stereotypical Polish migrant, to consider encounters with superdiverse populations and how they are experienced, to explore processes of adaptation to superdiverse difference and to think about superdiversity as a resource in itself. The vignettes and examples we have used are not intended to be generalisable but are used to illustrate the potential of superdiversity as a concept for undertaking research on CEE migration. In our paper we show how the superdiversity lens can be applied to CEE migrants using the example

of Polish migrants in the UK. This is particularly important in the context of substantial growth of the population of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe in the UK after 2004 who, however, are often perceived in an oversimplified and homogenous way in spite its diversities and complexities. Our examples show that many migrants, because of interpersonal characteristics, adaptation strategies and/or lifestyles, do not fit with what they themselves often perceive as the prevailing representations of Polish migrants in the UK. We also demonstrate that the superdiversity encountered by Polish migrants is often experienced, at least initially, as a challenge needing to be addressed. Initial reactions to superdiversity constituted the combination of interest and excitement, anxiety and fear but also the recognition of the variety of opportunities. Coming to terms with superdiversity took various forms and had different implications, ranging from defensive reactions to cognitive opening up and conviviality which might have its limits or might lead to full immersion into a superdiverse culture to the point that superdiversity was embraced, viewed as a resource or even as an integral part of individuals' identity. Some examples showed the simultaneous co-existence of a distinct Polish identity and being embedded in superdiversity while others indicated that a line was drawn between being Polish and those constructed as others.

The concept of superdiversity has enabled us to illustrate the heterogeneity of Polish migrants in the UK, questioning approaches which, with a few exceptions, often homogenise this population, with existing categorisations obscuring complexities and intersectionalities. As Vertovec (2015) argues, superdiversity can be used to move beyond ethno-nationalism and investigate increasingly blurred social categories and complex life trajectories. Our work aims at developing the increasingly complex and nuanced insights into the diversity of Polish migrants in the UK – visible, for instance, in the work of Ryan (2011, 2016, 2018). We argue that, through using the superdiverse lens, we can not only depict internal differences and highlight exceptions and minorities but try to de-construct group images and boundaries and show how identities and responses to encounters with superdiversity evolve over time. Superdiversity offers an alternative social paradigm of complexity and mobility to the limited nation-centric and static paradigm constrained by traditional fixed groups, categories and essentialist notions of cultures. These latter are pertinent to the study of migrants from Poland who are quite often bundled together in categories such as 'the Polish' and 'Eastern Europeans'.

In this paper we have used superdiversity as a heuristic device for uncovering the heterogeneity and fluidity inherent in the Polish migrant population and their encounters with difference in the UK and show how these encounters with diversity may result in culture shock, identity reinforcement or shifts and new ways of thinking or being. We highlight the relevance of the literature around conviviality in order to understand the experience and outcomes of the immigration of Polish migrants into superdiverse areas. Further research is required to explore the potential of superdiversity and its applicability to a broader range of CEE migrants (in terms of ethnic origin, type of migration and other socio-demographic characteristics) and in other places. These might include rural areas where, in some parts of Europe, CEE migrants have brought diversity into communities previously perceived as traditional and homogeneous. Research might also be used to shed new light on recent migration to CEE countries and those various migrants engaged in onward and circular migrations – as is increasingly the case in Brexit Britain.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> In the symbol UK09/m/3y, 'm' stands for male and '3y' for three years.

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## ORCID IDs

Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5032-428X>

Jenny Phillimore  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1213-2302>

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