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— ARTICLES —

'Mixing Different Traditions and Picking What's Best': Characteristics and Migration Experiences of Polish High-Tech Professionals in Silicon Valley

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Growing demand for a highly skilled workforce in a knowledge- and technology-based economy stimulates the recruitment of international professionals, resulting in their increased participation in the total volume of international migrants. However, little scholarly attention has been paid to their integration strategies and migration trajectories. Drawing on 46 interviews with Polish high-tech professionals, this article explores their characteristics and migration experiences in Silicon Valley. Grounded theory, a biographical method, a transnational approach and the concept of social anchoring guided my data collection, analysis and interpretation. The study results indicated that high-tech professionals were well prepared for immigration to the United States and were able to integrate effectively into the multicultural environment of Silicon Valley by adopting the rules of the host society 'only as much as necessary' without rejecting their previous cultural affiliations. Working at the level of competence and professional experience from the moment of arriving in the United States facilitated their structural adaptation to American society. The study contributes to the existing body of literature in migration research by offering a nuanced insight into motivations, identities and values of modern highly skilled migrants and providing new ways of understanding their decision-making processes on migration and settlement.

Keywords: migration of the highly skilled, high-tech professionals, Polish migrants in the United States, Silicon Valley, transnationalism

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Introduction

Migration is a permanent attribute of humanity (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Kubiak and Slany 1999; Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci and Pellegrino 1999). People leave their home countries to improve their living conditions, gain access to resources, pursue educational opportunities and ensure civil liberties and all kinds of freedom. Migration, however, driven by globalisation processes (Stiglitz 2002), has gained increased political salience in recent decades and has never had such a significant socio-economic and political impact as it does today (Castles *et al.* 2014). International migration has tripled since 1970, totalling some 272 million migrants in 2019 – about 3.5 per cent of the global population (International Organization for Migration/UN Migration Agency 2019).

The increasing participation of highly skilled international workers, also referred to in the literature as 'transnational professionals', 'international talent' or 'international experts' (D'Costa 2008; Koser and Salt 1997; Wagner 2011), has been a strong modern migration trend (Kaczmarczyk and Tyrowicz 2008). As of 2010, there were at least 28 million highly skilled international migrants – an increase of 130 per cent compared to 1990 (Kerr, Kerr, Özden and Parsons 2016). Although highly skilled workers constitute only a fraction of the total volume of international migrants, their skills are indispensable for today's modern knowledge- and technology-based economy and are in rising demand (Koser and Salt 1997; Salt 1997). Therefore, there has been considerable competition between countries in recent years – known as a 'global race for talent' (Czaika and Parsons 2016) – to recruit highly skilled workers. Wealthy countries offer the best living and working conditions, competitive salaries and other opportunities beyond financial incentives and are thus able to outcompete poorer countries (Solimano 2008). About 50 per cent of all foreign highly skilled workers settle in the United States, making it the leading host country for transnational professionals (Turner 2006).

Despite the growing participation and importance of highly skilled migrants, published data on their integration strategies and migration trajectories are still limited. Little scholarly attention has also been paid to the modern migration stream of highly educated Poles to the United States and their decision-making processes on migration and settlement. This article, drawing on a qualitative study comprising 46 interviews,[1] aims to help to close this knowledge gap by identifying and better understanding the characteristics and migration experiences of Polish high-tech professionals in Silicon Valley,[2] defined as those who 'obtained a higher education degree with a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent, migrated[3] to the United States and, at the time of the interview, worked in the high-tech industry'.[4] To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to focus on the contemporary migration stream of highly educated Poles to this part of the United States. I seek to answer the following research questions:

- What factors contribute to becoming a transnational professional? (Q1)
- What are the educational and professional career paths of Polish high-tech professionals in Silicon Valley? (Q2)
- What are typical circumstances of and motivations for their migrating to the United States? (Q3)
- What is the process of adaptation to American society like for Polish high-tech professionals? (Q4)
- How do migration experiences influence their identity? (Q5)

The collection, analysis and interpretation of data were conducted with the guidance of grounded theory (Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Konecki 2000), a biographical methodology (Bednarz-Łuczewska and Łuczewski 2012; Szczepański 1973), a transnational approach (e.g. Babiński 2009; Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Faist, Fauser and Reisenauer 2013; Glick Schiller 2003, 2004; Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992, 1995; Levitt 2009; Nowicka 2020; Opiłowska 2014; Ślusarczyk 2019; Waldinger 2013, 2015), the concept of social anchoring (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2013a, 2013b, 2016) and the findings of other relevant

reports (e.g. Cekiera 2013, 2014; Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2006; Eich-Krohm 2007, 2012; Hardill 2002; Hatalska 2017; Latusek-Jurczak 2014; Ong, Cheng and Evans 1996; Oommen 1989; Raczyński 2019; Sosnowska 2016; Wagner 2011).

Theoretical background

Technology, globalisation and migration

Technological, economic, political and cultural changes in the world in recent decades, facilitated by globalisation, have transformed migration and settlement patterns (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995). In the past, international migration meant the inevitable loosening of social and cultural ties with the country of origin. The current development of modern means of transport and the communication revolution have reduced the costs of travelling long distances and thus facilitate connections between migrants abroad and communities at home (Waldinger 2013: 764). Thanks to the advent of the internet, communication between migrants and stay-at-homes can be instantaneous (Waldinger 2015). Nowadays, migrants are less isolated and can maintain relations with their country of origin (through various communication channels, such as telephone calls, videoconferences, social media; in-person visits; family gatherings; involvement in immigration organisations or investments) with less effort while simultaneously integrating into a new society (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995).

Research suggests that high-tech professionals, due to having competencies which are easily applicable outside the place of their education, English-language skills, knowledge of Western scientific methods, cultures and work style and the ability to use new technologies, may choose different adaptation strategies than migrants were able to do in the past (Ong *et al.* 1996; Wagner 2011). Scientific evidence shows that highly skilled migrants may not feel much pressure to assimilate (Babiński 2009; Faist *et al.* 2013; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995), seem to integrate structurally into new societies faster than migrants in the past and to drift between two cultures, maintaining their identity from the place of origin and adapting 'only as much as necessary' (Babiński 2009).

The integration of high-tech professionals

Integration models explain how individuals adjust and adapt to the host society and its norms, values and social behaviours. An assimilation perspective on migration, which dominated the scientific discourse until the 1970s, showed the integration processes as unconscious and irreversible, resulting in a homogeneous society in which ethnic diversity disappears or becomes imperceptible among its members (Kubiak and Paluch 1980). This concept was not intended to explain new patterns of international migration and the integration strategies of migrants in the context of technological developments and progressing globalisation (Opiłowska 2014). It also ignored the fact that 'international migration means cross-border connection' (Waldinger 2013: 756) and actions of immigrants may be bi-directional and encompass not only the host society but also the country of origin and relatives who stayed there (Faist *et al.* 2013). Scholars suggest, therefore, that the international movements of high-tech professionals cannot be adequately analysed through the lens of the assimilation approach (Babiński 2009; Eich-Krohm 2012; Faist *et al.* 2013; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995; Wagner 2011).

The transnational perspective on migration and the concept of social anchoring

The transnational perspective on migration, created in the 1990s in response to the limitations of the assimilation approach (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995; Opiłowska 2014), has been proposed by some scholars to study the contemporary migratory movements of highly skilled workers (Babiński 2009; Faist *et al.* 2013; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995; Grzymała-Kazłowska 2013b). It accentuates constant and ongoing cross-border connections (known as transnational social spaces) between different geopolitical areas that are created and maintained through social ties – repeated interactions between migrants and non-migrants from the countries of residence and origin – such as visits to the family abroad or video conferences on professional matters with a co-worker living in another part of the world (Faist *et al*. 2013). For transnational social spaces to thrive, migrants must have the ability and readiness to enter two (or more) sociocultural environments and embrace a transformation of their identity, nationality and citizenship (Ślusarczyk 2019).

Transnationalism, when defined as 'an outcome of multiple belonging, practice and dispositions coming together, (…) allows addressing the aspirations of migrants and their attitudes, and apparent paradoxes in their behaviour" (Nowicka 2020: 1–2). The transitional perspective highlights that migrants are simultaneously exposed to different social, economic, political or cultural systems (Glick Schiller 2003) and that their lives are shaped by diverse and sometimes conflicting values, norms and ideas (Levitt 2009). As a result of being 'here and there' (in the host and the home country) at the same time (Waldinger 2015), migrants may feel that they have two homes and acquired a bicultural identity (Babiński 2009) or, on the contrary, they may feel lost and with no home at all (Waldinger 2015). Hence, as Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004: p. 1011) explain it, transnationalism's salient quality involves 'simultaneity', with 'movement and attachment' to home and host countries 'rotating back and forth and changing direction over time', just as 'persons change or swing one way or the other, depending on the context'.

The concept of social anchoring draws from the transnational tradition and complements it by connecting the issues of identity, adaptation and integration. It describes migration as a profound change that facilitates a need to establish identity, psychosocial stability and security in the host country that migrants achieve by 'establishing anchors' (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2013a, 2013b, 2016). This echoes research studies indicating that transnational practices help to maintain the balance and meet migrants' needs on their road to adaptation (Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Morawska 2003; Pustułka and Ślusarczyk 2016). Modern migrants, however, tend *not* to make the final decision about where they will settle permanently and prefer to remain open to new opportunities, including further migration. Therefore, they are ready to 'un-anchor' at any time and change their residence, citizenship or surname (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2013b).

Babiński (2009) calls highly skilled Poles migrating nowadays to the United States 'transnationals' and argues that, although they integrate structurally much faster than their counterparts did in the past, culturally they seem to maintain their Polish identity and ties with relatives from Poland much longer. Since Polish high-tech professionals in Silicon Valley fall into Babiński's definition of highly skilled migrants, the transnational approach has been chosen to study their characteristics and migration experiences, and particularly to learn about their motivations, aspirations, integration strategies and identity challenges. The concept of social anchoring adds value in helping to explain the migration decision-making process and in providing more context in which why and how migrants adapt to the new rules of the host society can be understood.

Methods

Study setting: The Polish community in Silicon Valley

The Polish diaspora in Silicon Valley and the neighbouring counties consists of about 75,000 members (60,000 in the counties of Santa Clara, San Mateo, Alameda and Santa Cruz and 14,500 in San Francisco County), of whom almost 90 per cent (67,000) were born in the United States (United States Census Bureau 2015). It is a diverse community comprising several clusters of migrants, vastly differing from each other in terms of their migration circumstances and motivations, adaptation pace, strategies and attitudes towards the country of origin. The Polish community in Silicon Valley encompasses (1) immigrants from the pre-transformation period; (2) people of Polish origin – immigrants in subsequent generations; (3) professionals; (4) entrepreneurs; (5) representatives of Polish companies; (6) students and apprentices; and (7) illegal immigrants (Latusek-Jurczak 2014). This article focuses primarily on professionals who predominately work for international corporations. However, some participants were entrepreneurs or considered developing their own businesses.

Poles in Silicon Valley, unlike some other diasporas (Gold 2018; Pellow and Park 2002; Wong 2005), do not form a coherent and integrated ethnic group due to their relatively small number, territorial dispersion and the lack of Polish institutions that could effectively integrate the Polish community (Latusek-Jurczak 2014). Most Polish organisations in the region operate beyond the boundaries of Silicon Valley (in San Francisco and the eastern part of the San Francisco Bay Area, where many Polish migrants settled before 1989). Silicon Valley hosts only one traditional ethnic institution (the Polish Roman Catholic parish in San Jose). Moreover, there are several informal groups focused on meeting the informational, social and entertainment needs of individuals rather than on integrating the Polish ethnic group as a whole, and several business-oriented organisations aimed to strengthen business cooperation between people of Polish origin and to support Polish entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley. Organisations run by and for the Polish ethnic group in Silicon Valley have no political goals.

Sample

Since the Polish community in Silicon Valley is small and dispersed, I used a purposeful snowball sampling strategy (Patton 2014) to recruit my participants – a suitable method when members of migrant communities being studied are difficult to reach (Babbie 2020). I also targeted participants from several independent sources to diversify the study sample and ensure that it was not limited to one particular social group or employees of the same company (Rapley 2011). I recruited professionals at meetings (formal and informal) organised for the Polish community in Silicon Valley, via social media and at the Polish Roman Catholic parish in San Jose. The criteria for inclusion were (1) to live in the area (place of residence in Silicon Valley), (2) have arrived in the United States after 1989,[5] (3) to work in the high-technology industry and (4) to have a higher-education degree in the field of high technology or experience in the industry. Additionally, to learn more about the living conditions of the group, I interviewed several ‘social experts’ (members of the local Polish community with extensive knowledge about the community or Silicon Valley). The process of selecting expert interviewees was guided by my study objectives, recommendations and my knowledge and expertise.

Interviews

I conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with Polish high-tech professionals in Silicon Valley between April 2014 and March 2017 aiming to understand their migration experiences and career trajectories, learn how they

integrated into the host society and identify their characteristics. Additionally, I conducted 6 in-depth interviews with social experts between July 2017 and March 2018 to validate my findings. The interviews explored the following aspects of participants' biographies: (1) their education choices and professional career; (2) the circumstances and motivations of their migration to the United States; (3) their integration into American society; (4) the impact of migration experiences on participants' identity and approach to life and their decision-making processes regarding career and personal life.

Interviews that lasted about 60–90 minutes were conducted in person in locations chosen by the participants (primarily in their workplaces, homes or cafés/restaurants), audio-recorded and then transcribed *verbatim* (with all personally identifying information removed from the transcripts). Informal post-interview conversations with the recorder turned off, which often lasted for hours, allowed me to gain participants' trust and learn nuances that later facilitated the analysis, interpretation and contextualisation of the data.

The ethical conduct of the study was ensured by the voluntary participation of the respondents, following informed-consent rules, respecting the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, protecting my research data, acknowledging the multiple roles of the author, accurately reporting results and acknowledging other publications where, *inter alia*, the study results have been presented. No formal ethical review process was required at the institution where the study was conducted.

Analysis

I conducted a rigorous thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) based on the directions of the biographical method (Bednarz-Łuczewska and Łuczewski 2012; Szczepański 1973) and grounded theory (Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Konecki 2000). I performed two cycles of coding, including open coding (breaking data into discrete codes), axial coding (creating more abstract categories encompassing several different codes) and selective coding (connecting all categories around one core category). The final version of an inductively developed codebook contained 45 codes. Concurrently with coding, I created concept maps and theoretical notes for specific transcripts, codes and categories, following the recommendations of the grounded-theory method of qualitative analysis (Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Konecki 2012). For the analysis and interpretation, as instructed by Jan Szczepański (1973), I applied the following methods: typological (identifying types and patterns), constructive (using biographical material as a primary source of information) and exemplification (supporting the conclusions with quotes from research participants). In addition, by contextualising the results of this research through the lens of the transnational perspective, the concept of social anchoring and findings from numerous relevant studies, I made inductive reasoning intersubjectively verifiable.

I established the trustworthiness of the study through (1) sustained, prolonged engagement with the data; (2) the triangulation of sources (including interviews with professionals and social experts and an extensive literature review), research methods/techniques (grounded theory, biographical method) and theories (transnational theory, the concept of social anchoring); (3) peer debriefings throughout the process; (4) thick descriptions of context and (5) the search for disconfirming evidence, among other techniques (Denzin 2006; Grabowska-Lusińska 2012; Nowell, Norris, White and Moules 2017; Patton 2014).

Positionality statement

During the conduct of this research, I identified myself as a Polish immigrant (and the spouse of a high-tech professional) living in the United States (and, more specifically, in Silicon Valley). Over the years, however, with my legal status changing (from a temporary visa-holder to a permanent resident to an American citizen)

and experiences accumulating, my identity has also undergone a transformation. Nevertheless, I studied the community of which I felt that I was a member. My dual role – an expert and an insider – generated challenges (such as objectivity); yet, I believe the project would not have succeeded were it not for my residence in Silicon Valley and my knowledge of and access to members of the local Polish community that would be an arduous task for an outsider. I physically attended in-person meetings organised by and for the Polish community, where I reached many high-tech professionals and met people who later introduced me to prospective study participants. As an immigrant, I experienced many of the situations described by my respondents and could relate to and understand their dilemmas of living at the intersection of two cultures as well as their legal, adaptation or identity challenges. This helped me to bring my participants' perspectives to my data analysis and interpretation. As a social scientist, on the other hand, I was equipped with the tools to translate participants' stories into the language of science.

Findings

Participant demographic characteristics

A total of 41 Polish high-tech professionals participated in interviews,[6] 30 of whom were married, and 33 of whom were men, which reflected the over-representation of males in technical professions in Silicon Valley. The participants were relatively young, with an average age of 35.3 years.

All my participants had graduated from higher-education institutions with at least a Bachelor's degree (as per the adopted definition of a professional), with 39 graduating from Polish institutions and 8 from institutions abroad. Many had studied at world-renowned universities such as Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Cambridge University. Most of them had an educational background in information technology. Of the interviewees, 25 had studied computer science, software engineering or a similar field. Of the remaining participants, 5 graduated with a degree in other areas of applied science (electrical engineering, telecommunications, computer physics, mechanics and materials engineering or robotics), 4 studied life sciences (biotechnology, chemistry or biomedical engineering), 4 graduated with a degree in management or marketing and 3 studied social sciences (psychology or applied economics). Furthermore, 7 respondents obtained additional degrees or completed professional development postgraduate courses – such as a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) – or human resources, management, technical or language courses.

Most interviewees were employed in international corporations that recruit foreigners on a large scale, such as Apple, Cisco, Ericsson, Facebook, Google, Intel or Nokia. Several of them worked in start-ups, smaller companies or educational institutions. The study cohort encompassed a broad representation of professions, among which the dominant roles were (senior) software developer, (senior) software engineer, project manager, product manager and programme manager.

As my study focuses on the contemporary migration stream from Poland, the participants' length of stay in the United States was relatively short, with an average of 5.7 years, a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 26 years. Nearly all (36) interviewees held temporary visas upon entry to the United States, with 30 of them holding either L1B or H1B visas (the two most common work visas for professionals). Over time, the legal status of many respondents changed. At the time of the interview, 8 had applied for permanent residency ('Green Card') and were awaiting a decision; 11 were already permanent residents and 8 were American citizens. Table 1 summarises the interviewees' demographic information.

Table 1. Participant demographics characteristics

Variable	N
***Age** (in years)*	**40**
Min-Max = 27–49	
Mean (SD) = 35.3 (6.0)	
27–30	11
31–35	12
36–40	9
41–45	6
46–49	2
Gender	**41**
Male	33
Female	8
Marital status	**41**
Married	30
Single	11
Type of higher education*	**40**
Polytechnic in Poland	26
University in Poland	7
Other higher education institution in Poland	6
Higher education institution outside Poland	8
Field of study	**41**
Informatics / Software Engineering	25
Other Applied Sciences	5
Management / Management and Marketing	4
Biotechnology / Chemistry / Biomedical Engineering	4
Social Sciences	3
***Length of stay in the United States** (in years)*	**41**
Min-Max = 1–26	
Mean (SD) = 5.7 (5.3)	
less than 3	11
3–5	20
6–10	6
more than 10	4
Visa status upon entry to the United States	**40**
L1B	18
H1B	12
Other temporary visas (including L2, B, J, O)	6
Permanent residency	4
Legal status at the time of the interview	**41**
Temporary visa	14
Permanent residency application submitted	8
Permanent residency	11
Citizenship	8

Note: *Participants who attended higher education institutions in both Poland and other countries are counted twice; therefore, the sum is greater than the total number of participants.

Characteristics and migration experiences

The analysis of interviews with Polish high-tech professionals in Silicon Valley elucidated seven areas of participants' biographies, including (1) primary conditions; (2) migration motivations; (3) adaptation processes; (4) establishing and maintaining relationships; (5) professional career in Silicon Valley; (6) identity challenges; and (7) plans for the future. All the quotations below came from interviews with my participants, were translated from Polish into English and then edited for grammar and clarity while retaining the original context and meaning. The names of the interviewees have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Primary conditions

Many participants began their professional careers while still in college, which they considered a competitive advantage factor in the labour market. Their motivations to work varied. Some started their first jobs out of curiosity, due to free time or for fun. Others were motivated by the prospect of high compensation and the opportunity to pay off financial obligations or have a head-start over their peers. Professional experience was indicated as equally important as formal education, as Krzysztof reveals:

> *At the age of 19, when I was in the second year of college, I started working in the IT industry and worked all the time until the end of college... In the last semester, I gave up the second major... I have been told my whole life that you study to have a good job, and I had a good job.*

English-language skills were considered a prerequisite for employment in an international company and more important than technical skills. Several of my interlocutors even decided to pursue a university degree in English, despite the high costs and significant effort involved. Respondents indicated that possessing job-related English skills accelerated their professional careers by helping them to build and maintain professional relationships beyond their country of origin. These findings echo research by Ong *et al.* (1996) and Wagner (2011) which showed that English skills increase mobility by extending the professional network and facilitating access to international job offers.

My interviewees had a proactive outlook on life, intentionally pursued their dreams and passions, did not fear changes and unexpected situations, were open to new experiences and willing to learn new skills and continuously broaden their knowledge. They actively pursued satisfying careers that suited their interests, talents and personalities. Therefore, like Anna, below, they were willing to put considerable effort into acquiring new skills and to obtain a dream job:

> *I started my career as a chemist. After four years, I realised that… job would not satisfy me until the end of my career. Therefore, I applied to the MBA programme and… I found a job right here, in Silicon Valley, in marketing in the medical devices industry.*

The three features of high-tech professionals described above (having early work experiences, learning English to have more professional opportunities and being intentional about their careers and willingness to learn), defined in the study as 'primary conditions', were found to be personality predispositions, life experiences, intentional individual decisions and external circumstances that preceded or occurred at an early stage of their professional careers, facilitating mobility and leading to them 'becoming' an international professional. Those findings contribute to research on transnational professionals, indicating that upon completing the training, they possess standardised knowledge, English skills and knowledge of Western scientific methods, culture and

work style (Ong *et al.* 1996) and, therefore, are well-prepared for international migration (Wagner 2011). Moreover, this suggests that Polish high-tech professionals – among other young Polish employees – who are lifelong learners, open to new experiences and invested in personal and professional growth, are well-equipped to meet market expectations facilitated by fast technological changes with their flexible approach and the ability to quickly absorb new information (Mrozowicki 2016).

Migration motivations

My study participants decided to move to the United States motivated by their curiosity about Silicon Valley and desire to learn, test current and develop new professional skills, face new challenges and take advantage of this unique opportunity. Financial incentives were not claimed to be a direct reason to migrate, which seems to confirm the results of other studies on the adaptation of highly qualified immigrants (Cekiera 2014; Eich-Krohm 2012; Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska and Golińska 2011; Kaczmarczyk and Tyrowicz 2008, 2015) that 'decisions to migrate are far more complex than foreseen by neoclassical economic migration theories' (Kaczmarczyk and Tyrowicz 2015: 3).

The analysis also revealed that some participants decided to move abroad because they could not find exciting work opportunities in Poland (push factors). Others were attracted by the fame and prestige of Silicon Valley, perceived as a technological mecca and a place of extraordinary professional development opportunities (pull factors), as Dawid testifies:

> *I would not try to find any complex motivations here; the matter is simple. Only a few people get a job offer in this company and the opportunity to see what Silicon Valley looks like from the inside. If I did not take advantage of it, I would regret it for the rest of my life... When there is an opportunity, I try to grab it, like this time.*

Some participants stressed that they had come to the United States in exceptional circumstances, considering the history of Polish emigration – holding a visa allowing them to stay and work legally in a profession that matches their level of education and experience. Employers often helped them in completing visa formalities and organising the move. These factors eased their entry and facilitated their adaptation to American society. By contrasting their experiences and migration circumstances with those who migrated to the United States in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, interviewees, like Izabela, indicated different motivations (economic and political vs individual and educational) and the freedom of modern migrants who now travel freely and can return to Poland whenever they want:

> *We… did not leave for… economic reasons or as politically persecuted people because the country was free then. We had a completely different view of the migration* [from previous migrants].

In fact, the social, political and technological changes of the last decades have significantly altered how people travel. System changes initiated in 1989 in Poland reduced politically motivated migrations and new technological solutions reduced migration's financial and emotional costs. Migration today is not as burdensome and definite as it was in the past, as has been accurately illustrated by Cekiera (2013: 73): 'One does not emigrate today; one is just leaving'. As captured by the transnational perspective, migrants maintain these cross-border connections and transnational social spaces by moving between home and host countries (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Ślusarczyk 2019).

Adaptation processes

Integration happens when 'different individuals and groups, while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness, enter into relatively permanent relationships with the host society and participate in various areas of its life' (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2008: 35). Migrants enter the host society in various dimensions, including legal and institutional, economic, social, identity, cultural or spatial (Ager and Strang 2004; Babiński 2009; Biernath 2008; Grzymała-Kazłowska 2013a, 2013b, 2016; Winiecka 2011). They often experience adaptation difficulties. For many study participants, the move to the United States was perceived as uncomplicated and not much different to changing the place of residence within one country, as Jan shows:

> *You just buy a plane ticket, fly in, rent a hotel, look for a flat, send your belongings from Poland, move in, buy a car, and arrive at work. It's simple… you just move in the same way as you would move between cities in Poland.*

However, some interviewees experienced difficulties that had a negative impact on their initial perception of the new place. Renting a flat, buying a car, setting up a bank account or obtaining a local driving licence, due to their limited knowledge of the procedures and rules of the system, were considered complicated, burdensome and time-consuming. Participants were negatively surprised by the high cost of living in Silicon Valley to the extent that some of them had to revise their financial plans. They were also shocked by the low quality of services and housing conditions, considering the skyrocketing prices.

The other major obstacle was the linguistic issue, defined not as an inability to communicate but as difficulties expressing oneself eloquently and being understood precisely as intended. As Waldinger (2015: 45) suggests, 'language is both a symbol and a tool of membership, functioning simultaneously as the means of communication and as a meaning-laden indicator of group membership since the capacity to speak a common tongue defines the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. For these reasons, language possesses powerful emotional connotations, well beyond its instrumental value'. That is supposedly one of the reasons why participants like Izabela made efforts to increase their language skills:

> *The manner of expression and eloquence we have in our language is impossible to make up for in the second language... I had a problem with it, and I probably still have it.* [My English] *is not as eloquent as it should be. This is not how I speak in Polish, so I worked hard to… speak… and be understood in the way I wanted.*

Over time, however, 'migration [started] transforming the migrants. (…) They absorbed the tastes, preferences and behaviours' (Waldinger 2015: 45) of the new society, acquired social and cultural competence and began understanding social rules and norms. They gained confidence that they could cope in the new environment. They also expanded their circle of friends, increased their exposure to American culture, began intentionally participating in American society and 'established anchors' (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2013a, 2013b, 2016). For the high-tech professionals interviewed, their migration status turned out to be one of the crucial factors affecting their adaptation. They wanted to obtain a permanent residency status to gain more stability (so that they could stay in the United States permanently without any restrictions), more mobility (so they could change jobs or move within the United States without any limitations) and more financial opportunities (so they could change employers or their spouse/partner could obtain a job). Some participants, who were also American citizens, indicated that they decided to apply for citizenship so that they could vote and fully participate in the community. Waldinger and Duquette-Rury (2016: 45) argue that 'until the migrants become citizens, they

stand outside the polity, which keeps them distant from the efforts at mobilisation that so often trigger political interest and knowledge'. Referring, then, to the concept of social anchoring, permanent residency or citizenship therefore 'anchor' migrants even more and are the foundation for integration (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2008).

The analysis of my interviews with Polish high-tech professionals revealed that they were open to other cultures, understood cultural nuances and were able to selectively adopt the new cultural rules of the host country without rejecting their previous cultural affiliations, which helped them to thrive in a multicultural environment. Like Krzysztof, they picked the most useful elements of Polish and American cultures:

> *I like certain traditions very much, but I am very open to new ones... For example, I do not think we have to eat Polish food. We like various cuisines; we like Polish and American food and enjoy a good burger or steak but we also like Asian food... We like celebrating Polish traditions but we do not have... such isolation that we only accept Polish traditions and nothing else; that we absolutely cannot mix different traditions… I think we can mix different traditions. We can take cool things and add them to what we do. And I think that's the way it should be because the only healthy approach is to pick what's best* [for you].

These findings shed new light on the intersection of migration and identity. 'Reflecting the inherent duality of their situation', as Green and Waldinger (2016: 17) emphasise, 'the people who are simultaneously immigrants and emigrants often prefer to have it both ways, as opposed to choosing either place of destination or place of origin'. My results also reflect other research from a transnational perspective, suggesting that highly educated migrants of the new era seem to integrate structurally into new societies faster than previous waves of migrants (Babiński 2009; Cekiera 2014; Grzymała Kazłowska 2013a, 2013b; Sosnowska 2016; Wagner 2011) and to drift between two cultures, maintaining the identity of the place of origin and adapting 'only as much as necessary' (Babiński 2009). They do not feel pressure to assimilate (Babiński 2009; Eich-Krohm 2012; Faist *et al.* 2013; Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 2014) but instead selectively adopt some elements of the new culture to adapt effectively to the host society (Babiński 2009; Opiłowska 2014). In this context, transnational practices could be considered as a strategy helping to maintain a balance in migrants' lives and satisfy migrants' needs (Ślusarczyk 2019).

Establishing and maintaining relationships

A successful adaptation to a new social and cultural environment requires establishing new social networks. Since building a network of social contacts – including friends, acquaintances and others whose services are used daily (hairdresser, plumber, mechanic, doctor, lawyer, tax advisor, etc.) – often takes years, my participants felt lonely and lost, particularly during the initial period of migration, as stated by Adam:

> *It was hard for me (…) at the beginning. There was much stress and such a feeling of a lack of help as I was left on my own.*

Therefore, building a social network prevented isolation and anchored interviewees in the host environment (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2013a, 2013b). They mainly used social media and existing social networks to find new acquaintances and expand their social networks. Spouses (usually wives), who served as primary caregivers, met new people inside the community and coordinated the family's social life by engaging its members in various social activities.

Building and maintaining successful working relationships with co-workers of various cultural backgrounds and nationalities was considered a laborious effort and challenge. Participants, like Dariusz,

highlighted the necessity of developing a common platform for communication and principles of cooperation that would satisfy all co-workers, which often included polite behaviour, political correctness and discussions based on rational reasoning:

> *First, we have to work more to gain mutual trust with people who speak other languages, come from different cultures and have different habits... We must try a lot more to integrate, learn the new way of thinking, listen, absorb and recognise patterns, preference, and what can and cannot be said.*

The social networks of Polish high-tech professionals encompassed representatives of various cultures and nationalities and were not limited to members of the Polish community. These findings echo research from a transnational approach by Babiński (2009), indicating that modern Polish migrants with high socio-cultural capital and good English skills tend to establish multi-national social networks and are not tied to a Polish ethnic group, as were migrants in the past (Kubiak, Kusielewicz and Gromada 1988). Contrary to Babiński's conclusions – but echoing Gold's research (2018) about Israeli info-tech migrants in Silicon Valley – many participants preferred maintaining relationships with Polish people or other international migrants in Silicon Valley, mainly Europeans, due to their shared migration experiences and cultural similarities. Waldinger (2015: 33) explains this phenomenon: 'migrants… undergo similar experiences… of displacement and strangeness, which is why they suddenly discover a commonality in people originating from the same place. Finding comfort in the company of a familiar face, gaining pleasure from reminiscing about times gone by… migrant hometowners repeatedly come together'. Therefore, some participants found it easier to build lasting connections with fellow European or Polish immigrants, as Marek points out:

> *It is easier for me to make friends with Poles or other migrants, mainly from Europe, than with people from the United States or those who were brought up here. I understand them more; their culture is closer to mine; I know what to expect from them... Their mentality is also different. They are not afraid to face challenges, have broad interests and can do many things by themselves. Americans are not interesting* [to me]*; I don't understand social norms and do not know how to behave in their company. It's much easier for me to understand people from Europe, especially from Poland.*

While establishing new social networks in the host country, the high-tech professionals I interviewed maintained relationships with significant others who remained in Poland. Such transnational practices supported migrants emotionally, gave them a sense of stability, fulfilled their needs in the interim (Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Morawska 2003; Pustułka and Ślusarczyk 2016) and prolonged their home-country orientation (Waldinger 2015). Moreover, obligations to the family at home (particularly concerns about ageing parents) kept migrants engaged with the country of origin (Waldinger and Duquette-Rury 2016). Importantly, what somehow contradicts the transnational approach is that migration changed the relationship between migrants and those who stayed behind in the home country. Consistent with Waldinger's arguments (2015: 41), 'a variety of factors embed migrants in the receiving country's national social field, tearing them away and differentiating them from the people and places left behind'. The migrants feel 'betwixt and between their new and old homes, in the country of immigration but of the country of emigration' (Waldinger 2015: 41). Relationships change because migrants and stay-at-homes undergo different experiences and because migration also transforms migrants who 'develop a new set of wants, needs and expectations that are no longer fully compatible with the ways of life and modes of behaviour back home. Those changing orientations generate conflict in the cross-border relationship' (Waldinger 2015: 178), resulting in identity challenges.

The professional career in Silicon Valley

My participants perceived Silicon Valley as the professional reference point, which echoes other research findings (Latusek-Jurczak 2014). Its worldwide fame and countless professional development opportunities were indicated as pull factors. Interviewees emphasised the importance and potential of Silicon Valley on a global scale (as a significant contributor to new technologies and inventions) and on an individual level (as a career accelerator). Like Dariusz, they indicated that Silicon Valley is a unique ecosystem facilitating technological innovations:

> *Silicon Valley for the IT industry is like New York City for the financial sector. People want a place where everything is concentrated and it is much easier to meet for coffee with someone and do business. This usually entails the need for engineers who make the idea reality. As with most of the accelerators, venture capitalists and angel investors located here, that's what makes most of the solutions and start-ups here. They then turn into corporations that remain here, creating a centre of gravity that constantly absorbs and attracts.*

Some interviewees, particularly those with a status allowing them to change employment, highlighted that Silicon Valley was a place of endless opportunities for high-tech professionals. With the abundance of job opportunities on the market, they could choose more risky but innovative and exciting projects. They were not afraid to negotiate employment conditions. Additionally, they knew the qualifications and value which they brought to the table. In a worst-case scenario of losing a job, they could get employed somewhere else 'the next day', according to Tomasz:

> *I don't have to worry about anything here. When I am fired from one company, I will find a job in another company for the same or higher compensation the next day.*

The high-tech migrants interviewed often began their professional careers in international companies, where they travelled abroad and collaborated with co-workers of various nationalities and cultures. They knew how to work with co-workers of diverse cultural backgrounds. Even if that sometimes required putting in more effort at the start to make it work, respondents believed each member of such a multicultural team could contribute by bringing different perspectives. As Dawid said, they repeatedly emphasised that a multi-ethnic team could create a new quality, significantly exceeding the contribution of individuals:

> *Cultural diversity is fantastic. Everyone contributes… a different view. Everyone… looks at a given problem from a perspective I would never have considered. This is… invaluable.*

Participants suggested that it was easy to adapt to and blend in with the multicultural inhabitants of Silicon Valley. Public institutions and businesses are prepared to provide services to foreigners (such as driving tests in various languages or interpreting services in government and healthcare institutions). Moreover, American employers recognised participants' credentials without additional requirements, which meant that they could work in the United States, immediately upon arrival, at their qualifications and educational level, which placed them in the middle tier of the social structure and facilitated structural adaptation processes.

Many interviewees showed idealistic traits regarding their work and profession (Grzeszczyk 2003). They considered work as a place to develop and fulfil ideas and were emotionally invested in it. High-tech professionals rated being helpful to others, participating in significant projects, influencing the final results

and having a sense of fulfilment at work which was greater than financial incentives. They believed that, to be a true professional in high technology, a person should love their work and treat it as a hobby. Therefore, as Jan indicates, they considered continuous training to stay up to date as a natural part of their career and personal growth:

> *In IT… you have to love and be interested in what you do... It has to be your hobby, your passion. Only then can you keep up with what is happening... What I did a year ago is outdated. Today, everything changes so quickly... From week to week, I have to learn what is up to date by doing projects on the side. I also have to love what I do. Otherwise, I couldn't be a good engineer.*

The above arguments do not prove that the prospect of higher compensation cannot be an effective stimulus for a job change; however, it may not be the only or sufficient reason. My participants switched jobs when they did not see more opportunities for further development or felt boredom, stagnation or a lack of impact. Changing jobs – especially for permanent residents or American citizens with more freedom and opportunities than temporary migrants – was relatively easy.

Identity challenges

Research demonstrates that migration is a transformative experience and significant life event that facilitates reflection on a person's life, identity, cultural affiliations, norms and values and broadens migrants' mental horizons (Cekiera 2014; Green and Waldinger 2016; Grzymała-Moszczyńska *et al.* 2011; Raczyński 2019). Polish high-tech professionals in Silicon Valley also considered migration a life-altering event that allowed them to confront their values, biases and stereotypes internalised during the socialisation process, provoking insightful self-conscious work and leading to profound identity changes.

As already indicated, the transnational literature suggests that migrants may sometimes develop a sense of having two homes (Babiński 2009) or, on the contrary, feel completely lost and as if they had no home at all (Waldinger 2015), reflecting the argument by Waldinger and Duquette-Rury (2016: 42), that 'every immigrant is an emigrant, every alien a citizen, every foreigner a national (and) these dualities lie at the heart of the migration process, leaving migrants caught in a dialectic of constant tension'. My interviewees indeed indicated that they had more than one cultural reference. They found it difficult to choose the most important one, which often caused identity conflicts and made them feel insecure and alienated. As Dorota explains, participants – particularly at the early stages of migration –experienced loneliness, a lack of support and a feeling of being 'split' between Poland and the United States:

> *I miss the Polish mentality, the one that everyone is complaining about. Here, I discovered that I liked my country more than I thought. I just know one hundred per cent that I will never get along with foreigners the way I do with Poles; we will not have such an understanding. It is rare to have someone you are so close to here.*

Polish high-tech professionals, as mentioned earlier, could adapt to the new society 'as much as necessary' (Babiński 2009: 221) while maintaining their Polish identity. They did not feel pressure to fully assimilate into American culture and they made significant efforts to preserve their Polish identity by speaking Polish at home, keeping in touch with their family and relatives from Poland, regularly travelling to Poland, celebrating Polish traditions and teaching their children the Polish language, unlike migrants from the past who preferred to blend in at the expense of losing their previous identification (Babiński 2009; Kubiak *et al.* 1988). However, they

realised that, even if they 'may continue to identify with the home community, they do so as residents and sometimes members of a foreign country' (Waldinger 2013: 763) with different experiences and sets of needs and expectations. Over time, therefore, their ties with relatives and friends in Poland weakened, contributing to further identity transformations.

My analysis also revealed that emigration to the United States changed how participants perceived place, distance and what was culturally close and distant. 'Place' is an important block in building identity since all human experiences, memories and emotions are associated with some significant place. Symbolically, people refer to place when determining where they 'feel at home', meaning where they feel safe, free and themselves. In a transnational context, significant places are assumed to be located both in the country of origin and in the host country and the physical distance affects both the way they are perceived and the decisions and life strategies of migrants (Ślusarczyk 2019: 29). Polish high-tech professionals felt cultural proximity with other Europeans and defined themselves as Europeans, not just as Poles. They highlighted that Europe became their home when they moved to the United States. Europe, from their perspective, was close (geographically and culturally) compared to the West Coast of the United States. Patryk, for example, indicated that travelling from Silicon Valley to Poland to visit a family takes a massive amount of effort (including both transportation costs and time commitment):

> *How you perceive distance changes a lot when you arrive here. An hour-and-a-half flight to England by Ryanair, which costs you less than a hundred dollars per return trip… well, is not worth mentioning compared to the expenses you incur here. Fourteen hours of flight plus costs, that's a lot... Europe is now home; once, Poland was home and now Europe is home.*

Emigration also became an opportunity for participants to test their relationships, broaden their horizons, learn their abilities and gain a perspective on existing stereotypes, principles and authorities, which is consistent with other reports (Cekiera 2014; Grzymała-Moszczyńska *et al.* 2011; Raczyński 2019). Interviewees emphasised that migration, though sometimes challenging, has many positive consequences: it transforms how people perceive social reality, enriches and strengthens them internally and increases their self-esteem and self-confidence. Successful adaptation increased self-confidence and self-esteem and fostered freedom and personal emancipation among my participants. Like Piotr, they believed that immersing themselves in more than one culture helped them to become more mindful and awake, to question the authorities and established habits and to reshape their identity more intentionally:

> *Getting away from your circle, home or culture opens your eyes... to all kinds of ideas and approaches to life – to be a better person… At some point, you start to question how you were brought up... It allows you… to self-shape even more, consider who you want to be and what approach in life you prefer.*

Plans for the future

My interviewees perceived the future as full of possibilities. They welcomed change with excitement and did not want to make final decisions about their future. Intentional unpredictability (defined as refraining from determining their migration timeframe and plans) was indicated as a common strategy in their decision-making processes and professional career plans, reflecting other research findings (Cekiera 2014; Eade *et al.* 2006). Interestingly, uncertainty regarding the future was not considered to be a destabilising element but a manifestation of participants' value systems, prioritising freedom and offering multiple choices. As Hatalska (2017) demonstrated, transnational professionals value mobility, freedom and independence and choose

a lifestyle aligned with these values. Therefore, for my high-tech professional interviewees, plans were always subject to change when there was a new, more attractive offer. The concept of simultaneity (being 'here' and 'there' at the same time), proposed by the transnational approach, may explain why high-tech professionals easily 'rotate back and forth and change direction over time (…) depending on the context' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). 'Developing and maintaining multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political – that span borders' (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992: 1) helps such 'transmigrants' to stay connected to more than one socio-cultural environment.

The stimulus for change was not necessarily a financial factor but, rather, a result of stagnation in the workplace, a lack of intellectual challenges and a loss of motivation resulting from the lack of influence on the work results, as Dawid explains:

> *I have no plans. Life has offered me so many unexpected possibilities so far. If something interesting happens, then… I will no doubt jump in and give it a try. However, I do not plan my life. We'll see what it brings.*

The analysis suggests that high-tech professionals differ in how they define emigration and its timeframe. Some saw it as a temporary episode and perceived their stay in the United States as an opportunity to learn, develop professional skills and grow personally. They wanted to 'squeeze' as much as possible from this opportunity, so they travelled extensively and participated in various business conferences, workshops and other professional events. However, since, like Andrzej, they did not plan to stay in the United States permanently, they did not feel the need to integrate, build relations or invest in household appliances or furniture:

> *I left a flat and car in Poland… Everything is there and waiting. It wasn't like we abandoned everything and came here. We didn't even want to buy new furniture; we assumed that we would only stay here for a year…* [and then] *move back to Poland. So, we sent worn-out furniture from Poland here.*

Others, like Izabela, considered migration as a permanent life event and believed that this was the only approach to achieve socio-psychological stabilisation and successfully adapt to a new socio-cultural environment:

> *You cannot look back and be in a situation where you are not entirely sure what you want, i.e., with one foot somewhere in Poland and the other foot in the United States. Something like this... can lead to a nervous breakdown... I never say that I am somewhere permanently. I never plan where I will live in five or ten years because I don't know...* [However], *my whole life revolves around my work, friends and children and I am not here temporarily... The fact that I do not plan to be here in five years gives me a sense of stability... As long as you are open to various possibilities, you can feel fulfilment and satisfaction.*

This study also reveals that, despite being open to new opportunities, migrants create connections (anchors) over time that help them to maintain a sense of stability and belonging. My analysis discovered three main types of anchor: social (e.g., children and established social networks), professional (e.g., satisfying jobs for professionals and their spouses) and psychological (e.g., fear of returning to Poland). This is closely tied to Grzymała-Kazłowska's (2013a, 2013b) concept of social anchoring. Children, friends and work were the most significant reference points in the new social reality. In addition, professionals with temporary visas desired permanent resident status, which would anchor them even more. Participants also highlighted factors which

lead to leaving the United States, including economic (e.g., high cost of living), identity and social (e.g., longing for the country of origin) and family and lifecycle factors (e.g., the need to care for ageing parents).

Conclusions

This article, drawing on a qualitative study of 46 interviews, investigated the characteristics and migration experiences of Polish high-tech professionals in Silicon Valley. The analysis centred around the primary conditions leading participants to become transnational professionals, their migration motivations and cultural and structural integration into the new socio-cultural environment, the impact of emigration on their perception of social reality and their identity transformations and future planning strategies. The study generated new knowledge on highly educated Polish migrants in the United States. It contributes to the existing body of literature in migration research by offering a nuanced insight into the motivations, identities and values of modern highly skilled migrants, providing new ways of understanding their decision-making processes on migration and settlement. It may serve as a source of information for prospective migrants and migration policymakers.

The study aimed to answer the five research questions presented in the introduction. The analysis revealed three 'primary conditions' (factors that preceded or occurred at an early stage of professional careers, facilitating mobility and leading them to 'becoming' an international professional): having early work experience, good English skills and being intentional about their career and willingness to learn (Q1). Participants often began their professional careers with international companies, frequently travelling abroad and collaborating with co-workers of various nationalities and cultures. Therefore, they knew how to build and maintain lasting relationships with representatives of diverse cultural backgrounds. High-tech professionals were aware of their qualifications and value on the job market. They were not afraid to get involved in risky but innovative and exciting projects and to negotiate employment conditions. Moreover, working immediately upon arrival at their qualifications and educational level helped them to get placed in the middle tier of the social structure, facilitating structural adaptation (Q2). The participants decided to move to the United States motivated by their curiosity about Silicon Valley and desire to learn. They wanted to learn, test their professional skills, face new challenges and gain new experiences. Financial incentives were not claimed to be a direct reason to migrate (Q3). High-tech professionals were well prepared for international migration and able to integrate quickly into the multicultural environment of Silicon Valley by selectively adopting the cultural rules of a host society without rejecting their previous cultural affiliations. Intentional unpredictability was indicated as a strategy regarding decision-making processes and professional career plans (Q4). Migration was considered as a significant event in the participants' lives that revised their perceptions of reality and facilitated self-reflection. Immersion in the new socio-cultural environment became an opportunity to verify relationships, broaden horizons and gain a perspective regarding existing stereotypes, principles and authorities (Q5).

As noted before, research on the migration of transnational professionals is limited, with much more still to be discovered. In the context of this study, two topics, in particular, require further investigation. Firstly, there is a need to continue research on contemporary migrants with high social and cultural capital from Poland. The circumstances of their migration are different to people who left Poland before 1989 or even 2004 (Poland's accession to the European Union) due to their unique characteristics and the rapid social, economic and technological changes in recent years. It would be valuable to understand more about their adaptation patterns and identity changes resulting from immersion in a new culture, how they build and maintain Polish cultural affiliation in the second and subsequent generations, as well as about transnational families, as this type of family becomes increasingly common (Plewko 2016; Slany, Ślusarczyk and Krzyżowski 2014;

Ślusarczyk 2019). Secondly, my participants repeatedly raised the topic of the adaptation of their family members, in particularly spouses in the professional sphere, as this influences the overall success of family migration and integration. Researchers mainly focus on lead migrants, assuming that they are the decision-makers. Sparse study findings demonstrate, however, their spouses are generally highly educated themselves and worked professionally (often in respectable professions and at high-level positions) before the family migrated abroad. Their experiences upon arrival may be entirely different. While their spouses start working in the United States right away and their professional identity is not challenged, tied migrants are often excluded from the professional sphere, at least for a while, due to visa limitations or a lack of knowledge of the labour market and its rules. Spouses, however, play an important and often decisive role in the migrant family, and their adaptation success (or lack thereof) may largely influence the decision to stay or leave (Caligiuri and Tung 1999; Eich Krohm 2007, 2012). Therefore, future research exploring their identity challenges and their coping strategies is warranted.

Notes

1. The findings in this article come from my doctoral dissertation entitled 'Polish High-Tech Specialists in Silicon Valley: A Sociological Portrayal'. Some material in the article may overlap with the information presented in other publications (Sasnal 2021a, 2021b).
2. The geographical boundaries of Silicon Valley include Santa Clara County (all), San Mateo County (all), Alameda County (part) and Santa Cruz County (part) (Joint Venture Silicon Valley, Institute for Regional Studies 2021: 6).
3. Migration is defined in this article as mobility related to crossing a state border. A migrant is anyone who crosses the state border (excluding people travelling for tourism, recreation and business purposes), regardless of the duration of their stay (Górny and Kaczmarczyk 2003: 9). The broad definition of migration has been chosen to capture various types of mobility, not only a permanent change of place of residence.
4. High technologies are defined in this article as 'fields and products characterized by high research and development intensity, and in addition, they are characterized by a high level of innovation, short product and process life cycle, rapid diffusion of innovation, increasing demand for highly qualified personnel (especially in the field of technical and natural sciences), large capital expenditure, high investment risk (and rapid 'aging' of investments), close scientific and technical cooperation (within individual countries and on the international arena between enterprises and research institutions) and increasing competition in international trade' (Ratajczak-Mrozek 2011: 26). In addition, high-tech industries include, *inter alia*, the production of electronic products, telecommunications, computer and electronic equipment, aircraft and services requiring high-tech knowledge, telecommunications activities related to software, IT consulting, the Internet and research and development in the field of biotechnology, natural and technical sciences (The National Centre for Research and Development 2017).
5. 1989 refers to the transformation of a socio-political system (from socialist to democratic) in Poland that hugely affected migration patterns and motivations and provided new migration opportunities for Polish citizens.
6. I conducted 40 interviews with 41 high-tech professionals (39 individual interviews and one interview with a couple of high-tech professionals).

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