

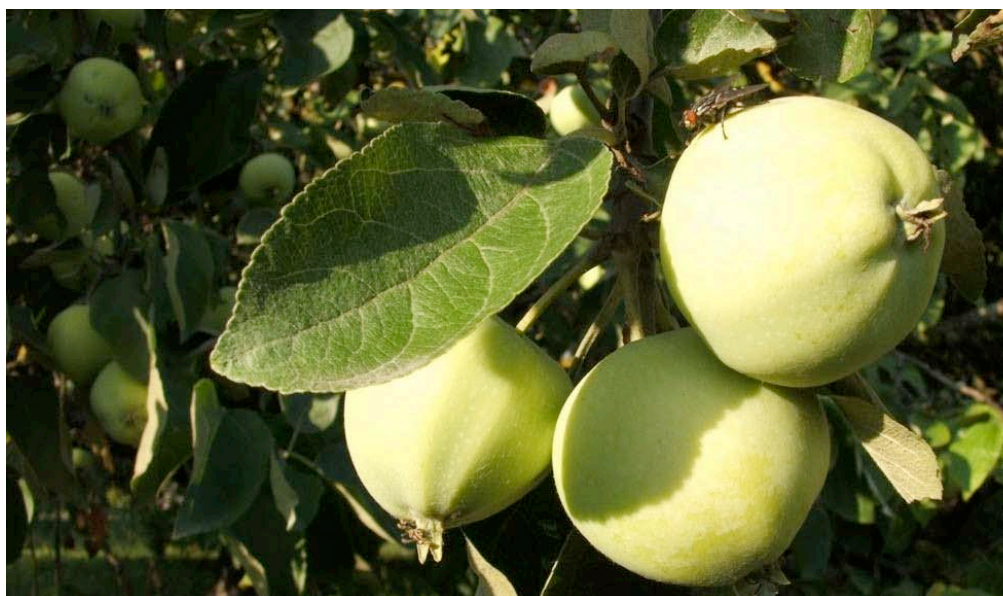
CONSULTATION ON THE CULTURAL INTERESTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN BOSTON AND SOUTH HOLLAND

**Working paper for Culture East Midlands by
Drasute Zaronaitė & Alona Tirzite**



Culture East Midlands

2007



Aurimas Paleckis

Consultation on the cultural interests of migrant workers in Boston & South Holland

Culture East Midlands

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is the result of a consultation exercise commissioned by Culture East Midlands and undertaken by Drasute Zaronaitė and Alona Tirzite of the Migrant Workers Project based in South Holland, Lincolnshire. It is part of a programme of exploratory work by Culture East Midlands designed to raise awareness of the cultural situation of migrant workers.

The consultation involved 74 people with diverse national backgrounds now living and working in South Lincolnshire. The interviewees were broadly representative of the migrant worker community identified in the earlier research by Zaronaitė and Tirzite. A high proportion of them had professional or vocational qualifications, and many also had cultural skills.

The principal conclusions of the consultation include:

- Most respondents have a good understanding of what cultural services are, and many have a strong interest in different aspects;
- They expressed preferences for concerts, libraries, theatres, museums and visiting famous and historical places, as well as cinema and nightclubs; parks and open spaces were also widely enjoyed;
- Big free events, such as flower parades, Christmas markets and street entertainment, were also popular, while in more rural communities, local festivals had greater importance;
- Libraries were valued as a source of books, information and learning support materials, as well as Internet access;
- Migrant workers also take part in a wide range of informal cultural activities, including watching TV, reading, crafts, music and so on; there was interest in more social opportunities through cultural classes such as dancing;
- The main reasons for not attending more were lack of time and being too tired after work, though problems with transport and limited interest in what was available locally were also significant barriers;
- Lack of information about what was on, where and when, about what different venues offered, even about where it was permitted to walk or fish, played an important role in limiting people's access to culture.

This paper will be circulated to interested partners and form the basis of further discussions and initiatives.

1 FOREWORD

Culture East Midlands is delighted to have been able to commission this paper on the cultural interests of migrant workers in rural areas. Although British cities have long been characterised by their cultural and ethnic diversity, rural districts such as South Lincolnshire have experienced significant migration only relatively recently.

Culture is an essential element of people's identity with a complex influence on many aspects of migration, from the choice of destination to reception, integration and hybridization. At a more basic level, new residents bring new skills, interests and needs that cultural providers in the public and private sectors need to take account of. Migrant workers and their families are service users and consumers and important steps have been taken in recent years to meet their needs by the county's cultural and education organisations. Innovative projects have been developed, such as Lincolnshire Heritage's *Moving Here* oral history programme, and new services like Boston library After-Schools Club, established after consultation with migrant worker families.

This working paper is the result of a preliminary consultation, based on the views of a limited group of people. It is concerned mainly with people's use of existing cultural services, including libraries, museums, the arts, sport and heritage sites. The issues it raises are practical, since it is intended to help inform the work of cultural agencies and organisations.

We are pleased to acknowledge the financial contribution of East Midlands Development Agency and Arts Council England East Midlands in commissioning this work. We are very grateful to Drasute Zaronaitė and Alona Tirzite for their insight and commitment this work would not have been possible without their experience and sensitivity.

Most of all our gratitude goes to everyone who gave their time and care to answering questions and filling in forms: this report is the result of their openness and trust. We hope that it will be a starting point for further discussion about the cultural interests and contribution of migrant workers and, more importantly perhaps, for cultural activities that will engage the widest possible range of people living in South Lincolnshire.

François Matarasso
Culture East Midlands
Culture in Rural Development Programme

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We welcome the initiative of Culture East Midlands in looking at the migrant worker population from a different perspective by taking into account their cultural needs and aspirations.

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals and organisations who helped us contact migrant workers and collect their opinions, especially Rachel Bowser (Lincoln University), Geoff Whitwell (Boston College) and Alex Dean (Spalding Further Education Centre). We are grateful to Aurimas Paleckis for permission to reproduce some of his photographs. We would like to thank the Rev. David de Verna, Migrant Workers' Chaplain for South East Lincolnshire, for his support and encouragement.

Drasute Zaronaitė and Alona Tirzite

Migrant Workers Project

<http://www.migrantworker.co.uk/>



Aurimas Paleckis

3 THE CONSULTATION

3.1 Aim

Culture is a complex and changing field. The policy and services of national and local government and of cultural institutions are part of the equation, alongside the offer of commercial providers. But the cultural interests and values expressed by people, individually and collectively, are equally important, though not always so well recognised. This independent and voluntary activity forms the core of people's cultural lives, so much part of how they live that it is easily taken for granted.

For various reasons, there are often gaps between the formal cultural offer of local government and other public bodies on the one hand, and the demands and interests of the local population on the other. When that population is changing in demographic, social and cultural terms, those gaps are likely to widen. In Lincolnshire, where the population comprises substantial numbers of workers from Eastern Europe and elsewhere, that change has been rapid, and it is a challenge for cultural services to meet the increasingly diverse needs of local people.

This consultation can help fill that gap by finding out about migrant workers' needs and their use of existing cultural services. It helps identify the changes and trends through feedback from users of cultural services and institutions. The aim of this research is to understand better the cultural backgrounds and needs of migrant workers living in South Holland and the Borough of Boston, so as to inform the planning of future services.

3.2 Consultation method

Consultation was originally planned to be undertaken through focus group discussions, although it was recognised that migrant workers are a 'hard to access' group. In the event, it was difficult to attract people to these meetings; although many posters were put up in different places only a few people turned up. To overcome this problem a local college which provides ESOL classes was asked to help by inviting their students to fill in the questionnaire. Individual interviews also took place via telephone or face-to-face contacts.

The research covers the Borough of Boston and the District of South Holland. It seems this is the first time research into migrant workers' cultural skills and

aspirations has been carried out in the UK. Because this is a pilot project, it is hoped that more in-depth research will be carried out later.

3.3 The profile of the migrant workers interviewed

Age and sex

The fieldwork for this study was carried out in South Holland and Boston during September and October 2006. A total of 74 people were interviewed, of whom 47 were female and 23 were male; (the sex of 4 respondents was not recorded). The interviewees were mostly aged between 25 and 49 years old.

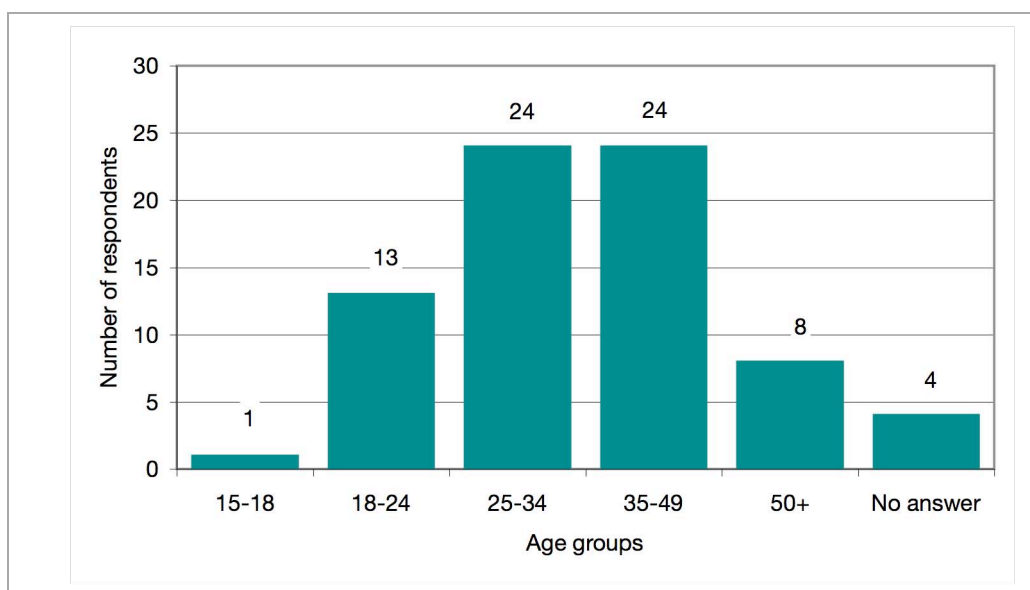


Fig. 1: Age groups of respondents

Dependents

Half of the interviewees (37) do not have children, but 33 have one or two children. Of this latter group, 19 have brought their children with them to the UK, while the rest have left their children in their country of origin.

Nationality

In terms of nationality, the largest group is Polish (23), followed by Latvians (18) and Lithuanians (17); figure 2 shows the respondents' nationalities. Thirty-nine of the interviewees live in Spalding, 22 in Boston, and the others in Quadring, Peterborough, Bourne and Holbeach.

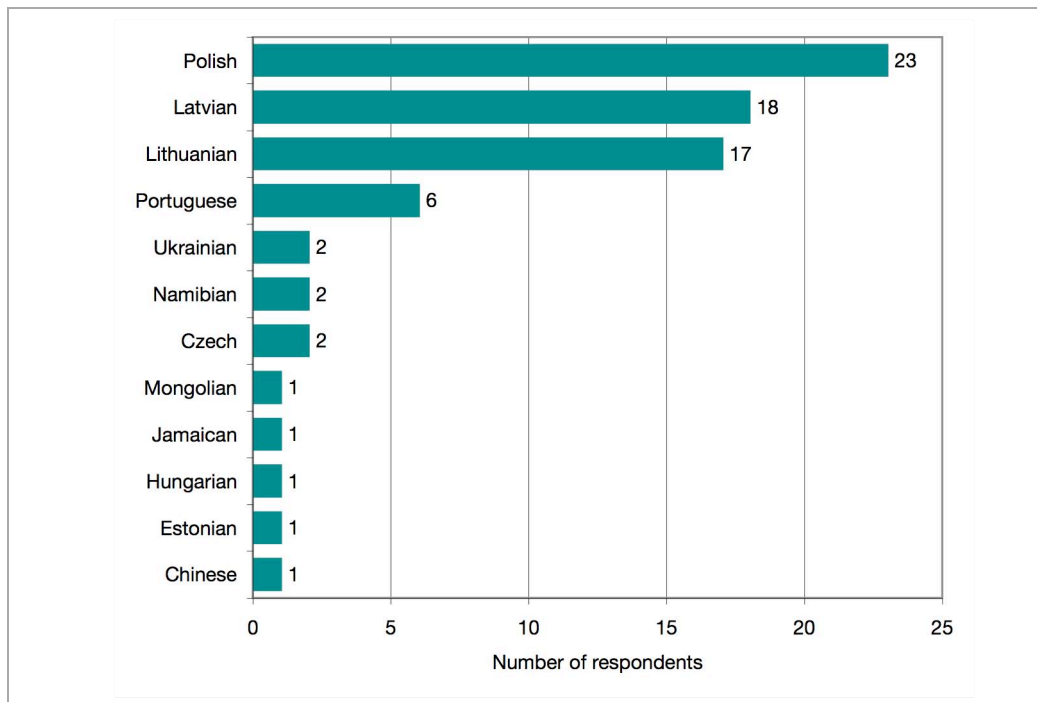


Fig 2: Nationalities of respondents

Length of residence in the UK

Most of the interviewees (47) have been living in the UK for between one and three years, while 14 have been here for more than three years; nine people have been in the UK for less than a year.

Language skills

Interviewees were asked to describe their knowledge of the English language. The group involved people with very different English capability.

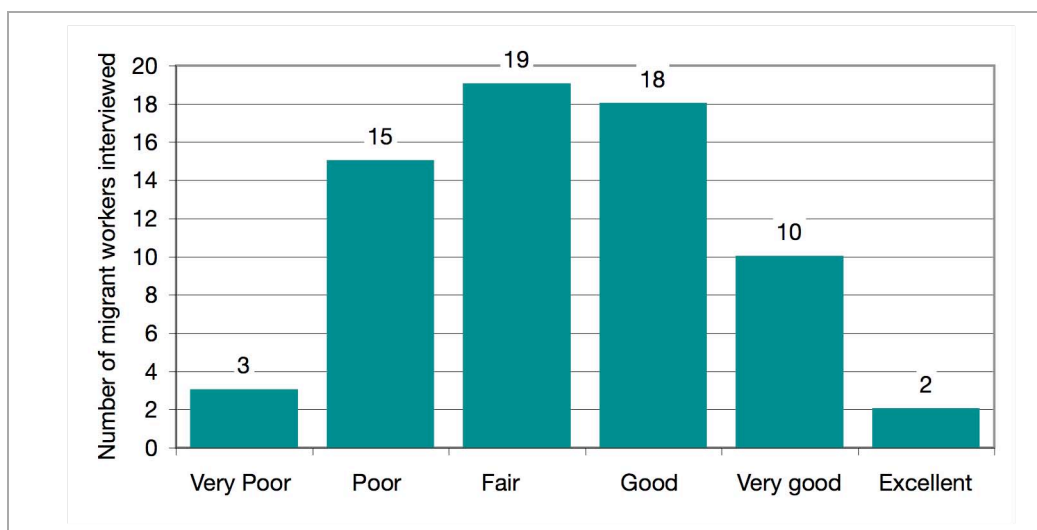


Fig 3: Respondents knowledge of English

Some interviews took place in a college where migrant workers study English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). These were people both with and without prior English language knowledge and who were really keen to improve their English language skills:

“I am going to college. I am willing to attend more often than once a week, but it is impossible because I am working at night. The College offers just one lesson a week in the afternoon. To study full-time would mean I have to leave work.”

“I am really keen to learn English. Everybody at work is very friendly. They often try to start a conversation with me. Sometimes I understand what is said to me, but most of the time I just put a stupid smile on my face pretending to understand. It is so frustrating!”

“I would like to learn English and have a proper conversation. I hope I will be able to learn English but it is quite difficult at my age.”

“I went to study English at the college but I could not understand what was being said. The teacher was trying very hard, using his hands to sign, but it did not help. I’ve stopped going. There was no point, because I could not learn anything. But I really want to learn English. It would be much better if a Russian speaking teacher could be available for Russian speakers and for Latvians and Lithuanians.”



Aurimas Paleckis

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Migrant workers' educational and cultural background

The group interviewed included people with a wide range of skills: 47 have professional qualifications, ranging from retail staff to teachers and post-graduates. Ten people did not have any qualifications and 17 did not answer this question. The following qualifications were identified:

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 6 Teachers | 1 Confectioner |
| 4 Business management | 1 Decorator |
| 3 Engineers | 1 Degree in economy and law |
| 3 Food processing technologists | 1 Driver |
| 3 Masters in public relations | 1 Hairdresser |
| 2 Cashier / shop assistant | 1 Jeweller |
| 2 Electricians | 1 Journalist |
| 2 Horticulturalist | 1 Marketer |
| 2 Hospitality | 1 Masters in political science |
| 2 Technicians | 1 Physiotherapist |
| 1 Aromatherapist | 1 Receptionist |
| 1 Beautician | 1 Secretary |
| 1 Builder | |

Of more immediate relevance, there were also many people with professional cultural skills; the following were identified among the interviewees:

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 6 Easter egg painting | 2 Pianists |
| 5 Singers (not professional) | 2 Professional dancers |
| 5 Textiles: weaving, damask, needlework, knitting, crocheting | 2 Professional singers |
| 3 Painters | 1 Cake designer |
| 2 Dancers (not professional) | 1 Computer animator |
| 2 Drawing (not professional) | 1 Poet (not professional) |
| 2 Film-makers | 1 Theatre actor |
| 2 Guitarists | 1 Theatre technician |
| | 1 Jeweller |

Fourteen interviewees reported knowing other people within migrant worker communities with cultural qualifications, including a saxophone player and a painter, both of whom are working professionally. The rest work in factories and do not use their cultural skills; they include dressmakers, caricaturists, painters, singers, animators, graphic designers, a piano teacher and a guitarist.

4.2 Perception of 'cultural services'

Migrant workers were asked to give their own description of 'cultural services'. All the interviewees had an understanding of what 'cultural services' means but not everyone could explain it; the responses included:

- *"All places to visit; where you can have a nice time, also to see interesting things and performances"*.
- *"Nice things for the soul, spirit and eyes."*
- *"Different exhibitions, good films in cinema (not rented DVDs), theatre, concerts, travelling, excursions, entertainment"*

The following definition from Culture East Midlands was explained to interviewees: 'Culture defines the way we live. It touches everyone's life, whether playing sport, visiting the cinema, making music, supporting local events or simply visiting the region's buildings and landscapes.' After further discussion, they were asked to complete the questionnaire.

4.3 Migrant workers' use of cultural services

Introduction

Every group develops its own cultural and social values – values and norms of behaviour that people live by and which are important for their welfare. This is true of migrant workers as of everyone else. In many cases cultural activity is connected with family and friends, underlining its social importance.

With increasing mobility, it is noticeable that people are less inclined to use local cultural activities within the area in which they live, preferring to fulfil their needs at institutions and organisations elsewhere. Some people are happy to attend cultural events in the area where they live, but are not able to do so because there is no public transport on Sundays: *"I can't attend events in Spalding as no transport is available to travel out or to come back."*

Preferred cultural venues and events

The respondents listed the following as the most important cultural events and institutions: concerts, libraries, theatres, museums and visiting famous and historical places (see figure 4). People living near busy towns like Boston and Spalding are more likely to visit the cinema and nightclubs. Those living in rural locations are more likely to visit places like libraries or local festivals – usually due to transport issues.

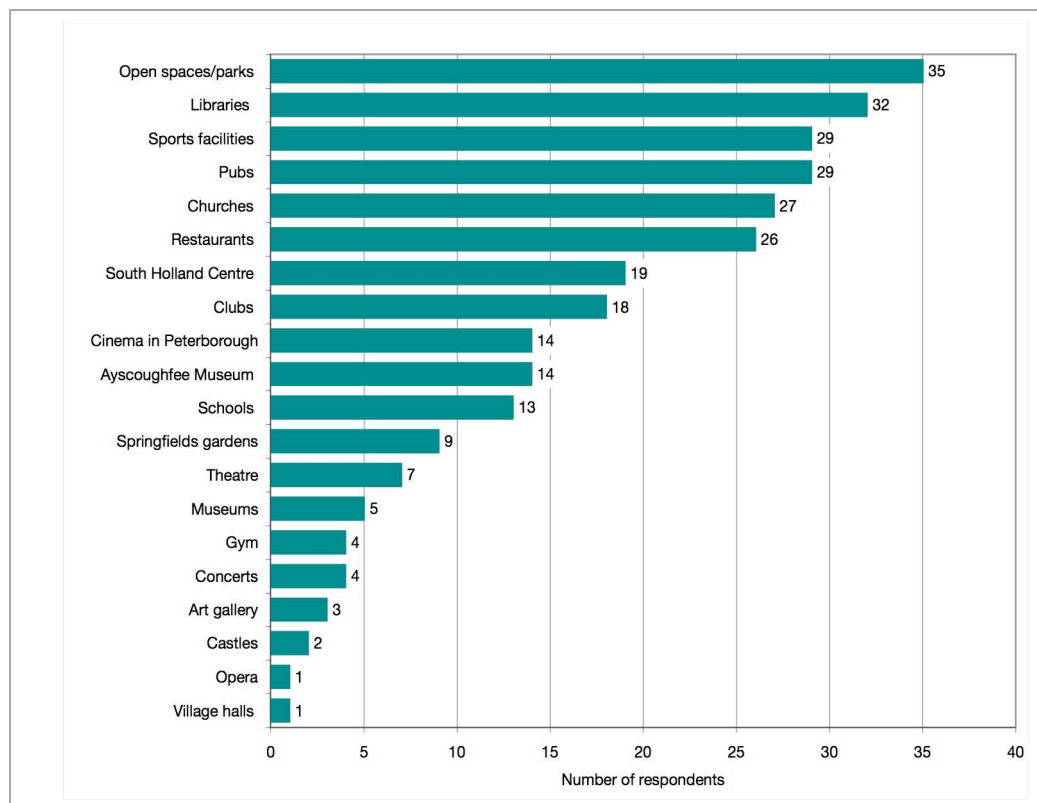


Fig 4: Preferred cultural and leisure venues

Libraries are important to migrant workers, with 43 per cent of the interviewees using them. We are living in an information society and this changes perceptions of the role of libraries. Libraries are increasingly becoming communication and information centres, providing access to the latest local and global information. Even in cases where Internet access is limited, the information role of libraries is vital through providing access to newspapers, with their job vacancies. Often libraries themselves become the centre of cultural life (especially in rural places).

As might be expected, older migrant workers are less interested in concerts and nightclubs; most do not like crowded places or loud modern music. However, cultural centres are still rated as important to fulfil other cultural needs.

The interviews suggest that men and women have somewhat different cultural interests, at least in part. Women tend to be more interested in museums and cultural activities, while men enjoy spending time outdoors and are more interested in sport. Men also give preference to passive cultural activities like watching TV and spending time on the computer; some migrant workers do not connect computers with culture.

Respondents were interested in festivals and other events provided in the South Holland area; (see figure 5 below).

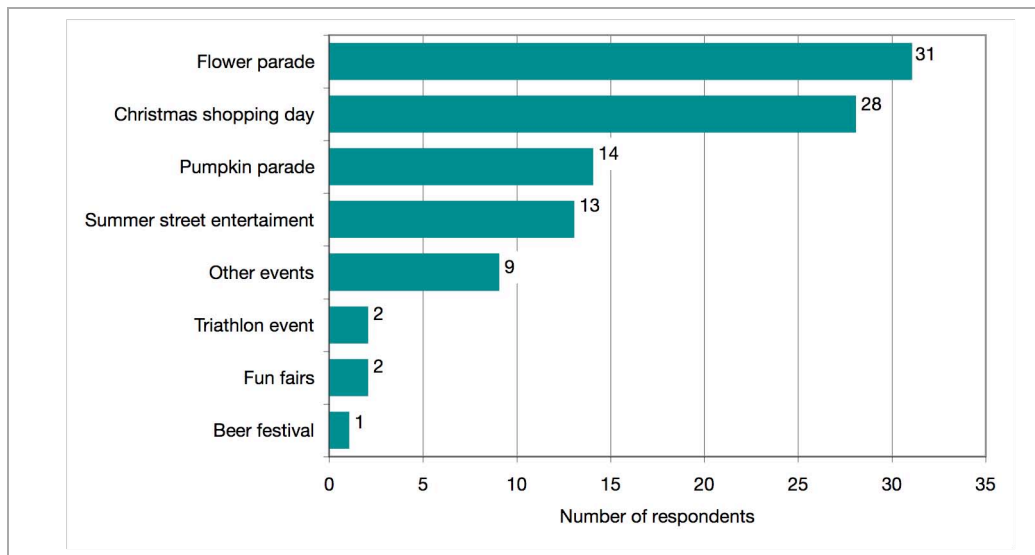


Fig 5: Cultural events attended

The most popular local event is the Flower Parade, which was attended by 31 of the interviewees; another 10 were prevented from being there by work commitments.

"I was amazed when I saw the Flower Parade for the first time. It is a shame we have not got anything like that in Latvia".

There are also cases where migrant workers live together in larger groups, reducing the need to attend public events as they mainly watch satellite TV in their own language.

Reasons for not attending cultural venues and events

Interviewees were asked what prevented them from attending cultural events: many did not answer this question, but those who did offered various reasons including lack of time and being tired from work.

Lack of information about events and limited interest in locally available performances or activities are also important (see figure 6).

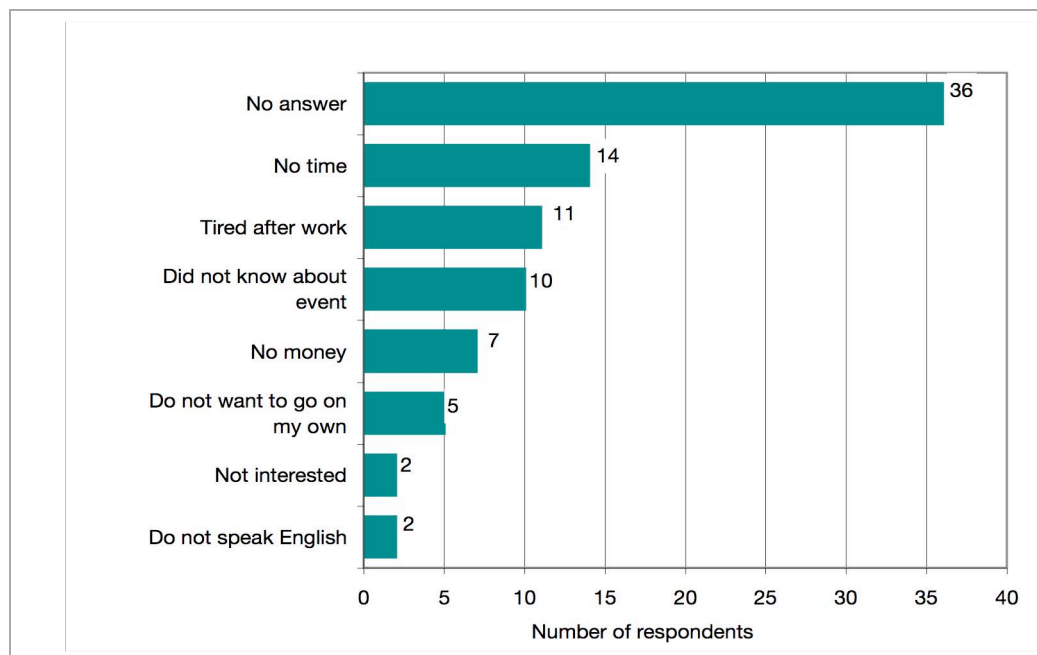


Fig 6: Reasons for not attending cultural events

When asked why they didn't attend the local cinema, interviewees mentioned that the movies shown locally were often old and not of good quality.

"Most of the movies are out of date, the sound system is not brilliant. That is why we go to the cinema in Peterborough"

Some migrant workers did not know about venues like the South Holland Centre, thinking it was just another shop; some had to be told where it is and that there are cinema and theatre performances.

4.4 Informal cultural activities

It is important to understand how people use cultural services in looking at the accessibility and relevance of these services to migrant workers. But people are involved in many cultural activities independently of these services.

Home based and individual activities were understandably popular among the interviewees: 23 interviewees enjoyed watching TV (especially the news, *X-Factor*, *Strictly Come Dancing*, sport and other cultural, environmental and history programmes); the same number of respondents liked reading books (history, detective, love stories) and ten enjoyed computer games.

A number (20 people) were more outgoing and enjoyed travelling, visiting museums, churches, concerts, the circus, horse riding and socialising in pubs. (see Figure 7 below).

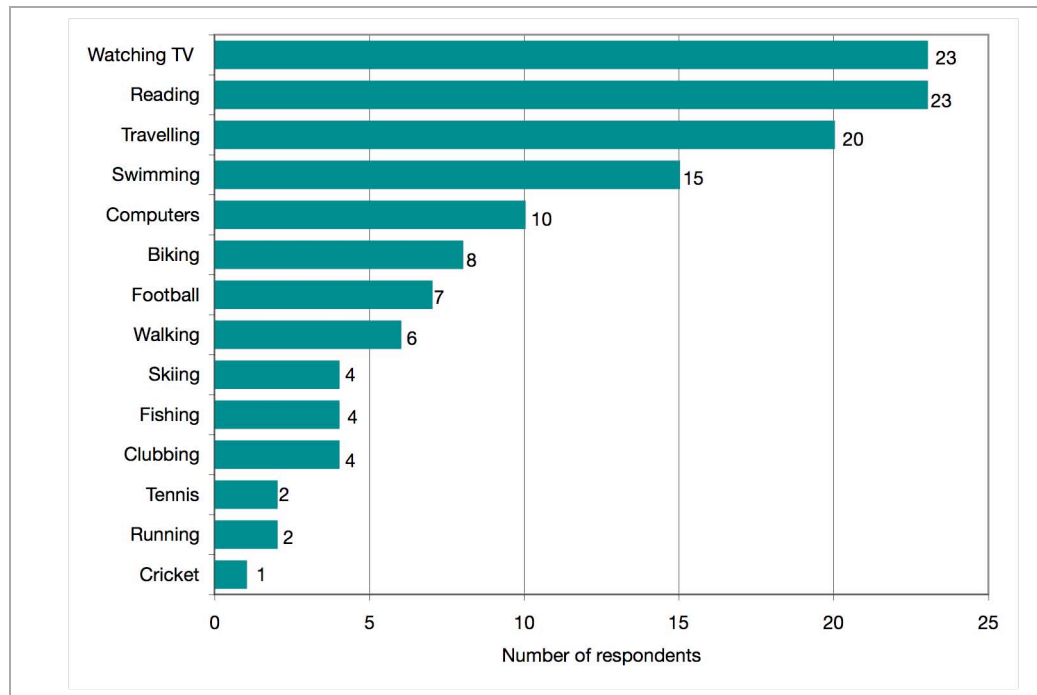


Fig 7: The most popular informal cultural activities of the respondents

Those who go to the cinema generally have good English language skills, but not many use local services: if they have transport, they prefer to go to Peterborough to enjoy a better quality, bigger screen and the latest movies. Some interviewees like the theatre and opera, or simply listening to music, but they never visit a theatre in the UK, because it is either too expensive or too far to travel, and they do not know where to stay overnight.

Some people study business management and English language courses in their spare time. It became apparent that many of those interviewed (especially from Latvia and Lithuania) would like to have a Russian speaking English teacher for beginners and a Russian speaking GP.

Sports activities were popular: swimming, cycling, football and gyms were the preferred activities, but tennis, cricket, fishing, running, skiing, and hiking were also enjoyed by some.

Other activities mentioned included gardening, flower arranging, drawing, sewing, writing poems, cooking, playing pool, snooker, tennis and football, swimming, going to the gym, cycling, computer games, surfing the Internet, crosswords, shopping, going to nightclubs and yoga.

4.5 Opinions of cultural services used

Some of the respondents thought that the cultural services provided in the area are very good while others were not very happy about them, saying that though they lived in the area, they did not know much about what was happening. There is a large difference in people's satisfaction with cultural services, according to whether they live in rural or urban areas. Comparing men and women's views of local cultural services, it appears that cultural services are more important to women than to men.

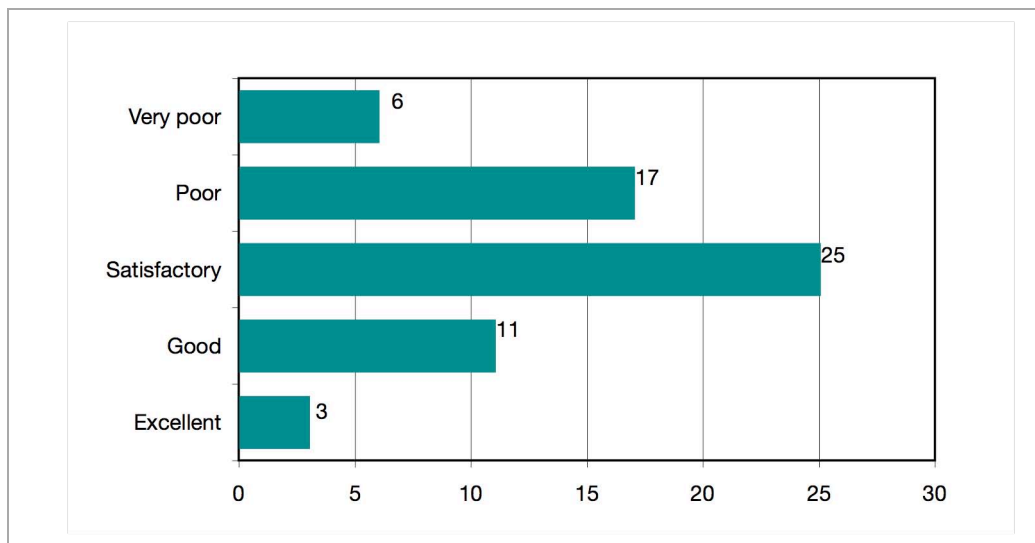


Fig 8 Opinion on cultural services used

Interviewees were also asked "What encourages you to use cultural services?". In many cases the encouragement came from friends and the close location of such events (especially in rural areas where the public transport is poor).

There were different views about price and quality. One group felt that free events would encourage migrant workers to use cultural services more, but others said that only good quality events would encourage them to take part.

It is important to take account of the situation many migrant workers live in. New arrivals are usually in a very difficult position, working long shifts and being paid the minimum wage. Free events are therefore the only possibility for participating in cultural activities and socialising. More settled workers in better employment have a greater interest in good quality activities, such as attending exhibitions or concerts in neighbouring cities or even in London.

Cultural needs are related to socialising and meeting other people. Many respondents mention the possibility of meeting people of the same nationality at public events and celebrations. The need for cultural events based on the na-

tional traditions of foreign workers was also stressed: e.g. Latvians celebrate 'Ligo' on June 24th with dancing, songs and bonfires.

4.6 Finding out about cultural opportunities

Distribution of information is related to the infrastructure of cultural services and depends on people's personal preferences and living patterns. All those who have good or very good English language skills (51 per cent) do not mind in which language they receive information. Of the rest of the group, early 27 per cent would prefer to receive information in Russian, 10 per cent in Polish, 3 per cent in Lithuanian, Latvian, Czech and Portuguese.

Fifty-five per cent of those interviewed said that their preferred source of information was the Internet, followed by leaflets. The other two best ways of accessing information were posters at the place of work and posters in supermarkets and foreign shops (Lithuanian and Polish). Posters in town centres, newspapers and word-of-mouth are other popular methods of receiving cultural information.

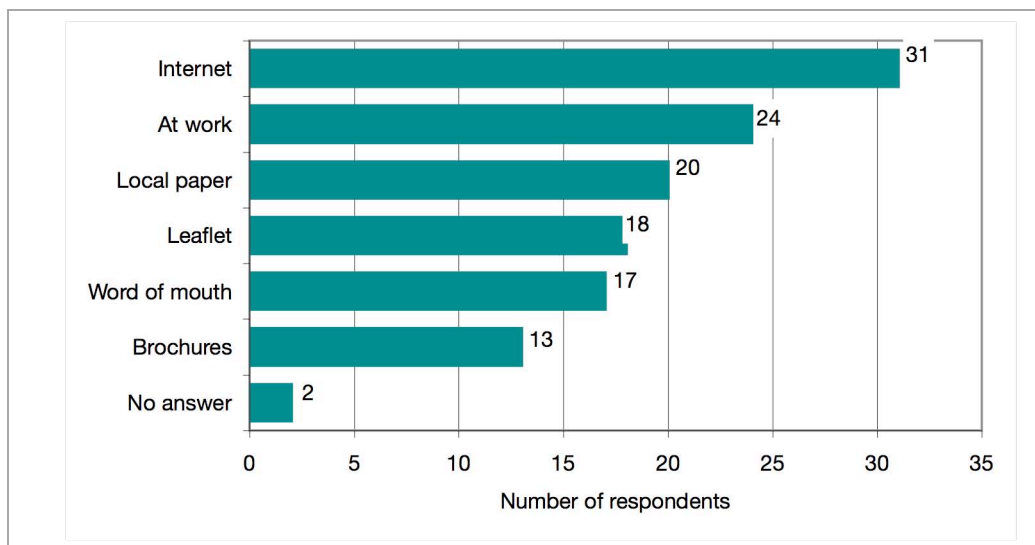


Fig 9: Information sources about culture

It is sometimes difficult for migrant workers to access all available information about 'What's On' in their area. Some suggestions were made about how information could be made more easily accessible: for instance, a monthly local magazine like *South Holland NOW* could be introduced to publish detailed information in the two most popular languages (English & Russian) about upcoming cultural events. This would reach almost everyone because it could be distributed to every home in the area.

Interviewees did not mention TV as a source of information and only 2 out of 74 mentioned radio. This might be because some migrant workers do not understand programmes in English. The most popular source of information for migrant workers is the Internet, followed by workplace connections and word-of-mouth (see figure 9).

People who use the Internet are able to find information on events and performances in bigger cities and centres but not enough information is provided on the Internet about local community events. Migrant workers are able to access computers at home, at friends' homes and in libraries.

4.7 Un-met needs and interests

Migrant workers were asked which services they would like to be able to access but were not available in Boston and South Holland. Twenty-two per cent wanted to go to theatres, operas and museums; some would like to attend events such as concerts or performances (e.g. ballet on ice) or exhibitions that are only available in bigger cities, (e.g. Leonardo and Rubens in London). In all these cases, transport is a major obstacle, as it is for many rural people.

Many would like to see better local cinema; they were put off attending by the poor sound quality and the non-mainstream, often out of date, film selection.

Younger people (18-25 years) miss more lively events such as outdoor concerts, clubs and discos that play international music. Young men in particular felt that there is little to do in the local area; they would really like to participate in activities like paint balling and go-carting. A few did not know where they are permitted to fish or go biking. Again, some of these issues are common to many young people living in rural areas.

Some people would like places where migrant workers could socialise in their own language (mostly Russian), meet new friends and share common interests. It was mentioned that embroidery clubs, photography, flower arranging and women's clubs would be very useful. Dancing was the skill which most migrant workers would like to develop.

Good, affordable childminding places and play areas are very important for those who have children. Some interviewees reported that their children were being discriminated against because of their foreign nationality.

Some people wished for more English language learning aids such as books and tapes in local Libraries.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Many migrant workers do not know or understand about cultural events. To attract more people from migrant communities it would be necessary to provide more detailed information about events in community languages, without making assumptions about what may be 'obvious'. This could be done through local newspapers and magazines (such as *South Holland NOW*) and also via leaflets in canteens at work places.

Information would also be welcome about outdoor activities – for instance, where fishing and biking are permitted, as well as commercial facilities such as paint-balling and go-carting. Many migrant workers do not realise that they can order foreign books from bookshops: it would benefit both local bookshops and migrant workers if this information were more obvious,

More information about local events and cultural services on the Internet and at workplaces would greatly increase the chance of migrant workers being able to access cultural services. As one interviewees put it, "*If you do not know what is on, you will never go*". This underlines the need to focus more on how information is relayed to migrant workers: translation into the most popular languages for migrant workers (Russian, Portuguese and Polish) is crucial.

Cultural organisations in the area have made changes to their services but it is important not maintain this momentum. For instance, the provision of English learning aids in different languages is a key library service for migrant workers. Migrant workers living in rural Lincolnshire share many of the problems accessing cultural services as do their neighbours: improving access to culture should be a general goal for the benefit of the whole community.



Aurimas Paleckis

APPENDIX

Culture East Midlands

Culture East Midlands is a Regional Cultural Consortium, established by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Represented on the Consortium are interests from across media, arts, tourism, heritage and sport. Members of the consortium include

Arts Council England East Midlands

www.artscouncil.org.uk/regions/homepage.php?rid=2

Big Lottery Fund

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

East Midlands Development Agency

www.emda.org.uk

Museums, Libraries and Archives East Midlands

www.mlaeastmidlands.org.uk

East Midlands Regional Assembly

www.emra.gov.uk

Sport England East Midlands

www.sportengland.org/eastmidlands_index.htm

East Midlands Tourism

www.eastmidlandstourism.com

EM Media

www.em-media.org.uk

English Heritage

www.english-heritage.org.uk

Government Office East Midlands

www.goem.gov.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund

www.hlf.org.uk

Regeneration East Midlands

www.regenerationem.co.uk