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# 'Between pierogi and stamppot: the food experiences of Polish migrants in the Netherlands'



Image: Polish store, *Polski Smak*, located on Nieuwe Ebbingestraat in Groningen.

Kasia Szachna  
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Student: Kasia Szachna (s4039246)

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## **Abstract**

Social and cultural implications and physical consequences of food habits make them a genuinely holistic concept that needs an interdisciplinary approach. Food habits, encompassing social and cultural behaviors, are not permanent, yet relatively hard to change. Changing food habits, especially in the context of migration, challenge socio-cultural belonging and threaten public health. To contribute to already-existing literature on the food habits adaptation of Polish immigrants in the UK, this thesis aims to study how the food habits of Polish migrants look after the migration to the Netherlands. Qualitative research methods were chosen to achieve the goal of the study. Five interviews were conducted face-to-face with Polish immigrants of different age and immigration length to answer the main research question: what are the food habits of Polish migrants living in the Netherlands? The interviews were coded and analyzed for prevailing themes: food, practices, and perceptions. The results of the study show that the food habits of Polish migrants change after migration to the Netherlands. Polish immigrants eat diversely and likely integrate elements of different cultures in their daily life. Polish food is consumed on occasion, and during traditional events, the celebration of which is still continued by most of the participants. The overall consensus between the participants was that Polish food is tastier and of higher quality than Dutch food.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Despite their relative geographical proximity, the Netherlands and Poland are countries of significantly different cultures. The gap between the „collective programming of the mind” of Polish and Dutch which „distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9) is not unique. Cultural differences exist between any country, including immediate neighbours and historical occupants and occupiers.

Cultural differences, as culture in general, are manifested through plethora of rituals, behaviours, and notions. For the past decades, culture has been continuously defined and re-defined in reaction to the current evolution of modern, cross-cultural concepts of identity and belonging (Minkov, 2013).

The undeniable charm of cultural manifestation is that it is not only channelled through the intricate systems of meanings, but also by prosaic and daily elements of life - such as food. Consuming food is, after all, not solely about biology. Food habits were, and to this day are, a platform for bonding - not only between the entirety of the ethnic group, but also members of one family, sitting over a dinner table.

Food habits are a cultural aspect, serving as a marker of difference between two groups (Abbots, 2016). The identity-creating role of food habits speaks through manners in which migrants react to the clash with the „new” food reality.

Research has looked into the changing food habits of migrants, especially those of African, Asian, and South American descent living in Europe. It is a forever-relevant topic, as changing food habits have a long-term effect on public health and well-being (Fieldhouse, 2005; Popovic-Lipovac and Strasser, 2013; Satia, 2010). As global migration continues to increase (National Intelligence Council, 2021), the food habits of individuals and groups will be challenged more, and in more diverse settings.

Despite the bulk of research focused on long-distance migrants, pronounced differences in food habits do not require a vast distance between the country of origin and the destination. The Dutch and Polish, nations divided by merely a 10-hour ride, serve as an example of how diverse can food habits be. The distinction between Polish and Dutch food habits, even if subtle, is relevant to nearly 210,000 Polish people permanently residing in the Netherlands (CBS, 2021). In 2004, Poland joined the European Union, which resulted in Western Europe opening its borders to Polish immigrants, who gladly took that opportunity. Polish emigration to other EU countries peaked in 2007 when 1 860 000 Polish people left the country, including the 98 000 Poles who left to settle in the Netherlands (GUS, 2014).

Currently, Polish people account for 1% of the population in the Netherlands. The daily lives of Polish migrants intertwine with that of Dutch people, including the exposure to the local food habits. As a result, most of the Polish migrants in the Netherlands embark on the journey of food habits adaptation, which will affect their alimentary choices and therefore, lifestyle.

## 1.2 Research Problem

The universe of food habits splits in two. On the one hand, there are the visible, tangible, and measurable aspects of what and how we eat. On the other hand, food habits are rich with meanings, sentiments, and even expectations (Fieldhouse, 1995).

The interdisciplinary nature of food habits makes it a relevant research area not solely for dietitians and biologists, who focus on the bodily side, but also for geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists, who look into the mental. Thematic literature offers holistic approach towards the role of food in individual's life. This thesis seeks to be an empirical addition to the existing research on food habit challenges experienced by migrating Polish population. The aim of the research is to study how the food habits of Polish migrants change after migration to the Netherlands. The following research question has been formulated: (1) What are the food habits of Polish migrants living in the Netherlands?

To thoroughly answer the main research question, following secondary questions are posed: (2) What are food habits? (3) How are food habits affected by migration? (4) What are the perceived differences between Dutch and Polish food habits?

## 1.3 Outline

The introductory chapter offers a background information on the topic and presents the research problem statement. The next section, theoretical framework, will equip the reader with essential concepts and present a literature review of current academic knowledge on food habits and their changes upon migration. Following, the third chapter contains the research methods, data collection process, and reflection. The last, fourth chapter, presents results, answers to the research questions, and conclusion.

## 2. Theoretical framework

„You are what you eat”, phrase popularized in the 1930s through diet advertisement, originates in an 1826 French book written by a rich-man and gastronome - Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. „Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are”, wrote Jean, who, as a noble Frenchman of the early 19th century, was known to treat food very seriously (Brillat-Savarin, 1970). The original quote carries a message lost in its new, catchier version - the mutual relation between the dietary choices and the identity manifestation. After all, we not only identify with what we eat, but we also eat what we identify with.

As a matter of fact, wide array of factors shape food habits: geographical, economic, religious, social, psychological, and political (Fieldhouse, 1995). The mutual identification between food habits and an individual stems from the dietary choices, a direct reflection of our desires and preferences. Fieldhouse (1995) points out culture as the major determinant of what we eat. However, the scope of food habits is not limited to the actual selection of products. A full picture of an individual's food habits includes the reasons for which people eat, the manner of consumption, the selection of products, timing, purchasing process, storage method, and even the method of food disposal. In addition, food habits encompass the social aspect: companionship, dining etiquette, and the arrangement at the table (Haviland et al., 2014). Booth et al. (1994) highlight the behavioural nature of food habits. Food habits, just like any other expression of thoughts and feelings, are impossible to define solely in terms of natural sciences. Instead, food habits should be seen as psychological processes existing within their cultural contexts (ibid.).

Correspondingly, different roles of food habits are assumed in biological, anthropological, and sociological contexts. From the standpoint of the natural sciences, food practices are a biological process of satiating the essential need for nutrients. On the other hand, Pyke (1968) claims that people are not focused on ingesting nutrients but are primarily concerned with eating a desired food, not pondering its biological role. Food habits, seen as a cultural marker, are not at all biologically determined but learned through non-verbal cues and personal experience (Fieldhouse, 1995; Abbots, 2016). Combined biological and social nature of food habits makes them a bio-cultural topic. Similarly, anthropologists highlight the role of food in-group identity (Brown and Paszkiewicz, 2016). Food, when used to celebrate rituals and religious activities, “establishes relationships of give and take, of cooperation, of sharing, of an emotional bond that is universal” (Haviland and al., 2014, p. 30).

Food habits form early and are relatively stable. Food habits form during the process of socialization (Fieldhouse, 1995). The first experience of food and consumption comes from a place called home and is later perpetuated, contested, and negotiated (Rabikowska, 2010). Dietary

practices learned in childhood are most likely to track until the beginning of adulthood (Issanchou, 2017). As the formation of dietary practices is a cultural process on its own, so is the process of re-defining the food habits. After all, food habits are called „habits” for a reason - they are bound to change throughout the meanders of life. Culture is not determined biologically and is thus not a static phenomenon. Even to the contrary, culture involves change. General food habits alter naturally over time due to ecological and economic changes that affect the availability, discovery and innovation of food products and practices (Fieldhouse, 1995). The invention and popularity of house appliances have led to considerable changes in food preparing and house-making. Interestingly enough, an urban dweller not employed outside their household spends 55 hours a week on the housework, 35 hours more than Aboriginal women in Australia (Haviland et al., 2014). Therefore, the access to potentially time-saving appliances does not transfer to the actual time-saving, but more to the indication of a high standard of living.

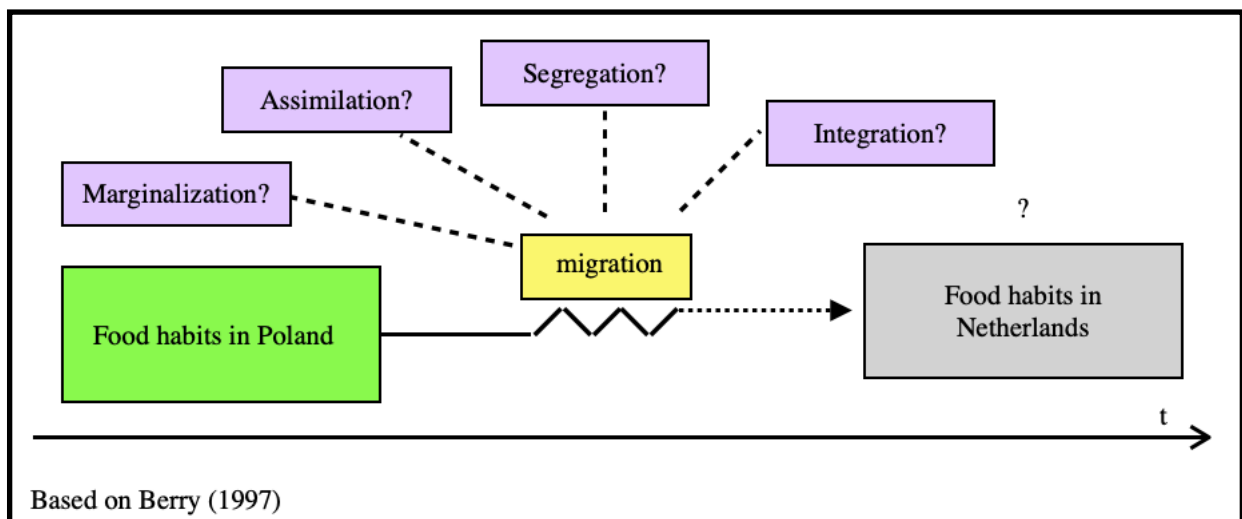
Furthermore, the reasons and implications of the changing food habits range were a subject of many studies. Dietary practices carry relevance to personal lifestyle and thus public health. Food habits are simultaneously stable and far from fixed (Fieldhouse, 1995). It might seem contradictory, but the cultural changes are expressed through a mosaic of adjusted behaviours. They could be disregarded separately but stacking them leads to a broader and more complex picture of cultural transformation. Likewise, food habits are subject to change, perhaps as a result of changing physical or social environments or as an outcome of educational and awareness programs. Significant life events, such as disasters, birth, or migration, challenge existing food habits and lead to transformation (Wandel et al., 2008). In case of migration, food habits are one of the last cultural traits to change among migrants (Abbots, 2016).

Migration is an important life event followed by a selection of short and long-term changes. Different views exist on the subject of the impact that migration has on migrants’ behaviour. Kulu (2005), in his research on the fertility of migrating Estonian women, offered two hypotheses reflecting the behavioural patterns after migration. First, the socialization hypothesis accounts that migrants’ behaviour will match their childhood environment (Kulu, 2005). The implication would be that the behaviour in the host country is not far from the country of origin. Second, the adaptation hypothesis, premises on a migrant’s capability to re-socialize and suggests that the behaviour of migrants eventually will resemble the dominant one in the host country (ibid.). Although Kulu (2005) applied these hypotheses to account for changed fertility, the implications of the socialization and adaptation hypothesis are relevant to the changing food habits and were already used in that context previously (Fieldhouse, 1995; Wandel et al., 2008). The adaptation hypothesis relies on the same principle as the concept of acculturation - on the migrant’s ability to observe and recreate behaviours prevalent in the destination country.

Following, dietary acculturation relates to the process during which immigrants adopt the food habits of the host country, regardless of the outcome (Edwards, Hartwell and Brown, 2010; Satia, 2010). During the dietary acculturation process, immigrants may keep and re-invent the use of traditional foods, exclude unknown, and explore „new” foods (Satia, 2010). It is important to note that the dietary acculturation process starts and paces individually. The degree and rate of dietary change are related to the immigrant’s age, life phase, living conditions, social networks established, and the sustainability of ties with the place of origin (Fieldhouse, 1995). Food habits adapt rapidly amongst young people exposed to their peers at work or school and where the cultural support for former practices is scarce.

Additionally to Kulu (2005), Berry (1997) offers a model of acculturation with four possible adjustment approaches. Assimilation, the rejection of old culture and simultaneous adoption of the new one; segregation, the preservation of the original cultural identity; integration; maintaining some cultural identity whilst simultaneously adopting certain new aspects; marginalization; rejecting both the heritage and the possible adoption of new habits. Berry (1997) introduces an additional theory, multiculturalism. Multiculturalism implies the eagerness of all cultural groups to accept, tolerate, and accommodate for other cultures whilst preserving their own identity at the same time. Conceptual model (Figure 1) illustrates Berry (1997) and links the proposed adjustment approaches with the main research question.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



In general, numerous examples of dietary acculturation processes rendered negative nutritional effects (Satia, 2010). Changing food habits of certain populations, such as South Asian immigrants in Europe, have been studied more thoroughly than others, mostly due to the drastic nature of these changes and health implications. Naturally, the cultural shock for internal European

immigrants is less pronounced, as most of European countries shaped their cultures under similar historical and social circumstances. Nevertheless, inner European immigrants are still experiencing cultural differences. Current literature on the food habits of Polish immigrant focuses on the Polish migration the United Kingdom. Rabikowska (2010), Rabikowska and Burrell (2009), and Brown and Paszkiewicz (2016) looked at the changes in food habits and the perceptions of British food. The results of all studies are similar and conclude that Polish people prefer their native food, consider it healthier, of higher quality, and carrying a special meaning. In Brown and Paszkiewicz (2016), Polish immigrants who initially shopped at British supermarkets decided to stock their pantries solely in the Polish store. It is possible, as stores carrying Polish food are widespread in the UK. Polish food is not as readily available in the Netherlands, but it is still possible to buy, especially in dense urban areas or around industrial towns, where Polish people come to work.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research methods**

Studying how the food habits of Polish migrants look after migration to the Netherlands requires a complete picture of said food habits, both pre and post-migration. The researcher chose a qualitative approach to match that aim and the research question. In food research, O'Reilly (2012) recommends allowing interviewees to talk freely and keeping the interview questions non-direct or semi-direct. The interview guide designed for this study contains three personal and 15 content-related questions. The interviewers did not ask questions until the interviewee finished all their free-roaming thoughts, which resulted in many questions answered without prompting. All five interviews were conducted face-to-face to build rapport and make interviewees feel actively listened to (Mason, 2002). The interviews were in Polish. Similarly, the content analysis was performed on the original, Polish version. Interestingly, the conceptual and linguistic diversity often accompanying food-related research (Rabikowska, 2010) has made coding the interviews troublesome. Respondents have used Polish, Dutch, and English to describe their food habits, often using different names for the same goods. Due to the subtleness of the topic and manageable sample size, the content analysis was performed manually.

The interviews were analyzed with the use of inductive reasoning. As the research question aims at capturing the reality of the interviewees, the choice of narrative coding was made. The interviews were transcribed, organized, and stored in the global cloud storage of the University of Groningen. Prior to the analysis, recorded interviews were listened to and coded manually. Food, practices, and perceptions were three main themes used to code the interviews.



### 3.2 Data collection

The data collection process started in March 2022, when the desired respondent pool was decided upon. The intended respondents were Polish adults who moved to the Netherlands permanently and are self-decisive about their food habits. Due to the relative difficulty of finding respondents, the snowball sampling technique was chosen. However, as the respondent pool was meant to be diverse, the capabilities of the private Polish network of the author, composed mainly of students roughly the same age and lifestyle, were quickly exhausted. The interviewees had to come from the broader Polish community of Groningen.

Inspired by previous research on Polish migrants carried out in Polish shops (Rabikowska, 2010) and also lead by instinct, the author searched for respondents in a speciality store located on the bustling Nieuwe Ebbingestraat of Groningen (pictured on the cover). Following the thread, the author visited a Polish school, which takes place every second Saturday in a local community centre in Korrewegwijk, a residential neighbourhood of Groningen, in search of interviewees.

In the end, five respondents were interviewed. The interview locations were always chosen by the respondents to maximize their comfort (O'Reilly, 2005). Interviews lasted from 20 to 50 minutes and were in Polish, however, respondents made frequent use of English and Dutch vocabulary to describe their alimentary behaviour and everyday practices.

### 3.3 Ethical considerations

All interviewees voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, knowing they can opt-out at any moment. All participants have declared their informed consent, either verbally or in writing, according to their preference. During the research, the identity of the participants was kept anonymous. No personally identifiable information was collected on the record, and participants were informed that their quotes would be anonymized to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

Additionally, the potential harm assessment was carried out early in the research design. The topic of food habits can be seen as relatively gentle to question. However, a reflection on the scope of food-related behaviours in human life reveals that food habits are, indeed, a personal story of spending money, feeding family members, and realizing one's expectations towards themselves. To minimize the harm risk and account for the age distance between the researcher and most of the respondents, only questions directly related to the research aim were asked. To respect the privacy of the respondents, no questions about education, professional life, family, or finances were posed. However, as food habits in the context of migration are tightly woven with other remarkable life aspects, interviewees themselves touched upon matters outside of my desired aim. Participants individually shared as much as they were comfortable with, which included an account of fleeing

from communist-occupied Poland, or a reflection on the role of motherhood in woman's life. The disclosure of sensitive information, albeit unplanned, was treated with utmost respect and attention.

The results of the study will be communicated to the interviewees who expressed their wish to receive them, in either English or Polish, according to their preference. Additionally, a printed version of this thesis will be displayed in *Polski Smak*, Groningen Polish store, where a designated Polish bookshelf can be found.

### 3.4 Reflection

It was a personal intention of the author to keep the topic of the thesis relatively light-hearted. The intention came from the positionality of the author herself. Being a student, a young migrant, a Polish woman, and many more put me in a certain position that needs to be acknowledged. I have used access to the Polish community through the language. However, a conversation held in Polish has its dynamics, set by the age difference. I had accepted that the hierarchical role of the Polish language will influence my interviews, and I adjusted my research aim accordingly to make data collection process feasible. Such a strategy possibly limited the scope of the research but allowed for legitimate data and the mental comfort of the interviewee and interviewer.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Overview of the context and respondent profile

The respondent pool consisted of three women and two men, aged respectively 36, 46, 47, 26, and 84. All respondents were Polish immigrants who came to the Netherlands between 1973 and 2016 and who reside in and around the city of Groningen. The accessibility of Polish products in this part of the Netherlands is moderate. Polish products are not available in Dutch supermarkets. There is one Polish store in the city centre and one Eastern European store stocking similar products but branded for different markets. Otherwise, online shopping for Polish foodstuff is available, although the services are based in other parts of the Netherlands and take time to arrive. The participant profile is presented in the form of Table 1. Due to the relatively small size of the Polish local community in Groningen, only the essential information is made available. The general findings will be presented accordingly to the chosen method of theme coding. Three major themes within the general topic of food habits are food, practices, and perceptions.

Table 1. Participant profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years in the Netherlands
Agata	Female	36	14
Asia	Female	46	23
Żaneta	Female	47	18
Wojciech	Male	26	6
Marek	Male	84	55

## 4.2 General findings

### *Dietary acculturation*

All participants have commenced their dietary acculturation process upon arriving in the Netherlands. Agata (36), Wojciech (26), Asia (46), Marek (84), and Żaneta (47) are from different regions of Poland, but they all recall their childhood dietary habits as generic, consisting of „just normal Polish food” (Żaneta, 47). Everyone has presented their trajectory of hood habits adaptation. Clearly, and in line with Fieldhouse (1996), age, life phase, living conditions, and social ties seemed to have the greatest impact on the dietary acculturation process. Wojciech (26) explains that his current living conditions obstruct him from cooking elaborate dishes:

*I have a very small kitchen, barely any work area. This is annoying but still doable. The worst thing is: I don't have an oven. That makes it impossible to process a lot of steps in the recipes I would like to make. I have to either boil or fry everything, which is limiting. In Poland, everyone has an oven.*

Regarding the weekly food intake, Agata (36) and Wojciech (26) consume Polish food occasionally. Asia (46) cooks Polish food regularly. Żaneta (47) rarely eats Polish food. She does not cook, as she either eats at work or relies on her non-Polish partner. She does, however, follow other Polish practices, such as baking sourdough bread and making Polish-style pickles. Marek (84) does not eat Polish food apart from visiting. He cooks for himself, however, he only eats dishes of what could be understood as colonial Dutch cuisine:

*(I eat) Indonesian, Caribbean, Surinamese. I learnt on the boat [when I was a sailor]. Cooks would change daily, we were used to helping them in the kitchen. We looked at the cooking process, and we picked it. They were people from all over the world - I didn't go there to eat pierogi [Polish dumplings].*

Agata (36), who is the main cook for herself and her family, also enjoys the foods that were brought to the Netherlands by other, yet fellow, immigrants:

*In the evenings, we eat a variety of dishes: curry, bami, nasi, leczo, pasta, we eat everything - apart from fish. I cook Dutch food for my partner sometimes - brown beans, bacon, Dutch sausage, and stroop. I had to learn how to make these.*

All the respondents are, daily, exposed to at least a few different cultures surrounding them. Wojciech (26) and Żaneta (47) describe their current dietary habits as „varied” and „taking from many cuisines”:

*The first big difference in my food habits occurred when I moved in with my husband. He is vegetarian, so he cooks dishes from all over the world to have more freedom. Mexican, Indonesian, Italian, very international. (Żaneta, 47)*

*I eat everything. Apart from meat products, of course. (Wojciech, 26)*

#### ***(Non-)Religious influences on food practices***

Agata (36), Wojciech (26), Asia (46), and Żaneta (47) celebrate Polish traditions directly linked to the Catholic faith, most notably, Christmas. They do so through the medium of preparing food and consuming it in a celebratory manner with family members back in Poland, which all four of them visit during Christmas. However, that does not mean that they are all religious. In most of their cases, celebratory food practices are detached from the actual church-going.

*On Easter, maybe we meet with friends and have brunch. We have hard-boiled eggs and a salad with more hard-boiled eggs and pickles. I don't go bless my food though. I used to, in Poland. (Żaneta, 47)*

The influence of Catholicism, a dominant and culturally determining religion in Poland, is expressed through a set of ritual expectations and dietary rules. Christmas Eve is, by far, the most celebrated religious event. On the evening of the 24th of December, the name day of Adam and Eve, families gather to enjoy a dinner of traditionally 12 meatless dishes. The significance of the number twelve has three main interpretations: the number of Jesus' apostles, the number of months in a year, or just a general display of prosperity (Kubiak and Kubiak). Agata (36) recalls:

*My family was not religious. Each Christmas Eve, we had way more than 12. It was lavish.*

Another Polish dietary practice rooted in Catholicism is abstaining from meat consumption on Friday. However, in Polish culture, fish is not considered meat. Catholics are expected to abstain from animals like to warm-blooded Jesus. Fish, a cold-blooded animal, can be eaten on fasting days, which legitimizes the image of fish as meat in Polish culture. The Christmas Eve 12-course

meatless dinner, mentioned in the previous paragraph, is also rich in fish. Fish Friday is only practised by Asia (46). Żaneta (47) is vegetarian, but used to eat fish:

*I go to Poland for Christmas, but if I stay here, I will prepare it too. This year, I made almost everything myself, only pierogi were store-bought. Real borscht I made myself. Mushroom soup, too. Mushrooms, cabbage and peas hotchpotch, too. No carp though. I bought carp once, but I don't want to bother with it no more. This year we had vegetarian fish sticks as a replacement. And Polish vegetable salad too!*

### ***Perceived differences in taste and quality of food***

Agata (36), Wojciech (26), Asia (46), and Żaneta (47) declared their preference for Polish food over Dutch food. Marek (84), on the other hand, claims that „Dutch and Polish cuisine are nearly the same”. He adds:

*Dutch cuisine is just extremely rich compared to Polish [cuisine]. When the Dutch had colonies and afterwards, people were coming here with their food. Extremely rich food. That differs from the Slavic kitchen.*

Asia (42), who is exposed to Dutch food through her social ties in the Netherlands, does not enjoy Dutch food as much as Polish food. Asia (42) cooks Polish food for herself and her family intermediately with her Dutch partner:

*Polish food? That is just better quality. So much more taste. We use spices, not only salt and maybe pepper and cumin. It is a heaven and earth difference. [...] I cook Polish food to keep it diverse; my husband, he cooks staple Dutch dishes, so when it is my turn to cook, I love to make Polish food. It can be simple - (Polish) schnitzel, (Polish) rissole, zapiekanka, but it still will be tasty and filling.*

Agata (36), who cooks for herself and her family diversely, was most exposed to Dutch food habits when she temporarily lived with her extended Dutch family.

*My mother-in-law.. she cooked weird stuff. Differently seasoned. Kielbasa (Polish sausage; Dutch sausage in this context) looks like kielbasa but is essentially inedible. Another thing I saw: cauliflower with cheese and cream sauce and nutmeg. Only misses cumin for the full experience. (Agata, 36)*

Soups are essential to Polish cuisine, and many Polish households consume their main meal of the day (the middle meal) in the form of a starter soup and a second warm dish. Wojciech (28), Asia (46), Żaneta (47) and Agata (36) remember soup as one of the staples of their dietary habits. Nowadays, they all agree that real Polish soup takes time:

*If I make soup, I, unfortunately, make them Dutch-style, I don't have time and energy for Polish soup-making. Here, the choice is not too great; Dutch chicken soup and tomato soup are watery, and all is cooked on powdered bullion, very artificial. (Agata, 36)*

*Polish soup - that is what you call a soup. Good, based on a made-from-scratch broth, with spices, simmering for hours. We have so many types of soups - borscht, (Polish) cabbage soup, and sour rye soup. Dutch soups are like the rest of the cuisine - rather poor. (Asia, 46)*

### ***Perceived differences in practices***

Agata (36) feels like Dutch people treat food and eating structurally different:

*In Poland, the eating culture is orientated towards pleasure that you share with your loved ones. Here, people eat to fill their stomachs, that is at least how I see it. People eat to eat. Throughout the day, there are moments that you eat at, and that is it. In Poland, if you feel like something, you go to the fridge and get it. Here, no one does that. My husband's family, Dutch, they eat apples and drink coffee at the same time every day.*

Asia (46), who also experienced living with her extended Dutch family, noticed a similar difference:

*One thing that surprises me in them [Dutch people] is that everything food-wise is very structured. They eat something sweet at 10 AM, then have lunch at noon, then tea with another sweet treat at 4 PM, then 6 PM supper, or to be fair - not even supper, but dinner, because lunch is usually just bread [which makes last meal the main meal of the day]. Desert after dinner. Full routine.*

Wojciech (26) and Agata (36) share a sensation that Dutch people are, in general, less hospitable than Polish people. In Poland, if you visit someone's house, you are very likely to be treated with food and beverages. Wojciech (26), used to this matter of fact, was very surprised to find out that Dutch people are, in his experience, less likely to offer food or drink to their guests.

*What I learned: when Dutch people want you to leave their house, they will tell you they are about to have dinner. It is a social cue that you shall leave. (Wojciech, 26)*

*There was no break from the routine. Even when guests were visiting. In Poland, when you have guests, you even go to the store to buy food and drinks to host them. No one does that here. They had yoghurt in the fridge but I could not have it, even though I was a guest. Same with the portion size; you get exactly as much as you need, no second servings. (Agata, 36)*

Asia (46) has changed her sugar consumption as a result of a difference between Dutch and Polish practices of tea drinking. In Poland, it is a custom to offer sugar with tea.

*I came here and initially participated in a few Dutch parties. No one ever offered me sugar with tea, I had to ask for it. It felt stupid to ask every time, so I just stopped taking sugar in my tea. (Asia, 46)*

### **Bread**

Bread, a baked good, was proved to be a very relevant topic for Polish immigrants in studies done previously (Rabikowska, 2010; Brown and Paszkiewicz, 2016). The results of this thesis do not steer back from the pattern, as the topic of bread has not only appeared, but also touched upon all analyzed themes: food, practices, and perceptions.

Traditionally, Polish culture places bread on a pedestal. Bread, a symbol of wealth and prosperity, needs to be paid its respects. A slice of bread fell to the ground and must be picked as soon as possible and kissed as a token of apology (Kubiak and Kubiak, 1981). Literature does not offer insights into the modern cultivation of bread-related customs, however, anecdotal data confirms the continuation of the bread-kissing ritual amongst older generations in Poland. Likewise, one cannot throw away bread into the trash. A stray bag full of stale bread hung outside of the communal trash can is a common sight in neighbourhoods where older generations reside. The importance of bread seems to be undeniable, as all five interviewees have mentioned bread pretty early on.

*I stopped eating supermarket bread. I cannot deal with the cotton-like texture. It also moulds within days. (Wojciech, 26)*

*(To make a pickling brine), you must use a piece of bread. Real bread, I mean, Polish. Not the Dutch one.. (Żaneta, 47)*

Interviewees referred to the most popular bread sold in every Dutch supermarket - *tarwebrood*. It owes its rise to the yeast, whereas the most popular equivalent in Polish stores will be sourdough-based. The difference for Polish people is dramatic: slices of bread have different sizes, textures, plasticity, taste, and functionality. Wojciech (26) also made a practical note on how fast the bread is going bad, which is, imaginably, an inconvenience that might lead to bread disposal.

*It is just simply not bread. (Agata, 36)*

Typical *tarwebrood* resembles what is considered toast bread in Poland. Toast bread is associated with a quick and unhealthy meal, and thus, Dutch bread is not considered „real food”. Polish cuisine sets expectations for the intricacy and effort put into the preparation of the dishes that quick yeast-dough does not entirely satisfy. Interestingly, Poles living in the UK have also described British

bread as „raw and inedible” or „sponge-like” (Rabikowska, 2010, p. 392; Rabikowska and Burrell, 2009, p. 215; Brown and Paszkiewicz, 2016). As a response to the unavailability of proper bread, Żaneta (47) started baking her own bread:

*We started baking our own bread 6 years ago. Now we are very familiar with the process, it feels automatic.*

Bread-baking practice was also observed by Rabikowska (2010) among UK-based Polish immigrants. Bread-baking was admired amongst the members of the Polish community and served a broader role in transmitting and cultivating Polish culture.

### ***Multiculturalism***

Marek (84) eats rice and noodle dishes as his main meal of the day. His current food intake is completely different from that of his childhood surrounding. Marek (84) enjoys Caribbean, Surinamese, and Indonesian cuisine, especially praising them for the intuitive use of various spices, such as cinnamon, cardamom, curcuma, pepper, and ginger. Asia (46) and Agata (36) also noticed that they started using spices more and in different manners since they came to the Netherlands.

*I never saw ginger in Poland. I came here and started using it, pretty often. Agata (36)*

*I started to explore food more thanks to my [international] friends. I lived 17 years next to a lady who cooked amazing ethnic food. I took recipes from her, and these usually included cinnamon, ginger, and cardamom. [...] But I buy Polish spices [spices sold in Polish stores], they are just better and have more taste than spices in the Dutch supermarket. Asia (46)*

Wojciech (26) keeps his diet various, as he eats out a lot and cooks with his international friends. When he cooks for himself, he sticks to the student staples, such as pasta with pesto, chicken, or frozen food. Asia (46), Agata (36) and Żaneta (47) have strong social links within Dutch society and are exposed to Dutch food regularly, as well as other to other foreign cuisines.

### ***Discussion of results***

Food habits have changed for all of the interviewees. The rate and degree to which food habits have adapted are individual, but common patterns are identified. All participants follow a rather mixed diet, based on many cuisines of the world, and enjoy Polish food from time to time and during celebrations. Marek (84) only consumes Polish food when he visits Poland. Everyone is, to a certain extent, exposed to Dutch food and has an idea of the difference between Dutch and Polish cuisine. In general, Dutch food was considered to be less tasty and of inferior quality than Polish food, a result similar to what Rabikowska (2010) and Brown and Paszkiewicz (2016) found



in the United Kingdom. The practice of Polish religious traditions is continued, however, its celebratory nature might be easily detached from religious aspects and enjoyed in itself. Differences were noted in practices, especially regarding the routine nature of Dutch food habits and perceived hospitality. Certain cultural commodities, such as bread offered in Dutch supermarkets, turned out to be remarkably different, which lead to the initiation of bread-baking practices, observed in previous research by Rabikowska (2010). Participants have noticed that their exposure to other cultures, including the Dutch, has expanded their test buds and culinary curiosity. Multicultural behaviours, such as the use of Polish spices to cook spicy, Asian food, are practised by all participants, who mix their own culture and others daily.

#### 4.3 Conclusion

Food habits have changed for all of the interviewees. The rate and degree to which food habits have adapted are individual, but common patterns are identified. All participants follow a rather mixed diet, based on many cuisines of the world, and enjoy Polish food from time to time and during celebrations. Marek (84) only consumes Polish food when he visits Poland. Everyone is, to a certain extent, exposed to Dutch food and has an idea of the difference between Dutch and Polish cuisine. In general, Dutch food was considered to be less tasty and of inferior quality than Polish food, a result similar to what Rabikowska (2010) and Brown and Paszkiewicz (2016) found in the United Kingdom. The practice of Polish religious traditions is continued, however, its celebratory nature might be easily detached from religious aspects and enjoyed in itself. Differences were noted in practices, especially regarding the routine nature of Dutch food habits and perceived hospitality. Certain cultural commodities, such as bread offered in Dutch supermarkets, turned out to be remarkably different, which lead to the initiation of bread-baking practices, observed in previous research by Rabikowska (2010). Participants have noticed that their exposure to other cultures, including the Dutch, has expanded their test buds and culinary curiosity. Multicultural behaviours, such as the use of Polish spices to cook spicy, Asian food, are practised by all participants, who mix their own culture and others daily.

Social and cultural implications and physical consequences of food habits make them a genuinely holistic concept that needs to be approached interdisciplinary. This thesis has aimed to explore how the food habits of Polish migrants change after migration to the Netherlands, as the pre-existing literature has established that migration, as a major life event, has a long-term impact on dietary behaviour. Multiple theories exist to describe the trajectories of food habits adaptation after migration. The immigrant can adapt and assimilate, segregate themselves through preserving their habits, integrate through maintaining their own identity and simultaneously introduce new habits or marginalize themselves through rejection of both old and new ways. The food habits of

Polish immigrants living in the Netherlands have changed for all of the participants of this study. Regarding the types of food consumed, Polish immigrants eat diversely and likely integrate elements of different cultures into their daily habits. Polish food is eaten on occasion, and during traditional events, which celebration is continued by most of the participants. The biggest perceived difference between Dutch and Polish food habits was the inferior quality and taste of Dutch staples. The interviewees have noticed the dissimilarities in seasoning, even for the dishes that essentially look alike. Otherwise, the interviewees have paid attention to the practices, such as higher attention to dining time in the Netherlands and a less generous approach towards feeding guests than in Poland. Lastly, the observations made during data collection have shown how intertwined food habits are with the rest of everyday life, and how researching food habits will inevitably lead to the intimate stories of family life, personal health, and even social expectations.

Changing food habits pose challenges to social tissue and public health. Thus, there is a strong initiative to research them further, especially in the context of migration. Further research could focus on the identity-creating role of food habits, or on the degree to which adjusted food habits influence the sense of belonging. Finally, this study has been conducted on a diverse group, and the results could have been different if a particular group was studied more intensively.

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