

CHAPTER THREE

IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABILITY IN STRATFORD-UPON-AVON: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES FROM A 'GLOBAL' SMALL TOWN IN NATIONALISTIC TIMES

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Introduction

There are places that, when mentioned, clearly evoke a person who was born, lived and/or died there. If one reads a paper about Stratford-upon-Avon, surely s/he would expect at least some references to William Shakespeare. Interestingly, the only literary composition to survive in Shakespeare handwriting is a fragment of a play about Sir (and later Saint) Thomas More¹ that had as subject matter international immigration and social conflict management in 16th century England (Bate and Thornton 2012, 43-44). The original script of *Sir Thomas Moore*—written by Anthony Munday in the early 1590s and inspired in a historical xenophobic riot against immigrants occurred on May Day 1517—was rejected by the government censor, shelved for over a decade and later revised by a number of dramatists, among them William Shakespeare (Rasmusen 2007). In this literary piece, cultural and socio-economic diversity and vulnerability are addressed, while the speech attributed to Thomas More is a call to peaceful coexistence and to the rule of law.

¹ Thomas More was author, among other works, of *Utopia*, a book that may inspire geographical imaginations, as Derek Gregory (1994) might put it.

Moreover, the importance of thinking and making human-friendly sustainable decisions during stormy historical moments as well as the relativity of borders in a planet that can be circumnavigated are suggested by a set of questions posed by Thomas More to the xenophobic mob (e.g. "What country, by the nature of your error, should give you harbour?").

Although in a different fashion to the aforementioned play, this paper is also focused on immigration and social cohesion issues while analysing the contemporary socio-geographical setting of the town known as Shakespeare's birthplace. The analysis is based upon an international research project that was mainly carried out in pre-Brexit times (2011-2015) and that captured instances of both peaceful coexistence and xenophobic tendencies in Stratford-upon-Avon area. Obviously, the 2016 Brexit referendum was legal and there were not riots as in 1517, but important xenophobic violence took place in England before and after the referendum, including the murder of a pro-remain British MP² and the xenophobic killing of a Polish immigrant worker³, among others. The shock of the Brexit referendum outcome and the increasingly difficult situation in the UK obliged us to stop writing, to rethink and to revise earlier versions of this paper. In this context, William Shakespeare was helpful as his published work invites us to overcome simple narratives, to be more self-critical as human beings as well as to try to wait for hopefully the best moment for doing the right thing. Hopefully, overcoming various painful circumstances, that moment has arrived and this edited book is the right place for publishing some results of our field studies on sustainability and immigrants' integration in Stratford-upon-Avon. This small town is placed in-between two differentiated geographical areas: the Birmingham metropolitan region to the north and the Cotswolds rural region to the south. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED 2007, 2163), "periphery" is a "borderline region, space or area". Stratford-upon-Avon is a town placed in the border of a metropolitan area with a rural area and thus can be both considered as metropolitan periphery and as rural periphery. However, as it will be explained below, Stratford-upon-Avon has avoided being a periphery in Immanuel Wallerstein's sense.

Since the beginning of modern social sciences, "integration" has been a key concept that has evolved from Durkheim thanks to a diversity of academic approaches proposed along the twentieth century by authors like Alpert, Landecker, Mills, Parsons or Luhmann (Morén-Alegret 2002). This is one of the reasons why integration, as Rainer Bauböck (1994) suggests, is

² See: <https://www.jocoxfoundation.org>.

³ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/02/world/europe/britain-polish-man-killed-brexit.html>.

a “rather elusive concept”. Nevertheless, elusive or not, renewed interest in “integration” is an on-going feature of current social scientific work (Böcker, de Hart, and Michalowski 2004; George 2006; Zincone, Penninx, and Borkert 2011; July 2012) not least as it is closely allied to the holistic emphasis essential to the concept of sustainability (Morén-Alegret 2018). The idea of sustainability focuses on planning for the future and finding ways of dealing with serious threats, so it contains an explicit time dimension (Portney 2015). In general terms too, in the sustainability discourse there is a fundamental emphasis on interconnectedness and unity (Adams 2006; Becker et al. 1997). In this sense, sustainability—the commitment to the long-term continuity of that which is valued, maintaining the best of what is there already but allowing and often promoting certain types of change—must be seen as always sitting in the middle of “social”, “economic” and “environmental” considerations, with any displacement into one sector, for example as “economic sustainability”, losing this holistic appreciation (Adams 2006). In other words, for sustainability to be realized, people, place and production should be mutually beneficially aligned, and any changes, such as the arrival of immigrants, need to be considered from all three perspectives (Morén-Alegret et al. 2009). Thus a sustainability perspective on immigration should study social, economic and environmental influences and consequences of this immigration taking into account the local, national and international contexts, rather than a focus largely on just one aspect, such as effects on the local economy. At the same time, a sustainability perspective on immigration should take into account both natives and immigrants’ opinions and experiences (Morén-Alegret 2018). In this paper, the focus is on the sustainability of the study town and surrounding villages.

Additionally, one may identify at least three types of integration processes relating to contemporary population changes (Morén-Alegret 2008): social integration (i.e. processes related to social and cultural dynamics), systemic integration (i.e. process related to economic, administrative and political dynamics), and habitat or environmental integration (i.e. processes related to environmental and habitat dynamics). As stated in the Justice and Home Affairs Council Conclusions of 5-6 June 2014 (JHA 2014), the EU Member States reaffirmed their commitment to implement the Common Basic Principles and the definition of integration was reaffirmed as a long-term and multi-faceted process, including respect for diversity and the EU’s basic values, such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The importance for policies to adopt a holistic approach that mainstreams integration into all relevant policy sectors and levels of government is highlighted. The JHA Council Conclusions also

noted that while integration measures are within the competence of Member States, they need to be implemented in accordance with the EU *acquis* and can be funded through EU financial instruments. Finally, Member States agreed that some aspects related to the Common Basic Principles should be further developed.

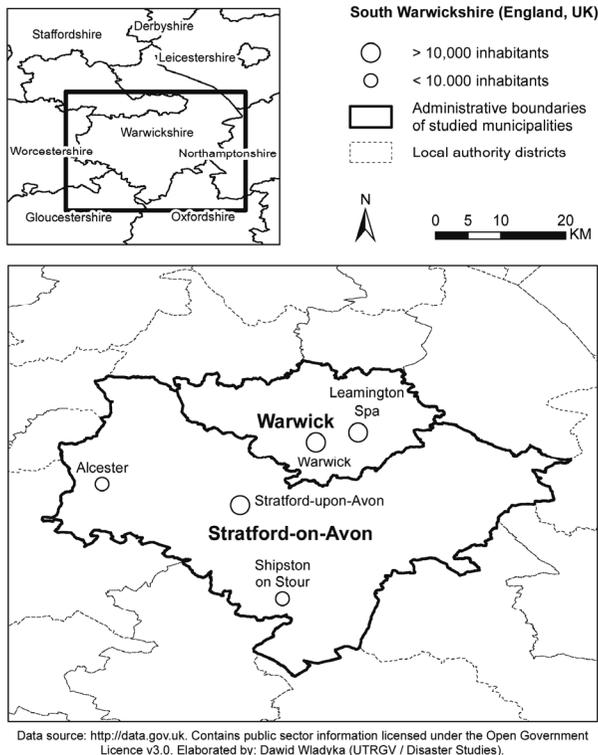
One should always take into account that integration policies do not operate in a vacuum. Actually, international immigration studies addressing integration processes have mostly been focused on the arrival of immigrants in big cities and large metropolitan areas, while much less attention has been paid to immigration in small towns and rural areas (Hugo and Morén-Alegret 2008). In contrast, in order to contribute to fill that gap, this paper focuses on a non-metropolitan small town and its surrounding area. Within the context of central England, Stratford-upon-Avon is remarkable as an attractive small town growing rapidly drawing on internal migrants from cities in the Midlands and southern England (because of its perceived good environment and cultural offer). Moreover, it has the economic opportunities which immigrants coming from the eight central-eastern European countries that joined the EU in the mid 2000s (i.e. A8 migrants) have been attracted to (Bayliss and Gullen 2007). In this sense, Stratford is also of interest because it is a relevant urban centre in the semi-rural region of South Warwickshire (the Avon Valley/Vale of Evesham) in which agriculture has been traditionally dominant, but there are also new forms of food production, decentralisation of small scale manufacturing from the major urban centres of the Midlands as well as, especially, a very important tourist and leisure sector (Hubbard and Lilley 2000; Jarvis, Dunham, and Ilbery 2002).

Bearing all that in mind, the main objective of this paper is to shed light on local perceptions about the main challenges for the social, economic and environmental sustainability in Stratford-upon-Avon in a context of increasing (international and internal) immigration and tourism. Thus, the next sections of this paper present some general aspects of immigration and tourism in Stratford-upon-Avon, the main research methods used during the research project as well as some results and discussion, including the literal transcription of various contrasting voices heard on the ground, which were recorded during qualitative interviews to key local and regional informants.

Stratford-upon-Avon in an Age of Multiple Mobilities: An approach to Recent Tourism and Immigration Trends in the Core of Shakespeare's Country

If one takes into account the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2006), in a place like Stratford-upon-Avon the links between migration, tourism and other mobilities like language learning visits are fundamental to understanding immigration (Hall and Williams 2002), e.g. some tourists travelling to Stratford can later become immigrants living there or the local touristic industry may need a multilingual foreign labour force. Stratford-upon-Avon is the main town of a quasi-homonymous wider district, Stratford-on-Avon, placed in South Warwickshire, in the West Midlands (see Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1 Location of Stratford-upon-Avon town within the context of Stratford-on-Avon district and Warwickshire county.



The most important economic sectors in Stratford-upon-Avon are tourism and, linked to it, commerce. In this place-name, "Stratford" means "ford crossed by a Roman road" (Field 2005, 17) and "Avon" makes reference to the homonymous river (in Celtic languages such as Welsh, "Afon" means river; see Bradford 2006). Thus, for many centuries, Stratford-upon-Avon has been a human settlement connected to other places and peoples through land and water, seeing travellers come and go. Periphery and remoteness are not synonymous. Connectedness is a key characteristic of some peripheries when understood as borderline regions, spaces or areas (OED 2007). As noted above, Stratford-upon-Avon is appreciated by residents and tourists alike both as well-connected small town via public and private transport (but relatively distant from big cities) and, at the same time, as the gate to rural areas that are visible at the edge of town. In fact, Stratford-on-Avon local authority district is classified by the Office for National Statistics as falling into the category "rural-80": districts with at least 80% of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns (ONS 2009). Interestingly, mostly thanks to William Shakespeare's legacy exploitation, Stratford-upon-Avon avoided the fate of being a so-called internal Wallersteinian periphery (Wallerstein 1979; Bunker and Ciccantell 2005). Being a cultural centre, Stratford is capable of keeping at least some of the profits in the area and to develop its own local economy in contrast to classically understood periphery that exports its own resources and fosters a poverty circle. Moreover, in contrast to Wallersteinian peripheries, Stratford tends to actually attract affluent tourists and immigrants in passage or willing to settle, rather than constitute a trap difficult to escape.

Regarding tourism, as Jeff Watkin (2005, 2) has noted, today "South Warwickshire attracts tourists from across the world, many drawn from its associations with William Shakespeare". According to the Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council (2017), the first Shakespeare celebrations occurred in the 1760s when David Garrick organised a three-day event of parades and speeches, placing Stratford at the centre of attention on an international level and paving the way to infrastructure improvements from late 18th Century that allowed more visitors to experience the Shakespeare legacy. Thus, the origins of wider tourism in the area go back at least to 1800 when it was an "activity open only to the leisured elite" (Watkin 2005), but in the 1930s tourism became a "highly commercialised industry catering for the masses, and 'Shakespeare Country' became firmly established as a major international tourist destination" (Watkin 2005, 2). In other words, since the 1900s Stratford-upon-Avon became increasingly popular as an "inland resort" and this has been the most significant factor

in its development (Bearman 1997). If the resort life-cycle model suggested by Richard W. Butler is taken into account (Butler 1980; Crang 2009; Wladyka and Morén-Alegret 2017), today Stratford-upon-Avon seems to be in a turning point linked to the consolidation/stagnation phase. Following that model, the fifth phase can be rejuvenation or decline.

In Stratford-upon-Avon, by early 21st century, it was stated “the fact that for every resident of the town, there are some 20 visitors during the year” (Sale 2007, 23) and “after London, many visitors to England put Stratford-upon-Avon next on the itinerary, and all because of one man. William Shakespeare” (Long 2007, 434). This importance of tourism may have also some side effects. As geographers Phil Hubbard and Keith Lilley (2000) stated, the marketing of Stratford-upon-Avon may generate conflicts regarding the conservation and commodification of place identity, e.g. some heritage businesses may implement a “conscious manipulation of history designed to create something which people will consider worth visiting and spending money on” (Hubbard and Lilley 2000, 221). However, according to those authors, the town’s historic identity has always been shaped by the interaction of locals and “outsiders” (Hubbard and Lilley 2000). Bearing that in mind, one may wonder how local identity and sustainability issues have been perceived by local actors during/after the arrival and settlement in the area of thousands of immigrants during the 2000s and early 2010s. Thus, the main focus of this paper is on international immigration, but internal migration to Stratford-upon-Avon has been very relevant too (with a great deal of housing development and new roads) and both migration flows are sometimes related to each other. In the analysed case, this interrelation is especially interesting, since international immigrants arrive to a growing town with tourism, and hence they may be less visible than in declining places, especially when most new immigrants come from countries like Poland with similar phenotypic features than most native population (Wladyka and Morén-Alegret 2014). Additionally, another factor is that Stratford-on-Avon district is being pressured (due to national policy) to build many more houses to accommodate population growth consequent upon international migration. Housing developments in the district are controversial, encroaching into the countryside and threatening the character of the area. One proposal for new housing developments was to create a number of new “garden towns” in the countryside, which are proposed to be more environmentally sustainable than conventional suburban housing developments, e.g. one is proposed for disused military land at Long Marston, a sparsely populated rural area five miles south of Stratford (Mullen 2017). However, Stratford already experienced massive

suburban expansion during the mid-20th century (SDC 2005). Unfortunately, during decades, as Richard Tomlins (1999) noted in a key bibliographic research, housing experiences and needs of minority ethnic communities in Britain has been a “neglected area of study”, which makes necessary new “research that provides a voice for minority communities to articulate their own needs” (Tomlins 1999, 26). As it will be displayed in the following sections, this paper contributes to fill that academic literature gap, giving voice to immigrants arrived during the last decades and other key local actors.

The current migratory, socio-economic and cultural situation might change after/if Brexit is implemented, but from the Second World War to the 2000s Britain experienced rapid social and economic transformation and radical cultural change that seemed solid until a few years ago. Rosen (2003) argues that three profound changes occurred to Britain: a) an unparalleled rise in the standards of living; b) a marked decline in popular support for orthodox institutions such as the police, the monarchy, religion, marriage and the trade unions; and c) society became far more flexible and diverse. Popular culture became increasingly absorbed into the American sphere and commercialised, while the British political elite accommodated itself to Europe (Preston 2004) and abandoned its imperial role. Over this period, England moved from being a net exporter to a net importer of people, and social policy moved from enforcing conformity to a single model of behaviour towards multiculturalism as the ethnic diversity of the population grew.

The culture of England has been influenced by international immigration throughout its history (Miles 2006), but this effect has increased as a result of large migration flows since the Second World War. Emigration exceeded immigration in most years up to the early 1980s, but since then, there has been net international migration to England in nearly every year. International immigration initially comprised return migration from the former colonies and migration from the “Old Commonwealth” (usually temporary) but the migration of non-white people from former colonies in response to job opportunities in industries where employers had trouble recruiting white British people started in the late 1940s and 1950s. These migration flows became established through family reunification and led to the permanent settlement of an “ethnic minority” population, which has grown to comprise one-fifth of the population of England in 2011 (ONS 2012). In the aggregate, post-war international migration to England has been predominantly focused upon the major cities and industrial towns, but there have been substantial differences between countries of origin/ethnic groups. Migrants from the New

Commonwealth mainly settled in the major urban areas and industrial towns and cities. White international migrants were more likely to be attracted to higher-status employment opportunities (e.g. as managers of international companies, scientists, doctors or financial professionals). Hence, they were more likely to settle in more prosperous areas, such as the commuter belt around London and the band of most rapid economic growth stretching from East Anglia, through Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire (including the M40 corridor, where junction 15 connects to Stratford-upon-Avon or other Warwickshire places) and the high-tech M4 and M3 “corridors” to the south coast.

International migration started increasing rapidly again from the early 1990s onwards, first as asylum migration and then economic migration from an increasingly diverse range of countries. The accession to the EU of relatively impoverished Eastern and Central European countries with the right to migrate to the UK undertaking legal employment and the growth in student and high-skilled migration have also been factors in net international migration to the UK (mostly to England) reaching very high levels (around 200 thousand per annum) during the early years of the 21st century. In 2009, around a third of migrants came for work-related reasons, while another third came to study (ONS 2010). The severe economic crisis of 2008/9 reduced the number of international migrants to the UK, and the continuing economic difficulties of Southern Europe led more migrants from the southern countries of the EU-15 coming to the UK, while Bulgaria and Romania also became major sources of migrants when the 7-year transition period following their accession ended.

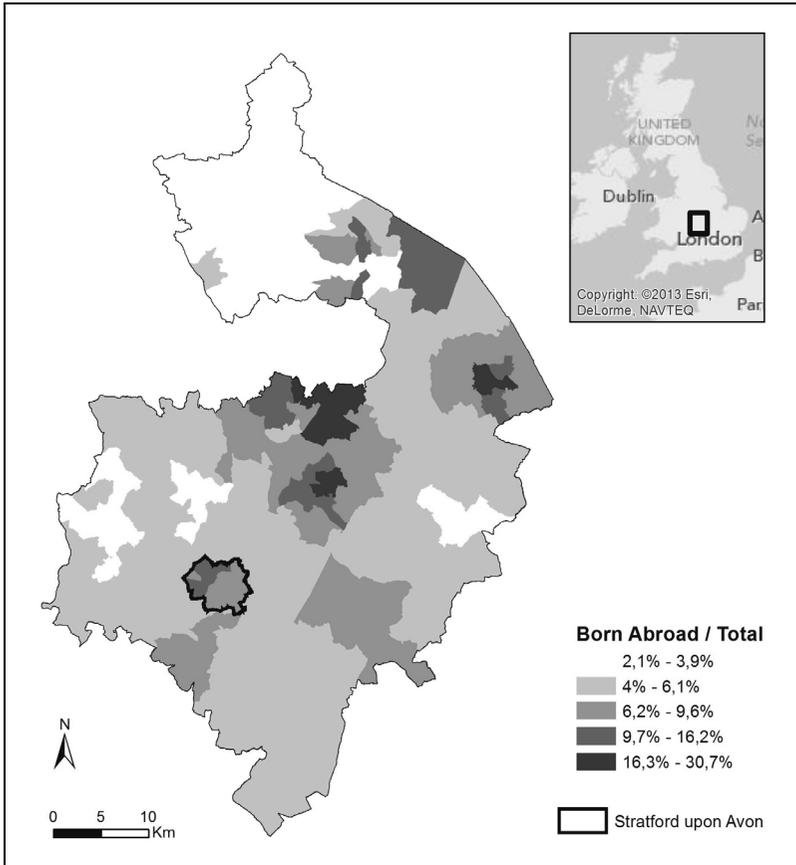
Many of the aforementioned immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe have settled down in English small towns and rural areas where they have been employed in various jobs ranging from agriculture to services and including some industries too (Rogaly 2008; Bloch, Neal, and Solomos 2013). Among those small towns and villages, Stratford-upon-Avon can be highlighted due to its international and cultural dimension, and, among those newcomers, Polish immigrants stand out as one of the major nationalities (Bayliss and Gullen 2007).

The increase of the new accession countries immigrants has been well recorded in the National Insurance Number registrations by non-UK citizens directly after the EU enlargement (it is necessary to have a National Insurance number in order to work in the UK). In particular, between the pre-accession period of 2002/2003 and post-accession 2005/2006, the number of the new accession countries (A8) in Stratford-upon-Avon district multiplied by 66 times (this total reaching 1130 in year 2016). Nearly half of this increase is to be assigned to immigrants that

arrived from Poland, followed by South Africa, and other Central and Eastern European countries (Bayliss and Gullen 2007, 32). Previous studies describe them as relatively young and single. The high professional skills (although often with non-recognized diplomas) and relative easiness regarding English communication had been recorded as characteristics of these immigrants in Stratford-on-Avon district (Bayliss and Gullen 2007, 44). The economic purpose of their migration was directly related with better conditions and more attractive salary than they could find in the country of origin (Bayliss and Gullen 2007, 6).

A few years later, according to the 2011 Population Census, 11.2% of the population of the town of Stratford-upon-Avon had been born abroad, in non-UK countries, a percentage well above the average in rural South Warwickshire's places like Ilmington village (see Figure 3-2) but well below the percentage in some metropolitan North Warwickshire towns, e.g. in Coventry. It has to be taken into account that Stratford-upon-Avon town is the major urban settlement within a local authority district, which is predominantly rural in character with settlement elsewhere in a number of villages and small towns.

Figure 3-2 Foreign born registered residents at Ward level in Warwickshire County



Source: Dawid Wladyka, based on geo-referenced data provided by the Office for National Statistics, ONS, and ESRI Population data (Population Census 2011) provided by ONS (Crown Copyright).

Among the resident population born abroad (see Table 3-1), there were 846 immigrants born in Poland (i.e. 3% of the total population), 157 born in India, also 157 born in Germany, 149 born in China (plus 58 born in Hong Kong), 123 born in the United States and 104 born in South Africa. When compared to the 2001 census data, those figures clearly illustrate a significant positive increase of international immigration because in 2001 the percentage of residents born abroad was only 5.9% and most

immigrant population groups were smaller, e.g. in Stratford-upon-Avon town the Poland born inhabitants figure multiplied from 55 residents in 2001 to 846 residents in 2011, while in the Stratford-on-Avon district the growth was from 111 Poland born residents in 2001 to 1,130 in year 2011.

Table 3-1 Resident population registered in Stratford-upon-Avon and in wider administrative units (according to country of birth, main geographical-origin groups, 2001 to 2011)

Place where born	Stratford-upon-Avon (town)		Stratford-on-Avon (district)		West Midlands	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
United Kingdom	20,778	24,386	106,387	113,023	4,868,609	4,971,874
Other EU countries ⁴	532	1,529	2,069	3,062	92,898	136,138
Poland	55	846	111	1,130	4,565	52,499
Africa	156	283	699	910	37,252	85,693
South Africa	76	104	322	363	6,122	8,848
Asia, incl. Middle East	269	645	931	1,464	194,266	295,042
Southern Asia	76	182	307	466	157,505	223,613
India	71	157	247	360	75,159	99,717
The Americas & Caribbean	143	234	644	745	46,123	51,066
Oceania	71	73	302	307	6,058	6,028
All Usual Residents	22,099	27,445	111,482	120,485	5,267,308	5,601,847

Source: authors' compilation, based on 2011 census data: Office for National Statistics (access: 14/02/2013), and 2001 census data: Derived statistics for wards, <http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk> (access: 22/03/2011).

It is still early to know the effects of the Brexit referendum on the international immigrant flows and stock in Stratford-upon-Avon, but according to ONS (2016) in the whole Stratford-on-Avon district from

⁴ The number of EU countries included in each figure corresponds to each date, i.e. 15 countries in 2001 and 27 countries in 2011.

mid-2014 to mid-2015 the inflow of international long-term migration was 772 and the international long-term migration outflow was 591, while from mid-2013 to mid-2014 the figures were 713 and 614 respectively. Thus the international migration flows balance was positive in the study area in the years just before the Brexit referendum.

Methods and Techniques

A purposive sampling method was used to collect qualitative data for the present study, with the sample size choice being inspired by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) methodological research. While the interviewed key informants are not representative of the broader population in the study area, the composition of the sample allowed us to capture a diversity of stakeholders' experiences, perceptions and attitudes (Mendoza and Morén-Alegret 2013; Fatoric et al 2017). Thirty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted from 2011 to 2014 with key informants in South Warwickshire, focusing mainly on Stratford-upon-Avon area (Table 3-2). After reaching saturation with thirty-two interviews, an additional three interviews were carried out in 2015 to ensure that no relevant additional perceptions emerged.

For the purpose of this study, we define key informant as a local resident who is an immigrant or whose activity could be related to immigration and/or plays a role in the local sustainable development decision-making in the study area. The selected sample was inspired by the aforementioned three-fold conceptualisation of sustainability and was at least linked to: (1) ten social and/or cultural (SC) organisations, including cultural institutions, social organisations or ethnic associations; (2) ten economic and/or political organisations (EC) including local economic development partnerships, local government and ruling political parties, tourism sector, ethnic businesses; and (3) five environmental organisations (referred to as ENV), including non-governmental organizations, environmental-oriented companies and green political parties. In effect, all interviewees together were directly related at least to twenty-five different local/regional organisations.

Table 3-2 Name/Type of organisations linked to the interviewees⁵

Society & Culture (n=10)	Economy & Politics (n=10)	Environment (n=5)
Warwickshire County Council, Adult and Community Learning	Stratford-upon-Avon Town Mayor	Stratford Ramblers
Stratford Society	Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Stratford World Class Project	Avon Navigation Trust
Lions Club	Stratfordward Business District Project	Family farm
Ken Kennett Centre	Hotel	Green Team Organics
CORD, international cooperation	Computers small Enterprise	Green Party
Warwickshire Race Equality Partnership, WREP	South Warwickshire Conservative Party	
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust	Town Hall	
The Buzz Arts & Community Centre	International restaurant	
Royal Shakespeare Company Theatre	Language teaching enterprise	
Oxfam Charity	International food shop	

Source: authors' compilation.

An interview script was used to explore various issues, including among others: the main current economic challenges and proposals for overcoming the current crises and/or local economic conflicts; main current social and demographic challenges for the social cohesion and integration of this place; main current environmental and territorial planning challenges; good practices already being implemented regarding sustainability; main current cultural and education challenges; main current challenges for local democracy and social participation. Additionally, demographic information on stakeholders' gender, age and

⁵ For some organisations more than one interview was done.

nationality were also collected in the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English, Polish and Spanish and the average length was about 45 minutes. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed for content analysis (when necessary they were translated into English). Transcribed data was first coded and then organized into blocks, which represented common themes that emerged from the interviews. Similarities and differences are analysed. Direct interview quotes are used in the next sections to further illustrate the identified trends and contexts. In each quote, details on the stakeholders' place of where born (UK stands for United Kingdom, PL for Poland, SE for South Europe, IN for India, SA for South Africa, NA for North Africa), main sector of activity (Social-Cultural, SC; Environment, ENV; Economic-Political, ECP), gender (female/male) and age (years old) are provided. Additionally, these interview quotes are a key way of giving voice, which is one of the key objectives of qualitative research (Ragin 1994). Thus, in this paper the data analysis is mainly focused on original narratives from active people living in Stratford-upon-Avon area.

The implementation of additional different data collection methods ensured triangulation. Data from scientific literature, reports, official documents, local newspapers and statistical data (e.g. from Office of National Statistics, ONS) were gathered to gain background information about the study area and to contextualize perceptions and knowledge brought up in interviews. Participant observations⁶ and photographic records were also gathered during several visits in the study area⁷.

Results and Discussion

In this section, a number of perceived challenges to sustainability in Stratford-upon-Avon (including social, economic and environmental issues) that were gathered during interviews with key informants are discussed, paying special attention to immigrants' integration challenges (also at social, economic and environmental levels).

⁶ Among other, including participant observation in River Festivals, open-air farmers market, Polish shop, church, bar-restaurants, supermarkets and theatres as well as specific local events.

⁷ In this sense, Prof. Danièle Joly participated in one of the fieldwork visits in 2011 and offered us some additional insights on Stratford-upon-Avon that were helpful for the study.

From Tourism Hegemony to a more Diversified Local Economy?

According to a relevant report published by the Stratford-on-Avon district, the local economy has been importantly based on tourism: the 4.9 million trips that occurred in 2009 there accounted for an “approximate spend of £335 million on tourism in the area supporting in the region of 8,002 jobs” (King 2011, 24). This is in tune with several interviewees' responses sharing the perception that Stratford's economy depends on tourism and that this is both its strength and a potential threat. Today, tourism in Stratford-upon-Avon is still mostly related to Shakespeare Birthplace and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) Theatre, as explained below.

Although the peak of the touristic season occurs in the summer months, the nature of tourism in the town attracts tourism all-year-around. Importantly for the local economy, students (including foreigners) working during summer constitute a key workforce during the peak period of tourists' inflow. Hence the seasonality of tourist visits is reflected in variations in temporary rather than permanent employment.

Moreover, some interviewees noted a connection between an earlier tourist experience in Stratford and posterior migration there:

“Holidays brought me to Stratford. The theatre, the Cotswolds... and then I was thinking ‘why I'm going back to London? This is so much nicer’. So we all moved up.” (UK-SC-woman-47)

“I came here in 2010, but I had come here before with my university for a couple of times and, after that, I decided to move to England to find a job and to improve my English... At the moment everything is OK. I have a couple of jobs.” (SE-SC-woman-35)

Stratford is believed to be sustainable as long as the tourism sector succeeds and is actively developed. Regardless, according to some key informants, there is an emerging diversification of the economy. Some outsourcing IT companies and agricultural companies set up in the surroundings of Stratford-upon-Avon are especially mentioned. The development of companies independent from tourism seem to be quite positively seen by various informants. Still, if tourism would seriously decline, it is believed that neither the agriculture nor the outsourcing companies would be able to support the Stratford's economy in the long-term. In fact, in tune with those perceptions that consider tourism as crucial for the local future as well as economic diversification as strategic, the Stratford-upon-Avon Neighbourhood Plan submitted in April 2017 to the Stratford-on-Avon District Council states the following:

“Stratford-upon-Avon currently enjoys relatively high levels of employment and this must continue as the town grows. The focus of this Neighbourhood Development Plan is therefore on retaining and supporting existing employers in the town (including those connected with the visitor economy) as well as encouraging additional, high value-added employment to relocate or start up in the town [...].

Stratford-upon-Avon is internationally renowned due to its association with Shakespeare and the presence of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the theatres. It remains a popular cultural destination and is an attractive place to live and work for artists, crafts people, and those working in the media and creative industries. Development that maintains or creates new employment in the areas of culture, media and tourism will be supported where appropriate.” (Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council 2017, 24).

Economic diversification is also seen as a positive factor while it comes to social diversity and cohesion. The IT and economy outsourcing companies are believed not only to bring jobs, but also to bring into Stratford-on-Avon area some well educated people and families from London or other English regions as well as from other countries. This is quite positively underlined. However, some voices of anxiety were found because the development and persistence of the diversified economic activity might only be to a small degree in hands of the local community. In this sense, one of the Polish immigrants directly expressed his doubts on the long-term economic diversification and sustainability of the town:

“There used to be a factory here, which stopped existing at some point. But the decision about it was taken about ten thousand kilometers from here. A guy in Texas thought he had five factories in England, he had no idea who worked there so he decided to close down two of them.” (PL-ECP-man-50)

Housing as a Huge Threat to Social Sustainability

Regarding social issues, affordable housing is the key challenge for many local stakeholders and immigrants. As one interviewee said, the main challenge is “housing for the younger people, because it is too expensive” (UK-ENV-woman-69). In other words, “most people can’t afford a house in Stratford” (UK-SC-woman-34). Those perceptions are in tune with a report published by the *Financial Times*⁸ on 17 April 2015 stating that, after the worse of the crisis from 2008 to 2010, housing prices have been rising in Stratford-upon-Avon, that the forecasted housing developments

⁸ <https://www.ft.com/content/61a7ad28-debb-11e4-b9ec-00144feab7de>.

there are houses for wealthy people (including a few Americans and continental Europeans) and that local housing prices are much higher in Stratford than the England and Warwickshire averages.

Additionally, another interviewed local stakeholder expanded on this question: "Stratford attracts lots of middle class middle age people, who have the money to enjoy the lifestyle here... Young people cannot afford to stay here and start families and buy homes" (UK-SC-woman-47). That interviewee was running a community centre taking care of local people threatened by exclusion (we carried out participant observation there). She went on to note that, apart from a significant rich population, in Stratford there are also poor families and that Stratford is not just wealthy as it looks in the mass media: there are disabled people, physically and psychically, and homeless people and, for her, they are not very well treated by local institutions (during fieldwork it was verified that in Stratford this sector of the population included both English natives and immigrants). In a few words, for her "there's a big gap" and the investments in the area have been directed to the wealthy part of the population (UK-SC-woman-47).

However, in contrast, for a participant in a social-cultural organisation mostly composed by members of middle-upper classes, the local situation was not so bad:

"There are some social houses. But, those are not bad housing, and they sit comfortably with private housing next to them. So, there are no what I call bad areas. In other towns, larger towns, you can get areas where you got ghettos, slums, where you got major problems, low social groups, family having problems living there, but that does not manifest to any great degree in Stratford." (UK-SC-man-65)

For some, even if the lack of affordable housing both for native young people and for immigrants is an issue, the solution has to be well planned. Otherwise, it can create further problems such as segregation:

"There is a demand to build more and more houses. And the trouble with a small market town is the more houses you build on the outskirts, the more difficult it becomes for those people [immigrants] to be integrated into the town. I think those are main challenges." (SA-ECP-man-75)

In any case, the fact is that in the website of the Stratford-on-Avon district the following information can be read:

"Social Housing is for people who cannot afford, or who cannot find, suitable housing to rent on the open market. As Stratford-on-Avon District Council does not own any properties, all affordable housing in this area is provided by

Housing Associations. These properties are advertised and allocated through Home Choice Plus.”⁹

Thus, in tune with the Conservative party’s hegemony in Stratford-on-Avon district, there is not such a thing as public housing. Already in the 1980s, the human geographer John R. Short (1982, 220) stated that the “practice of local politics in the rural and suburban areas around metropolitan Britain is essentially the politics of exclusion”. For decades, many Conservatives in Britain have seen “public housing as an assault on the ethics of a market society”, which may pave the way to a “tenure category traditionally associated with voting for the Labour party” (Short 1982, 189). However, under Tony Blair’s “New Labour” as well, many local authorities (e.g. Coventry) voluntarily transferred their stock of council houses to housing associations. These are now large quasi-public organisations and are bound by similar laws to the public sector (e.g. the Public Sector Equality Duty), and some have actively tried to reduce ethnic segregation in their housing stock (e.g. in Bradford).

Apart from ideological bias and in spite of various efforts, ethnic bias is also a relevant challenge since, in England, “mainstream” housing associations have been primarily run by “white people” (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 1992) and, despite some mass media campaigns, since the mid-2000s the “figures of new immigrants in social housing are particularly low” (Bloch, Neal, and Solomos 2013, 80). In other words, this is a very complex issue that emerged during fieldwork in Stratford-upon-Avon and a few decades later the aforementioned biases resound regarding “white” immigrants from EU countries, including the fact that there is a lack of public housing. However, during the current decade there have been legislative changes such as the Localism Act 2011¹⁰ that have paved the way to new planning instruments like the *Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy 2011 to 2031*, adopted on 11 July 2016, which establishes the overall spatial vision for the district up to year 2031¹¹. According to an interviewed local Conservative politician, solutions will be found in the future through spreading housing developments beyond Stratford town, in surrounding villages:

“The development has been really concentrated in Stratford town because the previous [Labour] government had a policy whereas you could only

⁹ <https://www.stratford.gov.uk/homes-properties/social-housing.cfm>.

¹⁰ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/pdfs/ukpga_20110020_en.pdf.

¹¹ <https://www.stratford.gov.uk/planning-regeneration/core-strategy.cfm?fmAlias=corestrategy/>.

develop where you have the services. So there has really been a moratorium on building houses in villages, but now [late 2013], with change of government, there is a greater emphasis on some development in the villages because we have young people who live in the village, they want to get married, they want to work, they want to stay in their own home villages, so there is pressure on many quarters for development in villages, but we want to see limited development. At the moment, the local authorities, under government guidance, are setting what they call 'local plans'... so they have to forecast how many houses for example are needed before 2028 and the Conservative policy here is to have limited number of houses in different villages, for affordable housing, starter homes, social housing and private housing, so a mixture of houses in the villages." (UK-ECP-man-65)

However, there are possible new housing developments (e.g. as noted above, in Long Marston, five miles south of Stratford town) including large semi-detached houses targeted at wealthy incomers who commute to work by car. Thus, in future studies, it would be interesting to analyse how the new housing policy evolves across the Stratford-on-Avon district, particularly in relation to immigrants and young people both in town and villages. In this sense, it might be interesting to compare the situation in Stratford-on-Avon district to metropolitan places like London, where house building has not kept pace with need (NAO 2017) and there is extreme overcrowding experienced by some immigrants.

Immigrants' Integration and Social Discrimination

For several local stakeholders, immigration is not perceived as an important problem in the town's life. Due to the long established history of international tourism, the town's inhabitants seem to be used to the presence of foreigners. On the other hand, especially in summer months, the visibility of immigrants is merged with the inflow of tourists. In tune with the aforementioned official statistical data, during interviews a frequently mentioned group is Polish immigrants. They are seen as recently arrived, and also as part of an immigration phenomenon that is related to other parts of the UK too:

"There's a number of Eastern-Europeans moving to the area, because they get work in the hotel trade and also in agriculture, because we are surrounded by a big agricultural and horticultural area [...] and they employ a lot of immigrants." (UK-ENV-woman-69)

In this context, although, some “A8” immigrants live outside the town on the farms where they work and thus do not usually come into contact with native residents, during some interviews integration processes emerge as an issue worth considering, but not as a big conflict:

“I would say, a large percentage they do integrate, but when other family members come and join them, then they got themselves, so the integration unfortunately does not happen. But I would say 60% want to be involved with what goes in the town.” (UK-ECP-man-54).

“They appear to integrate. I am not aware of any trouble between native population and them. But, I think they tend to gravitate to people from their own county. I am guessing that the Poles will live with Poles in rented accommodation and socialize with them, but they would also mix in their jobs and when they are shopping with other people. I have never perceived any problem at all with it.” (UK-SC-man-65)

The Stratford-on-Avon District Council Report on Community Engagement (Stratford-on-Avon 2009) confirms the perspective provided by the interviewees. The document stated a lack of significant minorities in the District as well as pointed out on the Polish Mothers group at the Ken Kennett Centre and local black and minority ethnic groups at Warwickshire Race Equality Partnership, WREP, as the objects of ongoing consultations with authorities. On the other hand, one of the interviewed native informants indicated that in some cases, Polish immigrants remain unnoticed as a group because of their physical appearance. A similar kind of superficial invisibility of Polish immigrants has been already noted in other European towns and cities (see Bobek 2010; Wladyka and Morén-Alegret 2014):

“It sounds terrible, just saying of Polish people. I am sure that there are other immigrants as well. I am sure there are quite a few families. I mean just visually I know Asian families and Chinese families. But some of the immigrants, you would not know... I mean, you would not know if the Polish family were Polish until they speak. You do not necessarily know where people come from.” (UK-SC-woman-53)

Interestingly, the Citizen’s Advice Bureau in Stratford-upon-Avon¹² provided a Polish advisor supporting relations with Polish clients (Bayliss and Gullen 2007). However, in some interviews with Polish immigrants

¹² See: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/stratford-upon-avon-district/>.

living in Stratford-upon-Avon, a few social difficulties and social challenges emerge, including discrimination:

- "I do not have problems, but sometimes people are not very polite... the customers. Sometimes if I am going to the bank, sometimes I meet people who would not help you, they don't speak easy language, they do not want to speak to me, I completely can not understand, if I ask 'sorry, can you repeat?', they will not help, that is the problem." (PL-ECP-woman-34)
- "Do you think there is a conflict here with this?"
- "Maybe not a conflict, may be the reason is because there is a lot of Polish people, sometimes I heard that we are taking jobs from English people, but that is not true because we are working, we are doing jobs that English people don't want to do. Some people is really nice, some others not, it's life, I think that is a problem in any country." (PL-ECP-woman-34)

Other times, the issue is to adapt to usual ways of socialising among native people. Several Polish immigrants stated that it was not easy for them to talk and make English friends at public places:

"It depends on how much do you drink [...] The English have a different way of thinking, too much party persons. Too much party is not too good because you forget about important things in life." (PL-ECP-man-22)

"I think they [English] are racist, toward Poles, toward anyone. Many Englishmen have no idea where Poland is... Poles usually go home, open a bottle and drink. Englishmen don't. They go to a pub." (PL-ECP-man-50)

The aforementioned quotes illustrate a perception of differentiated social habits and discrimination/alooftness toward immigrants. In this context, multi-linguistic workplaces are sometimes not allowed and English is imposed as unique working language:

"There was a problem when speaking Polish [...] they wanted to prove to me that the other staff was more important for me than clients, because I ignored clients and spoke Polish with the staff. I also had to sign in a document that I wouldn't speak Polish, what is illegal. I found out from a lady from Human Resource that it shouldn't be like this. She's also foreign, from India. She said it was illegal, I shouldn't have signed any papers. But I had done. There is a situation, that I feel uncomfortable speaking Polish. But I know that this is my language and I won't get rid of it." (PL-ECP-woman-34)

In any case, the scarcity of social life in town is also something mentioned by some immigrants from Italy and Spain when asked about what they would improve in Stratford:

“More social life... They [English people] go out just to have a drink in the pub, there is nothing to do apart from pubs.” (SE-SC-woman-35)

Furthermore, attending theatre plays or other cultural events is difficult for most immigrant workers due to long working hours (including evening-night shifts) and “because of the financial situation, it is hard” (NA-SC-man-51). Sometimes tickets at the RSC Theatre are extremely expensive and hard to obtain, often having to be booked months in advance.

(Non-)Participation in Mainstream Local Organisations and Immigrants Self-organisation

Still, some key informants believe that in Stratford there are not as many immigrants as in other towns in the UK. Thus, the participation of immigrants in the local, traditionally established organizations is not considered as numerous. In any case, those established organizations are often believed to be hermetic and inflexible when it comes to the relations with newcomers. That would not only relate to foreign immigrants, but also to young local natives and internal immigrants coming from London or other English areas:

“I think that, anybody in Stratford moving in, you have to be the one to make the effort... It’s hard work” (UK-SC-woman-47)

“This is what is lacking: entertainment for the youth. It’s a beautiful town, it’s wonderful in summer, but it’s not a lot of things going on. Besides the theatre there is some party, a concert once a month, two months. And that’s it. There should be concerts on the river. It should be more organized. I used to take part in those events.” (PL-ECP-woman-34)

Some traditional local organizations are perceived as opposed to changes and as having an incomprehensible division of power, which provokes a situation that for many young native people and immigrants mean that they cannot engage in local politics or associations. However, when an old local political actor was asked about that, he responded that the problem of the lack of young people’s engagement in politics is due to the abuse of new technologies that are harming face-to-face politics together with a lack of interest in society as a whole (UK-ECP-man-65).

Of course, this is just an opinion but illustrates a generational gap. In any case, some newcomers are doing well: since 2010 the MP for Stratford-on-Avon has been a Conservative born in Iraq with a Kurdish ethnic background. This might have to do more with national party politics than with local inclusion, but it is an interesting window of opportunity for improving local ethnic diversity life. In this sense, it is interesting to pay attention to the following narration by a local Conservative politician of the difficult early days of the then candidate Nadhim Zarhawi facing racism and religious prejudices in Stratford-on-Avon after he was selected by the local section of the party:

“We had a huge amount of racist comments, it was quite appalling, you wouldn't thought so in somewhere like the Stratford-on-Avon constituency... after he was selected. It was dreadful. We got him to all the villages, in public meetings. The village halls were full with people to meet him. Generally, we might get 20 people turning up but we were getting more... in one village hall we had nearly 100 people turn up, to listen to him. Once they listened what he had to say... they were enthralled, they really were quite excited that we had this guy as a Conservative candidate, they liked him, and all this racism, once he met people, it was dispelled. There were rumours that he was a Muslim, you know, it was very difficult because we are a tolerant society in this country and we shouldn't have gone into it, but once people knew that he was a Christian and a Kurd it changed again, it was quite extraordinary. So he fought and he won the general election and we had a good majority, and he works hard.” (UK-ECP-man-65)

In general, Stratford-upon-Avon's town council has been run by independents or Liberal-Democrats, while the wider Stratford-on-Avon district (including several rural areas) is ruled by the Conservative party.

The so-called hermetic construction of some organizations seems to be an issue, especially if one takes into account that the associative life in Stratford is quite rich and it could attract both immigrants and young natives. Their energy could be well used in numerous charities and global responsibility activities. Instead, different socio-cultural worlds co-exist in Stratford, including one devoted to the high-culture and related to the Shakespeare heritage, and consuming most of the town's resources (although also bringing important incomes), while a second socio-cultural world is in need of more popular culture activities and leisure.

The interviewed immigrants indicate some significant obstacles to participation. The long working hours has been mentioned as an issue for the Polish immigrants working in the tourism and hospitality industry:

“When it comes to Stratford we have clubs, karate clubs, dances, salsa, martial arts, there is always something you can find interesting. I tried salsa, ju-jitsu... I tried to work out. But mostly Englishwomen were the dominant group. When it comes to appearances, people are very kind and friendly here [...] I think we [immigrants] are very overworked here. There is no time to go out. If you come to work twice a day you just don’t feel like going out. And this is what happens to the majority of people who work in this business. The Englishmen with children mostly participate in those events.” (PL-ECP-woman-34)

However, according to some native informants, there is more participation observed among Polish mothers with small children, which is similar to other research on Polish immigration elsewhere (e.g. Lopez-Rodriguez 2010; Ryan 2011; Wladyka and Morén-Alegret 2014):

“I have a Polish group that meet in here once a week with moms and babies, so it is like Polish toddler group. That age group mixes more. The old ladies and the youth do not mix at all [...] We say Polish because it is predominately Polish, but it is EU group. Although we have had a couple of Asian and Indian ladies joining in. Some of them do not speak English, both Polish and Asians. I found that children speak better English and understand better than the parents. They go to school here.” (UK-SC-woman-45)

In fact, an interesting voice of one of the Polish immigrants directly connects the situation of Polish immigrants in Stratford-upon-Avon to the Polish immigrants elsewhere in UK and Europe. The long working hours have impact on their life-style and their level of English, which influences interactions and sets-up patterns that could possibly lead to exclusion from participation in the community as well as socio-economic improvement (e.g. Fomina 2010; Wladyka and Morén-Alegret 2014):

“I think that Poles have friends. Some try to be away from other Poles, other crave for them. I think they have a lot of English friends. Those who speak the language are in a good position. But I wouldn’t call it friendship, rather acquaintance. [...] What I heard from young people, there is a disco club ‘Chicago’, a pub with a girl who pole dances. A lot of Poles spend their time on working, drinking, [...] and then working again. That’s the routine they got trapped into. They consider it to be out of their control. They think England can be a country that might lead them somewhere. I think it cannot.” (PL-ECP-man-50)

However, overcoming time difficulties, there are recent instances of Polish immigrants’ self-organisation and collaboration with the wider local society in Stratford-upon-Avon. For example, in May 2017—five hundred

years after the London xenophobic riots described by William Shakespeare in *Sir Thomas More*—the “Polish Day” was organised as a community cultural event at a Stratford hotel in support of a local charity¹³.

During fieldwork, a few instances of other immigrants participating in local charities were observed too. For example, a South European woman expressed her positive inter-generational experience as volunteer at humanitarian level but also at practical level in order to improve her English:

“It’s really a great job, just volunteering obviously, but I like to work there, it doesn’t matter the age of the people there, they are amazing... To be a volunteer is a good thing for other people, you work for poor countries, you help them to have a better life, that is why I decided to enrol as a volunteer... I had a friend who used to work there, she was from South Korea, and she said to go to [the charity] as a volunteer because it’s a good experience for you, to improve also your English.” (SE-SC-woman-35).

Besides, these instances can be interpreted as a kind of newcomers’ adaptation to British volunteering culture as well¹⁴.

Environmental Assets and Challenges

Local inhabitants are pleased with the natural surroundings of the town and appreciate the improvements of green areas within the town center, especially by the river Avon:

- “It is a nice town, it is really small and I like because it is really a green town, there is lot of space and a lot of flowers... [...] I love all the flowers that is why I feel here nice, because, for example, I do not like Birmingham, it is too big for me, there are a lot of buildings...” (PL-ECP-woman-34)
- “Which parks do you go?”
- “It depends, sometimes I like sitting next to the river... if I do not have time, I like to go near to my home but if I have more time like on Saturday I go to the park or something like that, on the river, but I do not have any special place.” (PL-ECP-woman-34)

¹³ See: <http://naszglos.co.uk>.

¹⁴ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/volunteer>.

Regarding place identity and place attachment, in general, both interviewed local stakeholders and immigrants are happy living in Stratford-upon-Avon:

“I think Stratford is a good size of town. It’s big enough to have good shops, schools, things going on... But it’s not too big that you can’t get to know people [...]. I think it’s good for young people, I think it’s quite good for retired people. I’m not sure about the ones in between. I think they maybe have to do lot more travelling for work. I’m happy here.” (UK-ENV-woman-69)

“Stratford has the best [theatre] company in the world ... and you can go to the theatre every week... and be able to travel out to the Cotswolds, and travel up to Birmingham. It’s absolutely great ... not to have all the noise, smell and anger that you have in London.” (UK-SC-woman-47)

During interviews just a few environmental concerns emerged and car traffic is one of the most mentioned: “I would say that the only problems that we have in this town are severe problems as far as road traffic problems” (UK-ECP-man-54). Car traffic is regarded both as an economic issue and as an environmental issue. From the former point of view, if it is not well managed it can endanger traditional retail commerce in the town center, so the solution for some would be “free parking and easy parking” (UK-SC-woman-34). However, for others, there are better ways of managing the arrival of visitors:

“The difficulty for us of course is that most of our visitors, half has arrived by coach, which is better than car I know, so traffic in the way people travel is obviously an interest to us, we try to encourage using of public transports, we work very hard with train companies to improve the services to Stratford. [...] For us, in terms of business, it is that travelling to get here that is the big area that we could really make a significant difference.” (IN-ECP-woman-53)

Additionally, for some others, floods are a relevant issue at the local and county levels: “it was very bad a couple of years ago” (UK-SC-woman-47). This interviewee thinks that it is a regular thing, but floods can also be related to construction near the rivers and natural drainages.

However, for others these issues are not environmental problems in Stratford-upon-Avon:

- “I believe that we haven’t got any environmental concerns here at all.” (UK-ECP-man-54)
- “Floods?”

- "Not really. Our last severe flood was in 1999, I believe, but again... didn't cause any serious damage." (UK-ECP-man-54)

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that immigrants' participation in local environmental organisations has not been very relevant so far. For instance, in the Stratford Ramblers there was only one Spanish regular member and two other members from the Netherlands, and ethnic minority members were very few too. According to a Ramblers representative, there is no reason why they should not join their group, "but it's quite difficult to get them interested" (UK-ENV-woman-69). One explicative factor might be lack of private car among most immigrants, since public transport in the district in general is poor and expensive. However, there is also the cultural fact that environmental activism has not been evenly practiced across the world (Wall 1999) and in some countries it is not a mainstream issue. At last but not least, one additional motive for limited participation in local associations (besides also the above discussed long work hours) could be plans for relocation, since some interviewed immigrants mentioned their living in Stratford as a temporary stay in order to later move up to a big city or elsewhere in Europe.

Conclusions

In contrast with the aforementioned William Shakespeare's literary piece, our conversations with Stratford-upon-Avon's native and immigrant key informants—as well as observation of town's life—showed that its contemporary inhabitants appear far from constituting (or converting into) a xenophobic mob. In general terms, in the eyes of interviewees, the pre-Brexit Stratford-upon-Avon is a welcoming place that strives to make the best use of its assets and makes attempts to develop in a sustainable manner. Although Stratford can be considered as peripheral in geographical terms (e.g. periphery of the Cotswolds rural region and periphery of Birmingham metropolitan region) and could have become peripheral in socio-economic terms in Wallerstein's understanding, cultural tourism development became a key factor that put Stratford-upon-Avon closer to the England's core rather than to the so-called periphery.

Obviously, Stratford-upon-Avon is also far from being a utopian scenario and is currently challenged by several issues that, unless effectively solved, could potentially harm the local community life. As in many resorts, various key informants perceive that the local economy is frequently equated with "tourism". Although several tourism-independent start-ups and investments were mentioned, those developments bring mostly middle-class highly educated employees with families, while a vast

number of Stratford residents (especially immigrants) are still tied to various branches of touristic industry. On the other hand, there was a lack of trust in some fluctuating (speculative) foreign investments because they were perceived as lacking a commitment with the local economy.

Moreover, some housing developments of national/local innovative companies are regarded quasi-negatively because they bring affluent employees that could contribute to additional huge increases in housing prices. In fact, housing appears as one of the current major concerns in the eyes of key informants related to social organisations. While the affordability of private housing is a commonly known issue in some touristic destinations, the wages gap in Stratford increases its impact and could possibly lead to major social divides.

In this sense, another “gap” is also a threat to town’s sustainable development: several key informants have mentioned that while multiple social organisations exist in Stratford, many of them are actually serving the affluent seniors (including foreign retirees) of the town, but they are not inviting enough to youth and immigrants. Regarding immigration, various racist tendencies were reported during interviews but the fact that most immigrants were perceived as hard working and Christians dispelled racism up to certain point. As it has recently reported, William Shakespeare’s view of the world was a European view (Freyne 2016) and, as stated in a BBC (2012) documentary, one third of William Shakespeare plays are set in Italy, while others are set in Greece, France or Denmark. Moreover, Stratford-upon-Avon is an international place, but the Brexit referendum campaign put a lot of pressure on xenophobic/nationalistic feelings and Stratford-on-Avon constituency voted for leaving the EU by a narrow margin (51.6% for Brexit against 48.4% for remain). While Brexit negotiations are still at a very early stage, in future migration studies more attention should be paid to places like Stratford-on-Avon district—considered as part of the England’s heart—in order to keep on reflecting from the ground why a significant part of a country open to the world like the UK wants to leave the EU.

So far it can be taken into account that Brexit vote was associated with older people and Conservative voters, and Stratford-on-Avon has a high percentage of older people. Neighbouring areas to the south voted similarly in the referendum. However, Stratford does not have many of the so-called “left-behind” white working class, which voted for Brexit in northern post-industrial areas, but without a large higher education establishment did not have a higher-status ‘educated’ young pro-Remain Population either. In the current context of Stratford-on-Avon district, apart from some dangers for the tourism industry (including the

recruitment of staff in pubs), a major uncertainty post-Brexit is the position of the agricultural-farming sector (including nurseries) and from where the UK will recruit workers. One may wonder if the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme will be revived in order to recruit workers from non-EU Eastern Europe and Russia. Time (and geography) will tell.

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