

# Patterns of Cooperation and Non-Cooperation – the Case of Polish Immigrant Organisations in Germany

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**Abstract:** The article aims to investigate the cooperation patterns characteristic of Polish immigrant organisations in Germany. A situation analysis suggests a relatively broad collaborative network, with more than 100 Polish immigrant organisations in existence. However, the practice of the organisations' functioning shows that, in fact, PIOs often function in a kind of organisational vacuum. They cannot nor do not want to cooperate with a large group of potential partners. In the article, we will also try to justify this state of affairs and find the barriers that limit the possibilities of cooperation of Polish immigrant organisations in Germany.

**Keywords:** immigrant organisations, migration, diaspora, cooperation, conflict, intra-organisational cooperation

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

The Polish community in Germany results from over 200 years of intensive migration processes. Consequently, there are currently almost 870,000 Polish citizens (Destatis, 2021a: 23) and more than two million people with a Polish migration background in the Federal Republic of Germany (Destatis 2021: 58). People from Poland remain the second-largest immigrant community in Germany, after Turks. A characteristic feature of the Polish community in Germany is its heterogeneity. Migrants from Poland

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came to Germany in many migratory waves that differed significantly in motives, socio-demographic characteristics, and even ethnicity<sup>3</sup>. Both the research results and the observation of the public sphere of the Polish community indicate the existence of differences between people with varied migration experiences, coming from diverse generations, and finally, living in different German federal states (Nowosielski, 2016). Perhaps this internal diversity results in relatively low social cohesion, which manifests itself – among others – in the “invisibility” of the Polish immigrant community in Germany (Loew, 2014; Nowosielski, 2016)<sup>4</sup>.

The heterogeneity of the Polish community in Germany might also explain the existence of a diverse network of Polish immigrant organisations<sup>5</sup> (“PIOs”), which is estimated at over 100 associations. Many of these were established either in the 1990s or after 2004, although there are also organisations with a much longer history. Most PIOs, which might be called “traditional”, declare themselves primarily active in cultural activities – like sustaining Polish identity or teaching the Polish language – and are dedicated to the internal integration of the Polish community in Germany. However, there is also a growing number of “new” organisations focused more on social issues, including the integration of Polish migrants into German society. The essential features that characterise PIOs in Germany include poverty, the relatively low involvement of the Polish community in their activities, and the lack of consistent representation in the form of one umbrella organisation (Nowosielski, 2016).

Moreover, these organisations are often perceived as quarrelsome and conflicted (Loew, 2014; Nagel, 2009). The sources of these frictions are usually ideological and entail political differences, generational conflicts, and competition for resources. However, previous research shows that opinions about conflicts between organisations are often exaggerated. At the same time, the problem that significantly affects organisations may concern insufficient cooperation between organisations rather than internal strife (Nowosielski, 2012, 2016). Therefore, the goal of this article is to analyse the patterns of cooperation between Polish immigrant organisations in Germany. It aims to discuss the level of collaboration and its intensity and conditions. We are especially interested in showing – using case studies – the attitudes of PIO leaders toward cooperation, examples of such cooperation, their motivators, barriers and outcomes.

<sup>3</sup> Among the important waves of migration from Poland to Germany were *Aussiedler* (re-settlers) and *Spätaussiedler* (late re-settlers) who left Poland for Germany on the basis of having or claiming German nationality. In fact, this category grouped people with diverse identities: Germans, so-called “autochthonic” people such as Silesians, Kashubes, Mazurs, as well as people of Polish identity for whom claiming to be *Aussiedler* was one of the very few opportunities to flee from communist Poland (Stola, 2010). For more on the migration of *Aussiedler* see: Dietz, 2006; Hofmann, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> More detailed studies on the Polish community in Germany, especially in Berlin can be found in: Prasałowicz, 2010; Szczepaniak-Kroll, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Immigrant organisations are defined here as associations established by and for immigrants to provide social, economic and cultural services or those which represent and seek to advance the broadly understood interests of communities (Rodriguez-Fraticelli et al., 1991). For more discussion on defining immigrant organisations see: Moya, 2005; Nowosielski & Dziegłowski, 2021.

## Inter-organisational cooperation

Firstly, it should be stated that cooperation between associations is not at the centre of research on immigrant organisations. Instead, it is a rarely discussed topic. However, one can refer to the relatively rich literature on organisations and management studies, which devotes much more attention to the issue of collaboration between various types of entities. The choice of such a conceptual background is conditioned by the fact that usually in social sciences – sociology, psychology, anthropology or economics – cooperation issues are perceived in the context of relations between individuals and less frequently between organisations. Organisational theory and studies provide more relevant concepts describing and explaining this field.

Cooperation can be defined as the “process by which individuals, groups, and organisations come together, interact, and form psychological relationships for mutual gain or benefit” (Smith et al., 1995: 10). According to John R. Schermerhorn (1975: 847), inter-organisational cooperation can be described with various notions that carry different meanings, like organisational interdependence, cooperation, exchange, and concerted decision-making between two or more organisations.

Cooperation between organisations can take two primary forms: formal and informal. Formal cooperation can be described through formal rules and regulations describing the relationships between partners, shared goals and setting control mechanisms (Vlaar et al., 2007). An example of formal cooperation typical for NGOs are umbrella organisations, which may be interpreted as a federation of associations (Zbucha et al., 2018). Informal cooperation relies instead on informal social control and an unwritten agreement about common goals and shared beliefs about achieving them (Farrell, Heritier, 2002).

An important issue in the study of inter-organisational cooperation is the motivation to collaborate – one can look at it from two perspectives. Firstly, from the perspective of the organisation. In this context, we can talk about three motivators:

- resource scarcity or performance distress;
- positive valorisation of cooperation;
- influence of powerful extra-organisational which demands cooperation (Schermerhorn, 1975: 848–849).

Secondly, one can also take a more individual perspective; that of the manager or leader of the organisation, and pay attention to their personal motivators. Beth Gazley (2008: 37) identifies four groups of such influences:

- personal traits, like gender or political ideology;
- training/education;
- environmental/regulatory factors, like policies, availability of partners, capacity or need;

- direct/indirect experience, like reputation of a partner, results of past partnerships, trust, and experience as a volunteer.

Inter-organisational cooperation is usually perceived as a source of benefits for all the parties engaged. In the context of cooperation between NGOs and creating their networks, Marya L. Doerfel and Maureen Taylor (2004) mention organisational profits like access to information, additional resources or future potential partners. Other researchers dealing with inter-organisational cooperation also mention gains like increased environmental adaptation, creation of competitive advantage, access to critical resources, expanded market power, cost-sharing, risk reduction, and improved flexibility (Yu, Chen, 2013: 1226). However, cooperation means not only benefits but also potential costs for organisations. These may be loss of autonomy in decision making, image losses related to the risk of perceiving the organisation as not fully independent, and costs of rare organisational resources (Schermerhorn, 1975). The fear of these costs may constitute significant barriers to cooperation.

## Data

The analysis is based on data from multi-level studies<sup>6</sup> conducted in the years 2016–2018 that included:

- a survey among immigrant organisations in Germany (N = 24), carried out using the institutional survey technique. The questionnaire was sent to over 100 organisations, the return rate was around 25%;
- in-depth interviews with experts on Polish immigrant organisations in Germany (N = 7) based on purposive sampling, taking into account the criterion of maximum differentiation (professional activity). They included two women and five men, three of whom were related to Polish diplomacy in Germany; one was a representative of the Polonia media. There were also two experienced activists of the organisation and a researcher investigating issues related to Poles in Germany;
- case studies of Polish immigrant organisations in Germany (N = 5) based on purposive sampling, taking into account the criterion of maximum differentiation (location, year of establishment, main fields of activity). It was planned to conduct four in-depth interviews (with three representatives of the organisation and one representative of its environment). Ultimately, in the case of two smaller organisations, three interviews were conducted. Apart from IDI, observation and analysis of documentation, including analysing the organisations' websites, were used.

When selecting the organisation for the study, there were several criteria followed. The first was geographic diversity; closely related to the geographical dispersion of the Polish community in Germany, the size of the town; finally, the organisation’s characteristics. These criteria led us to select the five organisations described in Table 1.

Table 1.

Characteristics of organisations selected for the case studies

<p><b>Organization A</b></p>	<p>One of the longest operating associations in Germany that runs Polish language schools in several cities. One can describe the organisation as active. It perceives its role in raising new generations of Poles in Germany in the spirit of attachment to the homeland. Moreover, the organisation’s representatives describe it as an “ambassador of Polishness”. Organisation A’s activities are aimed primarily at school-age children interested in learning the Polish language. These are the children of both new migrants and the Poles already living in Germany and having German citizenship.</p>
<p><b>Organisation B</b></p>	<p>Operating in one of the main cities of Germany, B was established in the second decade of the 21st century and, therefore, may be defined as a new organisation, especially open to post-accession migrants. It is very dynamic, conducts wide-ranging activities, and takes care of self-promotion. The primary forms of activity is training, meetings, and workshops covering various topics – from integration in the German labour market to childcare or the psychological aspects of dealing with divorce. Organisation B’s target group is primarily migrant women. Their main goal is to support this group in various dimensions, which usually relate to broadly-understood integration: both with German society (e.g., in the labour market) and with the Polish community (e.g., with other Polish women).</p>
<p><b>Organisation C</b></p>	<p>Established a few years after Poland’s accession to the EU, C is very active, mainly thanks to the support of the local government in one of the largest German cities. Due to this support and financial security for its activities, the organisation’s condition in this aspect may be assessed as good. The goal of organisation C is to support Polish migrants – especially in their integration with German society, to lobby for Polish people, and improve the situation of the Polish community in Germany. It seeks to integrate this community internally, including the creation of structures related to self-help. The direct recipients of the association’s activities are Poles who have problems adapting to German society.</p>
<p><b>Organisation D</b></p>	<p>Established in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, D deals primarily with organising various events and meetings – both one-off and cyclical, aimed at residents of a small town in the Polish-German borderland. Organisation D sets itself the primary goal of the cultural integration and activation of the Poles and Germans who are excluded from the mainstream of both societies. It also wants to encourage cooperation between Polish and German neighbours.</p>

Table 1 cont.

<b>Organisation E</b>	Founded in the 1990s, E is a local umbrella organisation associating other PIOs operating in a large German city. However, its activity is hybrid in nature because apart from the activity resulting from stimulating cooperation between other organisations, it organises various events and meetings itself, which representatives of the local Polish community quite frequently visit. Organisation E has various goals, including internal integration of both Polish organisations in Germany and the Polish community living in Germany. Another important goal they have set is to represent not just other organisations but the entire local Polish community. Objectives related to cultural affirmation are also important – primarily maintaining Polish identity and language. The recipients of the activities of E are mainly people identifying themselves with Polish culture.
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Source: Own elaboration.

## Cooperation and non-cooperation of Polish immigrant organisations in Germany

### “A certain weakness refers to large divisions” – experts’ views

The experts interviewed devoted much attention to issues of cooperation between the PIOs in Germany. Clearly, the collaboration between organisations (or lack thereof) is perceived as an essential factor affecting the activities and situation of PIOs. However, experts’ opinions on the quality of cooperation were often inconsistent. The respondents claimed that some of the PIOs could develop fruitful cooperation. They even gave specific examples of such good, harmonious collaboration.

*There are signs of very good and intense cooperation, and I always, maybe not always, but often emphasise that (...) such an example of good cooperation is the town of [name], one with a population of 200,000, with several organisations associating the Polish diaspora (...). Several organisations work well together. (A\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Germany)*

Nevertheless, other experts were more critical as they drew attention to the negative phenomena of lack of cooperation. What is more, the experts, when asked about relations between PIOs, often focused on conflicts instead of cooperation, as if struggles between organisations were more frequent or more noticeable. The conflicts between organisations and within the organisations themselves were perceived as important factors weakening their condition and limiting activity. In this sense, some of the experts perceived the overall situation of PIOs in terms of disunity between them.

*A certain weakness refers to large divisions. (...) If those divisions turn into fighting or stalking, it weakens everyone, and I get the impression that many activists do not realise it being like a double-edged sword. (...) The concept of divisions itself is OK, but the way*

*in which they function or pay too much attention to those divisions, or some animosities, is highly negative. (9\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Germany)*

The experts pointed to two different sources of divisions between PIOs. The first was supposed to be a fight for power and domination between leaders. It is also a factor that negatively affects the internal cohesion of the organisations and is a frequent reason for their disintegration.

*[The conflicts] come mainly from the will to have power. (...) Because they result from some approach to organisation as to having something, I do not know, once given. For me it is inconceivable, incomprehensible and funny. (...) This is, you know, a matter of two years and in a moment, you see that the organisation is falling apart. Why? Because the one standing, who was elected to power, sees it differently than the one who would also like to have this power. And the dismantling of these organisations begins. (10\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Germany)*

The second source of divisions between organisations is a result of generational conflict. The experts observe a tension between “old” and “new” organisations that often prevents them from taking up joint initiatives, creating an atmosphere of distrust and conflict.

*If these people from the older Polish community say – ‘I know better, I am here for 20, 30, 50 years, and you do not know anything’ – it is obvious that this [young] person is going his or her own way to prove them wrong. And most often, it turns out, most paradoxically, this polarisation leads to the fact that this younger person is so stubborn (...) that she or he does it. But it does not help to bring the two groups together. (8\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Germany)*

When talking about cooperation between PIOs, experts often mention the functioning of the umbrella organisations. Some of the respondents perceived this type of cooperation in the shape of formal federalisation as important and necessary, even if their evaluation of specific actions and undertakings of such structures is often ambivalent.

*There are roof structures that work together. You can look at those structures positively and negatively in various ways. However, they do function, which is some value. In a sense, those structures (...) represent different parts and regions of Germany, better or worse, skilfully or ineptly, but they do, and it is hard to neglect. (9\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Germany)*

More often, however, the experts criticised the state of umbrella organisations. Some of them emphasised the crisis within the most important umbrella organisation – the Convention of the Polish Organizations in Germany<sup>7</sup>. Despite its initial

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<sup>7</sup> The Convention of Polish Organisations in Germany was established in 1998 and has been recognised by the Polish authorities as representative of Poles in Germany. In the second decade of the 21st century, the organisation went through a severe crisis, resulting in its activities being suspended. Attempts to restore it are currently being observed.

strong position, that organisation has significantly weakened in recent years. This may negatively affect the situation of all the PIOs in Germany because as a result, there is no “one Polish voice” in Germany. At the same time, the German institutions often expect Polish organisations to unite.

*From my point of view – and I have been observing the development of the issue since, say, the mid-1990s – we can see the consolidation that began in the mid-1990s on the initiative of (...) Ambassador Andrzej Byrt. That consolidation lasted until 2004/2005, and then in recent years, due to the collapse of the Convention, we have observed the reverse process. Or rather, the decomposition of the Polish diaspora organisations as roof structures, which is also associated with various personal ambitions in the management of those organisations and, unfortunately, deprives the Polish community of a single strong unified voice. The structures seem to be atomised, which, in my opinion, is not good and does not serve the interests of the Poles living here. (5\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Germany)*

According to the experts interviewed, the main reason for the Convention’s crisis seems to be conflicts – both inside the Convention itself and attacks from outside, from other organisations questioning the Convention’s legitimacy to represent the Polish community in Germany.

*I have the impression that this cooperation is difficult, but it was evident from the example of the Convention of Polish Organisations in Germany that the ambitions of individual leaders disrupted this structure. There was not so much sense and respect for the higher good of speaking with one voice, and that is why these structures fell apart. My impression is that every man for himself and there is not much cooperation. And this cooperation is difficult. (5\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Germany)*

## Cooperation and non-cooperation – the organisations’ perspective

According to the findings of the institutional survey, it can be said that the cooperation between Polish organisations in Germany is not highly intensive. Two questions were asked – one concerning intensity of cooperation with other PIOs, and the other on membership in Polish umbrella organisations.

The survey results show that although only one of the 24 organisations surveyed declared that it did not cooperate with any other Polish association, as many as 14 stated that they undertook such cooperation occasionally, and only eight did so regularly<sup>8</sup>.

Similarly, affiliation to umbrella organisations or, by the German nomenclature, “roof organisations” (*Dachorganisationen*) is not popular. Out of 24 associations analysed, only nine confirmed that they belonged to various types of formal federations associating PIOs. The remaining 15 remained outside of these. Moreover, in

<sup>8</sup> One organisation did not answer this question.

many cases, various organisations were cited – most often the Convention of Polish Organisations in Germany, the Congress of Polish Diaspora in Germany, or regional networks such as the Communications Office of Polish Organisations in Hanover and Lower Saxony.

This picture of rather non-intensive cooperation between PIOs finds its confirmation in data from case studies, which – in more detail – provide information on how the organisations cooperate or not with each other.

### **“Everyone sees their own garden” – organisation A**

Organisation A is quite well networked among other PIOs in Germany, according to the respondents. It has close links with many organisations.

*I mean, we have contacts with basically all organisations. (1\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

At the same time, it was emphasised that organisation A did not conflict with other associations. The respondents indicated that some frictions might have occurred, but it is a normal thing observed among various NGOs. It may result from conflicting goals, competition, or even personal aversions. However, these frictions are not perceived as abnormal or a hinderance to the organisation’s situation.

*This patch, which is often pinned on, is that emigration, that Poles are arguing and so on. I think that they do not argue any more or less than what is observed in Poland, and basically in the German parliament or in German organisations. It is simply life. (1\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

However, it is worth noting that neither an extensive network of contacts and relations with other organisations nor the lack of significant conflicts necessarily means developed and intensive cooperation. It only suggests a declarative willingness for collaboration.

*There is no organisation with which [organisation A] is somehow in conflict, if – I do not know – they would signal that they would like some cooperation, some one-time contact, we would not say no. (1\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

Moreover, statements made by members of organisation A show that actual examples of such cooperation are relatively rare. In other words, there are collaboration opportunities, but in many cases they are not being used. The reason for that may be the focus of activities of an organisation, and the lack of alertness to the benefits of strengthening contacts and developing cooperation.

*And here, as if for today, one could say that this is our weakness, because even declaratively such will [of cooperation] does not exist too much, that everyone sees their own garden. (1\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

This diagnosis finds its confirmation in the fact that the interviews and analysis of the organisation's website demonstrate that A cooperates closely and intensively with only one association – an umbrella organisation.

*A is a collective member of [name of the umbrella organisation], it is a roof organisation, and as long as it does not have its own schools, it actually actively supports us when it comes to these educational issues. (1\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

Interestingly, the relationship with this umbrella organisation is also personal – the members of organisation A belong to this association, and the boards of both organisations are partially composed of the same people. Thus, one can talk about a kind of “personal union” linking both organisations.

*In fact, part of the board also belongs to [name of the umbrella organisation], and each individual is a member. (3\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

The main reason for close cooperation with this umbrella organisation is the willingness to present the priority of organisation A regarding the teaching of the Polish language in the broader context of the Polish community's situation in Germany. The potential of organisation A is too small to break through into public and political discourses with its demands. Cooperation with the umbrella organisation, closely involved in the Polish-German dialogue, gives such opportunities. However, it is worth emphasising that the condition for such close cooperation was the convergence of goals and values of both associations.

*We, as A, are too small an organisation for us to be able to make our voice heard, I have my reasons, I can defend my arguments, and I do not know, I can sit down with everybody to comment on it, but you know, that you always talk to the greatest, strongest, those who represent someone (...). These considerations decided that we did not want to be completely alone, and [name of the umbrella organisation] represents the same values to as we do. (1\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

Although both close cooperation with the umbrella organisation and personal relations between the two associations were underlined, the respondents of organisation A also emphasised their independence from the larger and stronger partner. This issue has clearly been the subject of controversy and discussion both inside and outside the organisation.

*We are not subject to [name of the umbrella organisation], we are actually a part of it, but as a whole, we are in general independent. (27\_IDI\_O1d\_POIE\_Germany)*

*In fact, we are in no way dependent or limited by [name of the umbrella organisation] (...). I am saying this because I am often suggested that this is dependence on [name of the umbrella organisation], but I protest, because [our] whole politics depends only on what the management of A decides. (1\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

Information about cooperation with other organisations, including educational ones, was much less frequent. A deeper analysis shows that this type of collaboration is rather occasional and unsystematic. Sometimes it takes the form of using the services of other organisations.

*We cooperate, we have good contacts with cultural organisations, that is, if there is any information that somewhere, I do not know, [is something] in which our youth could participate in, we try to use it as much as possible. (1\_IDI\_O\_POIE\_Germany)*

### **“We would definitely like to do something together because we are women’s organisations” – organisation B**

The analysis of the organisation B representatives’ statements on cooperation with other Polish organisations gives a somewhat ambiguous picture. The analysis of this case study shows that B is an association eager to collaborate with other PIOs and willing to network and implement joint ventures with partners.

*We are open to cooperation. We are talking with [name of the cooperating organisation]. We want to meet other organisations and think about our cooperation. (13\_IDI\_O2c\_POIE\_Germany)*

However, in the case of organisation B, one can speak of limited-range cooperation – mostly with selected partnering organisations that, to some extent, are similar to B. This organisation tends to concentrate primarily on collaboration with other women’s organisations and new organisations created by post-accession migrants.

*But we would definitely like to do something together because we are women’s organisations, it is worth it. (...) So we also did some cooperation (...) We did some workshops together. (13\_IDI\_O2c\_POIE\_Germany)*

This constraint of the field of cooperation is also visible in the fact that the B is connected to the new umbrella association, which primarily brings together novel organisations and focuses on social issues.

*This cooperation is in fact under the roof of a kind of organisation (...) for example, last year [name of the umbrella organisation] was doing workshops and one of our girls, women was a speaker there, so we are trying (...) you know. It is some kind of common idea. (11\_IDI\_O2a\_POIE\_Germany)*

The specific topics around which the activities of the B organisation are focused – supporting women and their integration into German society – have a negative and positive influence on the cooperation possibilities of organisation B. On the one hand,

such goals allow limiting competition with the majority of Polish organisations that deal with issues related to cultural affirmation.

*Here the organisation very often tries not to get involved in one thing, also to be neutral, to embrace everyone, but we do not go into these cultural issues. Many Polish organisations deal with the issue of culture, and that is why we do not want to be a competition. (14\_IDI\_O2d\_POIE\_Germany)*

On the other hand, such a distinct focus of the organisations blocks the path to cooperation with cultural associations, due to the significant divergence of aims and methods of operation.

*We were invited under the roof to [name and surname of the chairman of one of the umbrella organisations], but it kind of put us off ... because he deals with this culture, these events, and this is not our direction. (13\_IDI\_O2c\_POIE\_Germany)*

Such a strategy may also stem from the reluctance to cooperate with traditional Polish diaspora organisations, which – in many cases – do not enjoy trust from new post-accession migrants. It is also clear that some of the representatives of organisation B either have negative personal experiences from contacts with traditional organisations or do not perceive them as important (or even potential) partners at all.

*I feel insecure, and I have problems with Polish organisations because sometimes I do not know how to talk to Poles. And this is what I see, there are certain structures that I cannot see and these intrigues. (...). I had my own experiences with other organisations, including the Polish community network. I walked into it suddenly and got a cold shower. 'Do not come in here, go away', gossips, things like that. And I said: 'God, no'. (12\_IDI\_O2b\_POIE\_Germany)*

A critical thread mentioned by the activists of organisation B, which reflects their reluctance to cooperate with traditional organisations, is the experience of being used by some of the traditional associations. On the one hand, such attempts consisted of treating organisation B as an object rather than a subject – entrusting it with non-prestigious and challenging tasks and not taking into account the organisation's voice in the discussion and planning of joint activities.

*At some point, it started to happen that someone invited us to cooperate, and it turned out that there was no time to decide who did what. Everything is already done, the poster is here, everything (...). And suddenly I heard that (...) 'do some shopping and clean up'. I said 'no, enough!', because these girls, my colleagues, will do anything because they want to do it, but I think that at the moment respect for them is also important, that they should also be invited to the table and that they decide what they can do, and what they cannot. (13\_IDI\_O2c\_POIE\_Germany)*

On the other hand, taking advantage of organisation B could have been an attempt to appropriate or claim B's merits and successes.

*It can be said that at the beginning, the association was treated slightly neglected, and now many of these, even older organisations, would like to pin B to their lapel. (14\_IDI\_O2d\_POIE\_Germany)*

Consequently, representatives of organisation B reveal that it cooperates more willingly with partners other than PIOs, among which traditional organisations tend to dominate. Therefore, they are looking for partners outside of the Polish ethnic group. In this context, they also state that their multicultural approach makes it easier for them to look for partners among German institutions or other non-Polish immigrant organisations.

*Because I was multicultural. I am the type that unites with everyone: Bulgarians, Hungarians, Turks – I have diverse friends. And I like it and I have never felt the need to be here with the Polish diaspora. (12\_IDI\_O2b\_POIE\_Germany)*

### **“I did not receive any invitation to cooperate” – organisation C**

The relations of organisation C with other PIOs can be called ambivalent. On the one hand, there are descriptions of fruitful cooperation and involvement in the new network of organisations that aims at joint representation of the interests of Polish migrants.

*Exactly, building this network of Polish organisations in Germany. (...) And forming a kind of common front against the German government because, so to speak, we want to raise awareness of the problems Poles have because Poles do not speak out. (...) We belong to the [name of the umbrella organisation]. To this roof organisation. We are in the net. (15\_IDI\_O3a\_POIE\_Germany)*

However, this cooperation seems to be, to some degree, vague. According to the representatives of organisation C, this cooperation usually does not take any specific form apart from an exchange of experiences. Only occasionally are joint ventures organised.

*Exchange of experiences, exchange of good practices, exchange of various conferences, e.g., you have such a conference, we have such a conference, come to us, we to you. We meet at meetings, now we have organised a workshop in the summer (...) Such a forum and as if we support each other with advice. (15\_IDI\_O3a\_POIE\_Germany)*

It is worth mentioning that the cooperation, in this case, is perceived through utilitarian purposes – as a way to have access to more comprehensive resources,

especially in the context of relations with the German authorities of different levels. According to the president of organisation C, better internal integration of PIOs might help obtain better funding.

*I mean now we are trying to work with this network of Polish organisations, it was a very good idea, all over the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany, because, as I can see how well organised other nationalities are, federal organisations, i.e., roof organisations, have. There are also very good subsidies for this in Germany, so I think it is advisable to organise. (15\_IDI\_O3a\_POIE\_Germany)*

On the other hand, the representatives of organisation C mentioned (often bitterly) circumstances where cooperation had not been possible. This happened in two types of situations. Firstly, collaboration was either hard or impossible in the case of traditional organisations centred around the Polish Catholic Mission. Such organisations seemed not to be interested in joint ventures with the new, developing organisation C.

*In [the city where organisation cooperates], Mr. [name of a prominent Polish activist] was such a very well-known figure. And when I came to him and said that I wanted to act, do something for Poles, I did not receive any invitation to cooperate or something to say: come, let us do some joint project. (15\_IDI\_O3a\_POIE\_Germany)*

Interestingly, representatives of organisation C expected good will for cooperation and some kind of support in organising new initiatives and projects. However, the traditional organisation was not eager to give this.

*Because, for example, this organisation, this Polish community (...). They do not support [name of the organisation's leader] very much, and she can submit a project for co-financing learning [Polish as a] mother tongue. There is nowhere to do it, and there is no one to help her. And it is, for example, very unpleasant. (25\_IDI\_O3b\_POIE\_Germany)*

The reasons for the lack of cooperation with traditional organisations, as described by the representatives of C organisation, may lie in the feeling that activists of traditional organisations are threatened by competition from a new wave of migrants. In fact, the president of organisation C claims that such activists are often poorly educated and afraid of new immigrants who often have better competencies and better skills in managing organisations and therefore pose a threat to them.

*I have noticed that here people without education, without studies (...) made careers there [in PIOs]. They slipped in there somehow, and at the moment, they are stuck in these positions, and they do not want to let go of them at all. (...) And so far, they are trying to compete somehow [organisation C] because they feel threatened simply by young, educated people. (15\_IDI\_O3a\_POIE\_Germany)*

The second type of situation in which collaboration with other organisations is hampered relates to personal animosities and preferences of the activists – in the case of organisation C, especially its president. In their own words, the reluctance to cooperate with some people comes from the reaction to their commercial nature.

*Well, sometimes, I am a little surprised that there is such a desire for profit. I mean, I am from a family of social activists. (...) I sometimes get questions: what will I get out of it? Well, let us say ... that I thought it was more ideological, that it was such help, that it really was solidarity, solidarity with people from this country. (...) And here I have the impression sometimes that it is also mainly about [money]. (15\_IDI\_O3a\_POIE\_Germany)*

However, one of the respondents outside of the organisation pays more attention to the characteristic of the organisation C's president, who is described as a conflict person, not getting along with other people and causing some controversies within the Polish community. This may influence the image of the organisation and the willingness to cooperate with it.

*And the main problem is that it is (...) an organisation of one person. Therefore, the views of this person have an impact on the operation of the entire organisation (...) There was such a situation that they could not organise activities for children themselves and they had 1,500 euros to donate to someone and they wanted to pass it on to the [one of the traditional Polish organisations], but the [organisation] did not want to cooperate with them. And now is the question. They did not want to, because they [had perceived C as] too pro-German or because some features or behaviour of some individuals in the past influenced that someone did not want to cooperate with them. (26\_IDI\_O3c\_POIE\_Germany)*

## **“It was such an empty shell” – organisation D**

Organisation D has poorly developed cooperation with other Polish organisations operating in Germany. In fact, according to its leader, there is no collaboration with any of the PIOs.

*There is absolutely no [such cooperation]. (16\_IDI\_O4a\_POIE\_Germany)*

The most straightforward explanation of that fact is that it is located on the peripheries – the Polish-German border, far from Polish centres. In such a case, on the one hand, these limitations would be objective in nature, but on the other hand, thanks to the ever-improving technical possibilities of contact and communication, they could be easily overcome by the organisation.

However, deeper analysis proves that there are also other conditions behind the lack of cooperation. It seems that the leaders of organisation D tried to develop collaboration with other PIOs – located in one of the major German cities. However, this

experience, which turned out to be hard and disappointing, only further exacerbated the isolation of organisation D.

*First, great hopes, and then I engaged into diverse, intense activities. Later it turned out that it brought no results at all, so I lost hope (...) It turned out that it was such an empty shell, and unfortunately nothing is hidden there. Nothing is hidden except that good first impression. (17\_IDI\_O4b\_POIE\_Germany)*

### **“This cooperation (...) is based on good friendships or personal contacts” – organisation E**

In the case of organisation E, the situation related to cooperation with other PIOs is specific because E is a local umbrella organisation. Consequently, its existence, as it were, is based on collaboration. However, it is not easy to define its scope clearly. It seems that there are at least two elementary ways of cooperation. First of all, it is about organising joint meetings where various issues related to the functioning of the local Polish community are discussed.

*We here try to invite all our member organisations and all organisations known to us once or twice a year, in spring or autumn... Some are involved using the meeting to activate contacts and business cards. (20\_21\_IDI\_O5b\_POIE\_Germany)*

The second way of cooperation described in the interviews concerns joint venture preparation and implementation. In this context, particularly important are projects which – thanks to the cooperation of many partners – may be more significant in scale and thus may be more costly. In such a case, organisations join forces to achieve goals they cannot realise independently.

*It is easier for many organisations to carry out a larger project if they merge into a working group. Because large projects, first of all, are difficult to carry out financially, because (...) an organisation that carries out large projects must have serious financial security because projects are settled after implementation. And to make a party for 20–30 thousand you have to give ten of your own. There is no such organisation in [name of the city] and Germany with such large financial security. (20\_21\_IDI\_O5b\_POIE\_Germany)*

As a rule, there are good relations between the organisations associated in organisation E. One can even speak of a friendly atmosphere. This is because it has been maintained for years and seems to have become a set of established social relationships.

*This cooperation, to be honest, in many situations, is based on good friendships or personal contacts. (20\_21\_IDI\_O5b\_POIE\_Germany)*

However, not all local Polish organisations want to be actively involved in the activities of organisation E. As its president notes, he feels used by other, less active

organisations and activists in many cases. Consequently, he wonders if the open formula of meetings and events makes sense.

*There is no association tendency. On the other hand, there is a tendency to use our work. This is it. I have also been asking myself for a long time with my team whether what we are doing should be only for our members, i.e., let us say 500–600 people, because there are so many of our members and we should be in this group, and the rest should not be of concern to us. We should do closed events, put up a fence and we do it for ourselves. (20\_21\_IDI\_O5b\_POIE\_Germany)*

Moreover, as the president of organisation E notes, some local Polish organisations do not want to cooperate with it and join forces on collaborative projects and other undertakings. This mainly applies to new organisations that define their goals differently and want to distinguish themselves from more traditional associations.

*There are those who want to have anything to do with us, and there are those who do not, such as [name of one of the “new” organisations], but we also send invitations to them. (...) However, there is no awareness that an umbrella organisation like E should [represent] the entire local Polish community. (20\_21\_IDI\_O5b\_POIE\_Germany)*

## Conclusions

The analysis of patterns of cooperation among PIOs shows a somewhat ambivalent picture. On the one hand, both the experts and organisation leaders stress that collaboration between organisations exists and sometimes may even be quite intensive. On the other hand, PIOs often do not engage themselves in extensive cooperation networks. Despite positive declarations about willingness to cooperate, PIOs actually refrain from this in many cases. This ambivalent picture is strengthened by experts who often mention conflicts and misunderstandings between organisations.

A more detailed investigation into ways of cooperation of the organisations included in the case studies, and attitudes towards collaboration which PIOs’ leaders display, helps to describe specific cooperation patterns.

Organisation A declares both an extensive network with which it has contacts and a willingness to cooperate. However, at the same time, it seems that its cooperation is mainly reduced to one umbrella organisation, which is an example of a formal federation. The reasons for close cooperation with this umbrella organisation seem to be twofold: solid personal connections between both organisations and access to additional resources and possibilities which this cooperation can provide A with. Interestingly, collaboration with the umbrella organisation seems to threaten A’s image of independence, which may be perceived as a critical cost of cooperation. In numerous statements, organisation A’s leaders tried to underline their autonomy. In the case of

other possible cooperation, A's leaders seem not to perceive any essential outcomes, which is possibly a primary reason for not using the extensive network of contacts.

Organisation B seems to be generally more open to cooperation. It collaborates with several other organisations and a federation – an umbrella organisation. This cooperation takes explicit forms – cooperating organisations support each other in organising joint ventures. Interestingly enough, B cooperates only with PIOs of similar profiles to their own – “new” women's organisations. At the same time, organisation B's leaders renounce cooperation with traditional PIOs. There seem to be several reasons for this. Firstly, there are significant differences between B and traditional organisations in terms of goals and modes of operation, and therefore B leaders do not see tangent points where cooperation would be possible. Secondly, B does not want to enter new fields of activity – which would open common spheres of interest with the traditional organisations – because its leaders are afraid of the potential competition. Thirdly, previous bad experiences – both of the organisation itself and the leaders' personal experiences in contact with traditional organisations – are discouraging and hinder potential collaboration, which is only perceived as a source of costs.

In the case of organisation C, an attitude of openness for cooperation is clearly visible. Its leader not only declares readiness to cooperate with other PIOs but also sees multiple benefits of collaboration – mainly access to additional resources, primarily financial. At the same time, in C representatives' statements, no particular examples of cooperation appear – apart from engagement in a federation, i.e., an umbrella organisation. What is more, C – one of the “new” organisations – seems to have experiences of unsuccessful cooperation with traditional PIOs. Apart from the tension typical of the relationship between new and traditional organisations, barriers exist like the threat of competition and reluctance to cooperate with specific partners resulting from personal bad experiences and prejudices.

Organisation D seems to be an example of lack of cooperation due to limited opportunities. It does not have available potential partners operating on the sidelines – the Polish-German borderland. Apart from these objective scarcities, bad experiences caused by attempts to establish cooperation with PIOs from a large city also negatively influenced the attitudes of the leader of organisation D, who feels discouraged from all forms of collaboration.

The last analysed organisation – E – seems to have the most developed cooperation network. This results from organisation E being a federation of other PIOs (although it also takes autonomous actions), requiring expanded collaboration with member organisations. Apart from that, the leaders of E have a robust pro-cooperation attitude, and in their statements they often stressed the positive outcomes of joint ventures. In practice, their disposition towards cooperation seems utilitarian. They perceived it as a way to connect and thus increase the resources and capabilities of partners and to be able, for example, to organise more significant ventures. Thus, collaboration would be a way to overcome financial scarcities which affect single

partners. At the same time, it should be noted that E, being a traditional organisation, rather does not cooperate with “new” organisations – according to the declarations of its leaders – primarily due to the reluctance of the latter.

Table 2.

Patterns of cooperation between researched PIOs

Organisation	Type of cooperation	Partners	Forms of cooperation	Barriers to cooperation	Reasons for cooperation	Cost of cooperation
A	Not intensive	Limited to selected partners	Federation – membership in the umbrella organisation	–	Access to additional resources and possibilities	Threat to organisation’s image of independence
B	Intensive	Limited to selected partners	Joint ventures; Federation – membership in the umbrella organisation	Incompatibility of goals and methods of action; The threat of competition; Bad experiences	Common goals	–
C	Not intensive	Limited to selected partners	Exchange of knowledge and experiences; Federation – membership in the umbrella organisation	Incompatibility of goals and methods of action; The threat of competition; Bad experiences	Access to additional resources and possibilities	–
D	None	–	–	Unavailability of partners; Bad experiences	–	–
E	Intensive	Limited to selected partners	Joint ventures; Federation – being an umbrella organisation	–	Access to additional resources and possibilities	–

Source: own elaboration.

## Discussion

The PIOs researched here have pursued diverse patterns of cooperation, which may possibly be shared by other Polish organisations in Germany. First of all, they differed in intensity. Some organisations (like B and E) seem to prefer more intensive collaboration, while others (like A and C) favour less extensive cooperation. There are also other cases in which PIOs (like D) have no contact with other similar associations and thus do not meet even such broad criteria describing cooperation as those cited by Schermerhorn (1975).

Intensity appears to be connected with the form of cooperation because the organisations that collaborate more intensively also seem to undertake more diverse forms of collaboration, mainly joint ventures. It is precisely this undertaking of joint activities and not formal cooperation agreements that is the most common basis of collaboration. This preference for informality (Hayoz, 2010) may be due to the cultural conditions of Polish migrants.

Although almost all the PIOs researched in the case studies were members of umbrella organisations, it has to be stressed that it can hardly be interpreted as an indicator of the high self-organisation of Polish immigrant associations in Germany. On the contrary, many of them were members of different *Dachorganisationen*. This observation does not fully support the thesis of a conflict between PIOs (Loew, 2014; Nagel, 2009), but it certainly provides evidence of discrepancies and division lines between organisations.

Heterogeneity and disunities between PIOs in Germany are also visible when analysing partnerships between organisations. All the associations that declared cooperation with other PIOs acknowledged that it was limited only to selected partners. The selection criteria were usually based on belonging to traditional or new organisations or a specific type of organisation (e.g., women's organisation in case of B). This seems to prove that the organisations undertake partnerships with other associations that are similar to them. On the one hand, it limits the number of possible conflicts between organisations<sup>9</sup>, on the other, however, it limits the synergy resulting from cooperation – similar organisations have similar resources: both skills and experiences (Doerfel, Taylor, 2004).

Looking at the reasons for undertaking cooperation between PIOs, it should be noted that most of them (like A, C, and E) seem to have a somewhat utilitarian rationale. Collaboration is obviously perceived as a way to access additional information, resources and opportunities. Considering the scarcities that PIOs usually struggle with (Nowosielski 2016), cooperation allows them to broaden their access to resources (Schermerhorn, 1975). The value-based justification was mentioned much less frequent (only one organisation – B).

Some of the PIOs refrain from cooperation with other Polish associations. One can even speak about barriers to collaboration. Interestingly, most of them have a personal character (Gazley, 2008). Bad experiences, in particular, disappointed trust and a sense of rejection, seemed to be most often observed (like in cases B, C, and D). The other was the threat of competition and incompatibility of organisations' goals and methods of action (B, C). The least mentioned barrier was the unavailability of partners, mentioned only by marginalised organisation D.

Regardless of the cooperation barriers resulting, for example, from earlier experiences, it is worth noting that PIOs rarely mention the costs of cooperation (Schermerhorn, 1975). In most cases, associations (like A) seem to be afraid of losing the image of an independent entity.

In summing up, it should be stated that the popular theses about the conflict of PIOs and the lack of cooperation between them have not been confirmed. Rather, one can speak of moderate cooperation between organisations. Admittedly, it is usually limited to other similar associations and is often not particularly intense, but it seems pretty common.

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