

# Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects for Immigrant Organizations in Supporting Integration of Minorities; the Case of Polish Organizations in Ireland

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to highlight barriers and opportunities faced by Polish organizations in Ireland in promoting pro-integrationist, as opposed to isolationist, tendencies among Poles. Despite noticeable integration trends, the majority of Poles prefer to remain within their circles, creating a so-called parallel society. Poles' respect for their cultural values may partially explain the fact that they fall into social exclusion by creating typically Polish networks inside which their lives oscillate. Currently, a critical condition for receiving funds for organizational activities is the requirement to adopt a specific profile in accordance with the demands imposed by sponsors. Consequently, the strategic role of Polish diaspora organizations is to implement programs aimed at integrating Poles into Irish society and with other minorities. Such, the role of Polish organizations will change; they are likely to employ a more cosmopolitan and integrating character, rather than isolating themselves and will need to respond to the changing needs of Poles in Ireland.

**Key words:** integration, Ireland, migrant, organizations, Polish

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Numerous sources indicate that Polish migrants in Ireland, especially those who decided to settle permanently, are beginning to show a more transnational, global orienta-

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tion and that they are slowly becoming part of the Irish landscape (inter alia Kropiwić, King-O'Riain 2006; MCA 2010; Olszewska 2011; Titley 2009). Nevertheless, despite these noticeable integration trends, most Polish immigrants, especially those planning to return to Poland, prefer to remain in their own cultural circle, creating a so-called 'parallel society' (Klimek 2012). The value and respect of Poles for their mother tongue, Polish identity, family values, history and customs may partially explain why they fall into a certain form of social exclusion and typically create Polish social networks within which their life goes on (Simon 2014). It has been widely documented that reliance on transnational relationships and networks acts against civic and political integration in host countries (Ryan 2010). Other research (inter alia Alba, Nee 2003, Babinski 1986, Praszalowicz 2010) demonstrated that life among the ethnic community does not unequivocally mean social exclusion and often serves as a coping mechanism against stressful migrant realities, which seems to suggest that the functioning of such ethnic enclaves can both facilitate and hinder integration with the wider society. In his research on Ireland from 2011, Dziągłowski points to barriers and low integration in many spheres of Polish migrant life; he lists the social and economic, identity, cultural, institutional-legal as well as spatial dimensions (Dziągłowski 2011). Recent research, almost 10 years later, indicates that Poles in Ireland have become socially embedded and integrated in terms of language, social relationships and housing ownership, etc; but not politically integrated as voters and citizens (see Dziągłowski 2019, Fanning, Kloc-Nowak, Lesinska 2020, Lopez Rodriguez 2019a, Marchelewska 2012).

Nowadays, one of the conditions for receiving funds by immigrant organizations in Ireland is the need to develop a specific trajectory and adopt an explicit profile in accordance with the requirements imposed by sponsors. An orientation towards pro-integration activities usually guarantees funding from the government and other Irish entities so there is a need to continually invest in the social fabric at a community level. In the Irish case, this translates into a crucial role for the local government, community partnerships, voluntary organizations, NGOs (Fanning 2009). In such a situation, the strategic role of Polish diaspora organizations is to activate the Polish community and offer activities aimed at integrating Poles with Irish society and other cultures present in Ireland. As a result, the role of Polish community organizations may change; there is a chance that they will take on a more activating, cosmopolitan and integrating character, rather than succumbing to a tendency to separate. Importantly, Fanning observes that what is generally referred to as social exclusion is when citizens are excluded from the predominant norms, ways of life and opportunities of mainstream society (Fanning 2011). Further, as currently defined by the (Irish) Office for Social Inclusion, "social exclusion" occurs when, as a result of inadequate incomes, people become excluded and marginalized from participating in activities considered the norm for other people in society' (ibid.). Following this line of argument, it is in the interest of Poles in Ireland to make all possible efforts to access spheres of life considered as a 'norm'.

The current Polish diaspora policy of the Polish state is anachronistic, does not keep up with trends of contemporary migration and places too much emphasis on education, history and tradition, instead of adapting to the realities of the migrant community<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, one can speak of a declining interest in institutions serving as cultural centres for uniting Poles. Due to globalization and technological advances, “recreating” Polishness abroad is less complicated and the needs of Poles in this area are currently satisfied, for example, by – as it has been for a long time – the Church, and more recently by the Internet and social media. Nevertheless, most of the organizations researched respond quickly to the changing needs and adapt to new circumstances – this is necessary to ensure financial resources and the attendance of active members. The realities of immigrants’ life in Ireland, as well as global ones, are changing rapidly and organizations are constantly looking for new, felicitous resources and attractive ideas, which could maintain interest of the Polish community.

This article attempts to highlight the issue of barriers and opportunities faced by Polish immigrant organizations in Ireland in promoting pro-integration and, consequently, integrationist, as opposed to isolationist tendencies. First, I’ll briefly outline the history of the Polish diaspora in Ireland and demonstrate the context of formation of Polish organizations. Further I’ll highlight the concepts around social belonging, delineate the function that Polish immigrant organizations currently perform in Ireland and reveal related barriers to the integration of the Polish community. Finally, I’ll discuss and propose what role Polish immigrant organizations may potentially play in nurturing social cohesion among Polish migrants in Ireland.

## **Outline of Migration Background; Poles and their Organizations in Ireland**

### **Polish Diaspora**

Ireland, always considered a country of exile, has only recently become an attractive destination for migrants. Until the last decade of the 20th century, Ireland was a country from which people travelled abroad in search of work and a better life (Ruhs and Quinn 2009). Located at a considerable distance from Poland, it was not an attractive destination for Poles until 2004. Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004 started a new chapter in the history of Poles in Ireland. The unprecedented eco-

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth adding that in 2016 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocated 30% more funds than in the previous year to activities promoting Polish culture, heritage and Polish language. In his speech during his visit to Ireland, the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Jan Dziędziczak stated: “We want to invest in making Poles in Ireland strong, self-confident and making them remember their roots. Emphasis must be placed on the education of children and youth. Passing the Polish language over to the next generation is most important for us” (<https://www.tysol.pl/a4072-Jezyk-polski-w-irlandzkich-szkolach-Wladze-Zielonej-Wyspy-zycziwie>, accessed: 21.03.21).

conomic *boom* on the Emerald Island, coupled with an open labour market policy, caused a wave of immigration from Poland and other countries (Krings et al. 2013). Ireland was one of three countries which gave new EU citizens full access to its labour market (Barret and Duffy 2008). Employment increased by almost 70% between 2004 and 2007; the construction sector was then the main driver of the demand for additional labour (Krings et al. 2013). Antje Roeder (2011) emphasizes the lack of historical ties between the countries of newly arrived migrants (*New Member States*) and Ireland; recent migratory movements are largely the result of the opening of the labour market. The influx of migrants reached its peak in 2006 (Krings et al. 2009) and remained relatively high until the onset of the Irish recession in 2008. Thus, in a very short time, Poles created a significant diaspora and became an important part of the Irish landscape. Currently, two groups coexist in Ireland: sparse “Polonia”, a group of about 250 people, middle aged and elderly, usually highly educated, speaking very good English; and a second group – economic migrants, who came to the country after the opening of the labour market for Polish citizens in 2004 (MSZ 2009).

Various *pull factors* and *push factors* have had a significant impact on the phenomenon of Polish migration to Ireland. Push factors were usually related to the economic changes taking place in Poland during the transformation period and the rising unemployment (Grabowska 2003; Kropiwiec, King-O’Riain 2006; Roeder 2011; Simon 2014; Krings et al. 2009). The abovementioned increase in unemployment in Poland<sup>4</sup>, deterioration of living standards and the need or motivation to earn money (frequently sent to Poland in the form of remittances) are considered the main push factors. Many studies conducted at the outbreak of the recession in Ireland in 2008 – and shortly after – showed that Poles did not want to return to Poland and many of them planned to settle in Ireland for longer (Krings et al. 2009; *ibid.* 2011; Simon 2014). As a result, despite the fact that the number of Poles migrating to Ireland has decreased, we cannot speak of a mass exodus from Ireland, especially in relation to those who have been staying in the country for some time (Simon 2014).

Polish immigrants were by far the largest group of immigrants from the new Member States (*NMS*) in Ireland in 2011; their number of 122,585 for 2011 (CSO 2012) is likely to be understated. In 2016, it remained at the same level and amounted to 122,515, which means a decrease of 0.1% compared to 2011. As reasons for staying in Ireland, migrants mentioned starting a family, opportunities related to their children’s education, developed friendships and an attractive broad offer in the field of recreation. In addition, self-employment, home purchase, gradual integration into Irish society and prospects for a better future for families play a role in the decision to put down roots in Ireland and ultimately stay (Simon 2014). Other studies have

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<sup>4</sup> The unemployment rate in Poland in 2003 was 19.4% – the highest since the last decade of the 20th century (GUS 2012).

shown that the overall quality of life in Ireland exceeds the quality of life in Poland and this may also be the reason for making such a decision (Nolka, Nowosielski 2009; Muhlau, Kaliszewska, Roeder 2011, Rakowski, Rakowska 2012, Marchelewska 2012).

## **Development of Polish Organizations in Ireland**

According to research by John Simon (2014), most Poles are unaware of the existence of Polish institutions and organizations in Ireland and are poorly informed about the benefits they can derive from using the services of such institutions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ 2009) also draws attention to the fact that few Poles residing in Ireland actively participate in the activities of Polish organizations. Despite previous attempts to create an umbrella organization in 2008 – the Forum of Active Poles and the Federation of Polish Organizations in Ireland – they generally remain independent and disorganized. Existing organizations typically have 20 to 30 members. The activities of those organizations are very diverse – from promoting culture and integration, through helping those in need, to promoting entrepreneurship; however, it is worth noting that entrepreneurship is becoming a key feature of contemporary Polish organizations (Plachecki 2012).

As Kafuski (2007) notices, the Polish community in Ireland was poorly organized until the current influx of immigrants from Poland. Before the period of an increased influx of Poles, there were only two organizations: the Polish Social and Cultural Centre (POSK) associated with the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Ireland, and the Irish-Polish Society. POSK is an organization aimed at maintaining ties among Poles living in Ireland, promoting Polish culture, art and tradition, as well as cultivating and strengthening the national identity (POSK, this year). The formal establishment of the Irish-Polish Society was related to the historic visit of Pope John Paul II to Ireland in 1979. Today, as an apolitical non-profit organization, it promotes friendship, mutual understanding and integration between Polish and Irish communities through social and cultural activities. According to the Report on the Situation of Polish Diaspora and Poles Abroad, prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2012), in 2012 there were 20 Polish organizations in Ireland. The “Atlas of Polish Presence Abroad” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014) lists four cultural and artistic organizations, 6 of an educational nature and 10 of a different profile. It also lists the centres of involvement of the Polish diaspora; these are three museums/galleries/institutes, one Polish house, six masses conducted in Polish and nine Polish libraries/archives. In addition to the two above-mentioned organizations, created before accession to the EU, in the literature and on the internet there are references to various other Polish centres, associations, institutions and organizations in Ireland.

The Consulate looks after five schools (so-called consultation points – SPK) financed by the Polish Ministry of Education (in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Cavan) and seven other educational units. According to the “Atlas of Polish Presence

Abroad" (MSZ 2014), there are 21 other Polish weekend schools in Ireland, financed through social support and partly by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *The Irish Times* reported in August 2013 that the number of Polish weekend schools had doubled (to 24) over the previous three years (Carbery 2013) and that they were attended by about 4,000 students from all over the country. According to Kloc-Nowak (2018), in 2005–2017, 48 community schools for the Polish community abroad were established in Ireland, attended by a total of 14,315 children.

## Grounds for the Formation and Operation of Organizations; Context for Reception of Migrants in Ireland

Integration policy usually undergoes transformations as a result of an emergency which requires the consultation of the society (Office of the Minister for Integration 2008). This is also reflected in Ireland's rapidly changing immigration policy; although the scale of the influx of immigrants after 2004 posed a significant challenge for politicians, the reaction to sudden events was often *ad hoc*. It is true that in 2000 the government launched several initiatives to counteract integration problems, but since the end of 2008, when the economic crisis began in Ireland, little funds have been allocated to this. It was left to local authorities and NGOs to deal with integration problems. These entities also suffered from severe budget cuts and therefore, any potential integration of the immigrant community in Ireland is still in question (Glynn 2014). One of the notable exceptions in this area is the facilitation of the naturalization process for those applying for citizenship.

However, Quinn (2010) stresses that despite such unexpected immigration and the lack of an integration policy, by 2010 Ireland did not face serious integration problems and tensions. In 2008, the then-created Ministry of Integration published a report which detailed "the imperatives of integrating people of a completely different culture, nationality, language and religion so that they become the new Irish citizens of the 21st century" (Office of the Minister for Integration 2008: 8). This document expressed the widespread belief that an intercultural approach is the best strategy for achieving success in terms of integration (Ní Chiosáin 2011). Factors that are seen as the most important indicators of integration of the newcomers are: employment, English language skills, children and their education, military service, naturalisation, participation in elections, real estate ownership and mixed marriages<sup>5</sup>. Many of the commitments in the aforementioned report were ultimately not implemented due to the crisis (Glynn 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> The document also outlines the key actions that need to be taken to bring about improvements in areas such as immigration law, the asylum procedure, naturalization and long-term residence in the country, and combating the exploitation and discrimination of migrants.

In the 2012 “Monitor of European Integration”, a journal published annually, Ireland was recognized for its active civic policy, but in terms of employment, education and the social inclusion of immigrants, the Emerald Island obtained low marks (Glynn 2014). For example, from 2008 to 2012, employment for the non-Irish decreased by 23%, while for Irish nationals the decrease was only 13%; this percentage gap widened even more in 2013, as the recession hit migrants more than the Irish (McGinnity et al. 2014). Moreover, the Monitor showed that financial support for teaching English to children in schools in 2012 alone decreased by almost a fifth (McGinnity et al. 2014: 1). Paradoxically, despite the declared state support for local integration efforts, local authorities have been severely constrained by significant budget cuts for integration measures; while in 2010 they received over 1.2 million Euros for this activity, this sum fell to 160 thousand Euros in 2012. NGOs face similar financial problems (Glynn 2014)<sup>6</sup>.

Despite this somewhat critical outline, in the legislative light, of the context of the reception of newcomers, it should be mentioned that governmental and non-governmental institutions, operating mainly on the basis of directives, regulations and guidelines from Brussels, also undertook many initiatives to help newly arrived Poles<sup>7</sup> (MSZ 2012). In many primary schools, in regions with a high concentration of Poles, additional teachers have been employed to teach Polish children the English language. The Irish authorities encouraged Poles to go to the ballot box during the elections to the European Parliament and local governments. Many institutions and government agencies have started to offer and continue to offer services in Polish. Some institutions employ Polish employees, other use the help of translators and interpreters or post information in Polish on their websites.

## **Social Integration Versus Ghettoization – Some Conceptualisations**

This section’s objective is to shed some light on what is understood by social integration versus a lack of belonging, for the purpose of my reasoning on how immigrant organizations can constitute an important link for making grounds for – and advancing – social belonging among Poles in Ireland.

The problem of a perceived lack of integration among the Polish population in Ireland is due to factors which are described below. This apparent lack of an evident

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the Irish public discourse towards Poles and the context of immigrant reception (Irish employment and migration, asylum and citizenship and anti-racist policies as well as educational integration) see Lopez Rodriguez, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> There are organizations that target migrants only; their activity is focused, for example, on providing them with assistance in obtaining social benefits or with issues regarding tax matters. The most important of these organizations are the Crosscare Migrant Project, Migrants Rights Centre Ireland, Nasc (based in Cork), Doras (based in Limerick), Cairde (MSZ 2012).

conflict situation does not mean, however, that the process of ghettoization, isolation and social exclusion, especially of the currently middle-aged generation, is not present and that they do not form invisible parallel communities, due to being white and voiceless. The creation of parallel communities, self-ghettoization and migrants moving solely and exclusively along their own corridors was not positively received in Great Britain; nonetheless, no one dealt with this hurdle. Ghettoization as a process can be understood in many ways; as it is most commonly acknowledged as an urban territorial process, but also the process of creating ethnic enclaves. For Wacquant for example, ghetto is not merely a neighbourhood that happens to cross a demographic threshold; instead, it is an institution (Wacquant 1997). The conceptualisations of a ghetto vary from scholar to scholar, but the idea that prevails is that 'ghetto is a particular type of neighbourhood which exhibits a cohesive set of characteristics, such as deteriorating housing, crime, depopulation, and social isolation, that recur from city to city; it is directly or indirectly perpetuated by either dominant society or, specifically, the state; and it constitutes a form of involuntary segregation' (Small 2008).

The case of Ireland is somewhat unlike the above-described scenario in a sense that most immigrants came here at a time of economic growth, and this could have been an impulse to create favourable conditions for their economic integration (Roeder 2011). In addition, most immigrants are from Catholic countries and are white, meaning there is less risk of discrimination based on religion or skin colour (Barrett and Duffy 2008; Fanning 2011). Moreover, since their main goal was to improve their material status (they ventured to Ireland in search of work), the probability that they would rely on social welfare was low. All this taken together may indicate that the integration of immigrants in Ireland should proceed with fewer complications than in other countries, where the economic context at the time of the arrival of the migration wave was less favourable and where immigrants differed more from the native population (Roeder 2011).

Albeit, other researchers emphasize that Polish migrants can create the so-called parallel communities. Simon (2014) points out that Poles are prone to living in a kind of social isolation, which probably arises due to the common interests of the people and the use of the same language. According to Nolka and Nowosielski (2009), although the majority of respondents stated that the attitude of Irish people towards Polish migrants is very positive, only a quarter of the group had in fact regular contact with Irish citizens, and these were mainly professional relations. The special regard of Poles for their language, identity, family values, history and customs may to a certain extent play a part in their tendency to social exclusion (Simon 2014). Moreover, in the research of Klimek (2012) a very important issue in the life of the respondents turned out to be the typically Polish social networks they created, and empirical data show that the private and social life of the respondents took place largely within these networks. As a result, apart from integrationist attitudes, they

also displayed isolationist behaviours. Overall, little that is negative can be said about the relationship between the two societies. Nevertheless, the Report on the Situation of the Polish Diaspora and Poles Abroad pinpoints the issue of many Poles continuing to socialize exclusively amongst themselves and thus creating a kind of ghetto, while Radiukiewicz et al. (2006) highlight the low interest of respondents in Irish culture. It triggers the fact that Poles are perceived in Ireland as a closed, marginal and aloof group. Thus, as Kloc-Nowak (2018) adequately points out, it cannot be surmised that the favourable attitude of the indigenous population will last forever, without genuine efforts to integrate attempted by the Polish community.

Poles and emigrants from other Member States are still an important part of the Irish landscape. However, the interviews carried out raised the issue of introducing changes in financing from European funds; these funds are intended for non-EU citizens. The integration fund for the 2007–2014 period covered only non-EU nationals; there were no alternative sources of financing in Ireland at the time. Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, the communities of the member states also have problems that the state should address, e.g., ghettoization or lack of civic participation: *Even though they live here, buy houses, send their children to school, they still live within their culture and language, and they are not keen to naturalize or actively participate in Ireland (7\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland)*<sup>8</sup>

In order to remedy this, the Irish government introduced the aforementioned “Supporting communities and active citizenship” program, which promotes active participation in political life – participating in elections, applying for citizenship or running for senior positions. It is worth noting that, unlike many other European countries, Ireland gives migrants extremely wide access to participation in local political life and has been listed as the country leading the best practice in this field (Niessen et al. 2007).

According to Marchelewska (2012), it fundamentally depends on the Polish community to what extent they will take responsibility for changes aimed at improving the situation and how they will use all these opportunities. Analysing the stages of immigrant integration, she concludes that the Polish community in Ireland is at the level between settlement and adaptation.<sup>9</sup> A very important question is whether children from local communities where ethnic minorities predominate will have the same chances in life as Irish children. If it turns out otherwise, then society may face the problems faced by many other European countries, namely the problem of ‘second-generation lost migrants’. For example, in a study of foreign-language children aged 5–18 it was estimated that only 70% of Polish children speak very

<sup>8</sup> In this article I apply general coding used in other reports in the project ‘Polish Immigrant Organizations in Europe’

<sup>9</sup> The author based her observations on the ‘Immigration Adaptation Phases’ model which, encompassing three dimensions, that is, language, employment and community, specifies *selection settlement, adaptation and participation* as phases of integration.

good English; it was one of the lowest percentages, and only young Chinese came out worse than Poles (CSO 2017). It can be argued that Polish-speaking children and youth pose a challenge for the Irish education system (Kloc-Nowak 2018).

## Research Methods

The data for the analysis of the material used for this article was collected during field research in Ireland in the period May 2016–January 2017 as part of a project entitled: ‘Polish Immigrant Organizations in Europe’. The data used in this article comes from in-depth interviews (IDI) with: (a) seven representatives of institutions dealing with the coordination, creation and implementation of immigrant policy in Ireland; (b) seven experts in the field of Polish immigrant organizations in Ireland; (c) leaders of five selected Polish organizations and representatives of the immediate surroundings of these organizations (20 respondents in total)<sup>10</sup>.

## Role and Functioning of Polish Organizations in Ireland

Polish organizations in Ireland play various roles, but as one of the respondents put it, “(…) *every plot is full, because there are cultural and aid organizations, and those that represent us towards the Irish*” (5\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland). At the time of my study, the most frequently mentioned Polish immigrant organizations in Ireland were: Forum Polonia, Polish Social and Cultural Centre, Together-Razem and the Polish-Irish Society (listed in alphabetical order). POSK and the Polish-Irish Society have been classified as ‘*classic Polish diaspora organizations*’ (4\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland). On the basis of the respondents’ statements, the following types of organizations present in Ireland can be listed (in terms of their functions):

- (1) cultural/promoting Polish culture;
- (2) welfare/social/supporting Poles/aid;
- (3) educational/of educational profile;
- (4) industry/professional/business;
- (5) lobbying/activating/pro-civic;
- (6) integrating/highlighting and promoting Polish-Irish relations;
- (7) representing Poles/promoting the Polish community in Ireland

Undoubtedly, the Polish diaspora organizations that served in this research as case studies (five organizations) often combine many of the above functions at the same time. One of the organizations analysed here, often referred to as ‘pseudo-umbrella’,

<sup>10</sup> The complete description of methodology can be found in: Nowosielski, M., & Dziągłowski, M. (2021), in the introductory chapter of this volume or on the project's website <http://poie.uw.edu.pl/>.

belongs to a separate category. Firstly, it places emphasis on encouraging Poles to participate in public life and on creating equal social and professional opportunities (activating/pro-civic role). It is one of those organizations that most explicitly strives for activities towards integration instead of cultural separation. As one of the few Polish immigrant organizations in Ireland, it reaches out to nations other than Poland and undertakes activities aimed at strengthening relations with Ireland by encouraging co-ethnics to vote and stand for local elections. This organization is simultaneously promoting and connecting; it acts as a communication hub for other organizations and the projects they run. In one other organization, a certain phenomenon can be observed – reaching beyond the framework of native, Polish culture. These two organizations aim at promoting integration and participation in the area of Ireland’s multicultural society and at collaborating with other ethnic groups – rather than “patriotic isolation”. It can be concluded that focusing on such a profile of activity is currently one of the most important guarantors of the stable condition of the organization due to the likelihood of obtaining funds from the Irish side. The pro-integration-oriented groups, which at the same time offer support to local communities, are in a better financial condition than those focused mainly on promoting Polish culture and language.

The most important issues related to the future of Polish diaspora organizations, mentioned by the respondents, are: the opportunity and need to create a strong Polish community structure, active and visible, which would have a supervising umbrella organization; adapting to the needs of the client/recipient of the organization; namely, developing a profile combining the fostering of Polishness with pro-integration activities. As Marchelewska (2012) points out, there is a growing need for dialogue and closer cooperation between the Polish immigrant community and Irish institutions, communicating needs, problems and finding solutions together. The author emphasizes that the study of ethnic minorities carried out by the Fingal County Council indicates that Poles are involved very little in the life of the local community – a small percentage are members of local clubs, groups, churches, councils or engage in politics at the local government level<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, some Poles declare that they do not feel part of this community, and rarely apply for citizenship or permanent residence and do not have an elected representative at any political level<sup>12</sup> (Marchelewska 2012). Therefore, one should ask whether the

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<sup>11</sup> To the question “are you or your children a member of a club or a social, church or neighbourhood organization?” – only 31% of the respondents answered positively. 65% did not participate in any form of social life in their country of residence, and 3% were unable to clearly answer the question.

<sup>12</sup> Also Marchelewska (2012) notes that the idea behind Forum Polonia is to assist with the collaboration process by providing opportunities for working together and supplementing resources. The Forum, active in various fields – importantly, in the promotion of Poland by organizing meetings and conferences, training for organizations, staging joint projects addressed to the Polish community, research, media monitoring – plays a particularly important role in information dissemination.

Polish community organizations could be a link and create a fertile foundation for the development of Poles' participation in the life of local communities, and not only serve as networks of their co-ethnics?

## Challenges to Integration from the Organizations' Perspective

Participation at the socio-political level is described by some theories as the most advanced degree of integration. Polish migrants in Ireland currently have no political representation and a low percentage register to vote in local elections. Only a few naturalise and thus qualify to vote in the parliamentary and presidential elections (Marchelewska 2012, Fanning, B., Kloc Nowak, W., & Lesińska, M. 2020, Pszczolkowska & Lesinska 2021). If we acknowledge that Polish diaspora organizations can constitute a link in the process of civic integration for Poles in Ireland – just as Forum Polonia is actively involved in this today – and thus contribute to a desired social cohesion, one should ask and analyse the reasons why Poles are reluctant to establish and join the ranks of these organizations. From the perspective of representatives of non-governmental organizations working with migrants in Ireland, there were negative voices about the self-organization of Poles and a number of barriers were identified as affecting this state of affairs. First, the lack of trust in the state and government (as a legacy of the former communist system) – and what follows it – preferring to fend for oneself. One of the respondents observed the following regularity:

*Communities from Eastern Europe have a different approach to the involvement of the state and the organization of their community than, for example, communities from Bangladesh, Pakistan or the Philippines ... Maybe this lack of trust in the state and organizations and the more individual struggle for one's rights comes from [the] communist times? (3\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland)*

The understanding of integration at the level of legislation and civil rights among Poles is perceived by the study's participants as deficient. It was mentioned that the activities of the organizations of Europeans coming from the east of the continent focus on activities with a robust cultural and social profile; therefore, the question of social security, welfare or legal matters is omitted. By focusing only on organizing events and cultural events, these organizations: *'do not question any structural obstacles which people face in the integration process.'* (2\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland)

Another barrier to building associations is the low need for formal self-organization, simply because the urgent needs of Polish migrants are satisfied within their own community and their own commercial and entrepreneurial activity; this is related to the insignificant dispersion of the Polish population in Ireland. As a consequence, many Poles have never been forced to speak English. One respondent stated that:

*Unlike Slovaks or Czechs who were scattered and needed these meetings once a week to meet and talk, Poles worked together, lived together, had Polish shops, doctors, churches, lawyers ... everything ... They never needed English on any matter. (2\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland)*

Such self-sufficiency is not necessarily conducive to establishing formal institutions or organizations that would bring together members of the Polish community for a specific purpose or cause, simply because there is a limited demand for that. At the same time, it was aptly noticed that Poles can organize themselves very well, also at the civic level, when it comes to matters about which they feel concerned<sup>13</sup>. They also cited the results of the questionnaire on the quality of life in Ireland, which showed that the surveyed communities are so satisfied with it that they do not see any need to protest or organize formally for the sake of improving the living conditions. The respondent quoted words of one of the questionnaire's participants: *Nothing to protest against here, everything is fine. I have a good job, I have a house ... Why? The government cares about me.* Indeed, this factor may significantly influence a certain passivity in relation to the establishment of formalised associations and organizations by the Polish population in Ireland. Withal, so-called post-emigration emancipation was identified as yet another reason for Poles' unwillingness to create associations. For them, leaving the country stood as a liberation from the structures imposed on them by the Polish state, and it seems that they do not want to recreate them. It can be concluded that at the group level, Polish migrants constitute a relatively compact group within which they derive mutual benefits.

Some respondents (among representatives of non-governmental organizations) disapproved of the nature of Polish organizations. Previously I mentioned the criticism of their exclusively cultural and social profile and activities which do not attempt to contest the *status quo* and which avoid issues of conflict. In addition, they were accused of being hermetic and inaccessible to ethnic groups other than Polish. It has been argued that the events that promote these organizations are primarily intended for the community; no attempt is made to encourage other groups to participate and integrate:

*The African community is fairly well organized. They understand integration at the legal level and want to influence it. The African Centre is one of the largest organizations in Ireland and I believe Forum Polonia could aspire to be a similar organization if they wanted to. (2\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland)*

The problematics of separatist tendencies and the forms of isolation within Polish organizations was raised relatively often, and in the interviews there were voices of criticism against organizations that focus on the issues of cultivating national values

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<sup>13</sup> The respondent referred here to a staged protest by Poles in Dublin in defence of human rights in Poland (7\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland)

and Polish culture as those that separate Poles from their new society. It was argued that they should: (...) *act as a connecting point, a point facilitating entering into this society, rather than ethnic isolation and separatism, because it is not even welcomed here (1\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland)*. The lack of cooperation of Polish immigrant organizations with other non-governmental organizations active in Ireland is openly perceived as a barrier in the process of supporting the integration of Poles. These contacts are rare and few representatives of non-governmental organizations have ever had any interaction with Polish diaspora institutions. If cooperation and interaction ever take place, the most common link is the aforementioned Forum Polonia, which brings together people who are directly and indirectly active in Irish organizations promoting migrants' integration.

Occasional conflicts between organizations, most often caused by political discrepancies, are another obstacle to smooth, seamless cooperation. If clashes or conflicts arise, they are based on beliefs, competition for funds, power and influence, or are of a personal nature. As suggested, it is related to the lack of a tradition of association, distrust towards pro-social groups and the anti-authoritarianism of Poles. Historical determinants include a lack of collective thinking and an emphasis on individualism as a legacy of the transformation period, as well as divisions in the Polish community that do not allow for building a common vision of action: [...] *the experience of how to talk to each other and how to focus on what unites us, not what divides us is missing there. (6\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland)*

Although these conflicts are not pungently manifested in Ireland and Polish organizations are characterized by cooperation rather than competition and tensions, some misunderstandings, especially concerning political proclivities, may affect their functioning. Politically motivated conflicts may hinder cooperation due to diverging interests. These tensions are growing due to the current political situation in Poland and certain radicalisms and extremisms do not allow organizations to build a common vision.<sup>14</sup> There has also been a narrative of tensions over exerting power; fear of losing autonomy makes it difficult to create a single, formal umbrella structure in Ireland. Indeed, it was the inter-organizational conflict that prevented the creation of an umbrella organization or a federation. There seems to be a distinctive dynamic – there are many potent organizations operating in parallel in Ireland, that do not want to “disappear under an umbrella” of the dominant one. Consequently, it is not unchallenging in such a climate to organize into larger cooperating cells.

Importantly, Ireland's integration policy can act as a barrier to the integration of newcomers. As mentioned earlier, integration policy is shaped by an unexpected reorientation in society requiring consultation (Office of the Minister for Integration 2008). This is reflected in Ireland's rapidly changing immigration policy; respondents believed that the response to sudden events was often *ad hoc*. This *ad hoc* nature

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<sup>14</sup> As an example, two organizations outside the capital of Ireland with differing views were given, whose conflict is at times an obstacle to fruitful cooperation.

of responses to sudden social changes, for example to a sudden influx of emigrants from the European Union between 2004 and 2006, was well captured by one of the respondents: *Everything was organized depending on the needs, facilities and competences. It was all created on an ongoing basis, depending on the needs. There was no action strategy prepared in advance. (1\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland)*

The policy of the Polish state towards organizations has often been described as inadequate and anachronistic in relation to the real needs of contemporary migration. It has been emphasised that Polish diaspora policy is mainly interested in endorsing Polishness. In fact, an employee of the Polish state institution confirmed the accuracy of this statement by referring to the popularity of such projects: *Generally, projects aimed at maintaining Polish culture and encouraging Poles to participate in various festivals and competitions are highly appreciated. Such projects which are generally diaspora-focused (5\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland). There were voices that the state's diaspora policy is outdated, does not keep up with the currents of contemporary migration and (...) it does not adapt to the realities and to what is happening with the migration of so many Poles (6\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland); it places emphasis on education, history and tradition. Despite the participation of representatives of Polish organizations in the consultation process of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, their observations and comments are not always taken into account when creating programs in cooperation with the Polish diaspora: (...) we are as if we were part of the consultation process, but we are not always being heard. We are not being heard because it is not "sexy". A lost Pole is not "sexy". A proud Pole, with a white and red flag – that's cool. (4\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland)*

## **Opportunities and Prospects – Organizations as Catalysts for Nurturing Social Belonging**

### **Needs, Opportunities and Prospects**

Among the five researched organizations (listed here as A,B,C,D and E) one organization's profile and potential bodes well for paving a way for the most advanced form of integration of Poles in Ireland; that is on the socio-political level where citizens are actively engaged in the state's current affairs. Organization E is the only one that, due to its role of "spokesperson" and lobbying orientation, has numerous contacts both with the Irish Government and other non-Polish NGOs. This is related to the fact that the E organization is often a liaison between Polish organizations and the Irish side – it managed to establish contacts with representatives of political parties and councillors, conducting a program of political activation of Poles in order to encourage them to vote and to put forward their candidates in local elections. They work actively with various types of consultative bodies and with the institutions working for migrants in Ireland. They also actively cooperate with other ethnic

groups on many levels, but their main goal is to focus the forces of minority groups. This action is characterized by not dissociating itself from other immigrants, which is comparatively uncommon among Polish diaspora organizations and allows the Polish community to exist and become known among other cultures present in Ireland. The E organization's aspiration is to share Polish experiences with other nations so that they can transfer the solutions developed by Poles onto their own ground.

On the basis of empirical research, the reasons for the poor development of cooperation between Polish organizations abroad and other groups in Ireland can be found, for example, in the already mentioned relatively problem-free existence of the Polish community on Irish soil; Poles do not feel they are victims of discriminatory or xenophobic behaviour. Another reason for the low-intensity cooperation is the fact that in 2009 the Ministry for the Integration of Immigrants was liquidated and there is currently no institution that would actively promote cooperation with ethnic organizations. It is the organizations themselves that must seek any form of liaison with the Irish Government. For this reason, cooperation is more often established at the level of local authorities, e.g. when organizing events, seeking funds or arranging internships. The ability to cooperate is often determined by the organization's capacity to receive funding from the Irish side. However, in order to obtain such subsidies, one must be integration-oriented and involve other migrant groups. The organizations with a "purely Polish diaspora" profile, due to their cultural separatism, often fail to meet the conditions of Ireland's integration policy and do not receive funds (organizations A and B). Difficulties in obtaining funds from the Irish side result from the lack of knowledge of the measures and rules of applying for grants, from the inadequate profile (non-integrative), inconvenient location (usually outside Dublin) or the lack of appropriate personal relationships with the Irish Government.

*Forum Polonia*, as a pseudo-umbrella organization, was often referred to as a representative of a separate category. Firstly, as mentioned above, the emphasis was put on encouraging Poles to participate in public life and on providing them with social and professional equal opportunities (activating/pro-civic role):

*Forum Polonia probably makes most effort to be recognized and to have something to say, and they are launching such initiatives ... Well, some kind of self-government training for Poles ... They are going in this direction, so that Poles vote, participate in public life here, or run for city councils, etc. (2\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland)*

*(...) so the main goal is – that there are simply Poles in decision-making institutions, that they are perceived as competent people, carriers of competence, which is also in line with the determinants of the "Polish Brand", which was issued in 2013 by the Senate (...)*<sup>15</sup>.  
(3\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland)

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<sup>15</sup> The respondent refers here to a social campaign 'Polish Brand – You Can Be Sure' aimed at entrepreneurs of Polish companies and encouraging the choice of Polish brands, which emphasizes the idea of economic patriotism and thus supports the Polish economy.

Moreover, as it has been pointed out several times, an important feature of Forum Polonia is its pursuit towards integration rather than cultural separation. It has been defined as (...) *an organization that goes out to the Irish, thinks about integration, and actually nobody else actually does it.* (7\_IDI\_INS\_POIE\_Ireland) Also, the initiative to encourage Poles to vote in local elections in Ireland ‘*You are at home – vote*’ is aimed at “*strengthening relations in Ireland*” (4\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland) rather than maintaining patriotic isolationism.

Commenting on the future role of Polish immigrant organizations in Ireland, the respondents mentioned the need for a stronger activating character of the organization, so that ultimately Poles: (...) *were visible in the local dimension and this would allow these Poles to exist.* (4\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland) There have also been predictions that they will evolve into more cosmopolitan and inclusive entities, as opposed to the tendency to isolate themselves: *[they will] drift towards, I mean, open up [to] the Irish, but also to various foreigners, because I see that there is such a need, evidently.* (2\_IDI\_E\_POIE\_Ireland)

Another issue raised in the interviews is the relationship between Polish organizations and the Polish state. An employee of the Polish state institution expressed the view that the relations between the Polish government and the consular representation, although correct, could be more intense, the ministerial visits more frequent, and the dialogue more extensive. Ireland is marginalized by the Polish government, and the consulate structure has too few jobs compared to other countries, despite the fact that Irish Polonia is one of the largest Polish diasporas in general. On the other hand, research participants also outlined strengths in the relations between Polish immigrant organizations in Ireland and the Polish state. The greatest positive opportunity for cooperation with the Polish government are the relations between Polish organizations and the Embassy of the Republic of Poland. The respondents unanimously described these relations as an effective dialogue and effective cooperation, based on respect from the Embassy.

## Current Situation and Changing Needs

It is important to highlight that five years have passed since data collection for this extensive study. Within this period several factors could have influenced the number of Poles as well as the functioning and condition of Polish immigrant organizations in Ireland. The most obvious factors include the Covid-19 pandemic, the related series of lockdowns, and Brexit in Great Britain which could have triggered an influx of Polish emigrants from Great Britain<sup>16</sup> and a low level of recession in Poland compared

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<sup>16</sup> Changes in the number of Poles in Ireland due to these factors can only be verily determined after the publication of the results of the Census of April 2021.

to other EU countries. It can be expected that many organizations have moved their activities to online platforms and social media, but this does not necessarily mean that all of them have reduced their scope of work. For example, the organization Together-Razem, with a predominantly supporting profile, moved its activities online, still actively and efficiently organizing information sessions, webinars, therapies, while maintaining this hybrid model. Nevertheless, many of the organizations faced real obstacles in the implementation of their projects and it is expected that their mode of working will undergo changes in the coming years, which will to some extent be the result of the pandemic<sup>17</sup>. One of the consequences of the current global situation, positively evaluated by the participants, was getting closer to the Irish side and establishing new contacts in order to raise funds for the activity and training of leaders and activists of the organizations. This may pay off in the future.

It can be concluded from the interviews that the role of Polish community organizations will change. As many respondents noted, they are likely to take on a more activating, cosmopolitan and integrating character, rather than succumbing to separating tendencies. In addition, they will have to respond to the changing needs of Poles in Ireland over time – for example, those related to senior care, the mental health of young people, domestic violence or more complicated welfare issues. An example of an organization that is successfully evolving this way is the aid organization C, which is also, if not primarily, working for marginalized groups of Poles in Ireland.

Based on the information gathered in the interviews, one can speak of a declining interest in institutions serving as cultural centres and centres for the unification of Poles. Much lower attendance at cultural events is linked to globalization and technological advances. Some Poles – people with more cosmopolitan aspirations – leave Polish diaspora associations and become involved in non-Polish non-governmental organizations. Centres of an “anachronistic” nature; e.g. libraries, are forced to modify their programs depending on the needs of recipients, but most do so successfully. Research shows that the demand increased or decreased, depending on services which the organizations provide. For example, the aforementioned tendency to unite with co-ethnics and make use of the cultural offer has weakened, while organizations that provide educational activities, as well as social, legal and mental health counselling are becoming more and more in demand. It can be concluded that associations that strive in this direction and at the same time support integration tendencies have better prospects for survival and expansion.

Most of the surveyed organizations respond quickly to changing needs and adapt to new circumstances; this is necessary to ensure financial resources and the attendance of active members. The realities of immigrants’ lives in Ireland, as well as global

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<sup>17</sup> For more on the change in the nature of the activities of Polish organizations in Ireland, see <https://www.facebook.com/ForumPolonia/videos/255519322618202> from this discussion with representatives of Polish immigrant organizations in Ireland, we learn how organizations cope in times of the pandemic and how they imagine their future activity (accessed on 12/03/2021)

realities, are changing rapidly and organizations are constantly looking for new, apposite resources and attractive ideas to increase the interest of the Polish community. The direction of Polish and Irish migration policy is of fundamental importance in the context of financial support for Polish organizations. The transformation of Polish policy concerning migrants in the direction of civic activation and lobbying with the existing Irish migration policy presents a noteworthy prospect for increasing the dynamics of the activities of Polish immigrant organizations.

## **Conclusion: Organizations as the Missing Link to Social Integration**

Based on the results of the research analysis, it can be said that the gradual rooting and integration of this group in Ireland resulted in the reduction of immediate needs for services and activities offered by Polish organizations. It can be observed that while a certain number of formalized Polish diaspora organizations exist, the self-organization of Poles in Ireland has been taken over by entrepreneurial and commercial initiatives, around which the life of Polish immigrants revolves and which essentially meets their needs. The integration of the Polish community in Ireland is not perceived as problematic and this is related to the nature of Polish immigration. Poles are seen as exemplary migrants; they are white and are perceived to be predominantly Catholic and driven by the desire to improve their economic existence. Also, it may be argued that there are relatively favourable social and political factors in Ireland supporting the integration of newcomers. This state of affairs can be interpreted in two ways; on the one hand, the organizations and active involvement of the Polish community are sincerely promoted by the central authorities and non-governmental organizations, which could potentially support the formation of Polish diaspora organizations; yet, paradoxically, the successful integration of Poles may decrease their willingness to form associations in Ireland. Importantly, the existing institutions have a cultural and social profile instead of lobbying for the rights of co-ethnics; they are mostly hermetic and addressed to their own community, which does not bode well for social cohesion.

Bilateral relations between the sending and receiving countries are in fact an important element in the process of shaping the condition of immigrant organizations. Ireland is perceived as a country that is tolerant, open to diversity and pro-integration in its policies. Due to the divergent political programs of Poland and Ireland regarding the admission and integration of migrants, cooperation with the Polish state raises challenges, especially since the new government came to power in 2015, and mutual relations have become somewhat tense. The nature of the cooperation nowadays is largely shaped through the prism of the current government policy in combination with the specificity of the activity of a given organization and its goals.

The contemporary political climate of the Republic of Poland supports to the greatest extent groups promoting Polishness, tradition, the Polish language and cherishing the memory of Polish roots. The only organization declaring a definite improvement in relations with the Polish authorities – the Senate and the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland – is the organization dealing with Polish diaspora education in Ireland. Supportive sentiments towards potential returns of Poles, strengthening their ties with the country and promoting the Polish language do not always go hand in hand with the pro-integration policy of the host country's government. Owing to the fact that a significant number of Polish organizations are focused on the integration of Poles in Ireland, they do not always have real financial, substantive and moral support from institutions of the Polish state. Due to the aforementioned divergence in political programs, social and political relations between the two countries may result in a conflict with the institutions of the host country. In the context of Poland-Ireland relations, it is difficult to talk about an open conflict but it should be emphasized that the disparity of positions may result in indifference or withdrawal of funds on the Irish side, especially if organizational activities are perceived as isolationist.

Yet, Polish diaspora organizations have a broad insight into the problems of Poles and can scrutinise them both, from the perspective of migrants and from the perspective of the Irish state. The current alleged lack of quandaries affecting Poles with their simultaneously missing integration, especially in the institutional dimension, does not mean that this will not constitute a predicament for the Irish state in the future. If the objective is to prevent a future in which newcomers are not endowed with the same opportunities and rights of indigenous peoples, one should think about the forms of activity that won't only endeavour to maintain ethnic values and traditions, but will also put emphasis on the effective inclusion of the Polish community in a meaningful participation and contribution to a new and multicultural Ireland.

The broad implication of the present research is that regardless of all the obstacles described here, organizations for immigrants are in a position to form and actively promote and strengthen the integration of Poles in Ireland. If the future objective is of societies that are cohesive, cooperative and granting equal rights to access all that the country offers, as such, both the receiving community and the newcomers must commit not to isolate and potentially become marginalized ghettoised groups, which can result in animosities and negative sentiments. As history shows, a gradual merging into society is a natural process which will ensue, mostly through schooling and the common spaces that young Poles share with locals throughout the next few decades and also as a process which requires a generation or two; one's serious hope would be to help and support it rather than to hamper it. Importantly, there are reasons to acknowledge that organizations in Ireland are heading in the right direction and are likely to take on a more activating, global and integrating role, rather than succumbing to separatory tendencies; they could become the missing link in the formation of social cohesion in the community, consequently resulting in an improved well-being of its

members and in a fully-fledged ‘belonging’. The main conclusion that can be drawn here is that immigrant institutions have a fundamental and valuable role in reconciling differences between the host communities and its settlers with the ultimate aim of forming heterogeneous but inclusive, harmonious and more equal communities.

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