

The Internal Functioning of Immigrant Organisations. The Case of Polish Voluntary Associations in France

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Abstract: The article presents the internal aspects of the social sub-system of non-profit and voluntary associations in France, whose members are people holding Polish and dual Polish-French citizenships as well as French people of Polish origin and who pursue the goals related to the presence of the Polish immigrant and post-immigrant communities in France. In relation with these organisations, the article provides answers to the following questions: 1) What are their decision-making structures? 2) How mobile are the members within the structures and where does the mobility stem from? 3) What is the cooperation like between the movers and shakers in a specific organisation? The conclusions have been based on data from five case studies and 48 individual in-depth interviews revolving around typologically diverse associations plus data obtained in the course of an institutional opinion poll, carried out among Polish immigrant organisations with an online CAWI questionnaire completed by members of the Polish diaspora in France.

Key words: immigrant organisations, internal functioning, third sector, Polish diaspora, France

1. Introduction

This article² presents the results of an exploratory data analysis of the operations of the social sub-system of non-profit and voluntary associations in France whose

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members are citizens of Poland, double passport holders (Polish and French) and French citizens of Polish origin and who pursue goals related to the Polish immigrant and post-immigrant communities in the country. Further referred to as the Polish voluntary associations in France (PVAFs), they represent the non-profit sector and differ from public and for-profit organizations which can also operate for the benefit of a diaspora (Smith *et al.* 2016: 93–94; Tschirhart 2006: 523–524). The research revolved around associations with various goals, including religious, but which are not separate congregations (churches, parishes, religious orders etc.). What is more, the research encompassed only associations operating in a formal way i.e. ones that can be referred to as non-governmental organisations (Bogacz-Wojtanowska 2016: 14–15).

Associations are voluntary and permanent social organizations which satisfy their members' needs and pursuits, at the same time serving the entire society (Romul 1965: 46). While informal bonds can be forged there, the effectiveness of associations is impacted by the effectiveness of institutionalised operations: the formalised division of labour, rules and hierarchy of the management and the membership-related obligations (Szczepański 1972: 341–351). By definition, the goals of organisations operating in the non-profit sector are not targeted at generating profits. However, in the past decades, many of them have been forced to adopt the philosophy and modes of operation on the market (Eikenberry, Kluver 2004: 133–135).

Back in the 1990s, very few academic works dealt with managing non-profit organisations (Lewis 2014: 19–21). Contemporary literature emphasises the differences in the operations of the third sector organisations and private and public ones (Enjolras 2009; Cornforth, Spear 2010; Huczek 2014). The voluntary associations can assume various formal structures, depending on the management hierarchy, the way of making decisions and the extent of bureaucratisation (Lendzion 2016; Ostrower, Stone 2006). Attention has been drawn to the impact of the board's human and social capital on the effectiveness of managing the organisation and its potential for strategic change and innovation (Jaskyte 2012). Research into non-profit organisations in Canada has showed a positive relation between the social capital of the boards and the governance effectiveness (Fredette, Bradshaw 2012).

Immigrant organisations can be defined as membership associations established by immigrants or their descendants from a specific ethnic or national group in order to render services (social, economic or cultural), predominantly to individuals from this group, or providing advocacy (Nowosielski 2016: 15–19). Under scrutiny are the functions performed by organisations for the members of the diaspora, the societies of the country of origin and the receiving country as well as their relations with the social and institutional environment, including other associations within the diaspora (Portes, Fernández-Kelly 2016; Wang 2018). Their state is viewed in the context of the factors which can be aligned with four areas: the characteristics of the migration process, the sending society, the receiving society and the

relations between them (Dzięglewski, Nowosielski 2021). Less attention has been devoted to the internal operations of immigrant organisations. Under analysis are the categories of immigrants more willing to be a part of an organisation and to work for its benefit (Christopoulou, Leontsini 2017; Schrover, Vermeulen 2005). Attention has been drawn to the fact that the functions of these associations change as a specific immigrant community integrates with the receiving society (Łopata-Znaniński 1977).

In 2020, there were 1.5 million associations in France. Typically, their activities revolve around culture (24%), sport (17%), social and health-related issues (13%) and entertainment (12%); paid personnel is employed by only 157 thousand of them (Bazin *et al.* 2020: 2). In 2013, 37% of the cultural organisations dealt with stage performances, 25% with visual arts and writing, 19% with socio-cultural animation, 13% with heritage and 6% with artistic and cultural education (Rathle 2019: 3). Research into performance arts associations, carried out in 2013, showed that it is easier to find employment in older and recognised organisations (one fourth of the analysed associations; 55% of them had paid personnel) (Deroin 2014: 8–9). The organisations representing immigrants and people of foreign origin in France do not have a separate legal status and are treated just like any other French association (*Loi du 1^{er} juillet 1901... 2021[1901]*).

In France there are approx. 220 PVAFs, located in all the departments (Kubera 2022). They relate to the traditions of the various waves of migration, including the political wave from the 19th century, the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, the mass economic migration in the 1920s and 1930s, WWII (combatants), the political migration between 1945 and 1989, the economic migration from before 2004 (the year of Poland's accession to the European Union; the French market fully opened to Polish citizens in 2008) and afterwards (Janowska 1964; Ponty 2011). In the past, there were many organisations based on the interwar period migration, focused primarily on the mining districts of Nord and Pas-de-Calais (NPDC) (Dzwonkowski 1979; Gogolewski 1990; Żaba 1986). However, the works devoted to these organisations revolve predominantly around the time from before the 1970s and 1980s when associations in the old centres started to function less dynamically because of the progressing integration with the French society and the decreasing influx of new Polish immigrants (Garçon 1992: 109; Petersen 1971: 154–155). On the other hand, research into the organisations located in Paris often relates to their contribution to the development of culture and thought as well as the development of social, economic, artistic and scientific contacts between Poland and France. The analysed issues include the impact of the actions instigated by the leaders of organisations from Paris and the NPDC on the increasing political visibility of the Polish diaspora in France (Voldoire 2015; Vychytil-Baudoux 2010).

2. Data and methods

The goal of the research was to explain the internal functioning of the PVAFs. The detailed research questions were: 1) What are the decision-making structures in these organisations? 2) What is the mobility in the organisations' structures and where does it stem from? 3) What is the cooperation like between the movers and shakers in a specific PVAF?

The analyses, whose results are presented here, encompass data collected as part of the "Polish Immigrant Organisations in Europe" project, presented elsewhere in parts (Kubera 2020; Kubera 2022) and included into 14 additional individual in-depth interviews which have not been used to date. Computer software for qualitative analysis was used to re-code and select all the data in order to provide an answer to the research question posed in the article. The data came from:

- 1) case studies of five PVAFs (typologically different with respect to the date of establishment, the geographic location, the profile, the characteristics and the number of members and recipients), based on observation of their operations, visits to their seats if there were any, analyses of the existing materials and those created in the course of the research, carried out between April 2016 and December 2017;
- 2) 48 individual in-depth interviews including 20 with board members, regular members and the recipients of their services or people from the PVAF's environment surveyed by means of case studies (four IDs in each organisation), 13 with experts living in France and knowledgeable about the various types of PVAFs (researchers, journalists, employees of Polish diplomatic services, honorary consuls, representatives of umbrella organisations and various environments, regional leaders), 8 with representatives of other various typologically different PVAFs, 7 with representatives of the French NGOs and institutions of importance to the PVAFs (local, regional and central level), carried out between September 2016 and July 2017.

The results of the qualitative data analysis have been supplemented with quantitative data from an institutional opinion poll (a questionnaire sent by slow post or electronic post completed by 51 PVAFs i.e. 23% of all of the existing ones, in operation or not, identified in various databases), carried out between November 2016 and July 2017 (see Nowak 2020) and an online CAWI questionnaire (375 questionnaires completed by inhabitants of France speaking Polish: 26% born before 1977, 22% born between 1977 and 1982, 27% born between 1983 and 1988 and 26% born after 1988. As it turns out, 98% of them have Polish citizenship and 10% French; 70% declared permanent stay, 22% temporary stay and 8% alternating stay in France), carried out in the spring and summer of 2018 (see Cichocki 2020).

Table 1 presents the selected characteristics of five PVAFs surveyed by means of case studies (further referred to by the number specified in the table). It shows the

diversity of their operation profiles, formal structures and the characteristics of the members and recipients. Some of them may be referred to as Polish-French because of the membership of people with a dual citizenship (PVAF no. 2, 3 and 4), the French without Polish immigration background (PVAF no. 3, 4 and 5) and individuals whose ancestors were Polish but they are not immigrants nor do they feel like ones (PVAF no. 2, 3, 4 and 5). Table 1 also reflects the results of an institutional opinion poll and an IDI analysis with experts according to whom a majority of PVAFs were established before 2004 and are managed by members of the diaspora from older waves of migration.

A feature shared by PVAFs no. 1–5 is all-year operation observed from outside the associations, typical of approx. one third of all the PVAFs. They are also relatively numerous organisations: out of the 44 PVAFs which answered a question about the number of members in the institutional opinion poll, 9 have fewer than 21 members, 12 have between 21 and 50, 15 have from 51 to 150 (like PVAFs no. 1 and 5) and 8 – from 151 to 500 (like PVAFs no. 2, 3 and 4). Data on the other PVAFs are included in interviews with the representatives of associations from outside no. 1–5. What is more, the experts, representatives of the French NGOs and institutions as well as some regular members and people from the environment of PVAFs no. 1–5, shared their experience of contacts with various PVAFs thus providing even better insight into the operations of this type of organisation.

3.1. Three rings of involvement and decision-making

An analysis of the data has shown two crossing structures in the organisations under scrutiny. The first, formal structure, is defined by the provisions of the associations' statutes. The structure consists of two stages (the authorised members choose the board from themselves) or three stages (the members select the administration board and the management board as part of it). It defines the framework of operations of the other, informal structure where the scope of competence and decision-making results from the scope of involvement in a PVAF's activity (the bigger the activity and the scope of a person's tasks, the bigger his/her impact on the association). In this structure, the organisation or its core part is represented by the board. However, it operates in an environment of other people, equally or less involved, including volunteers and paid personnel.

Bearing in mind the immediate environment of the core in a description of the informal structure of a PVAF, at least three rings of different frequency and scope of decision-making can be identified. The first ring i.e. the core, affects decision-making the most. It is competent to handle both the recent and strategic issues.

The other ring deals only with some of the issues; it may affect the decisions to an equal or lesser extent as the core members do. In PVAFs no. 1–5, allowing individuals

Table 1.

Polish Voluntary Associations in France (PVAFs no. 1–5) surveyed by means of case studies

	Operations, period when established, number of members, membership criteria*	Formal structure	The members' prevailing social and demographic features and citizenship	Major recipients
1.	Professional Est. after 2004. 51–150 members. Criteria: tertiary education, professional achievements.	Every three years, the general meeting selects the administrative council from the council members (up to 21 members; during the survey approx. 70% of them were women) and the board – every two years (5 people).	People in their 30s and 40s, with tertiary education, most of them women, speak Polish, Poles who came to France several or over a dozen years ago.	Speaker of Polish; typically members; with specific social and professional profiles.
2.	Scientific and artistic Est. before 1990. 151–500 members. Criteria: subject-related activity, recommendation of two existing members.	Every five years, the general meeting selects the administrative board (over a dozen people; during the survey approx. 85% of males) including the board (5 people). Employs paid personnel (6–10 people) and cooperates with interns. Has an advisory committee.	Older, with tertiary education, the French of Polish origin and Poles from the older waves of migration. The general meetings are held in French, the board speaks predominantly Polish.	Speaker of French; members and people from outside the association; with specific interests.
3.	Cultural and educational Est. 1990–2004. 151–500 members.	The general meeting selects the board (nine people; during the survey – seven women). Has thematic groups managed by board members.	Diverse age and education, Polish and Polish-French families with school children, Poles who came to France several or over a dozen years ago or in the 1980s and 90s, to a lesser extent the French of Polish origin. The latest general meeting was held, by exception, in French; the board speaks predominantly Polish.	Speaker of Polish or French; members and people from outside the association; at different ages; with different interests.

4.	Social and educational Est. after 2004. 151–500 members.	A formal division into two categories of members: beneficiaries (several hundred people, without the right to vote) and involved in the operations (approx. 20 people, at the general meetings they choose a board of 5, during the survey 3 of them were women). Employs paid personnel (1–5 people) and cooperates with paid interns.	A majority (of the beneficiaries): diverse age, immigrants from Poland and other countries. A minority (active members): Poles from the older waves of migration, the French of Polish origin or not. The board typically speaks Polish.	Speaker of Polish or French; mainly members; people at and past working age who need support.
5.	Performing Polish music and dances Est. before 1990. 51–150 members.	The general meeting selects the board (7 people; during the survey – 3 women). Thematic groups.	The French of Polish origin (the second to the fourth generation) or not. At different ages: from children to seniors.	Speaker of French, sometimes also Polish; from outside the association; the elderly.

* If there are special criteria on top of criteria like paying the fee.
 Source: Author’s own compilation on the basis of data collected in the survey.

from the other ring to make decisions depends on the core’s policy. For example, in PVAF no. 1, the president decided in favour of including the entire administrative board into the regular decision-making process. In PVAF no. 5, it is the board (representing the core in this case) that quite frequently organises meetings of all the members. In PVAF no. 2, if need be, the core includes single volunteers into the decision-making process. A voluntary from outside the core described the meetings dedicated to the subsequent season in the following way: *“People in charge of every section meet and discuss things. (...) When they have something more specific, it is easier to set the dates, accept them or not, discuss some projects and arrive at an annual action plan.” (IDI_20:42³).*

The third ring is represented by the remaining members with the right to vote. They are in charge of approving, modifying and controlling the decisions made by the two remaining rings, typically once a year during general meetings. In PVAF no. 1: *“(...) all the members decide only at the general meeting, during the year summary*

³ In this text, when I quote the content of an interview, the first digit refers to its number; following a colon, the second digit refers to the number of the paragraph in the interview in a post-transcription version.

and plans in general. (...) Later on it is not possible." (IDI_16:36). On the other hand, in PVAF no. 2, the general meeting is treated as an opportunity for the biggest number of members to meet (IDI_19:32).

A juxtaposition of the formal and informal structure is interesting. In the organisations where the formal structure consists of two stages (PVAFs no. 3, 4, and 5), the composition of the core of the informal structure and the importance of the other ring in the decision-making process are different. In PVAF no. 3, the core consists of a relatively large board. It makes decisions collectively ("*the board does everything*", IDI_5:280; "*great democracy*", IDI_6:68; similarly in another PVAF with a similar profile: IDI_38:56–62). In its plans, the core only considers support for individuals from the other ring: several other regular volunteers who devote less time to the association than the board ("*There are some people from outside the board who help us, some of them help in our school, and they do not want to be on the board (...). Of course there are people who, in specific situations, when something needs to be done, will always help, will go places, fetch things etc.*", IDI_5:364). In PVAF no. 4, the board members also have the biggest impact on the organisation, with the president's strong position (this stems from the fact that she devotes most of the time to the association; she is the only person who visits it on a daily basis). The decisions are made typically during meetings with the closest co-workers: the other volunteers and paid personnel. They all represent the core, tackling all the issues on a regular basis. The volunteers from outside the core, who devote less time to the organisation, do not take part in the decision-making process on a regular basis (the second ring) or make decisions at the general meetings (the third ring). Interestingly, PVAF no. 4 also has members who, according to the statute, are only receivers and who, formally, do not have the right to vote which casts them outside the decision-making rings. The situation is different in PVAF no. 5 where both the formal and the informal structures are two-stage. Owing to the considerable democratisation of the decision-making process, in PVAF no. 5 it is hard to note an indirect ring between the core and the regular members. The role of a member is not limited to participating in general meetings; he/she is much more active in the decision-making process than in the remaining associations under scrutiny.

Also in the organisations which formally have a three-stage structure (PVAF no. 1 and 2), the first and the second rings of the informal structure consisted of various elements and were of different significance to management thereof. In PVAF no. 1, the decision-making organ is the administrative council (the second ring) which attracts members acting for the association. The decisions are made by a majority of votes, often remotely – online. However, within the council, a group of the most involved individuals have come up (the core), including the board members and two or three other representatives of the council in charge of specific aspects of operations. In the interviews, these individuals were referred to as "*key, consultants*" (IDI_14:56) "*who in fact work very hard*" (IDI_14:44) or who "*in fact are very active*" (IDI_15:143).

However, the decisions are always made as part of the council where all the votes are equal. In PVAF no. 2, the council does not participate in regular management and acts more like a consultant, just like in the case of the other volunteers in the organisation (the second ring). The decisions are made within the core (the board and the paid personnel) on a regular basis and in content-related matters.

Individuals actively involved in the various PVAFs (also from outside of PVAFs no. 1–5) who gave in-depth interviews, treated the members and recipients of associations as potential future members of the first decision-making ring. So hypothetically, the organisation raising considerable interest of various social categories of the local diaspora had more possibilities to recruit new people to the core than the less popular ones. The research has revealed that this statement is only partially true. On the one hand, a large base of members is of course important if not indispensable for maintaining the operations on a specified level with view of the member fees and a possibility of financing some ventures with them. On the other hand, the number of members does not need to translate into the number of people involved. In PVAFs no. 1–4, a similar number of at most a dozen or so people work while their member bases vary with respect to size.

Assuming that, depending on the venture, the first and the second rings of informal structures in these organisations consist of 12–18 people, in each of them the people involved represent a different part of the member base. It is approx. 2.5–4% in PVAF no. 4 (including the members without a right to vote); 3–4.5% in PVAF no. 2; 6–9% in PVAF no. 3 (disregarding children enlisted in the NGO) and 17–26% in PVAF no. 1. On the other hand, in PVAF no. 5 the first and the second ring include practically all the members although the core is smaller (approx. 6.5% of the member basis). The number of active members may therefore be similar in organisations of several dozen as well as several hundred people.

In the CAWI online questionnaire, 48,8% of the respondents declared having contact with the PVAFs and 14,7% having used their offer. The members of these organisations represented 7,2%, they were supported financially by 4,5% while 4,8% of all the respondents acted as volunteers for them.

3.2. Mobility in the structure: recruitment to the core

Despite supplementing the core with new people, mobility in the structures of the organisations under scrutiny is limited. In 2021, the management boards of PVAFs no. 1–5 consisted mainly of individuals who had a previous tenure if not several tenures. In PVAF no. 2, the oldest surveyed organisation, the president has held his position for nearly twenty years. The organisations established in the 1980s and 90s are still managed mostly by their founders; the presidents have not changed in any of them (PVAFs no. 3 and 5 plus two other cultural and educational PVAFs). The same holds true for the younger associations i.e. PVAFs no. 1 and 4 established after 2004.

The members of the cores, volunteers and people from the PVAF environment who gave in-depth interviews, indicated the difficulties in supplementing the cores with new people. This holds true for both the organisations which have increasing problems with maintaining the number of members and the organisations whose members are regularly replenished. In the latter associations, a majority of their members and followers assume chiefly a consumer attitude. A representative of a cultural and educational organisation from a city different than PVAF no. 3 defined the involvement of the local Polish diaspora as *“that of an audience, (...) moderate”* (IDI_38:89–92). A board member of PVAF no. 1 had similar insights: *“The number of involved people is too small. (...) committed people would have been helpful, people who not only come and look but who actually help.”* (IDI_14:74). The core members perceived the small number of volunteers as a threat to continuing the organisation’s operations. This was the case of another cultural and educational organisation from outside PVAFs no. 1–5: *“I’m a bit worried. When we leave I cannot think of anyone who would be able to take it over. For some time, we have been attracting young people to commit themselves but nobody wants this burden.”* (IDI_40:141). Similar concerns were expressed by people from PVAFs no. 1–5. Interestingly, readiness for voluntary involvement in the operations of Polish organisations in France was declared by 51% of the CAWI online questionnaire respondents.

Inclusion of new people into the management boards of the PVAFs i.e. formally the decision makers in a group of members, takes place during the general meetings. In the surveyed organisations, sometimes the boards appointed members who were only known to individuals from the first or the second ring (e.g. PVAFs no. 1, 2 and 3). However, typically the people included into the management boards of PVAFs no. 1–5 for a new tenure have cooperated with the leaders and cores. Therefore, the transfer to the board and core was related to the organisation members’ presence in the second ring. A leader of one of the combatant organisations (from outside PVAFs no. 1–5) thought that to suggest changes, it was imperative to previously act for the benefit of the association (IDI_3:253–257). In PVAFs no. 1 and 3, the members were encouraged to affect the organisation by initiating new ventures and contributing to completion thereof. In PVAF no. 3, delegating some of the responsibility for smaller and bigger projects is a viable strategy of gradual inclusion of the members, first to the second and later on to the first ring. The strategy is also employed to check the motivation and modes of operation that in the future would be formally decisive for the organisation (IDI_5:500). Similarly, the members of the core of PVAF no. 1 try to execute some control of which member of the administrative council is appointed a board member: *“You need to be an active member and act for the benefit of the association to be in the group and become president. It cannot be anyone, someone unknown. What we need is trustworthy people: we know how they operate, what they stand for.”* (IDI_15:6–7). The founders of a cultural and educational organisation from the 1990s (from outside PVAFs no. 1–5) would like to see familiar younger

people in the future core. For the time being, the willingness to include them into the core has only been suggested. In another organisation from outside PVAFs no. 1–5, taking care of protecting the material traces of Polish presence in France, recruitment to the core is more advanced. Its long-time leader appointed one of her co-workers to take over her role in the future: *“I am growing a successor. (...) He already knows that he is intended to get involved.”* (IDI_36:64).

The association members may not only be included into the cores but also removed from them. In PVAF no. 1, during its tenure the administration council eliminates members who are not sufficiently committed. On the other hand, in PVAF no. 3 goals mainly shared by the core members are of importance. Some give up on work for the benefit of the organisation when they find out that there are no private, financial or other benefits involved (IDI_6:172–174). The differences in the goals were also the reason why one person resigned his position on the board (IDI_6:160–164).

The collected qualitative data suggest several factors which make it easier for immigrants from Poland or French people of Polish origin to be included as volunteers into a PVAF core. The factors conducive to long-term involvement in the operations include primarily the length of stay in France and the related stability of the familial and professional situation (more time for social activity), less mobility (conducive to lasting involvement) and better acculturation in the French society (a better command of the French language facilitating contacts with the institutions). The totality of all these features relates less to the latest migration from Poland and more to the older immigrants (who arrived in the 1990s and earlier) and older French people of Polish origin as well as other elderly French people (e.g. spouses of Poles, friends of people of Polish origin). Interestingly, these features refer not only to the cores of the organisations established before 1990 whose target audience is well-established in the French society (PVAFs no. 2 and 5). They are also characteristic of the cores of organisations established later (PVAFs no. 3 and 4): while their offer is targeted at immigrants from the latest wave, in neither of them are they core members. PVAF no. 1 is the only organisation where in the core people in their 30s and 40s prevail; they came to France after Poland’s accession to the European Union (this is the age of most of the members; the association’s goal is networking of people with similar professional profiles).

The small share of people below the age of 35 is typical of most boards of the PVAFs which took part in the institutional survey (Table 2).

The new migration’s poor involvement was an issue frequently touched upon in the in-depth interviews (e.g. an employee of a Polish diplomatic unit: IDI_23:12–15). A voluntary who has lived in France since the 1980s and has cooperated with PVAF no. 4, has indicated failure to satisfy the economic needs of the newcomers. On the one hand, it hampers their activity in the PVAF; on the other, it encourages them to contact other immigrants, specifically when they do not speak good French (IDI_12:61). A female member of the core of an association of special profile artists

Table 2.

The management boards of the PVAFs which took part in the institutional survey

	Number of board members	Number of female board members	Number of board members below the age of 35
Medium	7.52	4.52	1.13
Median	6,00	3.50	0.00
Dominant	5	3	0
Standard deviation	5.411	4.167	2.247

48 PVAFs provided replies to this question.

Source: The author's own compilation on the basis of data collected during the survey.

(from outside PVAFs no. 1–5) has also admitted that young people were unwilling to get involved. She indicated professional duties as the main reason: *"But it is not so simple. Especially that when it comes to [name of category of artists], we all have our lives, we are not retired, quite the opposite."* (IDI_20:91). In this context the fact that in PVAFs no. 2, 4 and 5, the presidents are retired individuals, may be of importance.

What also prevents involvement is high mobility related to professional activity. It is characteristic of members of PVAF no. 1 and its core; in the in-depth interviews it was mentioned as a threat to the continuity of an organisation's operations. The problem also affects PVAF no. 3: a large part of its members and recipients are young Polish immigrants: *"We had people, two or three of them, who were willing but it turned out that they did not stay here, left for another city."* (IDI_8:25–28). The groups of employees of Polish companies who stay for a short time in one place are the least prone to get involved in the operations of PVAF no. 3: *"They are willing to come to [name of an open air event], things like [name of an open air event]. But nothing else."* (IDI_5:375).

According to experts and activists from cultural and educational organisations, parents of school children, especially women, are a category standing out among the latest immigrants (IDI_13:14; IDI_38:92; IDI_40:109). In PVAF no. 3, they are not core members but they are reliable when it comes to active participation in a specific type of venture: *"They will get involved in whatever pertains to the school and their children's activity i.e. school plays, nativity plays, things in which children perform or when children need to be taken to a meeting. (...) And anything that relates to the family: a campfire where children can run around with the other kids and I can talk, that's the occasion."* (IDI_5:397–399). Inclusion of this group of immigrants into other ventures, like the promotion of Polish culture, requires the core members' straightforward requests for help (IDI_5:378). A female board member of another cultural and educational PVAF also emphasised many new immigrants' need for direct contact

with other Poles: *“Everybody’s happy to meet and talk. Even on 6 December when sometimes the number of children equals that of parents because they come to talk. (...) Some of them find it helpful.” (IDI_40:121).* On the other hand, this category’s regular involvement in the organisation’s affairs is not so obvious: *They come and some of them like it, they stay and want to act. Some don’t, some do something sporadically. When you ask them they will organise something, do something but not everyone wants to do it regularly because that means commitment. (IDI_40:109).* An expert shared similar reflections on the new PVAFs which accompany the Polish parishes in France and organise many social events. She noted that the events’ participants are involved by the parsons or PVAF leaders who suggest clearly defined tasks to tackle (IDI_13:20).

Locations in France, which before 1939 attracted large groups of the Polish working class, are an interesting case as today they are not always among the most popular destinations. In the relevant PVAFs, French people of Polish origin and their friends without the Polish migration background prevail. According to an expert knowledgeable about the Polish diaspora in the former mining district of Nord and Pas-de-Calais (NPDC), the cores of the local PVAFs consist mainly of people or their ancestors, who used to be active in organisations: *“First and foremost, these people grow up with it, it runs in the families, these are simply dynasties. You can call it like that: the people who saw their parents getting very involved together with the grandparents, that is how the family sustains itself. There are also people who were active in youth organisations and now want to continue it.” (IDI_2:23).* The NPDC also hosts the seat of PVAF no. 5 whose profile requires the members’ considerable involvement. To a large extent, they are recruited from individuals involved in inter-generational activities for the benefit of the association: *“Anyone can be a member but we have been lucky with what we call ‘large families’. Let me give you an example: me and my wife, our two daughters, their children, in total 12 people, we all belong. There are three or four families like this which represents roughly half of the association members.” (IDI_24:166).*

All over France, there are places similar to the NPDC mining district. The members of the older and continuously established new PVAFs are mainly people with solely the French citizenship, well integrated with the French society, sometimes not speaking Polish or attending courses of the Polish language. According to an expert, ironically – the difficulties with recruiting to the cores of these organisations stem from the local Polish diaspora’s establishment in the receiving society: *“(...) these people are integrated with the French society, they have their position in the French society; they may think from time to time about their Polish roots but that’s it.” (IDI_2:25).* In PVAF no. 5, the member base has been permanent since the 1980s (approx. a hundred members) although the newcomers are now less frequent: *“We have problems with recruiting children, this is the fourth generation. You need to make a real effort, advertise. They won’t come by themselves, unlike in my time.”*

(*IDI_27:32*). Since 2000, PVAF no. 5 has not attracted new members who would be new Polish immigrants born in Poland. The last new members of the type joined the association in the 1980s and 1990s but after some time left the organisation and returned to Poland (*IDI_24:228–230*).

The slow shrinking of the member base coupled with the increasing average age of the members and the resulting bigger problems with restoring the cores also affect the older or niche PVAFs in large agglomerations. While these areas are large centres of the Polish population, the activities on the part of these organisations do not satisfy the needs of a majority of the new immigrants. For example, these are older professional, specialist and combatant organisations, dealing with the past of the immigration, the contemporary and historical contacts between Poland and France or targeted at the French speaking public. A case in point is PVAF no. 2: *“In my opinion, the threat may be that (...) the association will vanish in a natural way because there will be no new members or the existing ones will not be able or willing to continue the activity.”* (*IDI_18:90*). An expert connected with the latest immigration to France thinks that the older (*“historical”*) associations could not open up to the younger members of the diaspora: *“(...) from my knowledge of the dozen or so historical associations, (...) they have not created a backbone in the form of young people who could continue the operations in a new way, according to a new formula.”* (*IDI_13:12*). The decreasing numbers of members have plagued every eighth organisation partaking in the institutional opinion poll and have provided answers to the question about the changes to the number of members within the two years preceding the poll (a drop in the number of members in 6 out of 48 PVAFs).

3.3. The operations of the cores

The board and council members in the surveyed organisations do their work free of charge which stems from the regulations of the French law (e.g. *IDI_24:148; IDI_19:172; IDI_38:130*). In PVAFs no. 1–5, the division of labour is described in a clear way. The distinct division of tasks in PVAF no. 3 has been noted even by outsiders, like an employee of a Polish diplomatic unit: *“They cooperate and sort of supplement each other, right? (...) Everyone has something to take care of.”* (*IDI_37:89*). The members of the core of PVAF no. 3, just like in PVAFs no. 2, 4 and 5, deal with similar issues for more than one tenure. Things are a bit different in PVAF no. 1 where the division of labour is also clear-cut but the assumption is that it is not carved in stone but rather, modified at the start of a new tenure or when a vacancy occurs: *“This year I received a new function because I wanted to transfer from communication towards sponsoring so I have tried my hand there, too.”* (*IDI_14:56*), *“We do not want it to be one person’s responsibility. (...) We want this experience to be exchanged.”* (*IDI_15:17*).

On the other hand, in PVAFs no. 1–4 there are situations when the division of labour among the members from the first and the second rings is established in an *ad hoc* manner. This happens especially before larger events, e.g. in PVAF no. 1: *“These things are absolutely assigned... but sometimes we act ad hoc, spontaneously. Besides, when there is an event, everybody works, there is no other way.”* (IDI_15:131). PVAF no. 3 has adopted a similar scenario: *“Yes, we have a division of labour. You could say that we all have our responsibilities but when there are events like Christmas Eve or something, everyone needs to make an effort and together we organise something.”* (IDI_5:263). When the associations organise large events, the core members sometimes handle a few things at a time. One of the experts said that in organising big events, few PVAFs can afford a clear division of detailed tasks and this may have negative effects: *“All this takes place in a rather ad hoc manner and this is how later things go south and chaotic.”* (IDI_13:28). The leader of PVAF no. 4 also mentioned the multi-tasking despite the assignment of the responsibilities, but more in the context of new issues coming up. According to the leader, this stems from the small number of people working in the organisation (IDI_11:81).

The core members of PVAFs no. 1–5 referred to the cooperation as constructive and friendly. According to one of the members, the core of PVAF no. 1 is not a social group although it attracts people who *“are on the same wavelengths”* and with whom you can *“talk about different things over coffee”* (IDI_16:44). The activists of PVAF no. 3 are also *“a collection of people you do not choose”* (IDI_5:591). However, they can ignore possible differences, for example in world views: *“(...) if this happens, we just put it all aside, it’s OK, we don’t need to talk about it.”* (IDI_5:593). PVAFs no. 1–5 referred to themselves as politically neutral (this was not the case of the leader of one of the combatant organisations). None of the associations showed quarrels in the boards which, according to a journalist, is a characteristic feature of the contemporary PVAFs (IDI_1:177; according to her, many conflicts stem from a rivalry for the president’s position). In PVAF no. 2, the core members accepted the leader’s role and recognised his merits (e.g. IDI_18:90). Both in PVAF no. 1 and no 3., democracy, effectiveness and concluding discussions were appreciated (IDI_6:68; IDI_16:44). In PVAF no. 4, the core members’ trust was emphasised which, in several cases, results from a long history together (IDI_10:53). According to the president, the decisions are made without conflicts (IDI_9:351). In PVAF no. 3, the core was compared with household or family members who have different opinions and characters but can count on each other and start working when they see that things need to be done (IDI_6:68). On the other hand, members of PVAF no. 5 are often members of several actual families: children, parents and grandparents. A board member described the atmosphere in the NGO as its strength: *“We know each other well and, how shall I put it, we have been through a lot and it’s a bit like in a family.”* (IDI_26:53).

Members of PVAFs no. 1–5, the people from their environment and experts, all emphasise the great importance of leaders to the organisations, e.g. an employee of

a diplomatic post called them “*flagship figures*” (IDI_23:52). There are at least three factors behind this impact of the leaders. Firstly, it stems from a general conviction that, in the French law, presidents are legal representatives of associations (IDI_41:66; IDI_19:158; in fact, it depends on the statute – typically the president initials agreements on behalf of the organisation but does not make decisions about the most significant issues; see *Instances dirigeantes...* 2021). Secondly, bearing in mind the mobility in the structures of the surveyed organisations, the presidents have at their disposal considerable management knowledge (e.g. IDI_42:21). According to the leaders of PVAF no. 3, when new, younger people take over management “*they deal with something which, to some extent, is an existing product i.e. we operate in a groove, everything is set and we have ploughed through stuff in many areas (...)*” (IDI_5:524). Thirdly, the presidents often have a bigger informal impact on the decisions than the other members, including the decisions on the division of labour; this was very distinct in PVAFs no. 2 and 4. The two latter issues may result in petrification of an association’s goals and modes of operation although not necessarily in a complete way (e.g. in PVAFs no. 2 and 5, new forms of presenting old content were introduced to interest new audiences). Fourthly, presidents are among people who devote most of the time to the organisation. President of PVAF no. 1 initiated and co-established some of the ventures. A board member in PVAF no. 3 referred to the organisation’s leaders as “*locomotives*” twice, adding that “*they have a lot of energy, many ideas*” (IDI_7:96). On the other hand, a board member in PVAF no. 4 admitted that the association’s condition depended primarily on the president’s work: “*I guess what is missing is the critical mass of people who would be its pillars. An association’s future cannot rely on one person because right now, [first name] is the only person who visits the association every single day, sometimes even on Saturday for the duty time.*” (IDI_10:81). Let me add that while the informal leaders of PVAFs no. 1–5 were also officially the presidents, these superimposing elements of the formal and informal structures are not a rule, at least in other, smaller organisations. In two small associations of cultural profile whose representatives took part in the survey (IDI_1; IDI_39; both have several members), people with formal functions other than presidents have the biggest informal impact on the decisions and contribution to their growth.

When the core lacks people who could take over the leader’s responsibilities, there is a risk that the organisation will end or limit its operations. An employee of a Polish diplomatic unit presented a situation like this: “*[City] is an excellent example: there is an association, there used to be even several of them with one person in the lead. It turned out that this person (...) stopped working, for a while, took a leave for various reasons and nothing is going on (...). Something is happening, there’s no denying, but it is not what used to be when [first name] was active.*” (IDI_37:75).

The paid personnel employed by the PVAFs can also be a part of the informal first ring. Although it is not a rule, it is the case of PVAFs no. 2 and 4 where the employees

have been with the organisations for at least several years (e.g. people formerly employed in PVAF no. 4 for a specified period of time were not core members). The board members from these organisations were of an opinion that the advantage of working with paid personnel over working with volunteers is the ability to get them more involved. On the one hand, the work of volunteers from outside the core makes it possible to complete numerous projects. On the other hand, the core members are not always certain about a task being completed (*IDI_19:178; IDI_9:442*). A member of PVAF no. 1 made similar comments on cooperation with volunteers as part of the first and second rings (*IDI_15:143*). Among the PVAFs which took part in the institutional opinion poll and related to the issue, 27 out of 48 did not have paid employees in the year preceding the poll. On the other hand, 8 PVAFs cooperated with paid employees on a regular basis while 13 declared cases of resorting to paid work against single contracts or job orders.

In PVAFs no. 2 and 4, the number of paid employees would have grown if not for the financial situation (*IDI_11:53; IDI_19:170*). In PVAF no. 1, a board member drew attention to the hypothetical advantages of a situation when an organisation has a secretary (*IDI_15:103*). However, the members of PVAFs no. 1, 3 and 5 thought that employing paid personnel was against the philosophy of their organisations (*IDI_6:110; IDI_14:70; IDI_27:60*). What is more, PVAF no. 3 considered introducing remuneration for the teachers in a Polish school but it turned out to be implausible for financial reasons (*IDI_5:322*). The teachers relinquish their salaries; as a result, the organisation can earmark the savings for other purposes (a similar situation in another cultural and educational organisation: *IDI_40:149*; in schools managed by the Polish ministry of education, the teachers are paid by the Polish state: *IDI_38:72*). A member of a hobby organisation from outside PVAFs no. 1–5 decided that no remuneration is what differentiates a company from an association (*IDI_41:12*).

4. Conclusions

Bearing in mind the data presented above, several features of structures can be identified in the surveyed PVAFs (*research question 1*). These include flattening (a small number of management levels), a wide range of management (few managers in comparison with the total number of members), power aligned with the competence and operations for the benefit of the organisation, centralisation, democratisation of the decision-making process on the management level and, to a small extent (with the exception of PVAF no. 5), on the level of the entire organisation, prevalence of horizontal communication on the level of management, and vertical on the level of the association. Formal structures (two- and three-stage) define the framework of operation of the informal structures where the scope of competence and decision-making is related to the degree of a person's involvement in a PVAF's

operations. The informal structures include three decision-making rings: the core (the people most committed to the association and the decision-makers), the second and third ring. The core of a PVAF is typically represented by the board members (an organ set in the official structure). In some of the PVAFs, the composition of the core is supplemented by the other most committed individuals, in some cases members of statutory organs other than the board, e.g. an administrative council. In the PVAFs employing personnel, the core sometimes includes paid individuals associated for a long time. In all the surveyed associations, the board members work as volunteers which stems from the provisions of the French law. Therefore, by definition, paid personnel strongly involved in a PVAFs operations may participate in making decisions attributed to the statutory organs only in an informal way. The second decision-making ring of the informal structure contains the remaining volunteers and paid personnel working for an organisation. The frequency and scope of their involvement in the decision-making process depends on the core's policy. The third ring consists of all the other members with a right to vote and taking part in the general meetings.

Within the several years of the tenure, the composition of the boards in the surveyed PVAFs changed only slightly (*research question 2*). In the older organisations, the presidents perform their functions for over a dozen years and longer. The small mobility of the structures in these PVAFs is affected by the consumer attitude towards the associations, lack of interest in their activity, lack of time because of family life and professional responsibilities, vocational mobility, insufficient acculturation in the receiving society or an unstable life situation (the latest migration), assimilation with the French society (the French of Polish origin), the niche nature of some of the PVAFs or problems with attracting new members. What is more, the work done by the boards of organisations operating all year long requires regularity and is not paid. These factors contribute to the difficulties with recruiting to the cores which typically consist of people connected with the older waves of migration. This also holds true for the PVAFs whose major audience arrived in France in the past few or a dozen or so years. The category of the latest immigrants, most willing to join the PVAFs and their activities, are parents (specifically mothers) of school children. Recruitment to the cores of the PVAFs is frequently two-stage. Then, at stage one, the core hands over some responsibilities and the related competence to a selected person. At stage two, when the disclosed motivation and modes of operation are positively evaluated, that person is offered more frequent participation in the work and decisions made by the core, or formal membership of the core i.e. joining the board.

The members of the cores and the second ring of the surveyed PVAFs specialise in the responsibilities, oftentimes carried out for longer than one or two tenures (*research question 3*). In the youngest organisation, surveyed by means of a case study, the members tend to switch responsibilities even if the president has not changed. Despite the division of labour, the core members are multi-task individuals. In the

course of tackling larger projects or, sometimes also regular activities, many tasks are appointed in an *ad hoc* manner. On the one hand, the relations in the cores are formalised but they are also close to social. Maintaining a similar composition of the boards for several tenures may be conducive to informal bonds in the decision-making process, reinforcing the position of the existing members (specifically leaders) and petrification of the goals and modes of operation of the PVAFs. In a longer perspective, it may lead to burnout in the board members and, if accompanied by difficulties with recruitment to the cores, limitation or altogether suspension of the organisation's operations.

What is more, the analysis has also led to identifying some interesting aspects, only touched upon in this text for volume-related reasons and the need to focus on the research questions. The boards' feminisation, the "family-like" nature and the ephemeral activities of some of the PVAFs, coupled with the impact of a sometimes acute acculturation of people of Polish origin are certainly aspects worth elaborating on in future surveys.

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