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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Nowosielski, M. (2020). The roles and functions of Polish immigrant organisations in Europe. *Migration and Diasporas: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3(2), 79-110. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-76825-1>

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The roles and functions of Polish immigrant organisations in Europe

Michał Nowosielski*

Abstract

The Polish migrant diaspora is both broad and diverse: at least 2.2 million Polish citizens originating from different migration waves live in other countries of the European Union. There are also estimates that at least twice as many people with a Polish migration background live in the EU. Polish diaspora in Europe has a long – in some cases lasting more than 100 years – tradition of self-organisation. Polish immigrant organisations are spread all over EU countries. The goal of the paper is to answer the question about the dominant functions of the Polish immigrant organisations PIOs in European countries (Germany, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Italy, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands) perceived from the perspective of various actors – organisations, Polish diaspora, and external experts. Such a multidimensional approach results from a larger research project based on the fieldwork, which consisted of both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Funding details

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The National Science Centre supported this work under Grant “Polish immigrant organisations in Europe” [number 2014/14/E/HS6/00731].

Introduction

Immigrant organisations¹(henceforth referred to as IOs) understood here as a non-governmental association established by and for an ethnic group to conduct tasks related to the provision of services – social, economic and cultural – or carrying out advocacy activities for the community (Rodríguez-Fraticelli et al., 1991, p. 34) attract growing attention of migration scholars (Christopoulou & Leontsini, 2017; Dijkzeul & Fauser, 2020a; Lillevik, 2020; Mora, 2018; Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2016). At the same time, this subject seems to lack systematic reflection rooted in migration research, international relations and the sociology of organisations (Dijkzeul & Fauser, 2020b, p. 3). One of the fields that are somehow overlooked are the functions and roles of IOs. This is especially surprising, taking under consideration that IOs perform diverse functions towards migrants (Owusu, 2000), the country of origin (Elwert, 1982; Schoeneberg, 1985), as well as the country of residence (Pries & Sezgin, 2012). Hence the need for in-depth reflection on the functions and roles of immigrant organisations.

In this paper, I will use the case of Polish immigrant organisations (henceforth referred to as PIOs) in nine European countries (Germany, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Italy, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands) to show what kind of functions IOs can play from perspectives of

¹ What is also worth paying attention to is the fact that in the literature abounds in terms that are equivalent to or synonymous with immigrant organizations: ethnic organizations, ethnic associations, immigrant organizations, diasporic organizations (Diaspora organizations), transnational immigrant organizations and cross-border migrant organizations (Dijkzeul & Fauser, 2020b, p. 4).

different groups. The Polish migration – especially within Europe – is a relatively well-researched field (Erdal & Lewicki, 2016; Rabikowska, 2010), which is clearly connected with the growing mobility of Poles after 2004. In terms of geographical focus, special attention has been paid to migration to the United Kingdom (Bell, 2016; Okólski & Salt, 2014; White & Ryan, 2008), Scandinavian countries (Bell & Erdal, 2015; Slany et al., 2018), Germany (Nowicka, 2013; Nowosielski, 2016; Wagner et al., 2014) as well as to other countries (White, 2015). In terms of research subjects, one may observe a slow change from topics related to the migration process and mobility to research on the life of migrants, including issues of transnationalism, their changing relations with Poland as a country of origin, as well as their integration (Bell & Domecka, 2018; Erdal & Lewicki, 2016; Garapich, 2016; Kloc-Nowak, 2018). Polish immigrant organisations also gained research interest (Nowosielski, 2016); however, it is somewhat limited.

This paper aims to answer the question about the dominant functions of the PIOs in nine European countries (Germany, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Italy, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands) perceived from the perspective of various actors – organisations, Polish diaspora, and external experts. I am particularly interested in the differences in understanding the organisation's role between diverse actors and the discrepancies between expected functions and functions actually relished by the PIOs.

Immigrant organisations' functions

Migrants

From the point of view of the migrants, IOs can play various roles, one of

the most obvious of which is representing their interests. Migrants, often lacking the citizenship of the country of residence and sometimes staying in its territory illegally, may be perceived as a vulnerable group whose interests are underrepresented. This applies to both situations of individual migrants as well as the entire migrant communities. In the former situation, the organisations may mediate contact between the migrant and the official, employer, landlord, etc. In such a case, the organisations often complement or replace the consular services of the country of origin. In the latter case, the organisations may play the role of political representation – they serve as carriers of demands, tools for negotiating issues that are important from the migrant communities’ point of view. For that to happen, however, the organisations must adopt a kind of “political” mode of action – they must be capable of exerting political and social pressure by conducting various political activities such as organising campaigns or protests. They must also develop strategies to successfully manage relations with the administration and political institutions of the state of residence (Yurdakul, 2006, p. 436).

Migrants may also find the organisations as a vital source of support, not only by exercising the advocacy function but also by providing social assistance, including self-help. This supportive function is of great importance, especially in case of those migrants who have difficulty coping with the new reality due to insufficient knowledge of the language or the culture of the country of residence as well as their weaker embeddedness in social networks (Weiss, 2006)².

Another critical function of immigrant organisations is sustaining migrants’

² One should be aware that in this respect the role of the organization may be taken over by the so-called migration industry (Garapich, 2008).

ethnic and national identity. For many migrants, organisations undertaking various activities related to the sphere of culture or the expression of ethnic and national identity may be the only, or one of the few, sources of contact with their native culture or language (Nowosielski, 2016; Predelli, 2008)³.

Moreover, IOs may serve as a kind of organisational “prosthesis” for the migrants (especially new ones) who are often experiencing difficulties in integration with the society of the country of residence. Their involvement in the IOs’ activities substitutes their participation in the organisations and institutions of the host society (Owusu, 2000, p. 1158). They are, in a sense, a kind of training schools for migrants who are being prepared for participation in the institutions of the state of residence (Odmalm, 2009, p. 158). Immigrant organisations – like other non-governmental organisations – exert a positive impact on the development of broadly understood civic skills of their members and, consequently, on their social and political participation (Jacobs & Tillie, 2004, p. 423; Myrberg, 2011).

Ultimately, IOs can also serve as a platform for establishing and maintaining social contacts with compatriots (Norris, 1975, p. 165), which applies to both compatriots in their home country and those living in the country of residence. In the former case, organisations may form a bridge between migrants and compatriots or institutions of the country of origin. Through that type of activity, organisations provide migrants with a sense of relationship with their homeland, thus minimising the sense of distance or abandonment. At this point, it is worth indicating a unique role of organisations associat-

³ However, it is worth noting that this function may be becoming less and less important in the face of increasing development of means of communication and easier transportation, which leads to the intensification of transnational ties between immigrants and their homelands on an unprecedented scale. Furthermore, that often leads to a decline in the interest in organizations as a source of contact with the native culture. Educational associations that run schools for migrant children seem to be an exception in this respect (Nowosielski & Dziegłowski, 2021).

ing residents of a specific region or town (often referred to in the literature as hometown associations), which hold ambitions to support their “small homelands” (Lamba-Nieves, 2018; Levitt, 2001). The latter case is more concerned with social functions as organisations make it possible for the migrants to spend time with others from the same country. They facilitate contact and create a platform for establishing relationships, especially in the case of hobby, cultural or sports organisations. IOs, therefore, play an important role in creating social networks, enabling regular contact with other immigrants and thus positively influence the adaptation of immigrants and provide additional opportunities for mutual support (Massey et al., 1990, p. 145).

Country of residence

Immigrant organisations can also play important functions for the country of residence. First of all, they exert an impact on the integration of migrants. However, in the literature on the subject, there are conflicting opinions about the direction of this influence. In the case of part of the community and part of the organisations, it is recognised that the involvement of migrants in the activities of IOs has a positive effect on the processes of integration with the host society. It is recognised that (especially in the case of secular associations) involvement in IOs increases the degree of participation of migrants in the political system of the host society (Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Stoll, 2001), and thus accelerates integration (Massey et al., 1990, p. 145). At the same time, some studies suggest that participation in IOs may negatively affect the integration of migrants into the society of the country of residence. Research on transnational organisations show that maintaining close rela-

tions with the country of origin and the so-called double loyalty can result in the reinforcement of national identity, which, in some cases, may slow down or even prevent full integration (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2000). Moreover, a whole network of “parallel institutions” (schools, media, cultural associations, etc.) may cause that the migrant community may be subject to processes of segregation and exclusion (Schoeneberg, 1985, p. 419). That is obviously possible only in the case of the so-called “institutional completeness”, which consists in the fact that the migrant community produces their own institutions that compete with those of the society of the country of residence and satisfy all or at least most of the needs of migrants (Breton, 1964; Goldenberg & Haines, 1992).

The second function that IOs can play towards the country of residence (and which seems to be somehow overlooked in the literature) is serving as a kind of transmission belt, thanks to which the institutions of the state of residence can relatively easily communicate with migrants. That is especially true for new migrants whose command of the language is limited. The mediation of in reaching such people is invaluable and can, for example, be expressed by providing them with information about the country of residence in their native language (Odmalm, 2009, p. 158).

Country of origin

The functions performed by IOs towards the country of origin relate primarily to the possibility of mediating between migrants and institutions of the country of origin. Institutions of the country of origin may build relationships with organisations as they can reach broader masses of emigrants

– thanks to the use of their social networks, media and other communication channels. Therefore IOs can be a tool for contact and communication with diaspora (Odmalm, 2009, p. 158).

However, mediation does not have to be limited to communication. On the contrary, IOs can be engaged in the development of their country of origin. They often act as intermediaries for the transfer of funds (tangible or non-tangible) from migrants supporting the native country, which mainly refers to humanitarian and development aid. Thanks to their ability to mobilise migrants, organisations gain the opportunity to accumulate resources and then transfer them to the country of origin (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2016; Rahman & Ranjan, 2019).

IOs may also endorse institutions and organisations of political or religious nature in the country of origin (Pries & Sezgin, 2012, p. 1). That type of function is more often performed by organisations associating refugees who have been forced to leave their homeland for political, ethnic or religious reasons. They try to support – through financing and building political support in the country of residence – the opposition organisations of the country of origin.

However, immigrant organisations can also perform important functions towards their former homeland by representing its interests to the authorities of the country of residence, primarily conducted in the form of lobbying (Mathias, 1980, p. 979). In many cases, it is the IOs that have the tools to lobby for the country of origin effectively. However, the condition is that those migrants should actively participate in the political system of the country of residence.

Table 1 contains a synthetic overview of the functions performed by organisations towards migrants, the country of residence and the country of origin. While analysing IOs' functions, it is worth mentioning that on rare occasions, immigrant organisations limit their activities and thus their functions to one field. On the contrary, they usually try to provide their members and recipients with a whole range of services that could attract them and keep them within reach of their influence (Owusu, 2000, p. 1158).

Table 1. Functions performed by IOs

Migrants
Representing the interests of the migrants
Providing support for migrants
Sustaining migrants' national/ethnic identity
Substituting migrant's participation
Establishing and maintaining social contacts with compatriots
Country of residence
Influencing on the integration of migrants
Mediating between migrants and institutions of the country of residence
Country of origin
Mediating between migrants and institutions of the country of origin
Engagement in the development of the country of origin
Supporting institutions and organisations of the country of origin
Lobbying in the country of residence

Source: Own elaboration.

Data

The data analysed in this paper comes from three sources obtained during

research conducted in nine European countries (Germany, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Italy, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands): an institutional survey among PIOs, individual in-depth interviews with experts in the field of PIOs, as well as the survey conducted through Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) on a sample of Polish migrants.

The institutional survey among PIOs in selected European countries was carried on a sample of $N = 190$ organisations from November 2016 to July 2017. The invitation was sent by traditional mail and e-mails to 930 Polish immigrant organisations identified in various databases. The questionnaire was partially or entirely completed by 215 organisations, among which there were 190 correctly completed questionnaires, which were analysed. The response rate was 20.4%⁴, which – taking into account the specificity of the research technique and the characteristics of the studied population – can be considered a typical result.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 45 questions, grouped into seven thematic blocks: essential characteristics of the surveyed organisations; activities; cooperation; authorities, staff and members of the organisation; functioning of the organisation; finances of the organisation; organisation details.

The Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) survey was carried on a sample of $N = 5000$ people who stayed in the country of residence for at least three months. A quota sampling was used based on two variables: the respondent's place of residence (country) and the level of education. For

4 In the case of 334 organizations, postal or electronic letters were not delivered to the addressees due to an outdated/incorrect address or failure to collect the parcel on time. In such cases, we assumed that the organization ceased to exist.

countries with small migrant populations from Poland, the sample sizes were disproportionate to reach a sample size that would allow statistical inference. Field studies were conducted in the spring and summer of 2018.

As the populations of Polish migrants in the selected countries covered by the study are difficult to access using standard methods of selecting and recruiting respondents, it was decided to conduct and select the respondents via the Internet. The participants were recruited using the following techniques: geolocation related advertisements encouraging you to complete an online survey (CAWI) associated with selected articles (Small Sticky Ads); invitations to complete a survey addressed to profiles identified as potentially belonging to Polish emigrants; survey invitations to migrant portals identified by the researchers.

A questionnaire was used, containing 52 questions divided into the following blocks: the history of migration, social situation, social contacts, non-governmental organisations and institutions, willingness to get involved, record.

The last source of data were individual in-depth interviews which were carried with experts in the field of PIOs in the nine selected European countries: representatives of umbrella organisations, Polish diaspora journalists, and consuls responsible for Polish diaspora. In each country, 7 interviews were carried out (in total: $N = 9 \times 7 = 63$). The purposive sampling was applied using the criterion of maximum differentiation due to such features as the level of knowledge about the organisation, the level of involvement in cooperation with organisations, etc.

During the interviews, a scenario was used, which consisted of two introductory questions and 22 detailed questions covering the following areas: characteristics of PIOs in the country of origin, the place of PIOs in the institutional and organisational environment in the country of residence; relations between PIOs in the country of residence and the Polish state; determinants of the condition of PIOs in the country of residence.

Analysis

PIOs' main goals

The surveyed representatives of organisations were asked about their most important goals in an open question. In many cases, they declared more than one goal. The analysis of the gathered answers (Table 2) proves that most of the PIOs are concentrated on objectives connected with the cultural affirmation of the Polish diaspora. One-fifth of all answers indicated for the promotion of Polish culture, art, traditions and customs in the society of the country of residence. Other goals mentioned by PIOs activist which may fall into the cultural affirmation category are education (usually focused on Polish language, history, the geography of Poland and religion); maintaining Polish culture, tradition and identity and the internal integration of the Polish community living in a given country.

Other PIOs' objectives focused on integration with the society of the country of residence or material support (social, financial) for Polish immigrants were rarely mentioned.

Table 2. Goals of the PIOs

Goal	N	%
Promotion of Polish culture, art, traditions and customs in the society of the country of residence	63	20%
Education (Polish language, Polish history and geography, religion)	57	18%
Maintaining Polish culture, tradition and identity	47	15%
Integration of Poles and people of Polish origin living in a given country	31	10%
Integration of migrants from Poland with the society of the country of residence	28	9%
Legal and social assistance for immigrants	23	7%
The organisation of cultural and social events	17	5%
Cultural activities (library, archive, theatre, music/dance group, choir, magazine)	11	4%
Integration of professional groups of migrants and indigenous peoples of the country of residence	10	3%
Mental health assistance (addiction, family support)	7	2%
Activities of a religious nature	5	2%
Charity work	3	1%
Assistance in supporting the education of multilingual children	3	1%
Maintaining monuments of Polish culture and history, supporting historical research	3	1%
Other	5	2%
Overall	313	100%

Source: Institutional survey.

PIOs' key fields of activity

The goals declared by the representatives of PIOs in the survey are consistent with key fields of their activity declared in the survey (Table 3). The

analysis reveals the apparent dominance of three primary priorities: culture and art, maintaining traditions and national identity, and education and upbringing. Apart from that, one other category seems to be important from the perspective of PIOs: promotion of Poland in the society of the country of residence, which is a crucial activity for every fourth organisation covered by the survey. All other areas of interest, including the ones focused on well-being of the members of the Polish diaspora and their integration with the society of the country of residence, turn out to be much less significant for the surveyed PIOs. It seems that for most organisations, activities outside the cultural realm are only marginal.

Table3. Keyfields of activity of the PIOs

Category	N	%
Culture and arts	79	41,6
Maintaining national tradition and identity	77	40,5
Education and upbringing	75	39,5
Promotion of Poland in the society of the country of residence	47	24,7
Advice and help for new migrants from Poland	17	8,9
Sports, tourism, recreation, hobbies	11	5,8
Religion	10	5,3
Building bilateral relations between the country of residence and Poland	9	4,7
Advocacy – activities to protect the interests of Poles	6	3,2
Industry and professional matters	5	2,6
Issues of veterans and combatants	5	2,6
Healthcare	5	2,6
Self help	5	2,6

International activities	4	2,1
Research	3	1,6
Welfare and philanthropy	3	1,6
Media	2	1,1
Youth affairs	2	1,1
Women's affairs	2	1,1
Politics and ideology	1	0,5
Environmental Protection	1	0,5
Finances	1	0,5
Other	11	5,8

Source: Institutional survey.

The percentages do not add up to 100 due to the possibility of selecting multiple answers.

Polish immigrants' contacts with PIOs

The researched migrants from Poland seems to have rare contact with PIOs. Only 48% of respondents declared that they know any Polish immigrant organisation, and approximately 17% stated that they had contact with one of them. This group was asked a further question about the specialisation of the organisation they got in touch with.

The results are consistent with the organisations' declarations about their objectives and activities because usually, the researched Polish migrants pointed at PIOs that focused on celebrating and maintaining Polish tradition and cultures and the integration of Polish migrants with other Poles living in the country of residence. The respondents rarely had contact with PIOs that dealt with issues like integration of od Polish migrants with the host society

and self-help. The least frequently mentioned PIOs’ fields of activity were supporting entrepreneurship and representing the interests of Poles in the country of residence.

Table 4. Fields of activity of the PIOs with which the respondents had-contact with

Category	N	%
Maintaining Polish tradition and culture among people coming from Poland and maintaining their ties with Poland, e.g. in the form of celebrating traditional Polish holidays	490	56.9
Creation and maintenance of ties between people from Poland, e.g. in the form of organising integration meetings	353	41.0
Creation of a positive image of Polish migrants in the society of the country of residence, e.g. in the form of presenting Poland and its culture during various types of festivals	274	31.8
Promotion of a positive image of Poland	263	30.6
Teaching Polish	260	30.1
Integration of Poles living in the country of residence with the society of that country, e.g. in the form of language courses	246	28.6
Help (e.g. social, legal) for people from Poland, e.g. in the form of counselling.	230	26.7
Creation of a positive image of Poles living there in the society of the country of residence	214	24.8
Representing the interests of Poles living in the country of residence	132	15.4
Supporting Polish entrepreneurship in the country of residence	95	11.0

Source: CAWI.

Percentages do not add up to 100%, as it was a multiple-choice question.

Polish migrants needs

As it is highly probable that the intensity of the contact is a derivative of the availability of PIOs with specific specialisations, it is vital to examine not only the supply of the organisation's services but also the demand from the Polish diaspora. Hence the respondents were asked about the desired spheres of the potential activity of PIOs.

The distribution of answers proves that only to some point the activities of PIOs are in line with expectations of Polish migrants. Although the most frequently chosen activity is connected to cultural affirmation – namely maintaining Polish tradition and culture – which to some point is in line with the PIOs' profiles, the other preferred spheres of involvement in the activities of PIOs seem to differ. Polish migrants appear to be also interested in organisations focused on either promoting a positive image of Poland or creating a positive image of Polish migrants, which partially coincides with the declared activity of the researched PIOs. However, a significant number of Polish migrants would like to use the services of organisations focused on issues like helping integrate Polish migrants into the host society or providing support, i.e. areas that are usually beyond the PIOs' interest.

Table 5. Preferred spheres of involvement in the activities of PIO

Category	N	%
Maintaining Polish tradition and culture among people coming from Poland and maintaining their ties with Poland, e.g. in the form of celebrating traditional Polish holidays	1543	66.0%
Promotion of a positive image of Poland	1510	64.6%
Creation of a positive image of Polish migrants in the society of the country of residence	1401	59.9%
Integration of Poles living in the country of residence with the society of that country, e.g. in the form of language courses	1315	56.3%
Help (e.g. social, legal) for people from Poland, e.g. in the form of counselling.	1300	55.6%
Creation and maintenance of ties between people from Poland, e.g. in the form of organising integration meetings	1279	54.7%
Teaching Polish	1045	44.7%
Representing the interests of Poles living in your country of residence	869	37.2%
Supporting Polish entrepreneurship in the country of residence	865	37.0%

Source: CAWI.

Percentages do not add up to 100%, as it was a multiple-choice question

Inwards PIOs' functions

Closer analysis of experts' interviews reveals that among the roles played by the PIOs, the most crucial are those which are directed "inwards" the Polish community. Undoubtedly, the integration function was one of the most often quoted. However, it is important to underline that in this case integration is understood not as incorporation in the society of the country of residence but rather as internal integration – within the Polish migrant's

community. In many cases, this integrative role is interrelated with the entertainment function. Often PIOs engage themselves in activities related to the organisation of free time for the Polish community, giving the opportunity to meet, feel “like in Poland”, build social bonds with people with similar cultural codes, interests etc.

They organised a song festival, exclusively Polish, (...) only Polish children, mostly religious songs – what they liked the most. (...) What caught my eye very much was this Polishness. (1_IDI_E_POIE_France)

Another PIOs’ function, which can be interpreted as “inward”, is related to cultural affirmation. Maintaining the culture of the country of origin in the Polish community and cultivating its traditions was perceived by experts as one of the main functions of the organisations. The performance of this function was manifested mainly in organising the celebration of religious and national holidays and – according to experts – was to be a common denominator for the functioning of many Polish organisations. It should be emphasised that this function is associated with the integrative role of PIOs because, usually, cultural activities related to maintaining the identity and cultivating tradition have a collective dimension.

First of all, the matter of cultivating Polish culture, certain traditions. We have these annual meetings on the occasion of national holidays, Christmas, Easter. It somehow also unites us in our daily work. (17_IDI_E_POIE_Sweden).

It is worth remembering that learning the mother tongue is also a critical element of cultural affirmation. Although it sometimes may be of a more

practical nature (related, for example, to considering the possibility of return migration), it is usually, however – especially from the perspective of PIOs – primarily activity aimed at internal integration of the Polish community. Knowledge of the Polish language is perceived as a tool for maintaining national identity in the next generations of the Polish diaspora.

Everything boils down to the language. Why? Because it is a very important part of the integration. (...) This is the part that proves that we are Poles, and even if our children (...) have only one passport, a German passport, they still learn this Polish language. (10_IDI_E_POIE_Germany)

Interestingly, the inward function is usually perceived by PIOs only in symbiotic terms. It is limited to issues of culture, identity and language. Some of the experts pointed out that in this context, the role that the organisations play for the Polish community is often defined too narrowly – it seems to be often forgotten that Polish migrant communities also have material needs related to, for example, their well-being: work, housing, social welfare, etc. Experts emphasised that there are very few PIOs concentrated on social issues, like self-help organisations. Most associations are not interested in such activities at all, although it might be advantageous from the point of view of the Polish diaspora. As a result, the capabilities of the PIOs in terms of assisting Polish migrants in vital matters relating to the material basis of their existence are minimal.

Outwards PIOs' functions

Some – although rather minor – of the functions played by the PIOs are connected with activities directed “outside” the Polish community. According

to the experts, the most important example is the representation function. However, surprisingly in most of the cases, this does not mean active advocacy but rather serving as an unofficial representative of Poles and people of Polish origin, acting as a bridge between Polish migrants and the society of the country of residence. Consequently, this role is fulfilled not by striving for realisation of the interests of Polish diaspora vis-à-vis the authorities of the country of residence but instead by participating in events and meetings under the patronage of local authorities or other associations.

This is a kind of hanging a flag and showing: “We are here, Poles are here, we are doing something here”.(5_IDI_E_POIE_France)

Within this function, also a kind of “warming the image” of Polish migrants, the Polish state and society in some times performed. On the one hand, it seems to be a direct response to the needs of Polish migrants who would like organisations to deal with, among other things, the promotion of Poland and Poles. On the other hand, this function may be crucial in countries—like the Netherlands or UK—where this image is for different reasons tarnished by media reports about the excesses of Polish post-accession migrants (alcohol abuse, hooliganism, petty crime).

I think that the organisations try to show the positive sides of Poles as well because when it comes to Dutch media, there are usually very negative campaigns against Poles or very negative things are shown. (18_IDI_E_POIE_The Netherlands)

When analysing the outwards functions, it is worth paying attention to the fact that the experts often critically assessed the possibility of effective-

ly fulfilling these functions by the PIOs. Some even stated that their role in this area was insignificant. Often in this context, the respondents used phrases such as “invisibility”. The experts mentioned, among other things, the absence of Polish immigrant organisations in the public discourse of the country of residence, as well as their inability to speak effectively on issues important to the Polish community or key issues from the point of view of public debates, e.g. on migration and migrants integration.

There are topics on which we should definitely speak up. We are not taking us because we are gone, because again there is nobody to ask. (7_IDI_E_POIE_ Norway)

Conclusion

Functions of PIOs as perceived from three different perspectives: the organisations themselves, Polish migrants in the selected countries, and experts were analysed. The analysis, first of all, show that there are equally important functions for all the researched groups. The most dominant function is sustaining migrants’ national/ethnic identity, which is of great importance for PIOs and migrants. Also, the experts perceive this role as crucial – not only from the perspective of the Polish communities abroad but also from the point of view of Poland as a country of origin interested in building a strong bond with its diaspora (Nowak & Nowosielski, 2019). Therefore it appears that PIOs’ dominant sphere of activity which lies in the domain of culture and cultural affirmation, is well correlated with expectations of immigrants and the country of origin. At the same time, it may conflict with the country of residence’s expectations of a PIOs’ positive impact on

integration (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2000). It is visible that inward integration is more important for PIOs than outward one. This may negatively impact how members of the Polish migrant communities that are actively engaged with PIOs integrate with the host societies. This potentially harmful effect may be mitigated by the relatively low involvement of Polish communities in the organisation's activities.

Second of all, in some cases, different categories of respondents perceived the importance of particular functions differently. In some cases, those differences may stem from the fact that different groups perceive the needs that a given function could satisfy differently. For example, representing the interests of the migrants is perceived as a function of medium importance by the PIOs and experts, while the migrants seem to surprisingly consider it as unimportant. Similarly, integration of Polish communities in the host society is a significant (although rather potential than actual) function for Polish migrants, while PIOs and experts give much less importance to this role. In the former situation, this may be due to the fact that in some cases, Polish immigrants in the European countries as EU citizens do not see a direct need to have such representation. It may also stem from specific attitudes of Poles towards NGOs and political engagement (Pszczółkowska & Lesińska, 2021). In the latter case, such difference may result from the fact that many PIOs seems to be concentrated on the needs of incumbent rather than new immigrants. This might suggest that the new waves of Polish immigrants should establish their own organisations focused on meeting their specific needs (Galasińska, 2010).

On the other hand, the divergencies may be an effect of differences in the

perception of the organisation’s potential and their ability to actually perform the assumed functions. For example, providing support for migrants is viewed differently because the PIOs and the migrants evaluate this function as of medium importance while the experts seem to doubt about the possibility of adequate performance of this function by organisations.

The third interesting observation stems from the fact that the study shows only selective fulfilment of the previously defined functions by PIOs. Any of the studied groups did not mention functions like substituting migrant’s civic participation, mediating between migrants and institutions of the country of origin or engagement in the development of the country of origin. Also, categories like mediating between migrants and institutions of the country of residence or supporting institutions and organisations of the country of origin, the respondents’ statements appeared only sporadically, which may indicate their minor importance.

Table6. Perception of PIOs’ functions by PIO, Experts and migrants

Category	IOs	Experts	Migrants
Migrants			
Representing the interests of the migrants	medium	medium	low
Providing support for migrants	medium	low	medium
Sustaining migrants’ national/ethnic identity	high	high	high
Substituting migrant’s civic participation	n/a	n/a	n/a

Establishing and maintaining social contacts with compatriots	high	high	medium
Country of residence			
Influencing on the integration of migrants	low	medium	medium
Mediating between migrants and institutions of the country of residence	n/a	low	n/a
Country of origin			
Mediating between immigrants and institutions of the country of origin	n/a	n/a	n/a
Engagement in the development of the country of origin	n/a	n/a	n/a
Supporting institutions and organisations of the country of origin	low	n/a	n/a
Lobbying in the country of residence	high	high	medium

Source: Own elaboration.

Summing up, it can be said that in the case of PIOs, asymmetric development of various functions was observed. While the functions related to the cultural affirmation and inward integration of the Polish community seem to be well developed, other roles, e.g. those related to the integration of Polish migrants with the host society, caring for social and material support for the Polish diaspora, or the development of contacts with the country of origin are less visible. This phenomenon would not be alarming if it only resulted from the demand for only such services on the part of Polish migrants. However, research shows that, in fact, some of the needs of Polish

migrants are not met by organisations. Consequently, this means that they may seek their satisfaction in other sources, turning away from traditional immigrant organisations (Garapich, 2008). In the long run, this may mean severe threats to PIOs' existence.

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