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One step forward, two steps back in political integration: why are Polish candidates not making progress in Irish local elections?

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ABSTRACT

The Republic of Ireland has had a significant Polish minority since the European Union enlargement of 2004. Despite their positive reception and successful economic integration, Poles rarely stand as candidates in local elections (in which all foreigners are entitled to run and vote); in fact, their involvement has even diminished – from nine Polish candidates in 2009 and 2014, to three in 2019. This article, based on interviews with 13 of the 19 Poles who have run thus far, 15 other politically or socially active Polish migrants and a survey ($N = 503$, CAPI, conducted in 2018) of Poles in the Republic of Ireland (henceforth Ireland) investigates this conundrum of a lack of progress in political integration. The political opportunity structure can be analysed from the perspective of the receiving political system – for example the attitude of political parties – or the perspective of the immigrant community. This article focuses on the latter and demonstrates that changes in the Polish community in Ireland over the last decade have made political integration more difficult. Our findings suggest that the politics and policies of the country of origin should also be considered as an important element influencing the political integration of migrants in the destination country.

KEYWORDS Political integration; local elections; polish migrants; Ireland; diaspora policies

Introduction

The history of Polish migration to Ireland is notable for its suddenness and for the exceptionally positive reception of the migrants. The suddenness was due to Poland joining the European Union on 1 May 2004, at a time when the Celtic Tiger was in acute need of workers. Ireland sought the opportunity and was one of only three EU countries (together with the UK and Sweden) to allow the new EU citizens to immediately undertake employment. Poles responded with great interest – their number in the Republic of Ireland

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soared from about 2000 in 2002 to a high of 200,000 in 2007, right before the economic crisis (GUS, 2014). After the crisis the number stabilised at 122,000 in both the 2011 and the 2016 Irish census (Central Statistics Office, 2017), making Poles the largest national minority on the island.

Compared to their compatriots heading to other countries, Poles who chose Ireland were younger (mostly in their 20s) and often came from large cities in Poland. Nearly a third held university degrees, which was more than in any other destination country or among any other nationality coming to Ireland (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski, 2009; Kloc-Nowak, 2017). The newcomers created a dynamic community, with a number of associations, shops and other businesses catering to Poles, with a Polish-language press, radio and even a TV programme in Polish on local Dublin television. The Poles seemed to integrate well in many fields, from employment levels and increasing home ownership to the personal – by the census of 2016, a third were sharing a household with an Irish person (Kloc-Nowak, 2017, based on CSO).

This was in part because Ireland proved especially welcoming. Even in times of economic difficulties, anti-Polish incidents were few and far between and no significant political parties to date have based their campaigns on anti-immigrant rhetoric (Fanning & O'Boyle, 2010; Szlovak, 2017). This was in stark contrast, for example, to the Dutch Party for Freedom or the United Kingdom Independence Party. A number of articles (Fanning & O'Boyle, 2010; Fanning, Howard, & O'Boyle, 2010; O'Boyle, Fanning, & Bucchianico, 2016; Szlovak, 2017) have investigated the participation of Polish and other immigrant candidates in the local elections of 2009 and 2014. These publications focused in particular on the political opportunity structure created for migrants by the Irish political system, notably the actions of political parties. Before the local elections of 2009, the main parties took great pains to attract Polish members, with Fine Gael and Fianna Fail employing Polish integration officers and the parties fielding a total of eight Polish candidates (a ninth candidate ran as an independent).

As it turned out, the favourable opportunity structure – both on the side of Irish political parties and the Polish community – did not translate into significant political activism. None of the 2009 candidates won seats and all but one disengaged from Irish politics after the experience. In the following local election of 2014, nine Poles ran but from the more difficult position of independents. Again, none were elected. By 2019, only three persons took up the challenge, two of whom stated in interviews for this research that they saw themselves as last-minute candidates, who stepped in only when they realised that no serious Polish candidate was running. The involvement of and opportunities for Polish candidates seem to be diminishing.

The purpose of this article is thus to investigate why, despite these opportunities and the candidates' successful integration in many other fields, the political integration of Poles in Ireland is not progressing with time spent

in the country. We develop the existing investigations into this subject not only by looking at the 2019 election but also by analysing the events of the last two decades from a mirror perspective – that of factors operating not on the Irish but on the Polish side, looking at the influence of the local Polish community and the Polish state. We believe these to be significant for the dynamics of political involvement of Poles in Ireland. Polish diaspora policy and Polish politics in general have changed fundamentally since the early 2000s, which allows us to observe in real time how these factors may influence the political involvement of the diaspora in their country of residence. Personal factors which pushed or discouraged actual and potential migrant candidates to get involved are also considered.

We base our research on qualitative interviews conducted with 13 of the 19 different Polish candidates who have run in Irish local elections thus far (two candidates ran twice, hence a total of 19 different candidates), interviews with 15 other members of the Polish community in Ireland who have been active politically or socially in a bid to understand why other serious local candidates have not emerged, as well as a survey ($N = 503$, CAPI) conducted between June and October 2018 among Polish residents in Ireland which was aimed at understanding the political and social interests and involvement of all Poles, not only the active elites (referred to from now on as the CMR survey 2018). Based on the existing literature and our experiences with the Polish community in Ireland we present four hypotheses.

(H1) Personal factors, such as early experiences in socialisation, influenced the decisions of potential candidates to run.

(H2) The political opportunity structure for Polish candidates in Ireland was the most favourable before the election of 2009, due to the attitude of Irish political parties and the level of organisation of the Polish community. After that election, both became significantly worse for political involvement.

(H3) The policies (especially diaspora policies) and politics of the country of origin were an important element of the political opportunity structure and influenced the political activism of migrants in the country of settlement.

(H4) Current life stage was a powerful factor determining Poles' social and political involvement.

The political integration of migrants: personal and institutional determinants

It is stressed in the literature that the activity of migrants in the political and public sphere is an important indicator of their integration. Marco Martiniello (2006, p. 84) highlights four dimensions of political integration: the rights granted to migrants in the host state, identification with the host society, the adoption of democratic norms and values shared in the host community

and – the last dimension – political participation, mobilisation and representation. Political participation as actual involvement in collective actions requires not only the involvement of specific resources (time, money, social networks etc.) but also a certain level of knowledge about the society and the legal and institutional environment in the country of settlement, as well as an interest in becoming active in a wider social group than one's own ethnic community (Adamson, 2007). Classic assimilation theory underlines the role of educational attainment, income, the ability to speak the native language and length of time spent in the host country. Sidney Verba, Kay L. Schlozman and Henry E. Brady (1995) are the authors of a volume on the civic voluntarism model. Explaining the determinants of political participation, they point to the role of three factors: individual resources (time, money and civic skills gained in the family, during formal education, at the workplace and through participation in civil society organisations), political engagement (a personal interest in politics and a basic motivation to become politically active) and political recruitment (personal involvement in recruitment networks – political and non-political institutions). This approach, as well as much of the existing work, has supported the cultural and socioeconomic attributes of individuals as key factors influencing their political participation, although it has neglected the importance of the legal framework and political institutions in creating opportunities for engagement in political life.

The case of Polish candidates in local elections in Ireland shows that the picture is much more complex and proves that the influence of contextual factors – such as the political opportunity structure provided by the host state – is also significant. By granting or denying migrants the right to vote, facilitating or hindering their access to citizenship, granting or restricting their freedom of association and ensuring or blocking the opportunity for migrants to represent their interests through the establishment or absence of consultative bodies, the host state determines the channels and scope of migrants' participation in the political and public spheres (Koopmans & Statham, 2000; Martiniello, 2006; Zapata-Barrero, Gabrielli, Sanchez-Montijano, & Jaulin, 2013). Some authors also refer to other important factors influencing the process of migrants' political inclusion – such as local policies and the prevailing discourse on immigration in the destination country as well as the context of the country of origin (Morales & Giugni, 2011; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Simpson Bueker, 2005). This last factor deserves special attention. The 'country of origin effect' matters in several aspects: it enables the determination of the key individual characteristics of migrants, such as their education and income and, at the macro level, the effect of their home country's policy on citizens living abroad. This effect may be a serious obstacle – for example, the mother country's lack of acceptance of dual citizenship could hinder the naturalisation process of the migrants in a host state. Another important aspect is political re-socialisation – namely

the political interest, values and behaviour 'brought' by migrants from the 'old' to the 'new' country. Whether and how a migrant is able to apply prior political knowledge and manners to a new political environment is an important dynamic of political participation. The theories of political socialisation reveal that early political learning (mostly in school and in the family) largely determines people's later-life political behaviour. For migrants, this means that, if they arrive in the new country during their formative years, the process of adaptation to and involvement in the politics and political system should be easier (White, Nevitte, Blais, Gidengil, & Fournier, 2008). Additional variables influencing migrants' political participation should also be mentioned here: the time devoted in the new country to obtaining the essential knowledge, language skills, social capital and networks which are crucial for civic and political engagement; the vision migrants have of their presence – whether permanent or temporary – in the host state; and the transnational identification related to both the country of origin and the country of settlement (De Rooij, 2012; Scuzzarello, 2015).

Besides migrants' individual-level characteristics and resources and the structural variables of the host country, the approach of political parties towards migrant voters and migrant candidates is crucial. As professional political organisations, political parties are key actors on the political scene, playing the role of system gate-keeper. Migrants, for many reasons, are perceived by the parties as a group difficult to reach and mobilise due to their residential mobility, their lack of a previous participation record and the potential language barrier (Bloemraad, 2013). Migrant groups are also seen as focused on the political situation in the country of origin rather than as interested in the host-state politics; in consequence, they are less responsive to mobilisation efforts. Parties seem to be less open to inviting migrant-origin candidates on to the electoral lists, a fact which is stressed as a significant obstacle contributing to the under-presence of migrants' representatives in political life (Dancygier, Lindgren, Oskarsson, & Vernby, 2015). Election outcomes clearly show that, for migrant candidates, political parties' channelling and being able to benefit from their support, resources and organisational infrastructure, are the conditions for electoral success.

The candidates

In the following sections of this paper we analyse the factors and opportunity structure influencing the participation of Polish candidates in the elections of 2009, 2014 and 2019. Before doing so, we introduce the candidates themselves and their motivations. Table 1 provides a full list of Polish candidates in the elections of 2009, 2014 and 2019 and their results.

Among the 19 candidates who stood in the three elections, 8 were women, 11 were men. The youngest among the 13 we managed to interview was 25

Table 1. Polish candidates in Irish local elections, 2009, 2014 and 2019.

Name	Electoral area	Number of votes (1st count)	Quota	Total number of valid votes cast in area
2009				
Tomasz Askuntowicz	Tullamore Town Council	200	503	5020
Anna Bańko	Limerick City Council (South)	66	1021	8162
Bartek Bruzewicz	Dublin City Council (North Inner City)	Withdrawn	1700	11,896
Agnieszka Fałtyn	Templemore Town Council (Tipperary)	65	145	1445
Katarzyna Gaborec	Mullingar Town Council	254	526	5256
Anna Kulikowska	Shannon Town Council	37	380	3798
Anna Michalska	Kilkenny Borough Council	233	662	8598
Lech Szczeciński	Dublin City Council (SW Inner City)	55	1654	8268
Wojciech Wiśniewski	Shannon Town Council	74	380	3798
2014				
Marcin Czechowicz	Dublin City Council (Pembroke South Dock)	44	1535	13,811
Sylvia Gołębiowska Jakubas	Louth County Council (Dundalk Carlingford)	71	1401	9802
Władek Hanczar	Kilkenny County Council (Kilkenny City West)	139	1388	9710
Rafał Kornatka	Dublin City Council (Inner City North)	91	1145	10,304
Remigiusz (Remi) Sikora	Kilkenny County Council (Kilkenny City East)	40	1341	9383
Lech Szczeciński	Dublin City Council (Crumlin-Kimmage)	70	1620	11,335
	Fingal City Council (Swords)	56	1406	14,051
	Fingal City Council (Howth Malahide)	104	1977	17,790
Agnieszka Wieczorkowska	Dublin City Council (Ballymun)	338	2143	17,143
Adam Zagórski	Kilkenny County Council (Kilkenny City East)	30	1341	9383
Grzegorz Zalewski	Cork County Council (Kanturk Mallow)	141	3044	21,301
2019				
Marcin Czechowicz	Dublin City Council (North Inner City)	24	1178	9422
Artur Górnik	Cork City Council (Cork City South West)	56	1955	15,637
Dorota Kulesza	Wexford County Council (New Ross)	151	1673	11,705

Source: Government of Ireland, 2009, 2014, 2019; O'Boyle et al. (2016).

on election day. A great majority were in their 20 s or 30 s. The oldest was in his 50 s but he was the outstanding exception. The candidates in 2009 were, on average, younger than those in 2014 and 2019, which is not surprising given that the Polish community in Ireland had also aged. The average time spent in Ireland before the election also increased, since none of the candidates interviewed arrived before the early 2000s. Most held university

degrees and all had at least some third-level education. They came from a range of large and small towns in Poland and stood in various constituencies across Ireland – from Dublin and Cork to much smaller towns.

The outstanding feature which all the respondents had in common was their previous political or social involvement in Poland – which was the case even for those who migrated in their early 20s – and their publicly minded upbringing. Several candidates, when asked when they first got publicly involved, spoke about their parents' experiences in the anti-communist movement in Poland before 1989 (and the oldest candidate, about his own activism). A great majority reported being socially active in various forms: from membership on school and university student councils, sports clubs and scouting organisations to political involvement. One ran in local elections in Poland when she was still a law student and was within a hair's breadth of winning a mandate. Another was a local activist in a leading political party in Poland and was on the campaign team of some of its most prominent members. Later he emigrated to Germany and there became involved in trade-union activism, before moving to Ireland to do the same and to also get involved in Polish community organisations.

This was certainly a much higher than average level of social and political involvement, which suggests very clearly that the same people tend to become socially or politically involved whether they are in their country of origin or elsewhere – and that early experiences in the home town, school or university are key factors determining who will later be involved. The biographies of Polish candidates in Ireland strongly confirm H1 – that early socialisation and experiences from their formative years influence who chooses to run in elections as a migrant. This is in line with findings discussed above (Morales & Giugni, 2011; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Simpson Bueker, 2005; White et al., 2008) regarding the importance of experiences from the country of origin for political participation.

Elections 2009

Ireland introduced voting rights in local elections for foreigners as early as the Electoral Act of 1963, at the time having in mind the only foreigners residing in the country in noticeable numbers – the British. Eligibility rules in Ireland for foreign nationals are among the most liberal in Europe: based on the Electoral Act of 1992, all foreigners aged 18 or older and 'ordinarily resident in that area' are entitled to vote and stand as candidates in local elections. The only practical obstacle is the necessity to personally register to vote before the election. To become a candidate is also a simple process – one can be nominated by a political party or register as an independent candidate (which requires submitting declarations by 15 supporters or lodging a deposit of €100).

Already, in 2004, two immigrant candidates – both of African origin and both running as independents – were elected. One of them went on to become mayor in 2007 (Fanning & O’Boyle, 2010). Despite this early involvement of the African community, the first significant efforts on the part of political parties to recruit immigrant candidates targeted the brand new Polish immigration. As Fanning and O’Boyle (2010, p. 427) write, ‘Our interviews with party officials did not contradict the optics that Poles enjoyed most-favored status and that comparatively little effort had gone into reaching out to many other immigrant communities’. In 2009, the Fine Gael and Fianna Fail parties each fielded several Polish candidates, Labour fielded one. The political atmosphere around immigrant candidates was very favourable, with some national political leaders advocating their participation and parties organising photoshoots of immigrant candidates with their leaders (Szlovak, 2017). In our interviews, several of the Polish candidates commented on the fact that the initiative came from the parties, not themselves. Some were not even aware that they were entitled to run before a politician or official pointed it out to them and offered a spot on the party ticket. It seems that most of the Polish candidacies resulted from parties attempting to identify active members of the Polish community and recruit them for politics, not from the candidates themselves approaching parties. Party recruitment was likely the decisive factor which made a number of Polish candidates take up the challenge of running. This does not mean that everything possible was done to support immigrant candidates. Szlovak (2017, p. 862) points out that ‘many migrant candidates were selected in electoral areas where parties did not perform well or were strong enough to run two or three candidates’, meaning that these candidates were in a more difficult position to begin with. Several interviewed candidates also complained of the minimal support received from their party. One believed the party had used her to attract Polish voters but offered little practical support and did not campaign for her – she received few second-preference votes from other members of her party who, on the other hand, benefited from the second preferences of her voters. Another candidate believed he had lost some votes due to running for a party which was losing popularity at the time. Although practical support in the campaign might have been insufficient for the candidates to be successful, the initial openness of political parties and other public actors was visible and quite new, as previous immigrants to Ireland could not count on such support in their political integration (O’Boyle et al., 2016). This was a strongly favourable element of the political opportunity structure for candidates in 2009.

The level of organisation of the Polish community in Ireland can also be treated as a helpful element of that structure, as it provided opportunities to stand as representatives of the Polish immigrants. The first years of migration to Ireland created a strong sense of community among Poles.

Not only were many of them young and educated. They realised that this migration was not like that of the previous generation in the 1990s and early 2000s, when mostly middle-aged people from smaller towns in Poland went to work in simple jobs in Germany or Italy to provide for their families. This was a migration of exploration and new opportunities; those Poles in particular who went to Ireland, where few had gone before, had a sense of participating in something unprecedented, of crossing new frontiers. As one of the candidates commented:

When all those Poles came, we started organising our first newspapers, radios, there were all these meetings, a kind of boom. Things were growing and everybody was so happy that we have this, that, a newspaper, then the radio, then our own programme on television. We even had our own television presenter in Polish on Irish TV! (...) This 'generation 2004', we were 25–26, we were young, beautiful, and strong. Now only beautiful remains, or maybe only strong, certainly not young!

This sense of community, which united the elites, turned out not to be enough to mobilise large numbers of Polish voters. Attitudes towards politics brought over from the home country played a role. Voter participation in Poland is regularly lower than in most democratic countries, and a certain disillusionment with politicians in general is present. It may have been especially strong among economic emigrants, who frequently felt 'pushed' out of the country by unsolved problems such as unemployment or precarious work contracts. This is suggested by the popularity among Polish voters in Ireland of protest parties on the Polish political scene (such as *Kukiz15* in the parliamentary election of 2015 or *Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość* in 2019). As some candidates reported, many Poles were convinced that they should stay as far away from politics as possible, be they Polish or Irish politics. Some refused outright to register. A 2009 candidate remembers: 'They said they came here to work hard, not play politics and they would not register. They simply were not interested'. In our survey, Poles who did not vote in the Irish elections declared that they did not do so because they were 'not interested in politics' (41 per cent), 'did not have enough information about the election/candidates' (22 per cent) and 'did not know that they were entitled to vote' (18 per cent). Among the five candidates from 2009 whom we interviewed, all but one admitted that they failed to mobilise the Polish community in their constituency and that the task was hugely difficult, with the Irish showing more interest in their campaigns than their compatriots. One candidate said that he made a big effort to personally register several hundred voters but later realised that most of them did not show up at the polls.

Several candidates even spoke of hostile or mistrustful reactions of their compatriots, who wondered about their motivations. A 2014 candidate felt stigmatised by other Poles when she declared her candidacy:

They perceived politics in a very negative way. As soon as you became a candidate, it was as if they had stuck a 'politician' sticker on your forehead, understood as 'somebody who is doing it for the money, who doesn't mean what they say'. Many other Poles and Polish organisations wanted nothing to do with you.

Even among those Poles who might have been interested in voting in Ireland, many were not aware of their rights or did not know how to go about it. In Poland, residents are automatically placed on the register. In Ireland, the newcomers had to register before the election. The Single-Transferable Voting system, in which voters number the candidates according to their preference, also proved a challenge – some voters put an 'x' instead of a '1' next to their preferred candidate, thus rendering the vote invalid. One of the 2009 candidates estimates that she lost about 100 votes that way. As she recalls: 'The N. family called me right after they voted and proudly reported that all six of them put an "x" next to my name. I did not know what to say'.

It also needs to be noted that no constituency in Ireland could have been won with just Polish votes, or just immigrant votes, as newcomers to the country are rather dispersed. The more effective Polish candidates realised this and directed their campaigns to the local communities at large. At the same time, they did believe to be representing the Polish, and were disappointed in the less-than-enthusiastic reactions of many Poles.

Despite the openness of the Irish political parties and a generally dynamic Polish community, the Polish candidates failed to mobilise Polish voters. Our respondents usually believed that most of the votes they received came from Irish voters. None of the nine candidates got elected, although three did relatively well: they received 200 or more first-preference votes (where the quota ranged between 503 and 662). Of the 31 immigrant candidates who contested the election (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2020; some sources give an even larger number of immigrant or 'New Irish' candidates, variously including persons holding Irish citizenship or persons born in Ireland to immigrant parents), four got elected, including a Lithuanian candidate for the Green Party who had been living in Ireland since 2001.

Elections 2014

As noted in the literature (O'Boyle et al., 2016; Szlovak, 2017), between the elections of 2009 and 2014, the atmosphere in the political parties around immigrant candidates generally became less favourable due to the economic crisis – some politicians were afraid that promoting newcomers in times of austerity could backfire. Political parties were particularly disappointed with Polish voters and thus no longer as enthusiastic about supporting Polish candidates. This is not surprising. As several studies have demonstrated, Poles in Ireland (Fanning, Kloc-Nowak, & Lesińska, 2020) (like Poles in the UK, see

Scuzzarello, 2015) vote in even smaller percentages than other immigrant groups. In our CMR survey of 2018, 12 per cent of Poles in Ireland declared that they had voted in every local election in which they were entitled to while in Ireland and 16 per cent declared that they voted in every Polish election while in the host country. In reality, the number for local elections is probably single digit, since survey declarations are usually overly optimistic.

In 2014, nine Polish candidates ran in the local election, this time all of them as independents. Szlovak (2017) notes that there were only eight immigrant candidates in 2014 running for parties, far fewer than in 2009 (when there were 29; however, the numbers are not directly comparable since the Local Government Reform Act of 2014 dismantled the lowest level of local government – town and borough councils – leaving only city and county councils). This suggests a much-less-favourable opportunity structure created by parties for immigrant candidates.

The crisis-inspired Local Government Reform Act contributed to a less-favourable institutional environment for newcomers. The reform, which the Taoiseach Enda Kenny described as ‘the most fundamental reform of local government in over 100 years’ reduced the number of local authorities from 114 to 31, and the total number of councillor seats from 1627 to 949, giving Ireland one of the highest ratios in Europe of citizens per elected representative (Quinlivan, 2017). In some constituencies, the main political parties had more councillors than seats available in the upcoming election, thus discouraging them from bringing in new people. Town and borough councils, which were the first and easiest step in a political career, disappeared. This likely influenced the decisions of Polish candidates, who in 2009 had focused their efforts on this lowest level of government. Of the nine Polish candidates who ran in the 2009 local election, six ran for town or borough councils. The only two who ran for city councils did very poorly, both compared to the size of the quota and in absolute terms (see Table 1). (The ninth Polish candidate withdrew before the vote).

In 2014, city and county electoral districts were much larger, demanding more resources and time to campaign. This discouraged some serious Polish candidates from running. As one candidate, who had a relatively good result in 2009 and considered running again in 2014, said:

If it were again just this town, the same constituency, I would run without a doubt. But it was a completely different beast. (...) I estimated that, to campaign in such a large constituency, I would have to stop working and devote myself to it completely for at least three months.

As some authors argue (Kavanagh, 2015), the abolition of town council made the contest more difficult in smaller localities for non-Irish and female candidates (who were more frequent on these councils), as well as for persons trying to enter the political scene.

The less-favourable opportunity structure offered by Irish political parties and the political system is one of the reasons for the continuing lack of success of most immigrant candidates – although, in the case of Poles, certainly not the whole story. First, it was not the case that parties became completely closed to potential immigrant candidates. Several Polish candidates or community activists whom we interviewed admitted that, before the 2014 election, they were offered a place on one or even two parties' ballots. Some were not interested in running, while one candidate decided to run as an independent because she did not feel any of the parties represented her views. Perhaps in line with the general skepticism of many Poles regarding political parties and a similar skepticism growing in Ireland at the time, some Poles believed that they would be better off running as independents, despite the organisational and financial challenges that this would entail.

Reasons related with the Polish community seem an equally, if not more, important factor which prevented serious Polish candidates from appearing. One was the diminishing role of Polish organisations in Ireland. After several years in the country, most people no longer needed their help – or that of the Polish-language media – to achieve basic things like finding a job (the early Polish-language outlets were full of job adverts). As two activists noted:

At first we were thirsty for everything Polish. (...) We felt lost here; now we have found our way. We no longer go to Polish shops so much, many have been replaced with Brazilian shops. We still need Polishness but we don't relish it as much; we have started functioning normally here and take from the two cultures.

The Polish organisations have died down. Everybody is married with children now, so why go to those meetings? Nobody goes anymore.

This seems like a natural comment and proof of the integration of Poles in Ireland. However, it also suggests that, after the first years of very dynamic activity by the Polish community, Polish organisations became an increasingly less viable channel for political mobilisation. In the CMR 2018 survey, only 5 per cent of Poles in Ireland said they were members of an organisation or club. Such organisations, unless very focused and strong in a particular locality, are not a viable route for entry onto the political scene in Ireland, as they themselves are less and less visible and unite only a small minority of Poles on the island. Also, as stated in the introduction, the number of Poles on the island had shrunk significantly due to the economic crisis – from a high of 200,000 in 2007 to 122,000 in 2011 (GUS, 2018). In this sense, the best moment for running as a Polish candidate was in 2009 and it had passed.

The lack of Polish community mobilisation on the island is also frequently perceived as good news: it demonstrates that there are no

burning problems uniting the group. Several of our interlocutors compared the Polish and African communities in Ireland, describing the latter as much better organised. However, as pointed out in several publications (Fanning et al., 2010; Fanning & O'Boyle, 2010) the 'glue' uniting these organisations is often perceived discrimination and difficulties in integrating into the labour market. Although working below qualifications is still an issue for some Poles in Ireland, their levels of employment are very high (Kloc-Nowak, 2017) and their economic integration is generally successful. One Polish activist, who was also involved with the African community, stated:

Poles have a very particular position in Ireland. They are immigrants but frequently not perceived as immigrants. From my activities with [African organisation] I remember that what kept them together was a sense of discrimination. Poles do not have any reason to stick together. We live easy lives, without any serious problems.

Another respondent, when asked what could bring the Polish community together, said only extreme situations, like war in Poland or local anti-Polish unrest. This generally good news regarding the lack of problems particular to the Polish community is bad news in terms of motivation for political involvement.

The lesser interest by political parties in fielding Polish candidates, the austerity-inspired electoral reforms and the general atmosphere on the one hand and the diminished number of Poles and their lesser interest in participating in community organisations on the other, all made for a more difficult playing field for Polish candidates in 2014. In accordance with our H2, it is clear that the political opportunity structure for Polish candidates was no longer as favourable as five years earlier.

The 2014 elections again ended with none of the Polish candidates winning mandates. One (Agnieszka Wiczorkowska, running for Dublin City Council from Ballymun) received over 300 votes on the first count, the highest number for a Polish candidate to date. Due to a large constituency, this was still less than half of the votes needed to get elected. Generally, only two immigrant candidates were successful in the election of 2014 – originating from Moldova (Elena Secas in Limerick) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Edmond Lukusa in Mulhuddart). A third immigrant, from Sweden (Madeleine Johansson), joined the South Dublin council between elections. A notable candidate who did not get elected was Rotimi Adebari, previously the first African mayor in Ireland, in Portlaoise. He lost his seat on the Laois County Council despite increasing his number of first-preference votes by nearly 300 compared to 2009. The constituency had grown from 15,000 to 20,000 voters, but the number of seats remained the same (Government of Ireland, 2009, 2014).

Election 2019

Two months before the election in 2019, there were a number of immigrant candidates campaigning but no Poles. *Forum Polonia*, the umbrella organisation of Poles in Ireland, published an April Fool's joke on Facebook claiming that there were 32 Polish candidates. As one of the authors of this prank explained to us, the aim was to mobilise the community, since *Forum Polonia* activists were afraid that not a single Polish candidate would run. Finally, three Poles sought mandates, two as independents and one representing a fringe political party – *Renua*.

The two independents both stated in interviews for this study that they decided to run at the last minute, when realising that nobody would be representing the Polish community. One already had the experience of running in 2014 but judged, before the 2019 election, that he again did not have enough time or resources to conduct a serious campaign and therefore had no hope of winning.

It's not so important whether I win or not. The important thing is that I am a candidate of the *Polonia* [Polish diaspora]. That's a win for the whole *Polonia*. It demonstrates that we do not give up.

This, indeed, is important. However, the three candidates' last-minute efforts did not garner many votes and they were the least (two cases) or almost the least popular candidates in their constituencies. This dramatic drop in participation among potential Polish candidates was certainly due to some of the factors discussed above, including the life-stage of most members of the Polish community. Being a politician, even at the local level, is often a lifetime endeavour, with first unsuccessful attempts to be elected used as experience for later success. The volatility of life plans regarding where they are going to settle discourages migrants from thinking long-term. Of the 13 candidates interviewed, two have since returned to Poland, one moved to Sweden. Only two of the 19 Polish candidates who ran in Ireland repeated the attempt at the next election. Thus far, there has not been a serious Polish candidate who would devote him/herself to local politics long-term.

As hypothesised in H4, part of the reason for this and for the lack of new serious candidates in 2019 seems generational. Most Poles arrived in Ireland in their 20s. Today they are in their 30s or early 40s (Kloc-Nowak, 2017), a time when people are often devoted to their children and/or professional careers and cannot find the time for political involvement. Several of the 2009 or 2014 candidates interviewed commented on their parental duties, which prevented them from considering running again; two have started successful businesses and one heads up a school for Polish children in Ireland. Some spoke of their political involvement as an episode, something they tried when they were young but do not intend to repeat. Other community

leaders also underlined that they had to choose between their professional, family and community involvement and gave priority to their jobs or families.

Other factors more particular to the Polish community in Ireland than to the Irish political opportunity structure or the immigrant community in general seem to have appeared in the last years. Although efforts to integrate immigrants politically have been criticised by organisations such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland (2020) as not sufficient and conducted on and off, the political opportunity structure offered by Irish parties seems to have improved again compared to 2014, with the government adopting a Migrant Integration Strategy for 2017–2020 (Department for Justice and Equality, Government of Ireland, 2017), which includes a section on political integration and with parties again inviting minorities to join their ‘intercultural’ sections.

The number of immigrant candidates running in local elections also suggests better opportunities – their number has risen from 21 in 2009 to 31 in 2014 and 56 in 2019 (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2020). The number of those elected even saw a minor breakthrough in 2019: the Immigrant Council of Ireland counted nine immigrant-origin candidates elected. A tenth joined the Longford county council in 2020 to replace another member. All the candidates elected were running on a party ticket (the most frequently Fine Gael – four councillors or the Green Party – two). The candidates had roots in Bangladesh, China, France, India, Moldova, Nigeria and Sweden. It must be underlined, however, that most of these candidates had been living in Ireland since at least the first years of the millennium, the most known example is the Green Party’s Hazel Chu, who was elected Lord Mayor of Dublin in 2020 is Irish of immigrant origin (born in Ireland to Chinese parents).

Nine councillors is not anywhere near representative of the 12 per cent of Irish inhabitants of migrant origin (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2020) but it does demonstrate that other – much smaller – immigrant groups have been more successful than the Polish in entering the political scene. Even some Irish media (Roberts, 2019) wondered, before the 2019 election, why there were fewer Poles running.

The political integration of migrants: the impact of the country of origin

Existing research on the factors influencing political integration underlines the role of two sides: (i) the host society, in particular political parties, which can create an opportunity structure for newcomers if they demonstrate openness; (ii) the immigrant community organisations, which can also be a vehicle for integration (Bloemraad, 2006). Our research clearly demonstrates that a third ‘side’ influencing this process should be included: the country of

origin. This concerns not only the socialisation of future migrants before their departure but also the influences which take place in a transnational social space. This is especially true for relatively short-distance migrations between developed countries, where communication is instantaneous, there is little or no time difference and visits home can be frequent.

As has been well-documented in the literature on both recent Polish emigration and voter participation abroad, the intra-EU migrants had a sense of 'liquidity' (Engbersen, Leerkes, Grabowska, Snel, & Burgers, 2013) or 'indeterminancy' (Krings, Moriarty, Wickham, Bobek, & Salamońska, 2013) regarding their migration plans, which decreased their need to become politically involved in a country where they were perhaps not planning to remain long-term. The transnational lives which many of these migrants led, with key services such as health care still provided during trips to Poland, also made them less likely to get involved with Irish institutions. As Fanning and O'Boyle (2010, p. 420) point out, 'Proximity to other European countries, low cost travel and rights to free movement may serve to undermine the civil and political participation [of EU migrants] in Irish society'.

In the case of Poles, the influence of the country of origin seems to be quite strong and of two kinds. Firstly, the influence of the country's diaspora policy, as demonstrated through changes in time. The parliamentary and presidential elections of 2015 in Poland brought about a shift in the governing party – to the right-wing Law and Justice. This resulted in a shift in diaspora policy (Nowak & Nowosielski, 2019; Nowosielski & Nowak, 2017). Previously, some of this policy had focused on creating influential transnational communities of Poles around the world who could help their country of origin, for example through a school for Polish diaspora leaders. The Law and Justice Party, in power since 2015, has focused its policy (and funding) on cultivating the 'Polishness' of the diaspora, especially through history-related events (Lesińska, 2016). Campaigns have also been aimed at attracting Poles back to the home country. As one Polish activist in Ireland commented:

Many activities of the Polish government are focused on cultivating patriotic traditions among the Poles abroad which, to a certain degree, stands in opposition to supporting the integration of these people in the place where they live. Large resources are directed at various patriotic remembrance events; much smaller resources at integrating people abroad and supporting those who could, at the same time, represent Poland and its interests.

The integration of Poles in their countries of residence, which was never the main goal of Polish diaspora policy, is now absent from it. Meanwhile, some potential candidates have suggested that they would have greater audacity to run with some kind of backing from Poland.

Perhaps even more importantly, Polish politics still influence views in the diaspora in Ireland. A large percentage of Polish migrants still follow the

Polish news. When asked in our survey in which language they follow information about political events, 51.2 per cent answered 'more often in Polish', 16.1 per cent 'more often in English' and 32.8 per cent 'equally in both languages'. They are entitled to vote in Polish national elections from abroad and, although the participation rate has never exceeded 24,000 and is usually about half of this number, it is still probably higher than the participation of Poles in Irish local elections (the above record number of votes was cast in the second round of the presidential election of 2020, see PKW, 2020). All our interlocutors agreed that Poles, if interested in any political events, were more interested in those in Poland than in Ireland. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the acute political divisions of the last decade in Poland have manifested themselves among Poles in Ireland. Many Polish organisations, although not political, are perceived as standing on one or the other side of the political barricade between the governing Law and Justice Party and the main opposition, Civic Platform. This contributes to divisions within the Polish community in Ireland. Some potential candidates commented that, if they had run, they would have felt compelled to declare on which side of the barricade they stand – something they did not wish to do.

Other Poles became even more weary of politics in general. Several interlocutors from non-political Polish organisations, when asked if they discuss politics with the Poles who visit them or encourage people to vote, assured us whole-heartedly that they want absolutely nothing to do with politics. One respondent described how she strongly suggested that no political comments be made during meetings of her organisation, so the community would not become divided. As one of our interviewees said, 'The [Polish] community [in Ireland] became very polarised. Earlier people were not as emotional, there were fewer political spats. Now Polish Facebook groups are full of them'. In such a polarised atmosphere, no candidate running on a 'Polish' ticket could hope to have the backing of the whole community, something of which potential candidates are aware. The above suggests, in accordance with our H3, that the diaspora politics of the country of origin and, more broadly, the 'echoes' of national politics resonating within the diaspora, can be an important element of the political opportunity structure, either encouraging or discouraging particular people to get involved.

Several of our interviewees commented on how the only Polish candidates who could have any chance of winning in an election would be those of the Polish-Irish second generation – or at least the 1.5 generation (people who arrived in Ireland as children) – who were active in their local communities and would stand to represent them, with their Polish origins only as a side note on their CVs. At least several university-age people of Polish origin are active in the main Irish political parties. One such person, when interviewed, commented on how it was only thanks to her political activism and other Irish party members' comments to the effect that she was Polish and should

involve that community, that she started thinking about her roots and renewing contacts with relatives in Poland.

Conclusions

Looking at the Polish candidates who ran in the three local elections in the Republic of Ireland since the EU enlargement of 2004, it is clear that the idea of becoming socially or politically involved was not something that first came to their minds in Ireland. All of the interviewed candidates spoke of their prior involvement in Poland (and in one case also in Germany) in school, university, scouting, political, trade union or other organisations. Of the 13 candidates interviewed, two were previously party activists or candidates in Poland, a statistically nearly impossible event. This confirms our hypothesis (H1), a fact known in the literature (De Rooij, 2012; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; White et al., 2008), that experiences in socialisation influence later political involvement.

Although those who ran in the Irish elections were 'destined' to be active, they could have limited their activity to social or other involvement. In many cases, they were inspired to run because of the favourable opportunity structure for Polish candidates in Ireland. As we have demonstrated, this was particularly the case before the 2009 elections, when two factors came together: the Irish political parties were very open to immigrant – especially Polish – candidates and Polish community organisations, media and other institutions were very active in creating at least a justified hope that the Polish electorate could be mobilised through them. Since this hope did not materialise, before the next election of 2014, the Irish parties were no longer as willing to field Polish candidates, and local government reforms made running more difficult and costly. The role of community organisations among the Polish migrants also diminished. The opportunity structure for the political activism of Polish candidates thus became less favourable (confirming H2). The experiences of the early years of the Polish presence in Ireland demonstrate that, contrary to some beliefs held by researchers and practitioners, good socio-economic integration does not automatically translate into political integration, at least not within one generation.

In the following years, changes in Polish politics and diaspora policy influenced migrant activism. After the 2015 change of government in Poland and the resulting change in diaspora policy, Poles in Ireland received less support for activities which could help them to integrate in the destination country. More emphasis was put on activities reflecting their own cultural heritage. Acute political divisions from the home country resonated within the diaspora, thus making it more difficult to run as the candidate for the whole Polish community. As a result, the opportunity structure became even less favourable for potential candidates and, in 2019, the

number of Polish candidates shrunk to only three, down from nine in each of the two previous elections. We believe the lack of (or even the negative) opportunity structure on the Polish side was decisive in discouraging potential candidates. This is corroborated by the fact that the election witnessed a minor breakthrough in the number of successful immigrant candidates, with other groups doing much better.

Based on the example of this recent Polish migration, we believe (in accordance with H3) that the policies and politics of the country of origin should be included in theories regarding the opportunity structures for the political participation of migrants. Their role is especially strong when contacts with the country of origin are frequent, and when the country of origin has an agenda to encourage or discourage this kind of participation among its diaspora. In such cases, it may be justified to speak not only of two sides playing a role in political integration: the host society with its political parties and the immigrant community organisations (Bloemraad, 2006) but also a third side – the country of origin and its policies and politics.

In accordance with H4, life stage also proved significant for all kinds of activism among Polish migrants, with family and professional lives taking up all the available time of middle aged Poles.

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