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## The Trap of Transnationalism—Polish Organizations in Germany

*Abstract:* Often in the migration literature transnational relations of migrants and their institutions with the sending country are described as important factor strengthening or improving the situation of the migrants in the receiving country. The aim of the paper is to empirically prove that in some of the cases the set of multiple conditions affecting immigrant organizations may have the opposite effect. The example of Polish organizations in Germany shows that transnationalization may have as a consequence the limiting, and the degradation of immigrant organizations standing. The four analyzed factors determining the situation of Polish immigrant associational in Germany: the characteristics of immigrant group, the policy of the receiving country towards immigration and IOs, the diaspora policy of the sending country, as well as the bilateral relations between the sending and receiving country together constitute a combination that has a strong negative effect on the functioning of Polish organizations. This all produces an impression of falling into the “trap of transnationalism.”

*Keywords:* migration; immigrant organizations; transnationalism; Poles in Germany.

The concept of transnationalism is perhaps one of the more fashionable ideas of contemporary migration studies. Although it is a useful tool for analyzing the diversity of relations that link migrants, the sending, and the destination country, it is also an extremely broad notion with blurred boundaries. The idea of transnationalism understood as “multiple and constant interconnections across international borders,” and migrants’ “relationship to more than one nation-state” (Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1995: 48) is quite capacious, for it encloses not only economic relations—expressing themselves mostly as remittances (Landolt 2001; Georges 1990; Massey, Golding, and Durand 1994), and transnational entrepreneurship (Kyle 1999)—but also contain social relationships—in the form of the creation of social networks (Levit 1998; Portes 1996; Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999)—as well as political relations (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003a; Smith 1994).<sup>1</sup>

When focusing exclusively on the political dimension of transnationalism and the role of immigrant organizations (henceforth IOs), it is clear that most researchers are concentrating on the ways in which migrants and IOs are affecting the political situation of the sending country directly (through double citizenship, participation in elections, and affiliation with political parties) or indirectly (through exerting influence

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<sup>1</sup> Transnationalization understood here as a process of building of transnational relations, ties and networks has also quite indistinct meaning.

on destination country politics). Eva Østergaard-Nielsen (2003b: 762) puts forward a definition of political transnational practices, which emphasizes these focal points:

various forms of direct cross-border participation in the politics of their country of origin by both migrants and refugees (such as voting and other support to political parties, participating in debates in the press), as well as their indirect participation via the political institutions of the host country (or international organizations).

Since this approach seems to be one-sided and reflects the situation of only some IOs, I would like to propose a slightly different perspective. This is one based on the notion that in the case of some IOs, their transnationalism expresses itself not in the transnationalization of their powers, but rather in their entanglement in a set of transnational determinants (like the immigration and integration policy of the receiving country, the diaspora policy of the sending country, the bilateral relations between the sending and receiving countries as well as the most general factor—immigration processes and its effects). In such a case, transnationalization of IOs may end up restricting and hindering their activities—an influence which is articulated in the title of this article, “the trap of transnationalism.”

This paper is organized in the following way: Initially, a short description of the research will be presented. The second part contains as necessary background the description of four factors affecting the situation of IOs in general. In the last part of the paper, four transnational factors determining the situation of Polish organizations in Germany will be presented with the use of empirical findings: Polish migration to Germany and the process by which the Polish diaspora in Germany organized itself, German policy towards immigrant organizations, Polish policy towards immigrant organizations, and Polish-German relations.

### **The Data**

The data presented in this paper comes from the “Polish Non-Government Organisations in Germany” research project, funded by the Fundacja Współpracy Polsko-Niemieckiej (Polish-German Cooperation Foundation) which was conducted at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009. The research was carried out using two research techniques: detailed interviews and institutional post survey.

Initially eight in-depth interviews with the pre-defined list of issues were conducted with the leaders of selected organizations. Due to the fact that the aim of the interviews was to take a kind of “view from above” of the functioning and problems of Polish organizations in Germany, the persons interviewed were first and foremost representatives of all (except two) of the umbrella and leading organizations. As an addition to this leaders of the smaller local organizations were asked to take part in the research. The selection of subjects for interviews was therefore purposive.

The interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours. Once transcribed the contents of the interviews took up 217 pages of text. Quality analysis software was used to categorize and put into order the content of the interviews. Due to the relatively small number of interviews conducted and the fact that it was not envisaged that they

would be an autonomous source of information, the analysis of the data obtained in the interviews was based on exemplification, through selection of those statements that illustrate and give a more detailed picture of the data obtained from the survey.

The main source of data was institutional postal survey (Klandermans and Smith 2002: 4). The specific nature of institutional surveys causes that the status of the respondent is different than in the case of typical surveys, who in this case is a representative (chairman, spokesman, etc.) of the organization. In a sense therefore this is an information provider rather than a participant in a survey. This does not affect however the status of the data obtained in this way, while institutional survey focus to a greater extent on determining declarative facts, and less on research into assessments or opinions. The main question that the institutional survey is used to answer is: reconstruction of the structure of the organization (age, geographical territory, management structure, etc.), determining the fields and methods of activity, determining the number and the characteristics of members, and, if applicable, employees; determining the revenue and expenses; describing the social environment of the organization; reconstructing the problems that arise (Klandermans and Smith 2002: 4; Nowak and Nowosielski: 60–61)

The basis of the survey was a questionnaire used in research into the III sector in Poland by Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor. An abridged version was produced, suited to the specific nature of ethnic and immigrant organizations on the basis of a review of literature on the subject and detailed interviews previously conducted with leaders.

When polling an organization it is extremely important to prepare a database of addresses of organizations. There are two possibilities for creating a list of this type. The first is a preliminary survey of the official data of the organisations collected by the relevant registry institutions (Vermeulen 2006: 22) (in the case of the BRD this source of information would be the *Vereinsregister*). This procedure makes it possible to create a relatively comprehensive list of the registered organizations, which, as Fennema observes, means that the researcher can avoid the problem of selection of subjects for research from a concealed population (Fennema 2004: 440–441). At the same time this technique of creating a database of organisations does give rise to certain inconveniences. Above all it requires a lot of time, and also this procedure has to be based partly on the choice of key words in the names of organizations. Not all organizations have references to Poland (for example Catholic Intelligentsia Club [*Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej*], “Lajkonik” Children’s Folklore Group [*Dziecięcy Zespół Folklorystyczny “Lajkonik”*] or “Solidarity Working Group” [*Grupa Robocza “Solidarność”*]) in their names. This can hinder the process of finding all of the Polish organizations. Thirdly, with respect to use of databases of registry institutions we can expect to find organizations that are registered but not necessarily active. Many organizations do not comply with the requirement to de-register an entity as of the moment it ceases its activity. The experience that Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor, the association researching Polish organizations, has in this area shows that out of the registered associations only approximately 60% are active, while the others either do not exist or are not active (Gumkowska and Herbst 2006: 19–20). The second possibility for preparing a database of addresses of organizations is use of existing databases

drawn up by other institutions. This procedure requires less effort and avoids the problem of searching for key words. At the same time it involves the risk that new organisations, and those that distinctly isolate themselves from others, will be missed.

In the “Polish Non-Government Organizations in Germany” research project the latter technique is used. Two existing databases containing information relating to Polish institutions in Germany maintained by the Congress of German Polonia [*Kongres Polonii w Niemczech*] and the Polish Community Association [*Stowarzyszenie Wspólnota Polska*] were used to create a database of addresses for the research. Individual searches were also performed, making it possible to add to the list of organizations. In total data pertaining to 200 organizations was collected. In most cases (115) it was possible to determine the full address for correspondence and e-mail addresses. In some cases only the postal address (72) or the e-mail address (13) could be established.

Due to the fact that not all of the organizations’ postal addresses were known and in order to increase the number of opinion poll forms filled in, the questionnaires were sent as hard and soft copies. In each case the form was accompanied by a covering letter which, apart from the standard information regarding the research and a request for participation in the research, also contained a request that the information be passed on to other organizations. This was intended to make it possible to reach associations not listed in available databases. Also, the form was available online on the website.

The operation to collect the filled-in questionnaires was spread out over time. Sending of forms commenced in December 2008, and the last questionnaire was received by the Institute for Western Affairs in April 2009. The moment the materials were being dispatched it turned out that the data of 97 organizations was out of date. In 103 cases information was not obtained that an address was out of date. It was assumed on this basis that there were approximately 100 existing or active associations. This assumption matched the data that can be found in literature giving accounts of Polish organizations active in Germany (Nagel 2009: 43; Kostrzewa 2005: 36).<sup>2</sup> A representative of one organisation requested that he not be contacted regarding this matter, and another stated that it did not consider itself to be a Polish or Polish-language organization and therefore also would not be taking part in the research. Reminders were also sent—once by post and twice by e-mail.

Ultimately, 42 filled-in forms were collected, which was approximately 40% of the 103 organizations. When interpreting the findings presented in the report it should be remembered that the carried out survey is not representative for the entire population of Polish organizations in Germany. A full study, i.e. encompassing all organizations, cannot for obvious reasons (unwillingness to take part in research, unwillingness to provide information regarding the organizations, absence of leaders,

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<sup>2</sup> Estimates by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the number of Polish organisations in the BRD vary. The *Raport o sytuacji Polonii i Polaków za granicą 2009* states that it is somewhere in the range of 170–180 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009: 178). In the government information on the situation and status of the Polish community in the BRD presented by Maciej Szymański, Director of the Department for Cooperation with Polish Expatriates at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—it says that this number is around 200 (Chancellery of the Sejm 2009). It should be taken into account however that some of the organizations formally exist but are no longer active.

etc.) be performed. The achieved return of 40% of filled-in forms should be considered a good result, allowing the research findings to be deemed to be credible.

The data used as an empirical evidence in this paper comes mostly from the qualitative part of the research but in some of the cases also detailed quantitative data is also invoked.

### **Immigrant Organizations**

One of the most important and widely discussed problems in the sociological and political literature on migration is the political participation of immigrants. Among the basic types of immigrant participation (Introduction 1985), involvement in ethnic immigrant organizations is one of the most important (Stoll 2001; Rex, Joly, and Wimpert 1987). The question of the relevance of immigrant organizations is generally analyzed according to two different approaches (Vermeulen 2006). The first approach focuses on the role of organizations in the life of immigrant communities. The second approach pays more attention to the integration of immigrants into their host societies. The problem of representation of immigrants interests lies however somewhere in between those two approaches, because this function of immigrant organization is implemented in interaction between the immigrant group and host society. This is the reason why the problem of conditions of the relevance and situation of immigrant organizations should be analyzed in context of multiple factors.

The first factor is the characteristics of the immigrant population, as well as the immigration process. The existence of ethnic conflict (Olzak and West 1991), expected functions of immigrant organizations that usually change over time (Jones-Corea 1998), as well as the cohesion of the immigrant group (Erdmans 1995), may all to a great degree influence the process of the immigrant organization, the condition of immigrant organizations, and their capabilities.

The second factor is the policy of the host country authorities towards immigrant organizations. This is often described in terms of the political opportunity structure (Koopmans 2004), which can affect immigrant organizations. However this influence does not have to be direct (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005).

Another important factor is the influence of the sending country especially, its cultural and social tradition as it affects organizational activity (Panayi 1995). It is also worth remembering that immigrant organizations are often financially and politically supported by the authorities of the sending country (Bonacich 1972). This component becomes even more important when we take into consideration the growing transnational character of contemporary immigration. Organizations often build active relationships with the sending country (Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1995) which can both stimulate and restrict their effectiveness in representing the interests of immigrants (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003a).

The last factor is the international relations between the authorities of the host and the sending countries. Although immigration processes are usually analyzed as a part of international relations (Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005), the existence of

immigrant and ethnic minority issues as a part of the political interactions between two countries is usually underestimated. They can however be of great importance when it comes to explain the position of immigrant organizations in the host society, and their capabilities of acting in the defense of immigrant interests (Wolff-Powęska and Schulz 2000).

Numerous interrelations and interactions between these coexisting conditions may impose certain constraints and facilities conditioning the effectiveness of immigrant organizations. I will argue specifically that in the case of Polish organizations in Germany, the transnationalism of migrant organizations is in fact a trap which to some extent complicates their situation and hinders their effectiveness. The concept of the trap of transnationalism is to emphasize the disadvantageous situation of IO's which is difficult or even impossible to overcome and which is a result of a set of noosing conditions external for organizations and arising from processes of transnationalization.

### **Poles and Polish Organizations in Germany**

Polish migration to Germany has been ongoing for about two hundred years, occurring in a number of waves. For this reason, Poles in Germany are very heterogeneous group. Individuals vary by legal status (some have Polish citizenship, some German, some both, while some are stateless), material situation, and the strength of their relationship with Poland and with Polish identity. Poles are one of the largest immigrant and ethnic groups in Germany. According to data from Mikrozensus 2007 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2007), Poles living in Germany constitute the third most populous group of foreigners in the Federal Republic of Germany, counting 638,000 people (after 2,527,000 Turks, and 761,000 Italians). The Polish group consist of Polish citizens (about 289,000), Poles naturalized in Germany (about 240,000), and about 100,000 Polish immigrants in the second and subsequent generations with German citizenship. Apart from these, there is also a significant group of resettled people (*Aussiedler*), who have strong links with Poland, the Polish language, and Polish culture, and the descendants of the prewar Polish national minority in Germany, whose number is hard to estimate. The size of the Polish and Polish-speaking group in Germany is assessed at about 1.5 or 2 million people. However this high number is not necessarily reflected by the status of the Polish group in German society.

While Polish migration to Germany has been happening over the span of last two hundred years, the process of organizing the Polish diaspora in Germany started only in 1877 with the establishment of the Jedność Society (*Towarzystwo "Jedność"*). As Janusz (2001: 22) states, "over the next few years in western Germany, about one hundred such organizations were created." After the end of the First World War, the process of organizing the Polish diaspora began to intensify. This activation expressed itself mostly in the form of unification processes. On August 27, 1922, the Association of Poles in Germany [*Związek Polaków w Niemczech*] was established with 45,000 members (Kostrzewa 2005: 18), which gave the Association great power.

Janusz (2001: 25) also observes that the Association of Poles in Germany played a vital role in creating a cooperative platform between minorities in Germany.

After the Second World War, the Polish movement began to be more heterogenic, because each wave of immigration tended to create its own organizations, which led to conflicts and weakness. In the 90s, a process of unification began, resulting in the creation in 1998 of the Assembly of Polish Organizations [Konwent Organizacji Polskich w Niemczech] in Germany by five umbrella organizations—the Rodło Association of Poles in Germany, the Zgoda Association of Poles in Germany, the Congress of German Polonia [*Kongres Polonii Niemieckiej*], the Polish Council in Germany [*Polska Rada w Niemczech*], and the Catholic Centre for the Propagation of Culture, Tradition, and the Polish Language [Katolickie Centrum Krzewienia Kultury, Tradycji i Języka Polskiego]—as the representative of the whole Polish movement in Germany. Although this structure is not formally registered, and it is no longer participated in by the Rodło Association, it remains the most representative organization of Poles in Germany.

The contemporary organizations and their potential to represent immigrants' interests results from the overall history of the whole movement. The history of Polish organizations in Germany is an interesting example of the growth, development, and decline of an immigrant organization movement. The subsequent waves of immigrants did not contribute to a development of the situation and importance of the ethnic group as a whole, or of its organizations. On the contrary it resulted in conflicts and a tendency to create new organizations instead of integrating into the old structures. In other words, new flows of immigrants tended to lower the potential and cohesion of the Polish group.

The results of the detailed examination of the Polish organizations' situation show also that as a consequence of their condition is not great. Both the human and material resources available for Polish organizations are limited. The overall lack of unity of the movement is also an argument in favour of a rather negative evaluation of their potential. Cooperation with other non-Polish organizations is also limited, which may hinder the role of Polish organizations in the immigrant movement in Germany. This also may contribute to the relatively low status of Poles in German society (Nowosielski 2011).

### **German Policy towards Polish Immigrant Organizations**

Since the Second World War, Poles have lost their national minority status in Germany,<sup>3</sup> which would entitle them to special prerogatives, as is the case with the Schleswig Danes, Frisians, Sorbs, as well as with the Sinti and Roma (Janusz 2000).

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<sup>3</sup> The suppression of the Polish movement in Germany began in 1939. Polish organizations, were outlawed by the Nazi government in February 1940. They were liquidated, their possessions confiscated, and their leaders arrested on the grounds of the Decree of the Council of Ministers for the Defense of the Reich issued on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1940, concerning the organization of the Polish national group (Volksgruppe) in the German Reich. For the discussion on the minority status of Poles in Germany see for example Sandorski (2010).

Poles in Germany are treated as any other ethnic or immigrant group. German policy towards immigrants and their organizations can be described as “neutral,” which means that the Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic country that complies with the standards of law-observing states and, for example, guarantees the right to establish ethnic and immigrant associations, and political party membership.<sup>4</sup> There are possibilities for immigrants to participate in the social and political spheres, e.g. through the medium of such institutions as the immigrant councils [*Migrationsbeiräte*], integration councils [*Integrationsbeiräte*] and foreigner councils [*Ausländerbeiräte*] that operate at different levels of authority.

At the same time, this “neutrality” refers to the fact that although the Federal Republic of Germany offers immigrants certain ways to participate in the German public sphere, it does not follow that they actively support the immigrants. Eva Østergaard-Nielsen (2003a: 3) calls the German incorporation regime one of “the most exclusive in Europe.” The above-mentioned councils play only a consultative role. The participation of immigrant and ethnic groups in mainstream German politics is rather limited. Immigrants and their descendents rarely take exposed political positions—even at the local level. The concern of German political parties in representing the interests of immigrants is also inconsiderable. With the exception of EU citizen who may vote in local elections, immigrants not possessing German citizenship are not able to vote.

In the case of immigrant and ethnic organizations, the “neutral” German policy means that not only is there a lack of proactive policies aimed at developing these organization, but neither is any advantage taken of their potential in carrying out integration policy. Zrinščak (2009) notices that this is especially visible in the case of organizations focused on social help.

Relations between Polish organizations and the German public administration at various levels are an obvious expression of the “neutrality” policy. Very few Polish organizations state that they have any cooperation with German authorities of any level. Only seven of the forty-two organizations investigated here undertake regular cooperation with German public administration offices at the federal level, while sixteen do so sporadically. The scope and range of this cooperation varies depending on the growth, importance, and specialization of the organization. The Assembly of Polish Organizations in Germany maintains the most intensive contact with German authorities, especially with the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media [*Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, BKM*]. Smaller and more specialized organizations cooperate (although usually not very intensively) with officials of the federal ministries that correspond with their activities.

It has to be underlined that in most cases, the cooperation between Polish organizations and German authorities at the federal level is limited to applications for funding. No evidence was found of any cooperation based on consultations about German policies concerning Poles in the Federal Republic of Germany. Therefore associations seem to be treated as the objects and not the subjects of policies, and

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<sup>4</sup> For an evaluation of German integration policy, see the Migrant Integration Policy Index (Niessen, Huddleston, and Citron 2007).

the relations between the organizations and the federal government is reduced to the allocation of limited financial resources.

An example of such a non-partnership relation in dialogue with Polish organizations was the 2006 National Integration Summit [*Nationale Integrationsgipfel*], which was aimed at preparing an integration plan—a tool for improving the situation of immigrants in Germany. None of the Polish umbrella organizations were invited to the Summit.

I will describe it with the example of the National Integration Summit. We were not invited at all [...]. In 2006 [...] was called first. We were not invited. We wrote a letter ourselves [...]. After a long time, there was nothing. Then the vice-minister of the Interior answered that there were two Polish organizations represented, the Polish Social Council [*Polska Rada Społeczna*] here from Berlin, and there was another organization, also from Berlin, incorporated in the women's group [...]. Well ok, they could have informed us that there are such organizations, and ten we could have submitted our problems to them or something, so that would inform us openly (RK5).

The failure to invite the biggest Polish umbrella organizations may be interpreted as evidence of the fact that Polish organizations are perceived as marginal, and that they are being treated as objects, not subjects, of policy.

The characteristic feature of the relations of the Polish organizations with the German public administration at the federal level is the fact that the Polish organization are in a sense forced to maintain contact predominantly with the BKM—an institution that, apart from a relatively small fund dedicated to Polish organizations—does not have any direct influence on shaping the situation of either Polish organization, or of Poles in Germany. There is no information that any of the researched institutions had contact with German offices such as the Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration, or the Federal Commissioner for Resettlers and National Minorities [*Bbeauftragter der Bundesregierung für Aussiedlerfragen und nationale Minderheiten*]. Therefore one can conclude that the desiderata of Polish organizations as regards immigrant and ethnic minority issues are usually addressed to a non-decision-making institution. As a result, even if the Polish organizations had enough negotiation power, they would not be able to actively influence German policies towards Polish and Polish-speaking groups.

### **Polish Policy towards Diaspora Organizations in Germany**

The Polish diaspora—also referred to as Polonia—is scattered all over the world and maintain ties with homeland to different degrees. The Polish state also maintains different degrees of contact with different Polish, and supports their activities with unequal engagement.

The main institutions that deal with the maintenance of relations with and financing of the Polish diaspora are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (especially the Department of Cooperation with the Polish Diaspora as well as Polish missions abroad) and the upper house of the Polish parliament, the Senate. To a lesser degree Poles living abroad are the concern of other institutions, e.g. the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, the Ministry of Economy, etc.

Apart from that, there are Polish nongovernmental organizations dedicated to the support of Polonia, such as the Polish Community Association [*Wspólnota Polska*], the Assistance to Poles in the East Foundation [*Pomoc Polakom na Wschodzie*], and the Semper Polonia Foundation [Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009].

Until recently, the priority of the so-called Polonia policy of the Polish state has the situation of Poles in the east, i.e. Poles living in the territories of the former Soviet Union. Most funding and organizational effort is devoted to predominantly humanitarian assistance and the sustenance of their Polish identity. Polonia in western countries and the organizations connected to it are usually perceived as less needy, and they therefore receive less attention and funding.

Nevertheless Polish organizations in Germany have very well developed contacts with the Polish public administration—especially with the Polish diplomatic missions. Twenty-five of the forty-two investigated organizations have regular cooperation with an embassy or consulate, while twelve of them said they had sporadic contact, and only two stated that they have no relations with Polish missions.

In many cases these relations between the organizations and the missions—although regular—are reduced to contacts at various meetings and ceremonies.

Well, there is contact in the sense that we are invited to ceremonies (CK3).

The consulate is present at all the meetings that are organized [...]. It invites us in turn to meetings and ceremonies. So there is this exchange, this everyday contact (CK3).

More often, the cooperation between Polish organizations and Polish missions is more intensive. Firstly, the embassy and consulates support the organizations' activities. This assistance may be financial—usually relatively small, but for many organizations, as one of their few regular funding sources, it is important.

I must say that we have very fine contact with the consulate in Cologne. Such good [...] working contact. [It] consists of their support for our magazine, and they even give us from time to time grants for printing it (PKK2).

The second type of cooperation, which was quite often mentioned by the investigated organizations, are consultations concerning the situation of Poles and their organizations. It must be underlined, however, that opinions on these consultations are ambiguous. Although such talks occur, they are not very regular, and do not necessary influence the strategy of Polish missions.

From time to time we meet with the ambassador to talk about current matters and to look at what has been done and what is to be done [...]. But instead I would see a need for closer cooperation, on the principle that we are going hand in hand, we are deciding on some kind of tactic of acting with the German side. In this way we can keep the German side in check (CK3).

Far fewer organizations have contact with governmental offices in Poland. Among forty-two investigated organizations, there were seven, which stated that they have regular contact with the Polish government and its offices, and twelve which stated that such cooperation was sporadic. In most cases the governmental institutions involved were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Senate.

The accounts of the relations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the organizations appear in interviews with leaders of the umbrella organizations. The ministry acts as a kind of relay of the Polish organizations' needs. The demands of the organizations are passed on to ministry officials, which in some cases can communicate them to the proper German authorities.

The Assembly [...] started to bring to light that this is not being implemented [...] and started to complain loudly, but through the Polish side [...] so we are beginning to shout and give information to the Polish side, and then the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tells the Germans that they do not like this, and that, and this [...]. And that is why I think that it is so good (CK3).

There are also critical remarks aimed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In most cases they refer to the level of commitment of the Ministry to the concerns of Poles in Germany, which is considered insufficient and is judged not to yield tangible results. Aside from that, in the opinion of some of the organizations' leaders, the Ministry does not appreciate or take advantage of the potential of Polish associations in Germany.

I believe that [...] the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not make use of Polish organizations. And in general I think that the mentality in Poland is that they know everything better. And I believe it's a total, giant mistake of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs that they see no possibility of taking advantage of the experience of the people that are acting here, that have done things, and who in different spheres of life have achieved success... of taking advantage of them. In my opinion this is all a mess, and nothing is being done. [...] It means there is no policy; in my opinion the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has no policy towards Polonia (CK3).

This lack of strategy manifests also in the frequent changes in both tactics and in the personnel of Polish missions and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, resulting from political changes after each election. These changes negatively influence the cooperation between the organizations and the Polish public administration.

One of the pains of the [Polish government's] cooperation with Polonia is the lack of continuity. For years I have encouraged the Polish political authorities to create a nonparty structure that would deal with affairs of Poles all over the world, and that would be free of being leftwing, or rightwing, or "Samoobrona" or whatever, but would just be itself... and would have a simple aim: contact, information, recognition and help for Poles that live outside the country. Just the way the Germans have it (MKK1).

### **Polish-German Relations**

The situation of Poles in Germany and their organizations is additionally complicated by the fact that to some extent it is entangled in bilateral Polish-German relations. On one hand this has some positive consequences. The Federal Republic of Germany is one of sixteen countries which Poland has signed treaties with—treaties that contain guarantees of rights for Polish minorities and groups. The Polish-German Treaty on Good Neighbourliness, Friendship, and Cooperation was signed on the June 17, 1991 [Polish-German Treaty 1991].<sup>5</sup> Although the German government did not recognize

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth to notice that the twentieth anniversary of the Treaty was an excellent occasion to evaluate its meaning and impact on the situation of the Polish group in Germany. Since 2010 Polish-German

Poles as an ethnic minority in the way that Poland recognized ethnic Germans living in Poland, the Treaty stated that actions should be taken by the German government to protect and support the ethnic identity of German citizens of Polish origin.<sup>6</sup> Apart from that, the Polish group should have their right to political representation guaranteed when it comes to the issues that concern them. There seems to be a lack of symmetry between their situation and that of the German minority in Poland,<sup>7</sup> and a somewhat blurry category referred to in the Treaty as “persons having German nationality in the Federal Republic of Germany who are of Polish origin or affirm that they belong to the community of Polish language, culture, or tradition.” On one hand this could have a positive effect on the situation of Poles in Germany, because the category is very broad and incorporates not only ethnic Poles but also those ethnic Germans (mostly *Aussiedler*) who speak Polish and have close contact with Polish culture. On the other hand, the lack of minority status means that the special rights of Poles in Germany are only guaranteed by the Treaty, and not by German law. Apart from that, it must be noticed that speaking about the rights of “persons in the Federal Republic of Germany” means speaking about individual rights, rather than group rights.

Nevertheless one can regard the situation of Poles in Germany as privileged in comparison with other groups not recognized by the German authorities as national minorities. This positive discrimination should express itself as support for Polish organizations’ activities, for the development of teaching the Polish language as a mother tongue, and for access to media. An example of such German activities is the fund dedicated to Polish organizations and managed by the BKM,<sup>8</sup> of about 300,000 Euros a year.

It must be underlined that both the Polish organizations and the Polish government assert that the execution of the Treaty in the context of Poles in Germany is insufficient and unsymmetrical. The most undeveloped sphere is the teaching of the Polish language as a mother tongue, which is conducted only in very few *Länder* of the federation<sup>9</sup> (and mainly in North Rhine-Westphalia). Aside from that, the BKM

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negotiations has been taking place. One of the most important problems taken up during meetings of representatives of Polish and German governments and non-governmental organizations was the minority status of Poles in Germany. Apart from that in June 2011 we have witnessed other, more symbolic gestures concerning the Treaty and indirectly Poles in Germany like the joint declaration of the Polish and German governments signed on the June 21, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> According to identical letters that the Polish and German Foreign Affairs Ministers exchanged on the occasion of the signing of the Treaty, the German side is also committed to ensure that Poles who are not German citizens but who live in Germany will also be able “to a great extent” benefit from the rights and options set out in Articles 20 and 21 of the Treaty (Graß 2000: 180).

<sup>7</sup> Persons having Polish nationality who are of German origin or who affirm that they belong to the community of German language, culture, or tradition.

<sup>8</sup> Which explains why Polish organizations maintain relations mostly with this German office.

<sup>9</sup> According to some of the Polish organizations, the teaching of Polish as a mother tongue reaches about 7,000 children in Germany, and the estimated amount of money available to fund this is about 1.5 million euro. At the same time, about 32,000 children of German national minority (which constitutes about 147,000 people) in Poland study German as a mother tongue. The Polish Ministry of National Education devotes about 15 million euro to this purpose (Małoszewski 2010).

fund is relatively small and covers only the costs of cultural projects. The funding of indirect costs, such as office rental, personnel, etc. is ineligible.

One of the biggest problems with the execution of the Treaty is the division of powers in the Federal Republic of Germany. The federal structure of the German state means that matters of culture and education lie in the competences of particular *Länder* of the federation.

With the execution of the Treaty the Germans did a simple thing, because to sum it up, matters of culture, education, and basically everything that's the subject of this treaty lies in the competence of the *Länder* (RK5).

In many cases this means that Polish organizations are in fact treated like any other ethnic or immigrant organizations. There are no separate agreements between Poland and the *Länder* of the federation, and most of them anyway do not have enough knowledge of the Treaty agreement, or else show no will to execute it.

“Well, the Land treats us like any other nation, like the Turks or the Russians” (PKK2).

The Polish-German Treaty, together with the tradition of the Polish national minority in Germany—which still exists not only in the institutional continuity of some of the Polish organizations, but also in the consciousness of some Polish movement activists—complicates the perception of the social location of Poles in the German ethnospace. Some Poles want to distinguish themselves from other immigrant groups (although the overwhelming majority of them have their own immigration experiences), and some of the Polish organizations want to distinguish themselves from other immigrant associations.

We wouldn't like to, as they say, be pushed [...] into this bag of foreign organizations, I mean organizations of foreigners, you know. We are trying... to be a German organization, established according to German law, and involving people that speak Polish, right? But it's also German, of course, isn't it? [...] So we don't want, as they say, to act like these immigrants, right? Because it all seems of course nice and beautiful, but in fact it is such... a blind alley. And we want to be, as they say, a normal, one of the normal German organizations here (LA9).

This attitude results in very poorly developed cooperation with other ethnic and immigrant organizations. Apart from that, Polish organizations are reluctant to applying for funds intended for immigrants. As previously observed, none of the Polish umbrella organizations have contact with the Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration. This isolation further undermines the already bad situation of the Polish organizations.

At the same time the entanglement of German Polonia issues with bilateral Polish-German relations can cause their situation to in some cases become the object of political manipulation. Taking into consideration the institutional weakness of the Polish group, the organizations often need the support of Polish diplomacy in their relations with the German authorities. Although this is understandable, it must be underlined that such support may to a greater degree weaken the position of Polish organizations. This results from the fact that the issues of Poles in Germany are

becoming one of many matters in Polish-German relations, and undoubtedly not the most important. Although these relations are generally smooth or (depending on political fluctuations) even warm, there are many unresolved points. Some have strong historic backgrounds, like the issue of the “Displaced” [*Vertriebene*], and the politics of the Federation of the Displaced [*Bund der Vertriebenen*]. Some issues are more current in origin, such as the problem of the Nord Stream pipeline.<sup>10</sup> These problematic issues may seem to be more important than, for example, monitoring the execution of the Treaty. Apart from that, there have been situations when in the name of politically correct Polish-German reconciliation, some of the problems of Poles in Germany have not been raised during diplomatic talks. Organizations seem to have noticed this problem.

This policy [of the German authorities towards Poles in Germany] is as the determination of the Polish government. The Polish government is, as they say... I had this feeling anyway that the Polish government was absolutely not interested in it, or maybe—it was interested, but there [...] was no determination to, as they say, to put pressure on the German side. And since the Germans noticed that there is no pressure, so they have been doing what they wanted to do, right? That's the principle (LA9).

### Conclusions

The concept of transnationalism is intended to express the situation of migrants and their institutions, such as associations, that are stretched between two countries and two societies. In many cases relations with the sending country, with the political and economic influence of the migrants, can bring about a strengthening or improvement in the situation of the migrants in the receiving country. However, as I have attempted to show by the example of Polish organizations in Germany, there are cases in which transnationalization may have as a consequence the limiting rather than the strengthening, and the degradation rather than the improvement, of IO situations.

In the case of Polish organizations in Germany, it is quite visible that the policy of the receiving country towards immigration and IOs, and the diaspora policy of the sending country, as well as the bilateral relations between the sending and receiving country may together constitute a combination that has a strong negative effect on the functioning of Polish organizations. This negative influence seems to be strongly interrelated with the fourth factor—characteristics of the immigrant population, and its organization processes. Entanglement in the sometimes uneasy Polish-German relations, political dependence on Polish diplomacy (which may also be perceived as not so robust) combined with institutional weakness of Polish organizations causes that in many cases Polish IO's become even weaker in contact with the “neutral” German integration policy. This stretching is visible not only at the level of actions taken up by the organizations, but also at the level of consciousness of their leaders. Dependence on Polish diplomacy is mixed with a lack of trust, which greatly complicated dialogue with the Polish institutions that are responsible for relations with the diaspora. Strong feelings of difference between Poles and other migrant groups results in isolation and

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<sup>10</sup> For a catalogue of issues significant in Polish-German relations, see Wóycicki and Czachur (2009).

the further reduction of political and social power. The groups' relations with the German authorities are additionally conditioned by the feelings of being a victim of constant deception when evaluating the execution of the Treaty. This all produces an impression of falling into the "trap of transnationalism."

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