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REFEREED ARTICLE

Polish Migrants and Organizations in Australia

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Abstract

The social profile and the organizational landscape of Polish diaspora, known as ‘Polonia’, in Australia has been undergoing a significant change: sociodemographic (ageing), sociocultural (diversification) and sociopolitical (integration and assimilation). The ‘wave-type’ immigration (1947–56 and 1980–89), combined with the sudden decline in immigration after Poland’s independence (1989) and accession to the EU (2004), resulted in the rapid shrinking, ageing and internal differentiation of the Polish community. The pre-1989 ‘ethno-representative’ and ex-servicemen organisations have been withering away. The ‘culture preserving’ ethnic organizations, as well as religious/church groups also weaken, due to their shrinking demographic base. The Australian ‘Polonia’ is diversifying, as well as internally dividing, the latter process accelerated by widening political-ideological divisions in Poland. Under the impact of social diversification and globalization, and in the context of evolving multicultural policies in Australia, new forms of organization and social activism emerge. Interethnic, integrative and ‘bridging’ organizations and initiatives, anchored mainly in metropolitan social circles of Melbourne and Sydney, attract the most educated immigrants and their offspring and break the mould of ethnic exclusivity. Next to traditional Polish Associations, multiplying Senior Clubs and still numerous Polish schools there also appear some nationalistic groups, active mainly in social media. These general trends: numerical decline, ageing and diversification (combined with political divisions) reflect the changing conditions in the Australian and Polish societies, as well as the processes of migrant adaptation and integration.

Keywords

Australian Polonia, ‘wave-type’ immigration, Polish migrants in Australia

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Introduction

Polish-born immigrants-settlers in Australia form a small and shrinking segment of a broader ‘Polonia’ or ‘Polish diaspora’ encompassing Polish immigrants and their descendants often referred to as ‘the Polish ethnic community’¹. The Australian ‘Polonia’ has four interesting characteristics:

- it has been formed mainly through the post-WWII (1945+) ‘wave-like’ migrations that strengthened the ethno-religious bonds and facilitated group or collective (rather than individual) adaptation and integration;
- strong links with the homeland combined with intense politicisation and, more recently, political-partisan polarisation. Due to the ‘political’ and crisis-triggered origins (the takeover of Poland by the Soviet-controlled communists, persecution of political dissidents and Solidarity activists before 1989), and due to the cyclical political crises in Poland, the Australian Polonia has been intensely politicized. Most of Polish immigrants still see themselves as a political diaspora, and many of them identify themselves as ‘refugees’ and ‘political immigrants’;
- rapid ageing – a reflection of reorientation of Polish migration after 1989, and especially after 2004, towards Europe, as well as declining birth rates – and, finally,
- social diversification and widening political division, again, in line with the rapid diversification of the post-communist Polish society and with increasing political polarisation in Poland during the last decade.

All these distinctive characteristics – as well as the accompanying changes in organisational forms and identities – have to be seen in the context of the processes of demographic transition, social adaptation and integration and cultural assimilation, the latter most pronounced among the children of immigrants.

The post-WWII (1947-56) wave of Polish ex-servicemen, Displaced Persons (DPs) and political exiles formed initially a socially cohesive, politically united and organisationally fecund ethnic communities. This cohesion – still quite strong among the older migrants – has been weakening with the inflow of the ‘Solidarity immigrants’ in the 1980s, and with the ongoing social integration of the post-WWII immigrants and their children. In fact, this weakening-cum-diversification has been so strong, that the term ‘ethnic community’ should be used with caution in relation to today’s Polish minority. While the number of Polish-born immigrants shrinks, the young, Australian-born members of the Polish diaspora integrate and

¹ The term ‘Polish immigrants’ refers to Australian residents born in Poland, as well as those who were born of Polish parents-refugees and Displaced Persons in exile. The post-WWII Polish immigrants included persons who identified as ‘Polish Jews’, ‘Polish Ukrainians’ or just ‘Jews’ and ‘Ukrainians’ – hence the difficulties in estimating precise numbers. The term ‘Australian Polonia’ or ‘Polish diaspora’ – like all socio-cultural (especially ethnic) categories – is also fairly imprecise. It refers to permanent residents of Australia who are, and who describe themselves, as persons of Polish descent and who remain attached to Polish culture and traditions (e.g., speak Polish) strongly enough to identify as members of Polonia (e.g., Markowski and Kwapisz Williams 2013, p.14). The concept of ‘ethnic community’ assumes a high level of internal cohesion. As argued below, the Polish diaspora not only includes multiple ethnic ‘identifiers’, but also shrinks, diversifies socially and politically, thus becoming less and less cohesive and uniform in its identities and lifestyles.

adopt hyphenated identities (e.g., ‘Polish Australian’ or ‘Australian-Polish’). They are better educated and skilled than their ageing parents; their interest in Poland declines and changes into ‘ancestral’; and they seldom preserve a good command of Polish – something regarded in the past as the ethnic ‘core value’ and main differential of Polonia.

There is also intense social, cultural and ideological differentiation within the Polonia. Independence-stressing, strongly religious (Roman Catholic) and socially conservative post-WWII Polish refugees distance themselves from more secular, pro-democratic and liberal Polish immigrants from the ‘Solidarity wave’. Moreover, with the ‘Solidarity consensus’² rapidly evaporating in Poland and among the Polish migrants, intensely religious and anti-communist ethno-nationalists (*narodowcy*) separate themselves from more secular, cosmopolitan and pro-multicultural liberals and social-democrats. As a result, the formerly socially cohesive and politically united Polonia gradually transforms into socially differentiated, politically diverse and loosely integrated ‘ethnic diaspora’.

These general processes and trends are neither unusual nor unique for the Polish diaspora. Social and political differentiation and demographic shift are, in fact, typical of many ethnic minorities, especially those formed through wave-like migrations. Migratory waves, as widely recognized and argued below, are conducive to creating socially distinct and internally homogeneous socio-political segments within migrant communities. Such segments, in turn, sustain and enhance internal differentiation by spawning highly (and sharply) differentiated outlooks, identities and organisations.

In order to describe and (at least partly) explain these general processes, we look briefly at the general social profiles of the two constitutive waves of Polish immigration, chart the processes of immigrant adaptation and integration, comment on the progressive social and political differentiation, and, finally, outline the main changes in the organisational profiles of the Australian Polonia.

Polish immigrants in Australia

The most recent census (2016) lists 45,370 persons as born in Poland. That is more than 13% decrease in 10 years. Polish language, according to the 2016 census, is used at home by about 48,000 people that indicates the persistence of Polish exiles born abroad – a category specific for ethnic diasporas experiencing political turbulences – as well as a high language retention within the Australian Polonia (e.g., Smolicz 1988). The number of Polish speakers is only 10% lower than 10 years ago (2006).

Polish ancestry, often in combination with other ethnic ancestry, is declared by about 180,000 Australians, though we can only speculate about the link between this census-declared ancestry and ethnic identity. However, there is the obvious correlation between strong Polish identity, Polish birthplace and recent immigration. Predictably, indications of Polish ancestry as the first response fell by 2.5% in the last 10 years, while the declaration of

² During the 1989 round table negotiations between the communist authorities and Solidarity leaders both sides reached an agreement, often referred to as ‘Solidarity consensus’ that paved the way for liberation and democratization in Poland.

Polish ancestry as the second response increased by over 37% – a typical process of ‘ancestral dilution’. As one could expect, a majority of those who declared Polish ancestry as the second response are young people (new generation of Polish immigrants) – 73% of those are under 50 years old (see Table 1).

Table 1. Australian residents of Polish ancestry: census of population data

| | Number of people born in Poland | Number of people who speak Polish at home | Number of people with Polish ancestry 1 st response | Number of people with Polish ancestry 2 nd response |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 2006 | 52,254 | 53,391 | 103,484 | 60,318 |
| 2011 | 48,677 | 50,695 | 103,501 | 66,853 |
| 2016 | 45,370 | 48,080 | 100,818 | 83,153 |

Data Source: www.abs.gov.au

The Polish diaspora remains very religious but it is also secularizing fast. About 70% of Polish-born Australians declared their religious affiliation with Western Catholicism in 2016, which was a high percentage. But it is also 16% less than 10 years ago. Moreover, the proportion of non-religious people has doubled, in line with other ethnic communities, and similar to the general population in Australia, as well as general population of Poland. As expected, the number and proportion of Jewish Poles have declined as a result of ageing, declining migration from Poland, and the increasing migration of Polish Jews to Israel (see Table 2).

Table 2. Major religious affiliations amongst Poland-born Australians

| | Catholic | Jewish | Secular Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation | Number of people born in Poland |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 2006 | 43,082 (86.7%) | 2,872 (5.7%) | 3,690 (7.4%) | 49,644 |
| 2016 | 31,979 (70.4 %) | 1,623 (3.5 %) | 6,512 (14.3 %) | 45,370 |

Data Source: www.abs.gov.au

The high level of Australian citizenship (85%) testifies to a generally high level of national and civic integration of the Polish immigrants, though only less than 2/3 of Polish-born Australians speak English well or very well. Their identity has also been changing rapidly. While the early immigrants often identified as ‘Poles’ (or ‘Polish exiles’) and harboured hopes of swift return to (liberated) Poland, the more recent immigrants adopt more readily a hyphenated identity (‘Polish-Australians’ or ‘Australian Poles’) and they see themselves as ‘Polish settlers’, who arrived with the intention of staying here for good. Polish-born Australians live most frequently in Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia, and South Australia, with a small, rapidly ageing, but still very well organized Polonia in Tasmania. The organizational life of Polonia has been most advanced in

Melbourne and Sydney, where the vast majority of Polish-born persons and their descendants resided.

The decreasing number of people born in Poland reflects not only the declining immigration from Poland but also the ageing of the Australian Polonia. With the EU accession (2004) and the Schengen Treaty (2007) the immigration from Poland to distant Australia was rapidly reduced, while migrations of Poles to Europe increased. During 2001–16 Australia was accepting, on average, only about 300 Polish immigrants per year. The rapid ageing follows the demographic trend affecting all immigrants from the post-WWII waves. In 2016 the average age of the Poland-born persons was 58 years, compared with 45 years for all overseas-born and 37 years for the total Australian population³. As expected, the most numerous cohorts are those over 55 years old (reflecting the arrival of the ‘Solidarity wave’), while the school-age cohorts of Polish-born are very small, and this means that Polish schools are attended by the Australian-born children of Polish immigrants.

This demographic profile reflects low fertility in the Polish diaspora. A typical Polish-born family in Australia has less than 1.5 children – which is less than the national average of 1.8. This low fertility has many causes: the increasing prosperity, the unsettling and conception-delaying experience of migration, delayed marriages, and popularity of family planning.

Because of rapid ageing, Polish immigrants have one of the most rapidly increasing proportion of retirees and pensioners, and – consequently – relatively low (and declining) incomes. Ageing also means – as we mention below – the proliferation of Senior Clubs and Welfare Committees among Polish organisations. But the high number of new retirees from the ‘Solidarity wave’ (as reflected by the numerous cohorts 55+) also means that the Australian Polonia is likely to experience in the next decade a temporary (decade-long) boost in organisational membership and activism. This changing sociodemographic profile, as mentioned earlier, is a product of a specific ‘wave-like’⁴ immigration pattern; and to this pattern we must turn now.

The two waves

There have been numerous historical and sociological studies of the origins and formation of the Australian Polonia. The conclusions of these studies can be summarized in a few points.

The pre-WWII immigration from Poland was small and diverse, including mainly Polish Jews, Protestant Silesians, and largely Orthodox Ukrainians from the eastern provinces⁵. Until 1947 there was practically no Polish ethnic community in Australia, though some

³ The median age was over 59, with 14% of Polish-born persons over 75 years old, and 36% over 60.

⁴ This wave-like migration, one must add, is typical of Polish migration in general. Like Ireland, Poland spawned waves of mostly political migrants-refugees during every major political (typically accompanied by economic) crisis and upheaval. This is why migrants are seen at home – and identify themselves – as refugees, even if immediate motives of migration are economic. This specific ‘politicized’ identification, though, is seldom transmitted to the second generation of Australian-born children.

⁵ In 19th century there were a number of Polish travellers and explorers including the well-known Paweł Edmund Strzelecki (a surveyor) and only a small Polish settlement in Polish Hill River, which disappeared in 1914.

ephemeral ‘Polish’ organisations and initiatives were noted by historians (e.g., Paszkowski 1962)⁶.

The post-WWII (1947-56) wave of Polish soldiers-refugees, Displaced Persons, family reunion immigrants and few escapees from communist Poland laid the foundation for a powerful and relatively ethnically (and religiously) homogeneous, strongly pro-independence and anti-communist Polish diaspora. At its peak in the late 1950s and early 1960s it numbered at about 65-80,000 organized in ubiquitous Polish Associations, Ex-Servicemen organisations (SPK and Women Auxiliaries), as well as the affiliated Polish schools, folk singing/dancing ensembles, religious/church organisations and dozens of other organisational entities, many still active today⁷. The main function of these organisations was ethno-political and ethno-cultural representation. The early Polish migrants formed effective ‘ethnic lobbies’, anti-communist political pressure groups and pro-welfare groups aiding social adaptation and cultural transmission (see e.g., Zubrzycki 1988, Pakulski 1988).

Adaptation of the early Polish immigrants to the new life was difficult. They arrived well before multicultural policies changed Australian institutions and the attitudes of ‘old Australians’ towards non-British ‘new Australians’. Moreover, the post-WWII Polish immigrants had limited social and cultural capital. They had, on average, low education – or a type of education that had limited application (job relevance) in post-war Australia – and they seldom spoke good English. Even if they did have professional education, skills and experience, these were not recognized in Australia, thus forcing immigrants into frustrating occupational degradation and into low skill, mainly manual, jobs. Moreover, most of the early (1947-8) Polish immigrants were professional soldiers, or *de facto* professional soldiers who after nine years of war had minimal civilian skills. They also had minimal contacts outside their ethnic communities (except for military contacts through Ex-Servicemen Associations and ROTA). Finally, many were forced to sign 2-year contracts for manual labour as the condition of sponsored migration and had very restricted opportunities for upward occupational mobility.

In spite of these challenges and difficulties, by the late 1950s the post-WWII Polish migrants settled down successfully. Soon they recognized their ‘refuge’ was not temporary, and that they were to stay here for good. They started to create ethnic associations, clubs, schools, folk groups and churches, published Polish journals, and started to transform from a migrant category and into a coherent immigrant community, with a rich, complex and strong

⁶ As noted by Markowski and Kwapisz Williams (2013, p.18), ‘The census of 1921 provides the first official data concerning the number of people of Polish origin living in Australia. Out of recorded 1780 persons, more than half arrived before the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 (Harris, Smolicz 1984, p.48). It is estimated that over 80 per cent of those arriving from Poland in the 1920s were ethnically Jewish (Price 1964, p.361).’

⁷ As noted by Markowski and Kwapisz Williams (2013, p.19), ‘The Federal Council of Polish Associations in Australia was established in 1950 and by 1991 it had 30 member organizations, grouping 200 smaller associations fulfilling numerous social, cultural and educational functions. Although it is estimated that no more than 5 to 10 per cent of Poles in Australia participated actively in Polish organizations (Lencznarowicz 1994, p.402), numerous associations, foundations and societies offered diverse forms of social and cultural engagement, organizing festivals of Polish culture, establishing theatres and cabarets, folk dance groups and sport clubs, and publishing a weekly Polish language.’

organisational structure (Sussex and Zubrzycki 1985; Lenczmarowicz 1994; Markowski, Kwapisz Williams 2013; Włodarczak 2005).

The Solidarity movement that started in Poland in 1980, triggered a deep crisis, and ultimately defeated the communist regime. It resulted in a mass out-migration of nearly one million Poles, about 20,000 of whom came to Australia. These new Polish immigrants differed considerably from their post-war predecessors. The ‘Solidarity wave’ consisted mainly of young, educated families. They were ambitious and career-oriented immigrants, and they pursued both skilled manual, as well as white collar and professional employment and careers. Above all, the ‘Solidarity wave’ immigrants sought freedom and prosperity, and they integrated fast. They also represented a much broader spectrum of orientations, beliefs and lifestyles than the older immigrants⁸.

The new Polish immigrants experienced a sudden liberation and democratisation of their homeland. Poland unexpectedly re-gained both freedom and democracy in 1989. Soon, it became the champion in post-communist transformation, a NATO member and a part of the enlarged EU. Polish migrants turned rapidly from condemned-at-home refugees into a proud Polonia, whose members were admired abroad and recognized as an integral part of the Polish nation ‘at home’.

With this strengthened connection came also political-ideological divisions, as well as a rapid enhancement of ‘political-ideological identity’. This identity embraced the notion of politically-motivated migration as an escape from the communist victimisation and persecution. The new Polish migrants harboured a sense of political mission: informing others about the communist oppression, even if this oppression has ceased. They also developed a sense of victimhood, a view of migration as a sacrifice, even when they succeeded in their new lives and careers.

From adaptation to integration

The first stage of immigration and settlement in new country is often described as adaptation, that is, the initial social adjustment to the new life in the new environment. The early Polish immigrants experienced an unsettling and often traumatic social adaptation via the resettling/refugee camps, the famous ‘silver cities’. But they longed for normal life, for regular jobs, families, own houses and settled communities. To fulfil these dreams, they had to create their own adaptive networks, hence the tendency to form self-supporting, often closed and exclusive, ethnic networks and communities. The internal bonds of ethnic solidarity grew strong, and with them developed a high degree of political consensus and ideological-cum-religious unity and cohesion. The typical organisational forms emerging in this stage were territorial Polish associations and clubs, often in close proximity to Polish churches⁹, the ubiquitous ex-servicemen associations (SPK and ROTA), Polish

⁸ The similar differentiation could also be found in the Solidarity movement. See also Jupp (1988), Sussex and Zubrzycki (1985), Pakulski and Markowski (2004).

⁹ Since there were no ethnic parishes, most Poles congregated around the ‘share’ churches where Polish services were offered regularly by the well-entrenched Polish priests. Many of those priests played the key role in establishing Polish organizations and in sustaining strong ethno-religious bonds of solidarity.

Saturday/Sunday schools, and Polish folk groups, mainly music, dancing and singing ensembles. These organisations reflected not only the adaptive needs but also the strong patriotic, pro-independence ethos and identity. The early Polish immigrants treated migration as a refuge from communist-dominated Poland. Therefore, the aims of the early Polish organisations combined the adaptive concerns with a drive to sustain Polish cultural values, religion, language and national traditions – all of them seen as threatened at home. They regarded migrant communities as repositories of the Polish culture. They considered their war experiences as ‘witnessing’ of suffering and sacrifice of all Poles. They also publicized the injustice of the post-war ‘Yalta order’ that left Poland – a faithful and loyal ally of the Western powers – at the mercy of Stalin and his communist servants. Intense anti-communism, patriotism and religiosity (which often identified closely Catholic faith with Polishness) constituted the unifying ideological basis of the emerging Polish organisations and communities (Zubrzycki 1988).

The later Polish immigrants (1980+) did not experience adaptive problems of such magnitude – and never achieved such a high level of unity. They did compete for scarce jobs in Australia in the early 1980s (following the 1982 recession), but they had an advantage of coming to the already multicultural, migrant-friendly Australia. Most of the new arrivals enjoyed numerous government-provided adaptive and integrative facilitations (language tutoring, skill upgrading, etc.), used assistance of multicultural NGOs, and benefited from wide assistance by their co-nationals organized in dozens of well-functioning Polish organisations. Their children could attend the already established Polish schools and cultural organisations.

This better start enjoyed by the ‘Solidarity immigrants’ sometimes caused some social friction, a sense of envy-cum-resentment on the part of the ‘early immigrants’ who considered the more recent Polish immigrants as privileged¹⁰. The new arrivals were privileged by circumstances – and they were typically more successful than their predecessors in adapting to the new environment and integrating with the Australian society. Moreover, they also had an escape route – if they failed in adaptation and integration, they could always return to Poland, where living conditions started to improve very rapidly following the reforms introduced by the Solidarity governments in the 1990s. Therefore, their integration was faster and more comprehensive: they were getting career jobs, joined political organisations and participated in the Anglo-Australian cultural activities.

Many promptly naturalized, embraced an Australian (often hyphenated) identity, usually supplemented by the proudly declared ‘Polish ancestry’ – the ancestry associated with widely admired Solidarity movement and its Nobel Prize winning leader, Lech Wałęsa. Such a swift and successful integration was also found among some early Polish immigrants, but it was more typical of their children and grandchildren, as well as the Solidarity wave arrivals.

¹⁰ One must stress that not all Polish organizations welcomed the ‘Solidarity Poles’. Some conservative leaders of Polish organizations were deeply suspicious of new immigrants and treated them as ‘tainted’ by their allegedly ‘communist upbringings’ and (liberal-democratic) ideological preferences.

The changing Polonia and its organizational landscape

The organizational landscape of the Australian Polonia reflects these trends and regularities. The number of Polish ethnic organizations – that grew rapidly in the post-war decades – started to decrease in the late 1980s. Between 1986 and 2012 alone, the number of active organizations in the Polish community dropped by about 50-70%¹¹.

The ‘Solidarity wave’ Polish immigrants were ‘joiners’, rather than ‘organizers’. They were more interested in swift economic adaptation and social integration than in creating new ethnic organizations. Only when their children started to grow and reach the schooling age, they joined the older generation in organizing Polish schools and some culture-preservation-cum-transmission groups. According to estimates, only some 0.5% of all Polish immigrants of the 1980s engaged in public activity in Australia (Pleskot 2014, p. 87).

This downward trend seems to have slowed over the last 5 years, possibly due to the inflow of Polish retirees into the ranks of Polish organizations. The most affected by this organizational depletion are ex-servicemen associations, regional Polish associations and formerly ubiquitous Polish clubs. Interestingly, there are also newly formed groups and initiatives, such as proliferating Senior Clubs and welfare committees, as well as more openly political groups, some of which are visible mainly (if not exclusively) in/through the social media and the Internet.

One must stress that some of the traditional ethnic-representative organizations, now run by the second generation and the retired immigrants, still persist and operate. There is a vibrant Federal Council (*Rada Naczelną*) of Australian Polonia¹², as well as some state-based federations of Polish organizations. There are numerous local Polish Associations, as well as multiplying Polish Seniors’ Clubs and Welfare Committees. But, invariably, the ethnic-representative organizations find it difficult to attract new members, especially from the new generation of children (and grandchildren) of Polish immigrants.

The current (2017) organizational landscape of Australian Polonia reflects these socio-demographic trends. Let us start by looking at the overall number of ‘Polish ethnic organizations’. The web lists between 100 (the National Council) and 200 (Consulate General) such organizations, ranging from the regional Polish Associations (25) and Polish Houses (16) to rapidly proliferating Polish Senior Clubs (40), as well as diverse cultural

¹¹ A list prepared by Pakulski and Czernkowski during 1984-86 contained over 210 active Polish community organizations in Australia (Pakulski and Czernkowski 1986). But it was an incomplete list, restricted to mainstream ‘Polonia organizations’, that is, Polish Associations, clubs and their ‘organizational supplements’. The comparable more recent list (*Directory of Polish Organizations 2012*) available on the Internet shows only 16 Polish community organizations, four newspapers and schools, eight folklore groups and two Scout organizations. This is also an incomplete list. The inventory published by the Federal Council mentions some 70 active Polish community organizations, but it is also partly incomplete (the NSW organizations are largely missing, probably due to the absence of Federation website. The lists published by the Polish Consulate General in Sydney are more comprehensive, but they are seldom verified, and may contain many ‘dead souls’. A more detailed survey of Polish organizations in Tasmania conducted by Jan Pakulski shows a rapid decline from nearly 30 organizations (24 in Hobart) in the early 1980s to less than 10 in 2018.

¹² According to the calculations by the president of Federal Council currently it includes some 24-26 Polish organizations (some of them are federations) with some 5 thousand members. This represents approximately 8% of all Australians born in Poland (or Polish refugee families).

groups (26) and initiatives (8). The current President of the National Council of Polish Organizations in Australia estimates the number of active Polish organizations at 161. They include relatively new ‘bridging’ organizations/initiatives/groups promoting Polish-Australian economic and cultural collaboration, whose number ranges from 6 to 12, depending on the classification criteria. They are not exclusively Polish in their membership and focus, so their number is difficult to establish, but almost all of them are very successful in their respective fields of activity.

A good example of such a relatively new (though now defunct) integrative initiative-cum-organization was *Help Poland Live* (HPL). It aimed at aiding Poles at home during the economically disastrous 1980s. HPL proved a great success in both mustering economic aid for impoverished Poland (estimated at about 3 million dollars), and in integrating Polish immigrants, as well as many Australian supporters. Another example of such ‘bridging’ (Polish-Australian) organizations is Polcul Foundation, currently renamed Jerzy Boniecki Polcul Foundation. It collected multi-million dollar funds in Australia and granted over 1600 financial awards, initially (1980-89) to Polish pro-democratic dissidents and Solidarity activists, and then (1990+) to philanthropic activists in Poland. Australian ‘Polculs’ (known also as ‘kangaroos’), have been playing a very important role in pro-democratic transformations in Poland, as acknowledged by all free Polish governments. It still operates successfully and enjoys a patronage of the Australian government.

One should also mention the Australian Institute of Polish Affairs, known as AIPA. The member-funded Institute, established in 1991 by the most prominent members of the ‘old’ (post-WWII) and ‘new’ Polish immigrants, is not only ‘bridging’ but also ‘trans-ethnic’. It accepts non-Polish members and conducts its affairs in English. Its aims include strengthening the relations between the two nations (Poland and Australia), publicizing the achievements of the Polish post-communist transformation, and conducting Polish-Jewish dialogue¹³. AIPA’s activities – in Australia and Poland – represent a specific form of public diplomacy in the ‘transnational public domain’. Over two dozen distinguished Polish guests were invited by AIPA to Australia and ‘networked’ with the members of Australian political, cultural and economic elites. At the same time, the Institute organizes public lectures, academic symposia involving prominent Australians, and book launches in Poland.

Conclusions

The Australian Polonia is ageing, shrinking in size and rapidly differentiating – some would say ‘normalizing’. The organizational ‘core’ of the Australian Polonia, increasingly managed by children of Polish immigrants, still presents a united front in cultural and social debates by avoiding conflicts and carefully bracketing political and generational differences. But more recently Polonia started to show signs of growing division that mirror the divisions in Polish society. The new sources of this division are located ‘at home’, in Poland, where the new

¹³ AIPA is too universalistic to be called an ‘ethnic organization’. Yet it attracts people who are interested in Poland and Polish-Australian relations, maintains very good contacts with the Australian and Polish cultural, media, economic and political elites, and, above all, is very active organizing regular promotion events both in Australia and in Poland.

right-nationalist government is taking an ‘illiberal turn’. The public and social media – increasingly global and accessible – disseminate the division worldwide.

The traditional ethnic organizations formed by the post-WWII immigrants – Polish Associations, Ex-Servicemen organizations, Polish Saturday Schools, and Church groups – are either withering away or changing their functions. They are turning gradually into senior clubs and de facto ethnic ‘welfare committees’ that direct voluntary help and state-sponsored assistance to ageing Polish immigrants. There are also well-functioning Polish Associations, as well as Polish schools and some cultural groups (typically folk dancing groups), but their number and membership are dwindling. The ‘Solidarity wave’ has stimulated these ethno-representative and culture-sustaining organizations, but the impetus seems to be reaching its end.

The Australian Polonia changes gradually from immigrant community into ‘people of Polish ancestry’ and this trend is likely to continue in the absence of renewed mass migration from Poland. People of Polish ancestry develop hyphenated identities (‘Polish-Australian’) that tend to grow stronger when Poland enjoys a good reputation, and that dwindle when Poland’s international reputation suffers setbacks. Polish organizations are likely to continue their transformation from ethno-specific (particularistic) towards more universalistic, ‘transcultural’ or ‘bridging’.

The traditional ‘ethno-representative’ organizations, such as regional Polish Associations, as well as the ethno-religious organizations (Church Committees, Rosary Circles, etc.) are likely to gradually wither away, due to a rapid secularization and differentiation of Polonia. Equally uncertain is the future of Polish schools and folk groups. All ethnic schools, for example, face not only escalating costs and shrinking subsidies, but also a growing competition from web-based courses that are cheap and accessible. One may also mention a growing impact of proliferating and widely accessible in-country courses in Poland. Such courses prove very attractive to young Australians with Polish ancestry, and they become more accessible due to grants and declining cost of long-distance travel.

The most rapidly growing Polish ethnic organizations in Australia in the first decade of the 21st century are various senior clubs and welfare committees catering for ageing and ailing Polish immigrants. This high demand for ethnically-specific old-age services, however, is likely to decline due to the demographic trends. By contrast, the general ‘bridging’ organizations prosper, and look robust. Obviously, their future success is conditional on the ability of their leaders to negotiate a shift from hierarchical ‘ethno-representative’ bodies to more horizontal ‘partnership-collaborative’, ‘bridging’ and ethnically plural bodies.

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