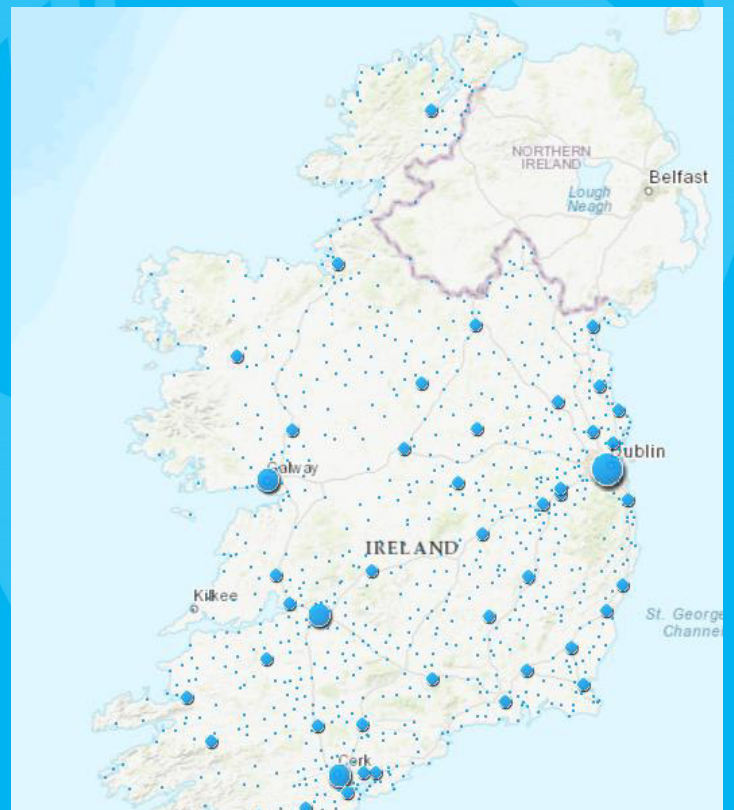


No. 1 (8), January 2019

(Non)participation of Poles in Ireland

What are the different forms, patterns and determinants of migrants' political and public involvement, both in the country of origin and country of current residence? How do Polish migrants to Ireland participate in the transnational space between the two countries? And does involvement in one country influence involvement in the other? These are just some of the questions that the project 'Between Poland and Ireland. Political and public participation of Polish migrants in a transnational space¹', currently conducted by dr Magdalena Lesińska and her team at CMR, aims to answer.



Map 1. Spatial distribution of Poles in Ireland, 2016.
Source: <https://arcg.is/0aSPuL> (CSO and OSI, 2017)



Between Poland and Ireland. Political and public participation of migrants in a transnational social space

Magdalena Lesińska, Weronika Kloc-Nowak, Dominika Pszczołkowska

Interest in Polish politics among Poles in Ireland is decreasing, and it is not replaced by interest in Irish politics. Although Polish civic and cultural organizations in Ireland are dynamic and visible, they engage only a small minority of Poles, which does not breed capital for wider political involvement.

These are some of the first conclusions from the research on political and public participation of Poles in Ireland currently conducted at CMR. The project included a survey of Polish migrants residing in Ireland (an analogous survey was also conducted in the UK and Germany); interviews with Polish leaders and activists in Ireland and representatives of Polish and Irish administrations and experts; and an analysis of databases of the Central Statistics Office of Ireland (CSO) and the State Electoral Commission (PKW) of Poland. Below we present the current demographic profile of Poles in Ireland, and then discuss in turn the political participation of Polish migrants in Polish and Irish politics, and their public involvement.

Main characteristics of the Polish population in Ireland

Post-EU accession migration of Poles to Ireland was a new phenomenon for both the sending and receiving societies. Ireland, which for many decades was a country of emigration, had started being an immigration destination only in the late 1990s. Such a late debut among immigration destinations was one of the reasons why the profile of immigrants in the country

differs from that of traditional European immigration countries – Ireland is (together with Luxembourg) the only country among the ‘old’ EU15 with more immigrants from EU countries than from outside the EU.

Before 2004, Ireland was a very infrequent destination of Polish migration. This changed almost overnight around the time of Poland’s EU accession on May 1, 2004. Today Poles constitute 2,6% of the Irish population. Already by 2006, they could be found in every Irish municipality (CSO 2008, p. 28). According to the PPSN system, the largest number of Poles (93 364) arrived in 2006. Since the years of the economic crisis the number has stabilized at 8-9 000 per year. Poles are no longer the main arriving group, with the British and Romanian being more numerous, but they remain the largest non-national group in the country. According to the last Irish census of 2016, there were 115 161 persons born in Poland living in Ireland. The population of persons with Polish citizenship (which included those with double citizenship, especially children born in Ireland) was 131 788.

The Polish population is rather evenly distributed around Ireland, with the capital Dublin, as well as Cork and Waterford in the south and Galway and Limerick in the west being large centres (Map 1).

In the first years after accession, men constituted a large majority of Polish immigrants, but since 2007 the proportions have started to even out and in 2016 they constituted half (50,5%) of the

Polish population. Polish men were more numerous to leave Ireland during the crisis, due to a strong downturn in the construction sector.

Another distinctive feature of Polish migration to Ireland, compared with that to other countries, was the relatively high level of education – 26% of migrants in the first years after accession held a tertiary degree (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009). The ‘typical’ Polish migrant to Ireland was thus either a qualified construction worker, or a young graduate from a large city in Poland (Kloc-Nowak 2017).

Despite the above, and in spite of a certain professional advancement of the Polish in Ireland, in the census of 2016 only 8% were classified as belonging to the top professional category (managers etc.), and Poles were over-represented in the lowest categories of semi-skilled (18%) and non-skilled workers (8%). In terms of sectors of employment, they are most numerous in trade and repair of motor vehicles, industry and accommodation and food service activities, and significantly under-represented in education, human health and social work activities.

The group is growing older, with thirty-somethings now dominating. The modal age has moved from 28 in 2011 to 33 in 2016. Whereas right after EU accession single people dominated, now most Poles live with families or partners. The number of very young children (0-5 years old) has also dropped in favour of school-aged children of 6-10 years of age. The percentage of Poles living together with an Irish person has grown to reach 33%, possibly more

due to the naturalisation of their Polish partners and children than to forming ties with the Irish.

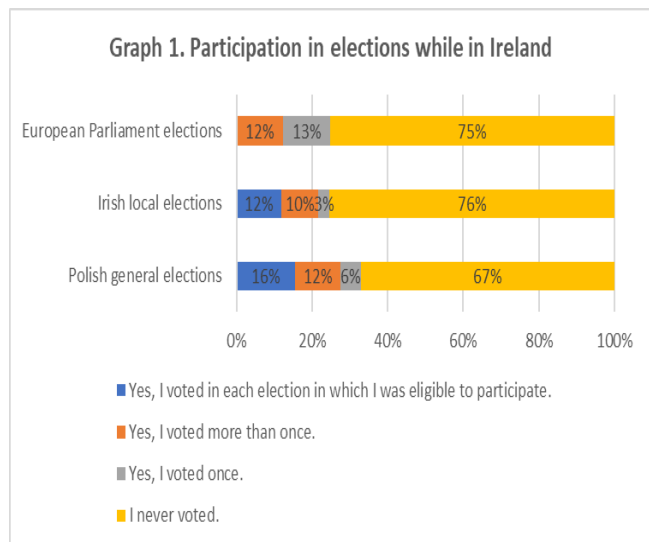
Poles’ participation in elections in Ireland and Poland, in light of data from the Polish State Electoral Commission and our own survey

From the Polish Electoral Commission data we know that Poles residing in Ireland do not vote in large numbers in Polish elections. The highest turnout was noted in the parliamentary elections of 2007 and presidential election of 2010, when about 9% of eligible Poles in Ireland took part (over 14,500 votes each time). In subsequent elections of 2011 and 2015 there was a drop in the number of votes, with 7,700 and 9,000 persons participating in parliamentary elections, and 10,600 and 8,200 in the two rounds of the presidential vote of 2015. In Irish local elections, data is not compiled by nationality of voter, but from our own survey it seems that turnout among Poles was even lower.

The survey of Poles in Ireland (CAPI, N=503), was commissioned by the CMR and conducted in June-October 2018. It covered a wide range of issues, including a number of questions on political and public participation both in Ireland (as residents) and in Poland (as citizens). Women constituted 51,3% of the sample (258 persons). Respondents aged 22-34 constituted 43,3% of the sample, respondents aged 35-44 44,9% and respondents of 45+ 11,7%. The study was conducted in all eight regions of the Republic of Ireland, with respondents in Dublin constituting the largest group (30,2%). The above reflects the age and geographical distribution of Poles in Ireland. The same survey was also commissioned in the UK and Germany. Results are being

compared, but in this paper, we will focus mostly on the results from Ireland.

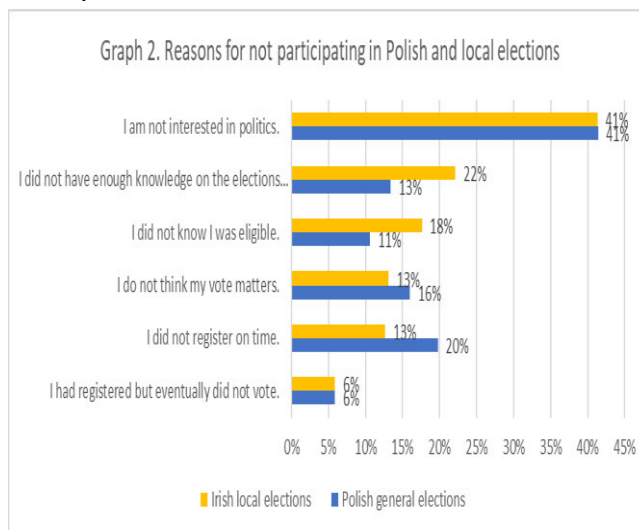
As shown in Graph 1, a third of Poles declared that they had taken part in a Polish election at least once while living in Ireland. A quarter stated the same regarding Irish local elections and elections to the European Parliament.



Source: Own elaboration of CMR 2018 survey data, N=503.

Reasons for not participating differ by country of election (Graph 2). Apart from the largest group who are not interested in politics anywhere (41%), Poles more often claim that they did not know enough about the elections or candidates in Ireland (22%) or they did not know that they had the right to vote (18%). Polish candidates in the local elections in Ireland also stated in the interviews we conducted that lack of knowledge of the electoral procedures in Ireland was a frequent obstacle to mobilizing their compatriots to vote, for example many people did not realize that they had to put their names on the electoral register in advance.

Nine Polish candidates ran in local elections in Ireland both in 2009 and 2014. In 2009 there seemed to be more interest among Irish political parties in fielding Polish candidates, and some ran as party candidates. In 2014 all ran as independents. None were elected. Some complained that Poles were not interested and seemed to generally view politics in a negative light: *When we were running, other Poles, [for example from scouts' organizations], labelled us as politicians, and we were doomed. They did not want to cooperate with us. Still now I am remembered for that and nobody want to cooperate with you because "X is a politician, she doesn't say what she means, she is just after money".*



Source: Own elaboration of CMR 2018 survey data, N=503.

Half of the participants of the survey (51%) declared that they had taken part in an election in Poland at least once before migrating. This experience seemed to differentiate them in terms of level of political involvement after migration. Persons who never voted remained passive. Those who did vote at least once were somewhat more likely to take part in a Polish

election than to ignore them. Men tended to be more electorally active than women: 24,9% declared they had taken part in an Irish local election more than once, while for women the number was 18,7%.

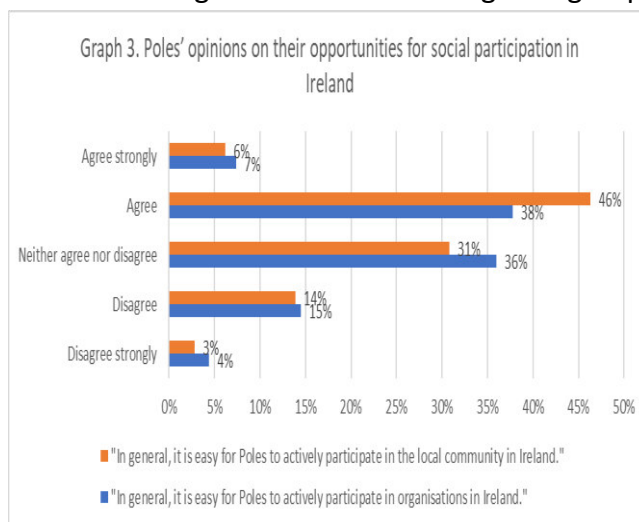
A particular group of respondents were persons who held both Polish and Irish citizenship (N=77). They were asked about voting in Irish presidential and parliamentary elections. 2/3 declared to have voted in them at least once, and slightly less than half that they took part in all elections in which they were entitled to. Their level of electoral activity is much higher in the country where they took on citizenship by choice than in the country of origin. Again, men were more active than women, with over 2/3 of men in the group and half of women claiming that they had taken part in national Irish elections at least once.

Participation of Poles in civic organizations and activities in Ireland

‘There is a wide spectrum of Polish organizations, which are also reaching out to the Irish’ – claims one of our interviewees, an official. This seems to be the perception of many of our interviewees and ourselves, with a large number of Polish Saturday schools, cultural and other organizations operating in Ireland. This view is, however, contradicted by the results of our quantitative study, in which only 5,4% of the respondents (27 persons) declared that they are or have been active in an organization, association or club while living in Ireland. This is much lower than among Poles in the UK (13%) and Germany (9,8%) in the same study. The average in Poland is 13,4% (which we know from

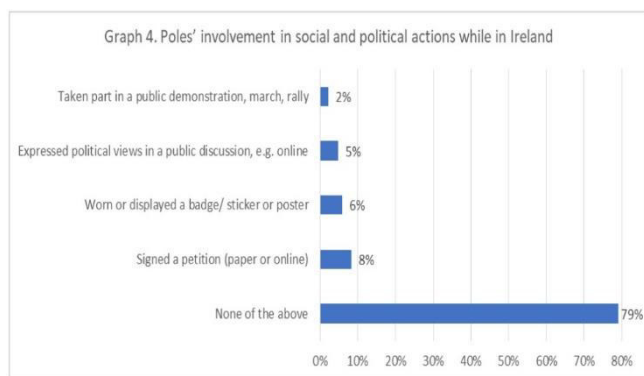
an analogous question in a different study – *Diagnoza Społeczna 2015*).

Poles were not active in Ireland in large percentages in spite of the fact that they tended to agree rather than disagree that ‘generally it is easy for Poles to actively participate in the life of the local community in Ireland’ and that ‘generally it is easy for Poles to actively participate in various organizations and associations in Ireland’ (Graph 3). Polish women were more active in the social sphere than men (6,6% to 4,1%). Levels of activity increased with age, with only 3% of 22-34-year-olds being active, 6% of 35-44-year olds and as much as 14% among the 45+ age group.



Source: Own elaboration of CMR 2018 survey data, N=503.

Participants were also surveyed regarding their spontaneous civic and political activity, even if they were not members of any group. Nearly 4/5 claimed that they did not participate in any way. The most popular forms of activity were signing a paper/online petition (8,3%) or wearing a badge/sticker/putting up a poster promoting an issue important to the respondent (5,8%) (Graph 4).



Source: Own elaboration of CMR 2018 survey data, N=503.

Conclusions

Interest in Polish politics among citizens residing in Ireland is not large, and may decrease further with length of stay, as seems to be the case in the last years (elections of 2011 and 2015). Interest and level of involvement in Irish politics is even more limited, which in part seems to be due to a lack of knowledge of the system. Some respondents may also still not feel great attachment to their place of residence.

Social activity, although noticeable in the media and to local observers, is limited to a group of active persons and dependent on leaders. The personal involvement of these persons can influence the general level of activity.

The age structure of the Polish population in Ireland seems to be of relevance, since people in the 45+ category tend to be more involved socially. Currently most Poles in Ireland belong to the younger groups of thirty- and forty-year-olds, who are burdened not only with work, but also young children. Their level of involvement may increase as the children grow older. So far, however, the very limited level of social

involvement does not seem to breed capital for wider political involvement and the creation of a political representation of Poles in Ireland.

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¹ "Between Poland and Ireland. Political and public participation of Polish migrants in transnational space", project funded by National Centre of Science (DEC-2015/18/M/HS5/00385). Principal investigator: Magdalena Lesińska, PhD; contact: m.lesinska@uw.edu.pl Co-Investigators: Justyna Salamońska, Weronika Kloc-Nowak, Dominika Pszczółkowska, Partner in Ireland: Bryan Fanning University College Dublin, Duration: 2016 – 2019.



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Joined the CMR after many years of working as a reporter and Brussels correspondent for "Gazeta Wyborcza", Poland's largest quality daily, to write a PhD about destination choices of Polish post-EU accession migrants. Her other research interests include immigration and integration policies. She currently is involved in the IMINTEG project on relations between immigration and integration policies

Keywords: Polish emigration / Ireland / political participation / public participation

Suggested citation: Lesińska M., Kloc-Nowak W., Pszczółkowska D. (2019), *Between Poland and Ireland. Political and public participation of migrants in a transnational social space*, CMR Spotlight, 1 (8).

Editors of CMR Spotlight: Michał Nowosielski, Dominika Pszczółkowska

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