Poles in Seattle 1890–2020: Continuity and Change

DOROTA PRASZAŁOWICZ[1]
ORCID: 0000-0001-8778-2145
Jagiellonian University

The text presents the preliminary results of the ongoing research on the Polish American community in Seattle, Washington. So far overlooked by the historians of the Polish American experience, the local group differs significantly from other centers of the Polish diaspora in the US. Poles settled in the Pacific Northwest from the late nineteenth century onward, and they developed in the city and around it a strong community that is internally diversified. In Seattle they were confronted with German, Irish, and Jewish groups, as was the case in other American cities, but also with other immigrants, for example with numerous Asians, Nordic people, Croatians, and Bulgarians. Contrary to the patterns of the Polish American community building, there has never been a Polish neighborhood in the city, and the Polish Roman Catholic parish was founded in Seattle as late as 1989. In fact, the parish never gained a crucial importance in the local ethnic community, and presently, as it used to be in the past, the immigrant life is organized around the Polish Home that was launched by the pioneer immigrants in 1918/1920. Many descendants of the earlier immigrant generations participate in the events initiated in Seattle by Poles who arrived in the last decades, and several recent immigrants became involved in the Polish Home Association. Moreover, web platforms – new forms of ethnic connection that developed in the last decades, contribute to the increase of the bonding social capital within the Polish group.

Key words: Polish Americans, Seattle, ethnic community, urban sociology

[1] dorota.praszalowicz@uj.edu.pl

> Linked by road, rail, ship, and air to global distribution networks,
> the city has grown to take on international economic importance,
> a development that owes much to Seattle's role
> as one of the world's leading centers
> for the manufacture of high technology
> and for Internet-based commerce.
>
> (Seattle-Washington)

Introduction

Despite its size, its uniqueness, and its impressive activity that dates to the end of the nineteenth century, so far there is no academic study devoted to the Polish American community in Seattle. The text presents some preliminary results of the ongoing research project that aims to fill the gap.[2] Its content is confined to the basic information about the group, presented in the context of the Pacific Northwest *milieu.* The text is based on a review of the basic literature, examination of selected primary sources, semi-structured interviews with the local leaders, and participant observation (July 2019).

With the headquarters of leading IT and high-tech companies, Seattle attracts highly skilled specialists, many Poles among them. As a part of the globalization process of career markets, the process triggers the emergence of a new creative, multicultural, and mobile class that operates in a trans-national space. One might assume that its members do not need any sense of locality and reject the idea of community belonging. Surprisingly however, their high mobility makes them self-aware to a larger extent when compared to non-migrants. According to the general overview of expats' testimonies, they are not indifferent to the question of individual and collective identity (McNulty & Brewster 2016). Moreover, despite being highly mobile, they usually try to integrate to the new *milieu,* both in the mainstream and their ethnic group (Foner 2015, Adam et al. 2018). Indeed, recent Polish immigrants in Seattle do not distance themselves from the old Polish American societies. On the contrary, they joined some of them, and contributed to their expansion, for example the Polish Home Association, established in 1918. At the same time, they launch their web platforms, and open them to the descendants of the earlier immigration inflows. To capture these phenomena, it is necessary to challenge the traditional patterns of the diaspora and ethnic studies, and to seek a new way of conceptualizing the complex patterns of mobility influencing a traditional, rooted in primordial, understanding of ethnic identity expressions.

Theoretical frame of reference

An important aspect of any migration study relates to a social change; migration is a change that leads to further transformation (Portes 2010). Since at the turn of the nineteenth century mobility often made migrants disoriented and lost in a new place, the immigrant community building process was meant to reinstate the social fabric and to prevent the social disintegration of the newcomers. And so, the community was to facilitate migrants' adjustment to a change. With its complex net of ties, an ethnic community became a stabilizing force that could slow down the integration process, but at the same time it counteracted the cultural shock (Morawska 1988). It is crucial to consider however, that a local immigrant community is a creative process (Follett 1919) that itself undergoes constant changes. The community is being Americanized and at the same time it Americanizes its members (Praszałowicz 1999). When new immigrants arrive, the local ethnic community becomes their shelter and serves as a bridge to the receiving society (Babiński 1977). On the other hand, each immigration stream coming from the Old Country infuses the community with the recent cultural currents that both transforms and revitalizes the ethnic community. It is important therefore, to trace the process of subsequent immigration streams that constructed and transformed the ethnic community in Seattle.

While focusing on the ethnic community and its conceptualizations, the study challenges the traditional paradigms of the Ethnic Studies developed in the 1960's and 1970's, which portrayed ethnicity as "an insider identity generated in largely closed minority communities whose members struggle in the interaction with society at large" (Lesser 2017:7). The case of Poles in Seattle makes this understanding of ethnicity inadequate, and one of the concepts that underpins the current research is the New Architecture of Ethnic Studies (NAES). It demonstrates that ethnicity which is practiced or felt by the recent immigrants is most likely to be observed among those least engaged with ethnic institutions (Lesser 2017:7). Indeed, Poles in Seattle managed to produce a high level of bonding social capital (Putnam 1995) however, many of them construct their identities outside of the traditional community. Sometimes they participate in one form of institutional activity (for example the Polish Film Festival) and avoid others. Therefore, the concept of the ethnic institutional completeness (Breton 1964) which was helpful to theorize immigrant community building in the past, does not apply today, and we engage a more constructivist perspective – what scholars call the *invention of ethnicity* (Conzen et al. 1992), or in the context of migration, the process of 'production' of ethnic groups that are 'made not born' (Glick Schiller 1977). Moreover, it seems necessary to deconstruct the traditional notion of Polonia (Polish diaspora), which has been openly rejected by most of the recent migrants, not only in Seattle, but everywhere.

Seattle – *a distant magnet* (Taylor 1971)

Seattle, an air and sea gateway to Asia and Alaska, is the largest metropolis of the Pacific Northwest. Settled in 1851, and an incorporated town in 1869 it became the chief city of the Washington state, and a seat of King county (Jepsen & Norberg 2017). "The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life." (Turner 1893). Seattle is a product of American expansion to the West (the moving of Western Frontier), a manifestation of creativity forged out in confrontation between the wilderness and the forces of the modern economy. Moreover, Seattle became a transit city on the way to Alaska and Klondike at the time of the Gold Rush (1897–1899), and the passing of thousands of people contributed to the expansion of the city and its infrastructure (Klondike Gold Rush).

Many pioneer settlers were recruited to the region by the railway companies to the construction works. The Northern Pacific Railroad that extended to Tacoma, a town south of Seattle, was completed in 1883, and the Great Northern Railroad reached Seattle in 1893. This sequence illustrates the competition between the developing centers that both became attractive destinations for Poles.

> "Lumber and coal were the primary industries, but the growth of fishing, wholesale trade, shipbuilding, and shipping also contributed to the town's economic expansion and population growth. (…) The city's population [240,000 by 1909] became increasingly diversified. Scandinavians came to work in fishing and lumbering, African Americans to work as railroad porters and waiters, and Japanese to operate truck gardens and hotels. There were significant communities of Italians, Chinese, Jews, and Filipinos" (Brief History of Seattle).

According to the information provided at the Nordic Museum in Seattle, by 1900 almost 25% of immigrants in the Washington State were of Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, or Icelandic background. Even if the figure is overstated, the ethnic fabric of the local population was a novelty to the Polish newcomers, also to those who resettled from the Midwest.

While discussing the phenomenon of the Seattle population, it is crucial to consider not only its districts located within the city limits, but the whole metropolitan area that includes suburbs with the largest IT companies. In the present, in comparison to the US demographics, the Hispanic and Black population is underrepresented in the Seattle metropolitan area, and the Asian group is overrepresented (table 1). The top 5 countries for King County's foreign-born population (2017) are: India, China, Mexico, Vietnam, and Philippines (US Census).

Table 1

Seattle population: race and ethnicity 2019

Race and ethnicity	Percentage of the population 2019		
	Seattle city	Seattle Metro Area	USA 2019
White	67,3	65,7	76,3
Asian	15,4	12,4	5,9
Hispanic	6,7	9,3	18,5
Black	7,3	5,6	13,4
American Indian	0,5		1,3
Two or more races	0,3	5,3	2,8
TOTAL NUMBER	753,675	3,671,095	328,239,523

Sources:
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/seattlecitywashington;
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219
https://statisticalatlas.com/metro-area/Washington/Seattle/Race-and-Ethnicity
[the other sources give slightly different figures:
U.S. Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey 1-year estimates]

As to the origin of the Seattle metropolitan population, German ancestry predominates, followed by Irish, English, and Norwegian (table 2).

Table 2

Seattle population – ancestry

	Seattle Metro Area in thousands	King County in thousands	Washington State in thousands
Other	1,290	765	2,31
German	595	307	1,26
Irish	380	200	765
English	370	207	733
Norwegian	206	99	380
American	137	70	329
Italian	136	76	247
Swedish	118	64	227
Polish	72	43	131

Source: https://statisticalatlas.com/county/Washington/King-County/Ancestry

The local population, including Polish Americans, shares a belief that it requires a great deal of courage, determination, but also imagination to reach the remote region of the Pacific Northwest (Jepsen & Norberg 2017). Indeed, even in the present day it takes a fifteen-hour drive from Seattle to get to San Francisco, the closest famous cultural metropolis in the West. The remoteness on the one hand, and creativity on the other, have been the main features of the city from its very beginning, therefore. In other words, everybody in Seattle underscores the uniqueness of the place and its people.

Seattle has experienced rapid development, interrupted (as in a case of any American city) by several downfalls, however, in general terms, it became known for its success. In 1909 Seattle hosted the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, and in 1962 it sponsored the Century 21 Exposition also known as the Seattle World's Fair. Both events manifested the modern spirit, openness, and dynamics of the city. The first one was showcasing the best of the pioneer Pacific Northwest and Alaska and the second one was meant to be a quest into the next century. Both events left spectacular architecture structures: the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition gave birth to the campus of the University of Washington – Seattle, and the Century 21 Exposition brought a new city district –Seattle Centre, with the famous Space Needle and the monorail. Both places became important for the Polish community- the Polish language has been offered at the University of Washington since 1952 and is supported by a volunteer organization, UW Polish Studies Endowment Committee. Since 2012, Polish Festivals in Seattle are organized every July at the Seattle Center Armory and Mural Amphitheatre which can be reached by the monorail.

The Boeing Company, founded in 1916, seemed to be a blueprint for the future. It expanded at the time of WWII, but suffered from a severe breakdown in 1970's. The city and the whole region managed to reinvent itself and it earned a fame of a cradle of modern creative economy. Companies like Amazon, Starbucks, Nordstrom, and Microsoft became business legends. In connection to the modern economy that requires highly skilled staff, Seattle calls itself one of America's most educated cities. Among many local academic institutions, the University of Washington (1861) gained the reputation of one of the best US state universities, and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (1975) conducts groundbreaking studies in its field, on a global scale. The city features many cultural institutions, one of the most popular being the Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP) which opened in 2000 as the Experience Music Project, Science Fiction Museum, and Hall of Fame (EMP|SFM). MoPOP is located in a sheet-metal construction designed by Frank Gehry, and is dedicated to contemporary popular culture, including Jimmy Hendrix, Pearl Jam, and Nirvana. As the story unfolds, it will become clear that Poles can take credit for their contribution to the success of one of the rock music giants.

The city accomplishments triggered wise social programs, with high quality public services. Seattle is known as *Emerald City*, thanks to its famous parks, designed by the

US' first landscape architecture firm of Olmsted Brothers, sons of the designer of New York's Central Park (Seattle Parks and Recreation). This effective connection at the beginning of the 20th century between the remote Pacific city with the Atlantic metropolis manifests the imagination and ambitions of the local city planners. An important asset of the city is its scenic location along Puget Sound between the forested Olympic Peninsula bordering the Pacific, and the Cascade Mountains to the East. Generally speaking, Seattle residents praise the vast range of opportunities that the city provides, and the high quality of every-day life. In the present decade, the regional planners locate the city at the center of an emerging bioregion called "Cascadia" – a corridor extending from Eugene, Oregon to Vancouver, British Columbia (Cascadia Now).

Despite all that, Seattle was deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in 2020/21 it struggles with challenges caused by the new situation. About 100,000 households in the state receive the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance benefits (December 2020, Confusion …).

Polish immigration

According to the US statistical data, at present there is a Polish ancestry population of 72,000 in the Seattle metropolitan area. The figure embraces the group dispersed in the city and its suburban towns of Bellevue, Redmond, and the nearby town of Tacoma (Ancestry in the Seattle Area). Altogether, there is a Polish ancestry population of 131,000 in Washington state with communities living in many smaller towns (Ancestry in Washington). One can trace a net of relations among all these places, for example the members of the smaller communities' frequent Polish events organized in Seattle.

Poles in Seattle are often identified with expats who work in the local IT companies. This image is accurate to a limited degree only. It is true that the local Polish American community developed later than the largest centers of Polish diaspora in the US, however, according to records, Polish pioneers arrived in the region already in the 1870's. "By the end of the nineteenth century, Poles were living in Seattle, Tacoma, Pe Ell, Aberdeen, Franklin, Roslyn, Enumclaw, and Cle Elum, to name just a few towns" (100 Years: 15).

Despite the well-established ties with the Polish diaspora center in Chicago (see the example of the PNA below), the process of the local Polish American community development was determined by the socio-economic conditions of the Pacific Northwest rather than by the general Polish American patterns. The pioneer immigrants were recruited by the railway companies to construction works, and many of them settled in small towns, launched along the rail routes. In the mid–1890's "(…) the Northern Pacific [Railroad Company] was actively courting Polish settlers for its lands west of the Cascades in Washington State" (Radzilowski 2002: 91). To some extent,

Poles reacted to these recruitment campaigns. One way to get to the Pacific North-west was to resettle from other regions of the US. However, while arriving at Ellis Island at the turn of the nineteenth century, several Poles declared Seattle or Pe Ell as their destination. The cases identified by the local historian point to the South-East of Poland (Podkarpacie) as the origin of the newcomers (Kowalski 2007, 2008). It is highly probable, therefore, that the first Poles in the area were recruited, and then they pulled their families and neighbors from the Old Country, according to the mechanisms of chain migration.

Other branches of the local economy that attracted immigrants, Poles included, were coal mines and lumber industries. In coal mine at Roslyn, Poles worked together with Slovaks, Serbs, Croatians, and Lithuanians.

There were several migration streams that brought Poles to Seattle and its sur-roundings:

1. the pioneer settlers (1870's –1914)
2. interwar immigrants
3. the World War II refugees
4. the *Solidarity* refugees and other immigrants from communist Poland
5. high skilled immigrants in the recent decades

"The first Polish immigrants arrived in Washington State in the 1870's, mostly settling in the mining and logging communities at the foothills of the Cascade Moun-tains, as well as in the fast-developing port towns". One of them, Ben Kozicki arrived from Portland, Oregon (100 Years: 15). Such stories are based on collective memory, transmitted by the immigrant families. Another, and very much different example is that of Wesley Zioncheck (Zajączek) who arrived in Seattle from Chicago. According to his testimonies, he arrived in Chicago in 1907 and worked there in meat processing – the job which he undertook in Seattle after his arrival (100 Years: 81). Still another way to reach Seattle at the pioneer time, especially before the railroad era, was to take a ship, so some Poles probably came via California.

Most research on the Polish diaspora in the US focus on the initial immigration phase, and the first decades of the 20th century (roughly until WWI), but in the case of Seattle, so far, nobody conducted a comprehensive academic study. The gap is filled by the members of the local Polish American community who gather and care-fully examine primary sources and make the results of their endeavors public. The very well documented jubilee book of the Polish Home Association, the largest local Polish American society, is a precious source of information (100 Years). In addition, some documentary movies, like "Passing the Torch", present the accomplishments of the local Polish American Community.

The immigrant community building

In comparison to other American communities of Polish diaspora, the ethnic profile of the local population (over-representation of Asians, visibility of Nordic groups and Croatians) provided Poles with novel patterns of ethnic activity and every-day life strategies. In contrast to other American cities, many Poles in the Northwest found employment in forests as lumberjacks, in small towns in sawmills, and in the railway constructions. In the railway settlements they met Asian workers and shared with them the fate of unskilled labor (Kowalski 2007). On the other hand, employment in the Pacific Northwest coal mines proved somehow similar to the Polish experience in the Pennsylvania anthracite economy. In comparison to Nordic groups and Croatians, Poles lacked experience in sea jobs like fishing, shipbuilding, and shipping.

To cope with the alien world, immigrants built their communities. However, in Seattle, Poles never established their neighborhood, they lived dispersed with a few congestions. Ballard, which was incorporated to the city in 1907, became so popular among Poles, that they built the first Polish Home there in 1904/1906 after establishing, in 1899, the first local lodge of the Polish National Alliance – Polish-Lithuanian Society Lodge No 489 (100 Years:17, 150). This fact testifies to the close connections between Seattle and Chicago, where PNA had its headquarters.

It should be mentioned that the PNA was founded in 1880 in Philadelphia and Chicago to counterbalance the influences of the Polish American clergy, and it successfully competed with the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America (1874). Based in Chicago, the PNA and PRCUA were the largest Polish American fraternal groups in North America. Both declared and pursued many patriotic, cultural and educational tasks, but first, they provided immigrants with insurance. Whether the PNA advocated resettlement of Poles to the Pacific Northwest, is a question which requires further studies. Still, popularity of the Alliance in the region is undisputable. The first PNA Lodge (No 156) in the Pacific Northwest was established in Tacoma in 1890. By 1914 there were at least 18 PNA lodges located, among others, in Seattle, Tacoma, Wilkeson, Roslyn, Enumclaw, Cle Elum, Aberdeen, and Pe Ell (Robert Hicker private collection of PNA records).

As demonstrated, Poles in the region did not begin building their ethnic community with launching a parish, like they did in almost all other places in North America. The first Polish Parish of SS. Peter and Paul was founded in Tacoma in 1892, that is two years after the local PNA lodge. For almost a century, it catered to Poles in Seattle (Kronika …). For a long time, until 1981, the parish was led by the Benedictine Fathers, and in 1983 the Society of Christ undertook the mission. In the present day, the parish offers services in English and Polish. There is one Sunday service in Polish (and two services in English), as well as one Polish service on Saturday, and three on weekdays.

Moreover, for a few decades Tacoma housed a parish of the schismatic Polish National Catholic Church. In the course of time the church building was seized by **47**

the Roman-Catholic SS. Peter and Paul Parish, and it was transformed into a parish hall. In 1916 Polish immigrants in Pe Ell, WA (south of Tacoma) who joined the Polish National Catholic Church, managed to build a church for their Parish of Holy Cross. The community disintegrated by the 1990's; the church building decayed, and it was demolished in 2010 (Polish church). It is interesting to note that in Pe Ell, Poles shared the local cemetery with Germans, established in 1899 which is now known as the Old St. Joseph's Cemetery (Kowalski 2007).

As to Seattle, it was not until 1989 that Polish (Roman) Catholics acquired the local Church of St. Margaret of Scotland and started their ethnic parish. The parish is run by the Society of Christ. In contrast to other Polish communities however, the center of the Polish activity and cultural continuity in Seattle has been the Polish Home Association and not the parish. It must be mentioned that in the earlier decades, Poles attended Polish language services that were occasionally offered in Seattle by priests from Tacoma. Since 1968, the services were hosted in the newly established St. Bridget Parish. The ethnic religious life in Seattle was not limited to the church services, as exemplified by the confirmation ceremony arranged in 1985 for a group of 32 Polish youth in St. Bridget's (Kronika …). It is interesting to note that the group was dressed in Polish folk costumes, however the ceremony was probably conducted in English by Rev. Eldon Schuster, the former bishop of Great Falls, Montana (1967–77) (Kronika …).

As already mentioned, the most popular Polish organization in Seattle is the Polish Home Association that celebrated its centennial in 2018 (100 Years). It owns a spacious building in the heart of the city and animates many attractive ethnic events. It evolved from the Polish Home established by the pioneer Poles in Ballard. Until the building in Ballard was constructed, local Poles held meetings in rented halls in the neighborhood. It means that they successfully found their way into the local surrounding. In other words, from the very beginning Poles managed bridging social capital with other immigrant groups, and with the American population (Putnam 2000).

The Polish Home Association was officially established in 1918, and it aimed to to create a place that could be called „home" for the growing Polish community. The PHA Articles of Incorporation were signed by seven Poles, one woman among them. Wesley Zioncheck, who in the course of time opened a furniture making company, and advanced to the middle class, belonged to the group. In 1920 the PHA managed to purchase a building of a former local club in the Seattle neighborhood (the Renton Hill, now Capitol Hill) for the price of $12,000.

> The Polish Home was becoming the hub of social meetings, artistic performances, and official and family celebrations. (…) the most admired aspects of the Home was the beautiful upstairs dance hall, kept in immaculate condition and a source of great pride for the community. Governor John Spellman, visiting the Polish Home during his electoral campaign, said that in his younger days there were only two dance halls in town: one being the Olympic Hotel, and the other one the Polish Hall. (…) By 1922 the Polish Home had a musical group … (100 Years: 23).

As indicated in the PHA jubilee book, the place inspired local Poles to launch new clubs, artistic groups, celebrate national holidays, and organize social gatherings. The musical group was followed by a choir *Dzwon*, and by youth and children's artistic groups. In the course of time "A manager was hired to maintain the building. This position was reserved for recent immigrants to provide them with money and to help them start new lives …" (100 Years: 24). This would indicate that local Poles were happy to meet and to help the newcomers.

The Polish Home organized events that were opened to a wide public – Polish, and non-Polish. It also rented out the hall. One of the most famous events became the 1959 concert of (Seattle born) Jimi Hendrix with the group *The Rocking Kings*; the event celebrated in the Polish American collective memory as his first public performance that opened the way to a global career for him.

With substantial remodeling, the Polish Home has been serving Polish Americans until now. The purchase and the remodeling meant a serious financial and logistic effort. The way to overcome the lack of funds was to sell shares. This solution was implemented at the beginning of the PHA, then in the 1960's (renovation of the building), and again in the first decade of the twenty first century (remodeling & renovation); but it did not solve the entire problem. In the 1960's "Thanks to numerous donations (…) $12,000 was raised (…), and a $15,000 loan made up the rest of the needed funds." (100 Years: 35). By the early 1970's the bank loan was paid off. The next remodeling took place in 2008–2009 and it included adding a new wing (an extension at front), and remodeling of the old part (Kott). In both the renovations and remodeling, the designs were made pro bono by the local architect and WWII refugee Roy Koczarski. The fundrasing campain, led by Ryszard Kott, was launched. Several community members provided in-kind donations (construction materials, painting, roofing, flooring, electrical work, landscaping, to name a few). The final tally for the fundraiser: $640,000 in cash and $220, 000 in-kind donations and other contributions from about 450 donors (100 Years: 110/111). Until the present day, the Polish Home is the most important place of Polish ethnic activity. It hosts celebrations, festivals, bazaars, concerts, balls, meetings, (including PNA), Polish School classes, artistic club rehearsals, houses a restaurant and bar open on weekends, and has a local archive collection. It is also available for rentals.

The Polish Home Association is an initiative of the pioneer immigrants who, as already indicated, welcomed each immigration stream, and sought to attract new members. The WWII refugees opened Polish School at the Polish Home in 1951. The school organized many ethnic events that reached out of the group boundaries. After a few decades, the school closed, and it was reestablished in 1990 by the new stream of immigration.

In the 1980's the *Solidarity* exiles and local activists held their meetings and political debates at the Polish Home. They educated about the anti-communist opposition in Poland and raised funds to support the *Solidarity* movement. The PHA jubilee book **49**

shows pictures of Polish anti-communist leaders Lech Wałęsa (1996), and Leszek Moczulski (1987) who were both guests at the Polish Home.

In the present day, the Polish Home Association is one of the main sponsors of the Polish Festival Seattle that takes place every year in July since 2012. The festival became an important event at the state cultural map. In 2019 the Festival took place on July 13th, and it attracted a few thousand participants – both Poles and non-Poles. Many Polish Americans came from Tacoma, Roslyn, and other towns. The Festival featured a live piano concert (Chopin); art exhibits; children's activities and folk-dance performances; Polish food (dumplings/pierogi, sausage/kiełbasa, and Hunter's stew/bigos), vodka tasting, beer garden; and workshops (cooking bigos, creating flower wreaths). An important part of the festival was a movie show that presented Polish accomplishments in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest (*Passing the Torch*; *Bronka Lady of the Mountain; A Piece of Poland*). It is remarkable that Polish community members initiated, directed, and produced the documentary movies in such a professional quality. The Festival program was addressed to a diversified public of any generation (children's activities versus debates about the documentary movies), and any interests (classic music versus folk music). However, a few attractions appealed to everybody, for example the stall with Polish desserts (e.g.: beignets/pączki, cheesecake/sernik, poppy-seed pastry /makowiec). The Festival is a joint effort that mobilizes the whole community and its associations. The PHA is the official producer of the Festival, the steering committee holds its meetings at the Polish Home, and the list of sponsors include, among others, the Polish Women's Club (Koło Pań), and the Seattle Polish Foundation.

The Polish Home Association supports another important event – the Seattle Polish Film Festival that takes place every autumn. Both festivals became a bridge between the recent immigrants and the descendants of the earlier inflows, as well as the multicultural population of greater Seattle. Both are well rooted in the tradition of the Seattle festivals, as exemplified by the Seattle Center *Festál* Cultural Festivals, and the Seattle International Film Festival.

In the present day, there are two Polish language schools (at a level of elementary schools), one located at the Polish Home – The Juliusz Słowacki Polish School in Seattle (that indirectly dates to 1951), and another one, located in the suburbs – The Fr. Jan Twardowski Polish School in Bellevue. The school in Bellevue, that became popular among the latest immigrants, is a recent initiative (2005). The success of both schools demonstrates that there is a need of a traditional school with classrooms, direct teacher-student contact, and student-to-student interaction. It must be mentioned that the Polish Ministry of Education provides (at least in the last decade) an online language instruction for the expats, which is a convenient language learning solution. Nevertheless, at the time of distant learning which became advocated long before the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional school proved to be more attractive. The recent Polish

immigrants create their communities (children with their parents and teachers with

their families) around the school. Of course, in the pandemic time (2020–21) Polish language schools offer instruction online, but everybody is longing for the return to direct teaching in a classroom.

The present list of Poland-related organizations, clubs, and institutions that are active in Seattle is impressive and it includes (along with already mentioned): Seattle Polish Foundation, Polish Book Club, Seattle-Gdynia Sister City Association, American Chamber of Commerce Pacific Northwest, Polish Scouts (ZHP) Troup „Kaszuby", Polish Choir „Vivat Musica". It should be added that Poles in Aberdeen have the Polish Club, that owns the local Polish Hall, opened in 1916.

In the last decades, recent Polish immigrants launched Web platforms that are open to anybody interested in Polish and Polish American issues. *Seattle Polish News*, Polki in greater Seattle (*Polki w Seattle i okolicy*) provide the space to get in touch, to get advice in practical matters ("any recommendations about grade schools in Redmond?"), to publish urgent announcements ("I am moving out and have to sell my car"), and information about ethnic events. In the pandemic time they invite everybody to join online events that are organized not only locally, but also in distant places. For example, in January 2021 the Seattle Polish News advertised a meeting in Polish with the writer Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, organized on ZOOM by the Austin Polish Society (Texas). It seems therefore, that the pandemic enhances relations between various Polish American communities across North America.

Each Polish inflow contributed to the enrichment and structure of the ethnic community, including the recent immigrants. In the present, expats make up an important part of the diversified local Polish American group. It is fascinating to trace the process in which they effectively shape their actions in the transnational space. For example, in 2015, in Seattle, they launched an electoral commission for the Polish parliamentary and presidential elections, so local Polish citizens did not have to travel to Los Angeles, to the closest Polish Consulate, if they wanted to vote. In 2020 they provided an update on the voting procedure for Poles abroad at the presidential elections. Moreover, one of the immigrant leaders serves as Honorary Polish Consul in Seattle, and she represents and promotes economic and cultural relations, and looks after the affairs of the Polish community in Washington State.

There is the sense of a cultural mission among all generations of Poles in Seattle. The generations that followed the pioneers are aware of their ancestry, and many of them are involved in ethnic clubs, as exemplified by the Polish Club in Aberdeen. The WWII refugees are respected and popular leaders in the community, and sometimes their children carry on their activity. The Solidarity refugees initiated the Seattle Polish Film Festival, and Polish IT specialists who have been arriving since the 1980's financially support many ethnic events.

Conclusion

In the present day, migration studies focus on migrants' flows within the global economy and less attention is paid to the question of diaspora. Somehow it is assumed that immigrant communities are obsolete. The Seattle case demonstrates however, that some traditional structures flourish – the most important examples would be The Polish Home Association, and the Polish language schools. Moreover, new forms of ethnic activity are developed (web platforms), and they strengthen the social capital bonding within the Polish community.

Clearly the old patterns of the Polish diaspora studies are not helpful in the case of Seattle. There is no Polish neighborhood in the metropolitan area, and the ethnic parishes are important but not essential to the community's life. Moreover, the community is well organized, although it has never reached the institutional completeness, and it never aspired to it. On the other hand, Polish festivals attract thousands of participants, and many Poles gathered to attend a concert (2010) by Garrick Ohlsson whose global career started when he won the Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw in 1970.

No doubt, the latest influx of Poles to Seattle revitalized the immigrant community, but at the same time the newcomers don't identify themselves completely with the (old fashioned) Polish diaspora. They have created a stable and effectively operating net of institutionalized ethnic relations, but they often reject a notion of belonging. Moreover, most of them openly reject the notion of Polonia. To grasp the phenomenon and our conceptual inability to name it, at the initial stage of the project, one may call the Polish American group in Seattle an "un-imagined community" (Anderson 1991).

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