

## Czech-Polish Family Relations. The Basic Assumptions of the Research Project

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*The article presents the assumptions of the research project, which aims to depict the common life of the multicultural families of Czech and Polish couples. This significant proximity for both nations does not abound in numerous relationships. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse the relationships of the couples/families and the social perception of them in their environments.*

Key words: *Research project; Czechs; Poles; multicultural family; marriage; education of children*

### Introduction

Relations of the families on the borders of the cultures are not a new phenomenon. Since ages, they have been present in the environments, in which the spheres of influence of nations, religions and languages permeate one another. Contemporary times bring us the marriages and new forms of a family created by the ethnically, racially, culturally and nationally diverse people. Relationships between people of divergent cultures, religions, languages or nations are addressed to as to intercultural, multicultural, mixed, inter-ethnic or heterogeneous<sup>1</sup>. They do not constitute a major group as they are driven by powerful ethnocentric tendencies, predominant influence of the cultures of their origin and strong fears of distinctness in its every aspect: cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic. Nevertheless, they are an important group as members of those families act as a cultural bridge set out between the families, nations and religious denominations.

I have been fascinated for some time now with the phenomenon of the relationships of many differences, between brave people breaching the canon of creating a couple of alike features, choosing their partners from

<sup>1</sup> Sowa-Behtane, E. (2016). *Rodziny wielokulturowe*, Kraków: Akademia Ignatianum, Wydawnictwo WAM, p. 65.

the “foreigners”. With regard to this matter, I would like to conduct a research project relating to the binational families of Czech-Polish and Polish-Czech nationality. My interest concerns the process of cultural coalescence of the representatives of two different nationalities. Their new culture emerging from the fusion of both is a distinctive *text* and the formed couples and families, this special kind of intercultural socialization constitutes a *process of growing into the text of a mixed culture*.

The goal I pursue relates to the attempt to discover the specificity of the Czech-Polish and Polish-Czech families in the dimensions of the marital, parental relations and the perception of them by the society: in the families, in their neighborhood, at work, at school. What is interesting, despite the close proximity of Poland and the Czech Republic the number of marriages entered into by the representatives of those two nations is not substantial. Between 1996–2011 there have been only as many as 112 marriages completed, which constitutes merely 0.6 % of all marriages.

What is intriguing, the abovementioned statistics include only the relations of Polish men with Czech women, the reverse couples are not comprised in the statistics<sup>2</sup>.

### Crucial terms

The subject of the article circles around such concepts as family, binationality, multicultural family. A family comes from the verb “to give birth”, which means to accept/acquiesce and bring forth the offspring to the world. The term itself constitutes one of the cultural universals. It is most predominantly defined *as the universal social institution – rooted in the tradition of every culture, ritualized set of human actions aimed at fulfilling the most essential needs of its members*<sup>3</sup>. A family is a living organism, a system of interpersonal relations, basic nurturing environment, a small social group comprising children, parents and their relatives. The relations between the particular members of the family: spouses, parents and children are of great importance<sup>4, 5</sup>. It is referred to

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<sup>2</sup> Szukalski, P. (2013). *Małżeństwo. Początek i koniec*, Łódź: Wydział Ekonomiczno-Socjologiczny UŁ, pp. 74–75.

<sup>3</sup> Szlendak, T. (2010). *Socjologia rodziny. Ewolucja, historia, zróżnicowanie*, Warszawa: PWN, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Okoń, W. (1998). *Nowy Słownik Pedagogiczny*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”, p. 336.

<sup>5</sup> Ryś, M. (2004). *Systemy rodzinne. Metody badań struktury rodziny pochodzenia i rodziny własne*, Warszawa: CMPPP.

by Leon Dyczewski as follows: *a community of people and social institution based on love and free choice of man and woman united by marriage, who by caring and fostering the new generation as it would care and foster the next generation themselves*<sup>6</sup>. Katarzyna Termińska states that *a family is a basic sphere of human development (...) it is understood (...) as the affinity between the people related by blood, marriage or adoption. (...) From the evolutionary point of view, a family is the most vital adapting mechanism of human being that facilitates the human kind's survival*<sup>7</sup>.

Family is still of utmost importance in many cultures. The forms it takes are changing, but it being perceived as a value does not alter. In addition, it is appreciated as a constant community of life, based on a monogamous marital relationship. It can be considered as a social group, an association or a system. It is a cradle of culture and a cultural universal as well.

Family is an extraordinary form imprinting in everyone's life. It is a place where everything has its beginning, it is a starting point for one's cognition (learning) of the external world and every man's experiences. Family is a world map and the first model of structures and social relations. It constitutes an actual and symbolic community, which is simultaneously a benchmark to all the experiences, people, time and space. A family is a metaphor of safety, care, tenderness, privacy and intimacy. It is one of the oldest and most common forms of social life. Functioning as a part of a family is acknowledged as the source of the most important experiences having reflection in all the cultures of the world<sup>8</sup>. Family is of great significance in two dimensions: as a basic socialization institution transmitting the models of culture and as the one that provides the individuals with the repertoire of tradition, determines the ways of conduct and evaluation<sup>9</sup>.

Binationality is a form of multiculturalism. It is comprehended as a duality and it is linked to the multiculturalism. It is on the other hand connected with the interculturalism and transculturalism. Multiculturalism

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<sup>6</sup> Dyczewski, L. (1994). *Rodzina, społeczeństwo, państwo*, Lublin: TN KUL, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Termińska K., (2008). *Rodzina i Ty. Fenomenologia wiązania*, Warszawa: Eneteia, pp. 11–12.

<sup>8</sup> de Barbaro, B. (2009). *Zdrowy system rodzinny – perspektywa terapeuty rodzinnego*, In Gulli, B. – Duda, M. (Ed.): *Silna rodzina*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Św. Stanisława BM, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Bertaux, D. – Thomson, P. (1993) Introduction, In Bertaux, D. –Thomson, P. *Between Generation. Family models, Myths and Memories*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 4, as cited in Sowa-Behtane, E., *Rodziny wielokulturowe*, p.19.

is a phenomenon of interaction between different cultures, its relations. Interculturalism is a mutual "learning from cultures". Transculturalism means diffusion of the elements from various cultures comprising a new cultural quality<sup>10</sup>.

Multicultural families contribute to the formation of the new cultural identity. They are becoming more and more common statistically. Their specialty comes from the fact that they have the possibility of crossing borders, connecting people, bringing people of diverse ethnicities, nationalities and religions together. One may risk advancing a thesis that bears a high level of probability that the multicultural relations will be intensifying in the upcoming years. Social integration, breaching the borders is the feature of the present days, it becomes a valid element linked to the globalization, which alters the previous patterns of social behavior. Free movement of people being chaotic, unrestricted and unstable takes place. It all triggers the formation of new cultural and civilization qualities<sup>11</sup>. Within the societies, in which the possibility of different cultures to meet exists, the phenomenon of cultural diffusion occurs effected by the communication and intercultural education. Its tempo is quickened when the relations between the two members of diverse cultures, nations, ethnicity or religion are tightened. Mixed marriages play a special role in intensifying those connections. Entering into such relationships facilitates the process of cultural diffusion<sup>12</sup>. Simultaneously, such intercultural relationships spark out various emotions in the society. It arises from the fact that the statistical majority chooses their partners from the people ethnically, culturally, linguistically and religiously alike. Intercultural marriage is especially significant for the relatives of the couple deciding to unite. It is them for whom this occurrence is principally important.

In multicultural families, various religious denominations have to be considered as such family becomes not only multicultural, but also multireligious. Religious distinctness may foster openness, willingness to know the different religion, learn tolerance, but it may as well cause the dissimilarities in attitudes towards the determination of what is good or bad, entice to accept the divergent philosophy of life, social life and difficulties with reaching a compromise in the religious choices of the children. It may arise the conflict and lead to persuasion to convert.

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<sup>10</sup> Śliz, A. – Szczepański, M. S. (2011) *Wielokulturowość i jej socjologiczny sens. Festiwal Caravan czy wielokulturowe Street Party?*, Studia Socjologiczne, Issue 4, p.13.

<sup>11</sup> Zwoliński, A. (2005), *Wprowadzenie do rozważań o narodzie*, Kraków: WAM, p. 235.

<sup>12</sup> Sowa-Behtane, E. *Rodziny wielokulturowe*, p. 15.

Religiousness confronts the future spouses in the early phase of their relationship<sup>13</sup>.

Religiously mixed marriages may encounter the particular difficulties relating to the following aspects<sup>14</sup>:

- attitude towards bigamy and divorce,
- raising children in the religion of their parents,
- specific religious rituals and requirements of the spouses,
- effect of the religious ideologies on the spouse.

Another aspect of the great disparity is a multilingualism understood as using two or more (bilingualism) on a daily basis by a members of the family<sup>15</sup>.

### The way of the research

An ideological aim of the projected research contains a fairly complete description of all its elements. The research will be qualitative, which by assumption means that it requires reflection and refinement of its every aspect. The biographical method and the qualitative, open interview will be used.

Biographical method consists in *the description and analysis of the course of human life perceived in the context of the specified extract from the social reality*<sup>16</sup>. It enables to capture the human life with respect to the activities one spends time on, family life, social and religious life. It provides the possibility of discovering the holistic and fragmentary specificity of the crucial spheres of activities. What is of interest to me is the part of life connected to the common, binational existence of Polish-Czech married couples. As a researcher, I strive to obtain biographical data through interview. The core aspect of the biographical research and its specificity as well is a subjective point of view of the story tellers<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, pp. 20–21.

<sup>14</sup> Stopikowska, M. (2013). „Przeżyłam piekło” – doświadczenia kobiet w świetle pamiętników muzułmanek i żon muzułmanów – między stereotypem a rzeczywistością, In Łojko, M. – Grochalska, M. (Ed): *Etykieta czy drogowskaz. Rola stereotypów w przestrzeniach edukacyjnej różnorodności*, Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo UWM, pp. 218–219.

<sup>15</sup> Sowa-Behtane, E. *Rodziny wielokulturowe*, s. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Łobocki M., (2008). *Metody i techniki badań pedagogicznych*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, s. 294.

<sup>17</sup> Lalak, D. (2010). *Życie jako biografia. Podejście biograficzne w perspektywie pedagogicznej*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie ŻAK, p. 238.

The qualitative interview chosen is defined by the author as directed. I intend to invite the respondents to tell their stories by asking them open questions that give an opportunity to spin their stories with a restricted right to formulate the detailed (additional) questions enabling to excerpt the important matters. Such interview does not comply with the criteria of the narrative interview, hindering the interpretation as a block of narration, but asking some additional questions allows to get the tangible knowledge of the researched people and conducting an analysis of these statements, taking advantage of the facts, experiences that interlocutors bring to the conversation<sup>18</sup>. I will use the qualitative interview. It gives an opportunity to open oneself to the representatives of the different cultures. At first, the researcher may not fully realize the multifariousness of the cultural factors, verbal and nonverbal (gestures), behaviours that influence relations, cultural norms, linguistic problems, difficulties related to the relation to persons of different sex, representatives of different social classes, religions. The assumption that there is a standardization of cultures or conviction that there is one globally shared culture, which in consequence does not consider the divergences inside the cultures may pose a problem.

I am inclined to think about the explorations as a metaphor of the traveler, wandering and meeting people in a foreign country – in my case, at the cultural borders, which permeate each other. Without any guidebook or a map, the traveler roams through the unknown area and encourages the people he meets to tell their stories about their lives and their worlds. The stages of constructing the knowledge in this approach link an interview with the interpretation. The emphasis is put on the narration – the story told<sup>19</sup>.

For the use of this research I formulated few research problems. The main thesis oscillates around the problem how the Czech-Polish and Polish-Czech families are created and how they function. Three important question follow from it and they relate to particular spheres of the researched problem, for which there have been formulated the detailed questions. All these are presented in the table below.

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<sup>18</sup> Dryll, E. (2000). *Analiza treści i analiza narracji w badaniach psychologii wychowawczej*, In: Straś-Romanowska, M. (Ed.): *Metody Jakościowe w psychologii współczesnej* Wrocław: Wyd. UWr. p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> Kvale, S. (2012). *Prowadzenie wywiadów. Niezbędnik badacza*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 53–54.

	<b>I. How does the relationship of the married couple function?</b>	<b>II. How does raising of a child in a bicultural family look like?</b>	<b>III. How do the people in the community perceive the respondents?</b>
1.	How did the couple meet?	To what extent is a child embedded in the cultures of its parents?	How are the respondents perceived by their families?
2.	What was the context of the marriage/relationship?	To what extent is a child embedded in the languages of its parents?	What are the information regarding themselves received by their neighbourhood?
3.	What is the role of their native languages?	What is the child's identity?	To what extent does the biculturalism influence the respondents' work place?
4.	How do the respondents think the influence their cultures have on their lives?	What are the conditionings of child's education?	
5.	What is the importance of the eating habits?	How does the child function in the group of other children?	
6.	What is the role of religion in the lives of the respondents?		
7.	What are the values taken from their cultures that are fostered in their lives?		
8.	What are the advantages of the common life for the respondents?		
9.	What difficulties do they meet in their common life?		

Source: own work

The aspects of the planned research have been reflected upon as well. They are allocated in the three spheres according to the research problems relating subsequently to the marriage, raising the children and social perception of the binational marriage/family.

With regard to the marital relationship of the respondents the following criteria will be taken into consideration:

- Language (of the spouses, family members, of the country of residence, verbal and nonverbal language),
- Religion (tolerance, the eagerness to know a different religion, the negation of authenticity and validity, considering the fact that it regulates many important matters),
- The influence of the national culture (the selection of place to live, tradition, “culture shock”, ethnocentricity – considering one’s culture as superior to the other cultures, expectation that the partner will adapt to the culture of the other partner),
- Values (symbols, rituals, habits, norms, attitudes, behaviour),
- Eating habits/ model of eating/nutrition (rituals, celebration of meals, selection of the ingredients, the way of seasoning meals, time of eating meals, people meeting at the table),

In the aspect of raising children, the following information are of interest to me:

- Language(s) of the child (selection of a language, linguistic competences of the child, bilingualism),
- Culture (openness to multiculturalism – biculturalism, a greater number of stress factors stemming from the attempt to understand two cultures, richness in knowledge, influence of the cultures, integration of two cultures, lack of adaptation in neither of cultures),
- Identity of a child (identification with homeland, synthesis, creation of a new, broader group identity),
- Child’s education (participation in school lessons, extracurricular activities and private lessons, informal education, child and parents’ attitude towards education),
- Influence of the group of peers on a child (types of peer groups, the easiness to coexist with one another, hardness to function within a group),

Third, interesting aspect of the functioning of the multicultural family is a social perception of the binational marriage/family reflected in a social opinion (linked with living in families of two cultures, place of residence – in the neighbourhood, workplace).

The binational families of Czech Republic and Poland living at the border of two countries, will constitute a research sample. An interesting



place to carry out this research is one of the Euroregions (Euroregion Glacensis), namely the Polish town of Międzyzylesie being a part of this region. This transit urban-rural municipality, passed by the travelers heading south. It is not a common knowledge that the Polish-Czech cooperation is extremely vivid in these parts, enhanced by the frequent and genuine contacts. Forms of collective activities relate to the work of the councils, implemented projects, cooperation of the firefighters (in case of the fire, they help each other on both sides of the borders), foresters and hunters. There are English lessons organized for Polish and Czech children, regional exhibitions, cooperation of dioceses between Hradec Kralove and Świdnica as well as the churches directly (the Czech altar is present in the procession of Corpus Christi in the parish of Międzyzylesie). This region will be a place to look for the respondents for my research. Their selection will be based on the direct communication with important people in this region, with whom I established a contact: the president of Euroregion Glacensis, the representative of the Polish minority in the Czech Republic, rector of the parish in Międzyzylesie. Having persuaded a few respondents to take part in my project, I will use the method of a "snowball", which entails the purposeful selection based on the contacts of my respondents.

## Conclusions

The project entails the research of the ways, in which the Polish-Czech and Czech-Polish families are formed and function on the borders of two countries. It constitutes an attempt to discover the specificity of binational family relations, being researched in the domain of marital (partnership), parental relation and the social reception of the families in their place of residence. The research will be carried out in the areas across the borders of the Czech Republic and Poland. It is oriented as a qualitative research, based on the biographical method using qualitative interview, which is described as directed.