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**BORDERLAND CULTURE IN THE SCHOLARLY
ACTIVITIES OF THE EMPLOYEES OF THE FACULTY
OF PEDAGOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BIAŁYSTOK**

Abstract:

In the article, the authors presented different approaches to the concept of borderland. Based on the general definition of the borderland, they describe the scientific activity of the staff of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Białystok, which deals with this topic. They analyse research tasks and research projects as well as the results of international and regional cooperation.

Key words: borderland, culture, education, pedagogy, research.

KULTURA POGRANICZA W DZIAŁALNOŚCI NAUKOWEJ PRACOWNIKÓW
WYDZIAŁU PEDAGOGIKI I PSYCHOLOGII UNIwersYTETU W BIAŁYMSTOKU

Streszczenie:

W artykule, przyjmując szerokie rozumienie kategorii pogranicza, przez pryzmat teoretycznych ujęć podjętej problematyki, zaprezentowano działalność pracowników Wydziału Pedagogiki i Psychologii Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku w zakresie badań nad pograniczem kulturowym. Wiele uwagi poświęcono aktywności naukowej, realizowanym zadaniom i projektom badawczym oraz współpracy międzynarodowej i regionalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: pogranicze, kultura, edukacja, pedagogika, badania naukowe.

Due to the specificity resulting, among other factors, from the phenomenon of cultural diversity, the issue of the cultural borderland is extremely interesting. This is evidenced by scholarly research conducted by representatives of various disciplines – educators¹, sociologists, psychologists, or geographers². The issues that prove commonplace in such studies are identity and identification (national, regional, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, denominational) as well as co-creation of various values, prejudices and stereotypes, and the functioning of schools, students and teachers.

In this paper, we present the effects of many years of activities on the part of the research and teaching staff of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Białystok concerning the promotion of borderland culture from the perspective of theoretical ap-

¹ For many years such research has been conducted in various centres, including: the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of Białystok, and the Institute of Education Sciences of the Faculty of Ethnology and Educational Sciences of the University of Silesia in Cieszyn.

² See A. Awramiuk, *Pogranicze kultur. Percepcja „własnego regionu” przez uczniów a edukacja regionalna*, Warszawa 2009.

proaches to the issues of culture and the borderland³. The main focus is on such forms of scholarly activity as research tasks and projects, international and regional cooperation.

Cultural borderland as a research category

Unambiguous definition of the term “cultural borderland” is not an easy task. This is due to the existence of many definitions of the term “culture”, interpretation of which depends on historical processes and philosophical, research, methodological or even ideological and political positions⁴. As aptly pointed out by Antonina Kłoskowska, this difficulty is reinforced by the fact that when analysing the concept of culture, one should adopt and consider a specific sphere of human experiences and creative activities⁵.

Culture, generally understood in terms of man-made values, is created through man’s efforts, and is a product of deliberate activity and reflection⁶. However, it cannot be an individual creation of man because it is the effect of the coexistence of people, created through their interaction and cooperation, and lasting for generations in being developed and enriched in the process of tradition⁷. Culture has long been a serious challenge for education, but at the same time it is becoming a starting point and a basis for educational activities⁸.

³ On the basis of reports on the activities of the departments and units in the years 1997–2016, analyses of materials placed on the website of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Białystok and materials obtained from faculty employees.

⁴ P. Petrykowski, *Edukacja regionalna. Problemy podstawowe i otwarte*, Toruń 2003, p.107.

⁵ A. Kłoskowska, *Problematyczność rozwoju kultury*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 1991, no. 1, p. 27.

⁶ J. Szczepański, *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii*, Warszawa 1970, p. 73.

⁷ *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku*, ed. A. Kłoskowska, Wrocław 1991, p. 17.

⁸ J. Nikitorowicz, *Edukacja regionalna i międzykulturowa*, Warszawa 2009, p. 11.

However, as Piotr Petrykowski notes, there are many undefined areas in its definitions. Therefore, two ways of describing culture can be distinguished in research here. The first one results from the perception of culture as a certain property of human collectives; features that distinguish human collective from the collectivism of other entities that are not socially shaped or tied into the system of social relations. In this approach, only patterns of behaviour and thinking can be included in the culture. Hence, in this trend of cultural research, it is also possible to include in the culture both models of thinking and behaviour as well as material objects associated with these patterns. Here "(...) culture is the property of a certain human collective, which determines the thinking and behaviour of its members; regardless of whether we only examine patterns of behaviour that make up culture, or their material correlates; regardless of whether we only study features specific to a given culture, or all the features that characterize it. So here we have a clear relationship between culture and its human background. The second method of researching the culture refers to the content of culture, understood in this case as a certain system of patterns with a specific shape and content. Such research concerns the content of signs and messages of particular cultural phenomena. Of course, between the two approaches there are important relationships resulting from the interaction of cultural content and the social characteristics of a given culture"⁹.

On the other hand, the borderland is most often associated with the territory near the border which divides certain spaces. Therefore, in lexicographical approaches, the area near the state border is usually indicated. However, you can find examples in the literature of broader interpretations of the concept of borderland. Andrzej Sadowski notes that the nature of the borderland is determined by the nature of social and cultural contacts, which must concern at least two neighboring nations or ethnic groups. The consequences of these contacts in the form of social and cultural reality (economic, political, etc.) shaped there are also

⁹ P. Petrykowski, *Spółeczno-kulturowe aspekty podstaw wychowania*, Toruń 2005, p. 69–70.

important¹⁰. In addition, according to the author the borderland can be considered in several aspects: spatial, where the borderland is an area (territory) located far from the Centre or near the border; socio-cultural, where the borderland marks the place of social and cultural contact between at least two national or ethnic groups; and personal-cultural, in which the borderland is the area of formation of the new culture of an individual¹¹.

On the other hand, Jerzy Nikitorowicz defines the borderland as the area "(...) between the Centres, between what is on the borders and can belong to both places, overlapping"¹². By treating the borderland as a socio-cultural phenomenon, the author considers it in terms of the subjectivity of individuals and groups that both create and process their culture. Hence, he distinguishes four types of borderland:

- **Borderlands in the territorial sense** – is an area of coexistence, a specific type of cohabitation of at least two cultural groups (national, ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.); distinguishable within it are the contact borderland (this is the area between neighboring groups with differences that limit socio-cultural exchange, which does not mean that they make the communication between them impossible) and the transitional borderland (the area shaped as a result of historical contact of cultures, constituting a kind of a bridge between values of these cultures that can either penetrate or destroy one another).
- **Content borderlands in culture** – these are the values of tradition, thanks to which they can be perceived and learned, which enables coexistence not only on the territorial borderland. Such features of the cultural borderland allow people to shape their identities through participation in several cultures. On the other hand, the essence of such a borderland is a shared cultural decline and a bond between it and inhabitants of the borderland.

¹⁰ A. Sadowski, *Pogranicze polsko-białoruskie. Tożsamość mieszkańców*, Białystok 1995, p. 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–47.

¹² J. Nikitorowicz, *Pogranicze. Tożsamość. Edukacja międzykulturowa*, Białystok 2001, p. 11.

- **Interactive borderline** – this is the widest perspective of perceiving the borderland. It can be said that such a borderland is a process, along with its effect in interpersonal interaction. The important factors here are the will to learn and to enter dialogue, while the social bond is created thanks to what connects and divides people, where it is important to feel the sense of community and differences. Interaction in such conditions is the result of choices; it results from free will and there is no place of subordination to the dominant culture.
- **Personal borderlands – internal** – they are determined from the perspective of a human being in a specific place and time, during creation of his personal identity. The effect of this process may be the “divalence” of emotional states towards “their” and “foreign”, but also the so-called “distorted identity”¹³.

Antonina Kłoskowska considers a borderland in categories beyond social space, as a historically changing social situation¹⁴. In her opinion, a borderland is a factor that activates shaping the sense of identity in a situation of mixed cultures, without the risk of losing one's roots and ties with one's culture¹⁵. Jerzy Nikitorowicz seeks the source of their loss in the lack of faith in the power of own culture. The author suggests that more attention here should be given to the ability to conduct a broadly understood dialogue, which is a priority condition in overcoming all barriers, fears and prejudices, constituting the basis of cultural meetings. Therefore, none of the cultures can deny others and use this fact to defend their own values, because they all have one source, they are an expression of humanity – humanism¹⁶. This borderland provides a unique opportunity to meet the Other; not only to understand their views, but also to shape attitudes of respect and acceptance towards diversity as “it allows you to try, nurture, develop new

¹³ J. Nikitorowicz, *Edukacja regionalna...*, op.cit., pp. 129–132.

¹⁴ A. Kłoskowska, *Otwarte i zamknięte postawy narodowe w sytuacji pogranicza*, „Kultura i Społeczeństwo”, 1995, no. 3, p. 19.

¹⁵ A. Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*, Warszawa 1996, p.125.

¹⁶ J. Nikitorowicz, *Kreowanie tożsamości dziecka. Wyzwania edukacji międzykulturowej*, Gdańsk 2005, p. 59.

strategies, to become, to conduct transformations in thinking patterns, to modify and reorientate (...)”¹⁷.

The variety of values present on the borderland builds a multicultural landscape of such places to create “borderland situations” that can be considered in both cultural and psychological terms. The culture of such a borderland, interpreted as a “culture of a place” or “group culture”, contains both cultural heterogeneity and homogeneity; each referring both to the perception of such a community outside and its internal cultural features that shape individuals “rooted” in such environments. Mixing cultural values can have different consequences but it is also the basis for shaping the “borderland”¹⁸.

In the afore-mentioned approaches, the borderlands are the areas of differences and otherness; they enable discovery and comparison, but above all they constitute an important category characterising the coexistence paradigm¹⁹. Regardless of whether we refer the borderline category to a specific territory, or whether we combine it with the symbolic space – and nowadays even virtual²⁰ – the sense of this phenomenon is the same. Lech Witkowski wrote many years ago that “(...) if a postulate representing understanding of the function (education) of preparation for creative participation in culture is to have a universal scope, then adjusting to the culture of own “environment” – marked with the radius of interaction based on ideological, ethnic or entirely local community – cannot be done without caring for the word “out of this world” (unofficial translation). The content of other people’s experiences and attitudes are data which (being a warp, foundation of the world that is alien to us) reduce the distance and thus better illuminate

¹⁷ J. Nikitorowicz, *Pogranicze...*, op. cit., p.17.

¹⁸ Szerzej J. Muszyńska, *Miejsce i wspólnota. Poczucie wspólnotowości mieszkańców północno-wschodniego pogranicza Polski*, Warszawa 2014, pp. 52–54.

¹⁹ J. Nikitorowicz, *Edukacja regionalna...*, op. cit., p. 134.

²⁰ M. Sobecki, *Komunikacja międzykulturowa w perspektywie pedagogicznej. Studium z pogranicza polsko- litewsko-białorusko-ukraińskiego*, Warszawa 2016, p. 14.

our own world and establish relations between the borderland and the world of others, relations that enrich life in each of these worlds”²¹.

Promotion of the borderland values in the activities of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Białystok

The beginnings of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology date back to the time when the scholarly and didactic work of pedagogues and psychologists was conducted within the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Warsaw Branch in Białystok. In 1977, the faculty became independent, but still remained in the structures of the University of Warsaw. In the current academic year, 20 years have passed since the University in Białystok foundation. Currently, the faculty structure consists of 4 departments, 15 sections and 3 labs, whose employees conduct fairly diverse didactic and scholarly activities²². One such area of interest is popularising broadly understood culture of the borderland, both in terms of promoting it and opening to other cultures and values.

The employees of the Department of Intercultural Education (formerly the Department of Intercultural Education) take on the biggest number of initiatives concerning the issue of the cultural borderland, which is obviously due to the specificity of this unit and individual research interests. From its inception – that is, from 1995 – the employees have been carrying out many tasks and research projects concerning the issues of multi- and inter-culturality, as well as establishing contacts between representatives of different cultures, cultural conditions of student and school functioning, cultural heritage, the pedagogical contexts of functioning of national minorities and the identity considered in the context of the broadly understood borderland category.

The employees focus on conducting analyses of creative potential of a culturally diverse world, assuming that culture is the basis for

²¹ L. Witkowski, *Edukacja wobec sporów o (po)nowoczesność*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 74–75.

²² More information: <http://pedagogika.uwb.edu.pl/wydzial.php?p=82> (date of access: 10/06/2017).

a unifying understanding and that with the use of educational interactions, it is the culture that can and should contribute to the solution or at least mitigation of many problems of the modern world manifesting locally in everyday life. Researchers in recent years have completed many research projects (among others the grant project named: “Kultura polska na pograniczach. Międzygeneracyjna transmisja dziedzictwa kulturowego mniejszości narodowych” – Polish culture on the borderlands. Intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage of national minorities”). The Department of Intercultural Education also organises and participates in the conduct of well-known cyclic conferences on the afore-mentioned issues in Poland, while its employees are the authors and editors of many works in this field. Noticeable too is cooperation with various research Centres, associations and other entities operating both in the country and abroad.

A slightly different direction of scholarly activity is taken at the Department of History of Education. Its employees, in accordance with the specificity of the operations of this unit, undertake many initiatives in the historical and cultural aspect. In recent years, the issues examined in the grants and research activities include: cultural and educational activities of the Karaites in the Second Polish Republic; education of the Tatars in 1918–1939; the importance of tradition in Tatar families taking the example of three generations of Tatars living in the Vilnius and Nowogrodek regions, the social function of the Salesian Schools in the Vilnius School District during the Second Polish Republic; social assistance in Poland and its functioning in the Vilnius region in 1918–1939; “Tatar Alfurkan” as the source edition of the history of the Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; and education of Jewish minority in the Białystok region in the years 1918–1939. In addition, the Faculty employees carry out many initiatives in cooperation with the Historical Museum in Białystok, Muzeum Podlaskie in Białystok, the Lithuanian Karaim Cultural Society and other institutions.

The Department of Theory of Education and Pedagogical Anthropology in its scholarly activities undertakes the issues of shaping the cultural identity, the importance of the “small homeland” in patriotic education, the educational character of regional tales on the example of Podlasie, folk art in Podlasie, intercultural tales as a new kind

of therapeutic tale, dimensions of religiosity of the teachers in Podlasie, the history of Christianity in the Belarusian territories and the issues of anthropology of the village and the city. In addition, the department also carries out public tasks, for example: “Cultural education of children and youth”, “Discover the culture of the region or Telling tales with “Żubrozwierz” in the form of artistic and educational workshops for children” and “Fun with the legend of the region”.

Interesting initiatives have also been taken by the employees of the Department of Andragogy and Educational Gerontology and the Department of Sociology of Education and Social Gerontology. In fact, research projects and tasks have been carried out for many years in the urban and rural areas of Podlasie and concern adults and old people in situations of violence, special needs and protection orders. The sections' employees also study the fate of old parents of Polish migrants from the perspective of intergenerational and transnational experiences; they even analyse the adaptation strategies of families of young Polish migrants in London. In addition, together with the students they participated in a student exchange with the University of A. Pushkin in Brest, under the title “Wymiary wczesnej dorosłości w Polsce i na Białorusi – w perspektywie studentów – “Dimensions of early adulthood in Poland and Belarus – from the student perspective” and “Związki uczuciowe wczesnej dorosłości w Polsce i na Białorusi – w perspektywie studentów” – “Emotional relationships in early adulthood in Poland and in Belarus – from the student perspective”.

The culture of the borderland is also an intensely examined issue by the employees of the General Education Institute. Among the completed research projects are those related to the selection and implementation of the educational content in a culturally diverse environment, the role and place of the educational content in passing cultural heritage, activities of students in the developing knowledge society on the border (in the field of information competences) and educational aspirations of students inhabiting the eastern multicultural borderland. Employees within the unit participated in inter-university exchanges with the State University of N.A. Nekrasov in Kostrom (Russia) and the University of A.S. Pushkin in Brest (Belarus).

Many issues concerning the broadly understood borderland can also be found in the scholarly activities of the Department of Cultural Studies, whose employees have been undertaking interesting initiatives for many years. These include carrying out projects “Tandemem przez pogranicze” (“On a tandem across borderland”), “Obrazy dzieciństwa w kinie szwedzkim na przykładzie filmów Ingmara Bergmana, Lukasa Moodyssona i Rubena Ostlunda” (“Pictures of childhood in the Swedish cinema based on the films of Ingmar Bergman, Lukas Moodysson and Ruben Ostlund”). They also include documentary films: “Africa – South Sudan, Turkey – Istanbul, USA – New York” and “Wielki Łapiak – Call me BIG”, realization of documentary films: “Zapolarny: Searching for hell – Russia”; “Searching for hell: Vardo – Norway Vardo”, preparation of two reportages about a stay in the north of Europe: “Vardo” and “Zapolarny”, production of short films: “Człowiek ptak. Portugalia” (“Man bird. Portugal”), “Człowiek ryba – Podlasie – okolice Biebrzy” (“Fish Man – Podlasie – around Biebrza”) and “Pieśni rzeki” (“Songs of the River”). The employees of the unit cooperate with many centres and organisations (among others University of Cordoba, Faculty of Education, Spain; Università degli Studi della Tuscia in Viterbo, DISUCOM Department of Human, Communication And Tourism Sciences, Italy; European Art Centre, Polish School in Grodno, Podlasie Branch of the “Wspólnota Polska” – “Polish Community” – Association in Białystok).

The Department of General Pedagogy and Methodology of Pedagogical Research has also carried out in recent years two research tasks in line with the issues of the borderland. They covered the following themes: “Miejsca w przestrzeni miasta Białystok i ich funkcje w świetle biograficznej narracji osób dorosłych w ujęciu międzypokoleniowym” (“Places in the city space of Białystok and their functions in the light of the biographical narrative of adults in the intergenerational approach”) and “Funkcjonowanie studentów w rozwijającym się społeczeństwie wiedzy na pograniczu – rozpoznanie własnej perspektywy czasowej” (“The functioning of students in the developing knowledge society on the borderland – recognising own time perspective”). In the implementation of the above research, employees cooperated, among others, with the University of A.S. Pushkin in Brest (Belarus).

Projects such as: “Działania podejmowane przez wybrane białostockie świetlice szkolne w ramach realizacji założeń edukacji regionalnej” (“Actions taken by selected Białystok schoolrooms as part of the implementation of regional education programme”), “Przygotowanie i doświadczenia nauczycieli w zakresie pracy z dziećmi imigrantów” (“Preparation and experience of teachers in terms of work with immigrant children”), “Działalność wolontariatu europejskiego, jego aktywność na rzecz dzieci uchodźców” (“European voluntary operations, its activity for refugee children”), “Mentoring w edukacji wielokulturowej” (“Mentoring in multicultural education”), “Funkcjonowanie studentów w rozwijającym się społeczeństwie wiedzy na pograniczu – współdziałanie” (“The functioning of students in the developing knowledge society on the borderland – cooperation” were carried out in recent years by the employees of the Comparative Pedagogy Department.

An important initiative was also the organisation and carrying out of the workshops for foreign volunteers of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) programme working in centres for foreigners in Białystok, that have covered art techniques developing creative activity of the children. During their realisation, the organisers invited to cooperate, among others, the DIALOG Foundation in Białystok and the University of A.S. Pushkin in Brest (Belarus).

The issues concerning the borderland were also present in the scholarly works of the Preschool and Early Childhood Education Centre (“Edukacja regionalna dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym” – “Regional Education of Children at a Younger School Age” and “Potencjał środowiska lokalnego w realizacji wychowania obywatelskiego oraz jako element wychowania obywatelskiego i patriotycznego w powiecie białostockim” – “The potential of the local environment in civic education programs and as an element of civic and patriotic education in the Białystok powiat”), and the Department of Social Pedagogy (research concerning the life stories of migrant families, transnational experiences of the family community, or attitudes of Białystok students towards transplantology).

They were also discussed by the employees of the Department of Social Psychology and Human Development in the study of the following issues: social identity of an entity and its consequences (stigma and dis-

crimination, conditions related to the construction and transformation of modern masculinity and femininity, also in the intercultural context); intercultural communication and cultural competences; psychological effects of the migration process; contemporary issues around refugees; and the problems of multicultural societies – comparative analysis of the situation of Polish emigration in the United Kingdom.

The borderland of north-eastern Poland has provided a lot of scholarly and research inspirations for many years. The scientific activity of the staff of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology is obviously only one excerpt of the activities taking place in the field of promoting the culture of the borderland. Many such intentions have also carried out while working with students, both during didactic activities and as part of the work in student associations.

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