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**Review of a Book by Aleksandra Zalewska-Królak:
Aleksandra Zalewska-Królak, *Metodologia badań
otwarta na dzieci (Children – Inclusive Research
Methodology)*, PWN, Warszawa 2025, s. 198.
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**Recenzja książki Aleksandry Zalewskiej-Królak:
Aleksandra Zalewska-Królak, *Metodologia badań
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The book *Metodologia badań otwarta na dzieci* by Aleksandra Zalewska-Królak (2025) is a scholarly publication in the field of social research methodology that addresses the inclusion of children in the research process in a conscious, reflective, and ethically responsible manner. The author proposes a departure from traditional research conducted *on* children in favour of research carried out *with* children, in which their perspectives and experiences

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become an important source of knowledge about social reality. The starting point of the book is the assumption that children are not merely objects of research, but subjects capable of co-creating meanings and interpreting the world, as adult researchers' access to children's experiences always remains partial. Children, as experts in the field of being a child, contribute to improving the tools used in research. In this way, the publication situates itself within contemporary methodological debates, articulated, among others, by researchers such as Jonathon Sergeant and Deborah Harcourt, in which increasing emphasis is placed on the need to "hear" children's voices and on critical reflection concerning the conditions that enable these voices to genuinely resonate in social research.

The author holds a PhD in social sciences and is a sociologist and anthropologist whose research is closely connected with social pedagogy and qualitative research methodology. The publication under discussion is an expanded version of her doctoral dissertation and is closely linked to her previous academic interests. Zalewska-Królak has also practical experience as a primary school teacher and educator, which clearly informs the methodological and ethical sensitivity presented in the book. She is a co-coordinator of the Sociology of Children and Childhood research network of the European Sociological Association (RN04 ESA), as well as the chair and co-founder of the Sociology of Children and Childhood section of the Polish Sociological Association. She teaches at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw and at the Children's University. Her research focuses on studies conducted with children and on the evaluation of artistic events addressed to children and young people.

Aleksandra Zalewska-Królak's scholarly output to date has concentrated on issues of children's participation, qualitative research, and the ethical aspects of research with vulnerable groups. *Metodologia badań otwarta na dzieci* is situated at the intersection of these interests and constitutes an attempt to systematically organize fieldwork experiences and methodological reflections developed through research conducted with children. The publication does not have an instructional character, instead, it proposes a methodological framework grounded in sensitivity to social context.

Within the Polish academic literature, the book organizes and develops an existing, but still fragmented strand of participatory research involving children. Although Polish humanities and social sciences include important

analyses devoted to children's participation (e.g. works by Ewa Jarosz, Jolanta Zwiernik, and Anna Górka-Strzałkowska), studies in which children appear as active co-creators of the research process remain a minority in comparison with the English-language literature. Publications such as *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (James Christensen) document a lasting shift towards an approach that recognizes children as competent social actors. Zalewska-Królak's book aligns with this trend and encourages further research. The publication explicitly refers to the childhood studies paradigm, in which childhood is understood as a socio-cultural construct and children as subjects endowed with agency and the ability to interpret their own experiences. In this sense, the book constitutes an important critical voice against "adult-centric" models of knowledge production and a significant contribution to the national debate on research methodology involving children.

The publication has a methodological-empirical character and is neither a textbook nor a collection of ready-made research procedures. The author clearly states that her aim is not to provide universal tools or "recipes" for conducting research with children, but rather to invite a reflective and flexible approach to the research process. The book consists of two parts: a theoretical-methodological section and an empirical section, which remain closely interconnected. Particular attention should be paid to the extensive paratextual layer of the publication: a double table of contents, appendices containing ethical documents, descriptions of consent-obtaining procedures, and acknowledgements, which together create a picture of a transparent research process.

The central concept of the book is "methodology open to children", understood not as a set of techniques but as a research attitude. The author emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, understood as the constant problematisation of one's own role, assumptions, and limitations in contact with children. Special attention is devoted to the relational nature of research, the process of building trust, and the adaptation of tools to the abilities and needs of participants. In this context, the author introduces the notion of a "methodological laboratory", in which the researcher tests, modifies, and sometimes abandons planned solutions. The "research tricks" described by the author do not serve as an instructional function, but an illustrative one: they show how flexibility and attentiveness can support the research process. Among the methodological solutions employed by the author is also the

bullet journal, treated not as a technique in the strict sense but as a flexible supporting tool helpful in documenting experiences. Its use fits into the logic of the “methodological laboratory”, in which the form of research work may be modified depending on the needs and possibilities of the research participants.

An important element of the discussed methodology is the participatory approach, in which children are treated as co-participants in research rather than merely as respondents. Zalewska-Królak consistently emphasizes the importance of informed consent, understood not as a one-time formal act but as a process requiring continuous verification. The author refers here to the tradition of Janusz Korczak’s thought, pointing to the need to recognize the child’s subjectivity and their right to refuse, change their mind, or reinterpret their own statements. In this sense, the book not only describes research conducted with children, but also reveals the ethical tensions inherent in such practices.

The empirical part of the publication does not function as a classical presentation of research results. Rather, it is conceived as a test of the proposed methodology and an illustration of its limitations. The author shows that data analysis in research involving children is non-linear and requires abandoning unambiguous interpretative categories. The “child’s voice” is not treated as a stable and fully accessible category, but as a relational construct emerging within a specific research context. This approach strengthens the methodological coherence of the book, although it may at the same time leave the reader with a sense of cognitive insufficiency.

Among the unquestionable strengths of the publication are its high methodological rigour and consistency in implementing the adopted assumptions. The author avoids simplifications and does not promise easy access to children’s experiences, emphasizing the limitations of every research strategy. The transparency of the research process also deserves attention: numerous footnotes, appendices, and a detailed bibliography allow the reader to follow the research process step by step. From the reviewer’s perspective, particularly valuable is the consistent integration of methodological reflection with ethical sensitivity, which remains uncommon in Polish academic publications. The high level of reflexivity and the deliberate avoidance of normative conclusions may, however, make the publication challenging for readers seeking concrete methodological guidelines.

Reading *Metodologia badań otwarta na dzieci* encourages reflection on the status of knowledge in social research and on the researcher's responsibility towards research participants. The publication may be successfully used by qualitative researchers, doctoral candidates, and students preparing their own research projects involving children. It also constitutes a point of departure for further work on participatory methodologies in the Polish context. Zalewska-Królak's book does not close the discussion but rather encourages further research.

The publication under review is a valuable and much-needed methodological study that addresses the issue of children's participation in social research in a responsible and reflective manner. Aleksandra Zalewska-Królak's book certainly deserves the attention of researchers interested in qualitative explorations of children's experiences. It can be recommended as an important voice in the discussion on the ethics and methodology of research involving children, as well as an encouragement to further develop this field of research.

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