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THE DETERMINANTS OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE CULTURE, TRADITION AND LANGUAGE OF THE GERMAN MINORITY ON THE INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF POLAND AND GERMANY

Abstract

The paper is a collection of reflections and observations, which could be expanded in a broader study. The author of the text endorses the view of those researchers into the issues of Upper Silesia who believe that this region encompasses the majority of the present Śląskie and Opolskie regions, thereby falling foul of those in favour of separating the latter from Upper Silesia. This is significant for the contents of the text inasmuch as the twenty years of the inter-war period was too short to alter the socio-cultural processes in Upper Silesia bringing about any significant differences between the eastern and western part of this region. Such claims are only made for current political gains. What is most surprising is that this opinion is shared by the leaders of the German minority from the Opolskie region.

Key words: language, of German minority in Poland, traditions of German minority in Poland, culture of German minority in Poland, intangible heritage of Poland and Germany

1. Introduction

This paper is nothing more than a collection of reflections and observations of the author, who was born and raised in Upper Silesia, which could be expanded in a broader study. I would like to make one comment, which is significant for the contents of this paper. I agree with those researchers into the issues of Upper Silesia who believe that this region encompasses the majority of the present Śląskie and Opolskie regions, thereby falling foul of those in favour of separating the latter, my homeland, from Upper Silesia. This is significant for the contents of this paper inasmuch as, in my opinion, the twenty years of the inter-war period was too short to alter the socio-cultural processes in Upper Silesia bringing about any significant

differences between the eastern and western part of this region. Such claims are only made for current political gains. What is most surprising is that this opinion is shared by the leaders of the German minority from the Opolskie region.

The paper is also an extension of the lecture delivered at the 17th Silesian Seminar “Cultural heritage of Silesia – places, architecture, people, customs and traditions.” Since the beginning, these seminars have been organised in Kamień Śląski near Opole by the Dom Współpracy Polsko-Niemieckiej/Haus der Deutsch-Polnischen Zusammenarbeit (the House of Polish-German Collaboration), established by the organisations and associations that foster Polish-German collaboration. The House is primarily associated with the Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Niemców na Śląsku Opolskim/Sozial-Kulturelle Gesellschaft der Deutschen im Oppelner Schlesien (the Societal-Cultural Association of Germans in Opolski Silesia).

The topic of the lecture was commissioned by the organisers, thereby somewhat suggesting the contents to the author, who immediately felt the need to modify it. The wording proposed by the organisers implied that the language of the German minority is, among other things, an element of the intangible cultural heritage¹ of Poland and Germany. It appears that it has

¹ For the purpose of this paper I suggest that two approaches to the studies into cultural heritage be adopted, following Zbigniew Mazur. In one, narrower approach, the issue of “heritage is narrowed down and culture is perceived by numerous cultural anthropologists primarily or exclusively as ‘**behavioural patterns**’ (highlighted by C.T.), handed down through generations in the process of socialisation. In European societies these patterns undergo continuous modification: some of them vanish, weaken or blend into new configurations which does not deny continuation, though. Stanisław Ossowski writes that we can talk about heritage only ‘when we are dealing with the transfer of cultural patterns by means of societal contacts;’ heritage means ‘certain patterns of muscular, spiritual and mental responses that shape the predispositions of group members, but no external objects would make up such heritage.’ In his opinion, artifacts are only the correlates of heritage. Understood in this way, societal groups become the carriers of such behavioural patterns that may be absent from other groups or are less frequent there, or have a different position in the configuration of patterns.’ In the other approach, cultural heritage is understood as the imperative to study the ‘**material creations**’ (highlighted by C.T.). Services in charge of the preservation of historical monuments are particularly consistent in applying the definition of culture as the movable and immovable historical monuments (objects), for obvious reasons. This has been reflected in numerous laws, conventions and recommendations made by various domestic and international circles. All these definitions take the same direction and are adapted to the practical needs of conservation services and museology; they allowed a relatively exact identification of the cultural heritage that

a certain potential to play this role. We have to agree that for the majority of members of various Upper Silesian organisations the main language is not German, but different Silesian dialects, with German ranking second in this respect. It is beyond doubt that the remaining two components of cultural heritage, indicated by the organisers of the seminar, namely culture and tradition, can also play this role. This closes the remarks on the role of language as a cultural differentiator of the German minority.

I would like to make a few remarks concerning the role of culture, tradition and language as factors that could facilitate the rapprochement of Poles and Germans. I will express my observations in the form of several propositions:

- since 1989 one can hardly speak about the culture, tradition and language of the German minority because it is simultaneously the culture, tradition and language of another group, of Upper Silesians, who distinguish themselves as the Silesian nation;
- before 1922, the components of cultural heritage named in the title were the elements of German culture with Polish accents, whereas after 1945 they were acknowledged to be Polish;
- the German components of Upper Silesian culture in Germany and the German components of Upper Silesian culture in Poland are frequently different and they complement one another to a moderate extent.

In this context, it is justifiable to formulate the research issue by the following question: to what extent is the German minority in Poland the sole ‘heir’ of the German elements of Upper Silesian culture? When formulated in this manner, the research issue gives rise to another one: how does (can) the German minority mediate in the transfer of Silesian cultural values to the German and Polish cultures respectively?

The title of this paper expresses the conviction that there is some common cultural heritage composed of the language, common experiences, everyday behaviour and tradition that can be referred to by the Germans inhabiting the area of Upper Silesia, whether they remained here, or were forced to leave, as well as by Poles who made their home here (‘zu Hause’) after 1945, having lost their previous homes mostly against their will, and eventually, by ‘regular’ Upper Silesians not described by any adjectives. It is important to bear this perspective in mind, considering the phenomena and processes related to the references to and adaptation of the Upper Silesian cultural heritage in the

was subjected to protection and care to be made, although it should be noted that the range of this protection has been continuously extended.” (Mazur, 1997, pp. XI–XII).

discussion on the cultural identity of Upper Silesia, in the context of its position between the Polish and the German.

As I have already mentioned in the introduction, this heritage is only a potential that can be applied to define the community that is being established there, although at present it is difficult to clearly determine whether such a community exists in the first place, apart from the elites committed to the continuation of Upper Silesian traditions. The cultural components of Upper Silesia comprise Polish, German and Moravian (or rather Czech-Moravian) elements. The participants of the debate are in agreement on that, yet they are cautious about whether we are dealing with a Polish-German cultural community in Upper Silesia, since the Polish, German and Czech nationalisms used to treat the culture of ‘their’ respective Upper Silesians as a component of each of their national cultures. This situation changed after 1989, which is not to mean, however, that the change of conditions altered the perception of the issue. The qualitative change that took place there, drastically influencing the perception of the Upper Silesian character, is the emergence of an attitude that has been present to varying degrees in the Upper Silesia since the mid-19th century, namely the attitude expressed by “it is us who are at home here.” This is particularly often mentioned in Upper Silesia after 1989 by all the participants of the dialogue: Poles, Germans and ‘regular’ Upper Silesians.

2. Subjective components of the sense of distinctiveness among the Germans in Upper Silesia and Upper Silesians

It would be possible to treat the common heritage as a starting point for collaboration only provided that the German minority abandoned ‘besieged fortress’ strategy it was pushed towards at the beginning of its activities, due to the Polish reaction to its emergence in the early 1990s. This strategy, which consists in defending German distinctiveness at all costs, was applied again after the success of the ‘Upper Silesian autonomists,’ confirmed by the 2002 national census and further strengthened by the 2011 census. The leaders of German minority organisations from western Upper Silesia responded to the results of the census, trying to marginalise their significance and accusing the autonomists of harming the activities of minorities seeking to protect the distinctiveness of Upper Silesian regionalism versus Polish culture. This can be exemplified by the dispute over the status of the ‘Silesian language.’ (*Emanzipation*) Whereas this

strategy was defendable in the first period of the existence of German minority organisations, as it allowed them to count on the aid of Germany, it is currently incomprehensible, under the assumption that the most important motivation for the involvement of minority activists is not their political ambitions. Ironically, when a new ‘actor’ emerged in the Upper Silesian fight for support, it is not the Polish majority that is the main antagonist in this competition, but the autonomists (Miś, 2002). They pose a threat mainly because they refer to the same components of Upper Silesian distinctiveness as the German minority. It should be objectively noted, however, that the young generation of German minority activists are changing their attitude towards the autonomists and see them as potential allies in a number of areas (Świerc, 2011).

Nearly all studies on the definitions of the cultural specificity of Upper Silesians indicate the following components of what is named the Silesian cultural core: nationality, natural environment, geographical properties, architecture, customs and traditions, religion and language (Smolorz, 2013, pp. 302–308). This list seems to be lacking one element, which is quite severely criticised by Michał Smolorz in his book *Śląsk wymyślony*, where he assesses the processes that have been taking place in Upper Silesia after 1989, namely the “syndrome (myth) of Silesian injustice.” It is understood as the Upper Silesian experience of having their homeland/*Heimat* located within the borders of two countries: Poland and Germany. Smolorz proposes a list that overlaps with the catalogue of Silesian features drawn up by another researcher into the problems of the region she originated from, like Smolorz himself. Maria Szmeja identifies the following elements of the Silesian canon: territory, language, religion, diligence, common experiences, the attitude to strangers and to group heroes (Szmeja, 2000, pp. 206–230).

3. Determinants of the dialogue about cultural heritage after 1989

During the first democratic elections in 1945, Poles, as well as the societies of other Eastern Bloc countries, made a more or less conscious decision that required them to identify the criteria of their identity, both national and regional. The suppression or strict control over the contents of the discussion on these matters that the authoritarian state exercised came to an end in 1989. For future Polish-German relations, including the discussion on the cultural heritage of German territories that were incorporated into the Polish state after 1945, the following factors were crucial:

- the signing of Polish-German treaties which stipulated the ultimate character of the border along the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers and the matters of the German minority in Poland;
- the emancipation of the German minority; over a short time over 300,000 persons submitted appropriate applications;
- a majority of Polish society declaring their pro-European ambitions in seeking affiliation after Poland regained sovereignty. These declarations had to influence, and continue to influence the attitude of the state to the ambitions of ethnic and national minorities living in Poland;
- generation change: the third generation of Poles and Germans has come to the fore, that is the generation that did not directly suffer from the war and occupation (in the case of Poles) and displacements and repressions by Communist Poland (in the case of Germans and Upper Silesians who chose to remain in Poland).

4. German minority in Poland

During the holy mass of Polish-German reconciliation, attended by Chancellor Helmut Kohl visiting Krzyżowa in Lower Silesia on 12 November, 1989, Poles could see a banner that read *Helmut Du bist auch unser Kanzler*. It made them realise that they had to become accustomed to the fact that there was a group in Polish society that referred to their German roots. To a varying degree this process has continued since.

The most significant components that have been influential in terms of the pace and range of this process of becoming accustomed to this reality include the following:

- the origins and goals the leaders of German minority movements identified at the beginning of their activities (to recover their German identity and the right to maintain it);
- the relations between the German minority and the Polish state (the issue of loyalty);
- the fact that in the initial period, the German partners of the German minority movements came from among the activists of the Federation of Expellees (*Bund der Vertriebenen*), which was perceived by the Polish society as the greatest threat to Polish territorial integrity at that time;
- the attitude to other ‘actors’ in Upper Silesia, who revealed their intentions to change the place they were told to take in Polish socialist society;

- the generation change that took place in the German minority movement in the mid-2000s. The essential change concerned the goals that the German minority should focus on, which can be described as follows: while remembering our origins and the past of our group, we are future-oriented. It can therefore be concluded that the key issue that divided the German minority movement at the very beginning has now gone.

5. Together or separately?

Together; to evidence the multiculturalism of Polish society. Together; with the Poles who accept the socio-cultural distinctiveness of Upper Silesia, with the Upper Silesians who for various reasons were forced to leave their homeland/*Heimat*. Together; with the Germans who were forcibly displaced but retained their affiliation with Upper Silesia, and together with the ‘regular’ Upper Silesians who reject both Polish and German nationalisms. Separately; as Germans living in Poland who want to make independent decisions about their present and future, while observing the law. This dichotomy was prevalent in the German minority. The so-called ‘Gogolin option’ was leaning towards treating any activities of the Polish state aimed at the assimilation of Germans in Poland as an attack on their right to independence. Another option, the ‘Katowice option,’ was leaning towards as broad cooperation with the Polish state as possible in order to resolve the current problems faced by the German population in Upper Silesia.

The following areas of collaboration are feasible and necessary:

- the protection of natural heritage, whatever the adjectives that describe it, as they immediately generate conflicts;
- the promotion of Upper Silesia as a European region and the model of collaboration between Poles and Germans both in international relations (minority as a bridge) and internally in Poland;
- collective support for the economic development of Upper Silesia either involving the German capital or on the basis of ‘returns’ to the *Heimat* of those inhabitants who were forced to leave it for various reasons. Legal and economic incentives for such returns should be provided by both central and regional authorities;
- cooperation of Germans, Poles and Silesians in obtaining finance for infrastructural investments from the central budget in Poland and from

- European sources; applications should be submitted via Poland, in collaboration (by means of lobbying) with Germany or directly to the European Commission;
- the promotion of the tourist merits of Upper Silesia, with the assumption that it is necessary to change the present image of Upper Silesia as a region that is environmentally degraded, and therefore not attractive in terms of tourism;
 - regional education, taking into consideration the historic and cultural sensitivity of all the inhabitants of the region: Poles, Germans and Upper Silesians. The purpose of this education is to learn about each other's past, differences and the vision of the position of Upper Silesia in Poland and in Europe. This is a difficult and risky task, as evidenced by the ‘war over historical monuments’ and the events that accompany the introduction of double (Polish and German) names to localities in the areas inhabited by the German minority.

The following issues are particularly sensitive and can potentially generate conflicts:

- introducing German language lessons into schools, especially where the German minority is not predominant;
- the presentation and assessment of historical events that have shaped ethnic relations in the region both in the first half of the 20th century (such as the assessment of the Silesian uprisings) and immediately after World War II (such as the verification of the nationality of Upper Silesians);
- mutual relations between the German minority and autonomists in Upper Silesia.

This section should be concluded by stressing that the ‘together or separately’ dichotomy does not only concern the Poles versus Germans alternative, but it requires their recognition that the process of preserving the cultural heritage of Upper Silesia has to involve all the other inhabitants of Upper Silesia.

6. Why together?

I suggest that in order to answer this question we refer again to the findings of a research team established in the Institute for Western Affairs in Poznań in 1995, which ventured to describe the attitude of the Polish authorities and society to the German cultural heritage in western and north-

ern Poland after 1989. Zbigniew Mazur concludes their report stating that “it is in the interests of both the past and contemporary inhabitants to care for the cultural heritage of the Western and Northern Lands, to protect permanent historic monuments and exhibit other elements of our heritage, regardless of their ethnic affiliation, as well as promote historical knowledge about different regions. This leads to two logical conclusions. One is that both sides can justifiably refer to the cultural heritage of the Western and Northern Lands understood as a common European good. Herbert Hupka was right to observe that, in this case, cultural heritage is a value of European significance which does not separate the German and Polish nations, but instead binds them. Secondly, the burden of protecting and caring for this heritage falls to the same extent on Poles and Germans. One can hardly oppose Arnulf Baring saying that “neither Poles nor Germans can or should forget to what extent this area is marked by its Germanness. This applies to us, as well as to Poles. In the future, we have to take care of our cultural heritage there together.” (Mazur, 2000, pp. 847–848)

To give a direct answer to the question in the title of this section, it has to be stated that the concept of common heritage assumes that both Poles and Germans will become equally attached to that heritage emotionally (although not necessarily in the same manner), it will deserve to be acknowledged and protected, and, first and foremost, that both parties will take and develop its most valuable elements for the purpose of creating a cultural bridge that will enrich both sides, thereby developing mutual trust, since we are past the stage of Polish-German rapprochement. This trust applies both to the relations between Poles and Germans – the citizens of Germany, and between Poles and Germans – the citizens of Poland.

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Streszczenie

Prezentowany tekst jest zbiorem refleksji i uwag, które wymagałyby rozwinięcia w szerszym opracowaniu. Autor artykułu podziela pogląd tych badaczy problematyki górnośląskiej, narażając się zwolennikom wyróżniania w rzeczywistości górnośląskiej "Opolszczyzny", którzy uważają, że Górnego Śląska, to obszar obejmujący swoim zasięgiem większość obszarów dzisiejszych województw śląskiego i opolskiego. Uwaga ta jest o tyle istotna, dla zawartości artykułu, gdyż wynika z niej, że okres dwudziestolecia międzywojennego był zbyt krótki, aby wnieść dla przebiegu procesów społeczno-kulturowych na obszarze Górnego Śląska zmiany, które dzieliłyby znaczco wschodnią i zachodnią część tego regionu. Jeśli tak się czyni, to wynika to bieżącego zapotrzebowania motywowanego politycznie. Najbardziej zaskakujące jest to, że pogląd powyższy wyrażają liderzy mniejszości niemieckiej z terenu województwa opolskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: język mniejszości niemieckiej w Polsce, tradycje mniejszości niemieckiej w Polsce, kultura mniejszości niemieckiej w Polsce, dziedzictwo niematerialne Polski i Niemiec

Резюме

Представленный текст является сборником размышлений и комментариев, которые требовали бы раскрытия в более объемном труде. Автор статьи разделяет мнение этих исследователей верхнесилезской проблематики, восставшая против себя сторонников выделения в действительности верхнесилезской «Опольщины», считающими, что Верхняя Силезия – область, охватывающая собой большинство территории современных Силезского и Опольского воеводств. Это замечание потому является столь важным для содержания статьи, так как показывает, что двадцатилетний межвоенный период был слишком короток для внесения изменений в социально-культурные процессы на территории Верхней Силезии, которые значительно разделяли бы восточную и западную части этого региона. Если так происходит, то в результате политически мотивированного текущего спроса. Самое удивительное в том,

что вышеизложенное мнение выражают лидеры национального немецкого меньшинства с территории Опольского воеводства.

Ключевые слова: язык национального немецкого меньшинства в Польше, традиции национального немецкого меньшинства в Польше, культура национального немецкого меньшинства в Польше, нематериальное наследие Польши и Германии

Анотація

Представленний текст являє собою збірку роздумів та коментарів, які вимагали б розвитку в більш широкому опрацюванні. Автор статті поділяє погляд тих дослідників проблем Верхньої Сілезії, які вважають, що це регіон, який охоплює більшість районів Шльонського та Опольського воєводств (наразіжаючи при цьому на прихильників виділення верхньошльонської «Опольщизни»). Цей коментар є важливим для цієї статті, оскільки період міжвоєнного двадцятіліття був надто коротким, аби внести в хід суспільно-культурних процесів зміни, які відбувались у Верхній Сілезії, і значно розділяти б східну та західну частину цього регіону. Якщо це зробити, то це буде політичною мотивацією. Найбільш дивує те, що вищезазначений погляд поділяють лідери німецької меншини з теренів опольського воєводства.

Ключові слова: мова німецької меншини в Польщі, традиції німецької меншини в Польщі, нематеріальна спадщина Польщі та Німеччини

